

Cottage industry wants incubation centres

By Benon Ojiambo

Fred Bazarrabusa hails from the western Uganda district of Kyenjojo, one of the areas where *Obushera* (porridge), a local beverage, originates from.

Bazarrabusa says because of the skills acquired from home, he embarked on selling to customers at his restaurant in Kyenjojo.

"I did not need any training to start manufacturing *Obushera* because I grew up making it," he said.

He, however, says he has been missing out on expanding his business beyond Kyenjojo due to the high competition in the beverages industry.

Just like Bazarrabusa, there are thousands of people in Uganda who are operating small informal manufacturing businesses from their homes.

In a bid to improve their production, the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Co-operatives has started engaging players in the cottage industry under their umbrella body, Uganda Inter Cottage Industries Co-operative Society, for training on how to produce standard products. So far,



Nankinga explaining to Gume (left) the production process of making homemade juice at the training. Photo by Ronnie Kijjambu

two trainings have taken place.

The Wednesday training at the Management Training and Advisory Centre (MTAC) in Nakawa, Kampala sought to encourage the co-operative

members to certify their products and follow the set standards.

"We have been losing money because of the low quality of products and poor branding,"

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ The co-operative does not want money from the Government but skills for them to make better products.

Esther Nankinga, the co-operative chairperson, said.

She explained that one of the things they learn from the training is that though one may have the basic skills of producing a specific kind of product, they need to follow specific standards to meet the expectations of both the local and international markets.

"The training is about equipping the participants with skills in product certification and value-addition. The association is made up of about 20,000 people," Nankinga added.

Patrick Rubongoya, the co-operative director for planning and strategic development, urged the Government to set up an incubation centre to equip members with skills for better production.

"We do not want handouts from the ministry, but we want to be equipped

with skills to make better products that shall enable us to sustain ourselves. We want to do a detailed course for every product, especially the food products.

"Our fruits, such as mangoes and oranges that are rotting in gardens and stores can be harnessed and turned into organic juice for the local and foreign markets," Rubongoya said.

He added that the industry needs a conducive environment to enable Uganda's private sector to effectively compete with other countries.

The participants also decried the low prices for their commodities, especially agricultural products.

The state minister for cooperatives, Frederick Ngobi Gume, promised to support the co-operative groups.

"They have planned strategically and we cannot leave them just like that. We have invited them for discussions to see where we can locate them, if need be and be able to assist them as Government," Gume said.

He urged the members to collectively market their products through the co-operatives and eliminate middlemen.