

INNOVATIONS AS THE KEY OF SOLUTIONS DECREASING MALNUTRITION IN AFRICA

by Uwase Larissa



Larissa Uwase completed an undergraduate course in Built Environment and Architecture in 2016, at the College of Science and Technology under the University of Rwanda. Her ambition has always been to eradicate poverty and feed the hungry. Currently, she is running her own company specialized in food processing, the Carl Group Ltd, for which she has been awarded the title of “Best Young Entrepreneur” in the “Youth Breaking the Cycle of Poverty” competition, organized by Rwanda’s Ministry of Youth and ICT. In the 2016 World Economic Forum on Africa, she was selected among Africa’s top 5 women innovators thanks to her commitment in tackling children’s malnutrition.

Before she started developing her idea, she did different entrepreneurship training under “African Innovation Prize” and an international organization called “These numbers have faces.” Recently, as an entrepreneur in food security, she took part in a participatory slum upgrading research in Kigali aimed at selecting the best project for feeding hungry cities.

My name is Uwase Larissa, co-founder of CARL Group located in Kigali-Rwanda. CARL Group is a youth-led company that was established in October 2014. Its mission is to foster innovative services that are aimed at promoting growth and transforming the orange-fleshed sweet potatoes industry, especially to provide well processed vitamin A products.

CARL Group adds value to the agriculture industry through using sweet potatoes to produce various well-processed consumable products such as baked products like donuts, breads, cakes, crisps and biscuits. CARL Group will soon introduce into the market spaghetti made from sweet potatoes. The sweet potatoes used are orange fleshed sweet potatoes because they are rich in vitamin A; they are grown in Rwanda.

Orange fleshed sweet potatoes are readily available and affordable. As a food, there has not been much innovation with regard to what more can be created out of them. Therefore, CARL Group is keen to use this opportunity to increase the number of consumption options that can be obtained from sweet potatoes. There will also be jobs created as the group expands and ventures into other areas, as well as capacity building opportunities and programs.

According to research conducted by the Rwanda Agriculture Board, in 2013 41% of men and 51% of women consume sweet potatoes at least once a week. Even though 80% of Rwanda's farmers grow sweet potatoes, the majority do not consume as it is regarded as a lesser food, at least not until Centre Internationale des Patates (CIP) introduced a new variety of sweet potatoes in Rwanda called the 'Orange Fleshed Sweet potato' in 2012. This type of sweet potato offers various nutritional benefits, including beta carotene containing vitamin A, which enhances cell growth and vision.

In light of the above statistics, CARL Group sought to add value to the sweet potato by increasing diversity in the consumption of sweet potatoes. Our products are called 'VITA Products', a name that was derived from the fact that sweet potatoes are rich in vitamin A. We have Vita donuts, Vita breads, Vita cakes, Vita biscuits, Vita Spaghetti etc.

Recently CARL Group, represented by Uwase Larissa, had the opportunity to visit the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism (IGCAT) in Spain, from 15th July to 18th July 2016. We were honoured to receive an invitation from Director Dr. Diane Dodd, an expert in Gastronomy.

"After reading an article of the World Economic Forum on Africa, held in Kigali Rwanda, and after noticing the outstanding work of CARL Group in adding value to the locally grown sweet potato, and hence promoting regional food, I decided to explore this area and meet with the individuals involved. A meeting was held with Uwase Larissa, a representative for CARL Group, at the headquarters of International Institute of Gastronomy. At this point we realised that CARL Group has a very good vision that will touch many lives in Africa." said Dr. Diane Dodd of IGCAT. IGCAT is an international organisation with associated experts spread across the globe. Its secretariat offices are located at the Ajuntament de Sant Pol de Mar in the Province of Barcelona.

As a growing company, there are still challenges to be met in growing our business and reaching many people as well as educating communities on the importance and value added that come with our products. Some of these challenges are lack of tools and equipment to facilitate and increase production that will help to meet the demand and also a lack of good packaging materials.

Your support and assistance to help us grow CARL Group into a prestigious company will be greatly appreciated. We would love to receive any help in the form of funds to finance our still growing company and expand the work force, donations of tools and equipment, and mentorship, as well as networking with experts in the field. We are so hopeful for the future and dream of a malnutrition free Rwanda.

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This paper was written in 2016 for **IGCAT**.

The Expert is promoted by **IGCAT** as he share IGCAT's mission of empower and facility local communities to realise the potential of their distinct food, culture, arts and sustainable tourism and local resources.

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