

Mary Poni discovers how vegetables can grow in rocks:

Poni Mary is a group member of Ayiki Village Saving and loans association based in Imvepi Refugee settlement, supported by JAM.

Mary narrates her ordeal with a smile.



Mary Poni in her vegetable garden that started it all

*She gleefully starts her story. "I and my husband arrived in Uganda in 2017. We were hopeless, but thanked God that we had arrived in Uganda safely and alive. Our Journey to Uganda was nightmarish, having lost all our assets and livelihood status, the future looked bleak. We were settled in Imvepi Zone 2, Village 9 where we were allocated plots to settle in. Before that we had spent two weeks in Imvepi Reception Centre. As we wondered where to start life from we continued depending on the handouts from the humanitarian partners. We heavily relied on the general food distribution by World food Program (WFP). In 2019, when JAM came up with the kitchen gardening training, I picked a lot of interest and through the expertise of JAM Agronomist, I replicated the new farm techniques acquired during the training to my small plot at home **despite the rocky nature of the soil.** I was also able to receive assorted vegetable seeds like onions, tomatoes, Cowpeas, Amaranthus, eggplants and cabbage plus tools like a hand hoe, forked hoe and a watering can. I particularly liked the **'Mandela approach'** which is all weather practice. Apart from participating in the group field activities, my individual garden has managed to feed me and my husband but also fetch me income that I have invested into procuring cereals and pulses. Before investing in the kitchen garden project, I would wait for the food distribution to sell part of my food ration to buy other necessities like soap, clothing etc. but now my food ration strictly supports us at home while the vegetable business provides money to acquire other essentials. I know earn an average of 60,000 Ugx (\$12) per month as compared to 20,000 shillings I was earning at the beginning when I solely sold only Fresh vegetables. Why I opted to use the Vegetable earnings to buy*

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Poni selling beans and maize bought through sale of vegetables.

produce is because the Vegetable earning is periodic while the demand for grain is daily. My husband has maintained the management of the vegetable garden, while I concentrate in the running of the stall in the market. As much as I have put more emphasis on grain, I supplement my sales with Vegetables produced by my husband.

My key challenge is limited land for farming. I therefore plan to accumulate more capital then expand my kitchen gardening by hiring land from the host community. I am a member of Ayiiki Saving group, but due to limited support from partners like JAM, where we lack financial literacy and saving kits, most members have opted out. I therefore urge JAM to actively include Village Savings & Loans Association (VSLA) package in her interventions. If the Savings group is rejuvenated, I believe I will achieve my dream. I am so grateful to JAM Uganda for introducing me to this new farming technique”, say Poni.



Poni's husband (Awili) narrates to JAM team their journey to success and their expansion plans.