

AF SA

ALLIANCE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA

A quiet revolution reshaping food systems

Stories of African Agroecological Entrepreneurship and Territorial Markets

Foreword

The Power of Stories in Cultivating Agroecology

Stories have always been the soil in which movements grow.

Long before policies were written or programs designed, it was stories—shared around fires, under trees, in bustling markets and quiet homes—that carried the wisdom of generations. Stories shape how we see the world. They pass on knowledge, spark imagination, and remind us of who we are and who we can become.

This collection brings together the voices of Africa's agroecological entrepreneurs—men and women who are not just farming, but transforming the future. Their stories do more than document change; they embody it. They reveal how communities are reclaiming their food systems from the grip of industrial agriculture. They show us that agroecology is not only a practice but a worldview—rooted in solidarity, resilience, and respect for the Earth.

In a world often dominated by statistics and technocratic jargon, stories bring us back to what is real. They help us feel the soil between our fingers. They let us walk alongside a farmer rebuilding depleted land, a youth group creating a composting business, a women's collective reviving forgotten seeds. These are not just anecdotes, they are blueprints for transformation.

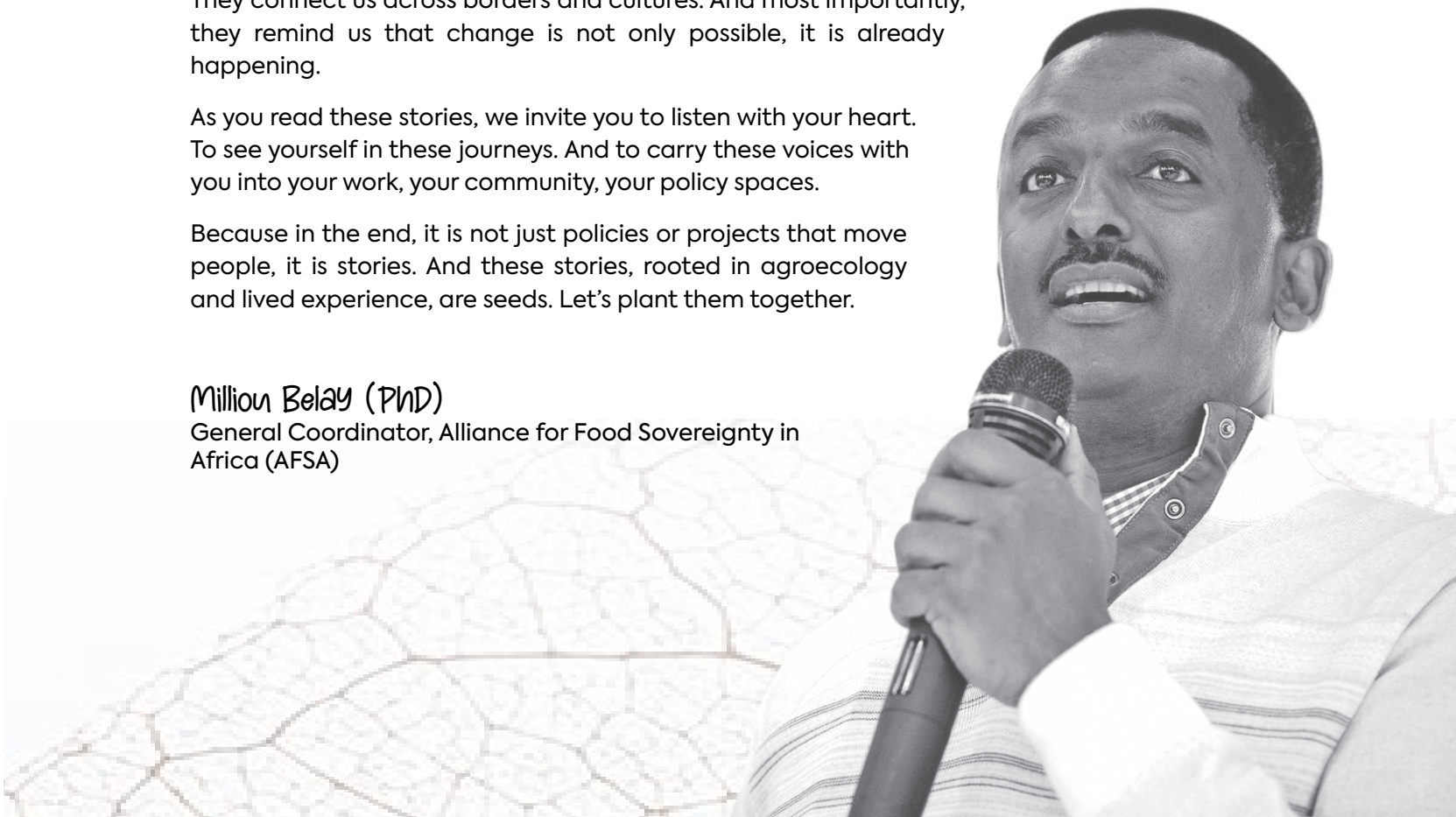
At the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), we believe stories are a form of power. They humanize our struggles. They deepen our advocacy. They connect us across borders and cultures. And most importantly, they remind us that change is not only possible, it is already happening.

As you read these stories, we invite you to listen with your heart. To see yourself in these journeys. And to carry these voices with you into your work, your community, your policy spaces.

Because in the end, it is not just policies or projects that move people, it is stories. And these stories, rooted in agroecology and lived experience, are seeds. Let's plant them together.

Million Belay (PhD)

General Coordinator, Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)



Acknowledgements

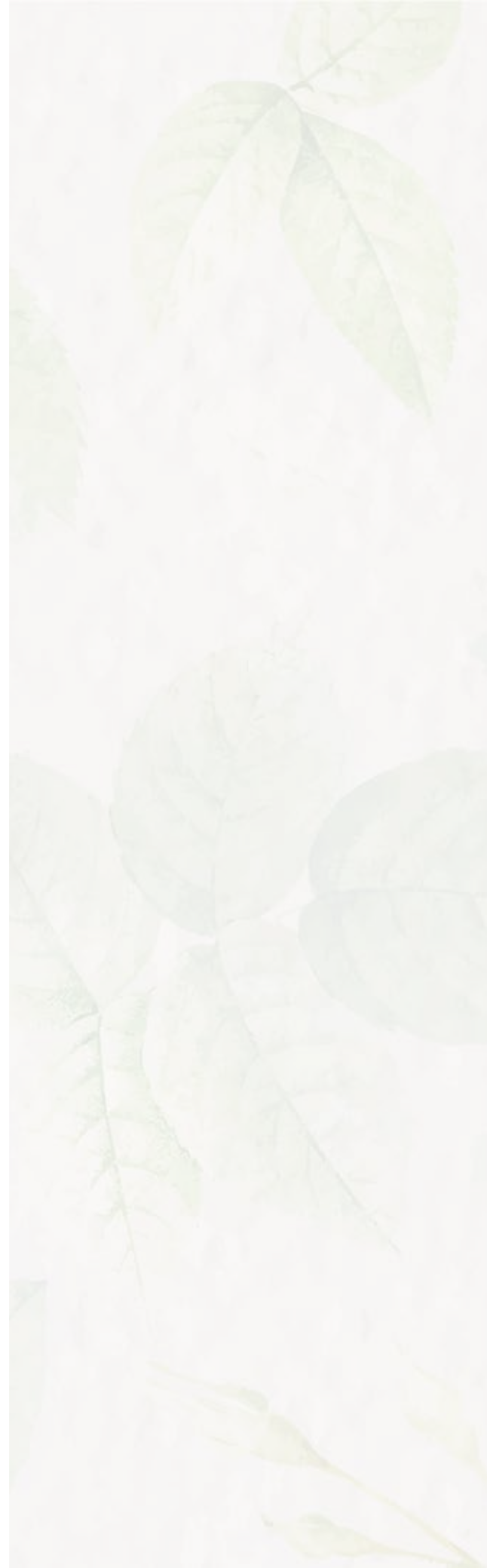
Editors

Ruth Nabaggala, Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa
Doug Reeler
Beulah Tertiens-Reeler

Design/Layout

Patricia Kabanyaaka, Sketch Net, Uganda

©2025



A Reflection on the 15 Stories

African Agroecological Entrepreneurship and Territorial Markets

The Significance of Agroecological Entrepreneurs and their Initiatives

The entrepreneurs presented in these 15 case studies embody the critical intersection of ecological stewardship, economic resilience, and community empowerment. Their significance lies not merely in their individual stories of perseverance and innovation, but in the broader systemic change they represent, shifting agriculture from exploitative practices towards regenerative, sustainable methods.

They represent a quiet revolution reshaping food systems, economies, and ecological practices across the continent. These initiatives are significant because they:

- **Challenge conventional agriculture** by proving that agroecology, rooted in sustainability, biodiversity, and traditional knowledge, can be both profitable and regenerative.
- **Empower marginalized communities**, particularly women and youth, by creating livelihoods, preserving cultural foodways, and fostering local leadership.
- **Bridge gaps** between rural and urban markets, demonstrating that territorial markets (localized, community-driven trade systems) can reduce dependency on exploitative middlemen and globalized supply chains.
- **Innovate under constraints**, turning limitations (limited land, capital, or policy support) into opportunities for creativity, such as confined-space farming, value addition, and circular economies.
- **Restore agency** to smallholder farmers, showing that food sovereignty, control over how food is grown, processed, and sold, is possible even in the face of corporate agribusiness dominance.

These entrepreneurs are not just growing crops; they are growing **viable alternatives**, to extractive economies, environmental degradation, and systemic disenfranchisement.

A quiet revolution reshaping food systems

Basket of Contents

1

- **Albert Kakande (JIMUSA Fertiliser, Uganda):** Kakande transitioned from a corporate job to agroecological entrepreneurship, innovating with bio-enriched compost and foliar fertilisers. His story highlights practical innovation responding directly to farmer needs, showcasing how grassroots innovation can bridge the gap between knowledge and practice and how farmer-led solutions can address soil degradation while creating scalable businesses.

7

- **Babra Kaikara (Imaro Innovations, Uganda):** Babra, leveraging digital marketing and strong networks through PELUM Uganda, developed unique value-added products like coffee sweets. Her use of WhatsApp for sales highlights how digital tools can democratize access for small-scale producers. Her journey underscores the power of young entrepreneurs to integrate modern marketing with traditional farming, expanding market reach and community impact.

13

- **Clever Mutonhodza (Beezimiz Honey, Zimbabwe):** Clever overcame numerous setbacks, including personal hardships, to establish a trusted honey brand. His experiences illustrate the value of community engagement and the mutual exchange of knowledge between entrepreneurs and local farmers. His focus on women-friendly beehive designs underscores inclusivity in agroecology.

19

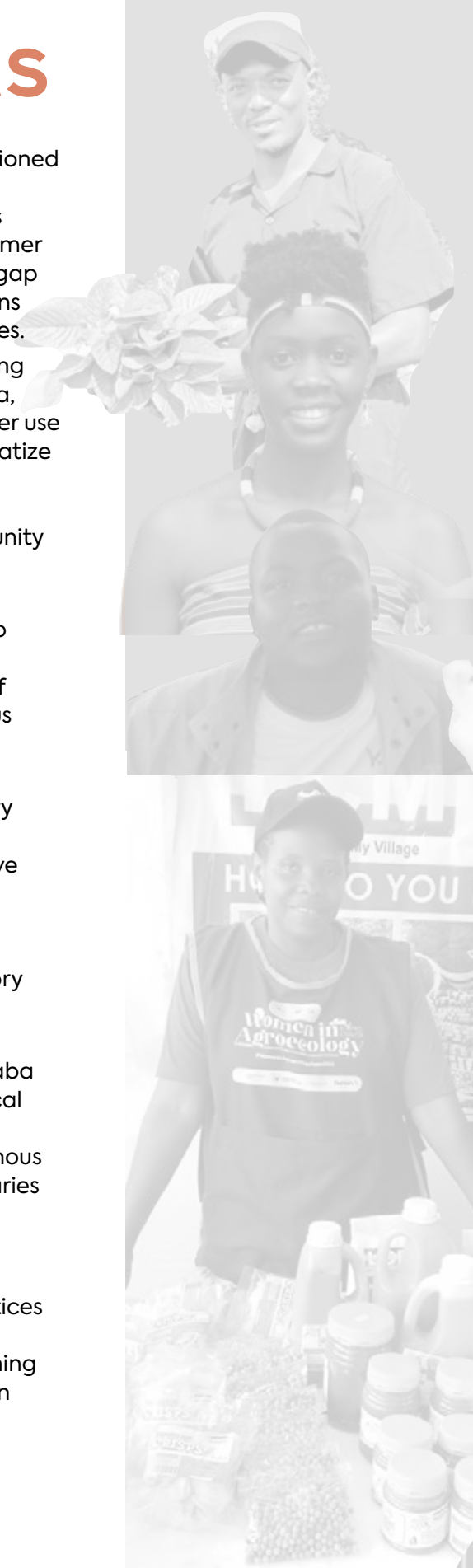
- **Deogratias Ndagijimana (Domestica Ltd, Rwanda):** The story of Marie Grace Niwemuhoza and Domestica Ltd emphasizes the scalability of agroecological methods through regenerative closed-loop systems, that integrates livestock, hydroponics, and waste recycling, directly challenging traditional industrial agriculture models. Their circular economy model shows how agroecology can thrive even in urbanizing landscapes. The story showcases how agroecological methods can achieve both environmental sustainability and economic viability.

24

- **Evalyne Orishaba (Let's Change My Village, Uganda):** Orishaba established a territorial organic market that revolutionized local economies by directly linking farmers to consumers. Her story vividly demonstrates how localized markets can revive indigenous crops and empower rural women while eliminating intermediaries can significantly enhance rural livelihoods and community resilience.

29

- **Freda Pigru's story of Sulemana Issifu Jobila (CEAL, Ghana):** Sulemana's approach integrates diverse agroecological practices to rejuvenate degraded lands, championing agroecology in a region dominated by chemical farming. His peer-to-peer training model proves that farmer-led education is more effective than





top-down interventions. The success he has had in community outreach and advocacy underscores agroecology's potential to address ecological crises while preserving cultural identities and promoting nutritional diversity.

- 33 • **Getrude Chambati (MajesticAfrica, Zimbabwe)** revitalizes traditional grains, promoting public health and rural economic empowerment through cultural identity and nutritional resilience, making traditional foods appealing to urban markets.
- 39 • **Helisoa Mampionona (Madagascar)** leads community-driven agroecological training without external funding, demonstrating the power of local resourcefulness and grassroots mobilization.
- 45 • **Imen Chelbi (El Rothen Farm, Tunisia)** challenges traditional gender roles in agriculture through her aloe vera-based skincare products, blending ancestral knowledge with innovative market strategies.
- 51 • **Juliet Kanyesigye (Kanyes Dairy Farm, Uganda)** uniquely utilizes goat milk for medicinal and cosmetic products, demonstrating effective integration of health, gender equity, and sustainability.
- 57 • **Lydia Kagoya (Uganda)** turns confined urban spaces into highly productive organic farms, addressing urban food security and inspiring local communities to engage in agroecology. Her story demonstrates how urban agroecology can combat food insecurity and inspire neighborhood transformation.
- 61 • **Martin Shaka (Zimbabwe)** is a market leader who pivoted to agroecological trading, creating demand for indigenous foods. His work reveals how territorial markets can shift consumer behavior stimulating demand for indigenous foods, reshaping consumer preferences and creating robust territorial markets.
- 65 • **Mercy Kyeraa Owusu (Ananse Poultry Farms, Ghana)** integrates poultry farming with renewable energy solutions and youth employment, highlighting resilience and innovation. Reviving her business after a devastating disease outbreak highlights the tenacity and courage required in farming.
- 69 • **Rita Nagudi (Pumzi Herbal Teas, Uganda)** emphasizes the therapeutic benefits of agro processing, transforming personal and ecological health through herbal products. Her approach uniquely blends personal healing and ecological restoration, highlighting how agro processing can profoundly impact both community wellness and ecosystem resilience.
- 75 • **Zororo Taruvinga (ZoroNeMugoti, Zimbabwe)** creatively revitalizes indigenous culinary traditions through gourmet innovations, effectively bridging cultural heritage and contemporary market demands. Her “bridge between memory and innovation” redefines African cuisine’s potential.

Reflective Analysis of Common Themes, Achievements, Challenges, and Lessons

These stories highlight that across diverse African contexts, agroecological entrepreneurs are reshaping rural economies, not by abandoning tradition, but by **evolving** it.

Figures like Zororo and Getrude exemplify this **fusion of ancestral knowledge with modern market tactics**, challenging the misconception that agroecology is anti-progress. Instead, it emerges as a dynamic, forward-looking model rooted in ecological balance and cultural integrity.

Women such as Imen, Rita, and Juliet defy patriarchal norms, **anchoring gender justice** at the heart of agricultural transformation. Meanwhile, youth-driven initiatives by Mercy and Helisoa counteract the “aging farmer” narrative, positioning agroecology as **a viable and attractive path for the next generation**.

Circularity is a through-line in many enterprises. From Domestica’s waste-to-fertilizer innovation to goat milk soaps and community-based composting, **entrepreneurs leverage circular economic strategies** to reduce costs and enhance environmental sustainability. They aren’t just producers, they’re educators, brand-builders, and market-makers. Martin’s local market innovations and Orishaba’s territorial models highlight how agroecological entrepreneurs **actively create demand, not just respond to it**.

Successes like JIMUSA Fertilizers and Ananse Poultry reveal that **agroecological products are scalable and commercially viable**. Juliet and Albert’s involvement in national certification dialogues shows that these entrepreneurs are **influencing policy, not just practice**. Community-level impacts, from Sulemana’s farmer trainings to Orishaba’s market

design, demonstrate how agroecology can build **resilient livelihoods and regenerate ecosystems at scale**.

Yet **systemic challenges remain stubbornly persistent**. Many founders must risk personal savings due to lack of access to capital. Certification processes, like Uganda’s UNBS, remain costly and exclusionary. Inundated markets, cheap imports, and chemical-fueled competitors drive down prices, undermining agroecological producers like Lydia. Land and labor access remains a gendered and structural constraint, especially for women like Imen and small-space farmers like Lydia.

These stories underscore that **agroecology is as much a social movement as an agricultural method**. A shared commitment to soil health, biodiversity, and equitable food systems runs through every narrative.

But the work is rarely straightforward. Entrepreneurs face dilemmas between scaling and staying true to ecological and community values. Certification and mechanization offer market access and efficiency, but risk diluting agroecological principles or alienating traditional stakeholders.



The tension between tradition and innovation is another tightrope. New methods often bring tangible benefits but can clash with longstanding cultural practices, requiring sensitive negotiation. Navigating these polarities demands not just technical skills, but ethical and adaptive leadership.

Crucially, networks like PELUM, AFSA, and Groundswell International have been indispensable. They function as amplifiers, linking local innovations to regional and global platforms, providing peer learning and advocacy channels, and helping sustain momentum in the face of institutional inertia.

These entrepreneurs aren't waiting for permission. They're building resilient futures from the ground up, rooted, regenerative, and radical in their quiet defiance of extractive models.

Advice for Key Stakeholders

For Aspiring Agroecological Entrepreneurs:

Success in agroecological entrepreneurship is grounded in **patience, resilience, and adaptive learning**. This is not a path to fast profits but a commitment to long-term ecological, social, and economic transformation. Begin by starting small, as entrepreneurs like Clever have done, experiment, document your failures and breakthroughs, and adapt accordingly. Agroecology rewards those who are willing to evolve alongside their land, community, and markets.

Building **strong peer networks and mentorships early on is crucial**. Connect with platforms like PELUM, AFSA and Groundswell International not only for knowledge and exposure but also for validation and shared resources. These networks help overcome isolation and provide collective muscle for advocacy and scale. At the same time, balance idealism with pragmatism: stay rooted in values but be flexible enough to navigate market realities, institutional gaps, and social resistance.

For NGOs Supporting Agroecology and Entrepreneurship:

NGOs must move **beyond the workshop model**. One-off trainings are not enough. Agroecological practice matures in the field, through mentorship, demonstration plots, farmer exchange visits, and consistent accompaniment. Long-term partnerships grounded in mutual learning are far more impactful than top-down interventions.

Also, **act as enablers**, not gatekeepers. Help entrepreneurs access tools that lower the barriers to growth, whether that's subsidized solar dryers like Rita's, affordable organic certification pathways, or mobile-based market platforms. NGOs are well-positioned to **bridge the gap between innovation and infrastructure**, helping build viable ecosystems around agroecological enterprises, including branding, logistics, and financing.

Finally, support advocacy. Amplify grassroots voices in policy dialogues, especially around land access, seed sovereignty, and market regulation. Agroecology is political, it challenges dominant systems, and NGOs have a role in pushing for systemic change alongside practitioners.



For Governments:

Governments must treat agroecology not as a niche but as a **core strategy for food security, climate resilience, and economic development**.

This begins with **substantial public investment** in rural infrastructure: localized processing centers, farmer-led research stations, and public extension services that reflect agroecological values.

Policy environments must also shift. **Simplify certification processes**, remove biases toward chemical-intensive agriculture in extension services and subsidies, and support **territorial markets** that shorten value chains and retain more value at the local level. Governments can set the tone by prioritizing procurement from agroecological producers in public institutions like schools and hospitals.

Land tenure reforms and gender-sensitive agricultural policies are also urgent, especially to protect and empower women and young farmers who face disproportionate barriers in access to land and finance.

For Donors:

Donors must resist the temptation of quick wins and **invest in long-haul transformation**. Agroecology thrives on flexibility, experimentation, and context-specific adaptation, none of which fits neatly into rigid logframes or short funding cycles.

Fund **multi-year, community-led initiatives** that allow for learning and iteration. Prioritize funding for farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange, infrastructure co-creation, and local innovation. Beyond production, support efforts to **build demand**, consumer education, product certification literacy, and local food campaigns are critical levers for change.

Finally, hold yourself accountable to the principles of **equity and power-sharing**. Design funding processes that are accessible to grassroots groups, especially women- and youth-led initiatives, and stay engaged beyond the project end date.

Agroecology as Living Resistance and Rooted Innovation

These narratives reveal agroecology not as a static blueprint but as a living, evolving practice, a dynamic interplay of **tradition, innovation, and resistance**. It is as much a cultural and political act as it is an ecological one. The journeys of these entrepreneurs oscillate between inspiration and constraint, revealing a terrain marked by deep commitment and structural obstacles.

These stories dismantle the myth that Africa must look outward for solutions. They affirm that the continent's food future rests in **self-determination, cultural resilience, and ecological wisdom**. Agroecology, in this light, is not just a method of cultivation, it is a reclamation of agency, identity, and possibility.

Yet realizing the full potential of these efforts requires more than grassroots grit. Entrepreneurs have sown the seeds, but **governments, donors, and NGOs must now nourish the soil**. That means removing institutional barriers, funding long-term systems change, and recognizing agroecological practice as a legitimate, strategic pillar of national development and food sovereignty.

