



TACKLING FOOD SAFETY AND MALNUTRITION: GEDA'S EFFORTS IN KASESE DISTRICT

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Uganda continues to face significant food safety challenges, posing risks to public health and the economy. Each year, approximately 1.3 million Ugandans suffer from foodborne illnesses, accounting for 14% of all reported health conditions. These illnesses are often caused by food contaminated with harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites, or chemicals.

Kasese District exemplifies these challenges, particularly in addressing malnutrition among children under five years of age. Despite being a food-rich region, Kasese struggles with food safety issues stemming from biological, physical, and chemical contamination. These not only cause widespread foodborne illnesses but also exacerbate the high prevalence of malnutrition in the region.

One alarming example is the continued sale and consumption of “*Ssanga*” meat (spoiled meat) that is sold across the district. This dangerous practice highlights the urgent need for improved food safety measures and awareness to mitigate such risks.

GEDA Uganda's Food Safety Campaign

In response to these pressing concerns, Gender Environment and Development Action (GEDA Uganda) has taken a proactive role in promoting food safety across the Rwenzori sub-region. GEDA has integrated its food safety campaign into its broader nutrition program, which primarily targets teenage mothers and their households.

The program focuses on several critical areas:

- **Food and Nutrition Security:** Training households on ensuring consistent access to safe and nutritious food.
- **Malnutrition Prevention and Management:** Addressing both acute and chronic malnutrition through education on balanced diets and proper feeding practices.
- **Diet-Related Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs):** Raising awareness about the prevention and management of NCDs linked to poor diets.
- **Maternal and Child Health:** Offering guidance on healthy practices during pregnancy and early childhood nutrition.
- **Food Safety:** Educating communities on safe food handling practices to reduce contamination risks along the value chain.
- **Food Loss and Waste Management:** Promoting strategies to minimize post-harvest losses and waste at the household level.

Community-Centered Awareness Efforts

GEDA employs a variety of methods to reach local communities with its messages:

- **Food and Cooking Demonstrations:** Practical sessions at the community level to teach safe food preparation techniques while preserving nutrients.
- **Radio Talk Shows:** Leveraging local radio stations to disseminate information widely across the region.
- **Peer-to-Peer Learning:** Encouraging knowledge sharing among community members to foster collective action on food safety issues.
- **Community Dialogues:** Facilitating discussions that engage diverse stakeholders in identifying challenges and solutions related to food safety and nutrition.
- **Drama Series:** Using creative storytelling to communicate key messages in an engaging manner that resonates with audiences.

Challenges Highlighted During Campaigns

Through its outreach efforts, GED-Uganda has identified several persistent barriers to achieving optimal food safety in Kasese:

- **Poor Agronomic Practices:** Inadequate farming methods that expose crops to contamination risks.
- **Substandard Post-Harvest Handling Practices:** Improper drying, storage, and transportation practices that increase spoilage.
- **Limited Awareness Among Food Handlers:** A lack of knowledge about safe food handling practices at various stages of the value chain.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure:** Insufficient facilities for proper storage, testing, and monitoring of food safety standards.
- **Weak Enforcement of Regulations:** Limited adherence to existing legal frameworks governing food safety.

- **Cultural Practices:** Traditions like consuming spoiled meat ("Ssanga") that undermine public health efforts.

A Call to Action

GEDA's campaign emphasizes that achieving sustainable improvements in food safety requires collaboration among multiple stakeholders:

- **Policymakers and Regulators** must strengthen enforcement mechanisms for existing laws while investing in infrastructure for monitoring compliance with food safety standards.
- **Farmers** should adopt better agronomic practices and ensure proper post-harvest handling techniques.
- **Consumers** are urged to demand safer products while adopting proper storage and preparation methods at home.
- **Local Leaders** (religious, cultural, and community leaders) should advocate for behavior change within their communities.
- **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)** need to continue raising awareness while advocating for policy reforms.

Sustained Commitment

GEDA-Uganda remains steadfast in its commitment to addressing food safety challenges through awareness creation, capacity building, advocacy campaigns, and community engagement initiatives. By equipping communities with knowledge and practical skills, GEDA aims to foster a culture of safe food handling practices while reducing malnutrition rates across Kasese District.

This holistic approach is vital not only for improving public health but also for enhancing Uganda's socioeconomic development by ensuring access to safe, nutritious food for all citizens, a cornerstone for a thriving nation.