

Ssekandi makes fortune from soap, cosmetics

When Hakim Ssekandi's father failed to pay his tuition after Senior Four, Ssekandi headed to South Sudan, where he landed a job as a cleaner in an IT firm. But scarcity of soap on the market drew him into the lucrative business of cottage manufacturing. Unfortunately, he lost everything in the military skirmishes of 2015, returning home almost empty-handed. But today, Ssekandi runs Hasha Cosmetics Ltd, a local manufacturing and distribution company. He told Reagan Sempijje how he turned his fortunes around

First shot at business

After Senior Four at Midfield Secondary School in Kibuye, Kampala, I stopped going to school because my father did not have money to pay fees.

Earlier during my P7 vacation, I tried and sold chapattis in Namusuba, Wakiso district, where I stayed with my uncle, to get upkeep for secondary school.

I made sh2,500 daily. I saved this money because I had no responsibilities at that stage.

Since I was no longer attending school, I pondered my next move. My uncle owned a computer training centre in Namusuba, Kampala, so I enrolled for training at the centre.

I studied computer software and maintenance for one year, paying sh150,000 per term using savings from a chapatti business I had done earlier.

After the course in 2005, I set up an Internet café in Kibuye, Makindye

division, but realised it was an expensive venture, so I put the idea on hold. I then went back to making chapatti because I needed a source of livelihood.

In the chapatti business, I only made about sh10,000 per day, which was just enough for food. I saved almost nothing. So I had to find something else to do.

Travelling to South Sudan

In 2010, a friend interested me in going to South Sudan for trade. South Sudan was still recovering from the war and there were many opportunities in the process of rebuilding it. So I used sh160,000, which I had saved from my chapatti business and travelled to Sudan.

Unfortunately, on my way there, our vehicle was ambushed by thieves in Gulu, who stole over sh100,000 from me. I was therefore, unable to reach Sudan.

I then stayed in Gulu, where I undertook petty jobs to make some money to enable me proceed to South Sudan.

Employment in South Sudan

After six months, I raised about sh100,000 and proceeded to South Sudan. Upon my arrival, I met a friend of my father, who helped me secure a market stall in Juba town. However, my ultimate goal was to work in an IT company.

A friend told me about an IT company in Juba called Network of the World (NOW), which provided Internet services.

I went there and applied for a cyber-attendant's job, but instead, they gave me a job as a cleaner because that is all they had. This was heartbreaking, but I stayed on, believing that one day I would be able to get what I desired.

I started out by helping other workers who were finding it hard to operate their computers and restoring those that had software malfunctions. I did this for a couple of months. When my boss realised what I was doing, he was curious to establish how a cleaner could do such technical work.

So in 2012, I was asked to join the technical team as a cyber-attendant, with a monthly salary of sh800,000.

Two years later, my salary was increased to \$800 (sh2.5m).

I worked for one more year and left the company.

Manufacturing soap

In 2013, while still at NOW, there was scarcity of soap in Juba. A friend who dealt in general merchandise advised me that if I learnt how to manufacture soap myself, I would make a lot of money.

I downloaded tutorials from the Internet about how to make soap. I also got training from people who were already doing the business. When I finally quit my job at NOW, I joined the soap manufacturing business full time. With \$100 (about sh300,000) then, from my savings, I bought ingredients for making soap.

My first production comprised six jerry cans of liquid soap which I sold for \$15 (sh45,000) in markets and retail shops around Juba, making a profit of about sh20,000.

After one year, I started selling to organisations, who often made orders of over 100 jerrycans. The business proved to be lucrative so I got in touch with distributors who bought from me and distributed the soap to various customers.

However, after working for two years, another war broke out in South Sudan. I lost virtually all my earnings and capital through looting and destruction of my products. I lost about \$15,000 each (about sh50m) in total.

Starting from scratch

I was forced to return to Uganda because it was no longer safe in South Sudan. Since I already had the experience in soap-making, I naturally gravitated towards that.

My biggest challenge though was lack of capital since I had lost almost everything. I negotiated with one of my previous suppliers to provide me with raw materials for soap.

In 2015, I resumed making soap from my rented house in Nalunumye. I started with five jerrycans of liquid soap. I also made glycerin which works as vaseline for the skin.

I began by selling my products to market stall owners, individuals and shopkeepers around Kampala.

What others say

Aisha Nandawula, employee
I have learnt a lot from Ssekandi for the short time I have been working for him. The company is growing daily and with the plans that he has for the future, we are destined to reach the top.



Hafswah Nasinde, employee
This kind of business needs time and concentration. But Ssekandi has eased up the process. I intend to learn more from him.



I worked hard to get market for my products by moving door to door selling to individuals.

Turning point

After six months, a friend called from South Sudan to tell me a non-governmental organisation wanted 500 jerrycans of liquid soap.

I did not have the capacity to produce that amount of liquid soap, but I knew this was my chance to turn my fortune around. So, I committed to producing the order in time. I borrowed raw materials and went to work.

I delivered the soap and earned \$3,500 (about sh11m).

I used this money to pay off the debts and expanded my business.

By this time, I had secured customers in supermarkets and wholesale shops countrywide.

We also got market from schools around Kampala.

I later realised that I needed to employ workers, so I hired 10 people, each of whom I paid sh100,000 monthly. This boosted my productivity from six jerrycans to over 20 jerrycans of soap per day.

I registered my business as Hasha Products Ltd and rented more rooms in the same area for expansion.

I used to sell over 50 jerrycans of soap in a month by this time.

Due to demand, in July last year, we started making other products such as cosmetics.

Today, we produce 500 pieces of body cream per week. A tin goes for sh3,000. We have also added value to our soap by making it herbal.



Ssekandi's employees placing labels on cosmetic products.

National Drug Authority, Kampala, certified our products in 2016.

Today, we produce 1,000 pieces from less than 500 pieces initially. We are able to make sales of more than sh10m per month.

Over sh1m is spent on salaries of workers. We spend about 50pc of sales on raw materials such as tins which we import from Kenya.

We also spend a lot on rent per month, going up to sh600,000 and paying licence of about sh100,000 annually. We operate in Kinawaka, Nalunumye, Wakiso district.

Risks Involved

●Mixing of ingredients, resulting in production of dangerous products in the market.

●Customers not appreciating your product since some Ugandans prefer imported items.

●Health hazards, especially if you do not protect yourself from some dangerous chemicals used during production.

Diamond TIPS

1 Be sure to account for how your business will collect on bills due and outstanding debts to your company.

2 Keep your finances and inventory organised. You could, for instance, develop a spreadsheet that helps you keep track of the important details in your company.

3 Once you have decided who should be responsible for the duties in your business, you need to remain involved, make sure all your employees are doing the tasks you assigned them.



Ssekandi mixing ingredients.