

Innovation

By Herbert Musoke

Unlike other areas where district land is grabbed, the case is different in Kamwenge.

Officials in the local government have partnered with Byabasambu Twimukye Women's Association, a community-based farmers' association in Byabasambu village, Kahungu sub-county to use the district's land for farming.

Partners such as Harvest Plus, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Samaritan's Purse and World Vision, have empowered the women to use part of the district's land to practise modern farming and improve their income.

According to the Chief Administrative Officer, Levi Bahemuka Musinguzi, the main objective of the initiative is to demonstrate to Kamwenge residents that one can earn a living from agriculture.

"We want to boost agriculture in Kamwenge and this is why we set up a demonstration site. We are happy that this group has demonstrated that there is money in agriculture," he says.

Musinguzi explains that they have already constructed a dam of 40 X 50 metres wide and four metres deep. The district has 150 acres and the women's group has so far utilised 50.

"We have greater plans, including putting in place a modern irrigation system. We also want to bring in livestock so that people can learn everything about farming," he says.

# Kamwenge leaders dedicate district land to farming



Members of Byabasambu Twimukye Women's Association displaying their produce. Photos by Herbert Musoke

**Humble beginnings**

The group was started in 2004 by ADRA to teach women and youth how to read and write. It had 26 members, but the number has grown to 78 (52 women and 26 men).

"At that time, there were about seven groups in the sub-county. Today, only one group is still going strong. Other groups collapsed because the members aimed at getting money from the development partners without considering sustainability," Josephine Kuheebwa, the group co-ordinator says.

Kuheebwa says that after the initial training, they were left to fend for themselves.

"In 2012, Harvest Plus came on board with orange sweet potatoes which have transformed the lives of members. They trained us in the best farming practices, marketing, the power of working together, value addition and how to use farming to improve the health of our families," Kuheebwa adds.

**Capital**

Kuheebwa says Harvest Plus gave the group orange potato vines, as well as bean seeds (of a variety rich in iron) to plant.

"The project has transformed us. Most children in the community are healthy and we are able to take them to school — some have even graduated from university. This has been possible because of orange sweet potatoes and beans rich in iron," she says.

The varieties of orange sweet potatoes are Naspot 15, 12, 8, Kabode, Vita, Ejumula.

Ejumula and Naspot15 are particularly good for making flour.

"If you are going to make flour to make bread, mandazi and porridge among others you should grow Ejumula and Naspot15," Kuheebwa explains.

**What others say**

**Simon Byabaqambi, USAID:**

We need to include nutrition in the farming programmes, so farmers can grow food that our bodies actually need.



**Richard Ssekakozzi, Administrator:**

Health workers should educate people on proper nutrition to prevent disease, especially among women and children.



**Lydia Pedun, partner:**

We need to teach people how to eat food as medicine before eating medicine as food. Eating right will save us from paying hefty hospital bills in medical treatment.



**Isaac Kambu, Samaritan's Purse:**

It should be a combined effort of all stakeholders to educate the population on feeding well for development and prosperity.



**Promoting value addition**

According to Sylvia Magezi, the director of Harvest Plus (the development partner promoting orange sweet potatoes and iron-rich beans), value addition not only increases the consumption of the tuber, but also increases farmers' incomes.

To achieve this, Harvest Plus started teaching members how to make other products from potatoes, such as pancakes, mandazi, chapatti and porridge flour. "We want to empower as many as 20 million smallholder households

in the country by 2020. Biofortified crops are rich in vitamin A and other essential minerals that can prevent many illnesses. Therefore, we want people to eat this potato," she says.

According to the 2011 Demographic Health Survey, more than 35% of children under the age of five lack vitamin A and health experts say bio-fortified foods can reduce such nutrition deficiencies in mothers and children. Orange sweet potato and iron-rich beans are some of these foods.



**Marketing as a group**

According to Johnson Bakeitha, the group chairman, every member owns a garden, but their produce is sold as a group. "During harvest, we record each member's harvest and sell as a group, after which the proceeds are shared according to everyone's harvest," he says.

This has helped them to have a steady market and set their prices since there is no competition amongst themselves. This also gives them an opportunity to sell to bigger markets

that want to buy in bulk like UN at the refugee camp of Rwamwanja (in Kamwenge) and schools, among others.

According to Kuheebwa, from the 50 acres of land they use, last year they harvested and sold 3,700 bags of vines in the first season and 9,070 bags in the second season — at sh15,000 per bag. They earned a total of sh191m. They also sold 470 bags of potatoes the whole year at sh60,000 each bag, earning sh28.2m.

"From this we have taken our children to school, bought solar

equipment in our homes, proper medication, property like land and build better and modern houses, among others, which has made our lives better. Even men who were hesitating at first are now supportive and some have joined the group," she says.

**Food for nutrition**

Godlier Nizeyimana, a paediatrician nurse at Rukunyu Health Centre IV in Rukunyu sub-county, expressed great concern about how many people have neglected nutrition, focusing more on profit.

"It is absurd that parents keep chicken and sell all the eggs without giving their children any to eat. When the children are diagnosed with illnesses such as marasmus as a result of malnutrition, the parents blame it on witchcraft," says Nizeyimana.

She says as the Government and development partners promote agriculture, family and community food security, plus nutrition should be given special consideration.

"As medical practitioners, we believe we can use agriculture to boost people's health and prevent several illnesses with proper feeding. Orange potatoes, for example, are rich in vitamin A. They boost body immunity, improve night vision, ensure a healthy skin and promote proper growth and development," she explains.

According to Lydia Kansime, the public health nurse at the hospital, with the help of development partners like Harvest Plus, USAID, Samaritan's Purse and World Vision, they have sensitised communities about best feeding practices, especially for children and pregnant mothers.