

Plenty of fruit, but also plenty of hurdles

Many types of fruit grow in the Uluguru mountains in Tanzania.

And the sunshine needed to dry them is plentiful and free.

The combination of these facts could mean a good business for farmers. But it is not so simple.

Even the most entrepreneurial and dedicated of people will still have plenty of hurdles to overcome. To sell a bag of dried mangoes, you need not only preservatives and packaging, but also quite a few official permits and certificates.



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Farmers form networks and unions for better marketing options. Many seek to improve their situation through meetings, projects and training, and also access to loans. However, results are limited. Many organisations seem to care more about the benefits for their employees than for their members. But some farmers are innovative and make additional efforts to pursue new ways of making their daily income.

One such farmer is Mr Ramadhani Fufumbe from Kinole District in the Morogoro region. He has been an individual member of MVIWATA, a farmers' network, for more than five years. Ramadhani is 55 years old, of Uluguru tribe origin, and speaks Uluguru and Swahili. He is married to Rehema and Sinavyo. They have six children, three of whom help on the farm. Rehema works mainly in the field while Sinavyo looks after the children and prepares food for the family.

The Uluguru mountains

Mr Ramadhani lives in Mfumbwe, a village in the Uluguru mountains. It is a remote place with scattered huts, and is difficult to get to. Although chiefdoms were formally abolished upon Independence in 1961, most people in Tanzania still respect tribal chiefs. The Uluguru chief resides in Kinole town, which gives the town a special flavour among Tanzanians.

Soils are reddish or black, each of which has different properties and crop suitability. A good rainfall of 2000 mm per year at a modest altitude of 400-500 metres in hilly terrain provides a varying microclimate. Farmers grow a wide variety of crops: highland rice, lowland rice, chilli, pepper, coconut, maize, jackfruit, oranges, beans, groundnuts, bananas and tomatoes. Most families do not depend much on cash; food is bartered and work is shared in various ways. Most farmers grow a variety of crops, so for most of the year, households have food. However, farmers are poor and rely on what they can grow for themselves. There is neither electricity nor piped water. In a nearby village there is a solar panel where people can come and recharge batteries for 100 Tanzanian shillings (TSh), about US\$ 0.06.

Mr Ramadhani with his second sun drier. There are airing holes in the top of the plastic sheeting, and a device on each leg of the drier to prevent ants climbing up.

Producing dried fruit for the market

In the mid-1990s, an effort to set up a juice factory in nearby Mkuyuni failed because the local farmers did not manage to raise their share of capital. Equipment that was left behind (such as a sundrier design and trays) was given to those few local farmers who were interested to continue working with local fruit processing, one of whom was Mr Ramadhani. Dried fruit production started in 1997. You would think that it was easy to set up a fruit-drying business here. Not really. Despite a relatively short distance to town (45 km), the road conditions are tough. During heavy rains, the area is cut off due to bridges and roads becoming impassable. Fruits for the town market may arrive too late or not at all. They may rot, or may never find any market due to transport hurdles and costs, or there may be excess supply from other villages. Mr Ramadhani does not despair and has tried a new way to overcome the difficulties.

Mr Ramadhani dries, packs and sells jackfruits, pineapples, bananas, mango, mizaituni-fruits (a fruit said to come from Central America, but grown here for ages), tomatoes and lemon grass. Since these fruits have different ripening seasons, it means he can spread his efforts throughout the year. Mr Ramadhani has two sun driers, 30 trays, a cupboard, a mobile phone, and an "office" of a few square metres. No electricity, no generator, no vehicle, no fuel, no piped water, no scales, no thermometer, and no local supplies (except for the fruits): these are the conditions a small-scale farmer typically faces.

The mobile phone is a striking innovation and three or four people in the village have one. The batteries can normally be charged at the local shop. SMSs are used to minimise the costs of communication. Without the mobile phone, Mr Ramadhani would not have been able to be in constant contact with customers and suppliers. He would have wasted time looking for people to buy his produce.

If all goes well

Fruits are cut and spread out on trays while fresh. They will be ready for packing in two to three days – if all goes well. The weather may be overcast, there may be excessive rains, or ants may claim their share of the harvest. At times trays of fruit become “burnt”. It might be that temperatures are too high, but the reason for this is not fully known and the problem is frequent and unpredictable. At times up to half of the trays need to be discarded. Fruit like mango need a chemical (potassium metabisulphite) to maintain the colour. This chemical is applied at a rate of 2 g per kg fruit. It is imported and expensive, but if it is not used, the mangoes turn black and cannot be sold. A friend at university has assisted Mr Ramadhani with this so far. However, in the future he may not be able to get hold of the chemical so easily, so he might not be able to continue preparing dried mango unless he finds an alternative method of maintaining colour.

