



BigPicnic policy brief 7: Food security in Uganda

BIGPICNIC TOPIC



UGANDA

FOOD 2030 PRIORITIES



CIRCULARITY



CLIMATE



NUTRITION

SDGs



United Nations Sustainable
Development Goals

Recommendations

Overall: Increase capacity in climate smart agricultural approaches to address challenges posed by climate change and the impact on livelihoods and nutrition.

- National and local governments should increase access to quality seed of early maturing crops and varieties which are best suited to shortened growing seasons and raise awareness among farmers about quality seed selection¹.
- Support farmers to adopt good agronomic practices, such as soil protection and water use efficient measures to address environmental degradation.
- Reduce food loss and waste through a variety of traditional and modern approaches in a culturally sensitive context.
- Adhere to food and safety standards and provide training to health inspectors.
- Develop training materials, including educational curricula at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, to raise awareness of the importance of nutritious and sustainable diets for improved livelihoods.

Background

Tooro Botanical Gardens was invited to be part of BigPicnic as the Ugandan context was seen to contrast to that of Europe. In 2017, 77% of the Ugandan population lived in rural areas, as opposed to only 25% of the European².

In Europe, it has been estimated that a third of children are overweight or obese³. In contrast, in Uganda this figure is considerably lower at only 4% and a third of children are affected by stunting due to limited provision of food and healthcare⁴. Therefore, the discussions that took place as part of BigPicnic were very different in Europe and Uganda.

Although many of the themes were shared (e.g. climate change, food waste, education), the specifics of people's concerns were often very different as were the suggested solutions. For this reason, to complement BigPicnic policy briefs 1-6, country specific recommendations for Ugandan policy makers have been developed. Consequently, this policy brief focuses on the dialogue generated in Uganda. It should be noted, however, that the issues raised here may also be relevant in other countries.

Findings

Climate change

It is widely accepted that climate change is negatively affecting both the quantity and quality of food production. Participants highlighted a series of negative impacts caused by climate change, such as prolonged drought, unpredictability of the weather and the seasons, weather-related diseases and excessive rainfall (causing floods, landslides and food spoilage). Such phenomena severely impact crop yields as well as increasing expenses and inputs. Although most farmers agreed that sustainable food crops enable households to have a steady food supply for immediate and future consumption contributing to food security, some did not consider the long-term issue of sustainability. Providing farmers with more information about sustainable crop production and the associated practices and inputs was therefore deemed important.

Reducing food waste

Considering the challenges of poverty, the importance of accessible nutritious food emerged as a significant theme. More specifically, the data highlighted the importance of choosing crops and varieties less prone to post-harvest losses and with a longer shelf life. Such crops were selected based on, for example, their capacity to survive longer in the soil without rotting, their short growth period leading to early cropping and their tendency to last longer after harvesting. It was suggested that farmers should be supported in seed selection choices and introduced to different ways of extending the life span of their food products after harvesting (e.g. drying, pounding, chopping and mixing with other products). The revival of traditional ways of storing crops, like the “Enguli” granaries, was seen as a potential solution to cope with food spoilage in periods of famine. This should be supported by government action to provide safe food transportation and storage equipment.

Health and safety

Participants had concerns over food safety, health and diet. For example, improving cooking methods to avoid extensive frying, overcooking and burning was considered important. Food contamination through the use of dirty utensils and dirty water and from poor sanitary conditions in food preparation areas was identified as a significant challenge. Avoiding the consumption of spoiled food was indicated as a matter that needs better attention stressing the obligation of both the citizens/consumers themselves as well as effective monitoring on the part of store owners and government services. Several farmers and food vendors face the additional challenge of being located in hard to reach areas where roads are impassable and transport facilities scarce. Transportation of their goods to shops, markets and customers is burdensome, costly and affects the quality and safety of their food products. Food products are also more likely to be exposed to unsanitary conditions due to the problems encountered in storage methods and facilities.

Food choices

It was deemed important that there is further promotion of home gardens with local fruit and vegetables. Certain food crops appear to have additional value to farmers as they not only help them to earn a living from direct sales but also allow for the creation of by-products offering an additional or alternative income source. People chose what food to grow and buy based on a variety of factors, including cost, taste and nutritional content. Therefore, crop diversification and the significance of value-added crops with complementary marketing opportunities was considered important. Quality education emerged as an important factor that could contribute to more informed choices in the kitchen, garden and market. This should support people to gain cooking skills, prepare healthy meals, improve sanitary conditions that affect food preparation and avoid food waste. Importantly, this would also support them to be more able to reflect on their contribution to sustainable food consumption and production.

Quotes

“I grow Irish potatoes but with the recent trend of climate change they are easily affected by pests and require a lot of spraying and maintenance which makes it expensive to grow compared to other crops like yams, cassava, and sweet potatoes which are not sprayed.”

Participant, Fort Portal

“Although I know that my grains rot due to poorly aerated storage containers, I do not have enough money to buy appropriate storage facilities on the market, they are too expensive!”

Participant, Fort Portal

“Although farmers have tried their best to dry the maize properly before sell, the government should subsidise the appropriate transportation facilities to keep the quality during transportation otherwise with these open lorries expect dust and rain to contaminate the maize during transportation, we have no choice.”

Participant, Fort Portal

Conclusion

In Uganda, engaging in conversations with the local farmers and other members of the public generated a wide range of suggested solutions and the identification of several challenges to the sustainability of crop productions, including the importance of timing and diversification of crops, seed selection and the preservation of traditional ways for storing crops. Furthermore, there was a clear need to promote and support waste reduction and improve food safety.

¹FAO (2006). Quality declared seed – Technical guidelines on standards and procedures. Rome: FAO

²The World Bank (2018). Rural Population (% of total population) [online] Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?end=2017&locations=EU&start=1960&view=chart>

³World Health Organization (2015). European Food and Nutrition Action Plan 2015-2020. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe

⁴United States Agency for International Development (2018). Uganda: Nutrition Profile. [online] Available at: <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/Uganda-Nutrition-Profile-Apr2018-508.pdf>

The logo for 'Big Picnic' features the word 'Big' in a bold, red, sans-serif font, followed by 'Picnic' in a green, rounded, sans-serif font. A small green leaf icon is positioned above the letter 'i' in 'Picnic'.

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