



AN OPEN LETTER TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

RE: PRIORITIZATION OF FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN THE COVID 19 MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Your Excellency, we wish to congratulate you on the efforts undertaken so far to manage the COVID 19 pandemic before and after Uganda registered the first COVID 19 case on the 20th of March 2020. Although there is a recent increase in the number of confirmed infections and deaths from the disease, the rate at which they are rising is under control. This can be mainly attributed to your strategic and political interventions that were timely and evidence-based. We are also cognizant of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that have been established to contain the spread of the pandemic and the food distribution that took place to ensure that people in Uganda continue having access to food during the pandemic.

WHY FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IS IMPORTANT

Your Excellency, we are concerned that the issue of Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) has by and large not been given the priority it deserves in the ongoing COVID-19 management response. From the onset of passing out measures to control the pandemic, the SOPs have not integrated messages on food and nutrition. The Policy Guidelines on Food and Nutrition Security under the relevant Government Ministries Department and Agencies (MDAs) have not been fully operationalized in the context of COVID-19. Apparent evidence suggests that good nutrition practices and diets rich in micronutrient are key weapons against the virus. In effect, hardly much information is filtering through from Government sources to the citizens on how diet and nutrition boost their immunity and fight the pandemic, yet clinical and social distancing, wearing of masks and sanitizing have been over emphasized.

Your Excellency, we draw your attention to the fact that whereas there are efforts to get vaccines for the virus all over the world Uganda inclusive, human immunity is the number one vaccine that a body needs to fight any infection. Indeed, as the first physician Hippocrates



pronounced, “*Let thy food be thy medicine and thy medicine be thy food*”, history has shown that food and nutrition are pioneer medicine and the human race has endured through dietary ingenuity to keep many hitherto terrible diseases at bay, what *Wana* Kiswahili would call “*chini ya ulinzi*”. The World Health Organization and Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations recommend adults to consume at least five servings of fruits and vegetables per day excluding starchy vegetables. Good nutrition is also key in the prevention and control of health risks related to overweight obesity, heart disease, diabetes and some types of cancer.

Your Excellency, while the experts must have notified you about the trending evidence that adequate intake of food especially fruits and vegetable rich in zinc, iron, and vitamins A, B 12, B6, C, and E are essential for the maintenance of immune function, the local farmers have not been adequately mobilized to produce these foods, while the general population has not been mobilized to provide the ready market. In essence, the potential of the fruits and vegetable value chain has not been fully exploited in the fight against COVID-19 and its related negative health and economic effects.

Testimony from many persons who have recovered from COVID -19 and other information from experts’ point to therapeutic benefits from the consistent consumption of food rich in vitamin C and other antioxidants in the diet. The table below summarize the most commonly referred to foods with benefits against COVID-19.

NUTRITIONAL VALUES	FRUIT TYPES
Vitamin C rich fruits	lemon, orange, tamarind, tangerine, onion, water melon, pineapple, yellow bananas, apples, mangoes, Avocado, grapes Pawpaw, passion fruit
Leafy vegetables	Spinach, Nakati, Grain Amaranths, cabbage, broccoli, Cali flowers, Leafy Vegetables



Those with essential chemical compounds	Onions, Turmeric, red pepper Ginger Honey, Garlic, Beans, pumpkins
Others	Mukene, fatty fish, chicken, Milk, Mushrooms,

These foods, and many more nutritious dense foods, are readily available and accessible across the country as a result of our rich biodiversity.

We are further concerned that despite your recognition of Food and Nutrition as one of the core priorities of rebuilding the Real Economy” after Covid 19, there has not been any stimulus package designated to the Agriculture Sector to boost the production of nutrient dense foods or even increasing production and productivity. Investing in Agriculture will not only provide food in the economy but also provide incomes to many whose enterprises have collapsed and the country’s broad plan of Agro Industrialization.

Given your overall mandate as the, we pray that you;

- 1) Instruct the relevant Ministries, Department and Agencies (MDAs) that are developing and disseminating COVID 19 messages to include the consumption of safe and nutritious foods as part of the SOPs. SOPs to Include **EAT NUTRITIOUS FOODS, WEAR MASKS, SANITIZE AND KEEP SOCIAL DISTANCE.**
- 2) Instruct Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development to mobilize stimulus packages for Agriculture that are inclusive and designed not only to increase production and productivity but also focused on boosting Food and nutrition.
- 3) Take lead in re-orienting the National Food and Nutrition Policy and Legal Framework within Government, and institutionalise a robust National Food and Nutrition Security Response Plan to Covid-19. This will awaken the population on the food and nutrition actions against the pandemic and guide farmers across the country to benefit from the food and nutrition demands of the pandemic.



- 4) Direct all leaders at all levels to educate and guide the people in Uganda to produce and consume nutrient-dense foods that have been singled out to have the capacity to boost immunity against COVID 19 e.g. those listed above
- 5) Guide all COVID 19 task force both at the national and local level to institute or utilise existing Food and Nutrition Committees (FNCs) within the task force to manage issues of food and nutrition security during this pandemic. In this regard, they should develop and communicate the sector and district-specific food and nutrition security response plans.
- 6) Task the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) to coordinate relevant stakeholders to develop a permanent disaster response mechanism/plan regarding food and nutrition security contingency and relief to respond to the current and future food issues in the country.
- 7) Support scientists to research our diverse protective foods in the country within the context of food and nutrition security to safeguard national food sovereignty, and generate home-based solutions to pandemics such as COVID-19 that can be available and accessible by all. Besides, such research will not only protect but also build the resilience of Uganda's food systems.
- 8) Refrain all actors from any form of actions that may distort and or destroy our biodiversity and food diversity. And where such actions are permitted, they should not distort the environment and the strong nutritious and medicinal properties of our food systems. Our food biodiversity and safe environment remains a core asset and weapon in the defence of such biological pandemics like COVID-19, and sustained progress in the socio-economic transformation of Uganda for which you have a major duty.

CONCLUSION: Good nutrition is necessary before, during and after an infection. Maintaining a healthy diet is therefore very important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are committed to joining all efforts against Covid 19 in Uganda through the promotion of consumption of nutrient dense and Antioxidant rich foods.



FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

REFERENCE

1. [World Health Organization, 2020](#)
2. [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation, 2020](#)