



The kitchen in Mwanza, Tanzania, where probiotic yoghurt is produced.

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Yoghurt bacteria – good for the health and economy of Tanzania



While our supermarket shelves abound with 'probiotic' dairy products that are good for the intestinal flora, in Africa the use of probiotics can really be a huge leap forward in health. The 'Yoba for Life' project is aimed at introducing health-promoting bacteria in Africa. Something that will stimulate not only health but also the local economy.

Researcher Dr Remco Kort is co-founder of the Yoba for Life Foundation. 'The idea came out of the TNO "Beneficial Microbes" conference in 2008 where a Canadian professor, Gregor Reid, spoke about a project in Tanzania in which probiotic yoghurt produced by *yoghurt mamas* was being given free of charge to HIV patients. The yoghurt appears to combat the diarrhoea from which many people in Africa suffer,' Kort says. 'Reid encouraged those at the conference to set up similar projects. It certainly got me thinking and I delved deeper during my personal development programme at TNO. The outcome is the "Yoba for Life" concept.' The acronym 'Yoba' derives from 'yoghurt' and 'bacteria'.

BUSINESS MODEL

Using the money he won from a different study, Kort travelled to Tanzania and visited the kitchen of the *yoghurt mamas* in Mwanza together with professor Reid. He spoke with a local dairy plant about the possible introduction of probiotics. A university friend then drew up a business plan, in the context of his MBA programme, and the Yoba for Life Foundation was founded in September 2009. 'The project is not the same as the classical development aid because it was established through a business model. The

profit margins on the process are very low but profit is made possible by widespread, large-scale application. We want to use that profit to set up an education plan for health. The Yoba will be produced at both industrial and local scale, so the project can make a difference to both health and the local economy,' Kort explains.

TNO is also contributing to the project. Kort: 'Within TNO there is currently a request to establish a platform for the selection and production of healthy bacteria to determine the right conditions for culturing stable bacteria. TNO may even be able to make this platform available to other parties in the future.'

PRODUCTION LINES

The 'Yoba for Life' project comprises several production lines, starting initially with 'Yoba-Pro' in which the yoghurt will be made in a dairy plant and then distributed to stores. In addition, fresh Yoba will be produced and sold by local female communities ('Yoba-Ma') and there will be a starters package ('Yoba-Home') that will allow people to make yoghurt easily at home.

'We are not targeting HIV patients especially but the whole population. In Europe, where hygiene and health tend to be good, the effect of probiotic yoghurt is difficult to gauge. But in Africa the impact of Yoba on intestinal health will be more significant. Together with the local hospitals and research institutes this effect will be studied,' says Kort. 'And it would be great if this approach could also be continued beyond Tanzania.'

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