



Joseph Kizito, 32, a veterinary doctor, combined his passion for chemistry with his experience, working for an agro vet distribution firm in Kampala, to create veterinary products that responded to the needs of farmers. From an initial investment of sh120,000, Butemuzi Agro-vet Ltd, his enterprise, is one of the fastest growing agro-vet solutions company in the country and employs 30 people, writes Michael Kanaabi

Laying strategies
In December 2009, just before Joseph Kizito and his colleagues graduated from Makerere University, they were already laying strategies to make ends meet in the days ahead.

They formed a group and went to districts in eastern Uganda, where, with the support of the area veterinary officers and local council leaders, mobilised farmers who had cows and goats for mass treatment and vaccination. They constructed temporary shelters in trading centres, where livestock were treated for between sh500 and sh1,000 per animal.

On a good day, Kizito says they would treat up to 100 animals.

"One of us on the team would be the day's cashier. In the evening, we would pay off the suppliers who gave us drugs on credit in the morning, pay for our food and accommodation then share the balance among us."

In March 2010, he got a job as a sales executive with MTK Uganda Ltd, selling veterinary drugs, crop fertilisers and pesticides.

Humble beginnings

While selling MTK products, Kizito always keenly listened to the concerns of customers. For those whose problems the MTK products could not solve, Kizito improvised a solution.

He always loved chemistry and, in his free

Kizito's innovations empower farmers to get better yields

time, he researched on various herbs. He had a small stock of chicken at home, which he often used as test subjects for his medicinal inventions before he encouraged customers to try out the products.

In 2012, while still working for MTK, Kizito saved part of his salary to open a drug shop in his hometown, Wobulenzi district.

"I started it with credit supplies worth sh10m of stock from the contacts I had made in the industry. The shop has since grown over the years into two adjacent shops and now has stock worth about sh40m," he says.

First breakthrough product

"In 2012, one of the biggest challenges chicken farmers faced, especially in urban areas, was bad smell produced from chicken houses waiting to neighbours and wet chicken droppings that made it hard to observe hygiene in chicken houses, which created a disease-prone environment," he says.

He made a product which he called Bavonite as a solution to the two menaces. After testing it on his own chicken back home in Wobulenzi, he decided to go commercial.

To make it, he invested sh120,000 with which he acquired ingredients to mix a sackful of his new product of about 100kg. He did not have any proper packaging so he used Kaveera (polythene bag) in measurements of 1kg and sold to clients.

The uptake of his product was very low initially, so Kizito distributed free samples to three shop owners. He received positive feedback from customers. To market his product farther, he acquired branded packaging materials from Nasser Road in Kampala.

Diamond TIPS

1

I recommend manufacturing to all prospective entrepreneurs. It can be done in a small space and the margins are considerable.

2

Integrity is key. Before big money, comes a good name. Avoid pressure to conform to societal expectations. They will bury you.

3

Have older people, mentors you do business with to show you the way it is done. Seek knowledge constantly. Ignorance makes no money and you cannot be successful in what you do not understand.



Kizito manufactures animal supplements

Although the materials were of poor quality, it was a step in the right direction.

Soon, word of mouth spread about how effective the product was. However, retention of clients was low because many farmers misused the product as a drug to treat diseases, such as coccidiosis.

This happened because he had limited time and resources to do enough sensitisation among his clients.

Quits formal employment

In March 2014, a year after his first product was tested and started being distributed on a small scale, Kizito quit MTK. "My goal was to quit once my business generated enough money to cover my salary," he recalls.

At the time, he sold 20 bags of Bavonite per month, which brought in sh3m and made a net of sh700,000.

To make his work easier, Kizito, who initially packed and mixed product from his home in Kawempe, rented a

room at sh100,000 and turned it into a workshop.

At the time, his biggest challenge was clients who acquired his product on credit, but took long to pay. Fortunately, as his product picked, he made enough to cover the losses.

Collaboration

A month after his resignation, Kizito hired his first salesman to ease his work since he had an entire country to cover. He paid him commission on the profits made.

Around the same time, Kizito met Indians who had imported veterinary products, but had no idea how to market them.

