

# Busongora reaping from coffee support

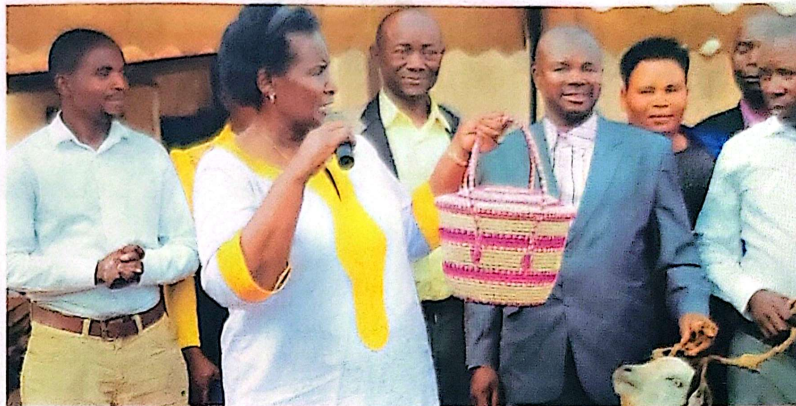
By Samuel Sanya

Coffee trees surround this mountainous village of Maliba in Kasese district where residents toil away under the hot sun to grow the coffee. Mwerya Bagonza, the village LCI and coffee farmer, says they had struggled in vain to fetch better prices for their produce, until the Government offered them a coffee huller machine two years ago.

Bagonza is a member of the Busongora Rural Farmers Integrated Co-operative Society, which was formed in 2013 by some 31 residents. The group now has about 400 coffee farmers.

"We were suffering when it came to processing the coffee seeds because there were few machines. Since the Government machine arrived, I have been able to make more money to pay school fees for my eight children.

**Amelia Kyambadde receiving a basket and a goat from members of the Busongora Rural Farmers Integrated Co-operative Society in Kasese district recently. Photo by Samuel Sanya**



One graduated at Nkumba University," Bagonza said.

The coffee huller, which has the capacity to clean two tonnes of coffee per hour was given to the co-operative as

part of the Rural Industrial Development Project. The project aims at converting Uganda from an agrarian to an industrial country through agro-processing.

Zakaria Walina, a member of the co-operative, revealed that they have made a small fortune by charging non-member's sh100 to process each kilogramme of coffee, while members pay sh50 per kilogramme.

Ronald Maseruka, the factory manager of the co-operative, pointed out that they made a profit of sh1.8m in their first year of operation and a lower sh1.2m in 2017, when the weather was much hotter and the coffee yields were less.

Simon Kasereka, the Kasese district commercial officer, said the co-operative has made a small fortune by selling to a local buyer called "Bakwanyi Enterprises".

He said: "The coffee huller has impacted the incomes of the people in Maliba sub-county. However, the problem of selling coffee that is adulterated with stones and soil has affected coffee prices. We need better post-harvest handling methods for farmers to realise the full benefit of coffee farming."

Zalot Kipura, the co-operatives board chairperson, noted that the factory has processed over 160,522.4kg of

coffee since September 2016 and this resulted in better incomes for 123 members that contributed to the volumes.

He said farmers' incomes would have been even better, if the electricity rates are lowered for village-based outfits like theirs, and members were given low cost microfinance to boost their output.

## High delegation visit

During the previous week, the co-operative received a high level delegation of the trade minister, Amelia Kyambadde, and William Nzoghu, the Busongora North Member of Parliament.

In her address to members of the co-operative and the local business community, Kyambadde said the Government intends to have several small processing plants, such as the one in Maliba village, which then feeds larger factories so as to industrialise the country.

"We are giving out machines, so that farmers can add value to what they produce. We are also working with the Operation Wealth Creation to ensure that there is sufficient raw material," Kyambadde

said.

She noted that the programme started in 2009 and, so far, co-operatives in 37 districts around the country have received machines to add value to the key area of agriculture enterprise in their respective villages.

Kyambadde urged the residents to keep politics out of the project, so as to ensure that incomes in the entire country are uplifted.

"Politics should not be mixed with work," she said.

Kyambadde promised to coordinate a team of academics from the Management, Training and Advisory Centre to visit and train the members of the Busongora Rural Farmers Integrated Co-operative Society in July.

She also urged the co-operative to form a savings and co-operative society, so as to be able to access soft loans to uplift production at their farms and, eventually, their household incomes.

Kyambadde also urged the business community to maintain proper books of account, so as to avoid paying hefty sums in presumed tax.

Nzoghu applauded the minister for sending the machine to the co-operative, but urged the Government to secure at least five more similar machines for the county, since Kasese is the third most populous district.

"We need the farmers to be trained to understand the national and international coffee markets, so that they do not have to go through middle men or women who enjoy the greatest profit," Nzoghu said.

Elly Magwara, the district LC5 chairperson, noted that the area also produces a great deal of pineapples and mangoes and could be a major supplier of fruit pulp, if the Government also equipped the local co-operative with fruit processing machines.



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