

Learning skills for small scale entrepreneurs



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Recapitulation

"On DVD, they showed me how to make pineapple/mango yoghurt instead of making plain yoghurt. It brought me new ideas. I tried it and made mango and pineapple yoghurt. So, now I have new sales opportunities."

Fredrick Osuna seems enthusiastic. He is a small-scale entrepreneur in Mbale who saw a DVD on small scale food processing made by the Uganda Industrial Research Institute (UIRI), whose goal is to improve competence for rural micro- and small-scale enterprises in Uganda through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The DVD is part of the ICT support given to UIRI by the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD).

Fruits, vegetables, meat, bakery and dairy products; whoever is able to make an attractive dish out of these ingredients can make a living. That's what the DVD of UIRI is showing. The actor explains step-by-step in a clear and simple English how to make kebabs and meatballs; cakes, bread and jam tarts; yoghurt and banana shakes; tomato-sauce and mango juice, in a tasty and also in an hygienic manner that attracts any number of customers.

Observation

According to Josephine Nalubega, coordinator of the ICT-projects of UIRI, "Many people believe that the actor is for real and the entrepreneurs want him to

train them. He has become a role-model." Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) can thus watch the DVDs in

the three UIRI/IICD funded ICT centres in the districts of Mubende, Kabale and Mbale - which seem to be successful.

Uganda Industrial Research Institute (UIRI), under the guidance of IICD has a set goal to improve competence for rural micro- and small-scale enterprises in Uganda through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)





"The ICT centres welcome members of the community", Nalubega says. "The DVD idea is new for most people, so everybody wants to see it. It is a good way of sensitising/creating awareness and instructing SMEs. If they forget the processes of production, they simply come back to the centres and watch the DVDs to refresh their minds again. And apart from the DVDs, the centres show SMEs how to balance their businesses by using simple spreadsheets."

Community outreach

The ICT centre in Mbale is situated in the Community Polytechnic: a vocational school in the industrial area of town that trains people in carpentry, building, motor vehicle mechanics, agriculture, tailoring business, electrical welding and metal fabrications. UIRI strongly believes in the importance of working together with schools. "Schools are the best way to reach out to communities", Nalubega says. "These are places that are highly accessible for the community and at the same time our contribution boosts up their vocational potential."

"It is true", Joseph Ojiambo, focal person of the ICT Centre adds, "the SMEs are called to the ICT centre by radio announcements to watch the DVDs. In addition, stakeholders and community leaders find their way to the school, because the school provides a meeting venue. Some of them are also parents of our students who are interested in the new ICT centre and we just show them the DVDs. They often turn up with a family member, a neighbour, an acquaintance or a friend who is in a SME and wants to learn more."

Though the six training computers are there in the first place to serve the small and micro scale entrepreneurs, the three hundred students of the Community Polytechnic profit as well and take the earliest opportunity to learn basic ICT skills.

Better tasting yoghurt

When Osuna started the business two years ago at home, he labelled the brand as Nutri Yoghurt. He was compelled to drop out from school in Secondary 5 owing to his inability in paying fee. A friend of his was into the business of yoghurt processing, and he asked him to join. That's how Osuna learned the skill. Although Osuna has been processing yoghurt for a considerable time, on DVD they showed it in a different way. "I saw that one should work with fresh milk", Osuna says. "The milk then tastes better and you can make a better quality of yoghurt. But the problem is that our milk comes from far, from Pallisa and Soroti, so when it arrives it is not fresh any more. Nevertheless, I saw I could improve my way of making yoghurt. Before watching the DVD I was using another procedure. I would first put the starter cultures in the milk and after doing that add the other ingredients like sugar and flavours, then heat it until 45 degrees and store the mixture for several hours. In the movie, the man showed how to first put in the starter culture, then heat the milk to 45 degrees, store the yoghurt for six hours and only then put the other ingredients. I tried it and the yoghurt tasted better. So I learnt."

