

How Kyarimpa is minting cash from snails

For Grace Kyarimpa, snail farming is more than just a source of income; it is a practical and innovative solution to wider challenges.

BY TAUSINAKATO

In Uganda, where snails are often dismissed as useless, inedible, or even a sign of misfortune, a young innovator is quietly challenging that perception, turning the tiny creatures into a source of income, innovation, and opportunity.

Grace Kyarimpa, the founder and Chief Executive Officer of AgroDiverse Impacts Limited, is using her journey into snail rearing to redefine what many Ugandans consider valuable.

From doubt to success, Kyarimpa's journey stands as a powerful testament to how unusual ideas, when pursued with determination, resilience, and vision, can grow into thriving enterprises that challenge perceptions and create real economic opportunity.

"I first encountered snails as food during my academic exchange in South Korea in 2018," she recalls. "At the time, I didn't even like them. But when I learned about their nutritional and economic value, my perspective changed."

Kyarimpa, who holds a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from Makerere University and a Master's degree in Animal Nutrition from Egerton University in Kenya, says that experience planted the seed for what would later become her business.

Starting small, dreaming big

Her journey into snail farming began in early 2019, shortly after returning to Uganda. With just Shs50,000 and a few snails collected during the rainy season from a farm in Mukono District, she started experimenting.

"I didn't even buy the first stock. I collected them from the environment and began breeding them," she says.

However, the early stages were far from smooth.

"At first, I didn't have proper structures. Ants would invade the cages and kill the snails overnight. It was frustrating," she recalls.

Through trial, error, and persistence, she gradually improved her methods constructing better housing, learning proper feeding, and understanding snail behaviour.

Today, her stock has grown to about 5,000 snails, with plans to expand to over 50,000 by the end of this year.

Turning 'pests' into profit

What makes Kyarimpa's enterprise stand out is her ability to extract value from every part of the snail. While many Ugandans are reluctant to eat snail meat, she found alternative markets and uses. Snail shells, which contain up to 98 percent calcium, are processed into animal feed supplements, while the meat itself is dried and ground into protein-rich feed.

"I realised that even if people here don't eat snails, they can still benefit from them indirectly through animal feed," she explains.

But her biggest breakthrough came with skincare products.

Using snail slime (secretion filtrate), popular globally for its skin-repair benefits, she produces soaps, lotions, and moisturizers that are increasingly attracting customers.

"The slippery liquid known as snail slime, which snails naturally

produce to help them move, protect their skin, and stay moist, is widely used in skin products. "The demand for skin products is actually higher than our supply at the moment," she says.

At exhibitions in cities such as Gulu and Soroti, her products often sell out, reflecting the growing interest in snail-based innovations.

Her average gross income per month from snail business is Shs4.8m, and the net income is Shs2.5m.

Fighting stigma and changing mindsets

Despite the progress, the journey has not been without social challenges.

"In the beginning, people would laugh or even refuse to shake my hand after seeing me handle snails," she says.

"Others associate them with witchcraft or bad luck."

Such perceptions are not isolated; recently, a viral video in Uganda sparked debate after a woman accused her housemaid of putting a snail in her food.

The incident drew mixed reactions, with many people expressing discomfort as snails are widely considered inedible in several communities.

Some users also noted that even when snails are accidentally cooked in food, most people would pour the meal due to strong cultural perceptions.

To counter this, she has invested in community sensitisation educating people about the economic and nutritional value of snails.

"We go into communities and show them that what they consider a nuisance can actually earn them money," she explains.

This approach is gradually paying off. Some community members now collect and supply snails to her, turning what was once a problem into an opportunity.

A business for the youth

Kyarimpa believes snail farming has huge potential, especially for young people and women.

"It requires very little capital, small space, and the feeding is simple. You can even start on a balcony," she says.

Snails feed on readily available vegetation such as sweet potato vines and leaves, making the enterprise affordable to start and maintain.

She estimates that a small-scale farmer can earn about Shs650,000 per month, with higher returns as production increases.

Additionally, snails reproduce quickly with a single snail capable of laying up to 100 eggs, ensuring steady growth of stock.

Growing demand, untapped markets

Although the local market for snail meat is still developing, Kyarimpa notes increasing interest, particularly from foreign communities.

"West Africans, Congolese, and some Ugandans who have lived abroad are our main customers for snail meat," she says.

She also sees potential in supplying snail meat, commonly known as escargot, to hotels and expanding into export markets as production increases. Beyond meat, snail eggs known as caviar in some markets offer another source of income.

Creating jobs and opportunities

Through her enterprise, Kyarimpa is not only earning an income but also creating opportunities for others.

She currently employs seven young people and regularly trains students, volunteers, and aspiring farmers.

"We want to build a value chain where more youth can participate from production to processing and

ABOUT KYARIMPA

Kyarimpa was born in Kankungu Village, Buhunga Sub-county, Rujumbura County in Rukungiri District. She began her education at Rutoma Integrated Primary School in Rukungiri. She later attended Kinyasano Girls High School in Rukungiri District and Gomba in Butambala District for her advanced studies. She then joined Makerere University, where she pursued a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture. She further advanced her academic journey by obtaining a Master of Science in Animal Nutrition from Egerton University in Kenya.

marketing," she says.

Her long-term vision includes establishing outgrower schemes where over 50 farmers, including students, are supported with training and starter stock, then sell back to the company.

Challenges ahead

Despite the success, challenges remain. Limited access to machinery for processing snail shells and extracting slime is slowing expansion.

"Right now, we do most of the work manually. If we are to scale up, we need equipment to automate some processes," she explains, pointing out the need for more skilled personnel and larger, modern facilities such as greenhouse systems to support production.

More than just a business

For Kyarimpa, snail farming is more than just a source of income; it is a practical and innovative solution to wider challenges.

Snail meat, she says, is a healthy alternative to red meat, being high in protein but low in fat and cholesterol, making it suitable for all age groups.

She believes promoting snail business could help address malnutrition and create sustainable livelihoods.

"If people understand the value of snails, they will stop seeing them as useless and start seeing them as an opportunity," she says.

What people say.

Denis Magumba, a youth working in the snail enterprise, says the business has helped him sustain himself and his family after dropping out of school in Senior Four.

"I like this business because it is unique. Very few people in Uganda are doing it, yet it has a big market," he says.

He adds that he was initially afraid of handling snails but gained confidence after seeing how they are managed in other countries.

Prof Francis Adarkwah, a researcher from the University of Ghana, says snails are highly valued in his country for both food and economic use.

"In Ghana, snails are a delicacy, highly nutritious, and, therefore, expensive," he says.

He explains that both meat and shells are utilised, with shells processed and even used in construction.

"Unlike beef or pork, snails are rich in protein and are good for children, the elderly, and the sick," he adds.

Kyarimpa has expanded her agribusiness beyond snails into Black Soldier Fly (maggot) production, vermiculture, Azolla and duckweed cultivation, poultry, piggery, rabbits and aquaculture.

She also produces organic inputs such as frass, vermicompost from earthworms, and worm tea, alongside Moringa and Indigenous Microorganisms (IMO), building a fully integrated and circular agricultural value chain.

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Grace Kyarimpa, a young innovator engaged in heliculture on Kiira Road in Jinja City displays some of the snails she rears. PHOTO:TAUSINAKATO