



Ankole Diocese Bishop Rt. Rev Sheldon Mwesigwa (centre) and other officials from the diocese inspect a plantation of one of the coffee small holder farmers.
PHOTO/RAJAB MUKOMBOZI

How Revival Coffee is fostering household and community transformation in Ankole

One of Ankole Diocese's key pillars is social-economic transformation of households, which draws strategies on how to make communities better placed to earn substantially. Currently, the diocese has planted 104,850 coffee seedlings on Church land, and supplied 82,000 seedlings to small holder farmers on more than 138 acres.

BY RAJAB MUKOMBOZI

Whereas the main mission of the Church is spiritual nourishment, for Ankole Diocese, pastoring a poor church hinders the gospel when it fails to address the material needs of Christians. It draws its inspiration from the teachings of the bible, in John 10:10, where Jesus says: 'I have come that they may have life and have it in full.'

The diocese says this is the reason they started a household and community transformation department that looks at several approaches and strategies to economically empower communities.

Among the key projects the diocese has since identified for social-economic transform communities is coffee growing and processing under the brand Revival Coffee.

The start

Mr Simon Kwikiriza, the head of the department for household and community transformation at Ankole diocese, said coffee growing in the

diocese started in 2021 under Ankole Revival Cooperative Society (ARCS).

"In 2021, Bishop Sheldon Mwesigwa brought to our attention the need to transform communities and households. He informed us that coffee remains one the cash crops but farmers were facing challenges to benefit from it, especially being cheated by middle men and lack of support in terms of technical expertise and in puts like seedlings. He tasked us to make sure coffee is given full attention in the diocese," Mr Kwikiriza explained.

Kwikiriza said through meetings, they chose to start coffee growing on Church land, starting with four archdeaconries out of the 16 as model plantations. These include Rutooma, Kinoni, Bujaga and Bugamba, with each planting two acres.

Mr Kwikiriza noted that to ensure they produce quality coffee that is competitive both locally and internationally, they forged partnership with key players in the sector such as the defunct Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA) and the Ministry of Agriculture,

Animal Industry and Fisheries (Maaif) for expert advice on good agronomic practices but also getting quality inputs.

"Through our partnerships, we received 22,500 seedlings from UCDA. Later, Maaif supported us with 82,000 seedlings of Arabic coffee.

"We supplied the seedlings to small holder farmers in Isingiro and Rwampara districts. All the coffee we are growing is disease wilt resistant," Mr Kwikiriza explained, adding that they had to organise Christians into community coffee farmer associations and registered them with Ankole Revival Coffee Cooperative.

"This is intended to ensure sustainability and ensure farmers get collective information and an amplified voice for better prices," he said.

"Every garden on Church land acts as a demonstration farm for all

community members to learn the best practices. And with this practice, we will be able to have the best quality coffee to compete on the international market," he explained.

Economically empowered

"Economic challenges can hinder the gospel. When Christians remain poor and lack basic needs, the gospel will become irrelevant. This is why as a Church, we need to have projects but also support communities to be economically empowered," Bishop Mwesigwa emphasised, noting that is how they identified coffee growing as a viable enterprise that can economically empower the Church and surrounding communities.

"We realised our farmers were being cheated by middle men but also the conditions here favour coffee growing and has a market. So we had to come with our own brand where we can maintain quality production to compete regionally and globally and give our farmers better prices," Bishop Mwesigwa said.

However, he noted that to profit from the coffee sector as a country, Ugandans need to consume it locally.

"Ethiopia is a leading producer of coffee in Africa, but 80 percent of its coffee is consumed locally and it contributes greatly to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). As we eye the international

market, we need to sensitise and encourage our people to take coffee," Bishop Mwesigwa said.

Achievements

Revival packaged coffee

Mr Kwikiriza said they have already started coffee processing and packaging under the brand Revival Coffee. The product is already on the market.

"We realised that the local market for processed coffee can improve the price

es to the farmer and create more jobs through coffee shops, cafes and coffee processing units. That is when we started coffee processing and packaging," Mr Kwikiriza.

"All regulatory requirements for our coffee have been met, our coffee has been to laboratory of African Fine Coffees Associations and its cup score was at 83.9 percent in 2024 and now at 83.2 percent. This is a very high score," he explained.

Each year, the diocese participates in global competitions and their coffee has been commended.

"We have competed in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) and we will be in Italy for the SIGEP food quality exhibition this year."

Economic empowerment of Christians

Mr Esau Barigye, a resident Kigarara parish, Kasumba Sub-county in Isingiro District said the diocese rebirthed the family tradition of coffee growing.

"Our family used to grow coffee. We were the probably the richest in our village but when our father died we abandoned it. The diocese, through our archdeaconry at Kigarara started sensitising us on growing coffee that I became involved again. I was given 8,000 seedlings by the diocese and in the first season I managed to get Shs2.5 million," he says.

"One might think this is peanuts but for the first harvest it is too much."

Mr Stuart Byamugisha from Kibingo in Nyakayojo, Mbarara City North Division also swears by the coffee and how it has transformed his life.

"In 2021 a friend of mine told me that Ankole diocese was giving out free coffee seedlings. I and my wife were given 6,000 Arabic coffee seedlings.

Mr Byamugisha said in the first season he harvested 40 bags of coffee which translated into 1,250 kilograms and Shs16.3 million.

"I used money from the first harvest to pay my wife's tuition for a full year at Uganda Management Institute (UMI), fees for my children for the whole year and secures more land to expand," he added.

He said also through coffee growing he has been able to have partnerships with friends from South America - Colombia and Peru - but also big coffee farmers throughout the country.

"I thank Ankole diocese for the initiatives on poverty eradication in communities. Most of my neighbours are embracing coffee growing now," he says, adding that the sector needs mentorship and a lot of training.

"Not every coffee you see on the ground is good for the market, you need someone to guide you," he said.

This year he hopes to get more than Shs36 million.

Future plans

Mr Kwikiriza said coffee is - and will - remain the green gold in Ankole sub region.

"We are working with government expand our processing plant, have tractors to open up more fields for coffee growing, buy a wet mill to help pulp only red ripe coffee berries, a high quality coffee huller, coffee roaster, grinder and moisture meters to have 100 percent of coffee value chain here. We want to change a narrative that people now can become addicts of coffee drinking compared to alcohol and other drugs."

In future, the plan is to export their coffee to regional and international markets.

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**22,500
SEEDLINGS
RECEIVED FROM
UCDA**