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Ruhiira residents reap wealth from goat rearing

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A visit to Kabuyanda and Nyakitunda Sub-counties is not an easy exercise, as one has to climb steep hills and at times gently rolling hills to reach their destination. In these hills live friendly people who have suffered for long under the yoke of poverty.

But much as poverty has been with them for long, a ray of hope came with the introduction of Millennium Development Goals implementation pilot project of Millennium villages in 2006.

Ruhiira Millennium Villages project was chosen because of the vulnerability of the people living in difficult locations among other criteria. Project activities started in March 2006 in the sub counties of Nyakitunda and Kabuyanda to establish a rigorous proof of concept for implementation of practical interventions needed to achieve the millennium goals over a five-year time frame.

One of the items identified by the locals themselves was goat rearing since the area is hilly and cannot support cattle rearing effectively. Ms MacLean Kamugisha from Ruhiira village has seen her life transformed from subsistence farming to progressive goat rearing farming. "I used to keep local goats on subsistence level, which would fetch me little money," she says.

"Before the project came into being I had 36 local goats which I was keeping on free range, but now with the advice of our agriculture coordinator, I keep 15 "improved goats," Kamugisha says.

An improved goat fetches Shs400,000 on the open market while a local goat goes for about Shs60,000. "I have already sold three improved goats which fetched Shs400,000 each and have used the money to put up a water tank," she proudly says.

Dr Louis Aziku, the livestock facilitator of the project says goat rearing was chosen as a form of enterprise because the locals themselves requested for it and once it is well handled it is very lucrative. "There is a very big market in the Arab countries which we cannot satisfy because of lack of enough animals," he says.

Dr Aziku says before embarking on goat rearing, farmers sat down and identified the problems they had like land shortage, poor breeds, inaccessible livestock inputs, extension services, poor pastures and lack of lucrative market.

To address these problems farmers have been trained in good goat management practices, have constructed six demonstration shelters, and availed improved pasture seeds, put up demonstration gardens where farmers are trained.

Kamugisha has been able to reach where she has because of the good practices she has learnt from the demonstration sites.

"I have been able to sustain my goats that I keep on Zero grazing because of the training which I have got from our extension worker Richard Gumisiriza. I consider him very instrumental in the success of the goat project," she says.

She says she would be able to increase on the productivity of her goats once she increased on the numbers of goats and also better breed. We have been promised better breeds of Boer he-goats form South Africa. She also says she no longer spends a lot of money on treatment of animals because of keeping them in the shade.

Kamugisha is not alone in the venture. Many women have embraced the practice and it has acted as one way of empowering them economically which is part of the millennium goals.

The commutations officer of the project, Shakila Bint Sheik says at this rate if women remain focused, they will be able to reduce on the dependency syndrome on men. This will empower the rural woman who will eventually be liberated from the yoke of poverty," Shakila says.