



# Redressing imbalances in food production



**R**edressing Imbalances In Food Production To Break The Cycle Of Rural Poverty: The Equal Opportunities Commission Joins The World To Celebrate World Food Day:

The number of hungry people in the world has dropped by 100 million in

the last decade, in large part due to coordinated efforts around the world to eradicate hunger and end extreme poverty. But there is much work left to do. Today, 795 million people still suffer from hunger and malnutrition, conditions that can drive instability and turmoil and continue the vicious cycle of poverty.

In Uganda, where the agriculture sector employs more than 60 percent of the population, over 500 family farms produce the food that feeds millions of people. These are farms which primarily rely on family members for labour and management of agricultural produces.

There are millions of



farmers across the country who have benefitted from increased yields, increased incomes, greater access to small loans that are making them more productive, greater access to market, linking up with technology in ways that assure that they get a fair price - all of which, since Uganda is disproportionately rural, is increasing incomes and spurring growth and building a middle class in the entire country.

It is a model that's working and then has been supplemented with private sector investments that is further advancing the development of a more productive agricultural sector across the country.

And yet, despite their critical importance, a large majority of farmers in Uganda are among the world's most vulnerable populations. Ironically it is not uncommon for many families who produce food to actually go hungry themselves.

The world is in transition from an era dominated by surpluses to one defined by scarcity. Not eating at all on some days is how the world's poorest are coping with the doubling of world grain prices since 2006. But even as the world faces



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new constraints on future production, the population is growing by 80 million people each year.

In a study carried out by the Food and Agriculture Organization, 37% of families in Uganda experience foodless days. In India it is 24 percent, in Peru 14 percent. One out of three children in Uganda under the age of five is stunted, meaning that 165 million children are so malnourished they will never reach their full physical and cognitive potential. About 2 billion people in the world lack vitamins and minerals that are essential for good health. By contrast, some 1.4 billion people are overweight. Of these, one-

third are obese and at risk of coronary heart disease, diabetes or other health problems.

Food security defines a situation in which all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

The Equal Opportunities Commission, a government body mandated to redress imbalances in all spheres of life, carried out research on the state of equal opportunities in Uganda in 2014. It was discovered that despite Uganda's progress in reducing the incidence of poverty, the absolute number of poor people has increased due to population growth and poverty remains firmly entrenched in rural areas, especially in the northern region. About 30% of all rural people still live below the national rural poverty line. Nationally almost half (48%) of Ugandans are food energy deficient, i.e., their regular diet fails to provide them with the minimum dietary energy requirement to lead an active and healthy life.

The commission especially marked the reduction in poverty in urban areas. But the absolute number of poor

people has increased due to population growth. Nearly 7.5 million Ugandans -or a quarter of the population -still live below the poverty line. Poverty remains firmly entrenched in rural areas, which are home to 87% of Ugandans.

Poverty is often the root cause of food insecurity because poor households lack the resources required to access enough nutritious food to live a healthy active life. Poor households are unable to invest in the inputs required to boost their own yields. Poor farmers may have to sell any surplus soon after harvest to earn income and repay debts, at once exposing themselves to fluctuating market prices as well as not being able to benefit from selling when prices rise.

“The extreme poor have no financial buffer to protect them from shocks such as accident or illness of a household member or poor harvests/crop failure due to drought. In times of such stress, households often resort to corrosive coping mechanisms that may involve reducing food intake and removing children from school, coping strategies that often perpetuate a cycle of poverty and further undermine their already

fragile food security status”, remarked the Secretary to the Commission Ms Catherine Amal.

The poorest sections of society have been excluded from Uganda’s steady economic transformation. The absolute numbers of poor are likely to rise if so many continue to remain illiterate and if the fertility rate and population growth does not abate.

According to the EOC report, poverty is entrenched in rural areas and the poorer the household, the more likely it is to be food

energy deficient, to have low dietary diversity, derive more energy from staples and have poor or borderline food consumption.

In addition, the poorest rural households are more market dependent than the middle quintiles, meaning they are more exposed to high food prices, which have hit Ugandans in recent years largely due to poor harvests prompted by rainfall deficits that have disrupted the expected seasonal pattern.

The world today - and Uganda in particular



- desperately needs leadership on the food security issue to help the world understand both the enormity of the challenge we face and the extraordinary scope of a response, one that, among other things, requires a total restructuring of the energy economy. The scale of this economic restructuring is matched only by the urgency of doing so.

The Equal Opportunities Commission has carried out a number of sensitization sessions to the rural based dwellers as well as opinion leaders, to emphasize the importance of good nutrition and healthy diets, in order to bridge the gap between the rural poor who barely have any basic knowledge about the crucial aspect of healthy food systems, which the urban rich are much aware of. As the pressure amounts to produce more food without destroying the environment to feed a growing population, the Commission continues to empower poor rural communities to demand for raise in the productivity of their crops and agricultural systems, including livestock, fish, and agro-forestry.

Smallholder farmers have been trained on how to invest in inputs and improved

techniques, though many times they are prevented from doing so since they lack income opportunities and access to credit.

They need inputs and infrastructures to be able to take full advantage of Uganda's fertile soils and abundant water sources in order to boost their yields, as well as to protect them from the unpredictable vagaries of Uganda's climate, such as rainfall shortages, floods

and rising temperatures.

Other factors, however, need to be addressed to improve child nutrition in Uganda. Morbidity rates in children could be lowered by improving hygiene practices and treatment for diarrhea, boosting immunization and vitamin A coverage and taking action to lower malaria rates. Programs must be created or scaled up if they already exist.



## About Equal Opportunities Commission

*The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) is an independent constitutional body that was established in 2007 under Article 32(3) of the EOC Act to give effect to the State's Constitutional mandate to eliminate discrimination and inequalities against any individual or group of persons on the grounds of sex, age, race, colour, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or social and economic standing, and to take affirmative action in favor of groups marginalized on the basis of gender, age, disability or any other reason created by history, tradition or custom for the purpose of redressing imbalances which exist against them.*

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