

Ms Enid Mbabazi and her husband Mr Ferdinand Mugisha, the owners of Go Fish Holdings Ltd, the first of its kind in the country, took a bold move into the restaurant business after a failed attempt at selling fish on the local market. **Eronie Kamukama** spoke to Ms Mbabazi on how they zeroed down on selling live fish in three different branches.

It was "wow" at first sight when the driver dropped me at a Go Fish restaurant in Bugolobi. My eyes rotated from the aquarium that sits in the parking lot to the wooden coffee brown African tables and chairs that give the restaurant a traditional touch to the fish menu across the counter. Not that I had never seen an aquarium, this time it was bigger and filled with live fish! Imagine picking your own fish using a fishing net, determining whether to take it home or have it grilled, boiled, baked or fried and served along an assortment of salads.

Unlike other customers, it is impossible to miss out on the brains behind the "Fish only restaurant" on the mar-

# Fishing: Couple nets city customers with fresh fish



Ms Enid Mbabazi prepares fish for her customers at Go Fish, Bugolobi. The fish eatery has two other branches in Naguru and Muyenga. PHOTO BY EROKIE KAMUKAMA

## TIPS FOR STARTUPS

It is more advisable to engage in the entire production chain because you are sure of the quality of fish you are selling. Go for commercial because if you do not, it is hard to break even since the costs of production are very high. Involve technical people.

ket, Ms Enid Mbabazi and her husband, Mr Ferdinand Mugisha.

While her husband, a contractor, had been in business for a long time, Ms Mbabazi, a medical doctor currently practising public health never took the time to involve herself in business until three years ago.

The Mugishas engaged in the fish business in 2012 because they wanted to diversify their business and fish farming presented a great opportunity.

"Our fresh waters are getting depleted and we thought if we went into fish farming, we could mitigate the

problem and increase fish stocks on the market," Ms Mbabazi says.

The Mugishas started off with cage fish farming on the waters near Kome Island on Lake Victoria, Mukono District.

The couple began small with 14 cages of tilapia fish to first establish market and feasibility of the fish farming business. When the pilot became successful, they expanded. They concentrated on tilapia which, according to Ms Mbabazi, is not only tasty but also good for small-scale consumers.

After farming their fish, like any other businesspeople, the Mugishas wanted to earn big. Initially, the couple was selling to bulk buyers within East Africa such as in Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya but competition became stiff and pushed them towards the local market.

## Starting

The Mugishas started selling to stall owners but the challenge was that they were more interested in "wild fish." More so, it became difficult for farmed fish to compete favourably with fish caught di-

rectly from the lake since the retailers were offering the same amount for both types of fish.

"They want fish directly caught by fishermen since the costs are not low; maybe the cost of buying a boat and the time they spend on water. But for farmed fish, you do the cages, feed the fish, pay the workers, transport it so the costs of production were high," she explains.

Marketing farmed fish turned problematic on the local market until they realised it was time to think out of the box. The duo believed there were Ugandans who cared about the safety and quality

of what they eat. That is when the idea of setting up a fish outlet that sells live fish came up.

In January this year, Ms Mbabazi implemented the plan. She says it has taken many preparations for the outlet to take off because its uniqueness requires technical readiness.

"You have to ensure the fish is live and there is a system that we set up to ensure its safety. It involves circulation of water, ensuring water is oxygenated and has right amounts of minerals," she explains.

She also had to prepare her customers to embrace the business and this shifted her efforts towards aggressive marketing and branding. The plan worked but customers demanded for more. "When we launched our first outlet, we thought we would have the aquarium and the tanks, people would buy and prepare from home. But the people who came for the launch insisted they wanted to eat from here. So, we quickly established a restaurant," Ms Mbabazi says.

# 60

AVERAGE NUMBER OF PLATES THE FISH RESTAURANT SELLS ON A GOOD DAY

## How fish eatery expanded to three branches

They opened more outlets to reduce operational costs and meet customer demand. The duo carefully picked its outlets, a decision that saw them open the first outlet in the high-end areas of Muyenga and a month later, Bugolobi and Naguru.

The market response has been good as people stroll in to buy a fish meal that costs between Shs15,000 and Shs45,000 depending on the size. On a good day, on average, the restaurant sells about 60 plates of fish at Naguru and Bugolobi.

The couple currently has about 420 cages and has taken on the entire production chain from hatching where the fingerlings are produced to selling to the final consumer in a restaurant.

Ms Enid Mbabazi nets fish for her customers at Go Fish, Bugolobi. PHOTO BY EROKIE KAMUKAMA



"We are yet to convert a large number of people into

## Achievements

Ms Mbabazi says her biggest achievement has been creating awareness about Go Fish outlets. Customer volumes are also encouraging. On matters of investment and profit, Ms Mbabazi says they have invested Shs7b since the fish farming business started and that it would be too early to say they have recovered a reasonable amount of the investment.

She plans to maintain and attract more customers, add products to the menu and open more outlets if the market is promising. Over the next two years, she hopes to sell 2,000 tonnes of fish annually instead of the current 20 tonnes sold a month.

As they hope to first seize a certain percentage of their

## PEOPLE UPLIFTED BY GO FISH

Go Fish is a fish restaurant with a unique concept that offers customers live and fresh tilapia. The couple behind this business has invested Shs7b since the fish farming business started.



"The business is very okay, I have been coming here ever since they started. I enjoy the fish. From my first impression, I liked it, it is cool and apart from the fish, the setup is very nice and unique." DENIS TUMWESIGYE - CUSTOMER



"The turn up is good especially for live fish, people keep coming back. It is a good innovation as people want to take it up. Sometimes they want to know how to start. It has personally changed my life because before I was taking care of young fish and now I take care of mature fish." PROSSY TABINGWA, AQUARIUM TECHNICIAN



"Whoever comes in is happy. Services are good. As a businessperson, Ms Mbabazi is friendly and good at what she does. I have got