



## Naturaleaf

(Hand made Banana fibre paper)

### **Background**

The enterprise was established in the year 2000 with an intention to assist the disadvantaged persons in society. The targeted were the single mothers, the prisoners and the unemployed youth. A Canadian lady named Ann with the above vision and mission in mind started the enterprise. The industry was to be self sustaining and environmentally friendly through recycling of materials into useful products. Many products were tired out and these included, toilet paper, paper boxes, and soap among others. Fibre paper for making cards turned out to be the most lucrative. Lately, the enterprise changed ownership and is currently run by Ann & Harry Abels. These two also run a retail outlet on Crested Towers building in Kampala known as A&K'97 shop. The enterprise begun with 8 people but has risen to 25 employees especially during the peak production periods.

## Product range

At present, the enterprise has become a center of excellence in fibre paper using raw materials such as Banana fibre, elephant grass, onion skin, pineapple crowns and shredded used paper. Table 1 below is a list of products and raw materials used in their manufacture. It is important to note that Banana fibre is a major raw material in most of these products and in some cases it is 100% Banana fibre while in other cases, it is blended with fibre from other commodities such as elephant grass, pineapple and even ordinary wood paper.

Table 1. Product range

Item	Raw material used	Demand status
1. Invitation cards	Banana fibre paper with or without any other fibres	High (Especially towards year end)
2. Season greetings cards	Banana fibre paper with or without any other fibres	High (Especially towards year end)
3. Souvenirs (boxes, key holders...)	Banana fibre paper with or without any other fibres	Moderate
4. Albums	Banana fibre paper with or without any other fibres	Moderate
5. Calendars	Banana fibre paper with or without any other fibres	High (Especially towards year end)
6. Notebooks	Banana fibre paper with or without any other fibres	Moderate
7. Picture frames	Banana fibre paper with or without any other fibres	Moderate
8. Contact cards	"	Moderate

## The process

Thoroughly dry Banana fibres are supplied from peasant farmers from the vicinity at a price of Ugsh 250 per kg. The fibres are chopped into small pieces 1-2 cm width and 1-2 cm length and then placed in a container ready for the next step in the process. Water containing ash is added to the chopped fibres in the container and the mixture is boiled for 8 hrs using firewood on an earthen stove.

Upon completion of the boiling process, dye or color may be added to the pulp as per the requirement of the order placed. The boiled fibre chops are placed in bowels and blended using an electric industrial blender and this results into pulp ready for drying. The process continues with the pulp getting scooped from the

container and placed using drying screens<sup>1</sup> and placed under direct sunshine for drying. Drying lasts one to two days if the weather is sunny and dry. Delays in this process can be experienced during the rainy seasons.

Upon successful completion of drying, the paper is cut off the screens and is taken to the press for compressing (pressing). This stage in the process ensures that the paper holds together and can go through an ordinary printer without getting torn. The plant has a modern press with ample capacity to cater for the required standards.

The pressed paper is then transferred to the designing room where it is worked on by skilled personnel as per the clients' requirements. It is at this stage that words, designs, logos and pictures are printed onto the paper and then the appropriate designs are cut to make the various products. The enterprise has trained the employees and imparted several skills to them in this regard.

This enterprise mainly takes orders from clients and details of the required specifications are also recorded. This is common practice with this nature of business. The clients have to spend time with the manufacturer and spell out to the minute detail what they would like. The process of designing the product to fit the customer's design is mainly embarked on at the stage when the paper is brought to the designing room.

### **Marketing of final product**

The nature of this business dictates that marketing begins at a point when a client specifies the kind of product they want. The enterprise has a couple of outlets in Kampala where such order can be placed and specification taken as per the clients' desire. The order plus the specification are passed on to the plant and executed accordingly. Ample time has to be allowed for delivery of the final product and this ranges from one to two weeks or more depending on the size of the order.

The enterprise has not had a very vigorous marketing campaign to make its products known to bigger markets both regionally and internationally due to uncertainty about the ability to meet up to the demand.

The enterprise runs a website [www.naturaleaf.com](http://www.naturaleaf.com) a window through which products get known to a wider spectrum of people all over the world. The enterprise has made attempts to participate in international trade fairs and exhibitions but the implications in terms of cost are quite limiting. Running a stall in such trade fairs and exhibitions cost over UK£ 3,000 which is quite costly for such a small establishment.

---

<sup>1</sup> The drying screen is basically a wooden frame of size desired by the client (A2 to A4 usually) with an ordinary mosquito net strapped onto the frame.

## **Major constraints in production**

The enterprise started as a social project seeking to address social needs but it has transformed gradually participate in highly competitive commercial environment. The enterprise ought to be prepared to face up to the challenges of participating effectively and efficiently in a highly competitive commercial world. At present, the plant is doesn't have the capacity to handle very huge orders that are required in a very short period of time and this is not very helpful in a highly competitive commercial world.

In periods when the demand for products increases, more personnel have to be hired and trained for the job. However, during the seasons when demand for products is low, the enterprise finds it difficult to maintain a big labor force. This fluctuation in employment is costly both to the enterprise and to the employees themselves.

## **Major constraints in marketing**

There is lack of capacity to respond to sudden market demands if they comprise of high quantities of products demanded in very short periods of time. This renders the enterprise not to be very competitive in a highly commercial environment. There is need to plan for growth in capacity to cater for this kind of situation

There is need to embark on very rigorous marketing and advertising campaign to exploit both the local and international markets. This can only be done if the capacity to respond to demand has been worked on.

## **The way forward**

There is need to seek technical assistance from both production and marketing specialists to work out a plan of scaling up the operations of this wonderful enterprise to a level where it can spread it wings beyond the horizon.

Compiled by: John Jagwe [foodnet@iitaesarc.co.ug](mailto:foodnet@iitaesarc.co.ug)

Contact persons:

Ms Elly Smith, Design & Marketing - Ms Harriet Nantale, Production manager

P.O. Box 34072, Kampala, Uganda.

E-mail: [papers@naturaleaf.com](mailto:papers@naturaleaf.com) - Web site: [www.naturaleaf.com](http://www.naturaleaf.com)

