

Nyanzi savouring the sweet success of stevia



Unlike most of Uganda's graduates who sit back, waiting to be employed, Chiaramani Julius Nyanzi, 27, set up PROF BIORESEARCH Company at Masanafu, a city suburb from which he produces health and other products, such as perfumes, mosquito repellents, fresheners and pesticides, among others, writes Herbert Musoke



One of Nyanzi's workers weeding stevia in the garden

Education and innovativeness

Right from my childhood, I started being innovative. I got the inspiration of doing research and innovations while in Top Class at Aidah and Tofa Infant School in Kawaala in 1994. We used to have film shows at cinema halls and at school.

When I was in Primary One, we had Kabaka Muteesa II and Idi Amin film shows at school. I was with my friend, Suuna, but since I did not have the sh100 for the film, we were chased out and I felt we were cheated because during the sampling, I saw them holding films then expose them to the light and pictures were projected to the wall or white cloth, which I felt was not worth the fee.

From here, I got an idea that we can as well project pictures and even get some money. So, I shared the idea with Suuna and we decided to collect negatives from children and organise a show. We even reduced the fee by half.

We got 25 children for our show and collected sh1,250 entrance fees. I brought my mother's cloth and pinned it to the wall. So, we got Kodak spools that we collected from friends then went to my father's shop and got a flashlight. Suuna, went to his father's television set and got a knob that we used to turn the films.

Unfortunately, when we cast the films, the pictures did not project on the wall. So, the children reported us to the school authorities, accusing us of fleecing them. We were punished. I was hurt when the experiment failed.

When I was in Primary Seven at St. Andrew, Kawaala, I asked myself how I could make something sweet that does not make people sick. When I tried sugarcane, one needed to chew them.

I looked at oxalis sorrel (*Kanyebwa*) and even made powder out of it, but it also did not work. I was disappointed for the second time.

During my A-level holidays at Merryland, Entebbe, I wanted to use Makerere University library and laboratory, but I was told I had to have a university identity card.

Before joining university, I used to teach myself sciences and do my own research on what plants can be used to make healthy sugar at home. During my Senior Six vacation, I invested into poultry.

I later discovered stevia, which is good for sugar, but was not available in Uganda. I even acquired knowledge on



Nyanzi arranging his products at Equatorial Mall outlet

mushroom seed production and tissue culture at Kawanda Research Centre in Wakiso. When I joined Makerere University for a degree in botany, chemistry pharmacology, I got a job at Buloba Agro Research Technology as a lab attendant. My salary was sh200,000.

My first association

In 2012, I set up and registered a Community Based Organisation (CBO) in Masanafu, Kampala and named it Bio Communication Network (BioNet). The association recruited over 50 youth members and employed over 200 people. We also trained community members in poultry, mushroom farming, among others, all for free. In 2014, we joined the Kampala Community Based Organisation competitions about CBO that have helped change lives of the youth. We were promised a sh5m award, but we never received the money. This created

mistrust among members who thought I received the money and never shared with them. This made it difficult to continue with this CBO because the youth wanted to share the money.

Establishing Prof Bioresearch

Disappointed, I established an income generating business, seeing as our CBO was not for profit and we were not professional in whatever we were doing. Because of its emphasis on professional services, we called the business Prof Bioresearch at Masanafu in the very place where BioNet was in 2014. We also registered the company with Uganda Natural Chemotherapeutics Research Laboratories in 2015 because all our products are medicinal.

I started with sh50,000 to collect the stevia leaves from the airport and I was doing this alone. It was during my last year at university. I got stevia from the US through a friend. He sent me



Expanding the business

I have continued to participate in different exhibitions in Uganda and East Africa. I also opened up branches in Mubende and Masaka, but my employees misappropriated the money. I have since maintained one selling outlet in Kampala. The company has different departments. Every week, we hold departmental meetings to review performance and consider accounts. I have workers with different experiences and qualifications, but I maintain a supervisory role. I procured a van that transports the products from Masanafu to Equatorial Mall in the city. My wife is in charge of finances and I always move with my daughter around laboratories, to acquaint her with the workings of the trade.

leaves, which, using my tissue culture skills, I soaked into Irish potato water and water hyacinth extracts, enabling me to grow it locally.

Making money from stevia

I started multiplying the plant and consulted with lectures at Makerere University. They said it would be helpful for people with diabetes and, they too, helped to market my products. I started making money from selling seedlings at sh5,000 and I would make about sh3m per month. I then thought of making powdered stevia. I asked my grandmother at Masanafu for space to plant more on a large scale and she gave me one acre of land in 2014 that I am still using.

One tin of 180g of powdered stevia costs sh15,000. It went well as I sold tins getting between sh100,000 and sh300,000 per day. This motivated me. I planned to participate in exhibitions. So, I went to Uganda Manufacturers' Association in Lugogo to book an exhibition stall for the 2015 trade fair. The stalls ranged from \$1,000 and more. I almost gave up, but on my way out, I met a friend who enabled me to secure exhibition space at the Small Scale Industries at sh300,000.

I told my mother, who then had a wine making business, about the opportunity. She gave me the money in exchange for selling her wine. I

used the money to buy tins to pack powdered stevia, which I sold. I collected sh800,000 at the first show.

After the show, I was offered space at the US Embassy for their market organised at the embassy premises through a friend I met while still at Buloba Agro Research Technology in 2013.

I then went into making perfume, mosquito repellents, and deodorants among others. After getting the space, I realised there was need to advance the products and also to increase on the number of products sold.

In 2016, I was invited to Switzerland for more entrepreneurship training. I packed some of the products to showcase. Some of it spilled into the plane, giving off a strong scent. The passengers loved it and became curious. Some bought my products. By the time I reached Switzerland, I had made \$1,000 dollars.

I used some of this money to rent a shop at Equatorial Mall and participating in several other exhibitions, mostly in Uganda.

I earn about sh60m per month, with net profit of about sh30m after expenditure on products. I save about 50%, which I inject back in my business.

Wife

Afrodith Namutebi, the wife of Nyanzi says she is happy for the innovations and plans that her husband has. "I am optimistic that his plans will take us places," she says.

She notes they are planning to do the business as a family thing and as such, she is fully involved and so is their daughter.

Challenges

- Negative feedback.
- Lack of goodwill from policy makers.
- Absence of practical policies to support youth schemes, such as ours.
- Expensive marketing avenues.

Future plans

- Spread out the business to other countries in Africa
- To popularise stevia as a viable and healthy substitute to manufactured sugar
- To industrialise research in the crop and build a big factory at Kigo, where we have secured land

Clients say...



Charles Kabunga: Nyanzi shows us that we can use the knowledge we have to make ends meet.



Joyce Nalweyiso: Nyanzi shows youth that we have to be innovative basing on what is around us.



Musa Mukilbi: Uganda needs people, such as Nyanzi because all his products are natural and healthy.