



A farmer shows some of the processed cashew nuts from his farm in Tezo, Kilifi County on May 7, 2021. WACHIRA

Kilifi cashew nut factory to hire over 1,000 locals

BY MARGARET MAINA

Up to 1,000 coastal residents are to get employment in a nuts processing factory currently under construction at the Vipingo Development Limited's manufacturing hub in Vipingo, Kilifi County.

Construction of Sh1 billion factory has been completed and erection of the prefabricated godowns is ongoing and set for completion by end of the year.

In a statement Mr Ken Mbae the managing director of Vipingo Development Limited noted that use of modular construction technology means the project will be operational by quarter one of 2022 and have an immediate impact on the economy of Kilifi County and adjacent regions.

VDL is a fully-owned subsidiary of Centum Investment PLC.

It is behind transformation of the former 10,000-acre Rea Vipingo sisal plantation into an urban node comprising residential, commercial, industrial and school districts.

Already over 400 residents of the initial Awai and Palm Ridge estates in Kilifi have received keys to their houses.

"The cashew nuts factory will have a processing capacity of more than 6,000 tonnes per annum, offering a reliable offtake for tens of thousands of coastal farmers who grow cashew nuts as a cash crop.

Packaged nuts will be sold to both local and international buyers with the developers targeting markets with the highest returns.

Besides signing up coastal farmers for supply of raw nuts, the factory will also be supplied by Vipingo Development's 200-acre cashew nuts plantation guaranteeing the minimum supply threshold for an all-year operation.

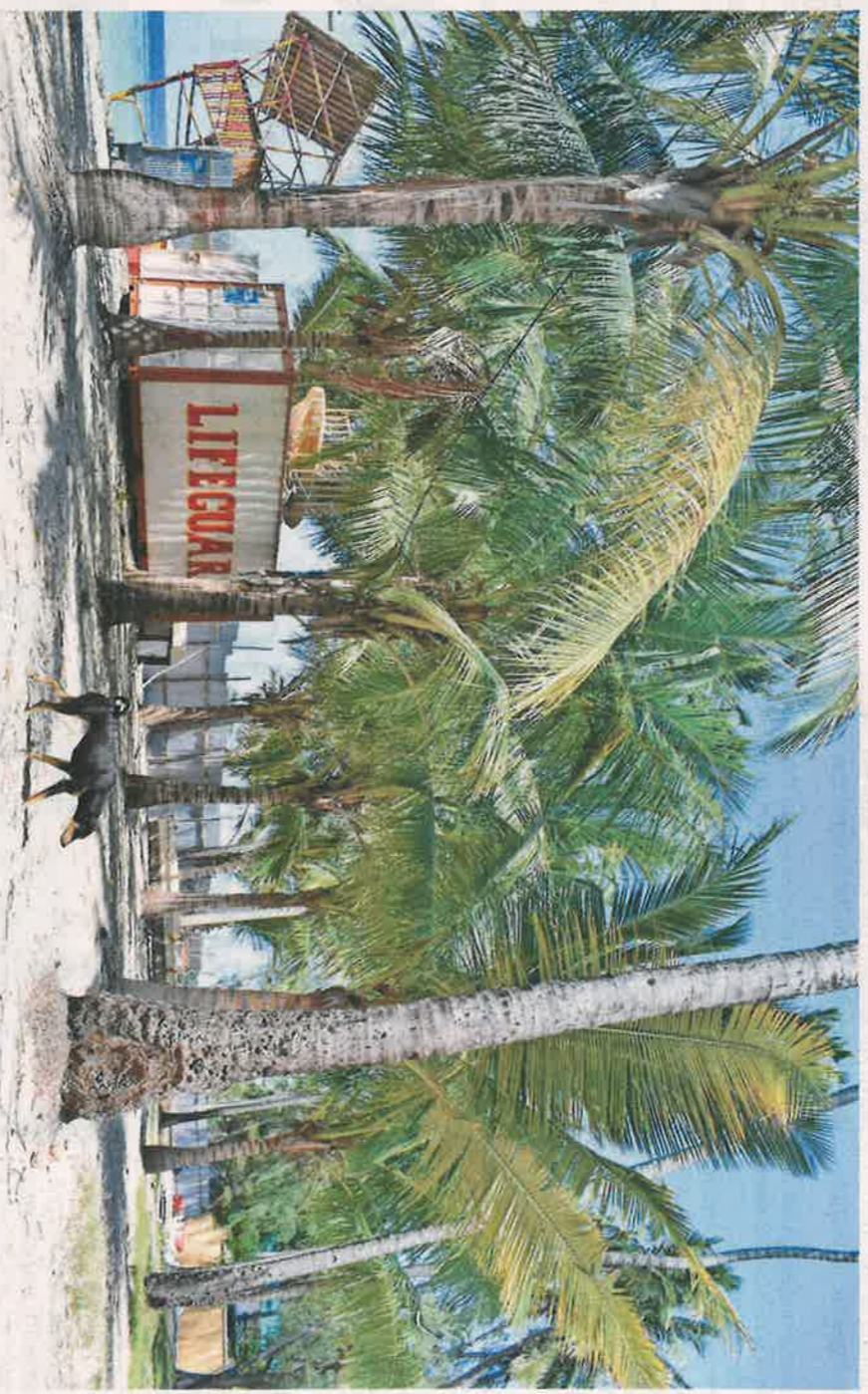
Job cadres at the factory will include low-skilled labourers to process the cashews, skilled employees to operate the machines and package the nuts, mid-level and senior managers in operations, quality assurance and logistics.

