

ACPCU has given back Ankole Coffee its appeal.



Jessica Birungi, a 45-year-old coffee farmer and resident of Kayanga West Ward, Rushozi Ward, Kabwohe Division in Mbarara district, in 2015, started with an acre of coffee and at that time it didn't look like it would ever grow beyond that. Fast forward to today, and Jessica is the proud owner of four acres of organic coffee.

It all changed when she became a member of the Rushozi-Kwefaho Growers Cooperatives Society in 2012; and hers is a testimony to the power that lies in cooperatives, as compared to those who venture out into the domain of commercial farming as lone rangers.

Jessica is one of the beneficiaries of Ankole Coffee Producers' Cooperatives Union (ACPCU) whose livelihood has been positively impacted as a result of the training conducted on how to grow coffee and manage the crop at harvest. She is also assured of market opportunities that accrue from quality organic coffee.

"We are paid in two trounces, the first on delivery, and the other after ACPCU has sold off.

"I was offered a premium price of UGX.2800 per kilogramme for organic coffee. After selling the products, us farmers get agricultural implements such as hoes. Some of the surplus of the money goes back into our communities, in Nyakashambya for instance, schools have been built, roads rehabilitated, and shallow wells sunk," she explained.



Left: Nyakashambya primary school constructed using premium funds in Nyakashambya ward, Central division, Sheema Municipality.

Another tale of triumph comes from Joram Kavundi, a 69-year-old retired vernacular teacher cum coffee farmer, from Ryenjoki, Rweibare, Kakinda TC, Sheema district who overcame immense odds to support his family.

Kavundi's coffee farming journey started in 2008, when he was much younger and far stronger compared to what he is today. Back then things were extremely slow, and he had to deal with soil erosion and pests that affected the coffee yield.

"I wasn't using fertilizers," he recalls, shaking his head sadly.

"We were doing agriculture much the same way that our ancestors did." Like some of his ancestors, Kavundi thought it okay to simply abandon a pest and disease infested garden to make a fresh start elsewhere, however, Kavundi neither had the land nor the means to freely move about as his ancestors did.

A ray of hope was realized in 2014, when an ACPCU field extension worker trained beneficiaries on tree planting and soil erosion control. The extension worker also provided coffee seedlings and taught on record keeping.

With all the learning, Kavundi grew his coffee garden from an acre to seven acres over five years and has continued to harvest organic Robusta elite coffee since then.

"I have made it", he says, with a huge grin on his face. "When you see this new house, it is because of coffee. I have also acquired four Friesian cows at UGX 2,000,000 each from the savings of the previous season's harvest."



Left: Mr. Kavundi with the Friesian cows. Right: Kavundi and wife in front of their house that was majorly constructed with proceeds from sell of coffee.

The tales of triumph show that cooperatives as an economic intervention do work wonders.

ACPCU, headquartered in Kabwohe, Mbarara district, was founded by 10 primary cooperative societies in 2006 with 3500 farmers. It operates in the South-Western districts of Bushenyi, Sheema, Rubirizi, Mitooma, Buhweju and Ntungamo. It has grown to cover 25 primary cooperative societies with about 9,150 members.

The cooperatives are engaged in the production of both Robusta and Arabica coffee with most farmers certificated in fair trade and organic coffee farming.

With support from aBi, ACPCU increased coffee export volumes from the 19MT they did in the late 2000s to the 110 (40ft or 20ft) containers by the first half of 2015..

Members also enjoy services such as processing and grading of their coffee for export, marketing, supervision, book-keeping and management, capacity building in good agronomic practices & natural resource management, provision of seedlings and ensuring organic and fair-trade certification of members' coffee.