

While Yumbe's mango farmers are happy to have ready market, they decry payment delays in their first buying season with the mango processing industry.

BY ROBERT ELEMA

A local farmers' cooperative in Yumbe District has described its maiden season of supplying mangoes to the newly operational processing plant as both promising and challenging, citing gains in market access but setbacks in quality control, transport, and delayed payments.

The Aringa Fruit Farmers' Cooperative Society mobilised growers across all sub-counties in Yumbe to aggregate mangoes for delivery to the Yumbe Mango Factory. That marked the first time farmers were formally organised to supply produce for industrial processing instead of selling individually to middlemen.

Speaking on Wednesday, the cooperative's board chairperson, Mr Saidi Aniku, said the group supplied 421,598.60 kilograms of mangoes to the factory during the last season.

"This was our first experience buying mangoes in bulk for a factory. It was not easy, but we learned a lot," Mr Aniku said.

He explained that a token-based payment system was introduced, enabling farmers to receive money on their phones through Centenary Bank. In total, Shs128.4 million was disbursed to farmers through the system.

Despite the milestone, the cooperative faced major logistical and quality challenges. Some consignments were rejected for failing to meet the factory's standards, while transport constraints led to significant spoilage.

The cooperative had committed to supply 50 tonnes daily, yet had only two lorries each carrying eight tonnes per trip from the collection centres across the district. Additionally, the factory broke down for three to four days, Mr Aniku said.

As a result, 167,192 kilograms of man-

Gains, setbacks in Yumbe's first mango-buying season



Some of the factory workers sort mangoes for processing last year. The factory is planning to start buying more mangoes as the new season approaches. PHOTO/ROBERT ELEMA.

SHORTCOMINGS

The Aringa Fruit Farmers' Cooperative Society board chairperson, Mr Saidi Aniku said the cooperative had committed to supply 50 tonnes daily, yet had only two lorries each carrying eight tonnes per trip from the collection centres across the district. This led to significant spoilage. Additionally, the factory broke down for three to four days.

goes went bad before processing. Mr Aniku said the cooperative agreed with

NileZilla Company to compensate for the losses at Shs200 per kilogramme, amounting to Shs33.4m, pending verification of affected farmers.

Farmers decry delayed payments

However, some farmers expressed frustration over delayed payments, saying the token-based system disadvantaged them.

Ms Asia Ondo, a farmer from Kuru Sub-county, said the cooperative issued receipts instead of cash at the time of purchase, promising payment within two days, but they did not honour the pledge.

"I sold mangoes to the cooperative six times, and intended to use the money to pay for my daughter school fees.

Due to payment delays, she was chased from school and I had to borrow money to pay," she said.

Ms Ondo said she received part of her payment but is still owed Shs194,000.

Mr Rashid Ekuma from Arilo Sub-county said poor coordination undermined what farmers had hoped would be a transformative business venture.

"We expected the cooperative to hold evaluation meetings with the farmers to assess last season's performance. That is because there are pending issues that must be addressed before this season starts. However, that has not been done," he said.

He added that farmers were paid Shs300 per kilogramme, a price he de-

scribed as low, and called for dialogue on pricing and a shift to cash payments to avoid delays.

Cooperative promises reforms

Cooperative leaders acknowledged irregularities in payments but said corrective measures are underway.

"We experienced several payment irregularities where some farmers have not received about Shs4 million to date," Mr Aniku said.

The cooperative manager, Mr Yashin Angua, said procurement began late but noted that 844.36 tonnes of mangoes were purchased overall.

"We will pay around Shs33 million for the mangoes that got rotten before reaching the factory. The unpaid money for unredeemed tokens is around Shs8 million, hence total arrears are about Shs41m," he said.

Mr Angua added that more than Shs300 million circulated among mango farmers in the district during the season, describing it as "a good start, nevertheless, a bad one."

"Unlike the norm where factories take over 20 years to start production, NileZilla started really fast. The people of West Nile must be happy that their mangoes produce pulp and there is a ready market," he said.

Ms Joan Asianzu, the factory's community liaison officer, said despite the rotten mangoes and mechanical failures, 90 percent of the mango puree processed last season was sold.

She assured farmers that those who did not receive payments would be cleared before the new season and urged them to update their phone details to facilitate mobile money transactions.

With the second season approaching, stakeholders say improved logistics, timely payments, and better coordination will be critical to restoring farmer confidence and ensuring the long-term success of mango processing in West Nile.