

How Namulindwa turned rat breeding into thriving business

According to Judith Namulindwa, albino rats and guinea pigs are multi-purpose animals, used for different purposes such as scientific experiments, pets and in some societies as food.

BY DAVID WALUGEMBE

When we talk about rats, many people immediately think of rodents that invade homes, and destroy crops in gardens. For Ms Judith Namulindwa, rat farming has become a source of livelihood.

The rodents she keeps are not wild but albino (white) rats and guinea pigs – carefully bred animals used for scientific research, school practical lessons, pets, and sometimes food in specialised markets.

In Seguku-Katale, Wakiso District, an area widely known for upscale mansions and affluent residents, Ms Namulindwa turned part of her compound – eight by seven square metres – into a rat breeding ground with cages and well-ventilated enclosures. The environment is kept clean, with proper feeding schedules and water supply.

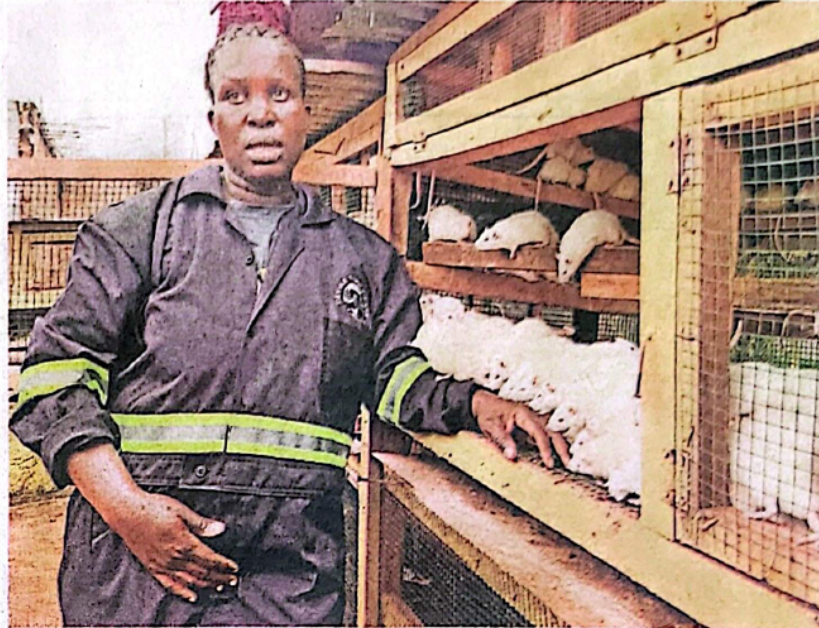
Her journey into rat farming was never part of the original plan. It started in 2016 when she went to buy rabbit feed.

"I had just gone to simply buy rabbit feed, but I was also told about the benefits of rat farming. At first, I did not like it and was even scared," she says.

However, her regular rabbit feed supplier kept encouraging her to take on the business.

Finally, she gave in and invested Shs150,000 to buy three pairs of rats – each at Shs50,000.

She got another pair on credit. She started taking caring the rats without any knowledge of



care, treatment and breeding, and depended on discovery.

"Although we have survived for eight years; there are no specific documentaries or seminars where I get tips on rat breeding, treatment and care. I just survive on creativity, guesswork and trial discovery," Ms Namulindwa stated.

Dumping rabbits for rats

When the business started to boom, she was forced to abandon her first rabbit farming venture to perfect rat breeding.

"I abandoned rabbit farming because they consumed a lot of space. For example, each cage accommodated only four rabbits, yet the same cage houses about 300 rats, which are carefully bred, with some kept for reproduction (rats give birth after every six weeks) while others are sold," she said.

Today, Ms Namulindwa has about 3,000 rats, selling each rat at between Shs10,000 and Shs100,000.

The market

According to Namulindwa, albino rats and guinea pigs are multi-purpose animals, used for different purposes such as scientific experiments, pets and in some societies as food.

She uses social media like TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube as marketing platforms to market her business through short videos and photos. She also uses word of mouth.

And although the market remains unstable, her biggest customers are schools – which purchase them for practical lessons and exams, as well as research organisations, and individuals.

"When schools close, the

customers remain gradual," she explained.

Engaging community

Ms Namulindwa's daughter, Juliet Nansubuga, says when she lost her media job, it was a blessing in disguise.

"I used to despise this business, until my mother asked me to make a delivery in Buikwe District. I was intrigued by the large sum of money that the customer paid," Nansubuga says.

This, she adds, was good enough to fully fall in love with the job.

"I was so amazed; from that moment I have never looked back," Ms Nansubuga says, adding that she is happily self-employed caring rats with her mother.

But it is not only Nansubuga who has embraced rat farming. Through this initiative,

Namulindwa has influenced the neighbouring community to take on the rat farming venture to supplement their family income.

Ms Amina Nasseje, a poultry farmer and resident of Katale, said she was interested in the craft after visiting Namulindwa's farm.

Unlike livestock that require seeing a veterinary doctor, expensive feeds, and care, Ms Nasseje says rat farming is more affordable.

"I could not imagine that rearing rats could also become one of my economic activities. I get frequent customers from schools," she said.

The rat economy

Though there is no official data showing the economic impact of mice to Uganda's economy, the National Population and Housing Census 2024 data indicates that 36.7 percent of the households were engaged in livestock keeping, with the majority (78.6 percent) keeping chickens and the least keeping rabbits (4.6 percent).

As Uganda continues to invest in science, technology, and innovation, the demand for laboratory rats is gradually emerging as a niche but significant sector supporting research and economic development.

Support noted

According to Namulindwa, government should expand the rat market to enable attracting more farmers into the venture since it is affordable and easy to maintain compared to other ventures.

Ms Nasseje on the other hand challenged the government to do more research on rat farming, by introducing demonstration farms specifically for rat breeding to enable farmers to get diverse knowledge on rat care, breeding, and treatment.

"It is rare to find any documentation explaining how rats are treated; we just relay on guesswork. The government should interest itself to develop this evolving venture," she added.

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Juliet Nansubuga helps out on the rat farm in Wakiso. PHOTOS/ GEOFFREY MUTUMBA

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