

# Catherine's Inspiring Leadership Journey



They say that the key to a successful organization is good leadership. Catherine Nakibuule (38), from Nakaseke District in Central Uganda embodies just that. Over the years due to her integrity, commitment, and positive attitude, she has found herself in various leadership roles. Today, not only is she the Woman District Councillor in the Nakaseke District local government, but she is also the Chairperson of Semuto Coffee Farmer's Cooperative Society LTD. After being recently elected as the Chairperson, Catherine has taken the cooperative from one level of development to the next. This is the story of her leadership journey.

At the age of 12, Catherine was unfortunately orphaned after the untimely passing of both her parents. Thereafter, she found herself living with her aunt who tried to educate her. However, Catherine's home village in Semuto Sub-county, Nakaseke, had very few schools. This meant the primary school she attended was overcrowded making it difficult for the students to learn. At the age of 16, Catherine's aunt who has been her guardian unfortunately also passed away in a car accident. This meant Catherine no longer had the financial support to attend school and she sadly had to drop out while still in secondary school. Despite this misfortune and the lack of access to quality education, Catherine was determined to make something of herself.

## From Student to Teacher

Fast-forward to 2010, Catherine was married with eight children and had become an avid coffee farmer. For this reason, she was among the farmers that were mobilized to participate in the International Coffee Partners (ICP) project which is implemented by Hanns R. Neumann Stiftung (HRNS). Through the passionate application of the improved farm management practices she learned in the project's training, Catherine was able to improve the production and quality of her family's 1.5-acre coffee farm.



Over time, due to her exemplary farm and ability to inspire others through her actions, Catherine was selected to become a Farmer Field School (FFS) Facilitator. This meant she was responsible for holding meetings where she would educate farmers on the improved farm management practices she had learned. Eventually, the ICP project supported the farming community to formulate farmer organizations of about 30 members. The Farmer Organization in Semuto Sub-county elected their own leadership and to no one's surprise, Catherine was assigned the roles of Lead Farmer and Sustainability Officer. In these capacities, Catherine trained other farmers on good agricultural practices and the safe use and handling of agrochemicals.

### From Farmer Organization to Cooperative

In 2012, ICP supported the farmer organizations in Semuto Sub-county to combine and register as a cooperative. Currently the Semuto Cooperative has 321 members (195F, 126M). As a cooperative, the farmers are licenced to sell their coffee in bulk. By doing so, farmers can receive more beneficial prices and terms because, with larger volumes of coffee, they can directly access export markets instead of going through middlemen. The cooperative also offers their members several services, including access to agricultural inputs, training on improved farm management practices, savings and loan schemes, and the ability to add value to their coffee – to achieve an even higher payoff for their hard work. Every 2 years, the cooperative elects new leadership and in the recent 2021 elections, Catherine was elected as Chairperson.



### From One Development Phase to Another

One of the objectives of ICP in Uganda is to strengthen about 12 cooperatives in three districts across Uganda. So far, using a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) tool called the Organizational Development Scorecard, ICP is able to assess and monitor the performance of the 12 cooperatives. The midline assessment that took place in July 2022 found Semuto Cooperative to be the most improved since the initial assessment at the beginning of the project (see figure 1 and 2 below.)

## Overall Assessment of Semuto Coffee Farmer's Cooperative Society LTD at Baseline and Midline

Cooperatives were assessed on 96 items and scored on a scale of 0% - 100%.

0-20% = Inception Phase

21-44% = Development Phase

45-90% = Consolidation Phase

>90% = Strong and Professional Phase

Baseline  25% Development and Learning Phase

Midline  50% Consolidation Phase

## Assessment of Semuto Coffee Farmer's Cooperative Society LTD at Baseline and Midline per Category

Actively offer services to their members

Baseline  12%

Midline  64%

Leadership structure in place

Baseline  63%

Midline  100%

Development of training curriculum

Baseline  20%

Midline  60%

Conduct advocacy

Baseline  0%

Midline  35%

As seen in the above results, thanks to Catherine's strong leadership, the cooperative has moved from the second phase of Development in the OD scorecard to the third phase. Currently, Catherine is leading in advocacy through her role as the Woman District councillor and has lobbied for a permanent certificate for the cooperative to legally operate. They have also been able to receive fertilizers at a subsidized price from the Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA) who are

a Ugandan government body. Catherine's goal is to ensure that the Cooperative buy land and build their own office so they can move out of the one they are renting. Thereafter she wants to construct a factory so they can add value to their coffee.

For herself, Catherine also has big dreams. She has broken the cycle of poor education by educating her children. Currently, her firstborn son is in university studying to become an engineer and her secondborn is studying nursing. The others are still in secondary school.

"My dream is to go back to finish my education and then become a Member of Parliament." – Catherine Nakibuule

We are excited to see the next chapters unfold in Catherine's journey.