

Fulgence Habimana had tried his hands on nearly all jobs before he settled in Nyabugogo suburb in Kigali City where he owned a large shop for auto spare parts, before he established factories making mattresses and iron sheets.

Habimana says the liberation of Rwanda in 1994 is a turning point of his life because that was when he started venturing into business. In spite of being young and inexperienced, he had to work hard to meet family responsibilities.

“I never had opportunity to further my studies after 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. Life was unbearable and getting a job was tough. I had no skills to create own job. So I worked for others in Mutara, my home area,” Habimana recalls.



Fulgence Habimana, Founder and Managing Director of Salama Machine Ltd

Fulgence Habimana is the Founder and Managing Director of Salama Machine Ltd the producer of mattresses and iron sheets. Relax foam, Dada Mattresses and Salam foam.

Habimana’s inward looking strategy increased the supply of locally produced mattresses and iron sheets as well as access because his favorable prices, almost half of imported products.

His business journey started in 1997 when he opened a merchandise shop in Rukoma sector of Mutara that was later added to other shops outlets.

The zeal and passion for personal development overshadowed the challenges he came across along the business journey and nothing would derail him.

Together with a friend, they ventured into transport. They started with bus offering public transport and later ventured into transportation of Agricultural produce from Rural Rwanda to urban markets.

Habimana took advantage of government programmes that aim at improving the investment environment alongside attracting particularly small and medium enterprise (SME) into various sectors of the economy.



Looking beyond Rwanda

On registering substantial growth in business in terms of visibility and working capital, He embarked on importing goods from Tanzania, China and Dubai.

“The growth of my business was a motivation to diversify economic activities to include import trade on the list. I started importing products that were scarce on the Rwandan market and was learning best practices from other traders and investments like in China,” says Habimana.

The knowledge and skills he learned as a result of engaging in import trade he started a firm that produces mattresses, which changed the face of Rwanda’s manufacturing sector at large.



“I started going to China in 2010 where I would import various goods and the travels enabled me to visit many industries and having learnt of what it would take to start up an industry, I secured some loan to open a factory in 2014.”

Initially, the factory used local machines but imported better ones from and with time Chinese businesses started offering them credit that would be paid later, and source raw materials from there given the low prices.

In 2020, Habimana opened another factory making iron sheets. The new factory tapped into the under served market niche.

Salama Machine also saw potential markets in neighbouring DR Congo and Burundi.

“We sell our products across the country and to neighbouring DR Congo and Burundi where our products are very competitive because of high quality standards.”



Steadfast growth

The staff at Salama Machine Ltd has grown from 14 workers to 140 permanent workers currently. All staff enjoy benefits like health insurance, pension and others.

Habimana attributes his success to good leadership under H.E President Paul Kagame. He says the country has registered tremendous economic development

traced to the enabling investment climate.

After opening doors to other nations, Rwandan business community travels to different countries such as China, Israel or Morocco to learn best practices in doing business.

Tapping into the opportunities provided by Rwanda Day, Habimana has travelled to six countries to promote made in Rwanda products.



Challenges

“One of our biggest challenges has been failure to get skilled Rwandan personnel to run our machines. We’re forced to import manpower to fill the skills gap, especially in production department. But we provide industrial training to interns before they are employed.”

“We plan to start up a furniture factory making sofa set chairs, tables and beds among other products that are imported,” underscores Habimana.