

Prolonged dry spell sparks fears

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BY MONITOR TEAM

The prolonged dry spell in the country has sparked fear of looming famine, with many farmers and traders sounding the alarm over the dire state of crops and livestock.

Farmers had expected to take advantage of the early rains for the months of October to plant crops, but several of the farmers in the affected districts said their respective areas have received little or no rainfall.

The weather update for December by the meteorological department in the Ministry of Water and Environment indicates that most of the country will experience dry conditions, but further warns that a full dry spell in some parts of the country will set in January until March next year.

In Bunyoro, farmers are already sounding the alarm after an extended dry spell destroyed large portions of their crops, causing fear of food insecurity in the coming months.

According to many farmers, the rains they had anticipated at the start of the season never came, and most of the crops they planted have dried up before reaching maturity.

Across Uganda, shifting weather patterns have begun to take a heavy toll on agriculture-dependent communities.

A 2025 alert by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) warned that East Africa is entering its third consecutive failed rainy season, a situation that erodes household resilience, dries pastures, reduces crop yields, and has already resulted in the loss of thousands of livestock.

In the predominantly agricultural districts of Kibaale, Kakumiro, and Kagadi, where maize and beans are grown on a large scale, farmers report sharply reduced harvests this year.

In Masindi, where sugarcane dominates commercial farming, growers said the prolonged dry spell has affected both household incomes and local food security.

In Kikuube District, Ms Josephine Nakato, the chairperson of Kikuube United Farmers, stood by her half-withered maize field and expressed deep frustration.

"We planted on time as always, but the rains came weeks late and then disappeared. The maize withered before it could form proper cobs. Even those that flowered have very small maize cobs. By harvest time, the production will be far below what we expected," she said.

Mr Emmanuel Mugasa, a maize grower in Kiryandongo, said communities that solely depend on rainfall now suffer unpredictable planting seasons,



Withering maize garden, devastated by intense sunlight in Kamira Sub-county Luweero District on November 25. PHOTO/FILE

shortened growth periods, and widespread crop failure, especially for staples like maize, beans, and bananas.

"My seven acres of maize are being threatened by this dry spell. Instead of the 31 bags I expected, I may only get around 10," he said.

Mr Mugasa added that market signals already show a looming crisis. "The impact is visible in rising prices. Maize flour and other food items are becoming more expensive because the national maize supply is shrinking," he said.

Agricultural officers warn that the situation is even more complex than the current drought conditions suggest. Mr Job Byaruhanga, the Masindi District agricultural officer, explained that smallholder farmers remain particularly vulnerable.

"Most small farms don't have irrigation systems. Soil fertility has declined after years of continuous farming without fertilisers. Many farmers lack drought-resistant seed varieties. When the rains fail, crops simply dry up; there is no safety net," Mr Byaruhanga said.

He added that Masindi has not yet reported severe yield reductions this season.

To address the growing threat of dry spells and broader climate change effects, the government introduced a micro-irrigation programme in every district. The initiative requires farmers to co-fund 25 percent of the equipment cost, with the government covering the rest.

However, many smallholder farmers say the co-funding requirement puts the equipment out of reach.

"Most of us cannot afford the 25 percent contribution. We farm on very small plots and live season-to-season. For irrigation to help the poorest farmers, it should be provided free or subsidised more heavily," he said.

Others point out that even when a farmer can afford the co-funding, the system requires access to a reliable water source, something many house-

holds do not have. Some communities have begun requesting valley tanks, boreholes, and small dams to support irrigation and livestock farming during droughts.

Local leaders and farmers alike have urged the government and development partners to expand climate-smart farming initiatives. These include distribution of drought-tolerant seeds, farmer training on soil conservation, and affordable irrigation systems for smallholders.

In central areas, signs of crop failure due to prolonged dry spells have set off a wave of panic among a section of farmers.

The mid-season dry spells have affected the maize and beans, among other crops, with a section of farmers already counting losses after the dry spell scorched their crops.

At Kamira Town Council and Kamira Sub-county Luweero District, the affected villages include Kabunyata, Kudumali, Kitenderi, Nadangira, Matembe, Bamugolode, and Kyangabakama, where farmers have lost more than 100 acres of the maize crops.

