



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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From Humble Beginnings to Food Processing Powerhouse

In a conference room at the U.S. African Development Foundation (USADF) in Washington, D.C., Charles Nsubuga stands at the front of the room with an array of brightly colored packages full of nutritious food products and a presentation entitled “The Humble Beginning” projected onto the screen behind him.

Hailing all the way from Uganda, Charles is Managing Director of successful food processing company SESACO. He is in the United States as a guest of the American Soybean Association to learn about school nutrition and health programs. Today, he says, he is visiting USADF headquarters to greet and give thanks to an organization that invested in his small business so many years ago.

The first part of Charles’ story is not uncommon in Uganda: he attended school only through the sixth grade, after which he worked on construction sites along with coworkers who, like him, didn’t always get enough to eat. But when he turned 18, he turned a simple idea into a secondary source of income. Charles started roasting soy nuts at home and bringing them to work to sell cheaply to other construction workers. His soy nuts became so popular among coworkers that he decided to expand his business, legally registering SESACO in 1987 with the slogan “Good Feeding/Good Living.”

By 2003, when Charles first came into contact with USADF, SESACO was processing a variety of wholesome, nutritious foods including soybeans, cereal, millet, maize and sesame. But, Charles points out today, the working environment was poor, transportation was substandard and profit was low. Some years SESACO didn’t even manage to break even.

Charles credits USADF, which makes targeted investments through direct grants to Africans under Feed the Future, with introducing his company to an effective two-fold investment approach over the course of a five-year grant: SESACO received money to purchase a suitable storehouse and machinery, plus staff training on product quality, standardization, effective marketing and proper bookkeeping. In the USADF conference room, Charles flips through photos of the once-new storehouse and recalls lamenting that it was unnecessarily large for his small operation. But since receiving the USADF grant, SESACO has outgrown that same storehouse, and the company continues expanding.

The numbers are impressive; SESACO has met or exceeded nearly all of its targets, growing from an average \$96,000 in annual sales to over \$730,000; more than doubling both employees and wages; developing export markets for its products in Rwanda and Sudan; and sourcing increasing quantities of raw materials from smallholder farmers in all four regions of the country.

The best part of SESACO’s success is that the company’s diverse range of fortified products – such as soy-peanut-sesame spread, a soy-millet porridge mix, and soy-wheat snacks – are now widely available in Uganda and helping combat undernutrition. Charles explains that SESACO was able to boost local demand for soy products by partnering with the World Initiative for Soy in Human Health on a public campaign, leading outdoor cooking demonstrations and public taste-tastings, exhibitions, and workshops in schools, bakeries and meat processing plants.

The last few photos of Charles’ presentation show employees of his company accepting trophies in recognition of their success. “In the beginning, it was just about survival,” he says. “But we ended up winning people’s hearts and their awards.”