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USAID Karamoja Resilience Support Unit: Turning evidence into action



Tackling malnutrition: understanding local needs and factors behind seasonal hunger

The challenges

Child malnutrition and stunting have posed challenges to populations in East Africa and the Horn of Africa for several decades. However, rates have not only continued to increase during this time, but now have a broader impact: for many years, it was primarily youngsters in agrarian communities that bore the brunt of the impact. Today, the effects are being experienced by both adults and children in pastoralist communities, and are exacerbated by ongoing population growth.

A variety of factors contribute to malnutrition in the Karamoja region. For instance, agro-pastoralist households (particularly poorer ones) rely on crop production for livelihood security – but variable rainfall and temperatures make this an unreliable food, production or income source. Meanwhile, a reduced availability of milk – both cow and goat – resulting from decreased access to pasture and water sources, has also been cited as a contributing factor to malnutrition and livelihood insecurity.

Livestock ownership has also long been a critical food and income source for a large number of households. However, during the last decade, a decrease in access to rangeland, varied levels of livestock commercialisation, a shift in

Key messages

- Malnutrition and stunting have been significant concerns in the East and Horn of Africa for decades – and are now affecting adults as well as children within pastoralist communities.
- Despite a number of initiatives undertaken by non-governmental organisations to help tackle these issues, little success has been made.
- The Karamoja Resilience Support Unit (KRSU) investigated why interventions were not producing their desired outcomes, using the participatory epidemiology (PE) approach to obtain more detailed insights and feedback from those impacted.
- Inspired by KRSU's success with PE, the Nawa project has adopted the same approach in their explorations of the causes and seasonality of malnutrition, and steps that can be taken to combat it.