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Banana producers' union launched

MBARARA

By Abdulkarim Ssengendo and Bridget Kansiime

Hundreds of banana farmers from all over Uganda gathered in Mbarara on Friday to witness the official launch of the first ever Uganda Banana Producers Co-operative Union. The launch, which took place in Mbarara Municipality, Mbarara district, was officiated by the state minister for co-operatives, Fredrick Gume.

According to Asap Mugizi, the chairperson of the Uganda Banana Producer Co-operative Union, the union was formed last year, through a merger of seven primary co-operative societies, to enable banana producers work together to transform the banana industry.

Mugizi was convinced that the union would, among others, help to improve the collaboration among the value chain actors, establish effective production, value addition and marketing systems for the banana and banana products and advocate for favourable policies that can enable banana diversification.

Addressing farmers who turned up to witness the launch, minister Gume cautioned union leaders against mixing union affairs with politics saying such are some of the problems that led to the collapse of the past unions.

He warned them against discrimination, saying everybody in the union must be equal. He emphasised the need for being transparent, if the union was to realise success.

He noted that the success of the unions will help the country move into a middle income status since they have simplified the work of the Government, by organising farmers into farmers groups.

The minister also warned farmers against dividing their land, saying such a practice would hinder them from mechanised farming.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

- The union is expected to help improve the collaboration among the value chain actors.

Dr Agona Ambrose, the director of National Agricultural Research Organisation, said the formation of the union was timely since beginning from the next season, they would be working with only farmers.

He expressed gratitude to the President for his effort to kick out banana bacterial wilt.

He, however, urged the Government to pass the Biotechnology Bill, to enable them start distributing to farmers crops that are resistant to diseases. He also called for a need to protect government land from encroachers especially the Mbarara Zonal Agricultural Research and Development Institute that houses a variety of banana species collected from over 16 countries, including Brazil and India.

Lt. Col. Sam Murari, an Operation Wealth Creation officer in charge of Mbarara district, urged co-operative unions to recognise women and youth groups if they are to realise sustainability.

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