

Student discovers goldmine in mukene

Henry Sserugo had never dreamt of making money from selling *mukene* but the threat of falling out of university after the death of his father motivated him to venture into the business. Sserugo is now a self-employed undergraduate. **Godfrey Lugaaju** spoke to him at his production unit in Kanyanya about how he started.

In 2014, Henry Sserugo, 23, joined Makerere University to pursue a bachelor's degree in Development Economics.

During his first year, Sserugo lost his father Joseph Bagundide who was his main sponsor at university.

While contemplating the next move, the third born in the family of six was advised by his paternal uncle to join him in the business of selling silver fish known among Ugandans as *mukene*.

Thrilled by the idea of making money from selling *mukene*, Sserugo without asking questions heeded the uncle's piece of advice.

"My uncle encouraged me to join him in business. I wanted to continue with my studies so I would not object to the proposal," said Sserugo.

Starting

Armed with capital of Shs300,000, Sserugo immediately got to work.

He went on to invest the cash in his new found business and would collect the *mukene* from mongers at Kasenyi Landing Site in Wakiso District and sell it in the suburbs of Kampala.

"I do not remember the figures but the first sales were encouraging. I got motivated and decided this was the business that would turn my fortunes," Sserugo remembers.

With the help of a one Yusuf Kayemba whom he had met at Kasenyi, Sserugo opted to reinvest his profits.

Business, booming and money coming in, Sserugo established several outlets within Kampala and occasionally stretching as far as Mukono and Masaka.

"Kayemba is big in the business. In the early days he would sell me 10kilogrammes of *mukene* at Shs100,000. As time went by, and my business growing, Kayemba now supplies me in bulk which I pay back after collecting money from my different outlets," he notes.

Value addition

Over time, with the business sprouting and money coming in, Sserugo reveals he decided to expand his business.



The student shows off tins of the silver fish powder. PHOTOS GODFREY LUGAAJU

HOT TIPS

The enthusiastic entrepreneur advises youth not to despise any kind of work and close their ears to people who keep on demoralising them from working hard to achieve their dreams. "Unemployment is high lately but it is better to start small with self-employment. Do not hit the streets looking for employment because even the people with jobs are not willing to make room for you," he says adding that youth should be patient and start with something small.

Profits

On average and after a successful production session with deductions of production costs, Sserugo can make Shs750,000 in a month. He pays taxes to the central division.

4m

THE AMOUNT IN SHILLINGS AGOL EARNS IN A MONTH IF THE SALES ARE GOOD.

After reading several journals relating to fish industry in Kenya, Sserugo discovered that Kenyans were already adding value to silver fish and that the market had responded positively.

"I asked myself, if the Kenyans are eating powdered *mukene*, why not Ugandans? So I picked the journal. Read it to the dot and exactly transferred technology to my small business," he said.

Production

Sserugo confirms he has now employed five people at his Kanyanya based production unit. The five help him to crush the fish and he does the mixture because the secret ingredient to his *mukene* powder is only known to him.

"We get tins at Shs450 each, seals at Shs150 each, stickers at Shs100 each, salt and then the secret ingredient. We strictly use mortars and pestles for now," Sserugo says adding that they finally sell off the 200gramme tin at Shs5000 and Shs40,000 for a box at wholesale price.

Customers

According to Sserugo the response was big, the customer base grew for the man who started with just Shs300,000 was now supplying big chain supermarkets in Kampala



Henry Sserugo with the finished product of the silver fish packaged in tins.

and several major towns with his new packaged and tinned *mukene* powder. "I m lost for words. The dream started small but today the customers are enormous. I work seven days a week," he says.

Challenges

Sserugo says the ever fluctuating prices of the *mukene* makes the business hard for him at times.

He also makes some losses accruing from transportation costs because the company neither owns a car nor a motorbike.

"There are times we spend more than Shs200,000 on

transportation alone. This is quite expensive because sometimes we make four trips a day depending on demand," said Sserugo.

Future

Sserugo wants to grow his business to one of the biggest in Uganda after graduating later this year.

"Next year I want to import a processing plant and grow my market to the entire region," he says.

"Mpigi is ideal for me because I will be between two fishing sites and this means I can never lack *mukene*," he notes.