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Tea farming transforming lives in Kitabi

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Farmers picking tea at an estate. Kitabi tea pickers say that their lives have improved as a result of Rwandan tea industry. Net Image

NYAMAGABE-Saturday was a special day for Kitabi tea farmers as they celebrated the achievements made over the past year.

Over 4,700 farmers, grouped under the Cooperative KOBACYAMU, chanted, danced and feasted as renowned afro-beat singer, Kitoko Bibarwa, joined them to mark the day.

"Growing tea has helped me raise my living conditions. I am sure that over 85 percent of all the income that I have comes from tea," said an ecstatic Francois Nzamurambaho of Uwinkingi Sector.

"I now own five cows which I got thanks to tea farming. I have also been able to install biogas energy which I use in all my daily activities. I have clean water in my house and I plan to get electricity," Nzamurambaho proudly revealed.

Another farmer, Venuste Nkurunziza, stated: "Without tea, I would never have been able to pay school fees for my two children".

The event was organised by the Rwanda Mountain Tea Ltd, a local company that owns the Kitabi Tea Factory.

The event was celebrated under the theme "Tera imbere Muhinzi", which reflects the need for transformation in the life of tea farmers.

It was also marked by the official opening of a Rwf 45 million office for the farmers' cooperative.

At least 13 outstanding farmers received a Friesian cow each in recognition for their efforts. It was noted that more farmers would be rewarded with domestic animals, various farming tools and other prizes for their outstanding work.

Speaking during the event, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Kitabi Tea factory,

Anthony Butera, observed that the day is organised annually to recognise the efforts of tea farmers.

"It is a way of evaluating what we have achieved in the past year and decide what we will do in the upcoming one," Butera observed.

He noted that since 2009 when the factory was privatised, its production had increased from 1,849 tonnes per year to 1,988 in 2011. He said the target is to raise the production to 2,400 tonnes by 2020.

He added another achievement was the increment of acreage area by 280 hectares.

"We will always strive to make this factory a competitive tea company in the region and worldwide so as to make sure it contributes to lifting farmers' wellbeing", Butera vowed.

He disclosed that last year, the tea factory scooped the third place for production of quality tea in Africa during an award-giving ceremony in Mombasa, Kenya.

Nyamagabe District Mayor, Philbert Mugisha, noted that the factory was contributing a lot in transforming the lives of local residents.

"We are seeing the birth of new modern business centres and the refurbishment of old ones. The money which is doing all this comes mainly from tea."

The Minister of Trade and Industry, Francois Kanimba, commended the management of the factory for producing quality tea and improvement of farmers' welfare.

"I am impressed by the collaboration between this factory and farmers. It is a sign that the work of farmers is valued. Their wellbeing is something important for the factory owners. This day dedicated to tea farmers is another sign", Kanimba observed.

He also commended the factory for the hygienic conditions.

"The fresh air inside the factory is surely surprising. I have visited many factories, but this one makes a difference as far as hygiene is concerned. What is most commendable is that they have not forgotten the exterior, it is also very clean," he noted.

The function were also attended by the Minister in charge of ICT in the Office of the President, Dr. Ignace Gatare, the Minister in charge of East African Community Affairs, Monique Mukaruriza, and other top government officials.

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