Bananas have carried a significant importance to Rwanda’s diet for a long time now. It is one of the highly consumed staple crops in the country thanks to its multipurpose use –culinary and brewing.

Urwagwa, a high demand banana brew is known among top alcoholic beverages in the Eastern Africa region for centuries. In Rwanda, the popular alcohol drink still plays an important role in fulfilling social obligations like marriage, community gatherings and constitutes a significant source of income to its producers.

The brewing process is known to different cultures and were passed over to generations but as demand grew some were starting to loose their originality and to safeguard it, this called for modernized brewing.



Banana growers and Urwagwa brewers in Musasa of Rutsiro District saw an opportunity in the increasing demand of Urwagwa, but there was a deteriorating quality of the drink on market. They resolved to work together to improve the value

chain of banana brewing.

When they realized a bigger potential they talked to more farmers and fifteen residents of Gisiza, Rutsiro in the Western Province initiated Coopérative de Production de Vin de Bananes, COOPROVIBA as its French acronym.

Anthère Ntahonsigaye, President of Cooproviba/Gisiza underlined that “Urwaga”, is an artisanal beer made from the fermentation of the Musa acuminata variety of bananas that is very popular among the local population and beyond.

The popularity of the drink encouraged them, as Ntahonsigaye said, to think of building a factory that has been able to contribute to development of farmers, local population and the district in general.



With Cooproviba/Gisiza having started a modern banana processing factory, the first of its kind in the district, banana farmers are already upbeat, saying this presents a major market for their produce.

‘‘The facility is providing a ready market for farmers and improving the quality of banana brew currently made compared to the traditional system that had started

deteriorating,’’ Ntahonsigaye said.

The Cooperative was started in 2009 with only 15 members who contributed a share capital of Rwf 100,000 that totaled to Rwf 1,500,000 at the time. Today, the cooperative has grown by leaps and bounds since they introduced new brands.

“We got this idea after noticing that banana farmers where loosing so much of their produce due to lack of enough market while their produce would go wasted and people were getting health related issues as a result of consuming unhygienic brew through rudimentary processes,” explains the president of the cooperative.

He underlined that, today the banana brew from their factory is a bottled drink of high quality standard, and making healthy drinks is one of their priorities.

With the deteriorating quality in many of traditional producers, which are not on the required standards as per Rwanda Standards Board (RSB), discouraging sub-standard brewing which involves squeezing bananas using one’s feet because its unhygienic and can bring health difficulties.

Producers like Cooproviba/Gisiza are raising the bar high in brewing of banana beer but there has been a high cost of production since they started.

The nature and size of the factory was one 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.

Ntahonsigaye revealed that they are now starting to take into account how to reduce the cost of production in order to make the price of their drinks affordable to many people.

Today, the factory has a permanent address with in- built state of art machines compared to previously when they operated from one of the members’ home facility and rented other required space fr storage.

The plant is able to buy 15 tons of bananas from the farmers per week and produces 1,000 crates of banana wine per week, each crate has 24 bottles all well packaged that meets quality standards as set by RSB.

To easy up the transport problems, Cooproviba has two vehicles that help in the transportation of the produce from farmers to the factory and at the same time

distribute to different selling outlets across the country.



According to the president, Cooproviba is oriented towards agro-processing industry sector with an objective of creating jobs and fighting against poverty among shareholders and the local population.

“We have our mission based on giving value addition to the Rwandan bananas by acquisition of appropriate production equipment’s and technologies in banana beer transformation and compete with other beers by enhancing quality.” He said

The factory has been able to contribute to the socio- economic wellbeing of its’ area through job creation as it employees 11 permanent workers and over 30 casual laborers. The factory pays well at the end of every month and all employees are

able to take good care of their families by paying fees for their children, health insurance and meeting other domestic demands.

“We share the profits among members, pay health insurance for all our workers and make sure that they also save in Ejo Heza pension scheme of which we do for them and when one encounters a situation that needs our help, we are always there to help them.” Ntahonsigaye underlined.

Cooproviba/Gisiza has been able to give a cow to each member and is also helping the needy by building houses for them as well as pay for their health insurance as a way of uplifting their community.

Furthermore, Cooproviba/Gisiza facilitates farmers by giving them banana suckers for planting and this is done in partnership with Rwanda Agricultural Board (RAB), when farmers harvest the cooperative buys their harvest at a fair price.

However, Ntahonsigaye says that they sometimes encounter challenges mostly in acquiring new factory machines which most of them are procured from outside the country.

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic was a major impediment to the cooperative as it was to most of the world, it caused a setback in their production and limited ability to satisfy the market as production is still low compared to the demand.

The President of the cooperative notes that, nonetheless Rwandans now enjoy the great Urwagwa beer taste with quality standards and a fresher taste because of their quality production and intend to expand the factory with more machines and workers so as to meet the demand on market.

“Our originality of Urwagwa has been kept with the required quality standards and packaging as well as branding necessities.” He said.

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