



Browns Food, A Ground-breaking Presidential SMME Award Winner

Browns Food was formed as an answer to a question that Mabel Akinlabi and her husband asked themselves on what will they do next with their lives. They were in broadcasting and the landscape was changing drastically. Mabel and her husband were hosting their daughters' 11th birthday party and decided to make corndogs for the children that were attending the party. The children loved them and from then, they knew they had a great potential in their product. Consequently, Mabel and her husband contacted Shoprite Checkers and started running their business.

The challenges that they encountered in their quest to establish their business was that there were no corndog factories or facilities to reference in Africa. To overcome this, they enlisted the assistance of an American corndog equipment supplier with regards to not only the equipment but processes. Furthermore, they learnt about sourcing the different roles involved in supplying retail. They also made sure to develop a strong relationship with their Shoprite Checkers buyer.

Mabel and her husband also borrowed funds from friends and because their business was formed during the 2020 COVID lockdown, they sacrificed paying their home loans, school fees and vehicle repayments so they could build a facility and purchase equipment. They skipped payments and made repayment plans trusting the business would be a success.

"I certainly would recommend the Department of Small Business Development to any budding

entrepreneur that is seeking assistance with starting a business because on my experience, there was less red tape than I thought, the turnaround times were reasonable, and our Investment Officer was fully committed and always available. Moreover, the repayment structure and cost is better than conventional banks," she said.

In ten years', time Browns Food plans to own each element of their value chain. They also intend to export to Europe, UAE and Canada and become a major player and contributor in FMCG. They also want to produce a large variety of food products and own a large-scale facility with various capabilities.

Due to loadshedding, the cost of generating power has quadrupled due to having to run a generator for the business. Stores have experienced major losses and are not always honest about declaring the cause of the damages and then passing on the cost to the company. Browns Food has benefited by learning new ways to maximise production and they have become very grateful of the resources they do have despite the power cuts. "We have worked across Africa, and we understand and appreciate the systems in South Africa to assist struggling businesses," Mabel elaborated.

Browns food currently runs a high-capacity generator as an alternative power solution to navigate loadshedding and they have invested in a smart energy saving freezer. The company did not encounter any challenges in the application/nomination process of the awards.