

Oluwaseun's opportunity:

putting women at the heart of nourishing Nigeria



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In 2013, Nigerian agri-entrepreneur Oluwaseun Sangoleye founded [BabyGrubz](#), a food company that manufactures a wide range of affordable, dried homemade cereals, grains, fruits, vegetables and condiments that serve as a base to make a variety of delicious, nutritious and fast meals for infants. To further support women and their children, the company has developed an inclusive business model that works with women to distribute BabyGrubz products and provide mentoring on the importance of nutrition and breastfeeding.

Malnutrition persists at unacceptably high levels in Nigeria, with an estimated two million children suffering from severe acute malnutrition. According to the [Global Nutrition Report](#), 36.8% of infants in the country are stunted, and 6.8% are wasted. The issue of malnutrition is personal for Oluwaseun Sangoleye, whose son developed rickets (which is often caused by vitamin D and/or calcium deficiency) as a child. She harnessed this experience to develop her now-thriving business, producing natural cereal from locally sourced ingredients.

Oluwaseun founded BabyGrubz in 2013, targeting low- and middle-income women with children aged six months to three years. At the heart of the enterprise is a desire to fight child malnutrition in West Africa. "No one shared the 'secrets' of a balanced diet or dietary diversity with me, so I resolved to help other children like mine whose mothers needed nutritious foods but couldn't get them on the store shelves," she explains.

Women empowering women

Prior to becoming the Founder and 'Mum-In-Chief' of BabyGrubz, Oluwaseun noticed that most imported complementary foods are made from rice and wheat and do not contain the dietary richness of traditional

"Scaling might seem daunting, but I encourage entrepreneurs to break down the steps and tackle them in small [and] calculated but deliberate steps."

Oluwaseun Sangoleye,
Founder, BabyGrubz

Nigerian ingredients, such as beans, nuts, sweet potatoes and moringa. In response, she developed a variety of affordable, nutritious, and locally-produced variants of baby foods with African flavours. These cater to both the cultural values of Nigerian mothers and their children, along with their nutritional concerns, including vitamin A deficiency and protein-energy malnutrition. The business currently employs 15 staff, 12 of whom are women, and sells 6,500-7000 units of product per month in Nigeria. About 1,000 additional units of product are sold each month in a Ghanaian outlet, which opened in 2018.

As women are the key to this enterprise's design, BabyGrubz's products are sold through a women-only business model that works with over 100,000 mothers; a deliberate approach for gender inclusion and empowerment. The women receive an income for their role as exclusive distributors of the company's complementary food, which enables them to earn a livelihood and support their families. "I decided to put 'Made in Nigeria' complementary foods on the shelves and help mothers like me make a living whilst doing it," emphasises Oluwaseun. As well as selling and distributing BabyGrubz products, the women provide peer-to-peer mentoring on the benefits of nutritious foods and breastfeeding – with a focus on exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of a baby's life.

Going global

In 2020, BabyGrubz was awarded the title of most innovative solution for improving nutrition in the 2020 Global Scaling Up Nutrition Pitch Competition and received a cash prize of USD 20,000. With these funds, the company purchased a grain dryer that will increase their drying capacity by almost 1,000%.

During the competition, Oluwaseun was also provided with business training and mentorship from the [Base of Pyramid \(BoP\) Innovation Centre](#) in the Netherlands, and [Cathy AgriProjects Management Limited](#) in Kenya. The training included core modules around investment readiness and strengthening the nutritional impact of businesses. "My biggest take-away was clarity on the next steps for my business and how to get there. Micro-franchising [the development of replicable business plans to scale up the impact of small enterprises]

was mentioned briefly during the training, and I wanted to find out more on the topic," says Oluwaseun. "My coach was really helpful, and we have begun to look into this to help us impact children and women on a larger scale." She explains that micro-franchising does not require a large financial investment or years of experience, and therefore empowers individuals to become business owners more easily and with fewer risks.

The company also won a USD 10,000 grant from the African Development Bank in the 2020 Agri Pitch Competition, which will allow Oluwaseun and her team to continue improving the affordability of these nutritious products in underserved communities.

This includes Baby Grubz's new range of complementary food products, aimed at the 'base of the pyramid' market. The products have been developed in collaboration with the Global



Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and the Technical University of Denmark and will be more affordable and nutritious compared to those currently available. Consumers gave positive feedback during testing, so the company will soon be seeking regulatory approval before making the range available on the market.

Change to fight challenge

Despite the enormous success of BabyGrubz now, Oluwaseun had to be resourceful when starting her business. Like many women (and men) in Nigeria, she faced challenges accessing finance, so built the business using her own money and capital raised from family and friends to help propel its initial growth.

More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically reduced the purchasing power of BabyGrubz's target market, leading to a drop in sales, so Oluwaseun repositioned the business and adapted products to create greater demand.

BabyGrubz was able to meet customer demands during lockdown periods after developing a robust digital mechanism for processing orders and deliveries. Digitisation was the main focus of the hands-on training she received from BoPlnc's digital specialists. Following this, a digital marketing plan was developed for BabyGrubz, and Oluwaseun attended coaching sessions to learn how to best implement this in her business.

Oluwaseun is grateful for the training – and continues to refer back to the notes. She has since observed impressive results, such as increased engagement on social media. "I particularly commend the support I received from BoPlnc. The training was specific to my needs as an entrepreneur, and the instructors took time to respond to my questions that were out of the scope of the modules."

Baby steps to a bold future

Looking ahead, Oluwaseun's aim is to claim 10% of the Nigerian complementary food market share by 2026 and unveil new ready-to-eat products. With a presence in Ghana and Togo as well as Nigeria BabyGrubz is looking to further expand in the West African market. In November 2020, BabyGrubz took another step towards this goal by undertaking internal restructuring to meet ISO and HACCP standards, and they have applied for the accompanying certifications through the Standards Organization of Nigeria. The company has also acquired a building that is currently being converted into a fit-for-purpose factory space.

"Our focus is to continuously develop and deliver low-cost, optimally nutritious complementary food products that address nutritional challenges in children in Nigeria," Oluwaseun reveals. "We will continue to produce, promote, educate and empower mothers on the best nutrition for their little ones."



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