



**Profile: adding value to fish: Lovin Kobusingye is not just a successful woman entrepreneur in Uganda but an influential voice in shaping pan-African fisheries policies**

Item Type	article
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Download date	06/12/2022 06:07:50
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/1834/41344">http://hdl.handle.net/1834/41344</a>

**L**ovin Kobusingye is a well-known young woman fish entrepreneur working in Central Uganda's Wakiso District. For over eight years, she, along with her two partners and over a thousand other fish farmers, has worked on fish processing and value addition. At the same time, she has persistently lobbied the government to support women-led entrepreneurship through an enabling policy framework designed to protect women in fisheries activities both in Uganda and, at a higher level, throughout Africa.

Lovin Kobusingye has a string of achievements to her credit. She is the Director and Co-Founder of Kati Farms (U) Ltd, a fish agro-processing enterprise. She is also the President of the Eastern Africa Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture Association (WIFA) that includes representation from eleven countries: Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, southern Sudan, Sudan and Tanzania. She is President of the Uganda National Women's Fish Organization (UNWFO) and Treasurer of the African Women Fish Processors and

managers at the Cooperative did not wish to invest into processing but they encouraged Lovin to start a fish processing business as a side job. That was the start of Kati Farms. Based in Wakiso, it now buys 15 metric tons of fresh fish from Ugandan farmers every week for processing into various fish-based processed foods for the local market and for export to East, Central and Southern African neighbouring countries

Lovin's idea was to use all the fish being delivered by farmers to launch a brand new product: fish sausages. But because she didn't know how to run a business let alone produce a sausage, she needed to build her own capacity in business management and food processing. She had heard about a business incubator at the Uganda Industrial Research Institute (UIRI), which funded, trained, and hosted businesses of young entrepreneurs. The UIRI's Head of Production was supportive of Lovin's innovative business proposal. Capital was however needed to fund the growth of the enterprise. Commercial banks considered the venture too risky. The only people willing to help financially were the fish farmers in the cooperative. They agreed to provide their raw material on credit and only be paid at the end of each week.

The Farmers Cooperative, with its ongoing fish production training programme and a ready market outlet created by Kati Farms, now has 1000 members. Kati Farms purchases 15 tons of fish every week, equivalent to 75 per cent of the total production. The fish meat is processed into 1.5 tons of sausages and other products like chilled gutted whole fish, chilled fish fillets, fish samosas, and fish mince for pet food.

The operations are scientifically and hygienically managed. To produce fish sausages, for example, the fish purchased from farmers is separated into fillets, trimmings and fatty tissues, all of which are cut into small pieces. The fish fillets and fats are ground separately in a 3 mm mesh. The resulting fish mince and fats are chopped together with ice, spices and food additives and chilled to +12°C. This mixture is stuffed into sausage casings of 26 to 28 mm diameter, and the sausages are linked and twisted to form individual pieces, each about 50 g in weight. The sausages are packed in plastic pouches to reach the retail weight of 0.5 kg (10 pieces) or 1 kg (20 pieces). Finally, the packed sausages are frozen to -18°C, at which temperature they can be stored for three to six months.

Launched as a fledgling enterprise in the UIRI business incubator with only 800 USD worth of savings, Lovin's Kati Farms is now worth an equivalent of 400,000 USD, shared among three investors. It provides direct employment to 38 people and indirect employment to about 500 others through distribution, marketing and sales activities.

Lovin Kobusingye's achievements are a source of inspiration to women not just in Uganda or even Africa but to women all over the world. **M**

## PROFILE

### **Adding value to fish: Lovin Kobusingye is not just a successful woman entrepreneur in Uganda but an influential voice in shaping pan-African fisheries policies**

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Lovin Kobusingye

Traders Network (AWFISHNET). Co-created by African Union Commission, AWFISHNET is a group that brings together women in fisheries throughout the African continent. One of Lovin Kobusingye's biggest achievements was in 2012, when she won the Africa Agribusiness Award. She was also recognised jointly by the Rabobank Foundation, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the European Market Research Centre (EMRC) as the best innovator of the year for her flagship product, the fish sausage, made from farmed fish. With all these achievements to her credit, Lovin Kobusingye has never looked back.

Her first venture, Kati Farms, grew out of her search to link Ugandan fish farmers with markets. Her first job in 2008, after graduation, was with the Fish Farmers Cooperative Society, where she joined as a programme administrator for what was then a 34-member fish farmers' cooperative. She conducted training programmes to help farmers produce more fish. Very quickly the productivity of the aquaculture ponds increased. Farmers started bringing in more fish to the cooperative office. Their complaint however was that there was no market for their fresh fish. So Lovin also started looking for marketing outlets. She approached processing plants in Uganda. No one seemed to be interested on account of multiple problems: small volumes, bad taste, too many bones, and irregular supply by smallholder farmers. The