

Moringa cultivation helps combat malnutrition in Cameroon

By Elias Ngalame

A PROLONGED drought in the Far North of Cameroon has reduced food output, pushed up prices and increased the severity and prevalence of malnutrition among children.

But there is some good news as well. A project promoting the cultivation of Moringa, a tree whose leaves and seeds are rich in vegetable protein, minerals and vitamins, is helping to abate the malnutrition crisis.

“The cultivation and production of Moringa at the local level in Yagoua and other towns in the Far North is bearing excellent results,” says Dr Ntamnia Grace, who works at the local Yagoua hospital.

Data from the hospital show that over 5,000 malnourished children treated with a teaspoonful of Moringa powder every day for three months regained strength and weight.

The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) says that Moringa leaves are rich in protein, vitamins A, B and C and mineral salts and recommends it for expectant women, nursing mothers and small children.

Caritas, a Catholic charity, in 2017 created an operational unit to support the local communities by training over 100 women in the planting and production of Moringa.

Father Charles Mussi of Caritas in Yagoua district said the Moringa vegetable project was started to complement the food supplement distribution that has been carried on by UN agencies.

“The food supplement distribution to households to combat malnutrition

especially among children and pregnant mothers was costly and largely insufficient. The Moringa vegetable cultivation project came to fill the void,” Father Mussi said.

Moringa seeds were distributed to farms and agricultural organisations and women groups.

The leaves are harvested and turned into powder, packaged in small packets weighing 50 grams and sold at an affordable cost of about 500 CFA.

In all Catholic health centres mothers who have children with malnutrition problems receive either seedlings or seeds for planting free of charge.

“We also equip the women, who are mostly illiterate, with knowledge on malnutrition so that they can take good care of their children and ensure a better life for everyone,” said Father Mussi.

According to the FAO, around 10.3 million people are food insecure this year in the Sahel region and over 1.4 million children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition.

The Health ministry said almost 40 percent of children under five years who suffered from vitamin A deficiency

recovered their health in the north, thanks to Moringa powder consumption supplement.

Cameroon’s legendary former goalkeeper, Bell Joseph Antoine, has hailed the project but advised that those tackling the malnutrition crisis in the Far North should coordinate their efforts.

“I think intervention by international organisations, the Catholic church and the government is good, but it would produce more positive results if they all work as a team rather than in dispersed ranks,” he said.

Cameroon’s Health Minister, Manaouda Malachie, recently announced that UNICEF and the World Food Programme would provide food and vitamin supplements and de-worming medicine.

“In the coming months, targeted feeding will be provided for more than 46,000 moderately acute malnourished children under five years old and 12,000 pregnant and nursing women in the Far North where malnutrition is serious to critical,” he said.



The Moringa vegetable cultivation project aims to improve the health of children and pregnant mothers. Photo Credit: Elias Ngalame