I-CAN POLICY BRIEF: BUILDING SYSTEMS FOR CLIMATE–NUTRITION INTEGRATION IN UGANDA

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SUMMARY

Uganda increasingly recognizes the importance of addressing the intersection of climate change and nutrition, with emerging efforts demonstrating that integrated action is both possible and already underway. However, climate shocks, including droughts, floods, and pest outbreaks, continue to disrupt food production, dietary diversity, water access, and disease patterns, ultimately undermining nutrition outcomes. A review of 39 national policies and consultations with 22 stakeholders across government, development partners, civil society, and the private sector reveal that climate and nutrition remain largely siloed within Uganda's policy architecture, and that implementation is constrained by gaps between policy intent and operational reality. However, a subset of policies demonstrates that effective climate–nutrition integration is already possible, particularly where clear pathways, costed commitments, and system-level investments are in place. Stakeholder interviews indicate that, although policy frameworks increasingly acknowledge the climate-nutrition nexus, integrated action is most often realized at the program level, primarily through donor-funded projects and civil society initiatives, rather than systematically embedded within government systems. These findings highlight a critical opportunity to strengthen policy coherence, institutional coordination, financing alignment, and cross-sector accountability to accelerate climate-nutrition integration efforts in Uganda.

KEY RESULTS

- Uganda's policy framework largely lacks integration of climate and nutrition
- Where integration exists, it is not operationalized into funded, accountable programs and action
- Financing architecture is the main bottleneck to implementing integrated climate-nutrition action
- Integrated climate–nutrition approaches are already being successfully implemented through project-based platforms, providing practical, real-world models that can inform and support their institutionalization within government systems.
- Weak subnational implementation undermines the effectiveness of integrated climate–nutrition actions.
- The weakness of shared indicators and joint accountability systems prevents system-wide integration



INTRODUCTION

In Uganda, climate shocks and stressors consistently undermine nutrition outcomes by disrupting food systems, health services, and livelihoods. The country faces recurrent droughts, floods, landslides, erratic rainfall, rising temperatures, and increasing pest outbreaks (Muzira and Nambooze 2024). Approximately two-thirds of Ugandans rely on rain-fed agriculture, leaving food production and livelihoods highly exposed to climate variability (Babyenda, Kabubo-Mariara, and Odhiambo 2023). However, adaptive capacity remains limited; Uganda ranks 163rd out of 185 countries on the ND-GAIN Index, reflecting very high vulnerability and limited capacity to adapt to climate change (ND-GAIN 2023). In the first half of 2024 alone, extreme weather events such as including floods, heavy rains, and droughts, affected over 100,000 people and displaced more than 27,000 in Uganda (UNICEF 2024). Karamoja remains the region most vulnerable to climate-related shocks, where prolonged dry spells during the 2023/24 season led to below-average crop yields, reduced pasture availability, and livestock migration, further constraining food production (IPC 2024).

The latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis indicates that approximately 2.46 million people in Uganda were facing Crisis-level or worse food insecurity between April and July 2025, with food insecurity remaining persistent in Karamoja despite seasonal improvements (IPC 2025). This occurs against a backdrop of persistent malnutrition: according to Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2022, 26% of children under five are stunted, 3.2% are wasted, and 9.7% are underweight (UBOS and ICF 2023).

It is within this context that the Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN) was launched in 2022 by the Government of Egypt during COP27, in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. I-CAN is a global, multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to accelerate transformative action at the intersection of climate and nutrition. By 2030, I-CAN envisions a world in which climate and nutrition agendas are fully integrated in policy, financing, research, and implementation. The initiative focuses on five strategic pillars, the first of which is to support national-level integration by strengthening policy coherence in countries facing both climate vulnerability and high burdens of malnutrition. Specifically, I-CAN targets four key outcomes by 2030:

1. Policy coherence: Greater integration of climate and nutrition across national policies, including NDCs, National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), national nutrition plans, food-based dietary guidelines, and public food procurement standards.

2. Scaled-up action: Accelerated implementation of climate and nutrition interventions.

3. Increased financing: Mobilization of new and existing resources for integrated climate and nutrition agendas.

4. Cross-sectoral integration: Enhanced alignment of research, advocacy, and policy to advance both nutrition and environmental goals.



