

NYIRABAGWIZA's story resonates thousands of Rwandan women who were living side by side with poverty and never had any hope of living a better life three decades ago. Thousands have gained financial independence and support their families with the fortune they make as resilient farmers. The creative, hardworking and resilient women determine their destiny, a departure from total dependence on their spouses.

Marie Claire Nyirabagwiza chose self-retirement from her high paying job with an NGO operating in Rwanda where she worked as a Certified Nurse. Today, she owns a modern mango farm that sits on a 10-hectare plot in Nyagatare District in Eastern Rwanda. She returned to her homeland in 1994 from DR Congo where she was born. Shortly, she got married and the couple was blessed with children.

The resilient businesswoman co-founded the mango farm with her late husband when she had just left her job, where she suffered from boredom linked to monotony and underutilization of her potential and time.

"I was getting tired of spending more time doing nothing at work. I would work on a few patients per day and the rest of working hours I would be just doing no work," she recalls.

Many project ideas crossed her mind including starting a childcare center, which she dropped before it was realized.

Notably, before Nyirabagwiza settled on fruit farming, she had ventured into growing a variety of cash crops.

"I later thought of investing in other cash crops. I started growing beans, maize, potatoes and bananas in Rwamagana and about 1.5ha where I planted avocado," Nyirabagwiza revealed to Rwanda Dispatch during an exclusive interview recently.

Well, her business steadily grew, helped other farmers with tips on mango farming, and soon became known locally as a "mango consultant".

Her role stretched from farming to training other farmers in modern commercial fruit farming skills, pest control, tree care among others.

Today, she supplies high-end hotels such as Ubumwe Grande Hotel alongside wholesalers in high- scale suburbs of Kigali city mostly in Kimironko and Nyabugogo.

The Nurse-turned-fruit Farmer boast a growing market in Rusizi and Rubavu and her quality mangos are competitive in the region particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Outstanding Achievements

Nyirabagwiza has created jobs for many along contributing to national economic development through paying taxes and reducing trade deficit through exporting the mangoes to foreign markets.

“I’m proud to play a role in society,” she says. “I have six permanent employees and over 100 temporary workers who come to help plant and harvest crops. The six young people I recruited are now married and have their own families.”

FUTURE PLANS

Nyirabagwiza has many plans in the offing, which reflect her stance to invest in value addition and expand to foreign markets.

The yield has been on the increase from a few kilogrammes to tones of mangos, today.

She plans to set up a mango drying facility to export mangoes in different recipes as one of the strategies to grow her revenue from the business. Additionally, she intends to open a mango confectionery to promote in-depth market research.

“I was inspired to venture into mango processing and effectively target the export market while on business trips in the US and South Africa. We have successfully increased production and have potential to start processing the mangos,” says Nyirabagwiza.

Message to Rwandans

“Collaboration is key,” Nyirabagwiza emphasizes, “One hand cannot clap alone.”

She believes that women perform better in farming when they work as a team . Teamwork is essential to overcoming obstacles and achieving long-term goals.

Women are naturally inclined to work together and think beyond the present, much like careful drivers navigating a busy road, observes Nyirabagwiza.