

E2 MyNetWork



THE YOUNG FARMERS' REVOLUTION

A farm is the last place you would expect to meet any soon-to-be graduate. But, having accepted the reality of food insecurity and the marvels of agritecture, these millennials are determined to make farming fun **P.4&5**

Podcast review

<https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/kamau-wairuri/>

The Kenyanist

The Kenyanist podcast, hosted by Kamau Wairuri, offers a refreshing take on Kenyan current affairs. Rather than diving into the daily hustle and bustle of news, Kamau takes a step back to explore deeper and broader issues that resonate with Kenyans. Each episode features insightful discussions with experts who shed light on specific social or political topics, helping listeners gain a better understanding of the complexities involved. Kamau says his aim is not just to inform but also to provoke thought and encourage dialogue on pressing societal challenges.

With a catalogue of over 20 episodes, The Kenyanist primarily focuses on political matters. One standout episode from 2021 delves into the fascinating topic of street naming in Nairobi, exploring what politicians hope to be remembered for by Kenyans, among other fascinating subjects.

Hotspot

4TH MAY
KITENGE FASHION FEST & AWARDS
7TH EDITION

HOSTED BY
OGA OBINNA
DJ NOSH
CLAUDIA NAISABA

FLASH SALE

ADVANCE TICKETS
REGULAR KSH 700 500
VIP KSH 2,000 1,500

APRIL 4TH-5TH

Get set for an unforgettable time at the seventh edition of the Kitenge Fashion Fest, which is all about celebrating African design and prints, showcasing Kenya's top designers and models. Happening at Eldoret Rupa's Mall ground on May 4, this event is set to dazzle. With comedian Oga Obinna and media personality, Claudia Nasbiwa as your MCs, expect non-stop entertainment.

Gates open at 9am, and the festivities last till dawn. Advance tickets are Sh700, gate tickets are Sh1,000, VIP advance tickets are Sh2,000, and VIP gate tickets are Sh3,000, available at Ticketcity.



Pierra Makena pictured on July 5, 2023 in Lavington, Nairobi.
PHOTO | BILLY OGADA

Pierra Makena is an award-winning actress and radio host who is more popular for her DJ skills. She won Best Supporting Actress for her role in *When Love Comes Around*

BY ELIZABETH NGIGI

Renowned DJ and actress DJ Pierra Makena has firmly established herself as a prominent figure in the entertainment industry. Beyond her role as a disc jockey, Pierra has a rich acting history, starring in popular local shows

like *Tausi*, *Tahidi High*, and *Changes*, among others.

With a background in Mass Communication, she also ventured into radio. In this interview, Pierra delves into her experiences working in a highly male-dominated industry and dispels stereotypes she has faced throughout her career. She also shares insights into her role as the primary provider and a loving parent to her seven-year-old daughter, Ricca Pokot.

1 What was it like starting your DJ career as a woman in a male-dominated industry?

Trust me, it was not easy to establish myself as a female DJ. It was even harder for people to see me in clubs doing my job. Most of the time, people associate females in clubs with promiscuity. Trying to prove that DJ is a career was hard, but I am happy I succeeded in making it a career and a thriving one at that.

I am happy that there are upcoming women DJs who can peacefully do the job without being judged. My family was very supportive from the start and after I started building my brand, they supported me even more. They trusted me. 90 per cent of Kenyans who know me support me but there is 10 per cent who just hate me. I will say this, if I can hate someone, then I don't know why someone should not hate me. I don't mind people who hate me. I have genuine people who support my career.

2 If you weren't a DJ, what career path would you have chosen and why?

I would have been a paediatrician. I love children so much and if not, I would be driving an ambulance and saving lives. When I retire, that is what I will do. I will buy an ambulance, go for training and start saving people's lives. I love

children and if I had the chance, I would have given birth to many of them. But I need to maintain myself and have enough money to raise them.

The reason I put my child in the limelight is because she is part of me. I love my baby to be everywhere I am. She is talented and I do not see why I shouldn't show that to the world. Raising my daughter is a testimony and is also my motivation to work hard. It gives me joy to raise her.

3 You recently turned 43, what advice would you offer to your 20-year-old self, and what are your plans?

First, embrace your sexuality and know that you cannot make money out of being female. If you ever think that you can get things easily for being female, you will never get anywhere but with your brains, you can go very far. Two, have God in your life no matter how

young you think you are. Three, believe in yourself and work for yourself. Don't expect to get a rich man who is going to take care of you, think about all those good things being done by you. Think about buying a car and acquiring all the good things in life from your hard work.