The soil these entrepreneurs tend is more than land, it is the **bedrock of a movement**. Their hands hold not only tools but visions. Each compost heap, community market, or seed exchange is an act of defiance against extractive systems and a gesture toward a future that is **rooted, regenerative, and radically just**.

Their work insists, and ultimately proves:

Another world is not only possible, it's already growing.



Organic Pathways: Innovation and Inclusion in Uganda's Fertilizer Markets

By Albert Kakande

MEMAGO Agroecology Ventures Uganda LTD, Uganda

A Journey from Corporate to Agroecology

My name is Albert Kakande, and I am 43 years old. I am married and a proud father of four children—two boys and two girls. I hold a Bachelor's degree in Organizational Psychology (2009) and live in Mende Sub County, Wakiso District, Uganda. I am an agroecological entrepreneur and farmer trainer. After graduating, I worked in the corporate sector at a telecommunications company. However, in 2012, I made a life-changing decision to leave behind the corporate world and dive into farming—a decision that would shape my future as an agroecological entrepreneur and organic farming trainer.

At the time, my friends thought I was crazy to leave a stable corporate job for the uncertainty of farming. The transition was far from easy. Although my decision was driven by a passion for practical agriculture, the journey was rough. I built my new venture from scratch, and there were times I questioned my choice, especially when things got tough. Eventually, I found my place in a local farmer group called *Balandiza Kimeze Farmers' Group*, which became a kind of home for me.

Discovering My Passion for Agroecology

Through my involvement with the farmer group, I was introduced to the Agency for Integrated Rural Development (AFIRD), an NGO promoting sustainable organic farming in rural communities. Recognising my skills, Balandiza Kimeze farmers' group recommended me for training as a Trainer of Trainers (ToT) at AFIRD, which I completed successfully. This opened the door to further trainings in organic agriculture at PELUM Uganda, since at the time AFIRD was already a member organization



The author (R) and a PGS farmer



of PELUM Uganda—a platform focused on promoting agroecology.

At the time, AFIRD was already part of a regional project run by PELUM Uganda called the “Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Africa” (KCOA). This initiative operated through regional hubs, and the East African hub is known as the “Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture in Eastern Africa” (KHEA). In 2019, the project was training farmer trainers, known as Multipliers, who would then share organic agriculture knowledge with farmers in their communities. Because I had excelled as a ToT under AFIRD, it was easy for them to recommend me to PELUM Uganda for the training as a multiplier. I was successfully enrolled as a KHEA Multiplier—a role I still hold today.

Innovating for Farmer Solutions: From Knowledge to Product

Over the years, I’ve gained extensive knowledge in organic fertiliser production, pest and disease management, and general agronomy practices. My goal has always been to help farmers apply this knowledge practically by developing organic agro inputs that they could use on their farms.

However, I soon realised that despite their interest in organic practices, many farmers were hesitant and lazy to adopt them. They always claimed that Organic inputs were bulky, time-consuming, and not as easy to use as conventional fertilisers. This led me to innovate around production of a finished marketable fertilizer which I could sell to them.

I started with a solid fertiliser—a bio-enriched compost using bio slurry, the by-product left after methane gas is extracted from animal manure in a biodigester. Initially, the slurry wasn’t adequately rich in the essential nutrients for proper plant growth. However, my local farmer group was also keeping rabbits at the same time, so I began composting the bio-slurry together with rabbit manure. The results were promising. Eventually, I developed the product into a pelleted and packaged version called **Bio Slurry Active** pellet fertilizer.

I kept improving it by blending in other nutrient-rich organic materials—like *Tithonia*, banana peelings, wood ash, and molasses—creating a more balanced, bio-enriched compost-based fertiliser. This was later rebranded to become **JIMUSA** pellet fertiliser, a recommendation that I got from Advocacy Coalition for Sustainable Agriculture (ACSA), an NGO which promotes organic inputs innovators.

Later, based on market research, I discovered that many farmers preferred a less bulky, more convenient option. They wanted a fertiliser they could simply spray onto their crops. This led me to develop **JIMUSA Foliar Fertiliser**.

... I discovered that many farmers preferred a less bulky, more convenient option. They wanted a fertiliser they could simply spray onto their crops.



These fertilisers help with water retention, improve crop resistance to drought, and boost yields. They also enhance soil health by increasing microbial life and improving soil structure, which helps nutrient, air, and water circulation. The pellet fertiliser is ideal at planting, while the foliar spray can be applied throughout different stages of plant growth.

My main motivation to start this business was the clear need for improved soil health. Many farmers were struggling to achieve good harvests using synthetic fertilisers which could not give desired yields for more than one season of application. Although they were trained in organic methods, very few applied them. I saw an opportunity to bridge this gap—by offering ready-made, practical solutions at their cost.

Market Development: Growing Through Partnerships and Exhibitions

The growth from a simple innovation to a marketable product has been supported by partnerships across the agroecology and organic agriculture space. I've showcased our products at various events, locally and internationally.

National exhibitions like the annual **Agroecological Markets and Systems Expo (AMASE)** and the annual **Indigenous Seed and Food Fair**, both organised by PELUM Uganda, have allowed me to connect with farmers, consumers, and fellow innovators. I've also participated in events like the annual **National Organic Week** organized by the National Organic Agriculture Movement of Uganda (NOGAMU) and the annual **Innovators Symposium** organized by Advocacy Coalition for Sustainable Agriculture (ACSA). Other valuable opportunities have come from AFSA-led events.

On the international stage, I exhibited at the **5th African Organic Agriculture Conference** in Rwanda (2023) and the **African Fertilizer and Soil Health Conference** in Nairobi (2024). These events showcased a variety of organic inputs, indigenous seeds, and innovations. I engaged with farmers, students, researchers, and other innovators through teaching sessions and product displays.

As an expansion strategy, I have given out up to 300 liters of free fertilizer to farmers between 2023 and 2025, with an aim of building trust among the farmers and also tracking performance of the fertilizer on different crop varieties. This is an estimated UGX 3,600,000 given out as donations aimed at building the market base. I have interfaced with upto 250 customers/farmers who have used my fertilizer, either as direct buyers or as beneficiaries of the free fertilizers.



Displaying my business at the Agroecological Markets and Systems Expo (AMASE)



Engaging with a delegate at the African Fertilizer and Soil Health Conference



5th African Organic Agriculture Conference



Challenges and Growth: Navigating the Journey of a Business

Building a fertiliser business hasn't been easy. There have been countless experiments, sacrifices, and even moments when I gave away products for free just to build trust and referrals among farmers. One of the biggest challenges was the lack of start-up capital. I didn't take out any loans—I relied entirely on my own savings.

But as farmers began to see results, they spread the word. Demand began to grow. To support this growth, I initiated a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) group among vegetable growers in my sub-county, called **MEMAGO Agroecology PGS Group**. This group uses our fertilisers and has helped us reach more customers.

PGS is a second-party model of organic product certification. It's based on trust and active participation among farmers growing a common crop or organic product with a shared vision.

All members of the PGS group use our fertilisers in their vegetable gardens. This has boosted product uptake. Coffee farmers have also found the fertiliser effective, especially for flowering and producing fleshy berries. Our customer base has grown to include farmers of cereals, legumes, and other seasonal crops.

However, managing a group of diverse individuals, each with their own mindset, is still a challenge. Some prefer to work independently, which slows the pace of the agroecological movement. Still, the group's rules and standards help keep things on track and ensure accountability.

While the journey has been rewarding, I still face logistical challenges, particularly in sourcing and transporting raw materials and maintaining a consistent supply of packaging.

These hurdles make it hard to scale production to meet rising demand.

I have not yet secured certification from the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, nor from the Uganda National Bureau of Standards. The certification process is costly, and I have not yet been able to raise the necessary funds on my own. This remains a key barrier to placing my product on open market shelves and reaching a wider customer base.

Achievements and Exposure

Over the years, I've gained significant exposure as a stakeholder in the agroecology space. Collaborations with networks, NGOs, and other actors have helped to position me as a recognisable figure in organic agriculture and agroecology. This has also elevated the visibility and credibility of **JIMUSA Organic Foliar Fertiliser** among farmers.

Impact of JIMUSA Fertiliser

JIMUSA Organic Foliar Fertiliser continues to gain traction, especially among coffee, vegetable and cereal farmers who report better yields and healthier soil.

In the first year of commercialization, 2023 I produced just 500 litres of fertilizer, and gave out free upto 160 liters. By 2025, I have produced an average total of 4,000 litres of Jimusa organic foliar fertilizer amounting to gross sales of upto UGX 48, 000,000.

While profitability is still modest, I am optimistic. With stronger marketing and continued consumer education, I believe revenue will grow steadily.

Group Achievements Through PGS

Our PGS group has made great progress. Farmers are now adding value to their produce instead



of selling raw vegetables at the garden gate. For example:

- **Fresh amaranth is now packaged for sale to higher-value markets like grocery stores and supermarkets. Before the packaging the members used to sell a 1kg bundle of fresh amaranth at UGX 700, but now the same packed quantity is sold at UGX 2000, giving a significant increase in income to the group members.**
- **The group also solar-dries and packages amaranth, extending shelf life and boosting profitability, although we still yearn to source and construct our own bulk holding solar driers.**

These efforts have attracted benchmarking visits from stakeholders like the **Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC)**, who are eager to learn from our group marketing strategies.

Expanding Farmer Networks

I've also focused on creating and strengthening farmer networks across regions. Together with other agroecological innovators, especially those producing organic fertilisers, we host joint on-farm training sessions. These demonstrations have helped spread knowledge and boost adoption of sustainable farming practices.

Looking Ahead Based on What I Have Learned

Navigating this journey has required

persistence, improvisation, and the ability to learn quickly from failure. One of the most affirming moments has been seeing JIMUSA Fertiliser gain international attention, not just for its innovation, but for its rootedness in the real needs of smallholder farmers. This recognition has elevated my position within Uganda's agroecology landscape and opened doors to train other farmers, contribute to policy dialogues, and co-create with like-minded practitioners.

But visibility is not enough. Looking back, I realise how much more we could have achieved, and faster, if I had pursued formal partnerships earlier, with research institutions, established organic producers, or social enterprises with access to seed capital. Instead of relying so heavily on personal savings and informal networks, a stronger foundation of investment and mentorship might have accelerated production and helped us clear regulatory hurdles sooner. I am targeting to produce and sell at least 10,000 liters of Jimusa fertilizer per year, yielding a gross sales of upto UGX 120,000,000 which is expected to increase exponentially in subsequent years.

Another key lesson is that product innovation alone isn't sufficient. The real work lies in farmer adoption, building trust, responding to local constraints, and demonstrating value again and again. Innovation must be flexible, field-tested, and responsive to feedback.

Advice for Aspiring Agroecological Entrepreneurs

If you're thinking of entering this space, don't romanticize the work. Agroecological entrepreneurship is not a shortcut to success, it's a commitment to serve, to learn, and to adapt constantly. It demands determination.

Start with what you have but never work alone. Networks are not just about funding, they are your first source of training, collaboration, and credibility. Engage early with organizations that have already walked the path: PELUM Uganda, AFSA, ACSA, and NOGAMU are excellent starting points. Their resources, events, and platforms will help you see beyond your farm gate.

Don't be afraid to start small, but design with scale in mind. Even simple innovations, like blending rabbit manure into bio slurry, can evolve into viable products. What matters is



whether your solution is practical, replicable, and meets a felt need.

Your ability to earn trust, communicate clearly, and build accountability in farmer groups will often determine your success more than technical knowledge alone.

Finally, be prepared to measure success differently. Impact may come slowly, but if your product is restoring soil, improving yields, and helping a farming community stand taller, then you are already building something of value. Keep connected to your purpose, and the rewards, economic, social, and environmental, will follow.

Plans for the Future: Expanding and Sustaining Agroecology

As I look ahead, my focus is shifting from product development to ecosystem building. We must foster a more enabling environment for agroecological enterprises: one that includes infrastructure for local certification, mechanisms for collective marketing, and stronger policy support. The future is not just about selling more fertiliser; it's about transforming mindsets, rebuilding soil health at scale, and proving that regenerative farming is both practical and profitable for Uganda's farmers. Looking forward,

... be prepared to measure success differently. Impact may come slowly, but if your product is restoring soil, improving yields, and helping a farming community stand taller, then you are already building something of value.

my vision is to expand our efforts to combat soil degradation and nutrient depletion across Uganda. Through MEMAGO Agroecology Ventures Uganda LTD, I intend to lead widespread public education campaigns on the risks of conventional farming methods and the regenerative promise of agroecology.

A central part of this plan is to establish a sustainable, well-equipped production facility worth USD 120,000 that will allow us to meet growing demand, ensure consistent quality, and reach up to 1000 farmers per season in more regions.

In parallel, I am preparing to pursue funding to support the certification of our fertilizer products, both nationally (through MAAIF, UNBS, and Uganda Organic Certification) and internationally. Achieving this milestone will unlock broader markets and build further trust among farmers and potential partners. Up to USD 6000 is required for this process.

A Future Rooted in Collaboration and Innovation

With a foundation of perseverance, innovation, and deep community collaboration, I remain confident in the future of MEMAGO Agroecology Ventures Uganda LTD. My journey as an agroecological entrepreneur continues to inspire others, and I remain committed to playing a meaningful role in building a more sustainable, regenerative agricultural future for Uganda.



Rooted in Purpose, Grounded in *LOVE*

By Babra Kaikara

Imaro, Uganda

My Journey into Entrepreneurship: From 65,000 UGX to a Growing Agroecological Enterprise

My name is **Babra Kaikara**, and I am the proud founder of **Imaro Innovations** “*Imaro*” meaning *love*. At 27 years old, I’m building a purpose-driven business from my home in Uganda, inspired by love for agriculture, sustainability, and community transformation. Raised by a strong, resourceful single mother, I learned early on what resilience looks like. I hold a Bachelor’s degree in Procurement and Logistics from Makerere University, but the lessons that have shaped my path extend far beyond the classroom.

Imaro Innovations adds value to Uganda’s rich agricultural bounty coffee, cocoa, spices, and fruits by transforming them into high-quality, sustainable products like coffee sweets, cocoa drinking chocolate, moringa powder,, soursop and dried fruit snacks. But my journey started with just **65,000 UGX** (less than \$20 USD) barely enough to buy basic ingredients and packaging.

I used that small amount to make my first batch of **Moringa powder, my first purchase was 3kgs each at 15,000 ugx**, and small pouches at 700 ugx each for 250gms which I then packaged carefully and sold at 25000 ugx each pack and began sharing photos on WhatsApp groups and my status. Orders began trickling in first from friends, then from strangers. That early success was the spark. I reinvested every shilling I made, growing my capacity, improving packaging, and experimenting with new products.



Today, Imaro generates monthly sales between **1,000,000 and 1,800,000 UGX** (\$300 to \$500 USD), depending on season and event participation. Through connections with CURAD under the **SAYE Project**, I’m now certifying my **coffee juice**, while my **dried pineapple**, developed through support from **CWEN**, is also progressing toward certification opening doors to institutional buyers and export opportunities.

I’ve also invested in acquiring small-scale tools and outsourced equipment to increase production, and I’m now saving toward a machine that will allow me to scale from **200 sweets a day to over 5,000**, which will significantly transform both my income and employment capacity.

This journey began with a modest 65,000 UGX but more importantly, it started with a conviction: that the gap between smallholder farmers and sustainable markets could be bridged through love, innovation, and community. Imaro Innovations is more than a business. It’s a growing ecosystem of hope, empowerment, and agroecological transformation and the numbers are just beginning to reflect the impact we aim to make.

Growing the Business, One Connection at a Time

I continued sharing product updates on WhatsApp, and the interest kept growing. In 2023, while attending an exhibition hosted by **PELUM Uganda**, I received my first major order, from a fellow exhibitor from Kenya. She requested 5 kg each of moringa, soursop powder, rosemary, and turmeric. She'd heard about moringa's health benefits, and when I explained more, she was thrilled, because she could sense that I truly understood what I was offering.

That first big order gave me momentum. More began to follow.

Developing My Market and Expanding Reach

2024 marked a turning point in my journey. At yet another transformative **PELUM Uganda** exhibition, I crossed paths with **Mr. Papius from CURAD**, who introduced me to a programme empowering young people in **Busoga** to create value-added coffee products. I didn't hesitate; I knew this was the kind of opportunity that could change everything. Today, with the support of **CURAD under the SAYE Project**, I'm in the exciting process of certifying my **coffee juice**, taking a bold step towards scaling and legitimacy in local and international markets.

Another door opened through **PELUM Uganda**, connecting me to **CWEN (Community Women Enterprise Network)**, a group focused on pineapple value addition. What began as a simple step has now evolved into a bigger dream—my **dried pineapple products** are now on the path to certification, joining my growing line of sustainable, proudly Ugandan innovations.

In this digital age, **WhatsApp** has become one of my most powerful marketing tools. Clients often invite me into their groups to share about my products, organically spreading the word through trust and community. I've also built strategic **commission-based partnerships**, enabling others to promote and distribute my products, creating shared success.

None of this growth happened in isolation. Through **PELUM Uganda's mentorship, immersive bootcamps, hands-on farm visits, and dynamic networking events**, I've learned to present my products with pride



I always move with my products whenever am called somewhere either a meeting or a workshop or training; I don't forget my business behind.



One of the trainings organized by PELUM Uganda and Community Women Enterprise (CWEN) on product quality control.



Pouring the coffee sweets in its liquid form into the molds to give it shape at home.



Coffee Juice processing at CURAD facilities in Kapeeka. That's one of the organization that are supporting me in juice production.

and purpose. I've sold out at exhibitions, landed bulk orders, and grown a community of loyal customers who believe not only in my products but in the story behind them.

This journey is living proof that when the right people believe in you, doors begin to open. Every connection, every conversation, and every shared opportunity is a stepping stone toward a greater impact. And with every product sold, I move closer to realising a vision that's rooted in purpose, driven by community, and sustained by love.

My Achievements So Far

Today, **Imaro Innovations** offers a growing range of certified and value-added products: coffee sweets, coffee juice, drinking chocolate, dried pineapples, moringa, and spices. With CURAD and CWEN's support, I've made great strides in the certification process.

In 2023, I acquired land in Jinja for future expansion, with dreams of one day building a factory. That dream continues to motivate me.

Through PELUM Uganda, I was selected to represent youth in agribusiness at the **African Youth in Agribusiness Forum (AYAF) in Ethiopia**. The aim was to enable the participatory involvement of young agripreneurs in the area of tension between agribusiness and the agricultural policy framework. Away from the engaging dialogues and policy discussions I was honoured to attend the **World Without Hunger Conference**, considering the fact that Hunger and malnutrition remain among the most vital challenges facing humanity. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires a well-coordinated effort among all stakeholders. It was such a great honour for me to be apart of the team deliberating on the gravest challenges of our time. My greatest highlight at the conference, was that a German delegate tasted my coffee sweets and was thoroughly impressed. Upon learning that I had not formally studied coffee



farming, she generously offered to sponsor me for a short training course. That experience reaffirmed a powerful truth: there are people across the world who recognize and support genuine value. Today, my network includes forward-thinking farmers and entrepreneurs, and I've gained meaningful insights into agroecology and sustainable agriculture.

At Imaro, we collaborate closely with farmers, promoting eco-friendly practices that align with organic certification standards. The increasing demand for our products has even inspired others to adopt more sustainable farming methods.

Turning Challenges into Opportunities

The path hasn't always been smooth. In the early days, I faced discouragement from people I once called friends—some doubted me, others dismissed my efforts entirely. Their words stung, especially when those same individuals later returned seeking my support. It was a difficult but necessary choice to distance myself and instead build a community rooted in respect, encouragement, and shared vision.

Marketing has brought its own mix of trials and triumphs. Operating from home can create misconceptions some customers expect a physical storefront, while others delay payments or overlook delivery costs. Production, too, presents hurdles; I rely on external machinery, and when it breaks down, precious time and momentum are lost.

Still, despite the obstacles, the demand for my coffee sweets continues to grow. Each piece, handmade with care using silicone moulds, carries the deep, authentic flavour of real coffee. I currently produce about 200 sweets daily, but the potential is far greater. My dream is to acquire a machine capable of producing over 5,000 units a day because these aren't just sweets. They're energising, portable, and even dissolve in hot water for an instant coffee experience.

This journey has taught me that every challenge is a doorway to innovation. With the right support, vision, and resilience, small beginnings can lead to something extraordinary.

What I've Learnt Along the Way

My journey has been a teacher of resilience, patience, and perspective. I've come to learn that opportunities often appear from the least expected places and that success depends not only on preparation, but on staying alert, open, and willing to evolve. One defining moment was my trip to Ethiopia. It broadened my worldview, gave me the confidence to dream bigger, and connected me with passionate entrepreneurs from all walks of life. I realised then that, regardless of our backgrounds, our struggles and hopes are deeply universal.

A particularly powerful experience was being offered a sponsorship by a German woman who had tasted my coffee sweets. She didn't

just enjoy the product she saw potential in me. That gesture reminded me how others can sometimes see the light in us before we fully see it ourselves. It also underscored a truth I now live by: never stop learning.

Organizations like **PELUM Uganda**, **Agro-Tourism Association**, **Community Women Enterprise Network**, have played a critical role in shaping my entrepreneurial path. Their exhibitions opened market doors I hadn't imagined. Through their boot camps, farm visits, and training workshops, I've gained hands-on knowledge about sustainable agriculture and how markets really function. But beyond skills, PELUM offered me something even greater a sense of belonging. They taught me that growth is not a solo journey; it flourishes in collaboration and community.

One of the hardest lessons I've faced is the emotional gap between expectations and reality especially when it comes to support from loved ones. In the beginning, I looked to family and friends for validation. When it didn't come, it was painful. But over time, I learned that not everyone will share your vision, and that's okay. What truly matters is surrounding yourself with people who do believe in you people who encourage your growth and stand with you as you rise. Professional networks like those I found through PELUM have been instrumental in that process, helping me grow not just as a business owner, but as a person.

Looking back, I also see the importance of strategic planning particularly in production capacity and land investment. If I had started earlier with crops like cocoa and coffee or secured land when opportunities arose, my business would be further along today. But these lessons, like muscles, are built through experience. Each challenge I've faced has shaped me and every step forward reaffirms that I'm on the right path.

Driven by Love: The Vision Behind Imaro Innovations

At the heart of my dream lies a simple yet powerful belief: that business can be a force for good. I envision **Imaro Innovations** as a leading producer and exporter of organic drinking chocolate, coffee, and fruit-based products renowned globally not just for quality, but for sustainability, integrity, and impact.

This dream is deeply rooted in the empowerment of smallholder farmers. My goal is to equip them with the tools they need to thrive through training in sustainable farming methods, eco-conscious practices, product certification processes, and market-ready strategies. By expanding our certifications and deepening our export capacity, we aim to unlock global markets and amplify the reach of products grown with love and care. But perhaps most importantly, we're cultivating a culture of mentorship creating pathways for future agripreneurs to rise, lead, and inspire.

