

Muguzi is brewing success with tea

A visitor at Arthur Babu Muguzi's home and tea shamba is welcomed with a smile and a cup of black tea. He will tell you tea is his life and just like every tea has its own unique flavours, every grower has his or her unique story to tell as Zaddock Amanyisa writes.

A chartered accountant currently working at National Council for Higher Education as Director of Finance in charge of Universities, Arthur Babu Muguzi was born in a tea shamba in 1968.

No wonder Muguzi is trying tooth and nail to change the narrative in Buhweju district by helping fellow farmers to make better tea and develop better work ethics a reality as far as tea growing is concerned.

Born in the famous tea growing district of Buhweju, Muguzi, inherited tea farming from his parents who migrated from Kajura to grow tea in the hilly district in 1963 and tea has transformed their lives socially and economically.

He is an independent tea grower seeking to make a name for Buhweju on the international tea scene.

Buhweju is a modest place of hilly nature and diversity, ideal for high quality tea.

Starting out

Muguzi started planting his own tea on a small scale. He planted for the first time in 2007 and started harvesting in 2009. The beginning was not easy because with tea, the smaller the land, the smaller gains you get. He narrates that it would make sense if he had more than ten acres. His four-acre garden was yielding but all the costs were going back to the garden.

He used to sell a kilogramme of tea leaves at Shs200 in 2009. By 2012, the price went up to Shs530.

He began with four acres which he bought from his savings and a loan from the bank. From four acres, Muguzi currently boasts of around 22 acres of tea.

Moving on

Muguzi has bought more land from his salary and tea savings. With time he has been able to buy more land and expand the acreage.

Due to his passion of tea growing, the farmers in Bushenyi and Buhweju requested Muguzi and his friends working in Kampala to come and take on the leadership of the industry.

He served as director and chairman board, Igara Growers Tea Factory covering the two factories of Igara and Buhweju for a period of six years.

Harvests

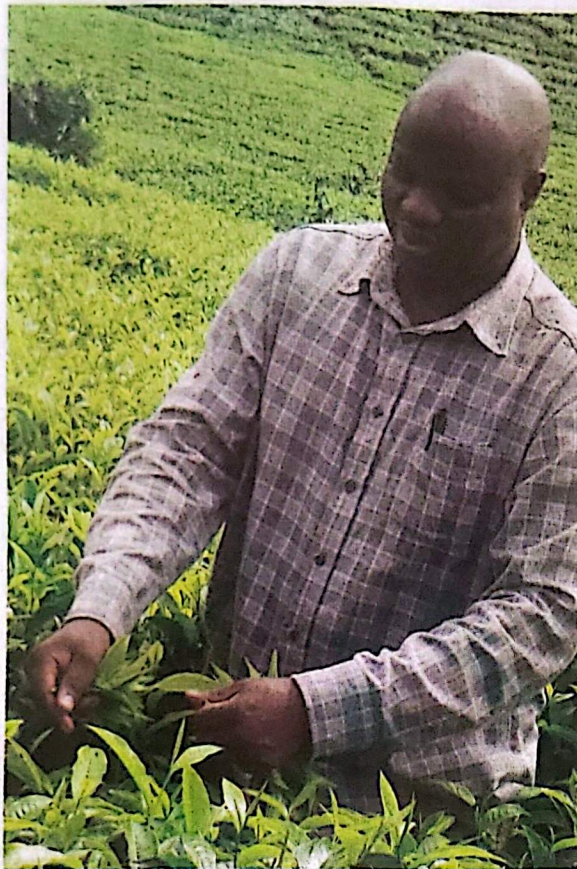
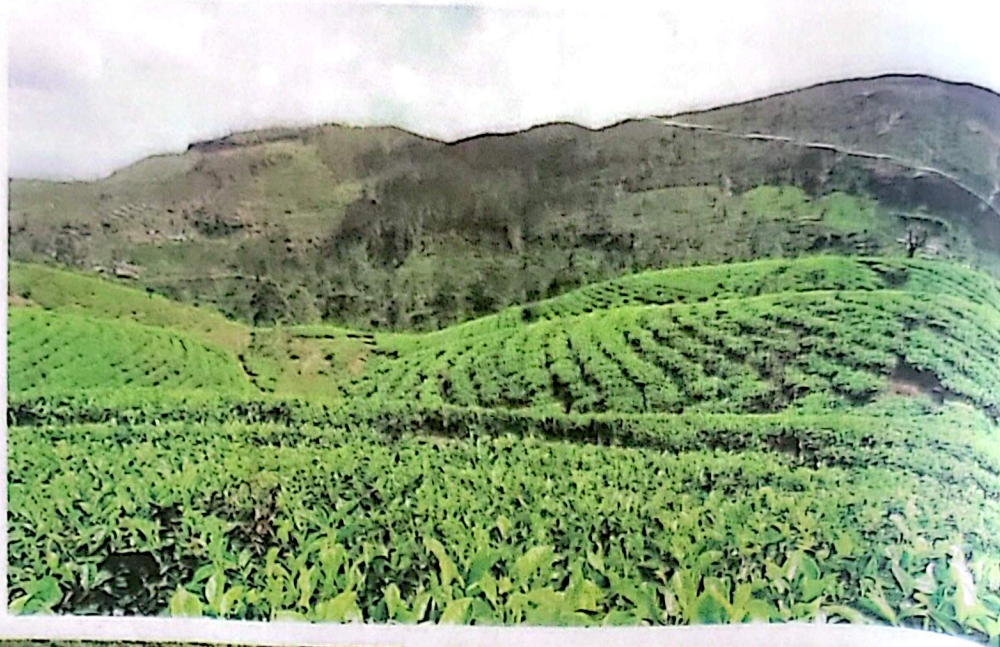
In a good season, Muguzi harvests 12,000 kilogrammes per month and has the capacity to harvest 15,000 kilogrammes with improved practices.