My plans are always dedicated to God but I want more success to come my way. However, if what I have planned doesn't come to pass, it doesn't mean I have failed.

4 What course did you study in school?

I studied Mass Communication at the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC). I was in the same class with Statehouse's digital strategist Dennis Itumbi. I didn't think I would end up being a DJ. That doesn't mean I have dropped what I did in school because I still do film. Right now I am producing and I also have an advertising company. I do communication and public relations jobs. I like the fact that people know me as just a DJ but I am so many things.

Most of my fans are unaware of what I own or my behind-the-scenes work, and I prefer it that way. Studying communication has opened many doors for me, allowing me to travel to various places. I believe I chose the right career. While it might not be the most popular right now, it is certainly sustaining me.

5 What is your take on marriage, and would you date a public figure?

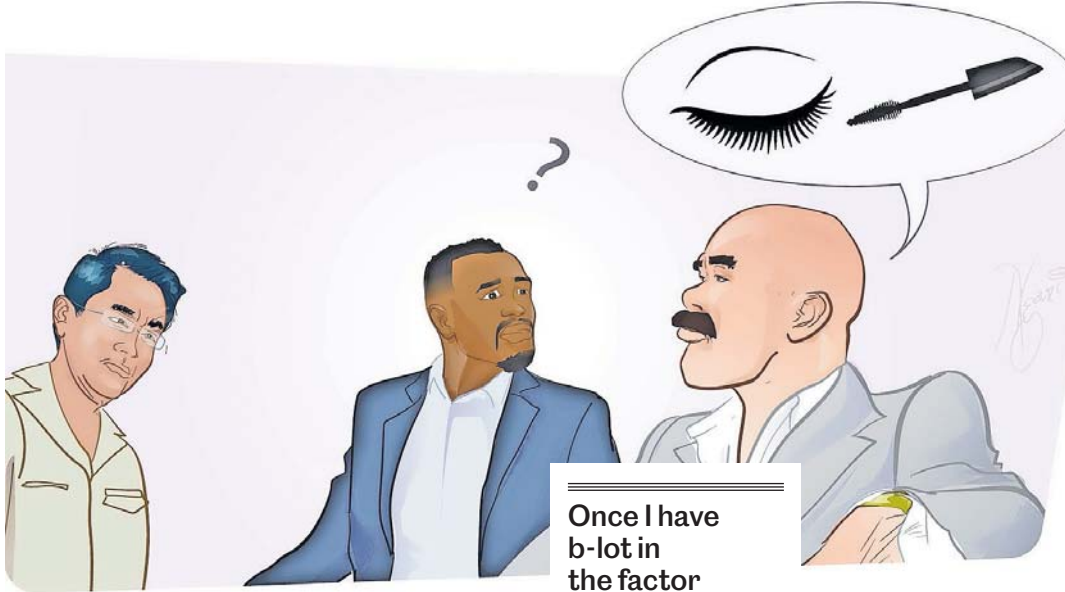
I am ready for a baby, I am just waiting for the right man. No pressure on that. My type of a man has to be God-fearing, good looking and very hardworking. I do not want to struggle and I also don't want to see whatever I have built being misused. Let us build more. It doesn't have to be a rich person, but someone who is hardworking and who will complement me. I get so many love advances on my DMs but I have not connected with any of them emotionally. I need to connect and I never want to make a mistake. Celebrities and even politicians hit on me all the time. I might fall in love with one of them but they need to be the right one.

If they are public figures and they are not married, I would date and marry them. I don't judge people by what they do. However, I would never get married as a second wife.

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The Hustler

Safara gets a chance to be factory manager



BY MIKE SAFARA

My aunt Cecilia Ikoma-Michael's funeral, held at her home of several acres in deep Ngong, was a smashing success – if you can call a decent send-off a success.

"If she were alive, she would have loved it," one of her glamorous sisters, Sophia, whispered to me. "Thank you, my nephew, for putting it all together at such short notice."

I shrugged a "no big deal," and felt a tiny twinge of guilt that I had profited from the occasion.

