

Bastille Day

France giving Ugandan farmers a future

Commitment. The project is training young farmers in best agricultural practices and raising awareness on effects of climate change.

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After dropping out of school in Senior Four at Pabbo Senior Secondary School, Amuru District due to lack of school fees, Patrick Otim thought that his future had died.

To Otim, education was his only gate way to a successful future. His dream was to study public administration in the university and later join politics, a career he so much cherished.

However, when his parents failed to pay his school fees, he knew his dream had ended and decided to retire to his ancestral village in Paomo, Gaya Parish, Pabbo Sub-county, where he embarked on small scale farming.

Otim planted maize and beans but the harvest from the farming and profits from selling crops for five years since leaving school in 2010 could not support him. By 2016, Otim had two children and a wife depending on his meager income.

"I was frustrated that life wasn't going to be the same again. The crops were not doing well in the garden. Even the profits were not enough to support me and my family," he says.

But his breakthrough came in July 2016 after Youth Movers Uganda, a non-governmental organisation that helps contribute to wellbeing of the youth, approached Otim and other youth, encouraging them to form groups.

Youth Movers Uganda had launched a livelihood pilot project on agro-ecology, food security, nutrition and income generation. Currently, the project is being funded by the French Embassy at a tune of €10,600 (about Shs42 million). The 10-month project involves training young farmers in best practices and raising their awareness of climate challenges.

"I had never been in a youth group before but due to the good messages the team from Youth Movers Uganda gave us, I accepted. They engaged us on good farming practices, environmental conservation and need to save money in groups," Otim says.

Otim and a group of other 30 members later formed a group Kica Ber (Mercy is Good). He was elected chairman of the group.

On July 20, 2016, Youth Movers Uganda distributed 10 kgs of beans seeds and 15 kgs of maize seeds to each of the selected five groups in Paomo village.

Otim says he planted the seeds and after three months, he harvested 300 kgs of beans and 400 kgs of maize.

"The harvest surprised me; I had never harvested crops in that quantity after nearly five years in farming. But it was possible because I got good farming techniques that include application of fertiliser, spacing of crops and constant spraying against pests," he says.

After selling his crops, Otim says he was able to open up a lock-up shop in his village and contributed Shs500,000 for his brother to open up a bar in Pabbo Trading Centre.

"I am currently selling cooking oil, soap, paraffin and airtime among other assorted merchandise. From my shop, I earn Shs150,000 as net profit per month," he says.

The 28-year-old says the profit from his shop has greatly changed his life, adding that he



Patrick Otim (C) shares his experience at the Paris conference early this year. COURTESY PHOTO

ploughs and pay for labour. Otim says he has also been able to buy a cow, goats and pigs, which he is rearing at his home. From his successful farming within a short period of time, Otim got a life-changing invitation to Paris in France in April 2017 to address a conference on the theme; "Altruism and fraternity".

At the conference in the presence of Bill and Melinda Gates, Otim shared his story how he is developing agro-ecology by planting cassava and maize.

The transformation

This farming season, Otim has planted one and half hectares of rice, one acre of maize, one acre of cassava, one acre of sim sim and two and half acres of beans. He used Shs700,000 as capital for planting the crops.

He expects to get Shs5 million after harvesting all the crops from the garden at the end of this year. His dream is to go back to school and continue with his education, educate his children, upgrade his business and acquire a motorcycle to ease transportation.

"I am who I am to-date because of Youth Movers Uganda, I have learnt a lot from their initiative to the youth. I encourage other youth to join youth groups where they can learn various ways of being successful through farming," Otim says.

Kica Ber group chaired by Otim is also engaged in planting pine trees, mangoes, guava and paw paw to diversify their earnings and conserve the environment.

Youth Movers Uganda was created in 2009 and supports several young people in the areas of livelihood, health and governance.

Under livelihood, the project focuses on agro-ecology, food security, nutrition, income generation while on health, it tackles HIV prevention.

AREA OF INTEREST

Agricultural production and processing, the most promising sectors for Uganda's growth, are of interest to the French companies, a group of which came to

Under governance, the project focuses on capacity building in planning, monitoring and evaluation, civic education, youth leadership and mentoring.

Ms Flora Aling, the executive director of the organization, says the project is currently benefiting 150 youth in Gaya Parish.

Ms Aling adds that they intend to extend the project to more than 1,000 young people in the area. "This is quite a good initiative that we have been able to see success among the youth in the area. We have seen attitude and behavioral change among the youth," she says.

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