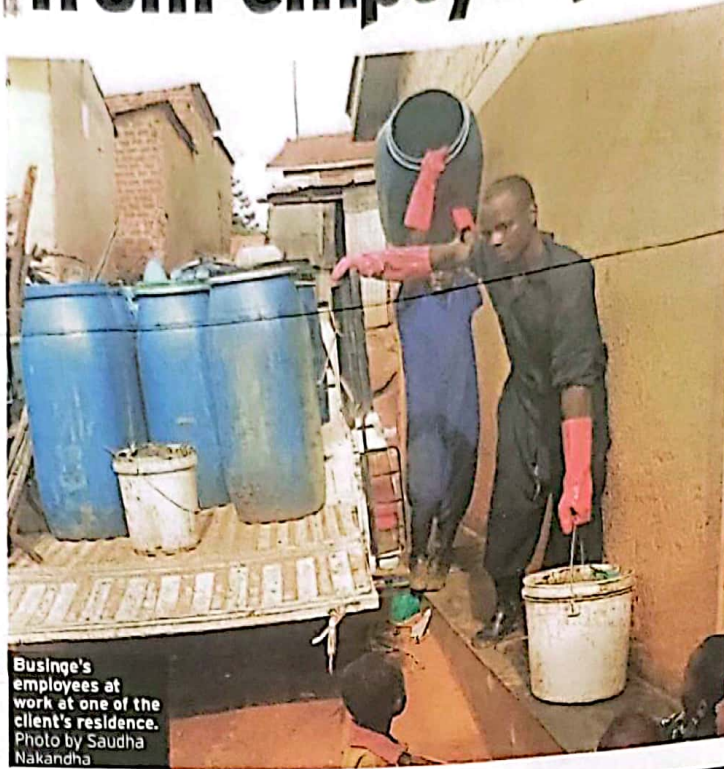




Graduate earns sh9m month from emptying pit latrines

John Businge, 32, is a graduate of business management from Makerere University. After working for a telecom company after university, Businge got his hands dirty emptying latrines, a job that was frowned upon by family and cost him his wife. Today, he runs Forever Sanitation Limited, a company worth sh40m in Kawala, Kampala and employs 10 people, writes **Saudha Nakandha**



Businge's employees at work at one of the client's residence. Photo by Saudha Nakandha

After university, I got a job as a marketer with a telecom company in 2012. I stayed in Namuwongo, Kampala. One day in 2013, I heard a radio advert saying "there is a potential gold harvest in Uganda."

The advert directed me to the place where I would find the gold in Kianta, Kampala. It turned out to be the offices of Water for People, a non-government organisation that trains people on how to empty latrines.

After training us, they expected us to experiment. I was so disappointed that I walked away after the day's lecture with no intention to return.

I despised people who worked in sanitation. The next day, I went back to my job, but a friend who had quit the company to market the pit latrine emptying business at Water for People encouraged me not to give up.

I went back to the Water for People offices. My friend's boss subcontracted me to market the business. He gave me flyers which I supplied to homes in Kasubi and surrounding areas. I earned sh400,000 monthly.

Potential clients would call to request for the service. I was paid a commission for every client I brought in.

Emptying latrine

Colleagues with whom we marketed the business put

my contact number on the flyers we supplied without my knowledge. A week later, people started calling me, requesting for latrine emptying services.

I was ashamed to mention that I was involved with latrine emptying business.

When calls became increased, I started promising them services, but told them to hold on.

There was a client who called and wanted his pit latrine in Kasokoso emptied that day. I did not want to do the job because I had no equipment such as the gulper, drums and the experience. This man called persistently and was becoming impatient.

I decided to borrow barrels and a gulper (pumping machine) from Water for People. I rented a truck at sh40,000, money I had saved from my former job, to transport the equipment to the site.

I then emptied the client's latrine. I extracted 30 barrels of waste and charged sh25,000 each. I earned sh750,000. The managers at Water for People assured me that the money was mine. I had earned more than my salary, which sometimes came in after three months.

