Shs545m irrigation project idle

BY RONALD KABANZA

RUKUNGIRI. A solar-powered irrigation scheme worth Shs545m in Rwakabengo Ward, Southern Division, Rukungiri Municipality, has remained non-functional for more than two years, leaving farmers stranded and counting losses.

The small-scale irrigation project, constructed by the Ministry of Water and Environment in the 2020/2021 financial year, was intended to support organised farmer groups with water for irrigation to boost productivity and enable year-round farming.

However, the system reportedly broke down after operating for just one season.

Mr Mathias Kahonaho, the chairperson of Rwakabengo Farmers Group, said the project had initially improved livelihoods and strengthened household incomes, with farmers supplying produce to Rukungiri Central Market.

He says ministry officials took the water pump for repair about two years ago but have never returned it. He appeals for urgent intervention as the pump supplied water for both irrigation and domestic use.

Ms Beth Nanziri, a resident of Rwakabengo A Cell and member of the farmers group, said the sudden breakdown caught farmers off guard and caused immense loss.

Mr Polycarp Mugisha, another farmer, blamed what he described as substandard materials, claiming the system was fitted with weak and thin capillary tubes that could not effectively serve the farmers.

"Our leaders were aware, but repeated pleas to the district authorities were in vain," he said.

Mr Denis Buzabo, the head of Production at Rukungiri Municipality, acknowledged the non-functionality of the scheme, attributing it to limited funds for maintenance and equipment replacement.

"I have engaged with the ministry and there is hope to restore the system," Mr Buzabo said.