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The Gambia

Fatoumata NJIE

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*"Our tea stands out from the crowd for its branding and packaging style".*

Black tea continues to hold the largest market share in Africa, followed by green tea. And specialty teas – such as herbal and fruit teas with functional benefits – are gaining popularity, particularly among the youth and millennials. Though the Gambia is not known for tea production, it has a tea-drinking population, ranking it among the top per capita consumers in the sub-region.

When she founded Yaxare in 2019, Fatoumata saw an opportunity to create a niche product, processing local herbs traditionally used as remedies in her country into packaged tea bags. Initially sold locally and through the Gambian diaspora communities, Yaxare herbal teas are getting increasingly known not only in the country but also across Europe and the United States.

Noticing a growing demand for natural and healthy products, Fatoumata's business model focused on making high-quality, organic tea, through sustainable agricultural practices and a community out-growers scheme that is providing over 1,000 women farmers with a regular source of income. Conserving biodiversity, reducing the impact on the environment and including vulnerable groups, particularly women and youth in the supply chain of her company are key elements of Yaxare's mission.

Another asset, which allowed her company to sell half a million bags per annum over its four years of operations, is the exclusive branding and packaging of tea bags that appeal to overseas customers and make them ready to exports.



Competition is fierce, as the tea market is dominated by imported tea, but Fatoumata learned how to take calculated risks, set SMART goals and take responsibility. Those three competencies are the ones she has been constantly refining after attending the Empretec Entrepreneurship Training Workshop (ETW) in 2021. She was also able to access loans and grants that allowed her company to buy machinery and packaging materials to strengthen the brand.

90% of Yaxare’s employees are women, who also hold management positions in the company. While her leadership style is flexible enough to adjust and adapt to an ever-changing world, Fatoumata believes that communication, trust and motivation are essential aspects of growing a team of dedicated people who work together towards the same objective. *“I am constantly motivating my staff to give their best to the job and solve problems wisely”*, she says.

Fatoumata sees her company innovating and exploring new channels to expand Yaxare’s market share, tripling her annual sales in the coming two years and selling 7-10 million bags within a five-year horizon. In doing so, she continues to provide fair trade market opportunities to a growing number of smallholder women farmers, engaging young people as sales agents.