Even Zhang Li, the owner of the Chinese mall, showed up – in a car as large as a house so that when he got in after the burial, he comically looked like a little man mounting a huge horse.

Accompanying him at the funeral had been a swarthy looking Arabic man with a broad chest, large sun glasses and a thin moustache that made me think of a 1970s Blue Movies male actor.

With his too-tight black shiny suit and sharp-nosed shoes, I had assumed the Arab was a new driver/bodyguard, especially with the obvious coat bulge betraying a gun, and I had told Zhang:

"It is always good to use protection!"

Not being a native English speaker, the China man just shot me a puzzled look, missing the joke. "Safa-la," he said. "Meet me Monday, nine AM sharp, at the Four Season hotel for bleak-fast."

Come this past Monday, I was

there on-the-dot!

The little Chinese mall mandarin wasn't a man, I had learned, given to waiting around.

"You come even ten minute late," he often said about 'Kenya Time,' scowling, "You find I gone."

"Time is money," was one of Li's little English aphorisms that he peppered his talk with.

"A penny saved is a penny earned," was another, and "Don't go bloke t-lying to look leech!"

Mr Li said the latter so often to me, it felt personal.

But when you are meeting a tycoon, a hustler sometimes tries to look the part – and it is true I had broken the bank on a new light blue and second charcoal gray suit, three business shirts, new watch and new leather shoes, at a total cost of Sh50,000 which I could barely afford.

But after you've had to wear the red coat and khaki pants and Ben Bella loafers you wore on Valentine's to your aunt's funeral almost two months later, it is time for a change of clothes.

I got to the Four Seasons 10 minutes early and served myself generously from the breakfast buffet, and had just sat down when Mr Li walked in dressed in his usual modest Kaunda suit.

The Arab guy was dressed in a dazzling white suit, shirt and shoes, which on this gray Monday morning, gave him the look of a sparkling ghost in dark glasses.

A shade with shades, I thought, although I am no poet – in fact I loathed poetry in high school.

Once I have b-plot in the factor equip from Guangdong. You will be my factolee manager, okay?

Mr Zhang Li



"My name is Ben Bella, and I come from the city of Mascara in Algeria," the thickset Arab said in a surprisingly high voice. I shook his hand, surprisingly sweaty for such a chilly Monday morning.

Zhang Li came back balancing a tray that only had a banana, apple, a glass and a bottle of mineral water. "You eat like bird," Ben Bella teased the tycoon. "No wonder you are so tiny!"

"Small body, big bank account," Mr Li said, looking at me – and Ben Bella burst out in a high guffaw, looking at my well-toned muscled body – now that I was gyming in lieu of lack of sex.

"Time is money," Li said, indicating that the time for banter was over: "What you have to offer?"

"Mascara," the Arab said.

"Mascara?" I asked.

Ben Bella nodded, then over the next half hour, went into a detailed spiel of the small mascara factory he intended to open in Industrial Area, if only Mr Li would

invest in it, to manufacture cheap mascara.

"Iron oxide to darken lashes, polymer for the eyelashes, candlelila wax..." These were the sentences that I heard, drifting off at some point (beauty talk isn't exactly my forte), before Mr Li brought me back to reality.

"Once I have b-plot in the factor equip from Guangdong," he said, "You will be my factolee manager, okay?" Then turning to Arab: "Mike is honest guy. Also, he pay back all his debt."

"Could we call it 'Safara Mascara,'" I suggested, only half in jest, "And in return for my brand name rights, you give me shares of 10 per cent? This way, I'll also be motivated to give my very best."

On this occasion, Mr Li took it as a very good joke and laughed until he had to wipe his eyes with a serviette, even as Ben Bella, having made his pitch, went off to get himself breakfast.

"A fool and his money are soon parted!" the tycoon said, tapping me on the shoulder, and it was my turn to feel perplexed. Sometimes the context of his sayings made no sense to me.

