

In a modest home kitchen in Kigali, Sharon Akanyana stood at crossroads. Fresh out of university with a degree in agriculture, she was on a job hunt that yielded only silence. What she didn't realize then was that her quiet struggle would become the foundation of one of Rwanda's most inspiring agro-processing success stories: Ishyo Foods.

Today, Akanyana is the Founder and Managing Director of Ishyo Foods Ltd, a company known for producing high-quality yoghurts and fruit jams using locally sourced Rwandan ingredients.



*Sharon Akanyana, the Founder and Managing Director of Ishyo Foods Ltd*

But her journey is not just about building a business—it's about fostering a movement rooted in passion, sustainability, and community transformation in post-genocide Rwanda.

"I like food, I like culinary experiences. I love making food and sharing it with friends and family," Akanyana says warmly. "It's from this love that Ishyo Foods was born.

## **FROM KITCHEN EXPERIMENTS TO A GROWING ENTERPRISE**

It began as a simple hobby. Akanyana started making jams and yoghurts at home to indulge her culinary passion. She shared her creations with friends and family, who were immediately impressed by the flavor and quality of her creations. Encouraged by their enthusiastic feedback, Akanyana realized her passion could evolve into something greater.

In 2017, she launched Ishyo Foods, guided by a clear mission: to provide healthy, affordable, and sustainable food options to Rwandan families, support local farmers, and reduce reliance on expensive imports.

"I studied agriculture and food technology, so combining my education with my passion just made sense," she explains.



Today, Ishyo Foods offers a growing range of products, including:

Ishyo Kinyomoro/ Tree Tomato Jam  
Ishyo Strawberry Jam  
Ishyo Pineapple Jam  
Premium Pineapple Yoghurt  
Premium Mango Yoghurt  
Strawberry Flavored Yoghurt  
Vanilla Flavored Yoghurt  
Greek Yoghurt  
Probiotic Yoghurt Drinks in Blueberry, Raspberry, and Vanilla flavors.

Each product proudly carries the mark of freshness, quality, and sustainability, crafted from fresh Rwandan fruits and dairy.

## **A STORY OF NATIONAL RESILIENCE**

Akanyana's journey mirrors Rwanda's broader story of resilience and renewal following the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. In a country that has rebuilt itself through unity, reconciliation, innovation, ambition, and women empowerment, Ishyo Foods represents a modern success story. "Every jar of jam and pot of yoghurt we produce helps improve livelihoods, security, and wellbeing especially for women and children," the founder underlines.

By sourcing milk and fruit directly from smallholder farmers in Rwanda, Ishyo Foods ensures fair income and consistent markets for local producers. The company pays a living wage, helping break cycles of poverty and dependence.

The company's philosophy is rooted in sustainability—not just in production, but across the value chain. Packaging, branding, and transport services are all sourced locally, ensuring that every Rwandan Franc spent supports the local economy.

"Sustainability isn't just a buzzword for us. It's how we build stronger, more resilient communities," Akanyana affirms.

## **LEADING AS A WOMAN ENTREPRENEUR**

Akanyana's path hasn't been without challenges—particularly as a mother balancing business leadership and family life.

"Entrepreneurship is sweet but challenging," admits the mother of four. "It requires sacrifice, dedication, and resilience. And as a mother, balancing business and family

life is a journey.”

Her daily responsibilities include managing staff, overseeing production, securing working capital, and ensuring smooth logistics. Despite the demands, Akanyana is intentional about maintaining a joyful home life.

“I want my children to remember a mother who was present, and not busy all the time,” she reflects.



## **EMPOWERING AND MENTORING WOMEN**

Akanyana believes women play a pivotal role in Rwanda’s economic transformation -especially in sectors like agro-processing where the country still depends heavily on imports.

“When more women and entrepreneurs enter this sector, we reduce imports, create jobs, and grow our economy,” she emphasizes.

Through mentorship, she encourages young women—particularly agriculture and food science students—to embrace entrepreneurship with confidence. She proudly shares that one of her mentees established and now runs a successful business.

## **BUILDING ON QUALITY, SAFETY, AND TRUST**

Ishyo Foods’ success rests not only on taste but also on unwavering commitment to food safety and quality control. Food safety procedures are followed ensuring that every employee is trained to maintain high standards of hygiene and product safety. While the company’s food safety policy is displayed prominently at the factory in both English and Kinyarwanda.

“Creating products our customers trust starts with how we work internally,” the founder explains.

By pairing premium ingredients with rigorous standards, Ishyo Foods has earned the trust of Rwandan families—and is now setting its sights beyond national borders.

The Managing Director of Ishyo Foods reveals that they are open to partnerships that can help scale up and introduce Ishyo jams and yoghurts to the world.

Already, preliminary conversations with potential regional distributors are underway. The international demand for healthy, sustainable, and ethically produced foods is an opportunity for made in Rwanda products.

Beyond the factory, the true impact of Ishyo Foods is felt in Rwanda's rural hills, where farmers now have a reliable market for their fruits. Through fair pricing, training in sustainable farming, and guaranteed purchases, these farmers live and work with dignity.

This model of inclusive growth is vital for a resilient, equitable Rwanda — where rural families enjoy steady incomes and better living standards.

“Our farmers are not just suppliers. They are our partners,” the Managing Director emphasizes.

## **ADVOCATING FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND FAMILY SUPPORT**

Akanyana is also a strong voice for gender equality—both in business and at home. She advocates for more family-friendly policies, such as extended maternity leave and breastfeeding support at the workplace.

“We must encourage couples to raise children together. Its healthy and shouldn't fall solely on one parent,” she says.

At the same time, she urges women to seize the opportunities in different sectors that are available in Rwanda today because of the conducive environment and friendly policies.

“We have tax exemptions, education programs, and government support. It's up to us to use these tools to build stronger families and communities.”



## **FEEDING DREAMS, BUILDING THE FUTURE**

At its heart, Ishyo Foods is more than a company. It's a symbol of what's possible when passion meets purpose. It reminds us that rebuilding a nation begins with one jar of jam, one pot of yoghurt, and one empowered farmer at a time.

And leading that charge is Sharon Akanyana— entrepreneur, mother, and

development scholar with a Master's Degree in Development Studies— guiding the journey with heart, grit, and a vision as bright as Rwanda's future.