

One ventured into farming after retirement from formal work while the other is still in service.

BY COSLINE NAKAHIIRA

For many women in rural Uganda, farming is a pathway to independence, stability and the ability to support their families.

For Ms Edrae Kagombe, a 65-year-old mother of seven, agriculture became the lifeline that transformed her family's fortunes after business ventures failed.

Ms Kagombe's journey from office secretary to successful banana farmer is a story of resilience, partnership and the growing role of women in sustaining households through agriculture.

In 1992, Ms Kagombe retired early from her job as a secretary at Ntare School.

Ms Kagombe says she opted for early retirement after realising that her salary — combined with her husband's income — was not enough to cater for the needs of their seven children.

She then ventured into business, opening a clothes shop in Mbarara town. But the enterprise soon became unsustainable due to high rent and taxes.

"I used to travel to London in the United Kingdom to stock up on clothes, but the buyers were few. I also had a stationery shop, which I was also forced to close," she recalls.

With business failing, Ms Kagombe turned to a resource closer to home.

"My father-in-law had a large piece of land, so I asked for permission to use it to grow bananas," she says.

Motivation.

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Today, acres.

— Edrae Kagombe, a 65-year-old mother of seven

"I saw people earning from the sale of matooke and I asked myself why I could not do the same. I started the banana plantation with three acres. Today, it has expanded to 60 acres," she adds.

Over the years, the banana project has become the backbone of the family's livelihood.

Ms Kagombe credits her husband's support for the farm's growth.

"When I do not have enough workers, my husband hires prisoners to help with the work. We have a joint bank account where we deposit the money from the farm. Transparency has been a key factor in our marriage. You must tell your husband everything," she advises.

Through farming, Ms Kagombe has been able to educate her children and even pursue her passion for golf.

She has travelled to several countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Kenya and South Africa to participate in golf tournaments.

Challenges

Despite the success, Ms Kagombe says farming comes with many challenges, especially for women.



Ms Edrae Kagombe in her banana plantation in Kitooma Village, Nyakayojo Ward in Mbarara City. PHOTOS/COSLINE NAKAHIIRA

How 2 women built family fortunes through farming

She cites labour shortages and low farm-gate prices as some of the major obstacles.

"People do not want to work. When we pay workers, some spend the money on alcohol and fail to return the next day," she says.

She also notes that pests and diseases, coupled with unreliable markets, make farming unpredictable.

"Sometimes there are no buyers, and middlemen dictate the prices at which we sell our banana bunches," she laments.

Kagombe advises entrepreneurs to remain accountable and constantly monitor their businesses.

A teacher with a farm

Like Kagombe, Ms Sheila Atuhairwe has also turned to farming to strengthen her family's income.

The 46-year-old mother of five balances two demanding roles. By day she is the head teacher of Ngaara Primary School, and in the evenings she supervises workers on her farm.

Ms Atuhairwe has been a teacher since 2000, but in 2006 she ventured into farming to supplement her salary.

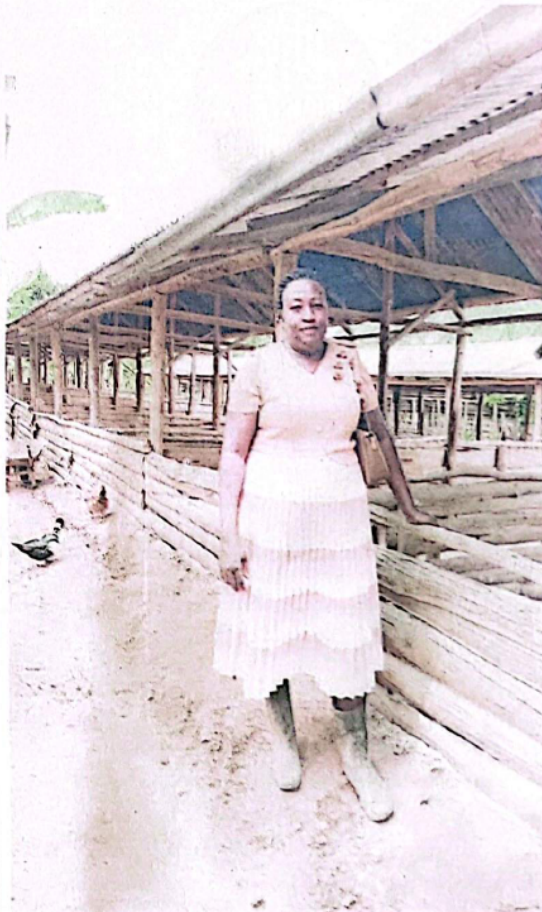
"I got my inspiration from my late father, who loved farming. I wanted to be self-reliant instead of depending on my husband for everything. I also wanted to be a supportive wife," she says.

She started her farming journey with a single pig. Today, her enterprise has grown significantly.

"I began with one pig, but now I have 233 pigs, about 300 ducks and a four-acre banana plantation," she says.

Her farm not only provides income but also employment opportunities for people in the community.

"I employ people from the community and also teach others about breeds and farming. For me, it has been a good venture. You hear teachers demanding



Ms Sheila Atuhairwe at her farm in Ngaara Nyakayojo Ward, Mbarara City.

THE KEY ISSUES

Agriculture remains one of the largest employers of women in Uganda, particularly in rural areas where they contribute more than 70 percent of the agricultural labour force.

Many women rely on farming to support family income, pay school fees for their children and improve household welfare.

However, women farmers continue to face challenges such as limited access to land, labour and reliable markets for their produce.

Experts say empowering women farmers through training, improved market access and better financing could significantly increase household incomes and strengthen food security.

salary increments, but I am not among them because I have another source of income," she says.

Ms Atuhairwe believes women's economic empowerment should go hand in hand with stronger family support systems.

She calls on government to sensitise men about their responsibilities to their families.

"Women do a lot to sustain their homes and eventually collapse under the weight of these responsibilities. Our husbands need to understand that the should be our support system," she says.

Through their work in agriculture both Ms Kagombe and Ms Atuhairwe have become examples in their communities — showing that determination, partner