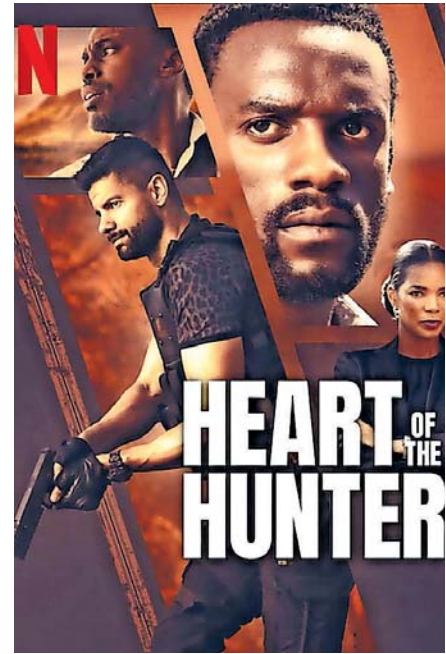
Once Ben Bella was back at table, Mr Li jumped to his feet, said "Time is money," and left.

"I guess I am going to be your new boss, eh!" the Arab said, and got me annoyed right away.

"I once worked in a manure company, Mr Bella, and your mascara factory sounds like manure."

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Movie Review



BY MICHAEL OCHIENG

HEART OF THE HUNTER

Where: Netflix

Genre: Action, Thriller

Heart of the Hunter is a riveting South African action film that captivates audiences with its intense and well-executed action sequences. Directed by Mandla Dube, the movie stars Bonko Khoza as Zuko Khumalo, a retired assassin whose tranquil life is disrupted when he is coerced back into the fray of his former violent profession. Khoza's performance is nothing short of stellar, as he brings more death and nuance to a character torn between his dark history and the desire for redemption.

The film's strength lies in its dynamic action scenes, which are both visually stunning and strategically choreographed, providing a visceral experience that action enthusiasts will appreciate. The movie action sequences are a standout showcasing high octane stunts and meticulously choreographed scenes that rival those of Hollywood blockbusters. Khoza delivers a powerful performance, embodying the character of Zuko with a potent blend of vulnerability and lethal prowess. His portrayal is both authentic and relatable, making him a hero that viewers can root for.

While the narrative has been noted for its complexity, the film's pacing ensures that the audience remains engaged. The story unfolds against the backdrop of South Africa's vibrant landscapes, adding a unique and beautiful setting to the thrilling plot. The movie also touches on themes of redemption and the struggle between one's past and present, adding depth to the adrenaline-fueled action.

Heart of the Hunter is a compelling storytelling movie and the way it incorporates elements of political intrigue into the action, it offers more than just high-stakes combat. It stands as a testament to the burgeoning film industry in South Africa and is a must-watch for those who seek a film that combines heart-pounding action with a meaningful narrative.

MyNetWork Cover Story

A group of comrades in public and private universities across the country have formed Kenya Agriculture Students Association, an organisation that aims to convince students to embrace agriculture courses

BY FRANCIS MUREITHI

Many university students shun agriculture courses. For decades, scholars have expressed concern about the declining number of students opting for agriculture studies. Universities records in Kenya indicate that if the trend continues, we will not have any graduates in agriculture in the coming years.

It is for these reasons that a group of comrades in public and private universities across the country have joined forces and formed Kenya Agriculture Students Association, an organisation that aims to convince students to embrace agriculture, and to make them aware that farming can be just as lucrative and interesting as a career in law, medicine or engineering.

They see themselves as ambassadors of change, and their mission is to influence Gen Z and millennials who are about to join university to consider agriculture-related courses.

Evans Ochieng, 22
Egerton University

I am studying Animal Sciences and Technology, and I'm in my fourth year hoping to graduate at the end of this year. I am excited that my comrades have established the Kenya Agriculture Students Association (KASA), a group that aims to convince university students to take agriculture courses, which are often neglected.

I think this is a noble idea that should be supported by the government. I am seeing a lot of possibilities and opportunities.

Agriculture courses are not that boring, they can be as interesting and lucrative as law, engineering, and medicine.

As a director of programmes and career development at KASA, my role is to encourage first year students to consider agriculture courses because I believe that this field will soon grow in demand nationally and globally.

At KASA, we also help mould new students and connect them with job opportunities and youth programmes that can give them a head start in their careers. This is our contribution to reduce unemployment rates among the youth finishing university. We encourage them to be innovative even before they complete their studies. We also plan to visit secondary schools to encourage teenagers to study agriculture.

Personally, I'm excited at the opportunities I see in this field. With the necessary knowledge, skills are resources, we can help farmers in lowland areas boost dairy production and alleviate the food shortage in this country which is now a huge crisis. We need young experts to teach farmers how to do this using the latest technology and knowledge.

