

Today's Woman: JACQUELINE JOYREEN BANDA

FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO GLOBAL IMPACT

JACQUELINE JOYREEN BANDA is the Managing Director of Jeyie Foods Company. She is a remarkable entrepreneur who has not only carved a niche for herself in the food industry but has also made a significant impact in her community and beyond. At 29 years old, she is already recognised as a leading African woman in the food sector. In this interview with MATILDA MAJAWA, she shares her educational background, the childhood experiences that shaped her entrepreneurial journey, the inception of Jeyie Foods Company, and her mission to bring positive change to her community.

May I know you?

My name is Jacqueline Joyreen Banda. I was born, raised and reside in Mangochi. I am the second born daughter in a family of four girls. I am 29 years old, the Managing Director of Jeyie Foods and I am a Leading African Woman in Food fellow.

Can you share a bit about your educational background and how it has influenced your journey as an entrepreneur?

I hold a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Shimla University, India. My degree provided me with a solid foundation in key business concepts, including marketing, finance, accounting, management, and operations. It has helped me to understand financial statements, budgeting, and financial management. These skills are crucial for managing my business; it also influenced me to see the solution that my products are solving.

Share a memorable childhood experience or influence that you believe played a significant role in shaping you as an entrepreneur and leader today?

I grew up in a family where both of my parents were entrepreneurs; my father is into agribusiness and my mother was managing our family shops. When I was a kid, every day after knocking off from school, I used to go straight to my mother's shop, this was a good business foundation for me, and now that I am in agri-food systems, I understand better. My mother was so much involved in women savings groups and I learnt about the significance of these groups, that is why now I am the Vice Lead of Comesa Federation for Business Women, Malawi Southern Region Chapter. I took the same concept and introduced it to women in my village, now we have 10 village savings and loans groups.

What inspired you to start Jeyie Foods Company, and how did you come up with the idea for your business?

I started Jeyie Foods Company in 2019. I started by producing chili sauce, aiming to help people



reduce inflammation and lower the risk of heart diseases. When I started processing chili sauce, in 2021 I prepared peanut butter for my cousin who was malnourished and after witnessing the positive impact, I expanded the company's product range. Now we offer various nutritious products such as porridge, flour and peanut butter (smooth and crunchy).

When people from my village saw the change in my cousin's health, they started approaching me to be processing peanut butter for them for free, but I could not manage rather, I started training them on how to make peanut butter as Chinama Village T/A Bwananyambi is well known groundnuts farming. So far, I have trained 216 women, using local available resources, as I believe that the caregivers' ability to provide nourishing food plays a crucial role in the well-being of children during their early years. A core aspect of Jeyie Foods' strategy is to support female smallholder farmers, hence we out-source farm produce from 178 farmers.

I work closely with women because growing up, I had seen how women in my community were being regarded as liabilities and not assets, which I want to change.



Starting a company from scratch can be challenging. Can you describe some of the initial obstacles you faced and how you overcame them?

Indeed it is very challenging. I started my food processing journey with zero experience in food system. I tried to reach out to people that I knew had been in the industry for a while to help me, but they never responded to my calls or text messages. When I approached people about my products, they used to say (we only know about so and so products) and therefore cannot buy that.

Another challenge was the information gap. I did not know which door to knock to find assistance but I thank God for the digital era. I started looking for information on the internet, started attending paid seminars just to boost my social capital (this helped me a lot). Most people I have met have been so helpful referring me to different trainings and opportunities, and I attended a short course at Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources under Sheama Scholarship in peanut butter production. All this helped me to boost my confidence in my business and give my customers quality products.

What were the key values or principles that guided you in building your company, and how have they contributed to your success?

I always understand my customers' needs and preferences, that is why we offer a range of products that cater to various dietary requirements and health goals. Excellent customer service is also crucial; I always make sure I stay committed to improving our products and processes. Regularly update formulations to align with the latest research and feedback from customers. Innovation is key in a competitive market. I also consider the environmental impact of our products and manufacturing processes. Many consumers today are conscious of sustainability and may prefer products and companies that are eco-friendly.

Could you share some of the major milestones and achievements of Jeyie Foods Company since its inception?

As the only Malawian woman in Leading African Women in Food fellow, I have attended community to community exchange programmes in Rwanda as



community nature-based enterprises, awarded the dream builder award by USAID, used the funds to purchase machinery for women in my village now we are about to build an operating place which was lost due to Cyclone Freddy. We have currently relocated and are in the final process of certifying our products with Malawi Bureau of Standards.

Can you tell us about a specific challenge you faced as a leader and how you addressed it, while also inspiring your team?

I believe that we work well together that is why I always involve the farmers in decision making. However, working with people from different backgrounds possesses some challenges to reach a consensus. There was a time when our team had to migrate from using CG7 to Chalimbana groundnuts for peanut butter production to attain the highest quality that we intended. Upon conducting our research, the team could not reach a consensus, some were in favour of CG7 because they are used to its model, while some farmers wanted Chalimbana because it provides high production. After several deliberations we agreed to resolve the issue in customers' interest. Thus, we opted for

Chalimbana nuts. However, as a leader I was accountable for the consequences and feedback, we have received great feedback from our customers since we migrated.

Jeyie Foods Company has undoubtedly evolved over the years. How has your business adapted to changing market trends and consumer preferences?

I always actively seek and listen to customer feedback. Customer surveys, reviews, and social media interactions that provide valuable insights into what customers like. I conduct regular market research to stay updated on industry trends, consumer behaviour, and emerging technologies. This has helped us to identify shifts in consumer preferences and market dynamics and we collaborate with other businesses, influencers, industry leaders to tap into new markets and audiences.

How do you balance the demands of running a successful company with your personal life and well-being? Any tips for achieving work-life balance?

It has not been easy and it will never be easy to balance the two, but I always go for



priorities. I plan ahead, give each task time, and at the end of the day give yourself a check list, see what has worked and see the room of improvement and do not forget to take care of your physical and mental health.

Can you describe your long-term vision for Jeyie Foods Company and the impact you hope to make in the industry and the world?

I want Jeyie Foods products to be a global household name, the problem of malnutrition is everywhere, we align with MW2063 where we want people to be healthy and productive, that is why we are making nutrition supplement products, and I also want to build a factory in my home village for the women I trained to make peanut butter, these women will be processing Jeyie peanut butter. All sales and profit will be theirs.

As a female entrepreneur, what advice would you offer to other women who aspire to start their own businesses and succeed in male-dominated industries?

As a female entrepreneur in a male-dominated industry can be a unique advantage, it brings different viewpoints and

experiences to the table. Being determinant and resilient can set you apart. Do not be discouraged by the challenges; use them as stepping stones on your path to success. Your success can pave the way for future generations of women in your industry.

Believe in your abilities and trust that you have what it takes to succeed. Self-belief can be a powerful motivator. Build a strong support system, seek out women and men who can offer guidance, feedback, and emotional support. Do not let setbacks deter you. Instead, view them as opportunities to learn and grow. Resilience is a valuable trait, lastly, recognise and celebrate your achievements, no matter how small they may seem. Acknowledging your successes can boost your confidence and motivation.

Finally, what is the most important lesson you have learned on your entrepreneurial journey that you would like to pass on to aspiring entrepreneurs and business leaders?

Start where you are, do not wait for right resources to get started, helpers always come in when they see that you are working hard on your own and managing your own resources.