

How we made
it in **Africa**



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NELLY MURUNGI, 19 MAY 2021

Innovative model incentivises Tanzanian small-scale millers to add micronutrients to their flour



A flour mill operating with Sanku's fortification technology.

For many people in sub-Saharan Africa, a typical meal comprises mostly starchy flour which lacks key vitamins and minerals. Micronutrient deficiency is the leading cause of intellectual disability in children, preventable blindness in adults and maternal death during childbirth.

Tanzania-based not-for-profit organisation Sanku has built a model that incentivises small-scale flour millers to fortify their flour with micronutrients. This not only improves the health of consumers, but also allows the millers to boost their sales. Sanku is the 2019 winner of the global [Zayed Sustainability Prize](#) in the Food category. To learn more, we spoke to Felix Brooks-church, co-founder and CEO.

Give us an overview of Sanku.

Sanku was created to address the gap in what is called fortification. Fortification is a nutrition intervention to add vitamins and minerals to staple foods. It's quite a common practice in the West and high-income nations, even in East Africa, but only at large grain mills. The majority of the population eat food from small mills in villages or towns; for example, 95% of Tanzanians buy their maize flour from these small millers.

Sanku provides fortification technology to these millers, enabling them to fortify flour and we are currently working with over 400 millers. We aim to reach 600 this year and 3,000 millers in the next five years. The majority of our operations are in [Tanzania](#) but we do have partner projects in [Kenya](#), [Rwanda](#) and [Malawi](#).

How does Sanku incentivise these small-scale millers to fortify their flour?

These millers are small. Typically, their production facilities are the size of a bedroom, with one machine and maybe one or two operators. They are often also strapped for cash. One fortification strategy would be to sell them expensive equipment to enable them to fortify the flour. However, they can't absorb the extra cost nor can they pass it on to consumers.

We had to be creative and invent a business model to incentivise the millers. What we do is provide the machines to use for free through grant funding from our donors. The machinery is a one-time cost. However, the biggest long-term expense is the recurring cost of the nutrients. We found an innovative way to offset this. The millers buy empty flour bags to package their flour but pay a premium for these bags because they are buying small quantities from middlemen who add their markup. We aggregated all the millers and negotiated discounted prices for bulk orders direct from the wholesaler of the flour bags. The savings are enough to offset the cost of the nutrients. So now we are able to sell empty flour bags plus nutrients at the same price point that the miller was previously paying for just empty flour bags.

The upside is the miller does not shoulder any financial burden. They can sell fortified premium flour at the same price as unfortified flour which attracts more customers.

Explain how these fortification machines work.

When we started over 10 years ago, it was never our intention to invent a machine but we realised to be able to reach these small millers and assist them to do the job, we needed a suitable machine. Nothing like it existed on the market and the only available machines were massive and too expensive. They are more suited to larger mills.

We spent about three years building a machine specifically designed for these small millers in East Africa. It is small and light enough to strap on the back of a bicycle, so it's very easy to transport.

The machine is compatible with existing milling equipment, requires no modification and is fully automatic which removes any risk of human error.

Each machine is fitted with a SIM card which sends production data in real-time through the cellular network to my dashboard. Right now I am looking at a live dashboard of 400-plus mills throughout East Africa. It calculates how much flour they are producing; what quantity of nutrients are being added; whether it is the right ratio and within the standard of the country and if there are any technical issues. What this means is we can quickly react if a machine is down or malfunctioning, or if a miller needs power connections, flour bags or nutrients.

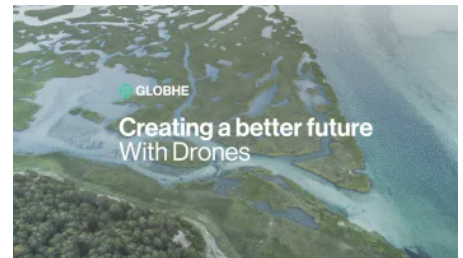


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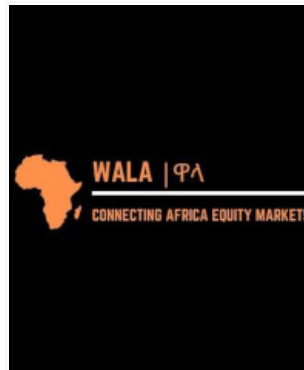
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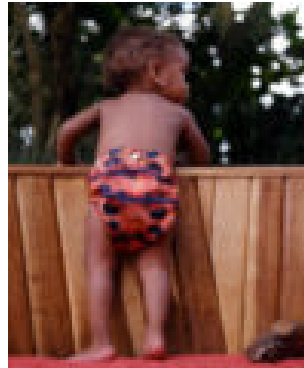
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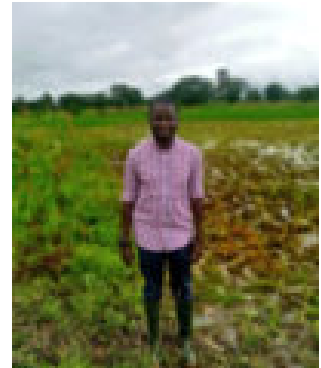
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