

# INNOVATION SERIES

## BUSINESS PROFILE



ZIMA ENTERPRISE LTD

KIGALI, RWANDA

[WWW.ZIMARWANDA.COM](http://WWW.ZIMARWANDA.COM)

### ABOUT ZIMA ENTERPRISE

- Company status:  
Limited Liability Company, founded in 2017.
- Number of employees:  
10 permanent youth employees, and other majority youth working as temporary sales agents.



**Marie Ange Mukagahima,  
Founder and Managing Director**

Marie Ange is the Founder and Managing Director of Zima Enterprise. She holds a Bachelor's degree with honours in International

Economics from the University of Rwanda. She further studied business management with the Business Professionals Network (BPN) Rwanda and the Rwanda Youth Industrial Training in Kenya. She also attended a training course in

China on processing and preservation technology of agricultural products. Marie Ange has also been certified in different modules and online courses provided by the International Trade Centre (ITC), the Tony Elumelu Foundation, the Academy of Women Entrepreneurs, Acumen and the IKEA social entrepreneurship.

In 2017, Marie Ange was also awarded as an outstanding youth innovator by Rwanda YouthConnekt and the Bank of Kigali, as well as received different recognitions from business partners of Zima enterprise. Marie Ange is determined to inspire other young people, especially girls, into employment by establishing their own small businesses, in order to address the high rate of unemployment and post-harvest loss in Rwanda and contribute to the country's development.

### BUSINESS MODEL

Centuries ago, pumpkins and their seeds were valued vegetables in the Rwandan society and culture. However, over the time, they became neglected and considered as non-quality food, resulting in high post-harvest losses and many farmers abandoning the culture. Despite the low

value given to pumpkins grown in her community, pumpkins and their seeds have well-documented nutritional benefits. They are rich in minerals such as magnesium, zinc, potassium and sodium; have high vitamin levels; contain antioxidants and dietary fibre; and are low in cholesterol.

This series of events is organised by the PAFO and the COLEACP. COLEACP operates within the framework of the development cooperation between the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) and the European Union, with the support of the French Development Agency.



Pumpkin and its products being prescribed to patients with cardiovascular disease, prostate cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and malnourishment. Consumption of pumpkin is further recommended for pregnant women and for children, especially those under the age of five.

Marie Ange became aware of the low value given to this crop and was searching for a social innovation to bring in youth business competition at University. She decided to produce a pumpkin bread and won the Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) Rwanda Youth Social Innovators Competition in 2017.

Marie Ange looked further into ways to add value to pumpkins and their seeds, so helping farmers to achieve better prices for their crops and enabling consumers to receive the nutritional benefits from

a variety of products. She started in 2017 Zima Enterprise, a social enterprise, initially producing non-durable products such as pumpkin bread and cakes, later moving to those with a longer shelf life and more suited to export markets. Nowadays, Zima Enterprise processes pumpkins into roasted pumpkin seeds, pumpkin seed oil and flour, as well as pumpkin cookies.

Since the inception of the business, Zima Enterprise has worked to improve health conditions for the people in Rwanda through accessible and nutritionally beneficial products.

Zima Enterprise intends to become the leading brand in the Rwandan pumpkin processing industry and to establish a world-class centre for all pumpkin related products.

## STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH SMALLHOLDERS

Zima Enterprise enables rural cooperatives of women farmers to form a ready link to processed pumpkin (seed) markets. The company is currently working with five cooperatives and over 50 farmers many of whom are youth and women.

Pumpkins are an easy crop to grow in Rwanda and they display little seasonality: the plants will continue growing and producing fruit for six months without the need to sow additional seeds during this period. By providing the farmers with high-quality seed for sowing, the company ensures

a constant supply of pumpkins for processing and packaging into value-added items.

The relationship supports a rise in the standard of living of these farmers and provides them with skills and market awareness regarding their crops. Zima Enterprise has provided farmers with solar dryers and has delivered training on the extraction and drying of pumpkin seeds, so that the farmers can supply part-processed material as well as fresh pumpkins to the Zima factory.



## PRODUCTS COVERED AND MARKETS

Zima Enterprise produces five separate products:

- Roasted pumpkin seeds
- Blended pumpkin seed oil
- Extra-virgin pumpkin seed oil
- Pumpkin seed flour
- Pumpkin cookies

The pumpkin seed oil is blended, offering a high smoke point oil with deep-frying capability, that is also nutritious, light in colour and viscosity, and

flavoursome. The extra-virgin oil is dark green in colour with an aromatic nutty flavour. Both oils are cold-pressed and unrefined, with no trans-fatty acids, and are low in cholesterol. The cookies are made from ground pumpkin seeds and are low in sugar.

The products are sold to food retailers, food manufacturers, cosmetic manufacturers, and nutritionists, including in 55 supermarkets in Rwanda.



## INNOVATIONS: MILESTONES AND EXPANSION PLANS

Since 2017, Zima Enterprise has developed from using an entirely manual processing line to a sophisticated semi-automated system. This will enable them to scale up production volume to reach international markets in the coming years. Zima Enterprise currently processes 24 tonnes of pumpkin per year, creating 19,4 tonnes of pumpkin products.

Zima Enterprise strives to have a reliable supply of raw materials and create certified products for consumer confidence, in a factory that meets the requirements of the Rwanda Standards Board.

The products are mainly purchased by high-income earners, but Zima Enterprise aspires to overcome this barrier and enable low-income consumers in Rwanda to also enjoy the nutritional benefits of Zima's products. Through offering products in different package sizes at competitive

prices, Zima Enterprise strives toward a business model of inclusivity in its target markets.

The company is also working to strengthen its product branding, labelling and advertising, so to appeal to a wider range of customers and acquire greater trust in the Zima merchandise. The company hopes to raise awareness of the health benefits of pumpkins and revive interest in their use by forming partnerships with other pumpkin producers across East and West Africa. It is currently working to increase awareness and market acceptance of Zima's products across the country, through exhibitions and trade shows. The company aims to increase its distribution from supermarkets in Rwanda, exporting (up to 70% of production) further into East Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and to international markets.

## SUCCESS FACTORS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Zima Enterprise creates employment opportunities for unemployed graduates and other young people in the local community and in districts across Rwanda. The company continues to build strong relationships with its partners and stakeholders, including the smallholder farmers supplying produce, to the packaging firms, to the supermarkets. It also maintains and grows links to national and local government and with NGOs, who provide the company's employees with necessary skills to strengthen the business and boost production to an international level.

By promoting the consumption of pumpkins and their seeds, the company also contribute to reducing non-transmittable diseases like diabetic, heart diseases, hypertension and prostate cancer.

As well as being open to learning from other entrepreneurs and companies, Marie Ange offers mentorship to young entrepreneurs in their business careers.

Despite a reported loss of 27% of their market in 2020, due to restricted movements as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Marie Ange is determined to avoid taking a bank loan to keep the business afloat. The company is fortunate to benefit from support provided through the Young Entrepreneurs Resilience Fund, an initiative of the Rwanda Ministry of Youth and Culture (MYCULTURE), the United Nations Development Programme in Rwanda and other partners, helping young entrepreneurs whose businesses have been negatively affected by the pandemic.