Through my partnership with **PELUM Uganda**, I've discovered the true power of collaboration and community. Their support has been transformative. They've shown me that our work is never just about the product it's about the problems we solve, the lives we touch, and the systems we reimagine.

Our offerings reflect this deeper mission:

- **Coffee Sweets:** A portable, energising caffeine boost tailored for modern, on-the-go lifestyles. Whether enjoyed as a sweet treat or dissolved in hot water for an instant coffee experience, they're a testament to creativity and convenience.
- **Cocoa Drinking Chocolate:** Packed with antioxidants, it promotes brain function, uplifts mood, and combats inflammation. It's a



wholesome alternative to processed drinks—blending wellness with indulgence.

- **Dried Fruits:** A solution to food waste and post-harvest losses. By preserving surplus produce, we create consistent income for local farmers and open new economic doors—especially in rural communities.
- **Moringa Powder:** Much more than a superfood. Moringa is a native treasure that restores soil health, prevents erosion, and improves water retention. Its cultivation sustains biodiversity, nourishes communities, and fosters long-term ecological resilience.
- **Coffee juice:** Coffee juice can help suppress appetite naturally due to its mild caffeine content and rich polyphenols. This makes it a healthy option for those managing weight, as it may reduce unnecessary snacking without causing energy crashes.

Building **Imaro Innovations** has never been solely about profits. It's about purpose. It's about transforming challenges into opportunities and using business as a tool for healing of land, livelihoods, and local economies. Each obstacle I've faced has refined my vision and deepened my resolve. With partners like PELUM Uganda walking alongside me, I'm more confident than ever in the journey ahead.

“**Imaro**” means **love**, and love is the engine that drives me love for agriculture, for innovation, and above all, for the people I strive to uplift. This is not just a business. It's a movement. A mission. A manifestation of heart, hope, and the unwavering belief that through meaningful collaboration, we can shape a better future together.



When in meetings or workshop I always get a table and display a few of my products that I have moved with so that they can see what I do.

Beezimiz Honey: A Journey of *Persistence, Learning, and Community Empowerment*

By Clever Mutonhodza

Beezimiz Honey, Zimbabwe

The Beginnings: Education and Early Encounters

Clever Mutonhodza is my name, and I am 35 years old. I grew up in Masvingo, attending Makwau Primary School, before moving to Mutare, Dangamvura, where I completed the rest of my primary and secondary education. In 2009, I moved to Bulawayo to study at the National University of Science and Technology, where I earned a BA degree in Applied Chemistry.

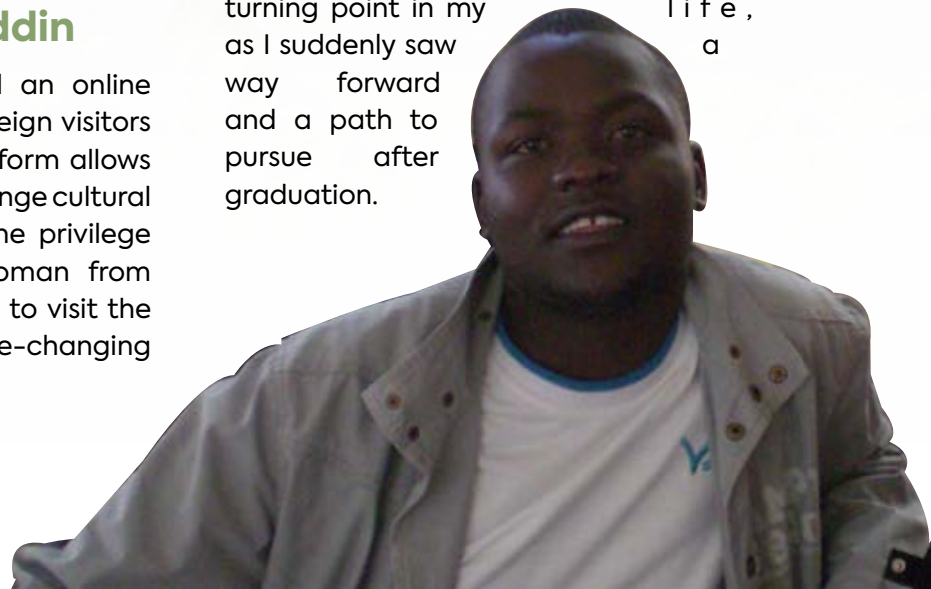
The job market was limited in 2014, which led me to settle into a teaching position in Buhera district. I later moved to Chimanimani district to continue teaching. But my journey was about to take an unexpected turn, one that would shape my future.

A Life-Changing Encounter: Hosting Masturah Kamaruddin

While still studying at university, I used an online platform called *Couch Surfing* to host foreign visitors in my rented place in Bulawayo. This platform allows travellers to stay with local hosts and exchange cultural stories and experiences. In 2013, I had the privilege of hosting Masturah Kamaruddin, a woman from Malaysia who was traveling to Zimbabwe to visit the Victoria Falls. Her visit turned out to be a life-changing experience.

During her week-long stay, Masturah shared her expertise in bee biology and beekeeping, which was completely new to me. She explained that she had come to Zimbabwe to explore the potential for sourcing eucalyptus honey, known for its wound-healing properties. Masturah had identified the Nyahari Beekeepers Association in Hauna, Honde Valley, which was dedicated to beekeeping and honey production.

What struck me most during this visit was how Masturah and I found common ground. I shared with her that I owed \$600 in university fees, which I couldn't afford at the time. Masturah, showing incredible generosity, offered to pay off my debt. In return, she proposed that I help her with packaging and exporting honey to Malaysia. This was a turning point in my life, as I suddenly saw a way forward and a path to pursue after graduation.



A New Beginning: Beezimiz Honey Processors

In 2015, I registered Beezimiz Honey Processors to export honey to Malaysia. The first batch was a small 400 kg shipment of honey sachets. However, the venture hit a snag when trade restrictions blocked the honey's export. The honey was intended for pharmaceutical use, which required certification and proof of its authenticity and medicinal properties. The project stalled, but Masturah's offer had already ignited my passion for beekeeping and honey processing.

Although I knew little about beekeeping initially, I was eager to learn. Masturah provided me with materials to read on the subject, and I learned from Mr. Timaremoyo, the chairman of Nyahari Beekeepers Association, who taught me about processing and testing honey. This laid the groundwork for my growing interest in beekeeping.

Discovering New Opportunities: The “Mupesepese” Plant and the Growing Honey Industry

In 2015, a plant known locally as “*mupesepese*” (scientifically, *Venonanthura polyanthes*) began to spread along the eastern border of Zimbabwe, including Chimanimani and Chipinge. This plant, originally from Brazil, was introduced by the Portuguese to boost honey production, and it quickly became a game changer for the region's honey industry.

The plant flowers in July and August, and honey is harvested between September and October. By this time, I was teaching in Nhedziwa, and many local beekeepers started seeking a sustainable market for their honey. With the increase in honey production due to the *mupesepese* plant, my interest in beekeeping grew stronger, and I decided to focus on processing and selling

honey locally.

Building the Business: Overcoming Challenges and Expanding

In 2016, I took the plunge into the honey business, targeting the local market in Zimbabwe. I turned to online platforms to find potential buyers in Harare. Despite the challenges of dealing with people I had never met, I received overwhelming interest from both individual buyers and honey processors.

One of the biggest hurdles was the lack of processing equipment. I improvised by building a makeshift wooden pressing machine and used plastic drums as settling tanks. Although the yield was lower, this helped us process honey while we worked on improving the setup.

The logistics of transporting honey from rural farmers to the market in Harare and Bulawayo proved to be another challenge. We discovered that using buses to transport the honey was both cost-effective and efficient. However, we still faced trust issues with customers, who were unfamiliar with the lighter-colour honey from the *Mupesepese* plant. To build trust, we began offering free samples, which helped us gain credibility.

In 2017, I got married, and my wife joined me in the business, helping with the honey processing. Honey sales rose steadily as people became to know about our brand and we were establishing new relationships both with the farmers and the customers. However, we still faced challenges, including difficulties with supply and access to capital.

Personal Struggles: Divorce and Business Setbacks

In 2019, I went through a tough divorce, which was emotionally challenging. It was difficult for me to continue teaching, as my ex-wife and I



taught at the same school. I resigned from my teaching post and moved back to my parents' home in Mutare. This move disrupted my access to the farmers, and the customers who had trusted our brand were left uncertain. For a while, I explored other business ventures, including motor mechanics. However, honey sales continued to grow, with customers still reaching out for our product. This prompted me to return to the honey business, but the biggest challenge was securing capital to restart operations.

Partnerships and Growth: A New Chapter for Beezimiz

A friend offered to partner with me by providing \$500 in capital to purchase honey. The agreement was that I would repay the amount with 20% interest over a period of three months. He also contributed a 20 kg honey presser and provided a workspace that required a monthly rent of \$100.

This partnership allowed me to restart Beezimiz Honey Processors and reconnect with some of my previous customers. During this period, I tested the market with a variety of products, including honeycombs, sachets, and jars.

However, the initial capital did not stretch far due to high operational costs, including transport, rent, electricity, and labour.

Staff weigh buckets of honey using a hanging spring balance.



In March 2023, I took out a bank loan of \$2,000, repayable over two years. This funding was used exclusively to purchase 700 kilograms of honey — the largest quantity I had ever bought. The honey was sold between June and August 2023. From this, I earned a profit of \$1,500, which I reinvested into purchasing more honey in September 2023.

In 2023, I joined the PELLUM program under AFSA, which offered valuable training on agroecological principles. The training really changed the way I viewed my trade and was eager to also share this knowledge with our farmers how everyone could contribute to sustainable beekeeping whilst encompassing the agro-ecology principles.

I remember one of the workshops that we held in Harare with Dr Kozanayi on Participative Action Research and the importance of documenting our work as entrepreneurs. This workshop really helped me a lot. I began documenting the names of the farmers, their contacts, number of hives, challenges they were facing. Documenting has helped me a lot because I now understand the seasons of honey in different regions much better. I am able to plan with the documented information. Being consistent and avoiding early business diversification has also helped me a lot.

Empowering Farmers: Knowledge Sharing and Community Support

We also began engaging with farmers on the importance of using fast-growing exotic trees and plantation-sourced planks, rather than harvesting trunks from indigenous trees, which take many years to mature.

My interactions with the farmers were always eye-opening. They generously shared their experiences and practical knowledge. I remember speaking with a group about transitioning to Kenyan Top Bar (KTB) hives

instead of the traditional box hives some were using. One young man pointed out a key limitation of the KTB hive—it disrupts the entire colony during inspection, unlike systems that allow for checks from one end. That conversation made me realize how essential it is to complement academic or commercial beekeeping models with local insights. At the same time, I also discovered that some local beliefs were actually misconceptions.

These meetings highlighted the need for mutual knowledge sharing—so we could support farmers in ways that were relevant to their specific needs. We noticed early on that most of the beekeepers we sourced honey from were men. This inspired us to encourage farmers to pass on their knowledge to the younger generation—including women and youth—to ensure the sustainability and continuity of beekeeping in their communities.

In one case, a customer complained about honey tasting heavily of smoke. When we traced the source, we discovered that some farmers were unaware of bee smokers and instead used open flames, which not only affected honey quality but also posed a danger to the bees.

From then on, we made it a priority to share knowledge during our visits and to bring essential beekeeping equipment with us—available for farmers to purchase at cost. This simple act became a meaningful step toward improving practices, sustainability, and long-term relationships with the communities we worked with.

To date, the business has positively impacted over 100 families in marginalised communities who supply us with honey. The income from honey sales has helped many of them diversify their livelihoods and improve their quality of life.

One inspiring example is Mr. Mwadzura from Botero village. He began beekeeping in 2020 after receiving training through an initiative that supported communities affected by Cyclone



Mwadzura with one of his hives in Botero village

Idai in Chimanimani. When we first met him, he had only a few hives. Although he had received initial training, there had been little follow-up or support. Through regular visits, we were able to share knowledge, offer practical advice, and provide materials like wire nails to help him build more hives.

Overtime, Mr. Mwadzura scaled up his operation significantly—harvesting up to a ton of honey in the last season. Beekeeping has become a family effort, and the proceeds have enabled him to expand into banana farming, purchase a motorbike, and send his children to school. His story is just one example of how knowledge-sharing, consistent support, and access to markets can transform lives.

Building a Fair and Inclusive Honey Value Chain

One of the guiding principles of agroecology is **fairness**, and this has always been a core value in our business. From the beginning, we've made it a priority to offer farmers a fair price for their honey. This approach hasn't just strengthened our reputation—it has motivated farmers to continue working diligently, knowing their efforts are valued and rewarded.

Honey is not only a source of income; it's also rich in medicinal and nutritional benefits.

Through our enterprise, we've contributed to both social well-being and healthier diets in the communities we serve. In a market saturated with counterfeit products, maintaining a reliable supply of pure, unadulterated honey has helped us stand out and stay in business.

Today, Beezimiz Honey Processors also supports **five students from Harare Polytechnic College** who are completing their industrial attachment with us as part of their Food Science studies. This partnership reflects our broader impact—supporting education, skills development, and innovation within the honey value chain.

Beyond the farmers, the business has positively affected the lives of our employees and even myself—as we are all able to earn a living from honey. Our customers, in turn, benefit by consuming high-quality, pure honey that supports better health and nutrition.

In 2023, I had the opportunity to join a tour

led by **Dr. Nyoka**, head of the *Feed the Future Zimbabwe – Fostering Agribusiness for Resilient Markets (FARM)* project. The tour focused on identifying ways to strengthen the honey value chain, and we visited several wards in Chimanimani, including the **Chaseyama Centre**.

This centre had been established to empower women through beekeeping, but unfortunately, the project had failed. The trained women were now selling honey on the roadside without access to the tools and support needed to sustain production. During the visit, I observed a common misconception—that hives must always be hung in trees. This method had inadvertently excluded many women, as it required climbing and made hive inspections and harvesting difficult.

In response, we introduced and designed **lockable beehive stands**—secure, accessible, and ground-based structures that allow



Staff exhibiting honey at a show in Harare.

women to actively participate in beekeeping without climbing. This small innovation has the potential to transform women's involvement in honey production, making it safer and more sustainable.

Reflections and Lessons from the Journey

Looking back, I've learned there's truly no substitute for hard work but with that came challenges like receiving poorly harvested honey. To address this, we began training our farmers on sustainable harvesting techniques like using bee smokers instead of open flames and avoiding overharvesting to prevent bee absconding.

Because honey is seasonal and requires upfront capital to purchase in bulk, I had to take a loan to start operations. At first, even the farmers were hesitant to trust us, but over time, our consistency in keeping promises helped build strong relationships.

One key lesson has been the importance of documenting every step this helps trace issues and improve systems. I've also realized that consistency is the only path to mastery. If I could do things differently, I would've separated business finances more clearly and invested in learning about entrepreneurship and financial management earlier on.

To aspiring entrepreneurs, I say: the journey is not easy. It demands full commitment and resilience. Find mentors or join networks where you can learn and build valuable connections. Most importantly, learn to sell—sharpening your sales and communication skills is vital.

Looking ahead, we hope to set up a honey processing centre in Chimanimani to bring processing closer to the source and support local farmers. We've also noticed a concerning trend—many young people have left rural areas in search of jobs. To ensure continuity, we're actively encouraging youth and women to take up beekeeping as a sustainable livelihood. This not only creates jobs but strengthens our communities.



The author explaining the benefits of eating honey to a customer at an exhibition

Domestica Ltd: Advancing Agroecological Entrepreneurship and Territorial Markets in Rwanda

By Deogratias Ndagijimana

Domestica, Rwanda

In Rwanda's rolling hills, where farming has shaped lives for generations, a new way of growing is taking root. It's not just about harvests and sales. It's about restoring the land, strengthening communities, and building a future where agriculture and entrepreneurship grow side by side. This is the story of **Domestica Ltd**, a pioneering agribusiness championing agroecology, innovation, and inclusive growth.

Planting the Seed: How it all Started

The idea for Domestica Ltd came from **Marie Grace Niwemuhoza**, an agribusiness professional with a sharp eye for opportunity and a deep respect for nature. She saw too many farmers struggling—soil depleted, markets out of reach, and livelihoods left vulnerable. She asked a bold question: *What if farming could work with nature instead of against it and what if it could be sustainable and still succeed commercially?*

Starting with a modest farm and big ideas, Marie Grace began experimenting raising goats and chickens on better diets, recycling animal waste into compost, and piloting hydroponic systems to grow fodder with minimal land use. But it was never just about what she could



grow. From the start, Domestica Ltd was envisioned as a shared platform for innovation, a model others could replicate, improve, and scale.

From Backyard to Backbone: Scaling Up with Purpose

What began as a home-grown solution quickly took on larger ambitions. As demand grew, so did the need for systems that could scale. Domestica Ltd invested in **climate-resilient technologies** that used fewer resources but delivered more resilient outputs. Hydroponic fodder became a cornerstone, reducing reliance on erratic weather and costly commercial feed. Organic waste was turned into a powerful soil enhancer, closing nutrient loops that had long been broken.

This wasn't just good farming. It was regenerative agriculture in practice healing the land while increasing yields.

By **implementing closed-loop systems**, Domestica Ltd ensured that every element of production contributed to the next. Animal waste became compost. Compost enriched soil. Crops and fodder fed animals. And so the cycle renewed itself. As systems improved, so did the livelihoods of those around the farm.

Today, Domestica Ltd is recognized regionally for its **high-quality goat meat, poultry, and**

organic fertilizers. But equally important is how these products are made with care for the environment, ethics in practice, and long-term community wellbeing at heart.

Beyond the Farm Gate: Building Market Connections

One of Domestica Ltd's greatest insights was realizing that **production alone doesn't change lives.** Market access is the difference between subsistence and sustainability. Early on, the company began cultivating direct relationships with buyers who valued transparency, ethics, and traceability urban markets, regional hotels, local restaurants.

This approach cut out exploitative middlemen and gave both producers and consumers better value. Over time, Domestica Ltd established itself as a **trusted brand** in Rwanda's premium agroecological market. It wasn't just about what they sold it was the story, the practice, the proof of concept.

They also began offering **training and consultancy services**, turning knowledge into another income stream while building a wide network of trust with smallholder farmers. These services solidified Domestica Ltd's reputation as not just a producer, but a **resource and advocate** for regenerative practices across the country.

Our story in numbers

Domestica Ltd was formally registered in December 2021 after six months of pilot operations, starting with \$25,000 in capital. In 2022, it secured a \$16,400 Green Grant from MINAGRI/UNDP to invest in hydroponic systems and farmer training. Support from the Circular Food System for Rwanda (CIRF), ACEN, WRI, and CPCIC/NIRDA provided technical and market development assistance.

These combined financial and technical inputs catalyzed rapid business growth. Domestica





scaled from 200 customers in 2022 to over 1,000 by 2024, with revenue increasing fivefold from \$50,000 to nearly \$250,000 in just two years. Now active in six districts, Domestica offers goat meat, poultry, organic fertilizers, and hydroponic fodder, and employs 20+ staff. With a strong market presence and proven impact, the company is a rising leader in climate-smart agriculture and circular economy solutions in Rwanda.

Our Roots, Our Reach: What We've Achieved Together

Domestica Ltd's journey has generated real, measurable impact across farming, employment, and environmental health.

- **Hydroponic fodder production** has dramatically improved feed security and livestock nutrition, particularly during dry seasons when conventional feeds become scarce and expensive.
- The company has created **numerous jobs** in rural areas not just for farmhands, but for technicians, trainers, maintenance workers, logistics staff, and agronomists. Each job supports a household, builds skills, and strengthens local economies.
- Environmental results are equally compelling. **Soil fertility has improved.** Methane emissions are down. And water use is more efficient, thanks to closed-loop

systems and hydroponic precision.

Domestica Ltd has also become a **learning hub**. Farmers from other districts visit to learn from the model. Workshops and demo sessions have reached **hundreds of households**, many of whom now practice composting, crop rotation, and organic pest management in their own fields.

Hard Earth, Hard Lessons: Overcoming Challenges

No success story is without its struggles. For Domestica Ltd, the early challenges were steep.

- **Startup costs were high**, especially for hydroponic infrastructure and waste processing systems. Conventional finance options were inaccessible. In response, Domestica Ltd pursued **grants, interest-free loans, and aligned impact investors** who shared the company's commitment to food security and ecological farming.
- **Market competition** also posed a threat cheaper conventional products flooded local markets. Domestica Ltd couldn't match them on price, so it doubled down on **value addition and quality**: vacuum-sealed goat meat, branded fertilizer in eco-packaging, clear messaging on health and environmental benefits.
- Navigating **policy uncertainty** was another hurdle. Agroecology still competes for recognition against heavily subsidized industrial farming in some circles. Domestica Ltd responded by engaging local governments, co-creating farmer cooperatives, and participating



in advocacy campaigns that call for stronger support for **territorial markets** and **climate-resilient agriculture**.

What We've Learned on the Way

Several lessons have defined the company's evolution:

- **Sustainability and entrepreneurship can work together**, but only if you're willing to adapt, experiment, and stay deeply engaged with the people you serve. It takes a mindset that embraces learning and understands that building a viable business doesn't mean compromising on ecological values. The two can reinforce each other when innovation is grounded in local realities and long-term thinking.
- **Agroecology is not just a method it's a philosophy.** It requires patience, systems thinking, and a commitment to practices that may take time to show results. It challenges entrepreneurs to look beyond immediate gains and to focus on building systems that are regenerative, inclusive, and resilient. This philosophy shapes not only how food is grown, but how decisions are made.
- **Relationships are the real currency.** Whether with farmers, buyers, funders, or policy-makers, trust and transparency drive everything. Building and maintaining strong relationships ensures that growth is supported by collaboration, shared values, and mutual respect. It's these connections that sustain both the business and the broader agroecological movement.

Domestica Ltd has shown that an agroecological business doesn't have to be niche. With the right model,



it can be scalable, replicable, and financially viable.

What Comes Next: Vision and Expansion

Looking forward, Domestica Ltd is gearing up for its **next stage of growth**.

- Plans are underway to **expand hydroponic fodder production**, allowing the company to support a wider network of livestock farmers and further improve food security in Rwanda's more vulnerable zones.
- The company is actively developing **export channels**, especially for its organic fertilizer and value-added meat products, which are drawing attention in East Africa's premium food markets.
- A **stronger digital presence** is also on the agenda, with new platforms

planned for e-commerce, farmer training modules, and storytelling to help consumers make informed choices.

- Domestica Ltd also intends to **advocate more forcefully** for policies that promote agroecological farming and support territorial food systems. By participating in farmer alliances and advisory councils, it aims to shape a future where nature-friendly farming is rewarded, not marginalized.

A Growing Future: Beyond Rwanda

Domestica Ltd is not just a farm or a company it's a **proof point**. It proves that regenerative farming can feed growing populations, create jobs, fight climate change, and keep money circulating in local economies.

The business model is grounded in **circularity, ethics, and local empowerment**. Its success has inspired others in the region to follow suit. And while the company remains proudly Rwandan, its lessons and its ambitions reach far beyond national borders.