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Mr Edward Ssendagire, a farmer in Kabunyata Village in Kamira Town Council, watched helplessly as the sun burnt large tracts of his four-acre maize garden.

At Matembe Village in Kamira Sub-county, maize and bean crop farmers are the most affected.

In the island district of Kalangala, tomato farmers are struggling to keep their crops alive as the prolonged dry spell continues to frustrate expected harvests.

Mr Amos Disan Kyambadde, one of the affected farmers, said the rains they normally rely on between October and January have drastically reduced, leaving his gardens scorched.

"We expected the rains to start in October, but by November we had only a little rain that couldn't sustain the crops," he said.

Mr Kyambadde planted his tomatoes in mid-October, anticipating continuous rainfall to support germination and flowering. But the rains failed him.

"I had to improvise by fetching water from the lake using jerry cans, but the heat was too much. The growth became very slow, and up to now the tomatoes haven't even flowered," he added.

The situation has left several smallholder farmers in Mugoye, Bujumba, and Bufumira sub-counties facing similar setbacks as crops wilt under the intense heat.

Mr Eugiene Kitatire, an agriculture extension worker in Mugoye Sub-county, says the amount of rainfall received in Kalangala has been declining for years due to shifting climate patterns.

He said the changes have shortened the rainy season and affected crop performance across the district.

Mr Kitatire recommended simple on-farm interventions such as tree planting and low-cost irrigation to help farmers cope with the changing conditions.

"We also encourage farmers to plant certain natural tree species that ooze droplets of water and help keep the soil

cool and moist during hot weather," he added.

In Mpigi District, the situation is not different. The escalating effects of the dry spells are taking a heavy toll on maize farmers in the district, with many reporting significant crop damage and fears of poor yields.

Farmers, specifically in sub-counties of Nkozi, Kituntu, Kammengo and Buwama, are watching helplessly as the relentless sun ravages their crops.

Mr Ahmed Gyagenda, a farmer in Kitokolo Village, Nkozi Sub-county, painted a grim picture of the conditions affecting his livelihood.

"My maize garden is currently experiencing moisture stress, and this has led to stunted growth and curling leaves. I'm ending up losing, and poverty is on the way for me. We need divine intervention," he lamented.

In Kawumba Village, Buwama Sub-county, the impact is already visible on the developing cobs.

Ms Annet Namuwaya, another affected farmer, told the *Daily Monitor*: "The cobs are forming, but they are visibly shorter, and many kernels are not fully developed. This premature and incomplete kernel development drastically reduces the marketable yield and quality of the harvest," she explained.

The distress among these farmers mirrors concerns raised recently by agricultural experts in the district, who warned that the prolonged dry spell could severely impact food security and commodity prices in the region.

Mr Patrick Sserwadda, the Mpigi District production and marketing officer, advised farmers to embrace modern agricultural technologies and irrigate their crops.

"You lose today, but you won't lose forever. We offer irrigation systems at subsidised prices for you to use. Reach out to us, we shall give you a helping hand by paying a little money," Mr Sserwadda advised farmers.

In Nakasongola District, the most af-

of looming famine



A scorched maize and coffee garden in Lwabenge, Kalungu District. PHOTO/MUZAFARU NSUBUGA.

Frustration.

We planted on time as always, but the rains came weeks late and then disappeared. The maize withered before it could form proper cobs. Even those that flowered have very small maize cobs. By harvest time, the production will be far below what we expected," – Ms Josephine Nakato, the chairperson of Kikuube United Farmers.

fected areas include the sub-counties of Wabinyonyi, Kalongo, and Kalungi, where farmers are counting losses as a result of the intense sunshine.

Mr Rogers Sunday Bwanga, the Nakasongola District Council speaker and a parliamentary candidate for Nakasongola County seat, identified the sub-counties of Kalungi and Kalongo as the most affected areas.

Mr Sam Bagonda, a farmer at Bamugolode Village in Kalongo Sub-county, is among the many farmers counting losses after losing three acres of his maize gardens.

"We have experienced intense sunlight for the past three weeks, which has left the maize and bean crop withered. Like many other farmers, we took advantage of the early October rains hoping that we could get a good harvest, but it seems we got it wrong," he said.