He gets a gross income of Shs9m to Shs10m per month. With this, Muguzi says he is able to cover all the necessities around him. His target is pushing

FUTURE PLANS

- Muguzi has set his eyes on the export business and value addition through quality processing and packaging.
- He also plans to establish a tea processing plant in Buhweju District to further maximise profits, as well as expand his tea farm to more than 50 acres.

Muguzi says to earn from tea, one must grow on a large scale.
PHOTOS BY ZADOCK AMANYISA



to 20,000 kilogrammes of green leaf.

He has also engaged in other enterprises such as banana plantation where he harvests 50-150 bunches a month getting about Shs3m per month. Muguzi also rears sheep and goats.

Management

He ensures timely supervision and participation in the tea farm, where he does not reach, he has a manager who has helped him set productive standards and targets that are rewarding.

At Muguzi's farm, standards are rewarded at quantity and quality levels. Every worker that meets their targets gets a bonus. His workers are motivated. They work in the morning and afternoon hours. An average worker at Muguzi's farm makes about Shs200,000 while the manager is paid Shs350,000 per month.

Balancing farm, office

Balancing office work and tea farm has been a big challenge. He regularly visits his farm, keeps in touch with his manager who ensures grade one record keeping. He has trained his workers on good performance targets to make sure they maintain the farm.

Challenges

Prolonged weather vagaries such as heavy rains, floods and dry spells, as well as high interest rates and inadequate research have been some of the big challenges he has experienced so far.

"Tea farming is capital intensive and requires a lot of time and attention," he says adding that banks are often not willing to give credit to farmers which affects the sector's productivity.

According to Muguzi, most farmers are still planting old varieties. Like other farmers, Muguzi is struggling with best quality standards. He explains that tea is tea with good quality but it has become hard to hit

the requirements.

"Poor rural infrastructure road network and storage facilities still pose a serious challenge to the sector," he says.

Achievements

Tea growing has become an additional income to Muguzi's family. He provides employment to the community.

"The truth is that tea is gold," he says. He has improved from growing tea on a small scale for the years he has been engaged in the business. He has made a move from four acres to 22 and he is planning to expand up to more than 50 acres of tea. Muguzi has also been awarded by Igara Growers Tea Factory as the fourth best farmer in agronomy management, tea husbandry and green leaf supplier in Buhweju district. In this, he has got the power to influence other farmers.

Tips on tea growing

According to Muguzi, tea plants typically fare best in acidic soils and regions with heavy rainfall (around 40 inches per year) which makes Buhweju conducive for tea farming.

He says that tea can be grown from a seed or stem cutting taken from an existing plant.

However, if you are growing from seed, germination will take about five weeks. "Therefore it's imperative to cover the seeds lightly with soil and keep it damp and warm," he says adding that using seeds, means waiting for some good time before the first harvest.

It takes at least four years to get a plant that will produce enough leaves for you to make a harvest.

Using soil that is slightly acidic increases production. He however says it is important to maintain the right acidity.

It is also advised to pick the leaves by hand for better quality during harvesting time.

Shs10m

MONEY MUGUZI EARNS PER MONTH FROM SELLING TEA