Whether it's hosting farmer field days, mentoring agroecological startups, or contributing to Africa-wide dialogues on sustainable agriculture, Domestica Ltd is helping to shape a **continental movement**.

Conclusion: Leading by Doing

At its heart, Domestica Ltd is about **farming with purpose** feeding people, protecting the planet, and restoring dignity to rural livelihoods. What began as one woman's dream has grown into a national model for climate-smart, community-rooted agriculture.

In a world of volatile food prices, degraded soils, and growing inequality, Domestica Ltd offers something rare: a working, profitable, and inclusive alternative. One that doesn't just sustain—but **regenerates**.

The company isn't done yet. If anything, it's just getting started. Because the future of agriculture isn't industrial monocultures—it's thousands of enterprises like this one. Grounded. Visionary. And built for the long haul.





Organic, Organised, and Owned *by the People*

By Evalyne Orishaba

“Let’s Change My Village” Territorial Organic Market, Uganda

My name is Orishaba Evalyne, and I am the co-founder of Let’s Change My Village (LCM), a community-based organization rooted in Rwabatungu village, Noozi Parish, Rwamucucu Subcounty, Rukiga District, in Southwestern Uganda. I am 42 years old, married, and a mother of four children.

Before I got married in 2009, I worked as a Secondary School teacher, a profession I loved but only pursued for three years. My journey into farming began after I married my husband, who had studied organic agriculture and later agroecology. His knowledge sparked a deeper interest in me. Though I had grown up farming with my parents, learning through observation and experience, I now began to understand farming as a science and a movement for sustainability.

Planting a Vision: The Birth of LCM

In 2019, we officially started our farm and registered Let’s Change My Village as a Community-Based Organization with a vision:

“To create highly productive, agroecological, and prosperous villages.”

But very soon, we ran into a major obstacle, *marketing*. Farmers were growing food, but they struggled to sell it. Middlemen were taking a large share of profits, conventional markets were not friendly to organic produce, and transport costs were high. These barriers kept our vision from becoming reality.

The Market That Changed Everything

That's when the idea of starting our own **Territorial Organic Market** emerged, a dedicated space within our own community where farmers could bring their organic produce directly to consumers. As drivers of this innovation, we invested about 8,000,000 Ugandan Shillings (USD2,000) to raise the shade, construct stalls, store and toilet. This was not just about selling food. It was about empowerment, creating a system that worked for us, not against us.

By establishing this market, we removed several key barriers:

- By creating a dedicated space for organic produce, we eliminated the risk of contamination from conventional goods, giving consumers confidence in the integrity and purity of what they were buying.
- Locating the market within the community significantly reduced transport burdens, enabling farmers to deliver their produce with ease and lower costs, which in turn encouraged more frequent and consistent participation.
- By removing middlemen from the supply chain, we ensured that farmers received a greater and fairer share of the income from their hard work, strengthening their economic position and motivation to continue farming organically.

Once we opened, the market brought immediate excitement. Farmers and consumers alike were overjoyed to have fresh, organic food available every day, right in their community. The farmers' incomes increased because they were able to sell their produce at 10%-20% higher price at the market. The stalls now display a beautiful variety of produce. These included leafy greens like stinging nettle, amaranthus, black nightshade, and cabbages, fruits like tree tomatoes, passion fruit, pineapples, staples like Irish potatoes, indigenous maize, and honey.

Even non-food products like improved biomass stoves and charcoal briquettes, which are essential for sustainable energy, could be found there.

Most of our buyers are local, from Rwabatanganu and neighbouring villages, but we've also begun supplying directly to customers in urban centres like Kampala, using social media platforms for marketing and communication.



The current total monthly sales at the market is about 3,000,000 Ugandan Shillings (USD800). This includes direct sales and social medial referrals sold online.

Bumper Harvests, Bitter Losses

However, our journey hasn't been without challenges. The biggest issue we face is during harvest peaks. When households have plenty of their own food, market demand drops, and unsold produce spoils. This leads to losses just when supply is at its highest. We know the solution lies in tapping into external markets, but transporting produce to urban areas is difficult without economies of scale.

To solve this, I'm now mobilizing more farmers to grow similar crops in bulk. The goal is to turn our market into a collection centre, a hub that aggregates enough produce to justify the transport cost to towns and cities. We're also working to expand our value addition facility, to process surplus crops during bumper harvests. This includes:

- Solar-drying vegetables,
- Juice-making, and
- Milling indigenous maize into flour.

These efforts help extend shelf life, reduce losses, and provide alternative products for the market during lean seasons. With this value addition, we estimate accelerated incomes from our produce to grow from the current 20% to 50%.



Our market vision

Integrity Sells: Building Trust Through Agroecology

One of our biggest achievements has been raising awareness about organic farming. In July 2022, we partnered with PELUM Uganda to launch a campaign that trained five farmer groups, but only those committed to organic practices. This built trust. Consumers began recognizing the market not just as a place to buy food, but as a space of integrity. They knew the farmers personally and trusted how the food was grown.

Walking the Talk: A Farmer First, Always

We've also built relationships beyond Rukiga, supplying honey, maize, and even local chicken to new markets. All this has been possible because I'm not just a coordinator, I'm a farmer myself. I understand the rhythm of the seasons, the stress of crop failure, and the joy of a successful harvest. This hands-on experience has helped me raise market standards, ensuring high-quality produce, creating a colourful and attractive market layout, and offering consistent customer service.

Still, we face ongoing obstacles. Consumer turnout is inconsistent. During harvest peaks, fewer people buy because they have food at home. During low seasons, turnout improves, but sometimes the supply isn't enough. Perishables go bad when turnover is low, causing losses.

To address this, I've focused on increasing off-season yields, helping to keep the market stocked even when others cannot supply. This creates a more reliable income stream and keeps our customers coming back.

Lessons in Soil, Patience, and Persistence

One lesson I've learned is that building a market takes time. Customers need to develop habits.



1st launch of market

Entrepreneurs must be patient and willing to absorb some losses before profits come. Mistakes are inevitable, but each one teaches something new.

If I had the chance to do something differently, I would have started by registering all our suppliers. That way, we could scale faster, track production better, and coordinate supply to meet larger urban demand.

Advice for Aspiring Agro-Entrepreneurs

To those wishing to move from subsistence farming to entrepreneurship, here's my advice:

Understand your consumer. Not every crop you grow will sell in your village, especially when everyone is growing the same thing. You need to identify gaps, grow something unique, and establish collection points for distribution. And don't forget value addition, when fresh food doesn't sell, processed goods can.

Don't wait for perfect conditions. Start with what you have, where you are. The land will teach you. The people will teach you. And together, we can build the kind of villages, and the kind of world, we want to live in.

The Road Ahead: From Rwamucucu to the Region

My goals for the future are clear:

- We aim to build strong, active market linkages with central and regional hubs, ensuring our farmers have consistent access to larger, more profitable consumer bases beyond the village.
- A key priority is to obtain formal organic certification for our products, enhancing credibility and opening up new, premium markets that value traceability and sustainability.
- We are investing in improving our value addition processes such as drying, milling, and packaging in order to extend shelf life, strengthen our brand identity, and make transportation and storage more efficient.
- We plan to harness the power of digital platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X to market our produce, share our journey, and connect directly with both urban consumers and potential partners.
- By developing agrotourism experiences and participating in exhibitions, we hope to grow our visibility, attract new supporters, and showcase the innovations happening within our rural community.
- Finally, we are committed to engaging more young people, recognizing their digital skills, creativity, and passion for agroecology as critical assets in building a future-facing and resilient food system.

To ensure long-term sustainability, both for our business and the environment, we're focusing on high quality, excellent customer care, and building cooperative partnerships with other agroecological entrepreneurs. This will allow us to diversify what we offer, maintain steady supply, and keep consumers excited about coming to our market.

This is more than a market. It is a movement.

What started as a response to local farming challenges has become a vibrant, living example of how rural communities can take power back into their own hands, growing food, creating jobs, and building futures rooted in sustainability.

Real change doesn't come from big institutions alone, it starts with individuals who dare to see possibility where others see limitation. It grows when women lead with courage, when farmers are treated as entrepreneurs, and when communities unite around shared purpose.

Let's Change My Village shows us that even the smallest village can become a centre of innovation, resilience, and hope. And that when we build markets that reflect our values, we don't just sell food, we nourish futures.



Showcasing our products in a local exhibition.





The Journey of Sulemana: An Agroecological Vision in Walewale

By Freda Aagyereyir Pigru

CEAL, Ghana

Sulemana Issifu Jobila is the coordinator of the Centre for Ecological Agriculture and Livelihoods (CEAL), a dynamic social enterprise based in Walewale, in the northeastern region of Ghana. What began as a small agroecological farm has now expanded into a large-scale operation integrating livestock, food crops, trees, fish, cereal crops, vegetables, and legumes. Sulemana's work reflects his deep-rooted passion for sustainable farming, and his enterprise stands as a model for eco-conscious agriculture in his community and beyond.

Roots in Walewale: A Farming Legacy

Born in Obuasi to farming parents, Sulemana's childhood was shaped by the rhythms of agricultural life. His father worked in the Obuasi

mines, yet always found time to farm. His mother and siblings worked alongside him in the fields, nurturing the land while his father was away. After moving back to Walewale, Sulemana completed his basic and senior high school education there. Growing up in Walewale, a community known for its strong agricultural traditions, Sulemana learned the art of farming from his parents and the people around him.

His early years were marked by a profound connection to the land, and he saw first-hand how farming fostered a sense of unity and cultural identity in his community. Yet, as Sulemana grew older, he noticed dramatic shifts in the local farming environment. Walewale's once-thriving vegetation and rich soils began to degrade due to the widespread use of chemical fertilizers, bush burning, monocropping, and land being lost to industrial and corporate development. The agricultural landscape was changing, and with it, the prospects of local farmers.

The Shift to Agroecology: A Vision for Change

Sulemana's commitment to sustainable farming deepened when he joined the Zagsilari Ecological Project in 2008 as a project officer. Founded in 1993 by a visionary local farmer, Zagsilari focused on promoting agroecology by minimizing external inputs and encouraging the use of locally generated resources. For Sulemana, this approach was a game-changer. It not only aligned with his long-held belief in sustainable agriculture but also provided practical, hands-on training in innovative farming techniques.

The project's philosophy, "Think, Practice, Learn, and Teach," emphasized a feedback loop where farmers tested techniques on their own land, learned through experience, and shared their findings with others. This methodology deeply inspired Sulemana, sparking a vision of farming that could restore the land, improve food security, and offer a viable alternative to the youth who were abandoning rural life for urban centres in search of white-collar jobs.

Building a Model Farm: From Dream to Reality

In 2017, Sulemana took the bold step of starting his own agroecological enterprise. With the mentorship of his Zagsilari colleague, Mr. David Abongo, he began transitioning his farm to a purely agroecological model. His first major breakthrough came when the chief of a nearby village donated an acre of land to him. He immediately put his principles into action, using compost made from local organic matter, integrating livestock, and introducing water-efficient irrigation systems to ensure year-round production.

Sulemana's approach was based on reducing costs while increasing yields through innovation. He utilized animal waste, farm residues, and biomass to produce compost and integrated guinea fowls into the farm for additional manure. The guinea fowls were also used to control weeds

before planting, they are usually introduced unto the field after the first few rains to pick on the weeds whilst dropping their droppings on the land, therefore playing two roles of clearing the land off the weeds and fertilising the land as well. He also experimented with crop rotation and intercropping, introducing legumes like soybeans and pigeon peas to fix nitrogen in the soil and enhance biodiversity. Over time, he expanded his farm to 10 acres, growing maize, sorghum, vegetables, and cultivating a fishpond for catfish production.

A Growing Market: From Door-to-Door to Social Media

In the beginning, Sulemana's marketing strategy was simple: go door-to-door. Many people in Walewale were unfamiliar with agroecology, and there was resistance to new ideas, especially regarding healthy, eco-friendly food due to high cost. Sulemana's personal outreach, speaking with consumers one-on-one, became a vital part of his strategy. He educated the community about the benefits of agroecologically grown food and emphasized the need for premium-priced, healthy produce.

He also expanded his reach through restaurants, radio stations, and food fairs, where he spread his message of healthy living and the advantages of traditional farming systems. His innovative "mother-to-mother outreach" helped promote family nutrition by encouraging women to diversify their diets. Additionally, Sulemana leveraged social media to create an online market, widening his reach and improving his production and packaging over time.

Networking and referrals played a significant role in growing his customer base, and he developed strong relationships with market aggregators, local women known as "market queens" who facilitate the sale and transportation of produce.



These connections, combined with the support of local institutions, helped Sulemana build a sustainable market for his agroecological products.

Achievements and Expansion: A Model of Agroecology

Sulemana's vision for his model agroecological farm and enterprise motivated him to invest financially in it beyond the subsistence and regular farming investments that other farmers often undertake each farming season.

By the time he completed a farming cycle, his total financial investment was about 25,000 Ghana Cedis (approx. USD 1,920). This was sourced from his savings as well as bank loans. And with a lot of hard work and social capital development, Sulemana attracted donors who shared in his vision and took an interest in supporting his farmer-to-farmer, mother-to-mother, and youth-to-youth outreach innovations like the Ghana Organic Agriculture Project (GOAP).

Today, both his total investment, personal and donor-funded, stands at about 250,000 Ghana Cedis (approx. USD 19,230), and despite the continuous plough back of resources to extend and grow his farm, he's able to save about 4,000 Ghana Cedis (approx. USD 310) after each cycle of production. With an expression of pride, Sulemana's major financial achievement so

far was in 2023 when he realised about 42,000 Ghana Cedis (approx. USD 3,230) from his enterprise activities.

CEAL's success has been evident in its expanding farm, increasing awareness of agroecology in Walewale, and the establishment of a growing network of trained farmers. CEAL's partnership with Groundswell International and membership in the Groundswell West Africa network have been key milestones. Additionally, CEAL's farmer movement, which includes nearly 10,000 trained farmers, has spread agroecological practices across the region, leading to a reduction in chemical inputs and a revival of soil health.

CEAL's focus on social justice and fairness has also driven its success. By offering training and mentorship programs, especially for youth and women, CEAL has fostered a spirit of shared growth and empowerment. Peer-to-peer mentorship, mother-to-mother nutrition training, and youth entrepreneurial initiatives have all contributed to creating a community of farmers who not only produce but also thrive together.

Overcoming Challenges: Innovation and Resilience

Sulemana's journey has not been without its challenges. Labor shortages and high costs have been constant hurdles, particularly as the farm expanded. The lack of advanced technology for agroecological tasks, like automated weeding



machines, has made some processes labour-intensive. Yet, Sulemana has used innovation to overcome these obstacles, finding ways to recycle materials and reduce production costs while maintaining high-quality output.

Competition from conventional agriculture has also been a challenge, but Sulemana's advocacy, networking, and commitment to producing healthy food have ensured that the demand for his products continues to grow.

A Bright Future: Continuing the Journey of Agroecology

Today, Sulemana's journey is a testament to the power of perseverance, innovation, and community. From a young boy learning from his parents in the fields of Walewale to becoming a leader in agroecological farming, Sulemana's story shows how one person can spark a transformation in their community. Through CEAL, he has not only built a thriving farm but also nurtured a network of farmers committed to sustainable practices, environmental stewardship, and social justice.

As he continues to expand his work and inspire others, Sulemana remains hopeful about the future of agroecology in Walewale and beyond. His story is a powerful reminder

that with determination, innovation, and a deep connection to the land, we can create sustainable livelihoods, restore ecosystems, and build a more resilient future for generations to come. To others who may want to venture into agroecology, Sulemana advises to start small and strives for gradual expansion. He believes this minimises risks and helps to manage any possible disasters that may arise.

A Vision Realised: The Power of Agroecology

Sulemana's journey demonstrates that agroecology is not just about farming, it is about community, sustainability, and the future. By choosing to farm in harmony with nature, he has built a legacy that will inspire future generations of farmers. His dedication to improving the lives of others, restoring the environment, and creating a profitable, sustainable farming model offers a beacon of hope for rural communities in Ghana and across Africa.

Through his work, Sulemana shows that when we embrace innovation, respect tradition, and work together, we can transform our world, one farm at a time.



From Rural Roots to Agroecology Entrepreneurship

By Getrude Chambati

MajesticAfrica, Zimbabwe

I am Getrude Chambati, a 30-year-old woman from Harare, Zimbabwe. I hold a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Management, and I am a proud wife to Mauricious Jochore and mother to our two beautiful children, Denzel and Dawn. My family has been my constant source of support and inspiration, walking with me every step of the way, lifting me through every challenge.

Growing up in rural Southern Africa, I was immersed in the rich cultural heritage of my community. My grandparents, both small-scale farmers, played a vital role in shaping my early life. I spent countless hours on their farm, watching how they lovingly cared for the land and learning traditional practices passed down through generations. Those days left a deep imprint on me.

What struck me most was the quiet strength and resilience of my grandparents. Though they lived in a resource-limited environment, they remained strong and healthy into old age. I believe this was thanks to the traditional foods they ate, nutrient-dense, unprocessed, and grown with care using indigenous knowledge systems.

The Spark of Inspiration: A Vision for Agroecology

As I grew older, I became aware of a troubling reality: many of the modern agricultural systems introduced into our communities were not only unsustainable, but they were also eroding our cultural identity. That realisation lit a fire in me. I felt a deep calling to become an agroecology entrepreneur, to preserve indigenous knowledge, promote sustainable farming, and reintroduce healthy, traditional foods into our lives.



Today, as the founder of **MajesticAfrica**, I'm proud to be part of a growing movement that is reshaping how we grow, process, and consume food. My work is rooted in the wisdom of my grandparents, their deep connection to the land, their respect for community, and their trust in traditional ways.

At MajesticAfrica, we process small grains and produce health-focused, natural products. Our range includes brown rice, finger millet, pearl millet, sorghum, dried local vegetables, herbal teas, and indigenous fruits.

Three core motivations led me to start this journey. Firstly, I wanted to empower myself and gain financial independence. I had seen how our elders lived longer, healthier lives, with fewer non-communicable diseases. Their diets, rich in unprocessed, traditional foods, played a vital role. I saw an opportunity: to build a business that not only sustained me but also helped others reclaim their health and reconnect with ancestral food systems.

Secondly, our ancestors ate a wide variety of crops, millet, sorghum, cowpeas, rich in protein, fibre, and essential nutrients. Their meals featured vibrant fruits and vegetables: leafy greens, berries, and roots. Their diets were free from refined sugars and harmful fats. They rarely got sick, and when they did, they relied on traditional medicine to cure their ailments. Their lives were deeply intertwined with nature, grounded in reverence for the earth and one another. They had a strong immune system, and their bodies were adapted to the local environment. This link between health and traditional food became my true calling. That's why I began working with local, nutrient-dense ingredients like resurrection tea, blackjack, baobab, and tamarind.

Thirdly, I was driven by a deep desire to uplift rural women and youth. Having grown up in rural Zimbabwe, I understand the challenges: limited access to education, economic hardship, and the growing threat of climate change. In Zimbabwe, non-communicable diseases account for 39% of all deaths (WHO, 2019), while substance abuse is rising, with some



Local teas and indigenous fruits sourcing.

children starting as early as age 10 (UNICEF). I knew I had to act.

At MajesticAfrica, we now employ young people part-time, offering them meaningful work and hands-on skills training, giving them hope and alternatives to dangerous paths.

By sourcing small grains directly from smallholder farmers, we also create steady market opportunities, helping them shift from subsistence to sustainability.

Growing a Business Deeply-rooted in Purpose

I often thought about the smallholder farmers growing finger millet, pearl millet, and sorghum, overlooked and struggling despite cultivating some of the most nutritious and climate-resilient crops. The problem is they lacked market access, which discouraged them from viewing agriculture as a viable business. What if I could help change that?

To do so, I needed knowledge. I enrolled in a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Management so I could understand the field deeply and support others more effectively.

Along the way, I noticed a serious gap in the market: most small grain suppliers failed to deliver high-quality products. Consumers were disappointed, especially by the presence of grit, long associated with small grains due to processing challenges. I saw an opportunity. I committed to producing grit-free, high-quality milled grains, nutritious, well-packaged, and tailored to health-conscious consumers.

Initially, my dream was to open a traditional restaurant. But with limited capital, I had to start where I was. When I shared my vision, my partner reminded me, "Business needs capital." But I couldn't wait. A message I had once heard



Meeting and have agroecology with small grains farmers

stayed with me: “Just start, God will do the rest.” So I did.

I started my entrepreneurship journey with just USD 4 in April 2020. I bought one bucket of pearl millet from a farmer in Mbare Musika, Harare, and began processing and packing it for resale. That first year, I earned very little 2020 was mostly about learning and trying to penetrate the market. It was also the year I began supporting myself through tertiary education.

In 2021, my annual revenue grew from just \$300 to \$1,500 USD. In 2022, I took out a loan of \$1,000 to buy finger millet in the off-season, ensuring I had stock throughout the year. This raised my annual income to \$2,400 in 2023. Then, thanks to improved visibility and business growth, my annual turnover rose to \$12,750 in 2024.

The most meaningful investment I made wasn't machinery or inventory—it was in my education. From 2020 to 2024, I consistently paid tuition fees of about \$500 per semester, along with expenses for a laptop and learning materials, all through my business. Now that I've completed my studies, I'm saving to acquire business property and machines to take the next leap.

I began by conducting market research and identifying my audience: health-conscious consumers, environmentally aware individuals, and those passionate about supporting local, sustainable agriculture. I used social media

to market my small beginnings, and people noticed.

From Learner to Leader

Organisations like CAMFED Association, PELUM Zimbabwe, and AFSA recognised my work. Through them, I received mentorship, training, and opportunities to showcase my business. CAMFED supported my participation in national and international events like the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair. PELUM Zimbabwe selected me as a mentee under the African Women Leaders in Agroecology program, and AFSA invited me to the National Good Food and Seed Festival.

Attending these food festivals and agroecology conferences opened a whole new world for me. I met fellow agroecology farmers, entrepreneurs, investors, and consumers, and these connections became invaluable.

Through exchanging knowledge with different people and organisations, I deepened my understanding of indigenous knowledge systems, improved my knowledge of my own products, including their health benefits, and refined my marketing strategies.

After each conference, I would update my social



Exhibiting 2nd Eastern African Agroecology conference.

media platforms, especially LinkedIn, Facebook and intun this helped me strengthen my professional profile and led to new opportunities: agroecology programs, business mentorships, and entrepreneurship support. Gradually, I became known, not just in my community, but also across Zimbabwe, as a voice for agroecology and youth entrepreneurship. Each step forward helped me grow, not just in knowledge, but in confidence.

With support from AFSA, I attended the African Youth Food Forum and the World Without Hunger Conference. These events were milestones. They affirmed my purpose, increased my visibility, and reminded me that my work matters. After each event, I shared my reflections online. People began to follow my journey, reach out, and engage. I could feel the impact I was having.

