Issues Paper

CEFROHT
The Center for Food and Adequate Living Rights

The State of the Right to Adequate Food in Uganda

Understanding the implications of rising fuel and the cost of living

This issue paper examines the rising cost of fuel and its impact on the realization of the right to adequate food, especially among vulnerable populations, and provides recommendations on the way forward

Introduction

The right to adequate food can only be realized when every individual child, woman and man, whether alone or in community with others, always has access to nutritious food or means for its procurement. It therefore requires that food should be available, accessible (physically and economically), adequate in quantity and quality, safe, culturally acceptable, affordable, and sustainable for everyone. The cost of production and distribution is an important determinant of whether people can realize this right. For instance, when the cost of agri-food inputs, transportation, among others, is high, the prices of food will also increase. Thus, higher food prices can reduce the quantity, quality, and diversity of food that people/households can access to enjoy their rights. Uganda's 2024 census found that 46% of households experienced moderate or severe food insecurity.



The cost at the pump

Uganda, 2026

When fuel prices rise, food prices follow.

Shs 7,000+

per litre of diesel in some markets

Shs 200

additional tax on every litre of fuel since 1 July 2026

Shs 4,100

per US dollar in early October, from about Shs 3,605 in March

46%

of households face moderate or severe food insecurity (2024 census)

Currently, Uganda is experiencing rising fuel costs ranging between Shs 6,800 and Shs 7,000 per litre in some markets, and diesel exceeding Shs 7,000, driven by a combination of international supply disruptions, currency depreciation, and increased domestic taxes.[2] These pressures have been compounded by disruptions in the climate seasons, with droughts that have disrupted planting. Many households are seed-poor and cannot afford to plant twice in a season. This has led to a sharp increase in prices of food commodities like beans and maize to levels that communities cannot afford.

The depreciation of the shilling against the US dollar has raised the domestic cost of imported petroleum products, with the exchange rate weakening from approximately Shs 3,605 per dollar in March to about Shs 4,100 in early October.[3] Since 1 July 2026, fuel carries an additional tax of Shs 200 per litre.

Rising fuel costs and their implications for the right to adequate food in Uganda

Fuel supports several activities in Uganda's food system, including production, processing and transport to markets. Rising fuel costs increase operating expenses for farmers, processors and traders, who may absorb some costs through lower earnings or pass them on through higher food prices.[4]

How fuel costs travel to the plate



For households, higher food prices can reduce the quantity, quality and diversity of food they can afford. Uganda's 2024 census found that 46% of households experienced moderate or severe food insecurity.[5] When household budgets are stretched, families may change what they eat before reducing how much they eat. This can help households manage immediate expenses, but sustained reductions in dietary diversity can compromise nutrition. Market studies also highlight concerns about the affordability of animal-source foods and the availability of fruits and vegetables.

> ***The right to adequate food also requires that the cost of an adequate diet does not compromise the fulfillment of other basic needs.[6]***

Who bears the burden

Rising food prices hit hardest where budgets are thinnest, and they reach children first.

Most vulnerable Ugandan households, in both urban and rural areas, are net buyers of staples; the 2008 price spike raised the poverty headcount by 2.6 percentage points, most sharply in the North.[7] Smallholders are squeezed twice, paying more for inputs and transport while still buying much of their food. A 1% rise in cereal prices cuts consumption by 0.61% in low-income countries against 0.43% in high-income ones, with poorer households hit hardest.[8]

+2.6 points	rise in Uganda's poverty headcount after the 2008 food price spike, most sharply in the North
0.61%	fall in consumption for every 1% rise in cereal prices in low-income countries, against 0.43% in high-income ones
9% to 15%	higher risk of child wasting when real food prices rise by 5%, with the higher figure among asset-poor children

The damage reaches children. Across 44 low- and middle-income countries, a 5% rise in real food prices raised the risk of wasting by 9% (15% among asset-poor children), worsened dietary diversity and, during pregnancy or infancy, increased later stunting.[9] Uganda's September rises were led by dry beans, milk, fresh cassava, sweet potatoes and cabbage, the foods that make a diet healthy, not merely filling.[10]

Led September's price rises

Dry beans | Milk | Fresh cassava | Sweet potatoes | Cabbage

> ***What is lost first is the right to adequate food, not only to calories.***

Invoking the law to realize the right to adequate food in Uganda

The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995

The Constitution provides that the State shall take appropriate steps to encourage people to grow and store adequate food, establish national food reserves and encourage and promote proper nutrition through mass education and other appropriate means in order to build a healthy State.[11]

Landmark judgment

Center for Food and Adequate Living Rights (CEFROHT) v Attorney General (2020)

The High Court recognized the right to adequate food, and the Government therefore has a duty to take all appropriate measures to respect, protect and fulfil this right.

Measured against these duties, the current response falls short

The Energy Minister's view that government cannot control pump prices in a liberalized economy overlooks the duty to protect people from private actors who undermine their access to food (CESCR, 1999, para. 15).

The Shs 200 excise, projected to raise Shs 450 billion (Parliament of the Republic of Uganda, 2026), is a deliberate state measure whose implications should be examined against the core principles of the right to adequate food.

Shs 200

extra excise on every litre of fuel since 1 July 2026

Shs 450 billion

projected revenue from the excise, 2026

What should be done?

Recommendations

1. **Establish functioning national food reserves.** These would help address uneven food distribution across regions and support a sustained food supply, especially for vulnerable groups.

2. **Promote agroecology as a sustainable agrifood system in Uganda.** Small-scale farmers should be empowered to advance agriculture that interacts with nature as a measure of reducing dependence on external inputs. Agroecology further enables local and community-based food production and distribution.

3. **Advance reliable early warning measures for farmers and consumers.** These include climate information and market information on the availability of food across the country.

4. **The government should reduce, subsidize or suspend the additional tax of Shs 200.** This measure may at least apply to diesel used by trucks that carry food and by food processors, to help prevent transport costs from further increasing food prices.

5. **Expedite the passing of the Food and Agriculture Regulatory Authority (FARA) Bill.** The Bill proposes an authority to oversee food production and consumption and to advise the government on underlying challenges, including rising production costs.

6. **The government should increase the budget allocation to the Agro-industrialization Programme.** In FY 2026/27, the Programme was allocated Shs 2.26 trillion out of Shs 84.4 trillion. The budget allocation is below the CAADP commitment of allocating at least 10% to agriculture. This may undermine agricultural production, monitoring, and, ultimately, the realization of the right to adequate food.

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