Production line at CETRAF brewery in Musanze, the manufacturing company started by Placide

For decades, Urwagwa (banana ale) has been among major alcoholic beverages in East Africa region. In Rwanda, this popular alcohol drink still plays an important role in fulfilling social obligations like marriage and constitutes a significant source of income for manufacturers and national economy of the country.

Brewing of Urwagwa from crushed bananas remained a faithful practise from ancient formulas handed down over generations but as demand grew some were starting to lose quality standards for the drink which called for modernised brewing.

Like most traditional skills, the recipe and process for brewing Urwagwa was mostly handed down from father to son. When Tuyishimire Placide born to a father who brew the banana ale, saw the increasing demand and deteriorating quality of the drink on market he spotted a business opportunity.

Tuyishimire had returned to school at INES Ruhengeri University in Musanze when he saw the opportunity to start a trade he grew up seeing. Equipped with some savings and a loan he paused his studies and started building Centre de Transformation Agro-Alimentaire en Afrique (CETRAF).

CETRAF, a local brewing company was founded in 2010 by Tuyishimire Placide with the aim of modernising the manufacture and packaging of a traditional alcoholic beverage.

Tuyishimire Placide, the CEO and founder of CETRAF explains that when he came to study in Musanze he realised that his father’s trade would be a big business opportunity and started a brewing company.

Tuyishimire Placide, the CEO and founder of CETRAF

The company started small producing at least 200 crates daily of Urwagwa with about 30 workers and the first 3 to 4 year was for building capacity before CETRAF would breakeven and started making profits after five years.

The CEO of CETRAF explains that even as they were making losses in the first years, he saw a promising future for the company.

The nature and size of the factory was one of the factors that the business would not make immediate profits and whatever was made would be washed away in factory overheads as they built capacity.

But with the initial investments of about Rwf.15 to 20 million francs in about ten years of operations the company has progressively grown to over Rwf.800 million and directly employees over 500 workers with 130 depots across the country.

The company has also invested massively into production raising the 200 crates they started with to about 45,000 per month and plans are to increase this capacity to at least 65,000 crates by next year.



The CEO of the company says Rwandans now enjoy the great Urwagwa taste with quality standards and a fresher taste because of local production.

The company is certified by Rwanda Standards Board for quality assurance which was given before its products were put on market. This confirms the standards set by RSB that contain a number of requirements that are put in place to make sure that whatever is for sale is fit for consumption.

CETRAF has maintained the originality of Urwagwa while keeping the required quality standards and packaging as well as branding necessities.

The head of the company says to maintain a quality and very popular product on market they have a secret ingredient. CETRAF produces two main products from bananas and another from ginger.

The products which are part of the Made in Rwanda initiative are gaining more ground each day as more Rwandans realise the quality when they taste CETRAF products. But its a challenge because locals haven’t appreciated that quality can be made by local companies.

Another challenge is the raw materials that are sometimes scarce to get and packaging materials that are mostly exported in the country. However, Tuyishimire emphasizes that there is a political will to promote locally made products as well as

investments in the country which mitigate some of these challenges.