Producing a bag of 100 grams of fruit requires up to 2 kg of raw fruit. The 100 gram bags are sold at a wholesale price of 400 Tsh. A small outlet for farmers with several similar products (food, spices, juices, etc.) is found in Morogoro at Boma Road. Here, the price reaches 500 Tsh. Other *ad hoc* sales opportunities are used as they arise; when Mr Ramadhani travels he always carries a display and small stock of his products.

Finding good bags for packaging is a headache. Even poor quality bags have to be imported from Nairobi. A better quality can be bought from the town of Moshi, 600 km away. Bags and labels often cost more than the value of dried fruit. Fruits are collected, packed in plastic bags, labels are filled out (with a production and expiry date), and sealed with the flame of a candle.

Box 1. Mr Ramadhani's turnover for year 2006

Income, all sales	750 400 Tsh
Costs (excl. labour and time)	563 640 Tsh
Gross profit	186 760 Tsh

It appears that Mr Ramadhani is making a profit. However, if all costs were included, his net profit would be zero.

Risk of imprisonment

Mr Ramadhani insists he can improve the situation by following the proper legal channels – which is quite a task. In order to have his business approved and legalised he has to be (and is) a registered producer. For registration he needs a health certificate for his products. This is a must for domestic and export sales and is quite an obstacle for a producer in a remote area. Firstly he needs to visit many offices. Then, samples of the fruit need to be analysed, at a cost of 100 000 TSh per sample (around US\$ 75). This soon adds up to quite a total for six kinds of fruits/vegetables, and prevents most farmers becoming registered and legalised. But Mr Ramadhani pursues this issue relentlessly and has invested everything. Eventually, he succeeded in getting his Registration and Sales permit. This was very important as, without registration, he faces imprisonment if his products are sold outside the Morogoro region.

As he is currently forced to travel out of the village to gather information and to purchase labels, bags, chemicals and other crucial materials, Mr Ramadhani is losing time and money. This may make his fragile business unfeasible. The profit may never be substantial unless the quantity increases and workload is shared, for example through the involvement of other local

Box 2. To become an entrepreneurial farmer, you need to overcome quite a few hurdles...

1. Produce excess of a product with local market value
2. Find customers for this product
3. Get registered as a food business with the Chamber of Commerce
4. Product Laboratory tests:
 - a. Identify a laboratory
 - b. Make an agreement
 - c. Pay for repetitive tests for each kind of fruit
5. Apply for Quality Control Certificate with the Tanzania Food and Drug Authority
6. Pay for the Quality Control Certificate
7. Collect certificate, make copies
8. Get permission for establishing a shop from local authorities
9. Establish a shop or stall, or link up with a business man / woman
10. Registration, accounts, payments to the Income Tax Department

farmers. Mr Ramadhani could specialise in a single product instead of six. This would give bigger volumes, ease marketing, and provide more profit – but at a higher risk, which Morogoro farmers do not like.

Support is distant and insufficient

Despite various strategies and policies aimed at alleviating poverty among small-scale farmers, the existing regulations pose serious challenges, even for the most innovative farmers. Box 2 shows that the number, costs and pace of the official requirements make it all but impossible to comply with the necessary legal conditions. Such requirements include business registration, laboratory tests of current products, quality control, quality certificates, local levies, and government tax, each requiring plenty of documentation. A poor smallholder, living in a remote mountainous region, in a house with clay walls and no furniture, simply does not have the means to fulfil the conditions required.

Most often, community and civil society organisations do not deal with the bureaucratic issues that innovative farmers with growth potential need. The local agricultural extension service seems to play an insignificant or invisible role. In most cases the only potential partners are from commercial business, from the research sector or if a development project should appear on the scene. The commercial sector often loses interest if the products come in low volumes, or if weather and logistics prevents accessibility. Many research projects are too small and do not take farmers' interests and sustainability into account. Farmer organisations have a tendency to get involved in local politics and move away from the interest of their members. Their key role –alleviating farmers' technical and operational needs– gets snowed under a whole lot of other tasks. Thus, as a paradox, the small-scale farmer, who actually was targeted for support in becoming an entrepreneur, becomes the loser, and often gets left behind by all those who originally wanted to help him or her.

Farmers in remote areas need improved technical and administrative support to enable them to continue improving production, yield, their storage capacity, and market access. In addition, networks and organisations need to be more co-productive and sensitive to their needs, for minimising costs and providing other support. Taking these issues into account will make farmers like Ramadhani Fufumbe even more successful. ■

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