I believe this knowledge in agriculture will



Why we are determined to make agriculture attractive to young people

soon be sought after by employers both locally and internationally, to plug in the widening food insecurity gaps. Therefore, students with skills will easily find jobs, and even create jobs for others. Moreover, they will be able to dictate their own terms of employment. The best time to join the bandwagon is now. Students should discard myths and negative ideas such as the notion that agriculture is for the poor.

I call on young people to embrace agriculture because technologies like digital farming are now available and have been proven to make agriculture easy and manageable. We can now obtain and analyse data in real-time. Data informs the decisions that farmers make and with the right data, there

will certainly be improved yields.

Agriculture was my dream career and joining Egerton University cemented my dreams and ambitions of being a stellar farmer. My passion was ignited while I was growing up in Mbita, Homabay County, where I observed keenly as my parents practiced subsistence agriculture.

I saw them spend so much time and money but at the end of the year, the yield was not enough. That is when I vowed to study agriculture at the university to help them boost production because I saw the food they were struggling to grow for the family was dwindling every year.

Ruth Rotich, 21

Kabianga University

As a second-year student at the University of Kabianga taking a Bachelor of Science course in Agricultural Education and Extension, I feel annoyed and disgusted whenever I see young people who are reluctant to get their hands dirty.

Every time young students talk about their ambitions, all I hear them say is that they want to become doctors, pilots, or engineers. This annoys me. I have never heard anyone say they want to be a farmer. Even



if you ask a farmer's son, the answer would very often be the same. I believe we need to change this narrative and the best place is at the university when students are joining as freshers.

This is crucial because often, most of the comrades aren't in touch with the reality on the ground. Questions like where our food, clothing, and all the necessities come from don't bother them.

More importantly, we all know the hardships associated with this profession, the uncertainty associated with it and the low monetary reward it offers.

So, right from our childhood, our parents and the people around us have shaped our minds to choose professions that are more likely to bring us respect, money, and power.

I am happy the newly launched Kenya Agriculture Students Association is determined to end the stereotypical mindset. The way we visualise agriculture – poor farmers or labourers sweating profusely to have a good harvest, should be a thing of the past. I believe that if the educated youth start taking farming and agriculture, this scenario can be changed.

The truth is that a farmer doesn't necessarily have to be dirty and sweaty all day in order to realise a good harvest.

There are so many different options today, especially with the use of technology, which offers more effective and efficient technical knowledge for farmers. This new way of doing things also reduces the uncertainty associated with farming.

If more farmers can embrace new concepts such as vertical farming, hydroponics, and consider better ways of combining agriculture with entrepreneurship, the whole country would be more food secure.

Taking up technical courses in the agriculture colleges by university students across our country would be a game changer in food production.

KASA hopes to intensify study tours to show students how paddy and wheat are sown, harvested, and processed to increase their levels of awareness and interest them in the courses.

Although the current situation isn't very bright, the future doesn't seem grim either. I believe that cutting-edge technology will make more and more students become interested in farming.

My passion for agriculture is driven by the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture to my people.

I come from a region where thousands lack access to adequate food, and that is why I strongly urge freshers to choose agricultural courses, because many of them come from backgrounds that lack adequate food.

Arthur Muiruri, 23 Murang'a University of Technology

I am a fourth-year student studying Agricultural Education and Extension, and this was my dream career path thanks to the vibrant 4K club programme I was a member of while I was a pupil at Madaraka Primary School in Nakuru.

Joining 4K Club ignited my interest in agriculture as I was taught basic skills in crop production, animal management, agribusiness, and other life skills.

I think 4K Club might help more students pursue agricultural courses at the universities. A popular Swahili saying goes, *samaki mkunje angali mbichi*, which means it is bet-



Evans Ochieng is a fourth year Animal Science and Technology student at Egerton University and a member of Kenya Agriculture Students Association (KASA).



Ruth Rotich a second Year student at University of Kabianga. She is studying agriculture education and extension and is passionate about agri-business.



Arthur Muiruri is a fourth year student at Murang'a University of Technology. He is taking a Bachelor's course in agriculture education and extension and is also the national chairperson of Kenya Agriculture Students Association (KASA).



Rose Kavetsa Simwa is a third year student of agricultural economics at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology.



ter to bend the fish while it is still fresh. I think it is highly important to teach and nurture students in secondary schools about new, fun ways of doing agriculture.