As my customer base grew, I began serving not only individuals but also corporate clients like hotels. I partnered with restaurants and health food stores. I invested in better packaging and branding, which expanded my reach, especially among Zimbabweans in the diaspora like Canada, America, United Kingdom South Africa. When they miss the taste of home, they trust my brand to deliver both quality and care.

Compliance was also key. Many businesses miss out on corporate clients because they're not registered. Thanks to capacity-building workshops, I learned how to register with the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA). Once I understood the process, it was simple. Before that, it was only lack of knowledge that held me back.

Today, I've developed a successful business model rooted in sustainability, social responsibility, and economic viability. I even managed to fund my tertiary education through the profits of my business, something that made me a role model for youth and young women in my community.

From Passion to Purpose

My work is not just about business, it's about building a better future. I promote sustainable agriculture by working with smallholder farmers to adopt climate-smart and environmentally friendly practices. I encourage home gardening and healthy eating at the household level. Even in my own family, we've embraced this lifestyle: no more overly refined foods, only wholesome, nourishing meals rooted in our heritage.

Empowerment is at the heart of what I do. I hire women and youth on a part-time basis during processing and sales, creating income-generating opportunities and practical training for those who need it most.

I am proud to be part of a broader movement of African Women Leaders in Agroecology, shaping a food system that honours our roots, empowers our people, and nurtures the earth.

From Struggling to Become a Role-model

There were moments I felt overwhelmed. I sometimes lost touch with my prayer life and my social connections. But something inside me kept whispering: "Keep going, girl. It is well." I drew strength from within, pushed forward,

and slowly became stronger and more focused.

I was fighting three battles at once, but what's most remarkable is that I didn't lose any of them. I didn't drop out of school. I didn't abandon my business. I didn't lose my family. I succeeded in all three. Today, I stand proudly as an educated entrepreneur with a thriving business and a happy family.

Without even realising it, I've become a role model, inspiring young girls and women, both locally and globally. That, for me, is the greatest reward. On 18th March, my birthday, I received so many messages of appreciation, people telling me how inspired they are by my resilience and my journey. And I felt something deep inside: a sense of joy, fulfilment, and peace. Because when something I do has a positive impact on even one person's life, that, to me, is success.

My business helped to find myself and identify who I am today. I discovered and developed my career. I am now a leader because of business. The mentorship I got did not only helped me in business, but it helped me in developing leadership skills.

My opportunities are as follows, growing demand for sustainable products, job creation and rural development, partnerships and collaborations and access to new markets. My challenges are limited access to finance, competition from larger companies, regulatory frameworks, climate change and weather variability and maintaining quality and consistency.

I developed a strong business plan that outlined my goals, strategies, and financial projections. This helped me secure funding and investments from like-minded organizations. I remember receiving a loan from CAMFED when I wanted to stock up on products to sell during the off-season when prices are higher. This helped me

overcome challenges brought on by climate change and drought.

I also built relationships with fellow agroecology entrepreneurs, farmers, and organizations such as PELUM, Fambidzanai Permaculture Centre, the CAMFED Association, and Women Excel. These networks provided valuable advice, resources, and opportunities. I diversified my product line to reduce dependency on a single product and built a strong online presence, especially on LinkedIn and Facebook. This helped me reach new customers, promote my products, attract investors, and spread awareness about the value of agroecology.

What helped me the most was a deep sense of empowerment and my love for traditional foods. These two forces gave me the inner push I needed. I was tired of being broke, uneducated, and limited to being "just a housewife." Something inside me said, *No, this is not your space.* So I pursued my idea. At first, I was doing business to fund my education, but soon I realized, it's more than that. It's a real business with real impact.

... shaping a food system that honours our roots, empowers our people, and nurtures the earth.

Overcoming Market Challenges

The biggest obstacle I faced was market perception. Small grains are often associated with grit, and many suppliers couldn't meet quality standards. Customers were disappointed, and it was hard to convince them that *my* products were different. What helped me was a focus on quality, both in service and in products. I made sure my grains were grit-free and listened closely to customer feedback. This helped grow my brand. Today, many customers come through referrals, and I even supply to corporate clients like hotels.

Another challenge was visibility. My ideal clients lived in the suburbs, while I was based in a high-



density area. As a startup with limited resources, reaching them was tough. But I learned that *if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together*. So I joined networks like PELUM Zimbabwe, Women Excel, the CAMFED Association, and African Women Leaders in Agroecology. These connections gave me mentorship and access to free exhibitions.

Working capital was also a challenge. My business needed machines, industrial space, and funds to stock products during harvest time. To manage this, I built trust-based relationships with suppliers and customers. Sometimes, I would get produce and pay after making sales. I also invested in networks for marketing and received social capital loans from CAMFED.

What Made the Difference?

Offering grit-free products helped me shift the narrative around small grains. But more than that, collaboration and strong networks made all the difference. My support system includes smallholder farmers, NGOs like CAMFED and PELUM Zimbabwe, AFSA, and my loyal customers, who feel more like family. Building solid relationships with all these partners has been key to my growth.

If I could go back, I would ensure I had more resources in place from the beginning and invest in eco-friendly packaging.

My advice to aspiring entrepreneurs is this: business requires love and passion for what you do. It should be sustainable and rooted in hard work and consistency. Most importantly, cultivate a culture of collaboration and build networks. You cannot grow alone; you are not

an island.

As an agroecology entrepreneur, I'm passionate about promoting sustainable agriculture and preserving indigenous knowledge systems. *MajesticAfrica* is committed to supporting small-scale farmers, protecting biodiversity, and providing healthy, nutritious food to local communities.

One of the initiatives I'm most proud of is our farmer training program. I work closely with local farmers, providing training, resources, and support to adopt agroecological practices such as soil conservation, composting, and integrated pest management. Through this program, we've seen significant improvements in crop yields, soil health, and biodiversity.

When I started, I had passion, but I was only selling the product. I wasn't truly living it. Now that I understand the value of these traditional foods, I've become my own customer. I'm not just teaching others, I'm walking the journey with them.

Looking Ahead

My dream is to make *MajesticAfrica* a leading agroecology brand by increasing market share and opening a traditional food restaurant. I want to invest in machinery and an industrial workspace, get certified by SAZ, build a website, and empower women and marginalized communities. I want to create a positive environmental impact. My motto is: *Generate wealth in a sustainable way for future generations.*



From the Land to Autonomy: My Commitment to Sustainable Agriculture in Madagascar

By Helisoa Mampionona Andrianarimalala

IloRaitra Apiculteur, Madagascar

My name is Helisoa Mampionona Andrianarimalala, and I'm a young Malagasy woman driven by a dual passion: agroecology and rural entrepreneurship. I have travelled a bold journey, from full-time mother to an active advocate for the agricultural transformation of Madagascar. Because of my growing awareness of the challenges faced by our farmers, I have chosen to dedicate myself to agriculture that respects nature, ecosystems, and future generations.

For some time now, I have been working alongside rural communities to promote agroecological practices tailored to our land. My commitment goes beyond raising awareness; I want to co-create sustainable solutions with farmers, valuing their knowledge while integrating innovations that preserve our soils and biodiversity. This is what I do. By offering them practical tools and viable economic perspectives, I aim to restore hope to those who nourish our country.

Through rural entrepreneurship, I see a unique opportunity to create lasting impact. Encouraging farmers to become autonomous, strengthening local circuits, and promoting high-quality local production are goals that motivate me every day. Each action taken is a stone laid in the foundation of a future where Malagasy agriculture is no longer synonymous with precariousness, but with prosperity and pride.



An Awareness Born from the Ground

I grew up in a village where agriculture shaped daily life. As a child, I admired the farmers, these men and women who worked the land to feed our people. But as I grew older, I noticed a growing problem: fertile lands were becoming exhausted, yields were dropping, and the reliance on chemical fertilisers was becoming an unbearable financial burden for farmers, further exhausting the soil and building a terrible dependency. This reality shook me. How did our ancestors manage to farm without destroying the land, while we, with all our “modern progress,” were depleting it?

One day, an elderly farmer from my village confided in me: “In the past, the land fed us generously. Today, it slips away from us.” These words resonated with me as a call to action. It was time to rethink our way of farming, to return to practices that respect nature while ensuring farmers’ prosperity.

Concrete Initiatives for Sustainable Change

Driven by this belief, I launched several initiatives to promote agroecology. After attending the “Youth Summit on Agroecology and the Food System” in October 2024, I developed the H.AMPI.TA initiative (Ho AMPIngan’ny Tantsaha, which means “Support for Farmers”). This program provides training, follow-up, and support that teaches farmers how to cultivate without chemicals, improve soil fertility, and diversify their crops. These sessions are not just theoretical lessons; they are based on practical experiences and exchanges between farmers and agroecology specialists, grounding these new methods in the reality of the field.

I also co-founded OP TAFa (TAFa, Tantsaha Antoky ny Fampiovarana an’Avaradrano, meaning “to succeed”), a farmer’s organisation that supports producers in their transition to agroecology. By providing locally adapted organic seeds and offering training on various relevant topics, we have helped many families improve their food and economic autonomy.

In 2023, I founded IloRaitra Apiculteur, a small business that integrates modern beekeeping with agriculture to enhance pollination and offer farmers an additional source of income. The impact was immediate: not only did yields increase, but farmers were also able to sell high-quality natural honey.

Throughout these initiatives, we have been self-financing. So far, no large institution has provided us with financial support. All the projects we launch are funded with our

own means, our personal savings. When we started IloRaitra Apiculteur, we used a personal investment 1 million ariary (around USD 224 at the time) to purchase some modern beehives and basic equipment. In our first year, we sold around 360Kg of honey locally at 25,000 ariary per kilo, generating approximately 9 million ariary in sales.

Encouraged by this, we gradually expanded to sale all types of beekeeping equipment and make objectives to sale a minimum of 500 Kg of honey annually. This brought in around 15 million ariary in revenue by late 2024, a portion of which we reinvested to improve processing and packaging. Our monthly net income now averages 500,000 to 700,000 ariary.

Due to the quality of our work, we secured a contract with the FAO in 2024 to manufacture and distribute beehives, which brought in an additional 4 million ariary in income and allowed us to employ and train three local youth.



We are also preparing to begin honey exportation, which could double our revenues in the coming year. These figures are more than numbers they reflect real transformation in our livelihoods, our community's resilience, and the economic viability of agroecological entrepreneurship.

To raise funds, we appeal to creativity. We organize solidarity sales, offer agroecology or social communication training, and, most importantly, rely on the strength of our local network. For expansion, we provide free training with affordable training materials for sale. When we have an urgent project, we mobilize the community, explain our approach, and seek even minimal support. Every little bit helps us make a huge difference.

In parallel, we are gradually developing a range of products and services related to our activities:

- Local honey from our pilot apiary, available in limited quantities but of high quality.
- Training on agroecology and agricultural entrepreneurship for young people, farmers, and associations.
- Farmer seeds that we reproduce ourselves.
- Support for agricultural and community projects, as our expertise is a resource we want to share.



In terms of crop production, we mainly plant crops that respect the seasons and soils of our region. These include:

- Vegetable crops: tomatoes, leafy greens, carrots, onions, beans, etc.
- Cover crops like mucuna (velvet bean) to enrich the soil and combat erosion.
- And of course, bee-friendly plants for our bees.

Our project is still young, but it is alive. Every day, it grows with our hands, our faith, and most importantly, the collective momentum of all those who believe in a just and sovereign agricultural future.

Challenges on the Path to Sustainable Agriculture

Moving from conventional farming to agroecological production, whether on a small or large scale, has not been without obstacles. The early days were marked by many doubts and resistance. Farmers were sceptical about the new practices and feared losing their only source of income.

During our first campaign and season of cultivation without chemical fertilizers, yields dropped. It was a critical moment. Some farmers were ready to give up, convinced that these new methods would never work. It took a lot of patience, pedagogy, and especially concrete demonstrations to prove to them that although the transition took time it would prove to be beneficial in the long run.

We also had to face the unpredictability of the climate. Madagascar is a country prone to cyclones and droughts, which complicates the work of farmers. To overcome these challenges, we introduced soil conservation techniques and adapted irrigation methods, helping to minimize losses during difficult periods while continuing to offer free training to support our beneficiaries and targets.

Accessing Markets: A Key Challenge

One of the biggest challenges of sustainable agriculture is market access. Producing healthy, environmentally friendly food like biological vegetables is not enough if these products do not find buyers. At first, we struggled to convince consumers to choose local agroecological products over often cheaper imported alternatives.

To address this, we implemented several strategies:

- Development of short supply chains: by selling directly to consumers through weekly markets, we gradually reduced the number of intermediaries and ensured more stable income for producers.
- Partnerships with specific clients: we collaborated with establishments that prioritize local and organic products.
- Use of online platforms: by establishing a digital presence, we reached a wider audience and raised consumer awareness about the importance of sustainable food.

Today, thanks to these efforts, our products are sold not only in local markets but also in some large cities, contributing to a shift in the perception of organic farming in Madagascar.

Founding *IloRaitra Apiculteur* was a significant leap that combined both passion and necessity. Starting with minimal resources, we took a risk on a business model that merges beekeeping with sustainable farming. Our goal was not just to sell honey but to create a local value chain one that boosts crop yields through pollination and offers high-quality honey for urban and rural markets. Early struggles included accessing start-up capital, navigating informal markets, and building consumer trust in local organic products.

Over time, through community-based sales, word-of-mouth, and product demonstrations,

we were able to establish a small but loyal customer base—now reaching over 50 confident local clients. A major milestone came in 2024, when *IloRaitra* secured a contract with the FAO to manufacture and distribute beehives, which significantly strengthened our operational capacity. We are currently in the process of preparing our honey for export, while continuing to explore innovative ways to process and package our products for increased value and shelf life. This venture has taught us that entrepreneurship in agriculture is not just about profit it's about resilience, adaptation, and using business as a tool to empower rural families and regenerate ecosystems.

A Social and Environmental Transformation

Over time, we have seen tangible changes in several rural communities like OP FISOI and SOAMITSINJO in the West of Antananarivo and also most of rural areas in Avaradrano District. Where the land was once depleted, we now see lush fields. Where young people once fled the countryside, we are witnessing a gradual return to agriculture. Families convinced by the popularized practices have found progress toward economic stability through income from beekeeping or the sale of agroecological products.



One of the most gratifying aspects of this journey has been the impact on rural women. Many of them have been able, thanks to our training, to diversify their sources of income and gain financial independence. I think particularly of Moira, a mother of three, who, after following our training, started her own production of agroecological vegetables and honey. Today, she manages her thriving small business and inspires other women to follow her example.

Education and Reforestation: Pillars for the Future

Beyond agriculture, we have also implemented educational programs to raise awareness among young people about environmental issues. In rural schools, we organize workshops where children learn how to cultivate, compost, and protect biodiversity. These initiatives aim to create a new generation of conscious and engaged farmers.

In parallel, we have launched a reforestation program. We want to plant fruit and indigenous trees around agricultural plots to combat soil erosion and restore biodiversity, as these trees can also provide supplementary income for farmers who can sell their fruits in local markets.

A Vision for the Future

My goal is clear: to make Madagascar a model of sustainable agriculture. To achieve this, we will continue to develop our initiatives by creating agroecology training centres, strengthening our food processing infrastructure, and expanding our distribution network.

I am convinced that the future of our country depends on our ability to value our natural resources while protecting our environment. Through perseverance, collective work, and innovation, we can build an agricultural system that nourishes not only the current generations but also those to come.

Sustainable agriculture is much more than a



production method: it is a true human adventure, full of trials, learning, and victories. Working the land, respecting its cycles, and adapting to its whims requires patience, resilience, and constant self-reflection. This journey has profoundly transformed me, both personally and professionally. Every difficulty overcome whether it be climate uncertainties, lack of resources, or challenges in knowledge transfer has taught me the importance of perseverance and teamwork.

Sustainable agriculture is also a strong commitment to future generations. It challenges us to rethink our practices, to value environmentally respectful methods, and to ensure dignified living conditions for farmers. Behind every harvest, there are often invisible efforts, sacrifices, and hopes. But there is also the satisfaction of seeing a living, fertile land capable of nourishing those who tend it.

I am convinced that we have a responsibility to preserve this essential bond between humans and nature. Together, through local initiatives, training, and agroecological practices, we can build a future where agriculture is not only a source of income but also a powerful lever for food sovereignty and sustainable development. This is a mission that fuels my passion and gives me the energy to move forward, convinced that every seed sown today will bear the fruit of a better future.



Cultivating Change from the Ground Up

By Imen Chelbi

El Rothen Farm, Tunisia

My name is Imen Chelbi, and I am the founder of El Rothen Farm, a small oasis born from a deep wound, a wild dream, and an endless love for the land.

El Rothen, (or “Er-Rouchen” /) is an Arabic word, from Tunisian Arabic or a Maghrebi dialect, with roots in Classical Arabic. Here it refers to a window or opening, especially a small, shaded window or balcony that allows light and air into a house.

For me, it symbolises a window into a different kind of agriculture, one rooted in care, community, and courage.

I come from a world where diplomas are everything. Where success means a stable job, a good salary, a predictable life. I had all of that. I was an executive assistant and a graphic designer. On paper, I was doing great. I had a good job with a good salary. In my family, of six, all of us are well-educated, each with a professional career. But something in me was restless. I didn’t want to just earn a living, I wanted to create something lasting, something real. Inside me, something was missing, a voice, a calling, something I couldn’t ignore.

That voice brought me back to my roots. To my grandmother.

She was illiterate, yet full of ancestral wisdom. She healed people with plants, not words. She respected the soil like a sacred being. She was an agricultural woman, strong and grounded.

She taught me that farming is not just about growing crops, it’s about feeding people, healing land, and honouring tradition.

As a child, I watched her with awe. She taught me, not through lectures, but through gestures and silences, that the earth never lies. That it gives back exactly what you offer it: love or violence, care or neglect.

It was then that the seed was planted inside me.

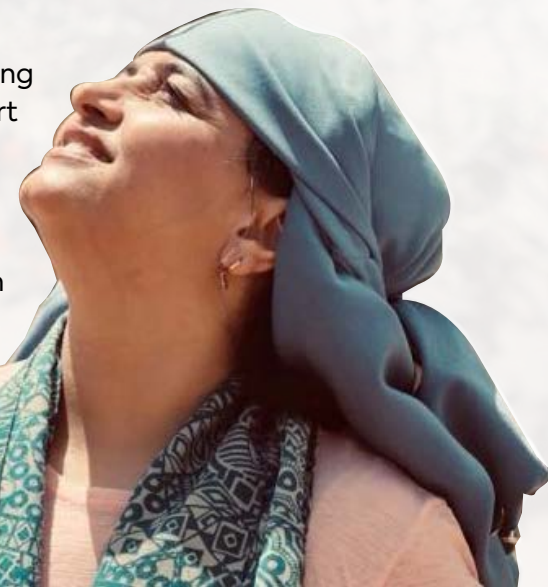
So, I chose agriculture. It wasn’t a straight path, and it certainly wasn’t easy.

I gave up my job. I took off my heels, put on boots, and stepped into a field with nothing but my hands and my faith. But this decision came with pain. My father couldn’t accept it. To him, a university graduate working the land was disgraceful. He pulled out my first plants with his own hands, trembling with anger and fear. I cried. I broke. But I did not stop.



I left. With nothing but a broken heart and a burning vision.

Then, a miracle happened. An agricultural





officer saw something in me, something even my own family didn't see. He believed in my project and gave me access to a piece of state land. It was dry. Empty. But to me, it was sacred ground. I sold my car to dig a well. I carried every drop of water like it was gold. I planted trees like I was planting hope. I raised animals, made compost, and taught myself to listen to the land.

I was alone. Exhausted. Sometimes I'm desperate. But every sprouting seed whispered: *"Keep going."*

And so I did.

From the beginning, I had to fight against deeply held beliefs, about what women can or cannot do, about what agriculture should look like, about who belongs in the field. I had to face my own doubts, to push past the limits I thought I had. What carried me through was my passion for the land and my desire for independence.

Agroecology is not just a job; it's my life mission. I grew up aware of the harm that conventional agriculture was doing to our environment, and I was determined to prove that another model is possible. My father didn't believe in what I was doing. He refused to give me any financial support.

People in Zarzis thought I was crazy, a young

woman alone on a farm, refusing chemicals, mixing crops, talking about agroecology like it was a revolution. And maybe it was.

Little by little, things changed. The elders came first. Men from my village, especially the older ones from my grandmother's generation, they watched me, in silence, then nodded. Then they began to ask what I was growing. They saw the progress. The youth followed, curious. The young men weren't so convinced, but the elders recognized something familiar in what I was doing. Then the women, inspired.

In the south of Tunisia, where men usually lead, it was hard for some to accept that a woman was succeeding.

But four years have now passed, and my journey continues.

Today, El Rochen is alive. It's a learning space. A refuge. A place where forgotten knowledge is reborn.

There have been good days and hard ones. But I'm proud that my work has attracted interest, especially from foreigners living in Tunisia. They understand what I do, and many of them now receive my farm products through direct delivery. I've also built a small restaurant on my farm, where we cook using only ingredients





grown here. This allows people, especially the younger generation, to taste what's possible when we return to traditional, agroecological ways.

To raise awareness, I've organised farm events. The first time people come, it's free. That's when the magic happens, once they taste, see, and feel what I do, their perceptions begin to change. I've had two successful public events so far, and now I'm reaching out to primary schools.

My hope is that the younger generation will grow up knowing and valuing traditional foods.

Part of my land is set aside for others who don't have access to land. I give them a small plot to grow their own seeds. As they watch their crops thrive, something shifts, relationships with the soil, with the plants, and with one another begin to form. That's how fellowship grows.

Cultivating Against the Grain: Faith, Resistance, and First Growth

I didn't study agriculture. I studied marketing. But I didn't let that stop me. I've learned through doing, through training, visiting other farms, asking questions, and doing research. I now hold a Diploma in Agroecology and Permaculture



from an institute in my region.

When I started, I had almost nothing, just a small piece of land in Zarzis, southern Tunisia, with dreams far bigger than my circumstances. The land was dry, and access to water and electricity was a huge challenge. But instead of giving up, I found solutions: rainwater harvesting, composting, mixed cropping. Each step was a struggle, but also a victory. Watching the earth come back to life, feeling the soil improve in my hands, that was my reward.

In the beginning, I sold small amounts locally. I chose to grow what I could manage and what the land responded to, vegetables, aloe vera, herbs. Later, I understood the power of visibility. I began participating in festivals, networking with other producers, and sharing my story. Slowly, my farm became a local reference, not just for what I was selling, but for the vision behind it.

From Isolation to Inspiration: Building a Living Community

The people I've met along the way have been essential. Friends like Amin Ben Abdallah, Saber Zouani, and Fraj Kaouach each offered support, technical, moral, emotional. Their belief in me gave me strength on days when I felt alone. Seeing my farm create jobs, inspire other women, and offer healthy products to my community, this is my greatest pride. It's not just about income; it's about ecological and social transformation.

