

Technology, production and partnership innovation in Uganda

Moses Musaaazi

Since 2007 a partnership between UNHCR, the Government of Uganda and 'MakaPads' inventor Moses Musaaazi has helped provide affordable sanitary pads for thousands of refugee girls and women while substantially reducing UNHCR's expenditure on these essential items.

In 2006 UNHCR was looking for ways to reduce its spending on sanitary pads for refugees in Uganda. Staff read about Dr Moses Musaaazi, a Ugandan entrepreneur, who in 2004 had been supported by the Rockefeller Foundation to come up with a design that would meet the demand for affordable sanitary pads for primary schoolgirls, many of whom miss school every month during their menstrual periods. Existing sanitary pads were all imported and were too expensive. The result, launched in June 2006, was 'MakaPads', sanitary pads made primarily out of papyrus (which grows locally) and recyclable paper, and priced some 50% cheaper than imported pads. In addition, the home-based production process entailed simple, low-energy machinery, and the skills could be acquired by anyone.

UNHCR Uganda recognised an opportunity to reduce the cost of providing sanitary pads while providing employment for refugees. The Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda gave permission for refugees to be employed in producing MakaPads, and in 2007 a new MakaPads factory opened in Kyaka II Refugee Settlement. Production grew from 30,000 MakaPads in 2007, employing 18 refugees, to 1,080,000 MakaPads in 2013, employing 48 refugees. In 2005-06 UNHCR had spent over US\$400,000 on (imported) sanitary pads; in 2012-13 they purchased MakaPads only, at a cost of US\$230,000.

The model of MakaPads production encourages entrepreneurship; while there is an overall manager of the plant in Kyaka II, each sub-process allows a group of refugees to form an enterprise and produce as many items as possible since the pay is per unit. This

model requires less supervision, encourages high quality and increases production rates; furthermore, employees may sub-contract to increase capacity, thereby providing wider employment. With the money earned, some refugees have been able to send their children and relatives' children to better, fee-paying schools. Having acquired entrepreneurial skills, some refugees have also set up a spinoff business to rear goats while others have established shops.

The MakaPads project stands out as a good example of innovation involving the private sector, the UN and refugees themselves, which offers both direct and indirect benefits.¹ MakaPads production could and should be expanded within Uganda and in other countries as appropriate, so that other refugees can be provided with the same skills training and income-generating activity. Furthermore, the model could work in other sectors. There are refugees engaged in agricultural production in all refugee settlements in Uganda. They sell their produce to middlemen who transport it to Kampala and elsewhere, with the middlemen making huge profits on the refugees' efforts. There could be a win-win situation whereby refugees are contracted (as a cooperative) to produce maize, process it into flour and sell it to UNHCR and/or the World Food Programme to then be supplied to refugees.

Moses Musaaazi mkmusaazi@t4tafrica.co is Managing Director, Technology for Tomorrow Ltd. www.t4tafrica.co

1. For more information, see Humanitarian Innovation Project (HIP) Mission Report #4: *Technology and Innovation in Kampala - June 2013* www.oxhip.org/wp-content/uploads/HIP-Mission-Report-4-FINAL.pdf and www.oxhip.org/innovations/locally-made-sanitary-pads-maka-pads/