

Vegetable farming transforms life of an ex-convict



David Odyek (42 years) and wife Akello Lohan (36 years) stand in front of their house constructed as a result of income from vegetable farming. Hut (in the background) is their former house

“After 18 years of serving imprisonment in the Luzira Maximum Prison of Uganda, I had nothing left at home. Life was problematic; my health was deteriorating due to HIV/AIDS, my land had been sold by relatives while I was in detention, my wife of six (6) children was gone and there was no hope.” narrates David Odyek. His wife had re-married elsewhere as a result of his absence.

It had been David’s passion to engage in agriculture but his health would not permit him. He needed urgent surgery. Through his counselling contact at the Infectious Disease Institute (IDI) in Mulago Referral Hospital, he was connected to a Samaritan Doctor who offered him free surgery which enabled him to stabilize health wise. On his return from the surgery in the Kampala hospital while at the bus stop in Lira town he noticed an agro-input shop owned by Martin Abila– a Trainer of Trainees (ToT) of the ISSD Project selling vegetable seeds and more.

“I knew this was my conduit to recovery. At this point I had no money left so I requested Martin - the shop owner to give me 2 sachets of cabbage Baraka variety as a loan. The shop owner was hesitant since he did not know me but after convincing him, he agreed to my request” says 42-year-old David with a happy face.

What Martin describes as determination prompted him to give David cabbage seeds on credit. To his surprise, David brought him payment at the agro-input shop after two weeks and also purchased more farm input such as watering can, spray pump, folio fertilizer and pesticide. “As part of my ToT inspection visits to farmers, I decided to go look for the dedicated man with such integrity in Tebule sub county,

Kole District which is an hour away from Lira town and inspect his progress and perhaps teach him knowledge of good agronomic practices” says ToT Martin 37-years.



Martin Amila, the Trainer of Trainees (ToT) shares vegetable farming knowledge with David and Lohan in the cabbage garden

David had prepared his nursery bed of the 2 sachets of cabbage while planning to plant it on half an acre of land. On the other hand, he had a group of 5 youth whom he was teaching how to produce mud bricks from the swampy corner of the land which he sold and bought farm inputs mentioned earlier and more.

“I made another round of bricks after buying farm inputs. The income from these bricks helped me to buy back part of my land that was sold by my relatives because they thought I had died in prison. I have so far bought back 2 acres of land from the income of vegetables and by the end of 2019 I will have redeemed the last part of land - one and a half acres of land by buying it back from the illegal owners” adds determined David.

“Martin has taught me how to plant cabbages, tomatoes and egg plants using best practices he also sells to us genuine vegetable seeds, fertilizer and pesticides. I have created a group of 20 farmers in total and he keeps visiting our vegetable gardens and offers training. Since 2018, I have earned approximately 15 million in total having sold the harvest in Lira, Aduku and Omodo markets respectively. This is how I

have been able to redeem back my land, bring my wife back home, re-invest in vegetable farming and build my family a house” narrates David.



Odong Moses, the Local Council (LC) leader of Tebule village says; “18 years in prison offered David lessons of hard work, forgiveness, resilience and conflict resolution. He is a changed and highly respectable individual of our community. He is teaching youth vegetable farming and vocational skills”. He adds “we need reformed hardworking people in our village like David”.

“Vegetable farming has given me a new lease of life. Am now able to

transport myself to hospital for Anti Retro Viral drugs, pay school fees for my children in school and provide basic needs to my family. My wife and I work in harmony. Since she is not infected with HIV/AIDS I protect her and we are living happily together” – notes David

To supplement income for vegetable farming, David and the youth make over 40,000 bricks in one month and sell it at for approximately 6 million. This is how he was able to build his house and also buy solar for lighting their home.

David advises fellow farmers to shift to vegetable farming in order to earn more income and live meaningful lives.



Farmers such as David are primary beneficiaries from the Training of Trainers services in Vegetable farming through the ISSD-Plus Project’ vegetable component that promotes the use of high yielding and pest resistance Dutch variety seeds. ISSD-Plus Project is implemented by Wageningen University Research (WUR) Centre for Development Innovation (CDI) and is funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda.

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