



Strengthening Nutrition Policy Implementation through Community-Centered Approaches

Investing in Local Voices and Data for Better Nutrition Outcomes

Background

Uganda's nutrition policies hold the potential to transform public health, yet their implementation is hindered by gaps in governance, data accessibility, and community participation. Without action, vulnerable populations, especially children and women will continue to suffer from malnutrition.

One mother in Kotido District shared her struggle: *“My child was growing weaker each day, but no one had the data to track what was happening. If health workers had been informed earlier, maybe we wouldn't have reached this point.”* This reality underscores the urgent need for better policy implementation.

The CAlyzing Strengthened policy aCtion for heAlthy Diets and resilience (CASCADE) project's assessment, based on key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs), reveals urgent areas of improvement. Now is the time for **bold policy action** that prioritizes local leadership, evidence-based decision-making, and robust cross-sector collaboration.

The Opportunity: A Path Forward

We can turn these challenges into opportunities through **three key actions**:

The Challenge

- ◆ **Lack of Data Undermines Decision-Making:** 80% of the 10 districts involved in the study lack structured data collection frameworks, making it difficult to track progress, identify gaps and allocate resources effectively. Without quality and timely data, policymakers are navigating in the dark, unable to measure what works and what doesn't.
- ◆ **Poor Leadership and Coordination in Nutrition Efforts:** Weak district leadership and disjointed stakeholder coordination hinder effective nutrition initiatives. In Gulu City, a lack of strong leadership weakens policy enforcement, while fragmented efforts and overlapping work plans create inefficiencies. Organizations often work in silos, leading to resource duplication and slow progress. Underutilized governance structures, like those in Napak District, further limit collaboration and impact
- ◆ **Agricultural Support Challenges:** Programs such as the Farmer Field Business Schools (FFBS) model in Lira City struggle due to poor seed quality and lack of irrigation support, making year-round food security a challenge for many households

1. Harnessing Local Leadership for Policy

Success: Strengthening traditional leadership models, like those in Napak District, will enhance community mobilization and policy enforcement. Prioritizing women's leadership in governance and ensuring their access to credit and land rights will further drive inclusive and sustainable development.

1) **Data-Driven Accountability;** Districts like Kamuli, which have adopted structured reporting and data collection, are improving policy coordination and resource allocation. Scaling these efforts, along with a peer-learning platform and capacity strengthening for districts to share strategies like by-law frameworks and stakeholder coordination models, will enhance accountability and impact.

2) Scaling Up Integrated Nutrition Programs:

Multi-faceted approaches, like FFBS, have already demonstrated impact by improving productivity, dietary diversity, and financial resilience. Expanding support for rural market hubs, cold enhance these efforts, reducing post-harvest losses and ensuring year-round food production.

Policy Recommendation

The identified opportunities can only deliver meaningful impact if translated into concrete policy action. We call on national and sub-national duty bearers to take urgent action by implementing the following policy measures.

- I. **Strengthen and expand community-led nutrition governance** by enhancing the capacity of existing local councils and establishing new ones where they do not exist. Equip community leaders with the necessary training and resources to enforce policies, drive accountability, and oversee effective nutrition programs.
- II. **Enhance data-driven policy implementation** by mandating all districts to adopt standardized data collection systems, integrating real-time insights into decision-making, and developing a national data-sharing platform to track progress and measure impact
- III. **Ensure Sustainable Nutrition Investment:** Secure long-term government funding by earmarking a district-level nutrition budget and strengthening local staff to reduce reliance on external actors. Leverage public-private partnerships and enhance domestic resource mobilization for efficient resource use and accountability. Strengthen productivity and market linkages to sustain and scale nutrition investment