

EDITORIAL

Sort out crisis at Soroti Fruit Factory

The government should quickly step in and sort out the problems of orange and mango fruit farmers in Teso sub-region. The project that should have secured ready market, quick sales and quick money to the farmers, has instead ruined their hopes. Delayed releases of funds, buying of factory equipment, construction work, and recruitment of extension workers have frustrated the project.

So far, poor project planning, evaluation and review have retarded the Soroti Fruit Factory in Arapai Industrial Park, Soroti District. Just what could have failed this noble government project since ground breaking in 2014, with construction planned for 2016, and commercial production set for November 2016?

Clearly, this was a project with interdependent activities. So just why didn't government through Uganda Development Corporation plan these project activities with all stakeholders?

The issue:
Fruit project woes

Our view:
The government should convince farmer in Teso that the estimated output of 120 tons of oranges and another 40 tons of mangoes per day would improve their life.

Indeed, this Shs24 billion rural income-generating project is commendable and meant to tap into comparative advantage of the region as the leading producer of citrus fruits in Uganda. Similarly, the local farmer would enrich our supermarkets and shops with home-made ready-to-drink juice with some spared for external markets.

But it's regrettable that farmers meant to be rescued from poverty are instead being pushed into poverty by this grand project. Government's pronouncement that the project will, after all, be up and running in November, one year after schedule, will be a hard sell to the farmers.

Already, some farmers have in frustration, cut down their orange trees to give way to market-ready simsim and cassava. Many more had to throw away bags of oranges for as low as Shs40,000 farm-gate prices instead of market prices of Shs100,000 per bag.

It's clear the key stakeholders did not guide the farmers through the years at every stage of the project. Had this been done, the farmers wouldn't have sunk into this pathetic position. The farmers' hopes of a ready market, quick sales and quick money have been blighted and it will require some hard persuasion to restore their faith in the fruit factory venture.

Both the government and Teso Tropical Fruit Cooperative Union should revive the farmers' faith and be more convincing that they will be more serious and the project will turn around their fortunes next November. The farmers will genuinely be sceptical after they invested for nothing and suffered losses after opening acres of land, planted, and painstakingly tended both oranges and mangoes.

Nevertheless, the government and local authorities should still convince farmer in Teso that the estimated output of 120 tons of oranges and another 40 tons of mangoes per day would change their life for the better and across generations.

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