

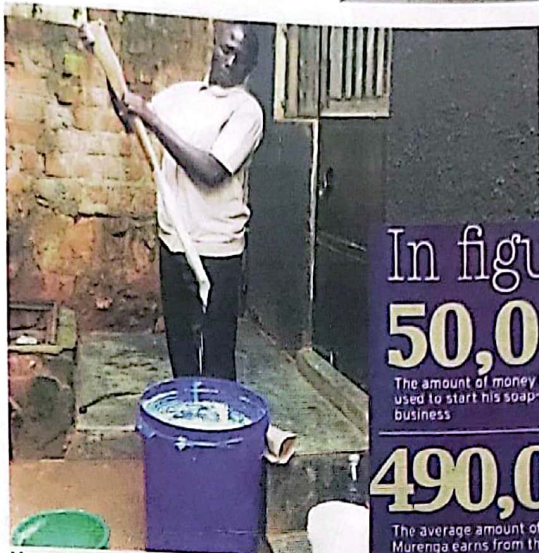
Soap washing off his poverty



When Edrine Murenga, 22, completed Senior Six, he joined his mother, who was a cleaner in Kampala. With a cleaner's pay, Murenga's mother could not afford to pay his tuition at the university. While cleaning at AAR Health Services in Kampala, Murenga met a Dr John Bahana, who makes liquid soap and pine gel disinfectant. The latter recruited him, but Murenga quit a month later to start out his business. Today, Murenga runs Morning Star Distributors Ltd in Zzana, Wakiso, which makes liquid soap and candles. He employs two youth, writes **Jovita Mirembe**

In 2013, while in my \$6 vacation, I joined A&M Cleaning Services on Lumumba Avenue in Kampala as a cleaner. Before long, I moved out of the single room I shared with my mother in Kamwokya, Kampala and rented a house at sh150,000 per month. Although I had qualified to join university, my mother, who had been paying my school fees, could not afford to pay my tuition. While at the cleaning job, I was posted to AAR Health Services on Eco Bank Plaza in Kampala, where, I met Dr John Bahana, a veterinary doctor. He owned a liquid soap and candle-making enterprise. Bahana persuaded me to join his company as a salesperson. He told me that he would pay me a 10% commission of the amount of money I made daily. He, however, cautioned me that if I did not make any sales, there would be no pay. At the end of 2015, I left A&M Cleaning Services and joined Bahana's company in January 2014. Hawking was not easy. It was hard to make a sale, so after a month, I quit. I then started my liquid soap-making business. I had learnt how to make liquid soap and candles from Bahana's company by observation.

A shaky start
I had saved sh50,000 in the bank. In February 2014, I withdrew the money and bought chemicals from Telesat International in Kampala at sh35,000. Telesat offers business development services and hands-on skills training to youth and women. From the knowledge I had attained, I started making soap from my single-room house in Kamwokya, which also served as my residence. However, after the process, I did not get the expected results. I called Bahana for guidance, but he told me he could not help me because I had abandoned his company. I returned to Telesat International to consult. After receiving instructions, I used the sh13,000 I was left with to buy other chemicals from which I made a solution of 10 litres of liquid soap. I packaged the soap in 22 half-litre water bottles. I sold each at sh1,000 and made a gross profit of sh11,000.



Murenga making liquid soap

In figures
50,000

The amount of money Murenga used to start his soap-making business

490,000

The average amount of money Murenga earns from the sale of liquid soap

Funding

In August 2014, life became hard because I did not have a standard salary. I hawked my liquid soap to pay rent and also get money for upkeep and that was not going well. I turned to my mother, who gave me sh100,000 capital and sh100,000 for rent. Around the same time, my mother quit her job to return to Mbale and do farming. She left her sofa set with me, which I sold for sh200,000. I looked for a smaller room to rent at sh90,000 a month. I paid for two months in advance with the money I

had got from the sale of my mother's sofa set and spent the balance of sh20,000 on foodstuffs. I used the sh100,000 of the sh200,000 mother had given me to buy ingredients at sh82,000 and banked the balance of sh18,000. I produced two 20-litre jerrycans of liquid soap and packed it in 40 water bottles, which I hawked door-to-door. I sold each at between sh1,000-1,500, depending on the client's bargaining power. I made sh60,000.

Change of marketing strategy
In February 2015, I withdrew sh60,000

Relocates to Zzana

In February 2017, I moved to Zzana on Entebbe Road after a friend advised me to take advantage of the numerous schools in the area. This meant that I could get good market for my soap. I still operate here. Currently, I supply four schools with 14 jerrycans each per term at sh50,000 per 20-litre jerrycan, in addition to other occasional orders. I also have individuals I supply liquid soap. I make between sh250,000 and sh730,000 monthly, depending on market availability. I make a lot more during school days.

I pay my employees according to the sales they make. I deduct 30% from the total sum to buy chemicals and the balance, after paying salaries, is saved. My workshop is a rented house in Zzana, which doubles as a store. I do not concentrate so much on candles because there is a lot of competition in the market.

Marketing

I market my products by giving out free samples, collect contacts and call them after two or three days to get feedback. I do this in Kampala, Mukono, Wakiso and Kayunga districts.

What makes him tick?

- I ensure that my team makes the best liquid soap; thick enough to compete with the other brands on the market.
- I also have good customer care.

Achievements

The business is meeting my personal needs such as subsistence and rent. In 2016, I bought half an acre of land in my village in Mbale at sh1.3m. I also train students in secondary schools how to make liquid soap at a fee.

Challenges

- There is stiff competition among liquid soap producers.
- Some customers undermine the quality of our products.
- There are fake chemicals on the market, which compromise the quality of the soap.
- Some clients delay to pay.

Mistakes

It was a mistake for me to start making liquid soap in large quantities without learning everything about the process. It was an expensive mistake.

Who is Edrine Murenga?

I was born on July 9, 1995, to Robert Kuloba and Sarah Kakayi, who are farmers in Busiwu village, Mbale. I attended Bufuhula Primary School in Mbale up to Primary Two in 2000, when my mother brought me to Kampala after she got a job as a cleaner in A&M Cleaning Company in 2003. I enrolled in Kiwatule Parents Preparatory School in P3 in 2003. I later moved to St Martin Primary School, Kulambiro in 2004, where I sat Primary Leaving Examinations in 2007. I then joined St Andrew Kaggwa SS Kabimbiri in Mukono district, where I sat both my O' and A' level.

Murenga's plans

- To register my business after getting office premises
- To set up a factory in Zzana because it is a busy place with a lot of business potential.
- To trade in liquid soap-making chemicals and make them more accessible in the outskirts of the city.
- To pursue a bachelor's degree in education

Clients say...

Maureen Nakimull
Murenga's liquid soap is good because it is thick. We get value for money.

Majorine Nantambi
His candles are good because the wax and threads he uses are of good quality.

Elizabeth Wanyana
He teaches youth skills. He inspires young people to join the liquid soap-making business.