Today, my land is more fertile, more resilient. Neighbours who once doubted now come to ask questions. The change is slow, but it's spreading. Every difficulty has taught me something. I've learned to see possibilities where others see obstacles. At the beginning, I received no recognition, had almost no resources, and faced scepticism from my own family. But I turned that pain into perseverance.



Planting Hope: A Vision Rooted in Memory and the Future

When I launched El Rochen Farm in 2021, I started with very limited means. I sold my personal car for 18,000 TND to finance essential infrastructure: drilling a well, installing a basic solar energy system, and acquiring tools. The first year, the income was modest — about 5,000 TND — and every dinar was reinvested into improving the soil, planting trees, and building a diverse agroecological ecosystem.

Today, the farm generates approximately 25,000 TND annually from the sale of Aloe Vera-based products, seasonal crops, and educational workshops. This growth reflects the impact of agroecological practices, not only on the environment but also on financial resilience. My dream is to continue expanding this impact to prove that with very little, we can build a model of sustainable agriculture that creates jobs, inspires others, and shows that agroecology is economically viable.

I've stayed true to my values, working with nature, sharing knowledge, and supporting



others who want to learn. If I could go back, I'd tell myself: *ask for help sooner, believe in yourself more fully.*

I grow Aloe Vera, cactus, fruit trees, vegetables, and medicinal plants. I created **Mon Aléo**, a natural skincare brand, inspired by my grandmother's love of aloe vera, not just for humans, but also for animals, especially horses, because they, too, deserve kindness and hope to export internationally.

My family sees me differently now. Even my father, who once destroyed my seedlings, is beginning to understand. And though my grandmother passed away last year, her presence is everywhere on this land. Together, we developed recipes and kept a journal of our processes. That book is now one of my greatest treasures, a living memory, rooted in love and soil.

Today, I receive invitations to speak at events and conferences. I use these platforms to encourage others, especially young entrepreneurs and women, to follow their dreams, even when the path is not clear. Because sometimes, all it takes is one seed, one story, one stubborn hope, to change everything.

My farm is more than a place of production. It's a place of transmission. I welcome children, women, visitors. I share what I've learned the hard way, knowledge, confidence, and dignity. I offer them what I once needed most: belief.

They told me I wasn't a real farmer. So, I learned. I trained. I failed. I tried again. And now I teach.

I'm not rich. But I've gained something more precious than money: purpose, freedom, peace.

My father no longer speaks with judgment. Now, he watches me with quiet pride. He knows.

My grandmother is no longer here, but I feel her in every leaf, every remedy, every soil I touch.

I dream of a world where farming means culture, nature, and future.

I dream that **Mon Aléo** will travel the world.

That my farm will become a living school.

That more women will rise.

That every child will know where their food comes from.

That farmers will finally be respected as guardians of life.

Because I'm not just a farmer.

I'm a woman who plants hope, with her hands, her heart, and her soul.

I Plant Hope

A poem by Imen Chelbi

I come from a world
 where diplomas are everything,
 where success wears heels,
 signs contracts,
 and never touches soil.
 I had it all:
 a good job, a good salary,
 a predictable life
 on paper.
 But paper burns.
 Inside me,
 a voice stirred ,
 older than systems,
 stronger than fear.
 It sounded like my grandmother.
 She,
 an illiterate oracle,
 read no books
 but read the land.
 She healed with herbs,
 not with degrees.
 She bowed to the earth
 as if it were divine.
 And as a child,
 I listened
 to her silence,
 watched her hands,
 and learned:
The earth never lies.
 It gives back
 what we give it ,
 love or violence,
 care or neglect.
 That's when the seed took root.
 Years passed.
 I shed my skin ,
 the title, the desk, the polished
 shoes.
 I put on boots.
 I took my broken heart
 and planted it in dry land.
 My father ,
 angry, grieving ,
 ripped my first seedlings from the
 ground.
 Not out of cruelty,
 but fear.
 He feared I was choosing disgrace.
 But I was choosing truth.
 So I left.
 Alone,
 aching,
 alive.
 Then came a miracle ,

a man who saw not my lack,
 but my fire.
 He gave me land.
 I gave it my soul.
 No water,
 no electricity,
 just faith.
 I sold my car
 to dig a well.
 Carried every drop
 like holy water.
 Planted trees
 like they were prayers.
 Mixed crops,
 fed compost,
 raised goats,
 and listened.
 The land whispered:
 "Keep going."
 Zarzis called me mad.
 A woman? Alone?
 No chemicals?
 No man?
 No chance.
 But I refused to shrink.
 And the old men came.
 They watched in silence,
 then nodded.
 Then came the women.
 Then came the children.
 Then came the change.
El Rothen ,
 my farm,
 my window,
 my revolution.
 A place where
 forgotten knowledge breathes
 again.
 I grow Aloe Vera,

cactus,
 fruit trees,
 healing plants.
 I created **Mon Aléo** ,
 skincare for humans
 and horses.
 Because they, too,
 deserve kindness.
 My farm is not a business.
 It is a heartbeat.
 A living school.
 A sanctuary.
 A seed bank
 of dreams.
 I open it to children,
 to strangers,
 to seekers.
 I say:
 "Here. Take what I learned in pain.
 Turn it into strength."
 They said I wasn't a real farmer.
 So I learned.
 Failed.
 Rose again.
 Now I teach.
 I'm not rich ,
 but I have wealth.
 The kind that grows roots.
 The kind that brings peace.
 My father?
 He no longer judges.
 He watches
 with quiet pride.
 He knows now.
 My grandmother?
 She walks beside me
 in every harvest,
 every handmade remedy,
 every whisper of the wind.
 I dream...
 of a world where farming
 means future.
 Where Mon Aléo travels far.
 Where women rise,
 seeds speak,
 and every child knows the story
 of their food.
 Because I am not just a farmer.
**I am a woman
 who plants hope ,
 with her hands,
 her heart,
 and her soul.**



Agroecology in Action - How Kanyes Dairy Farm Blends Science Soil and Skin Care

By Juliet Kanyesigye

Kanyes Dairy Farm, Uganda

Juliet Kanyesigye are my names, a 56-year-old Ugandan mother of four, and I am the proud Founder and CEO of Kanyes Dairy Farm. I live and work in Kampala, in the Makindye-Luwafu area. I hold a Master's degree in Women and Gender Studies (1997) and a Bachelor's degree in Education (1993) from Makerere University, along with a certificate in HIV/AIDS Programme Management (2002–2003), which shaped my understanding of health and development.

For over 20 years, I worked in research, business, and organizational development. From 1998 to 2003, I engaged in gender and agricultural research as a Research Fellow at the Centre for Basic Research. Later, I served as the Director and Gender Expert at IconAfrika Consult, collaborating with development partners such as the ADB, World Bank, UN agencies, and USAID. My professional journey has always been rooted in a passion for community empowerment and addressing critical needs.

Why I changed the course of my life

Although my career was fulfilling, farming had always been close to my heart. Since 2003, I cultivated crops like ginger, bananas, maize, and cassava for both personal consumption and small-scale sale. But in 2018, my life took a transformative turn with the creation of Kanyes Dairy Farm, a social enterprise focused on dairy goat farming, breeding, and value addition.

The decision to start Kanyes Dairy Farm stemmed from a deeply personal health challenge. I struggled with Hyperhidrosis, a condition that causes excessive sweating, even in cold weather. Despite numerous consultations with Ugandan health experts, no solution worked. Eventually, I sought the help of a Korean-trained herbal doctor who recommended incorporating goat milk into my diet for its therapeutic properties. However, goat milk was scarce locally, and imported milk was



too expensive.

Determined to improve my health, I bought my first dairy goat. It produced more milk than I needed, and I began sharing the excess with others facing health challenges. The demand quickly grew, and that's when the idea for Kanyes Dairy Farm took shape. I realized I could not only provide a valuable health product but also empower local farmers and promote sustainable agricultural practices.

The Model and Impact of Kanyes Dairy Farm

Kanyes Dairy Farm operates an urban, zero-grazing dairy goat model, showing that small landholdings can create jobs, generate income, and revive traditional practices, such as using goat milk for orphaned infants. Our farm fills a nutritional gap left by the closure of NGO projects like Heifer International and Farm Africa, ensuring vulnerable populations have access to nutritious goat milk.

When the COVID-19 lockdown resulted in milk

overproduction and poor distribution, we pivoted by creating value-added products. Working with a chemist, we developed goat milk-based cosmetics, which quickly gained popularity especially among teenagers with acne. This innovation led to our UNBS certification in 2023 and opened up new niche markets, increasing profitability.

At Kanyes Dairy Farm, we practice organic and agro-ecological farming methods. We use goat manure as fertilizer, ensuring our practices are environmentally sustainable. Our goats are fed natural ingredients like silage, grass, and banana peels. We breed resilient goats by crossbreeding Saanen and Toggenburg varieties and employ both conventional and experimental organic treatments for animal care.

Our Products and Sustainability

We produce a variety of goat milk-based products milk, yogurt, ice cream, soap, lotion, and foot soak gel designed for people with



compromised immunity, sensitive skin, and conditions like eczema and acne. Our products are organic, chemical-free, and rich in probiotics and lactic acid, offering health benefits beyond nutrition.

Our eco-friendly approach ensures zero waste. We recycle goat droppings and urine into organic fertilizers, pesticides, and charcoal briquettes, and use leftover materials as mulch. We also cultivate leguminous fodder to improve soil health and support goat well-being. By training local smallholder farmers in sustainable agricultural practices, we help them improve their livelihoods.

The farm is committed to sustainability in packaging, using biodegradable soap boxes, reusable lotion bottles, and sourcing packaging materials through a partnership with Bubugo Conservation Trust. This collaboration not only supports rural women but also helps protect the River Nile ecosystem.

Growth and Recognition

With an initial investment of \$75,000 from myself, NSSF-Stanbic-MasterCard Women Accelerator, and the Neycha Fund, we have scaled operations, diversified income streams, and extended product shelf life. For instance, our soap lasts three years, our lotion lasts two

years, and our fertilizer lasts one year reducing waste and boosting profitability.

Kanyes Dairy Farm's growth has been fueled by passion, persistence, and strategic partnerships. We have gained recognition through national exhibitions, media programs, and community outreach initiatives. Notably, I was profiled by UWEAL under the GROW Project and nominated for the UN Women in Agri-Business Expo. Our farm was also featured in the Bukedde-Pakasa Program and has participated in exhibitions supported by organizations like PELUM and PSFU.

From Small-Scale Farming to Larger Production

Kanyes Dairy Farm has successfully transitioned from small-scale farming to larger production through strategic investments, partnerships, and market expansion. Key steps in our growth include improving goat breeds for higher milk yields, purchasing efficient equipment like a lotion filling machine, and developing value-added products like lotion, soap, and yogurt. These innovations extended the shelf life of goat milk and diversified income streams. We have expanded our market reach through digital platforms, sales outlets, and aggressive marketing via social media, exhibitions, and media campaigns. Partnerships with local



farmers have strengthened our supply chain, supporting sustainable goat farming and organic fertilizer use. Our participation in trade fairs and media features has increased brand visibility, while support from accelerator programs like NSSF Hi-Innovator, Mastercard Foundation, and Neycha Fund has boosted our growth.

Personal and Community Impact

Since starting this journey, I have experienced deep personal transformation. I no longer suffer from the severe allergies that once required constant medication, and after consistently consuming our goat milk products, my health has improved. My children, who struggled with acne, have also experienced healing not only physically but emotionally, as their renewed confidence has brought them joy.

These benefits have extended beyond my family. Community members who use our products report stronger immunity, healthier skin, and, in some cases, even emotional upliftment. One of our satisfied clients was so inspired by the transformation that she became an agent, earning commissions while spreading the word about our products.

So far, we have reached 3,000 people with cosmetics, supplied over 180,000 litres of milk to various categories of the population and with the recent introduction of organic fertiliser, supplied 5 tones to farmers. We have also imparted knowledge about dairy goat rearing and its value chain including its circularity to over 10 million people locally and internationally through various channels i.e. Radio (Top, Bukedde), television, newspapers (New Vision, Bukedde, Observer), social media (tik tok, Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, you tube), national training events (harvest money expo) and training on farm. These products have been translated to increased income from 600 USD in 2018 to about 1600 USD per month

and this is increasing with increased uptake of the products.

We don't just produce food we cultivate wellness and opportunity.

By employing local women and youth, we provide income and purpose. Our organic fertilizers, made from goat droppings and agro-waste, are improving the soil health and yields of local farmers. Every product we sell carries the intention of health, sustainability, and shared growth.

Spreading Agroecological Practice

At Kanyes Dairy Farm, we believe in agroecology. We recycle goat droppings and agro-waste into organic fertilizer and make pesticide from fermented goat urine. These inputs not only help our farm but are also sold to other farmers, reducing reliance on synthetic chemicals and promoting soil health and biodiversity.

Our goats are fed natural silage, brewer's waste, banana peels, and fresh and dry grasses. Their housing is designed with good ventilation and enough space to support their health and well-being. Healthy animals produce better milk, and through training and knowledge-sharing, we've helped other farmers adopt these organic, welfare-based methods. Our farm is more than a production site it's a hub for sustainable agriculture learning.

Working with Opportunities and Challenges

I've always been resilient and purpose-driven. From the beginning, I knew I wanted to make goat milk products accessible to the 90% of Ugandans unaware of their health benefits. That passion pushed me to invest time, resources, and energy into building this enterprise and raising awareness.



Access to funding enabled us to get certified, improve packaging, and expand brand visibility. We embraced social media, joined exhibitions, and educated customers directly. The result has been greater visibility and public trust. We now have seven sales outlets, with more on the way.

Collaborations have played a key role. Training, mentorship, and market linkages have helped us grow. A particularly meaningful partnership is with a women's group in Jinja, who craft water hyacinth handles for our packaging—an empowering and environmentally sustainable collaboration.

Turning Market Trends into Growth

In recent years, the demand for healthy dairy alternatives and organic skincare has grown significantly. This shift in market trends created an exciting opportunity for us. We positioned ourselves not just as a farm, but as a trusted



provider of products that nourish both body and skin, especially for those with sensitive health needs.

The growing organic movement also created a new market for our fertilizers. As farmers seek sustainable ways to feed their soil, we are ready to meet that demand. Funding has allowed us to scale up, improve production capacity, and reach broader markets. Our eco-friendly approach, brand awareness campaigns, and strategic partnerships have all contributed to this growth.

Overcoming Obstacles

The journey hasn't been without challenges. Production costs and limited capital have tested us. But we've found ways forward writing proposals, securing grants, and adopting cost-effective methods like preserving feed as hay and silage for year-round availability.

We continue to improve. We've introduced better-yielding goat breeds, trained farmers, and built trust through customer testimonials. Exhibitions, customer education, and targeted marketing have helped keep our brand strong, even amid uncertainty.

Facing the Big Hurdles

One of our biggest challenges at Kanyes Dairy Farm has been the limited awareness of goat milk's benefits. According to our 2023 internal survey, over 90% of Ugandans are unfamiliar with how goat milk can improve immunity and skin health. This lack of awareness, coupled with strong competition from established cow milk brands and commercial skincare products, has kept sales lower than we would like especially among the vulnerable groups who could benefit most.

Another hurdle is cost and breed quality. High-quality dairy goats like Saanen, Anglo-Nubian, or Toggenburg are very expensive averaging about USD 600 per goat. Even then, their milk

output is often low, and they require significant feed and care, creating a heavy burden relative to their returns. While we know we need better breeds, capital remains a limiting factor.

Expanding Kanyes Dairy Farm has also brought its own challenges, particularly in accessing capital for essential equipment, branding, and marketing. The high costs of effective media platforms have made consistent marketing difficult, which is crucial for building recognition and trust for a young brand like ours. Regulatory hurdles, such as the lengthy and expensive process for organic certification, and public misconceptions such as the poor evaluation based on our goats' natural slender build have added to the struggles. Despite these obstacles, we remain committed to our mission, applying for grants, reinvesting savings, and working towards certification with NOGAMU. We are determined to educate the public on the transformative benefits of goat milk for health, community empowerment, and environmental sustainability.

Moving Forward

At Kanyes Dairy Farm, every setback has been a lesson, and every success no matter how small has strengthened our resolve. We've learned that true growth comes not just from overcoming challenges, but from embracing them with courage and creativity. Kanyes Dairy Farm is not just a business; it's a commitment to health, sustainability, and resilience. We are building something lasting, and we are only just beginning.

Our journey ahead is clear. With stronger breeding stock, improved production practices, and a solid commitment to sustainability, we're on the path to not only transform the dairy industry but also empower communities through innovative, eco-friendly farming. We envision a future where Kanyes Dairy Farm isn't just a name, but a symbol of quality, health, and opportunity for all.

As we push forward, we remain inspired by the belief that the challenges we face today will fuel our success tomorrow. We know the road is long, but each step we take brings us closer to our goal a thriving, sustainable business that empowers farmers, nurtures communities, and shapes the future of East Africa's dairy industry.

We're ready for what lies ahead because we are driven by purpose, guided by our values, and supported by a vision that is bigger than just us. The best is yet to come, and together, we will make it happen.

Acknowledgements

Kanyes Dairy Farm extends sincere thanks to all those who made this opportunity possible. We are especially grateful to the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) for their financial support, which enabled our participation in this conference and enriched our learning and networking. Special thanks to Doug Reeler and his team for their guidance during the case study process.

We also thank PELUM Uganda for their steadfast support, particularly Hadijah Nalule and Julius Ssemambo, whose assistance and encouragement have been invaluable.

To all our partners, stakeholders, and supporters, thank you for believing in our vision and helping us advance sustainable dairy goat farming and community impact.



From Backyard to Market: Earning from Fresh Vegetables and Spices in a *Confined Space*

By Lydia Kagoya

Abagalana Farmer's Group, Uganda

The Beginning of My Farming Journey

My name is Lydia Kagoya, and I'm 39 years old, married with three children. I am a small-scale farmer and entrepreneur from Abagalana Farmer's Group in Gayaza Parish, Wakiso District, Uganda. My journey into farming started in 2018 when I began growing vegetables for my own consumption and to beautify my compound. I had learned about confined space farming and sustainable

agriculture techniques through training from Caritas Kampala. What started as a hobby quickly grew into something more.

Initially, I would sell small quantities of vegetables to my neighbours or give them away for free. The little money I made helped cover basic needs like buying sugar, soap, and medicine, and sometimes I saved a bit to contribute to my savings group. I soon realised that there was growing demand for organic vegetables like Dodo (Amaranthus), spinach, lettuce, spring





onions and cherry tomatoes in my community. People were willing to pay a good price for fresh, organic produce. This motivated me to take the leap into business, though I kept it within my local area due to concerns about the costs of transportation and rent.

Opportunities and Growth in Organic Farming

In 2019, Caritas Kampala launched an organic market in Nsambya and invited me to become one of their suppliers. This was a significant opportunity for me, as it provided exposure and access to new seeds and ideas for expanding my production and marketing.

To increase production, I made an initial investment of 90,000 Ugandan shillings (approximately 24 US dollars at current exchange rates). This included 40,000 for two sacks of manure, 20,000 for seedlings, and 10,000 to hire two labourers who assisted in setting up the garden.

At the same time, I was already earning from produce that was available on the farm, such as fruits, spices, local eggs, and vegetables. Each week, I brought in around 100,000 shillings (about 27 US dollars) from the organic market and another 30,000 (about 8 US dollars) from home sales.

On average, my monthly income came to about 520,000 shillings (roughly 140 US dollars) during the dry season. In the wet season, thanks to higher yields and a wider range of crops, my income increased to around 600,000 shillings (approximately 160 US dollars).

However, the market was interrupted by the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020. Despite this setback, I didn't stop producing. I continued supplying my loyal customers in the community and kept my business afloat.

The market reopened in 2021, and I was back as one of the four initial suppliers. With limited products, we had to recruit more producers. I reached out to my group members, training nine women from my home in Gayaza in organic farming principles through practical demonstrations. We integrated animals like pigs and poultry into our gardens, which boosted production. All of this was done on a small 50 x 50 feet compound, what we call our "verandah space."

When the market reopened, there was a surge in demand for fruits like lemons and oranges, as well as vegetables and spices. Doctors were recommending these foods for their health benefits, which drove up local sales. As a result, my weekend earnings rose to an average of 200,000 Ugandan shillings (about 54 US dollars). However, meeting this increased demand required a lot of innovation and creativity to maintain a steady supply.

Innovative Farming Techniques in Small Spaces

We employed innovative farming methods, such as using tin cans, broken buckets, basins, old tires, and raised beds to make the most of the small space available. We also utilised kitchen waste as manure and practiced water retention techniques to ensure our crops thrived. This allowed us to have produce at different stages of growth, ensuring a continuous supply to the

market.

Today, we supply our vegetables exclusively to the Caritas Kampala market and to surrounding communities. By networking with other suppliers, such as Sulma Foods, we have expanded our reach and now serve a wide range of clients through a WhatsApp group where customers place their orders. Deliveries are made using boda-boda (motorcycle riders), making the process fast and efficient.

In a good season, I earn an average of 180,000 Ugandan shillings (approximately 49 US dollars) per week from the organic market, along with an additional 20,000 shillings (about 5 US dollars) from weekly home sales.

The garden setup is done once a year, including the reapplication of manure and the preparation of new beds. However, I no longer need to purchase manure, as I now keep pigs and poultry, which provide a steady supply of organic manure for the gardens.

Now I am part of a wider network of organic and agro-ecological farmers, which has provided valuable opportunities for learning and growth. Through these networks, I've gained insights into pest and disease management, soil fertility, and marketing, all of which have helped sustain my business. Also my client base has grown through these networks and the opportunities given to me through PELUM/AFSA under my membership with Caritas Kampala. The exhibitions I have



attended have helped towards exposing me and my products to different people and clients.

Building Confidence and Community

The experience has been transformative. At first, I lacked the confidence to promote my products, but through exposure and networking, I've learned how to confidently speak about my work and products to a wider audience. One of the most rewarding aspects of this journey has been the sense of community and collective action. The spirit of working together and sharing resources has created a bond within our group. It has stimulated togetherness, group cohesion, group savings and hard work amongst the community and group members. The women I trained are now successfully growing their own organic vegetables, and as a result, we've boosted our community's collective savings and access to larger loans.

Over time, the farming practices we've adopted have become more widely accepted in the community. More households are now practicing confined space farming, and a variety of crops, previously not grown for market, are now being cultivated. This includes spring onions, sukuma wiki (kale), cherry tomatoes, amaranths, lemon grass, bitter tomatoes, local eggs, and poultry. What started as a small-scale personal project has blossomed into a collective effort with a shared goal of improving livelihoods through agro-ecological practices.

The business has influenced the agro-ecological practices of the community in different ways. Community members have learnt that different crops can be planted on the same piece of land and give high yields, for example the integration of



different spices in vegetable gardens to control and repel pests and diseases. They have learnt how to use kitchen wastes like ash and dirty water from their kitchen to increase on the productivity of their soils.

