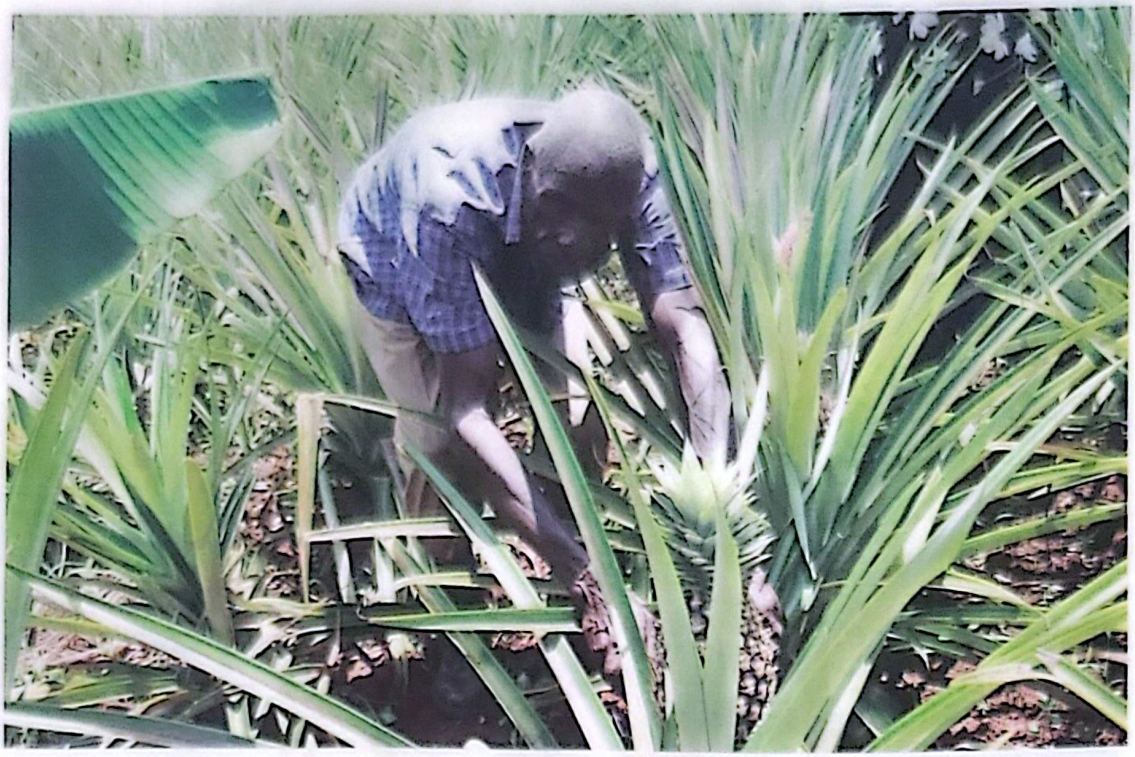
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Mr Okello inspects fruits on his pineapple plantation. PHOTOS BY TOBBIAS JOLLY OWINY

Pineapples change Okello's fortunes

Despite old age, George Okello who is 76 years old believes he still has the stamina to till the land, writes TOBBIAS JOLLY OWINY

The success rate of 76-year-old George Okello at farming pineapples gives one an impression that age is just a number. Look, Okello only started the pineapple business in 2009 but by 2013, he was named the biggest pineapple grower in Omoro District during a farming competition.
He credits the horticultural training with World Vision Uganda, that opened his eyes to commercial horticulture.

Capital

With only Shs750,000, Okello, went to Luweero District and bought 1,500 suckers of sweet pineapple (Kakoge variety) to plant.

Yields

"After one year of planting, farmers started frequenting my garden demanding for the suckers so that they could also change from the local breed that we had been planting," Okello says with pride.

With high yields on his 10-acre farm, locals bestowed upon him the name Kakoge – from his new found pineapples.

Okello, a retired former employee of Uganda Textiles Corporation, reveals he has been able to progress rapidly since he had a lot of self-motivation and determination in all his works.

400,000

AMOUNT OF MONEY IN SHILLINGS OKELLO MAKES FROM SELLING SUCKERS





Expansion

He has managed to expand his Odokomit farm from 10 acres to 25 as his pineapple business flourishes.

"I had to buy another piece of land two kilometres away to expand my farming acreage. I have also managed to expand and now I grow other crops such as bananas and vegetables," he said.

Okello has more than 20,000 stems of pineapple and a total 25-acre piece of land on which he does his farming.

Big harvest

"During the harvesting season, on average I sell at least 40 pineapples a day which brings in Shs120,000. The suckers supplement my daily income as they are booked earlier by prospective farmers," he said.

To pay the labourers that weed, prune and harvest, Okello loses about Shs300,000 to Shs450,000 a month.

Profits

He proudly reveals that he earned a net income of Shs23m last year which he reinvested into horticulture and dug a water storage facility.

"Since the Kakoge variety of pineapple is on high demand, I have always sold the suckers from because farmers come searching for me from home as far as Pader, Kitgum, Amuru and Gulu," he said.

Upon harvest, Okello sells the suckers at Shs1,000, which fetches him Shs400,000 per harvest.

Achievements

The farmer has since bought three motorcycles from pineapple farming. He has placed two of them for public transport and they bring in a daily income of Shs30,000. Okello also recently finished building his house that cost him Shs100m.

Challenges

Pests and diseases that attack the fruits give him a hard time although he says he has handled that by constantly spraying the gardens. Although he recently introduced drip irrigation for his farm, Okello says he still faces unreliable rainfall patterns which does not favour production.

Training farmers and youth

Okello's farm is also a demonstration farm for students from Bobi Community Polytechnic in Gulu where they attend practical and field work lessons.

"When the students come here, I take them through lessons courtesy of the skills I have earned over the years and I am paid per lesson. I also get to answer the many questions the students have," Okello says, adding that he has signed a contract with several schools and is paid Shs50,000 per visit.

With the help of his wife Bicantina Okello, they also train farmers on best farming practices.

"I gained a lot of knowledge in farming through visits and consultation with senior agronomists and experienced farmers around the country," he said he also recently underwent training by World Vision, World Food Programme and other government programmes (NAADS) which has turned him into a 'consultant' in his village.

GROWING PINEAPPLE AT HOME

Pineapples are wonderful fruits. Not only are they delicious, but they are also very easy to grow. All you really need to start growing your own pineapple farm is a pineapple sucker and land.

Obtain a pineapple
Go to wherever you like buying fruit from, whether it is a supermarket, farmers market, or from a retailer selling fruit on the side of the road. Buy a nice looking pineapple. Make sure it is ripe.

Cut and eat
Take your pineapple home with you. Rinse the fruit off, then place it on its side on a cutting board. Take a knife and cut off the leafy top part of the pineapple, along with an inch or two of the pineapple's meat. Set this aside while you proceed to eat the rest of the pineapple.

Planting
Your leftover pineapple top from the previous step is all you need to grow a pineapple. When you pick out a spot (or pot) for your pineapple, make sure it has room. The plants grow to about five feet across and get spinky leaves, so take that into consideration when deciding where you plant your pineapple.

Once you have decided where to plant your pineapple, dig a hole in the dirt. The hole only needs to be deep enough to cover the fruit still attached to the pineapple's leaves.

Place the pineapple in the hole, and cover with dirt, leaving the pineapple leaves exposed above ground. If you are planting in a pot rather than the ground, the same applies with the only difference being that your dirt is contained within the pot walls.

CamScanner