Advising and counselling

Though the DVDs are instructive, SMEs have to take some extra training. For that purpose they have to come to Kampala. Nalubega says, "we would like to train them in their own environment but they do not have enough resources there. At any rate, we are just not that far. The first priority is to train trainers in the schools we are working with, who will later on advise and guide the SMEs. We bring them to Kampala during school holidays for hands-on training, but in such a short time they are



not able to learn all the skills like baking bread, making jam, kebabs and name it. We can only train them in the basics so that they are able to instruct their SME students. For example, when the bread is going to collapse, they can't teach them how to make Swiss rolls or pastry. It needs more than that. It also needs more equipment in their schools and until now, we don't have enough resources to purchase it. Nevertheless, the trainers of the schools

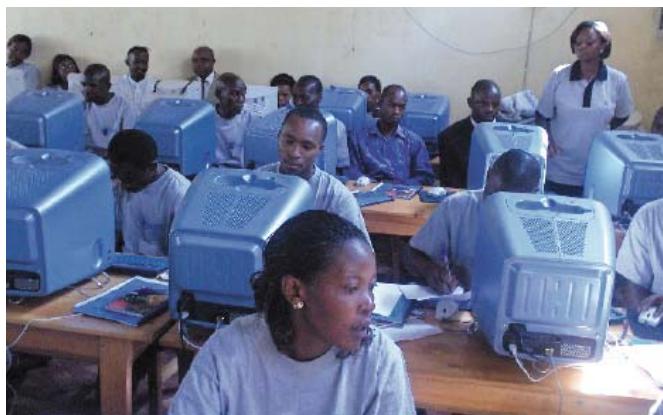


are very important to us, because they are the ones who reach out to the SMEs in the communities. With inbuilt knowledge, they are able to advise SMEs to get to UIRI for more expert training and knowledge.

In the middle of June 2006 UIRI has started conducting courses at Kampala, for selected SMEs from all over Uganda on an experimental basis. Nalubega herself went to some of the places to select the participants for the course. "I just selected the most motivated ones", she says. "The ones who were so eager, that they wanted to pay for it. We don't ask a fee, but of course it is good if the entrepreneur is willing to invest in training to make a better business. The first part of the course takes about ten days and is focused on the performing skills of the SMEs. They are also trained in total quality management, entrepreneurship development, the basics of an organisation or business, simple book keeping and ICT basics. Then they go back home to their businesses and come back some weeks later for the second part. In the follow-up, attention was on quality production and management skills."

Affordability and awareness factors

The ICT centre in Mbale is in full use. Fred Wauyo, who is the computer instructor at the Community Polytechnic, teaches all its 300 students on basic programmes like Windows, Excel, Access, PowerPoint, PageMaker and Web page designing, two



hours a week. To gain himself a commission, and to maintain the centre, he conducts some courses for private individuals, like an introductory computer course that takes two hours a day for a period of two weeks, at a fee of 30,000 shilling.

By writing time, 25 citizens of Mbale had been trained. "We disconnected the Internet one year ago due to the power cuts and yet we had to pay 100,000 shilling per month", Joseph Ojiambo says. "Our generator is actually too tiny to let the computers run all the time."

Wauyo does not consider the off line status as a big problem. "We have a DVD with which I can teach the participants on how to surf on Internet and how to use the email. They just go to an Internet café in the town and try it there." He believes that the ignorance about computers is a bigger problem. "Most of the people are not aware of the importance of Internet in the world", he says. "It's because of the under-education in this area. We have a lot of school drop-outs and it is also difficult for people to get their own computer. For most of them it is too expensive."

Demonstrative effects

It is the power cuts that Osuna too finds a big disturbance to his business. "Sometimes we don't have power for two or three days in a row", he says. "I don't have customers then, because there



are no fridges working to store the yoghurt." But he is not let down by it.

On the contrary, he proudly shows the device he just bought, which packages yoghurt in plastic containers instead of the plastic bags he always uses. He expects to sell more now. But he believes that he still has a lot to learn, like ICT for example. At the Community Polytechnic he saw the first computer in his life. "It is a good way for demonstrations," he says. "And from what I saw I certainly would like to operate the computer. I hope to learn it. It is a way of storing documents and I would like to know how to surf on the Internet and to get more information. After what I saw on the DVD I think I can also teach others yoghurt making and selling. I would like to be trained in book keeping, marketing and a better way of branding." ■