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SEGUJJA BYOMUGABI

Mr Richard Kadoma Basariza walks toward his compound Kabagana Village in Mugusu Sub-county Kabarole District unaided. The visually-impaired father of six halts several steps next to a pick-up truck parked in his compound.

"There are visitors here," he says, smiling from ear to ear. "And you are welcome. Always."

His wife, Monica Kanyunyuzia, proudly tells us how Mr Basariza's lack of sight has not stopped him from scaling heights.

"He can detect danger and moves freely to his banana and coffee gardens, monitors his pigs, can cook and go about other chores," she says.

Mr Basariza and his wife have been married for 21 years. And just like many other couples from his village and beyond, faced several domestic problems.

We fought a lot over small matters - especially money. This is mainly because cultural norms of gender stereotype had dominated many families and women could be seen as inferior and were never involved in decision making," Ms Kanyunyuzia says.

Her husband - a social works and social science diploma holder - nods in agreement, face hidden behind dark sun glasses.

"The constant fights were not helping," he says, proudly leading us to a pigsty in the middle of a banana and coffee plantation like he has done this several times.

"That one recently gave birth to eight piglets," he says, pointing at a sow in one of the sty's compartments. The eight-week piglets are due for sale.

Mr Richard Kadoma Basariza inspects a pigsty. The councillor representing People with Disabilities in Mugusu Sub-county is among the several beneficiaries of the Grow Equal trainings. PHOTO/ SEGUJJA BYOMUGABI



Grow Equal: How lives have been transformed in Kabarole, Kamwenge

Most of us are left in awe. He continues. "On average, we harvest 10 bunches of bananas every week. These we sell locally, which has helped us improve our financial capacity."

Similarly, Mr Innocent Mutegeki, a resident of Bubandi village in Nyabuswa Parish and his wife Annet Kasembo have started to harvest the fruits of working together.

The couple, married for nine years now, are proud owners of a 2.5-acre piece of land - bought at Shs3.6m - on which they grow cowpeas, bananas, and Irish potatoes to supplement their income.

Besides another small business, they have also bought goats, and a domestic garden where they harvest food for home consumption.

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"This transformation would never have been possible three years back. We fought a lot and I went back to my parents' house about three times because I could not stand the poverty we were enduring," Ms Kasembo narrates.

Like the Basarizas, the Mutegekis are part of a wider network of beneficiaries of the Grow Equal Project - an initiative that has since transformed their lives through mind set change.

The beginning

Launched in 2024 in the three sub counties of Harugongo, Mugusu and Hakibale in Kabarole district, the transformative project

WHY THIS MATTERS

The project not only supports mothers and female caregivers to build resilient micro-enterprises, but it also helps fund community savings groups (such as Village Savings and Loan Associations) to improve household income and keep vulnerable children in school.

aims at uplifting lives of the marginalized individuals by providing basic services such as Education, Civic education and community mobilization. It is championed by SOS Children's Villages in partnership with the Austrian Development Agency, the project also focuses on women's empowerment, social protection, and green economic opportunities through SHERESA, ACODOWE and Toci as implementing partners.

The programme operates in regions where SOS Children's Villages has established community programming - Kabarole, Kamwenge and Wakiso districts.

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"Through various community training programmes, we were equipped with critical thinking and decision-making skills which have helped us to participate in income generating activities," Basaliza, a councillor elect representing People living with Disabilities (PWDs) at the sub-county says.

The 18-week trainings have since empowered several individuals across Mugusu Sub-county in Kabarole district.

In Katumba Village, Kiburara Parish, Hakibaale Sub-county, Kabarole District, Margaret Muntu has also benefitted from the project, while in Rwamwanja Settlement Camp, Kamwenge district refugees say the birth of Grow Equal Project has significantly impacted their livelihoods while in Uganda.

Muntu, a widow has been able to complete the construction of her moderate house she shares with two sickly minors.

"This particular village is well known for Mairungi (khat) farming, which is mainly done by women. Every time they sold their produce, most of them would end up fighting with their spouses for the money. Domestic violence was rife," she says.

"Many families were destroyed. But some of us are living better lives because we undertook transformational trainings that helped us look at life differently."

A role model, Ms Muntu also owns several acres of land on which she grows different types of crops.

In Rwamwanja Settlement, Grow Equal Project operates in Ntenungi zone which has three villages - Ntenungi A, B and C.

Each village has 60 households, according to Ms. Saidat Namutosi, the community Empowerment and child protection officer revealed.

"One of the core focus areas is the Green Economic Empowerment which provides seed funding, financial literacy, and business management training to help women transition into sustainable, environmentally friendly livelihoods," Ms Namutosi reveals.

Bahati Teopista, 42 is a father of seven who fled from DR Congo in 2019 says before the project, they hardly had what to eat, domestic violence was on the raise, girl child suffered the most while meeting medication funds seemed hard.

"Today everything has gradually changed and can now participate in developmental activities like agriculture where we have gardens and rear pigs to boost the earnings," he said.

The future

Mr Basaliza has started lobbying for funds to start an apary project for People Living with Disabilities.

"I have already started the pilot project on my farm. I am targeting about 500 individuals in the subcounty. Hopefully, if they can embrace this, they can improve economically on the household level," he says.

He speaks for several other beneficiaries.

