

West Nile MSMEs eye bigger markets after UNBS certification training

By Robert Adiga

West Nile's micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are mooting plans to expand their production and reach in the market after acquiring skills on product standards and certification.

A NEW DAWN

For Aisha Ssebbi, the chief executive officer of the Twins Bakery in the Koboko district, the training by Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) was a "game changer since many of them were not aware of the requirements and need for certification.

"We had challenges with supermarkets because they want certified products, which I do not have and from this training I think I will be able to certify my products and access wider and broader markets," Ssebbi said. Ssebbi is one of over 50 MSMEs owners from West Nile who benefited from the UNBS training on product standards and certification.

The three-day training, held in the Arua district for MSME and local government technical leaders (commercial officers, production officers, and district health inspectors), aimed at equipping participants with knowledge on product standards and certification, a critical aspect of doing business both locally and internationally.

Another beneficiary, Moses Ashraf Ongei, a member of Arua East-West Bee Products Enterprises Limited, manufacturers of honey products and cosmetics in Arua city, described the training as an eye-opener.

"We have come to know the



A maize milling enterprise. Uganda National Bureau of Standards is targeting certification of such value addition and food processing companies from West Nile

process of coming up with a product, certifying it, the quality, the standard and the importance of the quality mark because we were taking the products to supermarkets and they would reject them due to the absence of a Q-mark authorised by UNBS. Now we know what to do and we needed this sensitisation long ago," Ongei said.

Carolyn Lilly Ocanda, a manufacturer of shea butter products in Arua city, is optimistic that soon her products will be certified, as officials from UNBS visited her place and guided her on the necessary processes.

"When products are certified, you are able to sell them in an open market without fear and you are able to export

IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING

Abubaker Bakulumpangi, the principal certification officer in charge of SMEs at UNBS, underscored the importance of the training, saying it helps empower MSMEs to become quality enterprises and implement standard requirements.

"We saw the need to come and talk to them and show them the importance of product certification, especially the need for them to be able to access the wider market without any barriers," Bakulumpangi said.

The training broadly covered topics such as the importance of product certification, the process of obtaining a UNBS mark, fundamentals of standardisation, certification requirements, processes, procedures, good manufacturing and hygiene practices and product-specific standards and the benefits of standardisation.

since those who buy products from outside always want proof that the products are not dangerous for consumption,"

Ocanda explained.

LEADERS PLEDGE SUPPORT

Jobel Ayiko, the acting



Bakulumpangi



Ocanda

principal commercial officer of Arua city, says the training has come at the time when they were updating the data on small-scale industries in the city.

"We were able to realise that some of the products are certified while others are not, so as we are going to continue with the data update, we are going to disseminate the information to the MSMEs on the requirements of certification so that they are able to follow up on the requirements and make money from their sales," Ayiko said.

The commercial officer of Maracha district, Palma Shida, who equally praised the timing

of the training, confirmed the presence of substandard and uncertified products in various markets in the district, saying the time has come to ensure consumption of standard products.

"If you go to markets, a lot of products are not certified and that compromises the quality of goods that we consume. Through the training, we are able to understand the mandate of UNBS and what it takes for our MSMEs to certify their product," Shida noted.

GRIEVANCE REDRESS

The production officer of Arua district local government, Dr Willy Nguma, said programmes like the Parish Development Model that inject a lot of money into the community are likely to spark zeal for value addition and agro-processing that requires them to be guided.

Nguma said there are areas that need to be addressed, such as the grievance redress mechanisms.

"There must be a grievance redress mechanism that needs to be established to address the complaints of the people, which must be people-friendly and easily accessible and that is what I want the UNBS to address by taking the training further and to have it more frequent in the sub-region," Nguma appealed.

The UNBS training is part of a broader effort to support MSMEs in Uganda.