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**KABALE.** The establishment of the first tea factory in Kabale District has excited farmers and local leaders, with growing optimism that it will alleviate poverty among residents.

Directors of Kigezi High Tea led by Mr James Musinguzi Garuga and Mr Jackson Twinamatsiko in April opened the Shs20 billion tea processing factory on Kabale-Katuna Road.

The factory has capacity of processing about 40,000kgs of tea leaves per day, according to Mr Twinamatsiko. It currently processes 15,000kgs because of the scarcity of tea leaves.

The company pays Shs550 per kilogramme to farmers and transports tea leaves to the factory.

"This factory has already started benefiting the local people, especially providing employment and ready market for the tea leaves. We employ about 100 people, but our current challenge is a shortage of enough tea leaves," says Mr Twinamatsiko.

Kabale LC5 chairman Patrick Besigye Keihwa says the factory is a boost to people's livelihoods.

He promises that local leaders will give it the necessary support to serve the community for generations.

Different categories of people are directly and indirectly benefiting from the factory; technical employees, casual workers, suppliers of fuel wood, owners of commercial houses, hoteliers and restaurant operators and tea farmers, among others.

"My appeal to the people here is that they should tap all the available opportunities to benefit from this tea factory. Issues of despising jobs should not arise. This is the first factory processing a cash crop in our district and it requires all of us to support it so that it can in turn serve us rightly," Mr Kaihwa says.

He appeals to farmers to plant more tea and look after their gardens well to ensure quality and massive tea production.

He also asks all leaders to massively campaign for tea growing so that the factory can keep operating.

The Bishop of Kabale Diocese, Rt Rev Calist Rubaramira, says establishment of the tea factory in Kabale is a blessing. He says the diocese, which has hundreds of acres of tea, will benefit directly from the factory.

The Bishop of Kigezi Diocese, Rt Rev George Bagamuhunda, has rallied the farmers to exploit the opportunity.

"We planted tea on about seven acres of our church land at Rukore and now that the factory has been established, I believe we shall be able to make money from this project. Christians who have enough land, please venture into tea growing now that there is ready market in our district," says Bishop Bagamuhunda.

The chairman of Kabale Tea Growers Association, Mr Philip Zikampereza, notes that the people who uprooted tea seedlings thinking that it was a wasted investment are now regretting.

The farmers have asked government to subsidise inputs such as fertilisers and herbicides.

They have also called for the es-



# New factory gives hope to Kabale tea farmers

**Development.** Kigezi High Tea processing factory premises on Kabale-Katuna Road in Kabale town. PHOTO BY ROBERT MUHEREZA

establishment of a tea authority as it is with coffee for purposes of regulating prices and quality control.

"The government should divert funds meant for buying tea seedlings to buying inputs for tea farmers so as to have quality tea that fetches good money at the international markets. The fact that tea growing is a new enterprise in the district, farmers need a lot of help from government to develop the enterprise to an international standard. Government should also help in organising tea farmers in groups and cooperatives for self-regulation in having quality tea production," says Mr Andrew Mwebesa, a farmer.

He adds that some farmers still sell their tea leaves to the factories in Bushenyi District because they pay a higher price compared to the factory in Kabale.

The executive director of the National Agricultural Advisory services (Naads), Dr Samuel Mugasi, last week asked the tea farmers in Kabale to embrace the tea enterprise now that a processing factory has been established in the area.

He assured farmers who supplied



**Hopeful.** Farmers pick tea leaves in a plantation in Kabale District last month. PHOTO BY ROBERT MUHEREZA

tea seedlings in Kigezi and parts of Ankole that they will be paid once the ongoing verification exercise is complete in a month time.

"Government is ready to pay for all the seedlings that were planted and are doing well in the gardens. Farmers claiming payment for the supplied tea seedlings that are not seen in the gardens shall not get paid. Only genuine claims shall be honoured and paid," said Dr Mugasi.

He added: "Our verification team is in the Kigezi Sub-region using GPS technology to establish the size of the gardens and the actual seedlings planted. The verification team shall be here for about four weeks and farmers should respect the outcome. We need to develop this tea enterprise together now that a processing factory has been established."

Tea growing in Kigezi sub region was launched by President Museveni in 2008 and he pledged that government would buy all the raised tea seedlings from private nursery bed

operators and distribute them to farmers for free to encourage farmers to embrace planting of the crop. He added that growing tea would enable Kigezi residents increase household incomes besides creating employment.

In October 2017, hundreds of tea farmers in the same region petitioned government over the non-payment of about Shs100 billion for the tea seedlings they supplied during the last three years (2015-2018).

The South Western regional chairman for Tea Nursery Bed Operators and Tea

Growers, Mr Frank Byaruhanga, on Monday also welcomed the establishment of the tea processing factory in Kabale.

He, however, asked government to pay for all the planted seedlings so that the farmers can be able to raise incomes to buy the necessary inputs required for quality tea production.

"Government has not paid for the planted tea seedlings for the last three

years' worth Shs55 billion and for the tea seedlings that are currently over growing in different nursery beds in the region worth Shs45 billion," said Mr Byaruhanga.

He added: "Besides the demands for payment, about 30 per cent and 70 per cent of tea seedlings grown in Ankole and Kigezi sub-regions respectively dried up due to the prolonged dry season (about 9 months) of 2016-2017. This left farmers, tea nursery operators, as well as the private investors in the tea industry frustrated and counting losses. If the government had paid them in time, they would have been able to purchase irrigation equipment and save their tea gardens from drying up."

However, Dr Mugasi insists that government shall only pay for the tea seedlings actually seen in the gardens. He adds that paying money to farmers claiming that their gardens were destroyed by floods or draught is not applicable.

"Government is ready to pay for all the genuine claims in the tea growing enterprise in Kigezi and Ankole. Any farmer presenting false claims is seriously warned because such acts may lead to their arrest. I appeal to the tea farmers to utilise the expertise of the agriculture extension officers and that from the technical experts of Kigezi High Land Tea, the lead agent of tea growing in the region, to have good tea gardens that shall give them clean money every month," says Dr Mugasi.

The Kabale District director of production and marketing, Mr Bada Mwebesa, acknowledges that about 70 per cent of farmers have not been paid for the tea seedling they supplied in the last two years. He asks government to expedite.

Mr Mwebesa adds that plans are underway to train tea farmers on better picking methods and use of fertilisers for better yields.

In October last year, the State minister for Economic Monitoring, Dr Kasirivu Atwooki, observed that poor procurement procedures had slowed down the takeoff of the government funded tea enterprise.