METHODS

A two-pronged light touch assessment was conducted in January and March 2026 to assess the climate and nutrition policy and stakeholder landscape in Uganda. A light touch policy landscape analysis reviewed the content of 39 policies, including both currently active and no longer in force policies. The policies reviewed cover the thematic categories of nutrition and health, climate and environment, food systems and agriculture, and general development. The policy landscaping findings were complemented by themes and results drawn from key informant interviews (KIIs) held with 22 Ugandan nutrition and climate stakeholders, including government actors, development partners, private sector actors, and civil society organizations. To assess the level of nutrition and climate integration in each of the reviewed policies, the methodology outlined in the 2023 I-CAN Baseline Assessment was followed, consistent with the 2025 I-CAN Assessment update which uses the same approach. A comprehensive keyword search was completed using Python, a high-level computer programming language. The level of nutrition and climate integration of each policy was then evaluated using the Assessment criteria:

Level 1: No intentional connectedness between climate and nutrition

Level 2: Some intention to connect climate and nutrition

Level 3: Intention to mobilise resources to connect climate and nutrition

Level 4: Commitment to mobilising resources and with distinct plans to take action to connect climate and nutrition

KEY RESULTS

Key result 1. Uganda's policy framework largely lacks integration of climate and nutrition

Analysis of Uganda's policy landscape demonstrates that climate change and nutrition are largely addressed in isolation, with minimal explicit integration across national policies. Most policies reviewed fall into Level 1 (no integration), meaning they do not substantively link climate risks to nutrition outcomes or vice versa. Where connections are present, they are typically implicit or framed at a strategic level, articulating broad interdependencies without clearly defined pathways or actionable commitments for implementation of integrated climate-nutrition action. Climate-focused policies largely prioritize resilience, mitigation, and environmental management, while nutrition policies focus on service delivery and undernutrition, often without systematically accounting for relevant climate-related drivers of malnutrition. This absence of explicit integration creates a structural disconnect between policy intent and real-world outcomes, limiting Uganda's ability to address malnutrition in the context of increasing climate variability, build resilient, nutrition-sensitive food systems, and align cross-sectoral investments toward shared development outcomes.

Key result 2. Where integration exists, it is not operationalized into funded, accountable programs and action

Even where climate–nutrition linkages are acknowledged in Uganda's policy framework, they are rarely translated into operational, implementable actions. Policies that demonstrate partial integration (Levels 2–3) include broad statements of intent, but lack the key elements needed for implementation such as costed activities, clearly defined institutional responsibilities, and measurable indicators. Stakeholder consultations further revealed that integration remains largely conceptual rather than functional, with limited translation into planning, budgeting, or delivery systems. As a result, climate–nutrition integration does not materialize in practice. Because integrated actions are not reflected in sectoral or national budgets, policies do not translate into funded programs and responsibilities remain unclear, leading to gaps or duplication across ministries. Without operationalization, policy commitments remain non-binding and non-actionable, creating a persistent gap between policy ambition and implementation and constraining Uganda's ability to deliver integrated climate-nutrition programs.

Key result 3. Financing architecture is the main bottleneck to implementing integrated climate-nutrition action

While gaps in policy design limit operationalization, evidence from both the policy analysis and

stakeholder consultations shows that financing architecture is the primary binding constraint to implementation. Even in cases where policies include costed actions, defined roles, and implementation frameworks, integrated climate–nutrition activities are rarely funded or executed in practice. Public financing and planning systems in Uganda remain largely sector-specific, with climate and nutrition priorities not systematically integrated into shared budgeting or implementation frameworks. As a result, integrated actions, which are cross-sectoral by nature, appear to not align with how resources are allocated and managed.

Stakeholders reported that climate-nutrition integration is not reflected in budget structures or expenditure frameworks, climate and nutrition financing streams are not designed to support joint outcomes, and even when policies are costed, funds are not allocated or released for integrated actions.

Key result 4. Integrated approaches are implemented in projects, but not institutionalized in government systems

Stakeholders revealed that while integrated climate–nutrition approaches are being implemented in Uganda, they are primarily delivered through donor-funded projects and non-governmental platforms rather than embedded within government systems. These initiatives often demonstrate strong integration, effectively linking climate resilience, food systems, and nutrition outcomes. While they currently operate in parallel to national systems, they provide valuable proof of concept and practical models for how integrated approaches can be designed and delivered. Stakeholders highlighted that integration is more feasible in project settings due to flexible funding, unified delivery structures, and clearer accountability, which offer important lessons for strengthening government systems. As a result, although climate–nutrition action remains localized and time-bound, these experiences present a clear opportunity to inform and support the gradual institutionalization of integrated approaches within national delivery systems.

Key result 5. Weak subnational implementation undermines the effectiveness of integrated climate–nutrition actions.

Key informants highlighted that while national policies increasingly recognize the linkages between climate and nutrition, translating these commitments into district- and community-level action remains a major challenge. Subnational actors (including district planners, health and agriculture officers, and extension staff) often lack the technical capacity, clear guidance, and flexible resources to operationalize integrated approaches. Fragmented funding streams for climate adaptation and nutrition further constrain local coordination and cross-sector interventions. Effective integration typically occurs only within donor-supported projects that provide dedicated technical support, financing, and reporting structures. Outside these contexts, districts struggle to coordinate across ministries, monitor progress, or scale interventions, resulting in uneven, temporary, and project-dependent implementation. Limited local data and monitoring further hinder the identification of climate–nutrition risks, prioritization of interventions, and demonstration of results. As a result, integrated climate–nutrition actions often fail to reach the most vulnerable populations, particularly in high-risk regions such as Karamoja, where droughts, floods, and pest outbreaks directly threaten food systems and nutrition outcomes.