Other manufacturers that have already secured development rights at the Vipingo Industrial Park include a warehousing firm, water bottling and LPG processing companies.

"This is possibly the best place to set up your manufacturing business in close proximity to the port. Investors will save on transport costs for imported raw materials enabling them to sell finished products at a discount to competition," said Mr Mbae.

Focus on Covid-19 jobs and not lockdowns, trade groups insist

Business associations in retail, hospitality, transport and entertainment sectors say continued curfews are not helping an already bad situation and call for reopening of economy in recovery bid



A dog walks at the Jomo Kenyatta Public Beach in Mombasa County on August 4, 2021. The Parliamentary Committee on Trade, Industry and Cooperatives wants the Mombasa County government to reopen Jomo Kenyatta public beach which has remained shut for almost two years to make way for its Sh200 million regeneration. WACHIRA MWANGI | NATION

BY PETER MBURU AND ANNATIENO

Trade associations from retail, hospitality, transport and entertainment sectors have backed calls for opening of the economy urging the government to focus on vaccinating Kenyans instead of continued lockdowns.

They spoke last week a day after President Uhuru Kenyatta announced extension of the Covid-19 containment measures, including the nationwide night curfew, and continued limited hours for operation of bars, restaurants and other entertainment outlets.

Players also accused policemen of extortion and carting away products from bars and restaurants in the guise of enforcing Covid-19 protocols.

Bar, Hotels and Liquor Traders Association Chairman Simon Njoroge said the group had decided to support a motion before the National Assembly calling for the end of economic lockdowns in the country.

"MPs need to show that they care for the suffering of those hard hit by the pandemic by supporting the motion in the National Assembly urging the executive to eliminate all forms of lockdowns, curfews and travel re-

A CBK report shows that as at June employment in the hotel industry was still at 62 percent of the pre-Covid-19 situation, meaning that about 35,000 formal hotel workers are still out of work. Players in the alcohol industry have reported job losses on the upwards of 150,000.

strictions and replace them with economically friendly containment measures and vaccination campaigns," Mr Njoroge said.

Traders argue that what Kenya needs is an aggressive vaccination drive, which will make it safe for the economy to open up as has been witnessed in the Western countries, as opposed to the trend of locking the economy and constraining business growth.

In the boda boda sector, Mr Samuel Ng'ang'a who represented the association said lifting restrictions would enable a resumption of the 24-economy that has been a big boost to the sector.

Mr Ng'ang'a said many boda boda operators in the country have been affected adding that some banks have repossessed many vehicles acquired on loans and whose owners were unable to service them after onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, leaving more than 400,000 families suffering.

"We have seen this already in the matatu sector and the enforcement is ongoing. Most businesses operate the same way, taking loans from banks and repaying them the same way, and it's time we began talking about how all Kenyans can be enabled to resume operating normally

but safely," said Mr Boniface Gachoka, representing bar owners.

Players complained that despite a relaxation of some measures by Tourism Cabinet secretary Najib Balala, allowing restaurants to operate until 9pm, police were still harassing operators and forcing them to close at 7pm.

"These new protocols are meant to guide the hospitality sector's operations as we work towards a resumption of operations, which will be aided by increased vaccination and adherence to the protocols. Unfortunately, we have had an alarming increase in police harassment of bars, restaurants and other establishments over the past three weeks," said Pubs, Entertainment and Restaurant Association of Kenya (PERAK) Nairobi chairman Frank Mbogo.

Mr Cyrus Githaiga, the national coordinator of the Market Traders Association, said restrictions of the hospitality sector have had a ripple effect on the fresh produce sector.

"Hotels and restaurants are the biggest consumers of fresh produce and when they are forced to shut down, we are some of the biggest losers. There has been discrimination even with vaccinations and we need this to end," said Mr Githaiga.

Their complaints come about

a week after the Central Bank of Kenya (CBK) released the hotel industry survey, showing that many players in the industry are against the night curfew, which has reduced their operating hours thus curtailing recovery.

The report stated that only 13 percent of players in the hospitality industry hope to resume normal levels of operation by the end of this year.

Banks are also reporting that among businesses most constrained and which have high cases of failing to honour their loan obligations fall in the hospitality and tourism sectors, with KCB stating that of the Sh95 billion gross NPLs it reported in the first half of 2021, 17 percent constituted players in the sectors.

The CBK's hotel industry survey in June indicated that 42 percent of hotels believe their business will only get back to normal, once they are allowed to resume 24-hour operations.

"On average, 13 percent of hotels expected to resume normal levels of operations by end of 2021. This is a decline from the 18 percent recorded in the May survey, with respondents attributing the decline to persistence of the pandemic," the report noted.

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