I would advise first-years to embrace agriculture by taking the various courses on offer in public and private universities. The courses will provide them with enriching opportunities to establish and manage agriculture projects at home.

KASA is following in the footsteps of 4K Club by promoting interest in agriculture-based courses, helping comrades and youth in general to tap into innovations and technologies to improve production and contribute towards food and nutrition security.

Our members come from different public and private universities and they all have diverse skills and knowledge. This is an association where student innovators get to pool their intellectual resources to address issues like climate change, agriculture, food waste and food insecurity.

I am also a member of the Murang'a Agricultural Students Association where students are nurtured to be the next big farmers, innovators and agri-entrepreneurs in this lucrative sector.

The president of the African Development Bank, Akinwumi Adesina, recently said agriculture is a major source of income in Africa, and students pursuing agriculture courses will be change makers because the sector will be one of the biggest by 2030.

That means jobs will be readily available and comrades will never lack jobs or go after the shrinking white collar jobs.

Rose Kavetsa Simwa, 22 Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology

I am a third-year student studying agricultural economics and resource management. Interestingly, agriculture was not my dream course but I was influenced by a mentor, Josephine Kirui, who is a farmer in Elburgon, Nakuru County. She has been in this sector for many years.

She advised me that if I ventured into agriculture, I would never regret. My mentor helped me see the opportunities available in this sector.

As I near the tail end of my undergraduate studies, I am already dreaming of a life in agriculture because the course I'm taking is so interesting and eye-opening. Studying agricultural economics is important for me for several reasons.

So far it has helped me understand the economic factors that influence agriculture, like supply and demand, market prices, and government policies.

This knowledge is crucial as it can help farmers, policymakers and other stakeholders in the agricultural sector to make effective decisions.

Additionally, agricultural economics plays a key role in addressing food security, rural development, and environmental sustainability.

It is for this reason that I encourage comrades hoping to join public and private universities to consider studying agricultural economics so that they can contribute to creating more efficient and equitable agricultural systems, which are vital for ensuring a stable and sustainable food supply for the growing global population. Agriculture is a result result-oriented course.

ALL PHOTOS | FRANCIS MUREITHI

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A farmer doesn't necessarily have to be dirty and sweaty all day in order to realise a good harvest,

Ruth



Money Matters



Finance skills to help you beat tough times

BY PAUL KARIUKI

With taxation policies hitting many pockets hard, employers and employees are both feeling the pinch as they are left with little disposable income. But all is not gloom. With a little discipline and wisdom, you can stretch that shilling to the next payday. Here are a few ways of doing this.

Cut unnecessary subscriptions

If you are subscribed to multiple merry-go-round groups, it is time to filter out some. Not all *chamas* are beneficial. Some are simply about passing money around. TV subscription is another area. It may be exciting to have access to a number of premium channels, but it comes at a cost. Consider going for the lowest bouquet or using free-to-air decoders.

Seek review on loans

If you have loans and your business or hustle is underperforming, seek financial relief by applying for restructuring with lenders. However, in case of a loan rollover, expect the interest on the loan to be added by a certain percentage.

Avoid panic buying

Having a good stock of food and other necessities to last you during a crisis isn't a bad idea. The problem is the strain it puts on your budget. Given that many subsist on daily wages and do not have emergency savings to cushion them in a situation like a pandemic or post-election mayhem, panic buying will likely see you struggling to meet other financial obligations.

Avoid unnecessary spending

Takeaway foods can be delicious and convenient, but it is cheaper to prepare food at home. Depending on where you're buying that takeaway meal, whether *githeri*, French fries or grilled chicken, the prices may be high yet no value is added in the overall end products.

Do-it-yourself measures

The goal is to stretch that shilling. You may have much disposable time at home on weekends, why not do your laundry yourself instead of hiring a cleaning lady, to cut on costs? Some house chores may not require expert labour. Fixing the roof, trimming the fence, caulking leaking pipes and fixing gutters are among the skills you can learn to cut down your spending. As you adopt a life of simplicity, you will be able to save more, which could go a long way in reducing that loan.

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Personality: Eutyucus Mwenda is the founder of Milestones Supplies, a fuel depot

Self belief: I always knew I was built to be an entrepreneur

Q&A

BY PAUL KARIUKI

On the outskirts of Meru town lies a busy trading outpost known as Makutano. Among the many businesses that dot the town, Milestone Supplies stands out. This is an oil depot that supplies fuel to others in businesses, including petrol stations, countrywide. The face behind the company is 35-year-old Eutyucus Mwenda Mugambi.

