

Traders drop everything for *nсенene*

By Benon Ojiambo

Just as Christmas is the most anticipated day for Christians, November is the most awaited month for *nсенene* (grasshoppers) lovers.

There is excitement with hashtags created on different social media platforms as many announce the arrival of the *nсенene* season.

On November 2, one social media user tweeted, "Yeah!!!! #*nсенene*!! Favourite month ever! Shaking my head as I cannot contain myself. I love these bugs!!!!"

Linda Nabusayi, the presidential press secretary also tweeted "Meenhh. I love these creatures under my teeth. My 84-year-old mum calls everyday from Budda to pray. Our last prayer ended with 'May God enable you to buy *nсенene* for me on your next visit home'. I have never hunted for #*Nсенene* so bad," ending her tweet with happy face emojis.

The excitement spreads beyond consumers. There is always excitement among traders as they wait to take advantage of the season and make money.

One *nсенene* retailer, who preferred to be identified only as Hassan, said he waited patiently for the season to start. Hassan vends apples during the rest of the year.

There are two *nсенene* seasons in a year, one between April and May and the other between November and December. However, the latter is the most popular season.

Hassan says as soon as the *nсенene* season started, he ditched his apple business.

"*Nсенene* is so lucrative that once the season comes, I ditch my apple business and concentrate on the new venture," he says as he



Traders at Nakasero market have turned to *nсенene* trade to make a quick buck

attends to his customers.

Although he does not get annual leave like his counterparts in formal employment, Hassan says the *nсенene* season is his leave.

"This is a season when I will spend my day at home relaxing and doing other things up to about 3:00pm, but still be assured of good returns when I come to the street to sell my *nсенene*."

For example, when I buy *nсенene* worth sh100,000, I will be assured of selling them at a price between sh200,000 and sh250,000, making 100% or more profits," he smiles as he explains.

He adds that this is unlike his 'tiresome' apples' business that he has to attend to throughout the day and get minimal returns of not more than sh30,000 per



Nсенene is popular local delicacy

day.

Another vendor, Gloria Mbabazi, a resident of Kawuku, Entebbe in Wakiso district, also temporarily abandoned her lungfish business at the start of the *nсенene* season.

Mbabazi says her business in Katwe, a Kampala slum, was not doing well and she

was getting minimal returns on investment.

She describes the season as a rejuvenator that can financially resuscitate anyone in the informal sector who may be struggling at the moment due to the poor state of the economy.

"I have greatly benefited and made profits," Mbabazi

"Nсенene is so lucrative that once the season starts, I ditch my apple vending business and concentrate on the new venture," Hassan

says, but declines to delve into her earnings.

The price of the grasshoppers is highly dependent on the market forces of demand and supply, so when there is high supply, a bag of grasshoppers can cost as low as sh20,000 and if there is low supply, the same bag can go for as high as sh600,000, according to Victor Kasozi, the chairman of the Basenene Trappers and Development Association.

The association is an umbrella body of people who are engaged in the trade.

By Tuesday, a bag was going for between sh400,000 and sh500,000 at Katwe playground, the major destination as transporters move them from Western Uganda to Kampala.

This is a sharp rise from the lows of sh20,000 two weeks ago, when the season peaked. The highest prices suggest the season is coming to a close.

Kasozi also agrees with Hassan and Mbabazi on people abandoning their

businesses to concentrate on the *nсенene* season.

He attributes the trend to the profitability of the business during the season, but also says the season always comes as a reliever to the unemployed and those whose businesses are not performing well.

"Whenever the season approaches, many people, mainly in the informal sector who are unemployed, vendors, shop owners and others benefit," Kasozi says.

He says although the association, whose membership is estimated at about 50,000 people across the value chain, is open throughout the year, it is busiest in November.

The Journey

Every year around this time, Ugandans mainly from central and western districts, spend their nights on the streets and designated trapping places to catch the insects.

However, Kasozi explains that prior to the season, there is a lot of behind the scenes preparations as people purchase items used in trapping such as high wattage electric lamps, long electric wires, iron sheets and large tins.

"People travel from as far as Bundibugyo to Kampala to purchase these items in preparation for the season," Kasozi says.

In-between the insects' trapper and the final consumer, there are different players who take part in the value chain such as transporters, middlemen and casuals who strip the grasshoppers of their wings and legs before frying.

For example, people who strip the grasshoppers of their wings and legs are paid between sh500 and sh700 per half-litre mug they work

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