



Gourmet Gardens

Green Business Spotlight

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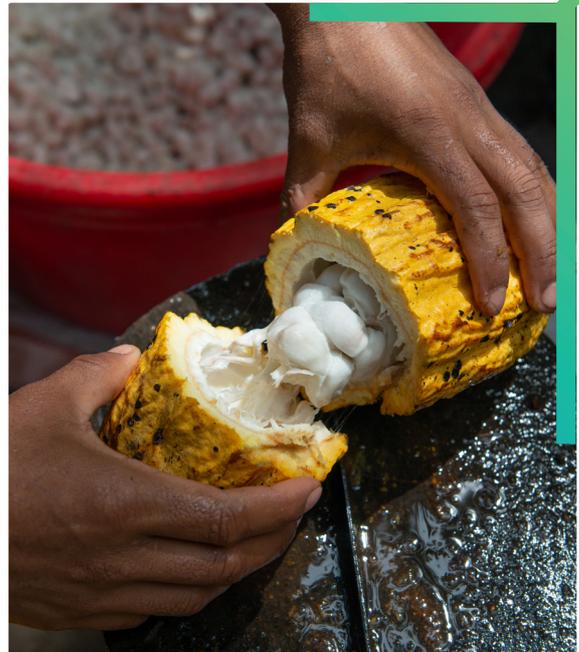


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A cacophony of car horns and plumes of vehicle emissions – the chaos of Kampala at rush hour is a huge contrast to the serenity that lies six hours to the west of it. The Rwenzori National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is flanked by the 120km Rwenzori Mountain range on the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo. There, under the Mountains of the Moon, are the Gourmet Garden farms.



Much like the National Park, the farms are a celebration of nature and all it has to offer. Vanilla, cocoa and spices are all grown and harvested, before being processed into the highest quality ingredients and products. “The company was built on the ethos of an economic, social and environmental desire to produce pure products in harmony with nature,” explains Gourmet Gardens CEO Clemens Fehr. “But this needs to be done with social responsibility to sustain the enterprise.”

It is that approach that gives Gourmet Gardens its identity. From its vanilla beans and paste to its cocoa products, all are organically certified and Fair Trade. This is even more impressive given that 70 per cent of all African raw

materials are processed abroad. Processing goods to this standard has obvious health and environmental benefits and economically empowers producers. They receive a significant premium for their products and the financial cushion this provides is especially important with fluctuating vanilla prices.

The erratic nature of prices in a highly price-sensitive market brings unwelcome volatility – one of the main challenges facing the business. This is exacerbated by shortfalls in working capital. Clemens and his team can sometimes be stretched thinly as a result, consumed by the day-to-day, distracted from the bigger picture. It is in that wider business plan that the sustainability Gourmet Gardens treasures can

be maintained and its impact felt more broadly.

Achieving this requires financial support, but such is the nature of the relationship between Uganda’s SMEs and financial institutions, that the true value of companies like Gourmet Gardens is often overlooked. This is apparent in the fact that the majority of its products are shipped to the EU, US and Japan. However, through the Uganda Green Enterprise Finance Accelerator (UGEFA), sustainable businesses like Gourmet Gardens are being taught how to speak a language better understood by banks.

UGEFA’s finance-focused programme facilitates the flow of capital to green businesses by reducing the risk of lending to SMEs through expert business advice and loan facilitation with UGEFA’s partner banks. Clemens of Gourmet Gardens found the training and preparation he underwent for loan pitching invaluable.

The benefits of a successful loan pitch ripple far beyond just the Gourmet Gardens team. A more certain future for the business means a more certain future for the 1,000 smallholder farmers on whom Gourmet Gardens relies. That’s our definition of sustainability.

