

# Vegetable farmers find hope in chili

PICTURE: FILE

■ RASHIDA NAKABUGA

UNTIL recently, Wilberforce Mudy could hardly take his children to school.

Mudy, a vegetable farmer in Buroboi village in Busia District, had perennially made losses due to lack of a market for his produce.

"I used to plant vegetables and could not find a market. I was unable to take my children to school," he says.

Last year, he decided to venture where few would tread. He started growing chili on his quarter-acre plot.

The crop had been introduced in the area by the Horticulture Development Centre, a non-governmental organisation funded by USAid. At first, his neighbours laughed at him as he planted his crop.

"When HDC introduced chili farming people were discouraging us saying it was a risky project," he recalls.

"Where will you sell it?" they taunted him.

Mudy, a pastor at a local church continued to tend his crop despite discouragement. His harvested his first crop and sold it for Sh7,000.

"I thought I would never earn a living from farming until chili was introduced here," he says.

He used to market his produce at church after the Sunday service.

"People laughed at me because of the way I used to woo my customers," he recalls.

He almost gave up but when he started earning from the crop, he decided to go on.

Mudy, a father of one, also educates a 12-year-old orphan, Kevin Lovembe.

Today, many of his detractors have joined him and the once poor farmers can now make ends meet.

More than 300 farmers have taken up chili farming. They have also formed a body, the Busia Integrated and Agricultural Forum Farmers Association, to co-ordinate their activities.



A healthy chili crop.

The association's chairman Lenox Barasa says an acre of vegetables would fetch a farmer less than Sh500 but now members can earn up to Sh10,000 from half an acre of chili.

"We used to plant cabbages and sukuma wiki but they would rot due to lack of buyers," he recalls.

Agronomist Fred Ochieng' says Chili farming was introduced in Busia district to help local farmers earn a living.

"HDC is helping farmers in Busia by introducing new crops that suit their soils. We also link them with the buyers," he says.

The farmers have been trained on new agricultural technologies to help them have quality produce.

Horticulture Development Centre plans on introducing passion fruit and vanilla farming to boost agricultural production.

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