Community members have learnt to keep animals in their homes to get manure for their gardens but most importantly farmers have adopted to different water harvesting techniques to produce on and off season.

Challenges and How We Overcome Them

Despite the success, there are challenges to overcome. Competition is fierce, and prices can drop significantly during bumper harvest seasons, making it harder to make sales.

Pest and disease outbreaks, particularly during the dry season, can also negatively impact supply. However, we have found solutions by

creating our own organic concoctions from surrounding plants to control pests and disease as well as making liquid manure.

Marketing through Networking and Collaboration: Key to Success

What I love most about this business is supplying genuine, organic products to my clients and maintaining their trust. Many customers now place orders via phone or WhatsApp, knowing they will receive high-quality, organic produce. This trust has resulted in lasting relationships and repeat customers.

The relationships I've built with other suppliers at the organic market have also been crucial. We exchange seeds, share knowledge on overcoming challenges, and collaborate on joint marketing efforts. This collective approach has strengthened my business and expanded



my network.

My family, particularly my husband, has been instrumental in ensuring our products reach the market on time. He provides transport every Saturday to deliver our fresh produce. The exposure I've gained through PELUM/AFSA has helped me explore new marketing ideas, such as better packaging and labelling, which have made a difference in how my products are perceived.

Learning and Expanding: Sustainable Growth

Thanks to the training I've received in agro-ecology, I've learned how to reduce farm expenses by saving seeds and integrating animals and plants on my farm. This approach has not only improved soil health but also the overall environment. I've also planted medicinal plants like aloe vera and rosemary, adding further value to my farm.

Through increased savings, I was able to purchase a 5,000-litre water tank, which has greatly improved my ability to irrigate my crops and maintain a steady production cycle. The collaborative approach to problem-solving with other suppliers has allowed me to expand my supply chain and diversify the products I offer.

The Future: Expansion and Certification

Looking ahead, my goal is to acquire more land by the end of 2026 to expand production and meet the growing demand for my products. I also plan to add value to our produce through processing and eventually register for organic certification. By 2026, I hope to begin exporting organic products, contributing to sustainable farming and income generation in our community.

Advice for Aspiring Entrepreneurs

For those who wish to transition from subsistence farming to entrepreneurship, my advice is to focus on positive thinking and goal setting. Understand your motivation, whether it's providing healthy food, improving your community, or generating income, and use that as your driving force. Love what you do, stay focused, and continuously learn the skills you need to succeed.

Through determination, collaboration, and innovation, I have transformed a small backyard farm into a thriving business that supports my family and benefits my community. The journey hasn't been easy, but the rewards, personal growth, community empowerment, and financial stability, have made it all worthwhile.

My Journey as a Territorial Market Leader and Agroecological Entrepreneur

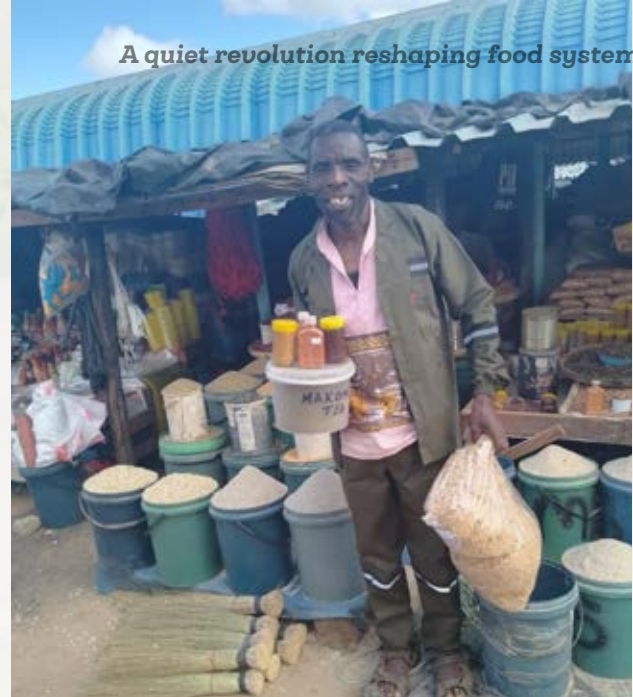
By Martin Shaka

Zimbabwe

My name is Martin Shaka. I am a 49-year-old entrepreneur from Masvingo, Zimbabwe. I am married to Suzen Shaka, a dedicated teacher, and together we are blessed with three children, one girl and two boys. We live in the city of Masvingo, where I run my business as an agroecological entrepreneur and also serve as the territorial market leader of one of Zimbabwe's largest agricultural markets.

From Trader to Market Leader

My journey began at a single market table, selling fresh farm produce and linking with farmers to source vegetables, fruits, honey, and peanut butter. Over time, I became deeply involved in the daily operations of the market, building strong relationships with farmers, traders, and customers. Eventually, the traders elected me as their market leader, a role I hold with pride and responsibility. As a territorial market leader, I manage over 700 traders at the provincial agricultural market in Masvingo. I coordinate the day-to-day running of the market, engage with government and local council authorities, and advocate for the needs



of both farmers and traders.

Discovering Agroecology

In 2023, I had the opportunity to attend a leadership and capacity-building workshop organized by PELUM Zimbabwe and Knowledge Transfer Africa. This was a turning point. The workshop introduced me to the principles of agroecology, farming and trading systems that respect nature, reduce chemical inputs, and promote culturally rooted food systems.

Some of the key agroecological principles that inspired me include:

- 1. Input Reduction** – Reducing the use of chemical inputs in farming has been a key priority for us. By shifting away from synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, we are protecting not only the health of our soils but also the wellbeing of animals, farmers, and consumers. This approach also helps restore the natural balance in the ecosystem and reduces production costs over time. It's a step toward farming practices that are healthier, more affordable, and more in



tune with the land.

2. **Cultural Identity and Food Diversity** – We take pride in celebrating and preserving traditional foods that have nourished our communities for generations. This includes embracing edible insects like ants and beetles, wild vegetables, and indigenous grains such as millet and sorghum. These foods are resilient, nutritious, and rooted in our heritage. By bringing them back into mainstream diets, we not only protect biodiversity but also strengthen our cultural identity and food sovereignty.
3. **Value Addition** – Adding value to produce through methods like drying, fermenting, or packaging has allowed us to extend shelf life and increase income for farmers. Instead of selling crops at the gate for low prices, we turn them into market-ready products that are easier to transport, store, and sell at a premium. This has opened new

markets and helped build a stronger, more resilient local economy.

I realised that no one in our market had yet tried to apply these principles. Our stalls were full of fresh produce, but little thought had been given to sustainability, health, or tradition. I decided to change that.

Smartrade Investments is Born

Motivated by what I learned, I registered my company, *Smartrade Investments*, with a vision to promote agroecological products. I started sourcing dried vegetables, grains, and indigenous products from farmers in rural areas like Shashe, Munyikwa, and Mwenezi, places where traditional farming practices are still alive.

With these products in hand, I returned to the market and began selling them alongside fresh produce. Slowly but surely, customers started showing interest, especially those with health conditions who needed specific foods like *Rhapoko* mealie meal, baobab coffee, or honey. I saw an opportunity not just for business, but for impact.

Building a Movement, Not Just a Business

I didn't want to keep this knowledge to myself. I began mentoring other traders, sharing what I'd learned about agroecology and value addition. I knew that if we could absorb everything our small-scale farmers produced, we would give them reason to continue farming this way, and ensure a reliable supply for our market.

Together, we approached the municipal council and requested a dedicated space within the market for agroecological traders. The request was granted, and we now have a section where customers can find dried vegetables, indigenous grains, natural products, and more, clearly labelled and easy to locate. This has

transformed the shopping experience for health-conscious buyers and created new demand for traditional foods.

Our Vision for the Future

We have big dreams. With the right funding and partnerships, we hope to:

- Acquire machinery to process and preserve our products (dryers, dehullers, roasters, packaging equipment).
- Improve branding and packaging to compete in formal and international markets.
- Conduct exchange visits with other agroecological markets in the region and beyond to learn and grow.
- Continue educating traders and farmers about sustainable practices.

Agroecology is more than a trend, it's a sustainable way forward for producers, traders, and consumers. It addresses health issues, respects the environment, and empowers local communities.

Obstacles

Starting small with limited capital meant making every decision count. We had to be strategic, resourceful, and patient, progress often came slowly. Changing mindsets among



traders and consumers was equally difficult. Many were skeptical of new methods or unfamiliar products, especially when cheaper, conventional alternatives were available. We also lacked machinery to streamline production, forcing us to rely heavily on manual labor. But each of these challenges forced us to think creatively, to seek partnerships, and to build solutions from the ground up. In many ways, the barriers became entry points for deeper innovation and lasting relationships.

Lessons Learned

One of the clearest lessons I've learned is the power of sharing knowledge. When we train others or open up our processes, it strengthens the entire system. Success in agroecology isn't individual, it's collective. I've also come to appreciate the value of traditional practices that many had dismissed as outdated. When combined with modern techniques, they not only remain relevant but offer a unique value in today's markets, especially among consumers seeking authenticity, health, and sustainability.

What I Would Do Differently

If I were starting again, I would focus on collaboration from the very beginning. Building a network early, of farmers, advisors, buyers, and even skeptics, would have helped us gain traction more quickly. It's easier to face challenges and grow sustainably when others are part of the process from the start. Momentum comes faster when it's shared.

How I've Grown

This journey has transformed me. I've grown from being a simple market trader into someone who leads, teaches, and mentors. I've developed the confidence to speak up, to share a vision, and to represent our work in larger spaces. I've also deepened my respect for the land, our traditions, and the quiet strength of the people who keep these practices alive. It's been a

personal evolution, shaped by both struggle and hope.

My Motivation

What keeps me going is simple but powerful, seeing change.

Watching rural farmers earn more, adopt better practices, and take pride in their work. Hearing from customers who return because they trust our food and our values. And knowing that, in some small way, our efforts are contributing to healthier communities and a more sustainable future. That's what drives me every day.

Looking ahead

My journey has taught me that true change begins with a single step, and the courage to take it. What started as a small idea, sparked during a workshop, has grown into a movement within our market and beyond. I have seen first-hand how agroecology is not just a farming method, but a way of life that respects our land, our people, and our future.

There were obstacles, limited resources, lack of awareness, and doubts, but through perseverance, collaboration, and a deep belief in what is possible, I have grown not just as an entrepreneur, but as a leader. I have seen others rise with me, taking ownership of this vision and shaping it into something bigger than any of us imagined.

Today, I stand with hope. I see a future where our markets are alive with indigenous produce, where smallholder farmers are celebrated, where young entrepreneurs bring innovation to tradition, and where we nourish our communities with food that heals and sustains.

To anyone who dreams of change: start small, stay committed, and share what you learn. Together, we can do more than we ever imagined. Together, we can grow a better world, from the roots up.



The Ananse Way: Wisdom, Work, and the *Will to* *Grow*

By Mercy Kyeraa Owusu

Ananse Poultry Farms, Ghana

Mercy Kyeraa Owusu is my name. I'm 43 years old, a proud single mother of three, and the founder of Ananse Poultry Farms. I was born into a family of six children and I'm the third in line. My early education began in a small village in Ghana, where classrooms were modest but filled with ambition. From there, I made my way to Aburi Girls' Secondary School, one of the best in the country, and later, Central University College. I trained as a Chartered Accountant through the Institute of Chartered Accountants Ghana (ICAG), passed all the exams, and worked in finance for over a decade.

But as the years passed, something inside me began to shift. I started to feel a strong pull toward being more connected to people and to the land. I realised I didn't want to sit behind a desk for the rest of my life. I wanted to build something with my hands and my heart, something that could touch lives, create jobs, and restore dignity to farming. So in 2018, I took a bold step and entered the world of agriculture.

I chose poultry farming, not because it was easy, but because it was real. The industry had been largely abandoned in my region, yet the demand for eggs and chicken remained high. I saw the gap. And I knew that you didn't need fancy machines or degrees to farm, what you needed was knowledge, courage, and commitment.

My parents, both retired teachers, were the first



to support me. Though they earned modest salaries, they raised us with love and a strong work ethic. Farming was always part of our lives. My father cultivated cocoa, and my mother raised chickens, goats, and sheep. I remember their words: "You can never go wrong with food. It will always be needed." Those words stayed with me.

When I told my father I wanted to start a poultry farm right behind his house, he was overjoyed. Not only did he offer the space, but he also offered his house as collateral when I needed a loan. That early support became the seed from which Ananse Poultry Farms grew.

I started with just 150 layer birds, mainly to support an unemployed family member. But within a year, I had expanded to 1,000 birds using money I had initially saved to change my car. That decision was a turning point, it made me realise I was capable of running a serious

agribusiness.

I eventually secured two acres of land in Old Tafo–Akim, a quiet area that had previously been used for sand mining. A friend encouraged me not to settle for just one or two plots, and I'm so glad I listened. That land gave me the freedom to dream bigger. We moved the farm there and began building infrastructure, one coop at a time.

Resigning from my corporate job and going full-time into farming was scary, but it was also liberating. I started cultivating maize on the same land to reduce feed costs and improve our control over inputs. Later, I added a cold store to help with distribution. What began as a small backyard project evolved into a vertically integrated business that spans across the poultry value chain, egg and broiler production, maize cultivation, and cold storage distribution.

Building a Brand and a Market, One Crate at a Time

In the beginning, it was easy to sell four crates of eggs a day. My neighbours were lining up outside my gate. But when production jumped to 30 crates a day, I quickly realised that I needed to expand my market. Eggs started piling up. I couldn't sleep at night, worried about spoilage and loss. So, I took to the streets, literally.

I carried samples from shop to shop, knocking on doors and asking to supply them. It wasn't glamorous, but it worked. Slowly, I built a network of reliable buyers. I later rented a shop in the centre of town, which helped us reach more customers. I also began using social media, not just to advertise, but to educate people about food quality, egg nutrition, and farming practices. I tapped into my networks, old schoolmates, church groups, social circles. They became my first big buyers, especially for chicken.

Today, I'm working to build *Ananse* into a

household name in Ghana, a brand that people associate with quality, integrity, and trust.

Why “Ananse”?

Ananse is a popular Ghanaian folk character, a spider who uses wisdom and creativity to outsmart stronger animals. He's a symbol of resilience, storytelling, and clever thinking. That's what I wanted this farm to embody. We don't always have the most resources, but we use what we have wisely. Like Ananse, we rely on strategy, not just strength.

From Passion to Purpose

Farming has completely changed my life. It's given me the freedom to support my children and shaped me into a role model. I now offer mentorship to other women and young people who are interested in agribusiness. Many of them see farming as a last resort, but I show them that it can be a path to purpose and prosperity.

Through the Guzakuza program, I received powerful training in agribusiness, leadership, and marketing. I met other women across Africa who are building food systems with dignity. And in 2024, I had the honour of attending the Tripartite Event on African Agroecological Entrepreneurship and the Harare Seed and Food Festival in Zimbabwe, organized by AFSA. It was eye-opening to see how deeply food, culture, and identity are intertwined across the continent.



A Living Ecosystem

At Ananse, we are creating more than a farm, we're building a living ecosystem. Over 80% of my workers are women and youth. We train them in poultry management, feed formulation, and organic practices. We also support local farmers who are transitioning from chemical farming to agroecology. Our chicken droppings are now being used as fertilizer in cocoa farms nearby, saving costs and improving soil health. What used to be considered waste is now a valuable resource.

We've also diversified into coconut trees and a small snail farming project. These enterprises not only generate extra income, but they also reflect our commitment to biodiversity and sustainability. We rely on solar energy for over 70% of our operations. This isn't just about reducing bills, it's about building a climate-smart farm that can withstand the shocks of the future.

I've even started offering consultancy and farm management services for aspiring farmers. It's my way of giving back, sharing what I've learned, so others don't have to start from scratch.

At every step, I try to be fair and inclusive, whether it's with my workers, customers, or suppliers. People should feel respected and valued in everything we do.

I believe deeply in this work. I believe that farming can restore dignity, create jobs, and feed not just stomachs but futures. I believe African agriculture is not backward, it is wise, resilient, and full of promise.

Challenges and successes

Looking back over my entrepreneurial journey, one of the most emotionally challenging moments came just two years into my poultry project, when a sudden disease outbreak

wiped out most of my birds. It was devastating, completely unexpected and financially crippling. I was drained, emotionally and financially, and forced to start from scratch.

I reached out in every direction I could think of for support, banks, friends, people I thought would believe in me, but no one was willing to help. They didn't see a future in my agribusiness dream. Some even advised me to return to the corporate world and stop "wasting" my time and resources on farming.

As a former accountant with a stable and respected job, facing this loss was heart-breaking. I had poured my life savings into this project. I was battling not just financial strain, but also the fear of failure, and the echo of every doubtful voice around me. My workers left, seeing no future there. I felt completely alone.

But there's a saying I've carried with me since childhood: *"Winners never quit, and quitters never win."* You only fail when you stop trying. I knew that giving up wouldn't only be a personal failure, it would let down everyone who had started to believe in my dream: my workers, my family, and most of all, my children. That became my source of strength. I decided to start again, and this time, to thrive.

Today, one of my greatest joys is that I found the strength to bounce back, relying on nothing but belief in myself and my dream. Not only did I revive the poultry business, I built it back stronger than before. That experience gave me invaluable lessons and became the push I needed to diversify. I added two new, complementary ventures: a maize plantation to produce quality feed, and a cold store for distributing our broiler chickens.

To grow further and build resilience, I began seeking out knowledge and support. I joined several farming and agribusiness groups, including a community formed by Guzakuza (Ignite) and later an agroecology network. These connections opened my eyes to best



practices and the principles of agroecology, which have become a foundation of how I farm today.

As I continue to expand, I face two persistent challenges: access to funding and a reliable labour force. Agriculture in Ghana is still seen as high-risk, and many banks and individuals are hesitant to invest. Graduates are also not interested in agricultural work, so I rely on the informal sector, which requires extra training and supervision. It's demanding and often exhausting.

What Made the Difference?

Despite these challenges, I've steadily grown the business by reinvesting profits and mechanising key operations to reduce the workload and simplify tasks for my team. What made the biggest difference was my willingness to take a risk and restart the poultry after the outbreak. Adding the maize plantation and cold store was a turning point.

Over time, I've reinvested consistently, combining profits, salaries, and strategic loans. I initially started the farm with personal savings of about USD 2,800, which allowed me to raise the first 150 layer birds. Later, I took a personal bank loan of USD 5,800 and, along with profits and personal income, invested a total of around USD 10,000 to grow the flock to 1,000 layers. These careful investments, along with hard work and persistence, have paid off. Today, the farm is worth close to USD 1,000,000 and generates annual profits of over USD 200,000. This journey from modest savings to a million-dollar enterprise is a testament to what can happen when local innovation, purpose-driven entrepreneurship, and agroecological principles align.

Staying consistent and rooted in strong values has sustained my business over the years.

If I could go back, I would have started those two additions, maize and cold storage, much earlier. It would have improved the quality of my chickens, lowered production costs, and helped me reach a wider market.

Farming must be approached as a full-time business, with the same commitment and resources as any other enterprise. To anyone thinking about moving from subsistence farming to agribusiness, I say this: give it your all. It's worth it. Farming is the surest path to sustainable growth for Africa. Growing Africa, eating Africa, when our food is African, we grow Africa.

Food is something no one can do without. We can live without certain luxuries, but never without food. That's why I believe food will always be a secure investment, especially now, as more Africans become conscious of what they eat.

My future vision is to build an agroecological village where people, plants, and animals can all thrive in harmony. I also aim to become one of the leading producers of maize and poultry in Ghana and West Africa, helping reduce our reliance on imported chicken. My next major goal is to secure more land and install an irrigation system to ensure year-round maize cultivation.

Looking back on this journey, my fears have steadily been replaced by confidence. I now stand tall in what I do. Many of the same people who once doubted me are now praising my success, and some even ask for guidance as they consider entering farming themselves. Financially, everything has changed. And as a businesswoman, my confidence has never been stronger.

Brewing Resilience in a Teacup

By Rita Nagudi

Pumzi, Uganda

My name is **Rita Nagudi**. I live in **Gayaza Manyangwa in Wakiso District**, Uganda. I'm a mother of two boys, aged 12 and 10, and a woman of many paths, **social worker, chartered accountant, auditor, and lawyer**. But perhaps most unexpectedly, I am also the founder of a thriving herbal tea business, born not out of ambition, but **out of healing, hardship, and heartache**.

A Career Built on Purpose, and Pain

I began my professional life in **a remote village in Tubur, Soroti**, near the Katakwi border, working as a **Child Development Officer** focused on sponsorship. Coming straight from university into a rural community was both **humbling and formative**, it taught me the value of **hard work and humility**.

But then, a **fraud incident** threatened to destroy the very project that had brought joy and hope to the village. We were on the brink of collapse. The only accountant was gone, and no one else could fill the gap. I stepped in, **teaching myself the basics of accounting**, determined to keep the project alive.

With no strong background in mathematics, I had studied **Social Sciences**, I was often discouraged. But I persevered. I enrolled in **both an MBA and ACCA**, studying side by side and finishing both within three years. I wanted to become an **auditor and accountant**, someone who could build systems that **protect the vulnerable** from fraud and financial mismanagement.

My journey through the corporate world took me into **Audit, Financial Management, and eventually, Law School**, as legal issues became a frequent part of my work at senior levels. I never imagined I'd be an

entrepreneur, or a farmer.

Tea as Therapy: A Cup of Calm

The seeds of my business were planted in **personal pain**, not profit. After my second child, I experienced **depression**, weight gain, and a deep sense of loneliness following a **failed marriage**. I found solace in a quiet ritual: preparing a beautiful tea setup just for myself. It



became my moment of calm, a way to breathe, to slow down, and to feel held. In my backyard, I had planted a small herb garden with rosemary, spearmint, lemon balm, lemon verbena, and a few other mint varieties. I began experimenting, mixing different herbs and spices, seeking not just flavour, but comfort.

Tea became my sanctuary. But it wasn't just the tea, it was the **experience** of it. I remembered how, as children, my **grandmother** would serve us tea in tiny cups with a teapot, telling us, "These are your special cups because you are special." Tea became symbolic, a ritual of love and memory.

Some days, I added slices of fresh orange or lime; other times, I brewed it with ginger, turmeric, or black pepper. The results were deeply nourishing but preparing everything from scratch each time was a task in itself. Gathering fresh herbs, sourcing fruit and spices from the market, and slicing and steeping took time and energy I often didn't have.

That's when the idea came: ***what if I dried everything in advance, herbs, fruits, and spices, and created my own blends?***

This would make it simple to enjoy a beautiful, healthful cup of tea whenever I needed it.

