



Kwanza Cocoa

Malawi, Mzuzu & Nkhatabay

<https://www.kwanzacocoa.com/>

## ABOUT KWANZA COCOA

- Company status: Sole Proprietorship
- Year of registration: 2021
- Number of employees: 6 full time, 7 part time (5 male and 8 female)



**Wezi Mzumara, Founder and Managing Director**

Wezi Mzumara is a Malawian entrepreneur and founder of Kwanza Cocoa, a company specializing in bean-to-bar chocolate crafted from locally grown cacao. With a background in public relations, event management, and design, Wezi made a bold career shift in 2020 following the COVID-19 pandemic, embracing agriculture and cocoa production full-time. Building on her family's initial cocoa planting efforts in

northern Malawi, she established Kwanza Cocoa in 2021 to promote value addition at origin and showcase Malawian cocoa through artisanal, small-batch chocolate. A recipient of seed capital from the Tony Elumelu Foundation and alumna of the Women Entrepreneurship 4 Africa programme, she recently joined the African Women in Food Fellowship cohort of 2024. Wezi champions cross-border collaboration with other African producers and takes pride in crafting unique chocolate flavours inspired by local ingredients, while empowering smallholder farmers and introducing Malawian cocoa to wider markets.

## BUSINESS MODEL

Kwanza Cocoa was founded in 2021 in response to both personal reinvention and broader market potential. The idea took root when Wezi Mzumara, returning to her family farm in Nkhata Bay (northern Malawi), discovered a few cocoa trees her parents had

planted years earlier. Initially unfamiliar with cocoa farming, she expanded the plantation to over 1,000 trees by 2017, driven by inspiration from West African cocoa-producing countries. However, it was during the



Funded by  
the European Union

2020 pandemic, as her previous industries halted, that she explored cocoa value addition.

Immersing herself in the world of bean-to-bar chocolate, Wezi began experimenting with fermentation and production. Encouraged by exchanges with African and Caribbean chocolatiers met virtually at the 2021 Eko Chocolate Show, she acquired basic processing equipment and launched small-scale production from home. With support from the Tony Elumelu Foundation and WE4A, she secured seed funding to build a dedicated processing facility in Mzuzu.

From the beginning, Kwanza Cocoa was envisioned not just as a business, but as a tool to localize value chains, showcase Malawian-grown cocoa, and create opportunities for smallholder farmers. The company's mission continues to evolve with commitment to innovation, quality, and regional collaboration.

**Mission:** to unlock the potential of Malawian cocoa by crafting high-quality, locally made chocolate products that celebrate African flavours, empower smallholder farmers, and promote homegrown value chains.

**Vision:** to become a leading African-origin chocolate brand that inspires pride, builds inclusive supply

networks, and connects consumers to the richness of Malawian agriculture through innovative, sustainable, and locally crafted chocolate.

*Kwanza Cocoa differentiates itself by:*

- **Growing and sourcing cocoa locally**, with additional ingredients (pineapple, chilli, strawberries, coffee, etc.) from Malawi and neighbouring countries.
- **Controlling production from bean to bar**, allowing for product experimentation and limited-edition batches.
- **Leveraging digital channels and corporate gifting** to market its chocolate while preparing for future cross-border expansion.
- **Designing all packaging and branding in-house** to ensure authenticity and cost efficiency.
- **Building collaborative relationships** with other African producers, such as coffee farmers from Ghana and spice makers from Tanzania, for joint flavour innovations.

This model enables Kwanza Cocoa to remain agile, creative, and community-driven, positioning the company as a pioneer in Malawi's emerging chocolate industry.

## STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH SMALLHOLDERS, COOPERATIVES...

Kwanza Cocoa maintains a close and collaborative relationship with a growing network of smallholder farmers and value chain actors across Malawi and the broader region. The company sources cocoa beans both from its own family farm in Nkhata Bay (Northern Malawi) and from a network of local smallholders, contributing to the gradual emergence of a cocoa farming ecosystem in a country traditionally focused on maize, tobacco and groundnuts.

The company's community outgrower program currently engages **30 farmers**, while the commercial outgrower program includes **over 75 farmers**. Kwanza Cocoa also collaborates with two community-based organizations and is actively seeking opportunities to expand its partnerships. These efforts reflect Kwanza Cocoa's commitment to inclusive growth and long-term collaboration with grassroots actors.

