

Succeeding in Economic Reintegration: a Burundian Ex-Combatant Story

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Ndayisaba Athanase in the middle of his vegetable fields

Ndayisaba Athanase, a Burundian demobilized combatant, is now at the head of a thriving farming business. After leaving the demobilization center in June 2006, he happily reunited with his wife and four children in his hometown of Gihanga in Bubanza province, a region still recovering from conflict.

Like many other demobilized individuals, his situation remained precarious during the early stages of reinsertion, despite the support received from the National Program for Demobilization and Reintegration, financed by the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program and the World Bank.

To start his income generating activity, Ndayisaba chose to start a small business. However, he found that market conditions (he lacked regular clients) and the line of business selected were not well suited to his environment.

Facing the prospects of insufficient income and a family to feed, he decided to relocate to a place offering more opportunities, moving to the outskirts of the country's capital Bujumbura.

After analyzing the market, Ndayisaba realized that there was a substantial demand for fresh produce, especially vegetables. He started cultivating them for resale, leaving behind his life as a businessman and becoming a market farmer.

He sold all the goods from his retail business and used the proceeds to rent a little house in Kiyange, a village located in Buterere *commune* of Bujumbura Mairie province. Then, with the remaining money, he managed to rent small nearby plots of land on which to farm.



Women tend to the lettuce beds

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Despite starting during the dry season, when fields needed to be watered regularly by hand, Ndayisaba managed to generate 150,000 Burundian Francs in the first month of his activity. He then decided to invest this money into renting more patches of land in anticipation of higher profits during the rainy season.



Today he farms on more than 3 hectares of rented land and has even had to hire additional help. His business now counts 25 workers, including eight women, six demobilized ex-combatants and one agronomist. Tomatoes, cabbage, string beans, celery, cucumbers, parsley, leeks, bell peppers, spinach, eggplants, zucchinis, lettuce are a few of the many vegetables grown on his land. By watering his fields by hand during the dry season, Ndayisaba is able to harvest several times a year. Three months of activity now generate a net profit of up to 1 million Burundian Francs.

With these profits, he has now bought two plots in Kiyange for a total amount of 3 million Burundian Francs, and is the owner of a small house. He plans to build a bigger one in the future. In the meantime, his immediate plans are to buy two cows to provide enough manure for his fields.

Life is peaceful now for Ndayisaba; thanks to his activity, his children go to school and have access to medical care. They rarely need to see the doctor though, he says, because they are healthy from eating fresh produce.

Ndayisaba does not hesitate to give his fellow ex-combatants the benefit of his experience. He advises them to think outside the box and use their creativity to conceive profitable and viable business ideas. And this, Ndayisaba stresses, is only possible after thoroughly studying one's environment, just as he did.

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