From Kitchen to Concept: A Business Is Born

For a long time, my herbal tea blends lived quietly in the corners of my kitchen and heart. Friends and colleagues who visited my home would sip a cup, inhale its earthy aroma, and ask where they could buy some. Their compliments became a chorus of encouragement: "*You should turn this into a business.*"

At the same time, the world had slowed down during the COVID-19 pandemic, and I began noticing new things, particularly how **seasonal fruits like lemons, limes, and oranges became scarce and expensive out of season**, while in times of abundance, they rotted on market stalls. It felt wasteful. It felt like a missed opportunity. That's when I started **experimenting with drying and preserving fruits and herbs**. I sliced citrus, dried ginger and turmeric, ground peppercorns. I explored combinations. I made powders and fruit slices, ensuring my tea could stay rich, aromatic, and healing all year round.

Stepping into Vision: Watoto Marketplace Ministry

The turning point came when I joined a **Watoto Church Marketplace Ministry webinar**, which challenged participants to bring their business ideas to life. We were urged to write down our vision, mission, and values. "*Start with what you have,*" the speakers said. I still remember how their stories lit a fire in me, stories of ordinary people who had dared to begin, and built extraordinary businesses.

Through this program, I was assigned a mentor, **Mr. Charles Ocici from Enterprise Uganda**, whose guidance was both rigorous and inspiring. He encouraged me to put the idea into writing, define a clear vision, prototype the product, and conduct real market research. We were told to walk through supermarkets, contact businesses in the same trade, and compare local and international products. I was nervous, but ready.

Hitting Walls, Finding Paths

I reached out to a friend who was already in business. She kindly shared her knowledge about **branding, sourcing, and packaging**. But outside of that, I hit wall after wall. The contacts I found were guarded. Few were willing to meet. No one wanted to talk about where they sourced their herbs or how they started. It was discouraging. But I was determined.



I began reading everything I could find about the **herbal tea industry, its market size, challenges, and global opportunities**. I visited supermarkets and studied the tea aisles, inspecting ingredients, tasting different blends, and noting brand details and packaging designs. Every step taught me something new.

To dry my herbs efficiently, I **borrowed an electric dehydrator from my sister-in-law**. I scoured YouTube for tutorials, taught myself how to regulate temperatures, and practiced batch after batch.

Planting Seeds of a Supply Chain

Then I received a tip: the freshest herbs could be found at **Nakasero Market in Kampala, but only if I arrived by 3am**. So I did.

I arrived in the dark, expecting an eery quiet, but I was amazed by the hustle and bustle and the many people in jostling queues waiting for their produce. I waited around the truck handing out the fresh rosemary, hoping to get a few bunches, but after an hour nothing was available. I learned, painfully, that most of the produce was **pre-booked by wholesalers long before dawn**.

Frustrated, I voiced my disappointment. A kind vendor overheard me. After listening to my story, he offered help.

He told me, “I grow these herbs myself. And I know others who grow them in their backyards. If you can assure us of a market, we’ll grow more for you.”

That moment felt like a door opening. I hadn’t just found a source of herbs, I had discovered the beginning of something more: a potential **network of smallholder growers**, right in the community. It was no longer just about making tea. It was about **building something**



sustainable, inclusive, and rooted in shared growth.

Building “Pumzi”, The Breath of Life

I eventually managed to have my first product produced and packaged to present at the class, and the mentor told me it was an assignment to push our limits and to prove to ourselves that we can!

I named my brand **“Pumzi”**, from the Swahili *pumzi ya maisha*, meaning “breath of life.” That’s exactly what these teas were for me, each sip a breath, each cup a reminder that I was alive and healing. My first blends were Rosemary Spearmint and I named it “breath”; the Ginger Spearmint Lime and this I had named “Eden” and Ginger Peppermint Lemon, this I had named “Crisp”.

I brought a jar of **Crisp** to work one day. I brewed a cup, left the jar in the office kitchen, where it’s aroma attracted my work colleagues and they made orders for the tea, their family members ordered, their friends, neighbors and just like that my prototype had tested the market and gave me a paying business idea. My tea was now in demand and I had to scale up.

My initial capital was 200,000 Ugandan shillings (about 54 US dollars), which I used to purchase my first batch of ingredients, along with 12

glass jars and branded labels for packaging. I supplemented this with produce grown in my backyard. As orders increased, I consistently reinvested the profits back into the business.

To scale up, I moved into a larger space, set up my first solar dryer, and completed product certification. This required 8 million shillings (approximately 2,150 US dollars) from personal savings and a 12 million shilling loan (about 3,230 US dollars) from my investment club. The business was able to repay the loan gradually as revenue grew.

Trials, Triumphs, and Tea on the Balcony

Scaling up came with new challenges. I no longer had access to the electric dehydrator I had borrowed. I had also **moved out of my marital home**, ending up in a **small apartment** in a Kampala suburb. It was a tough adjustment, but the business had begun to take root. Orders were still coming in, and customers kept returning for more of my herbal tea blends.

Determined not to stop, I began drying herbs on my apartment balcony. I used trays and hanging lines, making do with what little space I had. However my neighbours started pointing at my drying herbs. I noticed them whispering amongst themselves.



Accusations and Humiliation

But soon, whispers turned into confrontation. Some neighbours began accusing me of witchcraft, claiming that my drying herbs and spices were suspicious. They threatened to leave the building unless I was evicted. Our landlord was pulled into the drama. When I sat with her and explained the nature of my work, and offered her a sample of my tea, she was intrigued. She encouraged me to be more open, to dry my herbs visibly in the sunlight, so that the process would be transparent and less prone to misunderstanding.

Sadly, not everyone was ready to understand. One afternoon, a neighbour deliberately parked her car over my carefully laid-out ginger and instructed her workers to wash it, destroying my produce in front of me. It was painful and humiliating. But it also lit a fire in me. I realised that this business was not just a passion project, it was necessary. It was how I would **supplement my salary, support my children, and build a future**.

Reimagining the Vision

That moment pushed me to think bigger: How could I scale up production, given the space constraints? Should I grow the herbs myself or begin working with community growers? What drying methods could I use that were safe, efficient, and protected from sabotage?

A Place to Grow

And then, something shifted. I often say the **universe aligned with my determination**. I was able to secure a standalone house, a place I could live in and work from. With space to breathe, dream, and plant, everything began to change. I connected with a kind and skilled gentleman who helped me design and set up a **solar dryer**, a sustainable solution that matched my growing capacity. I also installed a small **shade-net garden**, where I could propagate

herbs for my own use and share seedlings with local growers.

This wasn't just about scaling a business anymore, it was about **creating a local supply chain**, empowering others to grow herbs in their own backyards, and showing my community that this venture was something wholesome, sustainable, and filled with potential.

Our annual sales increased from 6 million shillings (roughly 1,615 US dollars) when we were operating from the kitchen to over 70 million shillings (around 18,800 US dollars) today. Most of the profits have been reinvested into the business. Our current capital investment exceeds 200 million shillings (about 53,700 US dollars), including physical assets, biological resources, and inventory.

We now employ 5 full-time staff, 4 part-time workers, and hundreds of casuals, both directly and indirectly, across the value chain and processing operations.

Partnerships, Visibility, and Growth

I've managed to access wider markets through exposure events where we offer tea tastings and connect directly with customers. Our online presence, through our website and social media, has also helped grow our visibility and reach.

Joining support organisations like PELUM Uganda and CWEN has been pivotal. They've amplified our brand, promoted our products, and opened doors to market opportunities. PELUM Uganda, in particular, sponsored us to participate in exposure markets in both Uganda and Kenya, promoted our teas within their member networks, and facilitated peer-to-peer field visits. These experiences expanded my knowledge of agroecological practices, improved our market positioning, and deepened our partnerships.

Through these efforts, the business gained

visibility and eventually accessed funding via the NSSF Hi Innovator Accelerator Program. This support enabled us to onboard more farmers, expand our solar drying capacity, and invest in machinery to increase efficiency.

In recognition of our work, I received a Vocational Award from the Rotary Club of Kisugu for contributing to community development through job creation and innovation.

Changing Perceptions, One Cup at a Time

Our products are shifting the narrative around locally made goods. We're committed to excellence, from working closely with farmers to carefully overseeing production, ensuring that by the time the tea reaches the consumer, it carries the highest quality and care.

I now mentor fellow women and young entrepreneurs, because I remember how isolating it felt to start this journey alone. Through programs like *Women Creating Wealth* (Gratia Mitchel Trust) and YALTA (by PELUM Uganda), I support startups and growing businesses. We meet one-on-one to identify business gaps, set practical goals, and map out actionable steps. My role is to offer encouragement, insight, and companionship on the path. They shouldn't have to make the same mistakes I did.

Setbacks and Strength

There have been moments I wanted to give up and return to employment, especially after my greenhouse roof collapsed and the contractor refused to take responsibility. That loss was devastating. I had invested so much in branding my business as one that controlled the value chain, from seedling multiplication to final packaging.

But the experience taught me a great deal about greenhouse management, soil health, and herb cultivation. I had to figure things out on my own, with no additional resources. Despite





the frustration, I found renewed purpose in the feedback I received, clients sharing how our teas improved their health and changed their views on wellness. That's what keeps me going: knowing that something I created is changing lives.

Joining entrepreneurial networks and accelerator programs has shown me I'm not alone. I've met others who've faced the same struggles. These communities have connected me with farmers, affordable suppliers, and new markets. I've learned to be ready, always stocked with inventory,

consistent, and reliable.

Looking Back, and Ahead

If there's one thing I've learned, it's this: you don't have to have everything figured out to begin. In agro-processing, we build while moving. Start small, learn from your mistakes, seek feedback, and refine your systems before you scale. That's how lasting businesses are built.

The road has not been easy, but it has been deeply meaningful. Each challenge has shaped me. Each connection has strengthened me. And each cup of tea shared with a customer reminds me why I began: to nourish, to heal, and to uplift.

I now walk with gratitude, for the support I've received, the lessons I've learned, and the lives I've touched. I carry the hope that others, especially women and young people, will see in my journey the courage to begin their own. Because sometimes, all it takes is one step, one seed, one story, to grow something beautiful.



From Family Roots to *Food Sovereignty*: My Journey with ZoroNeMugoti

By Zororo Taruvinga

ZoroNeMugoti, Zimbabwe

My name is Zororo Taruvinga, the third of four children. I come from a line of teachers, farmers, healers, and entrepreneurs, of men and women who believed that knowledge should be shared, land should be respected, and community should be nourished.

I carry my father's face. People often say I'm his spitting image. He was an ex-combatant who returned from the war and built a career in the military. But beyond the uniform, he was mellow, gentle, and deeply connected to nature. He loved long walks. I like to think I inherited that part of him too.

My mother? She was a force of nature, a creative well ahead of her time. She cooked with boldness and imagination, stretching what little we had into meals that developed our palates and our sense of wonder. She could turn scraps into delicacies and cloth into something elegant. While I somehow missed the fashion gene that my three siblings picked up so effortlessly, I drew endless inspiration from her creativity and generosity.

She loved books and was always sharing knowledge, whether it was recipes, practical life skills, or quiet wisdom, especially with other women in the church and community. She gave freely. She also worked her way up, starting as a secretary and eventually joining the accounting departments of various educational institutions. Watching her push forward, study, work, give, and grow showed me that ambition doesn't have to be loud, it can be steady and kind.



A Legacy of Land, Learning, and Love

We moved around a lot because of her work, and while it wasn't always easy, it taught me how to adapt quickly, to let go and start over when needed, and to find opportunity wherever I landed.

The Ground Beneath My Feet

My maternal grandfather was a legend in his own right, an award-winning commercial farmer and cattle breeder, a retail business owner, and a builder. His work was grounded in the land, in enterprise,

and in vision. That lineage runs deep in me. It's where my roots are, and it's where my future grows from.

My grandmother was a deeply religious homemaker who somehow balanced raising a large family with an iron fist wrapped in cotton candy. She had that rare blend of firmness and tenderness, the kind that holds a home together. Her hands were always busy, and everything she touched seemed to flourish. She had green fingers, a gift in the garden, and off-the-charts cooking and baking skills. Her homemade jams, lemon curd, and beautifully crafted breads weren't just family favourites, they won big at local shows.

On my father's side, my grandparents were educators and rural entrepreneurs. At any given time, they had a small team of helpers, four or more, supporting their ventures. My paternal grandfather raised chickens, tended a growing garden and a thriving orchard in Chiduku village, where I spent many of my early days. That piece of land, and the way he worked it, left a lasting impression on me. It was more than just farming, it was a way of life, a way of thinking, a quiet resilience that I carry with me.

Culinary Training Meets Indigenous Memory

These values came with me when I trained in Hospitality, Travel and Tourism, and later specialised in Patisserie and Culinary Arts at the Institute of Culinary Arts in Stellenbosch. My career took me across southern Africa, from bustling hotel kitchens in Harare to the wild beauty of the Okavango Delta in Botswana. I loved the creativity and the craft, but I often found myself missing the flavours of home. I began to ask: What would it mean to create gourmet food with indigenous ingredients? Could Zimbabwean cuisine stand proudly on any global stage?



A Pandemic Pivot

Then COVID-19 changed everything. With tourism at a standstill, I returned home to a kind of enforced stillness. But sometimes, stillness brings revelation.

My very first project was in Harare, a small backyard garden where I planted onions and baked treats with my brother, Takudzwa. We've always worked well together. I handled the kitchen; he handled the people. TK was the salesman! He knew how to talk, how to charm, and how to sell.

I started experimenting with value-adding chickens, cleaning and prepping them to be oven-ready, both cooked and raw. I made ready meals, and that's when I created my very first homestyle chilli sauce, designed to complement the chicken. It was spicy, simple, and full of flavour, people loved it.

We scaled up. I bought 300 Boschveld day-old

chicks, full of energy and promise, but wow, that experience humbled me! Chicks are fragile, and every loss was hard. TK was always there to calm me down, remind me that I was learning. Slowly, we got the hang of it. The plan was to get a solar incubator, raise chicks, sell some, and build a full-cycle business around them. That dream lit a fire in us.

A Return to the Village

Eventually, we made the decision to move back to our village. We wanted to take these plans seriously, to build something rooted in the land.

One of our first major moves in the village was growing winter tomatoes in open fields. Most people use greenhouses, but I wanted TK to really connect with the soil, to build something real, something sustainable. I chose tomatoes for a few reasons: when I was growing up, people in the village would run out of tomatoes and have to bring them from town. That always stayed with me. I also knew that with my background in value addition, nothing would go to waste.

We grew them together, from start to harvest. We sun-dried the tomatoes, marinated some, made tomato paste, even ground some into



possible.

Discovering the Power of Value Addition

We wanted to integrate the tomato project with chickens, create a proper agro-processing cycle. Around that time, the Ministry had a loan scheme. We applied with big dreams: a borehole, solar dryers, incubators, beautiful packaging, the works.

When the funds came, they were in local currency, and everything we'd planned suddenly cost too much. Instead, we bought a small dryer. That dryer changed everything.



If we could dry tomatoes... why not dry other things?

We started with what we had, chillies, guavas, herbs. I leaned into the culinary side of myself. I made chilli sauces and pastes: Hot Drops that worked as a dip, dressing, marinade, or stirred into a mocktail. I also created a (pickled) milder paste for those who wanted flavour without the heat.

Preserving the Unexpected

During COVID-19, everyone was farming. Cabbages were everywhere. I started pickling them, along with onions, cucumbers, and ginger, whatever was around. People were drinking Zumbani water, thinking it would help prevent illness, so I turned Masawu into a tangy condiment. It became a hit.

We sourced from other small farmers who had the raw materials but not the means to preserve them. That became our niche.

To encourage people to try our sauces, I made nachos from root vegetables. Then came the jams, gooseberry, mulberry, lemon. I crafted a rose petal jam that won a competition. We dried fruit in gourmet ways for texture and colour: tamarind drinks, masawu chutneys, lemon curd, marmalade with a twist. My philosophy? Value-add what people already eat and grow, but don't always know what to do with.

Snacks, Flours, and Ferments

I made crisps from yams and sweet potatoes, all gluten-free, all healthier alternatives to imported snacks - inspired by Woolworths but rooted in our ingredients and stories.

Even feeding chickens gave me ideas. I experimented with fermenting local grains to boost their nutrition and realised I could do the same for people. That's when I began making gluten-free cookies and rusks, great with sour milk, as cereal, or as a crumb coating. I blended

my own flours, leaning into gut health, sugar-free options, and nutrient density.

Rosemary grows like a hedge here. I used it in marinades, bakes, and herbal infusions. I started teaching others how to use what's already growing around them, empowering through food.

The Birth of ZoroNeMugoti

COVID-19 forced me to pivot. I spent countless hours researching entrepreneurship, finance, and marketing. I joined online classes, webinars, forums, anything that kept me learning. When restrictions eased, I began attending workshops and conferences, building real-world connections and deepening the vision I had started during lockdown.

I experimented with traditional ingredients, fermenting *maheu*, drying wild fruits, crafting sauces from leafy greens. One day, I made a batch of **nyimo (Bambara nut hummus)** and posted them online. The response was immediate: "Where can I buy this?" "Why don't we eat this anymore?" (I was then honored to cook and serve an office high-level meeting tea, where PELUM bought my services with a menu with all indigenous foods which spoke to the their funders)

That's how **ZoroNeMugoti** was born.

The name blends my own - *Zororo*, meaning rest or peace - with *ne mugoti* - "with the cooking stick."

Mugoti is the wooden cooking stick we use in Zimbabwe. It's symbolic. When a child begins solids, they're given a small mugoti, it says, *you can take care of yourself now*. For me as a chef, every creation is tied to that stick. It's carved from a tree, used to stir nourishment, and then returned to the earth.

It's where my journey meets my purpose, **rest, rooted in nourishment.**





Hustle and Hard Lessons: My Numbers Story

When I moved back home, I was lucky to have access to a regular kitchen. As a chef, I made the most of the tools and utensils already there. Whenever I turned a profit from my food services, I invested it into upgrading, from the family kitchen to what I now call the “cottage kitchen,” my current production space.

Mobility was key. I had a car bought with savings from my previous formal job, and that helped me reach markets and move stock. But not all investments paid off. I lost a painful amount of money backing a family member’s business. It started well, with promises and handshakes, but ended without accountability or return. That heartbreak was my most expensive lesson.

I’ve since learned that not everyone will believe in your dream the way you do. No one in my family has ever poured the kind of cash I did into this venture, and maybe that’s for the best. But I had to try. That decision, costly as it was, taught

me tenacity.

At one point, I had to stretch just **\$2,000** across everything: farming, business registration, product development, and basic operations. A loan of **\$1,200** from the Ministry enabled me to buy a small solar dryer and put together some packaging and stickers to start selling. At crucial moments, generosity showed up. My aunt, Mainini Faithful, and my uncle Gibson gifted me **\$400**, simply saying, “We believe in your dream.”

My sister and brother-in-law couldn’t support financially, but they sent care packages, things like hand lotion, chocolates, and soft slippers, reminding me to take care of myself. Those small acts of kindness made a big difference in moments of exhaustion and doubt.

Building a Bridge Between Memory and Innovation

As I grow as an entrepreneur, I realise I’m building more than a business. I’m building a bridge, between memory and innovation, heritage and

possibility. I want Zimbabwean children to grow up proud of their food, to know that our cuisine is not something to outgrow or westernise, but something to cherish, elevate, and share with the world.

Humble Beginnings, Bold Steps

When I started, I didn't have fancy networks or big platforms. I took my products wherever people gathered: weekend farmers' markets, paid stalls, church events, agricultural field days. I walked into shops and asked, "Will you try stock this?" If it sold, I got paid. If it didn't, I learned. I always brought tasters; free samples were my marketing. I shared on WhatsApp and social media, even though my skills were basic. But people remembered the taste, and slowly, word spread.

Finding My Way and Opening Doors

I reached out to people with knowledge and experience. That's how I joined ZimTrade's Next She Exporter Program, which opened doors I hadn't even imagined, from learning about export regulations to discovering that my products had potential beyond Zimbabwe. After that, PELUM Zimbabwe found me. They were looking for entrepreneurs in the agroecology space and saw something in my work.

In 2023, (the then deputy minister of industry Minister Raj Modi invited me to showcase millet-based products during the Year of Millets. That led me to ICRISAT in Bulawayo, and I made sure to visit their labs in Matopos. Soon after, I was invited to speak on a panel with industry experts.

I took part in AFSA's Tripartite Convening and the Good Food and Seed Festival, where I facilitated a session and shared my journey. In 2024, I was one of two Zimbabwean entrepreneurs selected to attend the African Youth Agribusiness Forum (AYAF) at the African



Union Headquarters in Ethiopia. It felt like the seeds I'd planted were finally taking root. I was one of the two Zimbabweans at the 2nd Eastern African Agroecology Conference in Kenya in March 2025 to share my Entrepreneurship in the Agroecology arena.

The Power of Collective Action

But it wasn't easy. I struggled with transport, power cuts, and the pressure of trying to do everything myself. Accessing loans was almost impossible without a credit history. That's when I teamed up with other entrepreneurs from the ZimTrade program and formed a SACCO (Savings and Credit Cooperative) called *Taumba*, which means "we have built." Our tagline is *Create. Believe. Belong.* I'm proud to be a founding member and its current chairperson. We raise funds, support one another's ventures, and lend at fair interest rates. It's community in action.



Learning the Language of Business

I also joined an SME community where I learned how to express my business ideas clearly, register properly, and speak the language of investors. I paid subscriptions, got mentorship, and was guided step by step. It was one of the best investments I made.

One of the greatest lessons I've learned is that you can't build a business alone. You need people, beyond your family and friends, who believe in your vision. My family gave me a safe space to return to. My community taught me new things. I worked with young women, men, and girls who helped with part-time jobs and errands. They brought back feedback from markets, connected me to excess produce from their villages, and gave insights I never would've had on my own.

Learning from Mistakes and Finding My Voice

Even my mistakes became teachers. I once underestimated how important marketing is. I believed good food would sell itself. But I learned, marketing matters. I had to invest time, money, and heart into telling my story.

Today, ZoroNeMugoti is known in shops, at trade fairs, and even across borders. I've become a consistent supplier of chillies, sweet potatoes, indigenous grains, and other value-added products. My customers trust me. I've created jobs. I support local farmers. I prepare herbal concoctions for my team and neighbours for free, because I believe health and nourishment should be shared.

Feeding the Future

We've made markets more accessible through bulk orders, direct sales, and resell opportunities. I've seen people in my community start their own ventures after watching mine grow. We've inspired others to believe that they too can turn local ingredients into sustainable livelihoods.

If I could speak to my younger self, I'd say: start earlier, take more risks. The dream was always there; I just needed the mindset shift. It's not all going to happen at once. There are seasons in business, just like in farming. But consistency, authenticity, and courage? Those are everything.

A Vision Rooted in the Soil

Looking ahead, I want to create a household brand rooted in sustainable living, export regionally and globally, and one day start a village school that teaches agroecology, culinary arts, and hospitality. I want to show young people that it's possible to build a business from the soil, from a *mugoti*, from tradition, and take it to the world.

At ZoroNeMugoti, we are stirring more than pots, we're stirring stories, systems, and futures. Because when we cook with the cooking stick, with intention, with love, with rootedness, we create food that feeds the future.





Email: afsa@afsafrica.org
Web: www.afsafrica.org