



Zambian Tea Company Brews Success

Yatu means “ours” in Nyanja, a local Zambian language. It is also the name of the tea processed at Modi and Miriam Chapotamo’s tea factory in Ndola, and it represents their desire to create a product of which their workers and all Zambians can be proud.

Friends and family cautioned the Chapotamos against starting a small business in the uncertain Zambian economy, but they forged ahead in 1999, selling many of their personal possessions to buy the tea factory. Modi says he “shudders” when he looks back at their risky decision.

They sought the guidance of a USAID-funded agribusiness program that helps develop new businesses by promoting sustainable practices. Using market research, the program helps small businesses identify environmentally and socially conscious products that consumers demand.

In its first full year in business, the Chapotamos’ factory processed three blends of tea and produced 900–1,000 packages a day. Yatu Tea can be found throughout Zambia at Shoprite markets—Zambia’s largest grocery store chain—and Total filling stations. Yatu Tea also reached an agreement with the Sun Hotel in Livingstone to provide gift baskets to all guests. Modi says the hotel chose Yatu Tea because it wanted to give its guests a Zambian-produced product.



Photo: USAID/Julie Pace

Modi and Miriam Chapotamo enjoy Yatu Tea at their factory.

But the potential of Yatu Tea goes beyond production figures. The Chapotamos seek to increase local pride and capacity by training factory employees in sales and management. In the beginning, USAID helped bring the Chapotamos to trade fairs throughout southern Africa, where they interacted with buyers and gained a greater understanding of the business process. Now the Chapotamos bring their workers to trade shows as well.

Despite lucrative offers to move their company out of Zambia, Modi and Miriam say they feel a personal responsibility to contribute to the economic revitalization of Zambia by creating a successful, locally produced product.

Because many Zambian women have been kept out of more labor-intensive factory jobs and are unable to find employment in the country’s industry-laden Copperbelt, USAID encouraged the Chapotamos to hire women at the Yatu Tea factory. Women now make up more than half of the 20-person workforce, and Modi says his wife—a successful woman who has attained a management position—serves as an excellent role model for female employees.

The Chapotamos have big goals for their company and are hoping to increase their output throughout Zambia and eventually move into the export business. Yatu Tea has already garnered attention at tradeshows in South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite lucrative offers to move their company out of Zambia, Modi and Miriam say they feel a personal responsibility to contribute to the economic revitalization of Zambia by creating a successful, locally produced product and increasing employment opportunities for fellow Zambians.