

Apolonali Kasimba describes life before joining Kibumba Farmer Field School as "miserable". "I was very poor, my land was poor and I used to get very small bunches of bananas. I used to sell milk from my local cows but I hardly raised 10,000/= per month. My children were almost dropping out of school," he said.

Since he joined the Farmer Field School in 2006, life has changed for better. His banana yield has more than tripled. Kasimba has adopted taught practices including proper planting, soil and water conservation as well as pest and disease control. "Before I plant a banana stem, I have to check to ensure that it is disease and pest free. I also fertilize the soil using organic manure. We have been taught how to harvest and store water in our gardens using simple methods. As a result, I am able to produce bananas all year round; even during the driest period", he said.



Mr. Kasimba nurturing his banana plantation

Kasimba says he has successfully fought diseases and pests that attack the banana. "My bananas are now very big. I used to get three small clusters but now I get between 10 – 15 big clusters on one bunch of banana. I now sell a minimum of 20 bunches of bananas every month. During the dry season, I sell one banana at 5,000/= and 1000 – 2000/= during the rainy season. Sometimes, buyers come to my plantation. I am now like a salary earner because I am assured of income every month," he said.

Besides bananas, Kasimba has also taken on goat rearing because goats provide manure." I make sure that I collect all the dung to make compost manure for my 3 – acre garden. As I increase the land under cultivation, I also hope to buy more goats," he said. Kasimba has 20 goats.

The future is bright for Kasimba. He wants to open more land to plant more bananas as well as purchase more goats. "I want to become a model farmer in

our Sub County. I want to show people that they can earn decent living through banana production rather than brewing alcohol as most people do. I want to educate all my 8 children to University level and diversify farming activities on my farm.

Kasimba is one of the farmers who have benefited from FAO's project – *Improving integrated production and pest management to control Banana Bacterial Wilt*. The project aims at improving BBW containment and management technologies for cooking and dessert bananas.

The project is being implemented in Lira, Mukono, Kamuli, Kiboga and Mbarara districts through the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries.

So far about 3,000 farmers have benefited from the project through 100 Farmer Field Schools that have been established. Farmers, through the FFS are assisted through training in banana production, soil and water conservation, planting materials and income generating grants.

The project is part of FAO's TCP, which mainly focuses on providing technical assistance in the areas of agriculture, forestry, fisheries and natural resources.

The project is implemented using farmer-driven participatory methodologies where farmers are facilitated to form a FFS of between 20 – 30 members to participate in research and validation of practices that augment the management of bananas to increase production.

During implementation, farmers carry out experiments on a study plot and only adopt authenticated practices in their individual plots. They study the banana crop right from inception to harvesting. In Mbarara, 11 FFS have been formed in 8 Sub Counties.



A plate of cooked bananas



Demonstrating how to plant a pest free banana

Mr. Joshua Himbisa, who is the facilitator of Farmer Field Schools in Ndeija Sub County in Mbarara, says the project was timely and is bearing fruit. "We selected the Ndeija Sub County because Ntungamo, the neighboring district had reported cases of Banana Bacterial Wilt disease. We had to move fast to stop it because bananas in Ndeija subcounty and Mbarara district at large are both a staple and cash crop. We wanted to empower the farmers with knowledge to fight pests and diseases in order to improve banana production. We are very impressed with results from the existing Farmer Field Schools. Farmers are reviving banana production after it went down in the last decade," he said. Mr. Himbisa is optimistic that if all farmers could take up the farming practices, banana pests and diseases would be wiped out of the district forever. "Farmers use very simple and chemical free methodologies using locally available materials such as banana stems and wood ash to fight the pests," he said.



Members of Ihena Farmer Field School prepare to sell their bananas

The LC3 Chairman for Ndeija Sub County said the system empowers farmers. "In this Sub County, we have started a FFS in each parish. We have committed 5 million shillings in this year's budget to facilitate the establishment of FFS because they are very effective in mobilizing farmers and adopting technologies. We have proved that this FFS approach can fight poverty with very little money. Farmers identify the problems and they find solutions themselves," he said.