"I signed as their exclusive dealer because I knew selling these products along mine would give it credibility in the market," he says.

"I attended agricultural seminars and exhibitions to teach people how to rear their animals. I also marketed my product and my sales grew."

Introducing Wonder Pig

As Kizito did his rounds in the field, he realised pig farmers needed cheaper supplements

to increase fertility, meat quality and size of their animals because the imported supplements were expensive.

He experimented with various combinations of herbs and minerals that would improve productivity, meat quality and hygiene of the premises, under which pigs are reared. The new product that Kizito produced was named 'Wonder Pig'.

The supplement can be used to deworm the pigs, get rid of the bad smell, kill flies in the sty, enhance the growth of the pigs and improve their fertility. For the second product, Kizito says, breaking through was easier, considering he already had proper packaging and a distribution network.

Setting up shop

At the close of 2014, with two key products that were moving steadily off the shelf, revenue grew from between sh3m and sh5m to between sh20m and sh30m. He opened a permanent outlet on Farmers Mall in Kampala.

The Indians Kizito had partnered with had since linked him to the manufacturers in India. He now imported the

products directly. This increased the variety of the products he offered.

To cover a wider market, Kizito hired a second sales man. He also hired another veterinary doctor because he could not juggle administrative and field work.

He advertised mainly on radio stations to create brand awareness.

Other products

Over time, Kizito and his team realised that people rearing cattle had challenges with low milk yield, smell from the cow dung, infertility and flies.

"We went back to the drawing board and came up with a new supplement which we named 'Wonder Cow'. The product effectively took care of the bad smell from cow dung, increased milk yields among farmers, killed the flies and increased fertility, too," he says.

Together with Dr Patrick Ogwang, a pharmacist, Kizito has developed Sup Herb at the end of 2014, a product which he says cures coccidiosis in chicken.

His other products include Golden Dog and Avamax for chicken.

Challenges

Transportation of both raw materials and distribution of products has been a challenge.

The cost of advertising, brand building and maintenance to keep the company's brand visible is high.

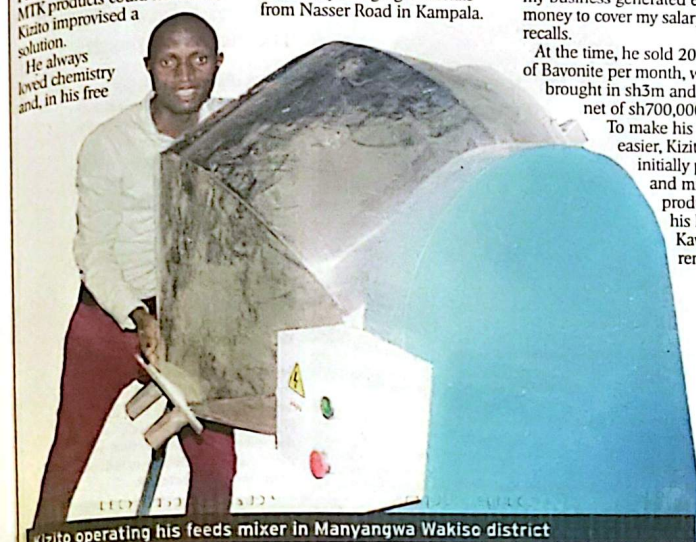
Reaching clients as far as Kenya, Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo is a challenge, but also shows the business has potential to go regional and beyond.

"Counterfeits of our products disrupt business and affect customer loyalty."

Plans

Kizito is in the process of setting up a factory with offices and a warehouse in Manyangwa, Wakiso district. He acquired the premises at sh150m from retained earnings and has been paying in instalments.

He also plans to import a modern fully integrated premix plant from France, at a cost of sh300m for the factory.



Kizito operating his feeds mixer in Manyangwa Wakiso district

What others say



Tracy Namitala, cashier
Kizito endeavours to understand people. He is approachable and hardworking.



Peter Kyeswa, sales manager
He is a calculative risk taker, resilient, brave and result-oriented.



Justine Zawede, shop attendant and first employee
He pays well and promptly. He is always willing to help.