

He turned his backyard into a fish farm

John Lubega Wavamunno harvests fish twice a year and sells each catfish at Shs30,000 to Shs38,000, writes Michael J Ssali.

John Lubega Wavamunno of Nkalwe Village, Kingo Sub-county, in Lwengo District has been rearing fish for the last three years on his crop farm located on the top of the hill and far away from the swamps where normally fish are farmed in Uganda.

"What I have done is to bring the swamp conditions to the back yard of one of the old buildings at the far end of my compound and so I am a fish farmer now like all the others in the swamps and valleys," he told *Seeds of Gold*.

Starting

He dug two three-foot-deep holes each about 25 by 15 feet, into which he fitted tarpaulin sheets.

An iron gauge directed rain water from the house top into the ponds.

He made spill-ways (water passages) on one side of the edges of the ponds to avoid overflow so that whenever it rained, fresh water was delivered into the ponds while at the same time the same amount of water that had been in the ponds for some time flowed out.

"The fresh water from the roof top comes with oxygen which the fish needs," he explained. "There ought to be fresh water continually flowing for fish to grow well," he adds.

He was however aware that it could not be raining all the time to meet this condition and so he made sure 20-litre jerry cans of fresh water carried from the swamps would be delivered and poured into the ponds at intervals of perhaps a day or two.

Luckily, piped water from neighbouring Nkoni Catholic Parish was extended to his farm after about one year and today Lubega uses piped water to rear fish in his compound.

To ensure that the water has sufficient oxygen, the tap that releases water into the ponds is raised about six feet above the ponds which, according to his explanation, makes the water pick plenty of fresh air for the fish to breathe before it gets into the ponds.

Harvest

He started with 400 African cat fish in each of the ponds. Today he keeps more than 2,000 catfish in the ponds and he harvests every nine months.

The biggest catfish at his farm weighs 15 kilogrammes while the least weighs 10 kilogrammes.

"You want to end up with such fish, or even one that weighs over 30 kilogrammes, then you must feed them well. It is all about feeding and you achieve the weight you desire in about 10 to 12 months," says the farmer of the venture that he invested an average of Shs5m per pond.



John Lubega examines a bunch of bananas on a stem growing in a hole. Below Lubega watches as the water from an overhead tap flows into the fish pond. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA.



most of them since 2014 when he started the fish project.

He sells the fish twice every two months, earning an average of Shs2m. He sells each catfish at Shs30,000. On average he sells more than 100 catfish.

Feeding fish

"There is no need to worry so much about feeding the fish," he said. They eat almost everything including flying insects, green leaves, rotting fruits, chicken feed, and some livestock dung and many other locally available feeding materials.

To attract flying insects into the ponds he has fixed two solar powered lamps on a pole which shine directly into the ponds at night.

The light is reflected by the water into the sky attracting a lot of insects to the ponds where they are eaten by the fish.

"I have used very little of the 100kilogrammes of chicken feed that I bought three months ago yet the fish keep growing all the time," he says.

Other crops

In a bid to increase his income,

EXPERT WEIGHS IN

Haji Moses Kalule, a fish exporter, says farmers who want their fish to attain more weight must learn to feed them well besides keeping them in a good environment.

"Protein is the most key in making fish attain the desired weight. Sources of protein include sunflower, soybeans, cotton seed cake and fish meal."

He recommends 40 per cent protein content in catfish feeds and between 28-35 per cent for tilapia meals.

Kalule says: "The catfish have a higher protein requirement as they grow faster than tilapia and they are carnivorous."

He adds that farmers can synchronise their ponds to ensure consistent production and, therefore, regular income.

"They should harvest fish that has matured and leave the rest to avoid unnecessary competition for food as fish do not necessarily grow at the same rate," he says.

"I have discovered that the best way to grow bananas is by digging a deep hole, four feet deep and five feet in diameter," he said as *Seeds of Gold* inspected his farm. "The wide hole is like a basin and it is the reason I never cover it up after planting the sucker. It traps rain water and stores it for the young sucker to use for several weeks. The area between the holes is kept weedy to minimise soil erosion. I routinely slash the weeds and the slashed grass falls into the large hole where the banana stem is planted and serves as mulch," he says.

He also said the other advantage with this method of growing bananas is that in the event of a strong rain storm there is less possibility of the banana stem being felled by the wind since nearly half of its entire height is underground in the hole and not so directly hit by the wind. He also said he had observed much less weevil attack on the banana stems.

Robusta coffee

Lubega, who has about 10 acres under cloned Robusta coffee believes in mixed farming as the best way to earn money from farming.

"If one project fails due to drought or any other catastrophe, another farming project may work out," he said.

"If for one reason coffee does not do well this season, I will still earn money selling fish or bananas."

It is not hard to believe him, especially after seeing his new house whose construction is about 70 per cent complete.

Lubega has diversified his farm to include the following;

Banana

Lubega who is also a coffee and banana farmer grows a variety of vegetables on his farm some of

400