How did your investment journey begin?

After sitting for my Class Eight examination in 2005, I became a porter at Gakooromo market in Meru town and hustled while saving to get business capital. With a startup capital of Sh5,000, I opened a food kiosk and operated it until 2008 when I decided to expand my education by enrolling for secondary education.

You opted out of business for education?

I did not close down the establishment, I delegated the running of the business to someone else, but I kept track of everything. After clearing Form Four in 2011, I resumed operations full-time, until 2018 when I decided to change my scope of business to maximise on profits.

You mean things weren't going as planned with the shop?

Not really. They say having a diversified income portfolio pays. After conducting a detailed market study, I realised that venturing into the petroleum industry would bring me more profits, but I had to find a way to avoid competing with the established petrol stations. I decided to be the go-to person, such that I supply them with fuel at a cheap price so that they don't incur additional transport charges while trying to get the commodity from elsewhere.

That must have been a capital-intensive venture, wasn't it?

The idea looked noble and

workable, but only on paper, as I had no means of getting it off the ground.

So how did you beat the desperation and get the business going?

I didn't let the idea die. I burned the midnight oil and prepared a business proposal which I presented to a financial institution for funding. After doing my calculations, the startup capital came to around Sh600,000. I was skeptical if any bank would accept to loan me that amount without collateral, but I chose to give it a try.

How did it go?

I have always been in good books with Sidian Bank, and when I approached the institution and explained my business plan, they were convinced and pleased. They advanced the credit facility to kick start the venture.

Most startups struggle to get profits especially in the first few months of operations, how did you handle this period?

I had already figured that out by roping in a few petrol station operators and when the first consignment landed at the depot, I had a ready market to distribute to, albeit a limited one with hired delivery lorries.

The company is now six years old, with a staff of 15 – eight drivers, four office workers and three field agents. The latter are tasked with looking for new customers as we spread to have a countrywide reach.

What of the eatery business that ushered you into entrepreneurship?

It is still around but under the stewardship of a sibling. I handed it to him so that I could concentrate on the current venture. Even in an organisation, you may find you've outgrown a role and look for something more challenging if you want to develop in that career. No one wants stagnation. I wanted something more challenging and rewarding, and I saw it fit to hand over the business and focus on nurturing my new baby.

What are your company's core values?

Milestones Supplies was set



Eutyucus Mwenda Mugambi runs Milestones Supplies, a fuel depot in Meru town. PHOTO: POOL

How do you get good hires?

This can be a daunting task. You never know if an employee is stealing from you like the case where drivers have been caught or accused of siphoning oil and selling it for a quick shilling. But during recruitment, we always do a strong background check. We look for integrity and a strong work ethic. We hire motivated people – employees with talent. We look for high-performing individuals, choose those with initiative for work, and follow the laid down rules.

What are some of the challenges you've faced so far?

Every business has its fair share of challenges, especially lack of capacity for bulk storage, a weak revenue collection system, and corrupt law enforcement agencies who demand kickbacks even if one has complied with everything. Also, small players in the oil industry cannot import the commodity because a small cartel is the one that runs the show. The one who gets the government tender is the one who supplies to the rest.

When global prices are low we see little or marginal drop in prices. Why?

A myriad of factors come into play, like taxation and, recently, increase in VAT which has a ripple effect in all sectors of the economy. Moreover, the landed crude could have been a consignment that was purchased months ago, before the price plunge.

How do sudden price changes affect the business?

Any investor will tell you they're always prepared to cope with market volatility. What matters is how healthy your balance sheet is at the end of the day.

What advice would you give to those about to establish startup ventures?

Always develop your entrepreneurial skills early if employment is not for you. Create attainable goals and read the success stories of those before you. Find an investor in a similar field who succeeded and seek advice. Don't think you're taking the investor down or bringing unhealthy competition, you may never know the business rapport you two will have. Establish a healthy work-life balance and always motivate your employees.

Would you ever leave business for employment?

Even if the business was liquidated, I'd never go that route. I would strive to remain self-employed. I would look for a market segment to explore and fill the gap. I feel there's no fulfillment in employment other than working to meet the expectations of others.

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