

YVID Report on SDG #2: End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition and Promote Sustainable Agriculture

“Choose one or more of the targets for SDG#2. Discuss the current state of these targets in your host country as you see them, related obstacles, and your recommendations for achieving them”:

A few targets needed to achieve Sustainable Development Goal #2 are, “By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round”. As well as, “end all forms of malnutrition, including targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age”. Over the years, Uganda has seen a steady decline in hunger and malnutrition throughout the country. But stunting and wasting in children is still widely prevalent. In fact one in three children in Uganda is stunted, which is relatively high compared to its neighbouring countries.

After being in Uganda for 5 months, I have become much more aware of the food security and nutrition situation around me. As part of my internship I’ve been able to gain insight through conducting a needs assessment and baseline survey in villages surrounding Lake Bunyonyi. So far, the results show that people around the lake are generally food secure and overall the caloric intake is standard. This is also relevant throughout the rest of Uganda, according to the FAO. However, beyond caloric intake, proper nutrition has other dimensions such as micronutrient availability and varied healthy diets and lifestyles. Unfortunately malnutrition, stunting, and wasting are noticeable around the lake. Not a day goes by that I don’t see it. As I conduct my survey it has become evident that most people eat the same meal on average twice a day, every day. This is usually a few sweet potatoes and beans. Although this meal contains many nutrients, it is not a sufficient diet on its own. Children in schools around the lake have a breakfast and lunch of corn flour porridge, called ‘posho’. And if able, they will go home for a dinner of sweet potato and beans. Posho porridge contains very little nutrients and a diet of this has led to malnutrition in many children.

The food security and nutritional status in Uganda is strongly related to agricultural performance. Over half the country is involved in smallholder farming and approximately 80% of Uganda’s GDP is from agriculture. Another target under SDG#2 is, “By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.”

Climate change has caused significant shifts in agricultural production. Farmers around Lake Bunyonyi have voiced concerns to me during the survey about unpredictable weather including heavy rains and prolonged droughts. This has caused a failure of crops and overall decrease in agricultural yield for many people. It’s also increased the prevalence of pests and diseases. One major problem has been on Uganda’s main export crop, coffee, which has suffered significantly from CWD (Coffee Wilt Disease) over the past years.

Climate change has forced increased pressure on natural resources in Uganda. Deforestation, soil erosion, and declining fish stocks have become considerable problems throughout the country which consequently impact food security. Uganda has one of the

highest population densities in the world, with 200-400 people per km². Demand for firewood is high and access to land is extremely limited. Farmers around Lake Bunyonyi tend to only have a few scattered plots, averaging between 0.5-2 hectares. Declining soil fertility and failure of crops clearly causes major issues for these subsistence farmers. Their plots of land are also on steep hillsides that surround the lake making soil erosion a common process. Not only is it bad for agriculture, the soil also floods into the lake. Heavy sedimentation combined with pollution and over-fishing has caused a significant decline in the fish stock over the years. My co-workers have often mentioned that catching fish has become a difficult task and certain species are noticeably decreasing in size.

Recommendations for Achieving SDG#2 targets:

Building resilience of local food systems against climate change will be critical for ensuring food security in Uganda. Agriculture needs to become more productive and less wasteful. This could be done through boosting yields on existing agricultural land, introducing more sustainable farming practices, and protecting natural resources.

Around Lake Bunyonyi land productivity is low, but there is so much potential for higher yields. The climate and relatively nutritious soils of Uganda has the potential to grow just about anything. The problem is a lack of research and spread of information. Therefore, one of the main things I would recommend to achieve SDG#2 is the investment in education and agricultural research. Farmers need better access to quality advice about sustainable agricultural practices and climate change. There needs to be more information about faster control of pests and diseases as well as soil and water management. Involving local farmers in participatory research would also be highly beneficial. There are many elements of traditional farming knowledge that, enriched with scientific research, can support more productive and sustainable agricultural practices.

Along with this recommendation, I would also bring forward the necessity of this information and research being equally accessed by women. 75% of Ugandan farmers are women. Around Lake Bunyonyi, it is clearly evident to me that they are the prime caretakers of the land.

As mentioned previously, there is a standard amount of food availability and caloric intake in Uganda. The problem is malnutrition and getting a varied diet and this is related to a lack of proper education, access to markets, and purchasing power. Children and adults need more information about proper nutrition and diets. They have so much potential to grow a variety of food, but they need more information and access to make these choices. Some people around Lake Bunyonyi have to travel more than 5 hours up steep hills just to get to the local market in town. If there was better agricultural infrastructure such as feeder roads to help improve access to markets, as well as more stable food prices, farmers could have a much stronger purchasing power. I think these recommendations would be a good starting point towards achieving SDG#2 in Uganda.