

Members of Namayumba Town Council Women Entrepreneurs Savings and Credit Cooperative (Sacco) showing off the different types of baskets that they make for export to Germany. The earnings from the exports has transformed most of their lives. PHOTO/ISAAC MUFUMBA

How baskets are making a difference among women in Namayumba

Emyooga is a Ugandan Presidential Initiative launched in August 2019 to transform 68% of homesteads from subsistence to market-oriented production. It provides specialized seed capital to 18 enterprise groups to boost job creation, increase household income, and promote savings.

BY ISAAC MUFUMBA

The pickup truck made its way down the pot-holed road and screeched to a halt at a shell house in Namayumba Town Council.

The neighbours including Ms Peace Nantaba, the Chairperson of Namayumba Town Council Women Entrepreneurs Savings and Credit Cooperative (Sacco), watched in disbelief as Ms Sylvia Nakaddu, and her four children off ferried their belongings into a house that had neither doors nor windows.

"We could all see that the house was not fit for human habitation. We told ourselves that "if they are keen on staying there, it seems the city has squeezed them really hard"" Ms Nantaba says.

Ms Nakaddu had indeed fallen on hard times. Until the placement of the country under a partial lockdown as a Covid19 containment measure, she had been running a Salon in Nansana Town. The raft of restrictions imposed under the lockdown included the closure of schools, bars and salons. They remained closed for more than a year.

"Since the Salon was not working, I did not have a source of income. We were forced to relocate," Ms Nakaddu says.

Beginnings

Ms Nakaddu is one of the 50 members of Namayumba Town Council Women Entrepreneurs Sacco. It was started in 2014 by Ms Nabiryo Joyce, the Chairperson of Namayumba Women's Council, as a cash round.

"We had challenges in terms of raising money for self-development. We would save and collect money for one month to give to one of the women for household development. The following month we would give it to another member," Ms Nantaba says.

The group was eventually turned into a fully registered Sacco and it is one of the many that received training in financial literacy from the Microfinance Support Centre (MSC) following the launch by President Museveni, of the Emyooga programme in August 2019.

TRANSFORMATION

Thanks in part to a Emyooga loan of Shs30million that the Sacco got from MSC, it has been able to grow with at least Shs15million in savings, Shs30million in loans to members and a share capital within the region of Shs15million.

Ms Nantaba says that the loan boosted them at group and individual levels.

"The loan boosted us. We purchased lots of materials with which we worked. The money has not done us bad and many of the beneficiaries are paying back the loans they got. The more they work at making handicrafts, the greater the pace at which they repay the loans," Ms Nantaba says.

Individual members of the group have since seen their lives transformed for the better. Thanks to both the loans they took out and proceeds from the sale of handicrafts. Ms Nakaddu for example, has been able to complete her house.

"It helped me to put doors and windows in my house. By the time I entered it there were no glasses in the windows and the front door, but when I got the loan, I was able to do that," Ms Nakaddu says.

the different handcrafts.

"When the contact was first made, none of us did not know how to weave, but we were forced to learn. People were sent to train us in making different items. The contact facilitated the process by paying the trainers. We started working with those people immediately after the training," Ms Nantaba says.

Raw materials

Most of the handicrafts are made using materials that are available on the local market and within the environment. They include straw, palm leaves, polythene material, reeds and in some instances corn grass.

Getting the different colours presents another challenge though.

"Getting quality dyes here is very difficult. Secondly, some of the colours that we want are not available on the local market. The dyes are therefore sent in from Germany," Ms Nantaba says.

Orders

Orders are usually relayed to them through the Germans' local contact.

"There is a time frame within which we have to deliver. That means that we have to work round the clock while at the same time ensuring that the products are of the required quality," Ms Nantaba says.

The sizes of the orders vary. Sometimes they are required to deliver as many as 700 or as few as 100 pieces of a specific product. Payments are effected once the goods have been rigorously checked for quality and beauty by the German's local contact.

The price at which they sell also varies. The downside is perhaps that they do not determine the price at which they sell.

"The price varies from items to item. But every time they give us an order, we already know the amount that they are willing to pay for every item they purchase," Ms Nantaba says.

What however matters is that they are making some money.

Empowerment

The money has come as a great relief to single mothers in the group. Ms Peace Mutesi, the Secretary of the Sacco is an example.

"I too was not doing well. I was getting support from my parents. My parents were taking care of me and my five children, but not any more I now take care of myself and my children," says Ms Mutesi.

However, the most important bit here is that most members of the Kibbo are telling stories of achievement on fronts that had seemed impossible and that is thanks to improved personal incomes.

Ms Aisha Nakyembe says that until the coming of the Emyooga and the basket she would at times go for a month without touching a Shs1000 note.

"I could not buy a piece of soap or a book for a child, but those are no longer issues. I am able to do that thanks to the Kibbo. I feel a lot of satisfaction because I used to stay in my mother's house, but when the Emyooga loan came, I added a little from my earnings from the sale of handicrafts and bought a plot of land. What is left is for me to build," Ms Nakyembe says with a radiant smile.

The smile is testimony that the baskets and loans have touched lives here.

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