Farmers have expressed fear that the intensified sunshine that has left crops withering signals possible hunger and loss of income.

Mr Edirisa Ssemboga, a resident of Kasangome Sub-county, said several farmers who had invested the Parish Development Model funds in crop cultivation are counting losses in Nakaseke District. The most affected crops include maize, beans, and coffee.

Mr Anthony Mubiru, a maize farmer in Kabira Village, Kyalulangira Sub-county in Rakai District, said his two acres of maize are likely to be lost if the area does not receive rain in the coming days.

"My maize, which was progressing well, started facing retardation effects when we stopped receiving rain about two weeks ago. The whole garden may

dry up if the area doesn't receive any rain soon," he said.

Farmers in Bugisu, who also rely heavily on rain-fed agriculture, have also raised concerns over food security and income losses for households already grappling with rising production costs.

"We are staring at a disaster. If rains do not come, we will face a severe food shortage," Mr Amos Manana, a resident of Sironko Town Council, said.

In Kayunga District, the dry spell has greatly affected crop production after crops like maize and beans dried up before maturity.

The most affected parts of the district include Bbaale, Galilaaya, Kayonza, and Kitimbwa Sub-counties located in the cattle corridor area.

In Bbaale, there are reports of animal deaths due to lack of pasture and drinking water.

Mr Andrew Muwonge, the Kayunga District chairperson, said if rains don't come in the coming days, there are fears of food shortages in the district, where a big percentage of residents earn a living from agriculture.

In the Lango Sub-region, the prolonged dry spell has ravaged crops, especially maize, leaving farmers in a precarious position.

In Lango, drought is just one facet of the challenges facing agriculture in Lango.

Pests and diseases continue to plague farmers, while access to finance remains a significant hurdle.

Many farmers lack the resources to invest in quality seeds, fertilisers, and modern farming techniques.

The situation is dire, with many households facing food insecurity and economic hardship.

"The farmers are still struggling, and most of them don't have collateral to be able to access finance," Mr Jonathan Kattende, a technical coordinator-regenerative agriculture at Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA), said.

At Cerelenu Market in Gulu City, agro-produce traders have started hoarding essential foodstuffs such as rice, beans, groundnuts, millet, and maize, in anticipation of the shortage. Their plan is also to make abnormal profits in case a shortage occurs.

A kilogramme of red groundnuts is now sold at between Shs5,000 and Shs6,500.

A kilogramme of maize now costs between Shs2,000, up from Shs1,200 the previous month. Meanwhile, a kilogramme of beans costs between Shs2,000 and Shs5,000.

In Pabbo, in Amuru District, one of the biggest rice-growing regions in the country, smallholder farmers are counting losses.

Mr Francis Babu, a rice farmer in Pabbo Town Council, Amuru District, said the early onset of the dry season has left farmers heartbroken.

Mr Samuel Olanya, a smallholder farmer in Labora Sub-county in Omororo District, said the harsh climate condition has forced him to abandon his groundnut farm.

"I have one acre of groundnut ready for harvest, but I can't because the soil is really hard," he said.

In West Nile, the areas that are most affected by the dry spell include Alwi Sub-county in Pakwach District, where crops such as maize are withering in gardens.

Ms Loyce Aciro, a farmer in Zeu Sub-county, Zombo District, said: "This year, we had a lot of rain and we have enough beans that are being harvested. But in some areas, the crops are already withering because the rain has virtually stopped."

The Executive Director for Rural Initiative for Community Empowerment, Mr Pax Sakari, said tampering with trees and wetlands is responsible for the unpredictable weather.

Mr Joseph Kakaire, a farmer in Buyende District, said the prolonged dry spell has affected his maize and beans. He explained that he hired two acres of land at Shs220,000, and spent an additional Shs100,000 on labour and seeds.

"Unfortunately, the crops have been scorched by the harsh sunshine, and I'm not certain of harvesting even three bags of maize," he said.

Compiled by Fred Wambede, Ismail Bategeka, Alex Ashaba, Dan Wanderinga, David Sekayinga, Al Mahdi Ssenkabirwa, Sadat Mbogo & Malik F Jingo, Fred Muzaale, Bill Oketch, James Owach, Felix Warom Okello, Clement Aluma, Denis Edema, and Tonny Abet