

Farmer to champion value addition in coffee

Byona is in the final stages of adding value to the coffee beans by investing into a multimillion processing plant in Kamwenge district later this year, **DENIS BBOSA** writes

He is a man of many hats - farming, rallying and business.

Ambrose Byona may not look 41 years old, but he manifests his burgeoning coffee farming and value addition project that measures in business.

Byona has big dreams to add value to coffee which historically has been a realm of exportation.

He chose Robusta coffee over Arabica because it suited his plans of having a modern coffee centre and nursery bed.

According to Byona, the processing plant will be located next to his Kabango Coffee nursery bed, in Kamwenge district.

The plan

With over four million coffee seedlings now distributed throughout the district, Byona plans to set up a mega warehouse so that he buys back all the coffee for processing.

"We have already made market.



Fischer Tugume, the General Manager of the farm, show off the maturing Robusta coffee which is used for agro-tourism



Workers busy watering the coffee seedlings PHOTOS JB SSENKUBUGE

300M

THE AMOUNT OF MONEY BYONA POCKETED AFTER SELLING OF 1.1M SEEDLINGS, EACH COSTING SHS300

The processing bit of it is a big time venture with Germany investors who have been here several times on a fact finding mission. The paper work is done and the real thing is just a stone throw," Byona revealed.

Already Byona, as an indigenous investor, has been apportioned land by Kamwenge District Council for the warehouse and the processing unit which he says will cost over \$2 million (around Shs 7 billion).

Starting

He conceived the idea in 2005 in 2005 after a lengthy chat with his Kenyan friend David Njoroge, who advised him to begin with the basics.



EMPLOYMENT

With 30 permanent workers and over 200 on temporary basis, Byona envisages an increment in value addition once the warehouse and processing units are up.

"My friend Njoroge challenged me; do the poor eat? Do the rich eat why are you not in farming?" he adds, "It was the same time that President Museveni introduced the Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) campaign and the proposed revival of cooperative unions, I seized the chance."

"In 2011, with limited capital, I started a modern germinating centre which was appreciated by the farmers

in Kamwenge after two years. We have now grown and the harvest is big. We have decided to buy the coffee from the farmers store it before processing it which will start very soon," he states.

His venture multiplied with Shs240m capital injection in 2015, growing seedlings on four acres and working in tandem with Balton group for agricultural advice and pesticides.

"We distribute seedlings after six months and in our first season we sold 1.1 m seeds at a cost of Shs300 each. When the farmers appreciated the quality, we put out 1.2 m coffee seeds in the second phase and 1.4 m seeds in the third."

Working in unison with the Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA), Kabango has a data centre for their customers that supervise the survival rate of the seedlings - something Byona says has made them stand out.

He says his coffee project will first serve Kamwenge to satisfaction before they roll out countrywide.

"The demand from Kamwenge

ADVICE TO FARMERS

"Never go into something you do not love," he advises prospective corporate farmers.

"I fell in love with farming. I have a day or two with the workers to motivate them. Don't expect to get quick money. I don't want to be in Kampala in 15 years because I want to retire early."

"Very many corporates are borrowing money from banks to venture into farming but pullout even before the first harvest. Any successful farmer must be ready to participate not through the phones but physically. You have to be with the farmers and feel it hands on."

Byona envisages a time he will be the leading producer, supplier and grower of coffee in the country whilst prospering in his other businesses a dream he wants to share with Ugandan corporates majority of whom are youth.

to Kyegegwa has increased. Next year, we are going to revive the school garden programme targeting intercropping of Matooke plus coffee," he revealed.

"I have started by planting a demonstration *farm (of intercropping) on two acres which I believe will lure the rural farmers into starting the same. When you harvest Matooke, the funds can help you look after coffee," he said.

Byona at a glance

The marketing diploma holder from Kampala College of Commerce is married to Achan Byona with four children.

He credits his wife for guidance in all his business ventures. He went to Kyabenda, Nyakasura, Sir Samuel Baker and Layibi College in Gulu which explains his fluency in luo dialect.

He owns a string of businesses that include Byona Executive Travels (deals in transport), Optima Company (mining) and Kabango Coffee.

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