

Institutional Arrangements for Rural Poverty Reduction and Hunger Eradication in Uganda: An Empirical Analysis

Rose B Namara

Uganda Management Institute-Kampala, Uganda

Benon C Basheka

Uganda Management Institute-Kampala, Uganda

Abstract

Poverty reduction has been an overarching and universal goal for global and local development agendas. Global leaders chose to combine eradicating extreme poverty and hunger in the first Millennium Development Goal under the assumption that institutional arrangements to reduce poverty would automatically reduce hunger. Further assumptions suggested that all governments would design poverty reduction policies consistent with food security outcomes. We argue that concurrent hunger and poverty eradication in the rural settings of Uganda need direct institutional arrangements and action to reduce hunger as well as mechanisms that address other contextual factors. We empirically confirm that there are diverse determinants of hunger in Uganda with an associated socio-economic and political context. There is a relationship between poverty and hunger; therefore, government policies intended to address poverty need to embark on a synergy that coordinates interventions to address the interrelated societal problems of poverty and hunger.

Key Words: Poverty Reduction, Institutions, Hunger, Uganda

INTRODUCTION

Many development frameworks brought poverty to the centre of development efforts with the assumption that other challenges were inherently interlinked to poverty. Governments initiated several institutions i.e. ‘the rules of the game in a society that constrains human agency...’ (North 1990:3), programmes and systems to condition behavior of communities to achieve poverty reduction. Supposedly poverty reduction would reduce inequality, lead to resource conservation, cause gender equality, empower women, and reduce hunger. However, in 2005, the UN decried of pending social calamities due to acute inequality between the rich and the poor between and within countries. In Africa, a majority of the poor live in rural areas and depend on agricultural livelihoods

(UNDP, 2005). Christopher et al (2005) disproved *the assumption that poverty reduction leads to renewable resource conservation. However, Opschoor (2007) maintained that there is a relationship between poverty and the environment although he insists that institutional factors are inadequate to explain the relationship between poverty and the environment. He suggested new approaches such as livelihood and capability perspectives that could explain this relationship.*

Poverty reduction has been an overarching goal for existing global and local development agendas in almost all countries. At the start of the millennium, both developing and advanced countries reached a consensus on how to tackle abject poverty and other human miseries through the Millennium Declaration translated into eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The UN chose to combine eradicating extreme poverty and hunger into

the first MDG. The MDGs assumed that institutional arrangements implemented to reduce poverty would automatically reduce hunger. It was hoped that a reduction of the number of impoverished people by 2015 to 28% would lead to a corresponding reduction in the percentage of the hungry and malnourished to 12.5% as MDGs targets. The targets assumed that all governments would design poverty reduction policies consistent with food security objectives.

In 1999, the United Nations (UN) Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted the *General Comment on the Right to Food*. States committed themselves to provide this guarantee; however, with minimal direct action. The lack of direct action in the fight against hunger arose from a belief that a success in *poverty reduction* (due to market-driven economic development) would automatically resolve of the hunger problem; however, this thinking did not take into account three points. First, *poverty reduction* took time, while the hungry needed immediate relief. Second, in contrast to many diseases (for which cures are either unknown or unaffordable) the means to feed everyone are readily and cheaply available. Third, hunger is as much a cause as an effect of poverty. These three points implied that the means to reduce hunger often need to be immediate. Equally, the argument is that unless hunger is reduced, progress in reducing poverty is bound to be slow or fail.

Food insecurity, hunger and poverty are closely linked (Ajani, Adebukola and Oyindamola, 2006). The existence of *hunger in a world of plenty* is a moral outrage; it is also short-sighted from a utilitarian/economic viewpoint because *hungry people* make poor workers, are bad learners, are prone to sickness, and die young. *Hunger* is also transmitted across generations, as malnourished mothers give birth to underweight children whose mental and physical activity is impaired. *Hunger* breeds desperation as well as national and global instability; the hungry are easy prey to those who seek to gain power and influence through crime and coercion. A direct attack on hunger will greatly improve the chances of meeting the other Millennium Development Goals such as poverty reduction as well as those related to education, child mortality, maternal health and disease (FAO, 2002).

Hunger is a worldwide problem and it was estimated that 800 million people were undernourished in the

1990s. In 1999, about 41% of the Ugandan population were considered food insecure and the most affected areas were in rural areas. The 2005 UN report *Hunger* stated that Uganda was a ‘hotspot’ characterized by wide-spread hunger issues associated with the prevalence of disease. The report further acknowledged that once a Ugandan household is food insecure it is vulnerable to other poverty issues such as disease. Uganda presented an appropriate study area to provide empirical evidence on the synergy of poverty reduction and the hunger eradication. This study provides an analysis of food security at the household and individual level as well as considers consumption patterns. The study forms important policy implications on institutional factors responsible for the eradication of concurrent reduction poverty and hunger in a rural Ugandan setting.

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTIONS

There is ample literature on the percentage of people living below the poverty line; however, there is limited empirical data on the relationship between poverty and hunger in the Ugandan context. For instance, since the early 1990s, the number of people living below the poverty line decreased, from 56% in 1992/3 to 44% in 1996/7 and to 33.5% in 1999/2000 (Ellis and Freeman, 2004). The trends reversed where the percentages increased from 33.5% in 2000 to 38.8% in 2003 and then the trends improved to indicate a positive decline from 38% in 2003 to 31% in 2006. There is limited information on hunger eradication in Uganda. This leaves a huge knowledge gap, which makes policy interventions challenging.

The inter-linkages between poverty and hunger may not be demarcated but it is still believed that efforts to address hunger without necessarily addressing poverty (and vice versa) are futile. The question remains “How can the poor increase their productivity when they are hungry?” Different global studies have addressed this critical question with mixed results. However, in search for answers to this question, government policy documents suggest a strategy to ‘mainstream food production and food security measures’ into poverty reduction programmes. The extent to which this has achieved a win-win situation between the reduction of