

## **A Balanced Diet in Local Communities is a Sham** **Hadijah KIBIRA (Uganda)**

Uganda, once described as the pearl of Africa, has a favorable climate that allowed all kinds of food crops, fruits, and vegetables to be easily grown organically. The soils too are conducive in over two-thirds of the country's land area. The country is also economically dependent on agriculture, growing both food and cash crops, together with a prosperous animal husbandry. It is basically from the home grown food crops that the Ugandans derive their food.

Being a country of cultural diversity (over 50 tribes), Uganda has a diverse food culture. Each tribe has a special delicacy and different ways of preparing the food. However, the food culture can be identified with the four broad regions in the country, thus, eastern, western, northern and central/southern.

In the different regions, different food crops are grown and eaten as staple food everywhere in the region. These staple foods vary from *matooke* (banana-type) in the central region, millet in western region, *posho* (mingled maize flour) in the northern, and sweet potatoes in the eastern. The food is eaten in three meals including breakfast, lunch and supper.

In the rural mostly poor households, breakfast is comprised of hot black tea, usually without sugar, and taken with leftovers from the previous night's supper. This is normally taken at around 11:00 am after working in the garden or early morning before going to work in the garden. In the middle income communities, the black tea contains sugar and is taken with bread. Milk is a rare commodity unless the region is a cattle keeping region like the western region. Even in homes where milk is produced, it is usually sold off for an income. The breakfast is never comprised of a balanced diet.

The lunch and supper are composed of similar foods depending on the region where the household is found. The food is usually made up of two types; a carbohydrate and a protein, for example, mingled maize flour and beans, cassava and beans, sweet potatoes and groundnuts, mingled millet flour and beans, etc. The protein is cooked as soup or sauce while the carbohydrate is regarded as the food. Meat is a rare delicacy eaten once a week in middle income homesteads and barely monthly in poor

households. Chicken is a special dish for festival days like Eid (Muslim festival) and Christmas.

In the central region where I come from, *matooke* is the area's delicacy cooked with ground nuts. The *matooke* are peeled, tied in banana leaves, while the groundnuts are crushed, mixed with water and the mixture put in a young smoked banana leaf. These are covered by many banana leaves in a source pan and steamed. This gives it an aroma that stimulates everybody's appetite. The longer it is cooked, the better the taste but with less nutrition.

In the good olden days, fruits like mangoes, guavas, jackfruit, and papaws that are perennial were enjoyed fresh from the trees any time of the day particularly by children. However today, in many parts of the country, these fruits are sold to merchants who take them to urban areas where they are sold at high prices.

Vegetables too, although widely home and wildy grown, are a rare species on the Ugandan local menu in all regions unless cooked as sauce. Unfortunately, they are overcooked and loose almost all food value.

Today, however due to changes in climate, the weather is no longer favorable to agriculture. Long droughts that have been experienced by all regions have changed the food culture from three meals a day to only one. Most regions are currently facing serious famine, with some regions seeing deaths. Coupled with a long period of insecurity, the northern region has been worse hit by the food crisis in Uganda. Families depend on wild fruits and vegetables collected from far away forests. Children are malnourished and starving to death. Currently, being the mango season, many families depend on mangoes for breakfast, lunch and supper. Women are especially affected and something must be done.