Key result 6. The weakness of shared indicators and joint accountability systems prevents system-wide integration

Across Uganda's policy and implementation landscape, researchers found no shared indicators or accountability mechanisms that track climate and nutrition outcomes jointly. Like public financing and planning, Ugandan monitoring and evaluation systems remain sector-specific, with each ministry reporting against its own indicators, frameworks, and targets. As a result, even where integration is prioritized in principle, there is no system to define, measure, or enforce shared outcomes across sectors.



The absence of joint indicators and accountability systems often leads to weak cross-sector coordination as ministries are not accountable for joint results, limited incentives for integration since performance is assessed within sectoral mandates, and the inability to track progress, making it difficult to evaluate or scale integrated approaches should they be prioritized.

Key result 7. Policy change is driven by informal influence networks rather than by formal institutional mandates

Analysis of the Ugandan climate–nutrition stakeholder ecosystem shows that policy influence is shaped not only by formal institutional mandates, but also by informal networks, including technical advisors, development partners, and individual policy champions. Climate–nutrition integration reflects this dynamic, with progress often enabled by relationships, convening platforms, and actors working across institutional boundaries. These networks play a critical role in translating technical concepts across sectors, shaping policy content, and advancing integration during key policy windows, making them an important driver of momentum in the current landscape.

At the same time, stakeholders highlighted that strengthening the link between informal influence and formal systems such as planning, budgeting, and accountability processes presents a key opportunity to sustain and scale progress. While reliance on informal networks can create vulnerability to changes in personnel, partnerships, and funding, stakeholder interviews also indicate strong and growing political will to embed climate–nutrition integration more systematically within institutional frameworks.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Policy Integration.** The government of Uganda has the opportunity to systematically embed climate-nutrition integration into key national and sectoral policies, especially in upcoming policy revisions and newly drafted strategies, such as the National Development Plan (NDP), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), and sector strategies (agriculture, health, environment). Climate–nutrition integration would be most effective if it explicitly articulates climate–nutrition pathways (e.g., climate shocks → food systems → diets and nutrition outcomes), and incorporates nutrition objectives within climate and agriculture policies, as well as climate resilience within nutrition policies. Aligning policy language and priorities across sectors would further support a shared national climate-nutrition agenda.

- **Operationalization.** Efforts should focus on translating existing policy commitments into operational, implementable plans. Policies should move beyond high-level commitments by embedding the elements required for implementation, including costed implementation plans linked to policy priorities, clearly defined institutional roles and responsibilities across ministries, and integration into sectoral work plans and implementation guidelines. This would ensure that climate-nutrition integration is reflected not only in policy text, but in day-to-day planning and delivery.

- **Financing Alignment.** To translate integrated climate–nutrition policy commitments into action, financing systems should be aligned to support cross-sector implementation. This can be achieved by introducing joint or aligned budget lines for climate–nutrition interventions, integrating climate-nutrition priorities into national planning and budgeting processes (e.g., program-based budgeting), and strengthening coordination between finance, climate, and sector ministries to enable co-investment and resource pooling. With stronger climate-nutrition integration in policy, Uganda can leverage climate finance mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and climate budget tagging systems as a pathway to finance nutrition-sensitive interventions at national and subnational levels.

- **Institutionalization.** The government should institutionalize integrated approaches within existing delivery systems by scaling successful project-based models into national and subnational platforms to ensure sustainability. This can be achieved by integrating climate–nutrition approaches into existing delivery platforms (e.g., extension services, health systems, and community-based platforms), aligning donor-supported models with government systems and priorities, and developing clear pathways to transition from pilot projects to sustainable, national-scale implementation through government systems. This would advance the integrated climate-nutrition policy agenda, while

strengthening Uganda's self-reliance by reducing dependence on donor-funded projects and enabling government systems to deliver and scale interventions sustainably.

- **Accountability Systems.** Establishing shared indicators and joint accountability mechanisms is essential to enable system-wide, sustainable, and effective climate–nutrition integration. The Government of Uganda should prioritize the development of shared climate–nutrition indicators across sectors and integrate them into national monitoring and evaluation systems to measure and enforce joint outcomes. This accountability system can be further strengthened by establishing cross-sector reporting and review processes to track progress, identify gaps, and inform joint decision-making.
- **Coordination.** Across contexts, effective climate–nutrition integration is enabled by formal coordination mechanisms that build on existing momentum. The Government of Uganda can build on the momentum generated by influential informal networks by strengthening formal coordination structures and institutional capacity. This can be achieved by establishing or reinforcing formal mandates for cross-sector coordination (e.g., through the Office of the Prime Minister or inter-ministerial platforms) and by institutionalizing roles and processes currently driven by informal actors and networks. An important consideration will be ensuring continuity of progress despite changes in personnel, partnerships, and funding cycles within government systems.



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