From then on, I got more calls from clients and started making more money. After two months in the business, I was made a supervisor at Water for People.

I started supervising and training new entrants in the

In figures

Sh300,000
The salary of each of his four permanent employees

Sh750,000
The amount of money Businge earned after his first job of emptying a pit latrine

18m
The amount of money he paid in instalments to acquire each of his trucks

business. I earned double; I was paid for marketing and training entrants.

Quitting a friend's job

I later joined one of my colleagues who quit Water for People and started his own latrine emptying business.

During that time, I acquired more skills after working as a driver of the business truck as well as an operator.

He paid me sh20,000 daily. It would have been enough if we were more than three people, but with the work I did; I felt I deserved more. I quit after three months to start my own

business.

From the sh250,000 I had saved, I bought four barrels at sh60,000 each, but did not have sh450,000 to buy the gulper. I contacted Water for People who lent me a gulper whenever I got clients.

Since Water For People had no truck, I always hired one whenever I had work. Unfortunately, at some point in my business, this friend refused to hire his truck to me. I resorted to commercial trucks.

However, whenever the owners found out the kind of business I did, they stopped hiring them out to me.



John Businge

Transportation became a big challenge. As such, I saved from March to July and by August 2014, I had saved up enough to buy a used Toyota Townace truck at sh18m. I paid for it in instalments of sh1.2m a month.

Recruiting staff

I did not face a challenge with securing a place for my office and store because my uncle gave me two rooms rent-free in Kawala.

I started out alone in mid-2013, but when the work doubled, I recruited my brother Matthew Ategeka in 2014. I recruited two more workers at the end of 2014.

I bought more barrels at sh60,000 each to make 20. I also stopped distributing flyers and opted for appearances on radio talkshows to attract more clients. After these talk shows, I would receive calls from bigger institutions such as schools.

I am always searching for better ways of marketing my business. For example, I now use social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook.

In 2015, I recruited three more staff and last year, I added four. There are four women and six men who are operators. I pay the four who are permanent staff sh500,000 minus the allowances. I pay the six casual workers sh20,000 per trip. Due to high demand for the services, my clientele increased from five to about 10 per a week in 2015.

The amount of money I earn depends on the number of barrels I get from a latrine. A big latrine can produce about 50 barrels. I charge sh30,000 per barrel if the barrels are less than 20 and sh25,000 if they are more.

I now have 50 barrels, two trucks and a team of 10 operators.

The business is still based at Kawala in my uncle's house, but we now pay rent.

Family involvement

The mother of my four-year-old son with whom I stayed at my uncle's house in Kawala in

Advice

- Many have started businesses and failed down because they did not listen to the advice that comes easy, hard.
- When you make a decision, do not just consult your family, but consult the business for expansion.

2013 left me for another on grounds that the job was ashamed her.

I was hurt, but this did not deter me from doing business. In fact, I got a determination to work harder.

I met my fiancé in 2013 and plan to have children. He helps with writing proposals to empty latrines at different institutions.

Besides her, I also employ my brother in the business.

Certification

I pay taxes to the Ugandan Revenue Authority. I have a trading licence and certificate of incorporation.

Achievements

I have been able to add to the youth in my community in Kasubi, Makerere and Kawala where most employees come from.

I earn at least sh9m a month, enough income to sustain my family and relatives.

In 2015, I bought a 50-acre piece of land in Bulungu, Wakiso, at sh4m from my brother. Last year, I started construction of a house for my family. I have spent sh20m on the

Challenges

We have always worked with a mortal fear of Hepatitis disease one can easily get if they get into contact with material, yet this is our business. But we have all been immunised, so safe.

We also have clients who fail to pay after we empty their latrine, this we have managed by introducing contract before the emptying.

Plans

I hope to buy a few cesspool tank trucks in future. There are some large projects that call for use of a cesspool tank to empty the latrine in shorter time, but I am limited by the current equipment.

The cesspool would enable me operate in the areas as Karamoja and Mbarara among others.