Kwanza Cocoa's **own cocoa plantation includes approximately 2,000 trees**, with additional acreage cultivated by partner farmers representing a modest yet strategic foothold in Malawi's emerging cocoa sector. Beyond its direct farming activities, the company collaborates with a range of stakeholders across the value chain: coffee producers in Ghana, spice and oil artisans in Tanzania and South Africa (whose ingredients are featured in limited-edition bars), and local packaging suppliers in Malawi and Tanzania deliberately avoiding imports from China to support local businesses and mitigate foreign exchange challenges.

Kwanza Cocoa also maintains strong ties with corporate clients such as banks, insurance companies, and government institutions, which commission customized chocolate gifts, as well as with a digitally engaged customer base via WhatsApp and social

media. These partnerships reflect a broader vision to build a resilient and collaborative ecosystem that

connects smallholder production with artisanal transformation and regional market access.



## PRODUCTS AND MARKETS

Kwanzaa Cocoa offers a carefully crafted selection of artisan chocolate products, grounded in Malawian cocoa and inspired by local and regional ingredients.

Product range

- **bean-to-bar chocolate bars** made from cocoa grown on the family farm and by local smallholders
- **Limited-edition flavours** developed in collaboration with other African producers, such as Ghanaian coffee blends, south African balsamic strawberry bonbons, chili-infused bars and Tanzanian vanilla.

Distribution channels

- **Domestic retail:** sold through boutique shops/cafes, local outlets in Lilongwe,

Blantyre, and Mzuzu, and via corporate gifting programs for banks and insurance companies

- **Digital sales:** orders primarily received through WhatsApp and social media platforms.

Market scope & expansion plans

- **Current market:** focused on Malawi, leveraging retail and institutional demand.
- **Near-term goal:** prepare for cross-border distribution across Africa by late 2025, pending solutions for logistics and temperature-controlled shipping.

Kwanzaa Cocoa's commitment to "grown and crafted in Malawi" highlights its dedication to local sourcing, artisanal quality, and the development of a premium Malawian chocolate brand.



## INNOVATIONS: MILESTONES AND EXPANSION PLANS

Kwanzaa Cocoa stands out as one of the first artisanal chocolate producers in Malawi, bringing innovation to a country traditionally focused on crops like tobacco, maize, and groundnuts. The company has introduced a local bean-to-bar value chain that integrates small-

scale cocoa farming with handcrafted chocolate production a novelty in the Malawian agri-food sector.

Key innovations and milestones include:

- **Local processing of cocoa beans into high-quality**, small-batch chocolate using affordable machinery sourced from India and China, making artisanal production viable despite infrastructural constraints such as frequent power cuts.
- **Product innovation through bold flavour combinations incorporating** ingredients like coffee (from Ghana), balsamic vinegar (from South Africa), and local fruits and spices (pineapple, strawberries, chillies) to craft unique chocolate bonbons and bars.
- **Creation of in-house brand identity and packaging**, fully designed by the founder using her background in media and PR. The company works with local and regional printing partners instead of importing packaging from China,

thereby supporting the local economy and addressing forex constraints.

- **Strategic use of digital tools like WhatsApp and social media for direct marketing and sales**, building a loyal customer base despite export limitations.
- **Targeted B2B distribution**, especially for hospitality and corporate gifting, through partnerships with banks, insurance firms, and public institutions in Malawi.

Kwanza Cocoa is currently preparing to expand its regional footprint, with plans to begin exporting to other African countries starting in late 2025. The founder is also exploring collaborations with other African food artisans to foster a broader value-added network across the continent.

## SUCCESS FACTORS AND LESSONS LEARNED

### Success factors

- **Local value creation:** by establishing one of the first bean-to-bar value chains in Malawi, Kwanza Cocoa has introduced a new model for cocoa transformation. The company grows part of its own cocoa, sources additional beans from smallholders, and handles processing locally creating value within the country and supporting rural livelihoods.
- **Strategic partnerships and collaboration:** the business actively collaborates with farmers and producers across Africa such as coffee growers in Ghana and spice or oil producers in South Africa and Tanzania to develop innovative chocolate blends. It also works closely with local printers for packaging, reducing reliance on imports.
- **Market positioning and diversification:** Kwanza Cocoa has built a diversified client

base by combining direct-to-consumer digital sales (via WhatsApp and social media) with corporate gifting for banks, insurance firms, and government institutions. This approach has helped the brand grow without formal retail exports.

### Challenges and lessons

- **Technical constraints:** power cuts in Malawi make chocolate processing complex, especially with equipment that requires 36+ hour operating cycles.
- **Limited access to inputs:** while most ingredients are locally sourced, access to quality powdered milk remains a challenge.
- **Need for scale:** expansion will require investment in equipment, cold-chain logistics, and technical support, as well as facilitation to ensure export readiness.





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