FOCUS ON LOCAL BUSINESSES

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HOW SSENYONGA WENT FROM SELLING CASSAVA FLOUR TO OWNING FACTORY



Ssenyonga (right) with Owoyesigyire (centre) while awarding one of his employees for her hard work during the thanksgiving ceremony at Masanafu

By Moses Kigongo

On the dusty streets of Kisenyi, Kampala, where many young men hustle daily just to survive, John Bosco Ssenyonga once stood with only four bags of cassava flour and a dream. There was no factory, no fleet of delivery trucks, no executive team, but just determination, faith and the courage to start small.

Today, that same young man is the driving force behind Mujjetukole Traders, a flourishing agro-processing enterprise operating a modern factory in Masanafu Industrial Park.

His journey from modest beginnings to industrial growth is a powerful reminder to Uganda's youth that success is not about where you start, but how consistently you move forward.

It was this remarkable transformation that recently inspired a thanksgiving ceremony at the Masanafu factory, where Ssenyonga and fellow traders gathered to appreciate business partners, customers, security agencies, religious leaders, traders' association leaders and political figures who have supported their journey.

THE POWER OF STARTING SMALL

Ssenyonga's journey began in Kisenyi with just four bags of cassava flour. At the time, the idea of owning a factory seemed distant. But he remained focused.

A close associate, Hassan Tumwine, encouraged him not to give up on the cassava business. That advice changed everything.

Together with colleagues, they embraced the power of partnership. They formed a joint venture and named it Mujjetukole, a Luganda phrase meaning "let's work together". The name reflected their belief in unity and collective effort.

They mobilised farmers who lacked reliable markets and positioned themselves as trusted buyers and distributors. Farmers steadily supplied cassava, while Ssenyonga and his team focused on building a strong customer base in Kisenyi.

Over time, their name became synonymous with cassava trade in the area. Their reputation grew, and so did their storage capacity.

To survive throughout the year, they needed to diversify, hence venturing into rice trading.

FACING RESISTANCE

Before fully venturing into rice trading, Ssenyonga first consulted trusted customers to confirm whether they would buy from him.

"I remember reaching out to one of my contacts and friends, asking whether he could buy my rice," he recalls. "Although he had better suppliers and limited demand for my rice, he accepted to start with a few bags."

That small gesture became his launch pad. Gradually, what started with a few bags grew into tonnes annually. Ssenyonga began aggregating rice from local farmers, sometimes spending days in villages collecting small quantities. When local supply became insufficient, he turned to Tanzania.

But cross-border trade brought serious challenges. As newcomers in rice importation, they encountered resistance from established players operating around Mutukula border. Ssenyonga said a group of dominant stakeholders controlled clearing and transportation processes.

"They overcharged us and even forced us into so-called voluntary savings arrangements that were difficult to recover," he recalls.

For many young entrepreneurs, such obstacles would have meant quitting, but for Ssenyonga, it meant strategising.

THE BIRTH OF A UNITED VOICE

In 2010, recognising that unity was strength, he and fellow traders formed the Kampala Rice Traders Association. The objective was clear: Build a united voice, protect their rights and engage the Government constructively.

Through structured dialogue and co-operation, they gradually overcame many of the systemic challenges. Mujjetukole was formally registered as a company under this broader umbrella.

Asked what he considers to be some of the key factors behind his great success, Ssenyonga said: "Being good to others, loving your job and the people you work with is key to success."

Ssenyonga says working closely with government institutions also greatly contributed to the exponential growth of his enterprise. Instead of fighting systems, he learnt to understand and work within them.

BUILDING A MODERN ENTERPRISE

From one small grinding machine, Mujjetukole has grown into a structured company with two modern production machines, including equipment capable of grinding 50kg at once. The product line has expanded beyond cassava flour to include rice, maize flour and groundnuts. The company strengthened its logistics network as well. Last year, three delivery vans were acquired, followed by three more, including a heavy truck capable of carrying 40 tonnes. The management team has expanded to seven members overseeing production, sales, accounts and transport.

Modern rice-processing machines now eliminate stones and impurities, significantly improving product quality.

Looking ahead, Ssenyonga envisions becoming one of Uganda's leading rice suppliers and expanding into regional markets.

Today, the enterprise employs more than 150 people.

LEADERS ENCOURAGE YOUTH

Speaking during the thanksgiving ceremony at the Masanafu factory, Nakawa councillor at Kampala Capital City Authority, Innocent Tugusuulwa, urged young entrepreneurs to remain patient.

"Everyone can become what they want to be. What matters is the time it takes to achieve it. Time is the only factor in our dreams and aspirations. Stay focused, be patient and work hard," he said.

ASP Luke Owoyesigyire, the deputy Police spokesperson for Kampala Metropolitan, emphasised that security is essential for business growth. "Security is about our lives; do not play around with it," he cautioned.

Owoyesigyire implored employees to treat workplaces as their own because businesses sustain families and communities.

Edward Ntale, the chairperson of United Arcade Traders Entrepreneurs Association, called for stronger government support for local enterprises, including affordable electricity, improved industrial roads and simplified tax procedures.

The thanksgiving ceremony was led by Fr Deogratious Kiibi Kateregga, who emphasised morals, discipline and faith as foundations for lasting success.