

BUSINESS CASE • NIGERIA

Kunun zaki: From family tradition to a growing business

Sarah Majin, Community Entrepreneur



Brief overview of the traditional fermented drink

Kunun zaki is a popular non-alcoholic cereal drink that is consumed in northern Nigeria. It serves as breakfast, appetizer, medicinal remedy, and is also consumed during social gatherings. The cereals used are millet, sorghum, and maize in decreasing order of preference.

Meaning “sweet beverage” in the Hausa language, kunun zaki is valued for its refreshing, mildly sweet-and-sour flavor, creamy appearance and nutritional value. It can be enhanced with spices such as ginger, pepper, cloves, and garlic, and enriched with ingredients like tiger nuts or peanuts, then naturally sweetened with sweet potato, sugar or honey.



The drink holds cultural, nutritional, and therapeutic significance. Commonly served at traditional ceremonies as an alternative to soft drinks, it also provides income opportunities and contributes to dietary diversity and food security. While consumed year-round, it is particularly popular during the dry season due to its thirst-quenching properties.

Deeply rooted in the traditions of rural Northern Nigeria, kunun zaki symbolises hospitality, togetherness, and warmth, playing a central role in family and community etiquette during social and cultural events. Its production is predominantly traditional and small-scale, typically carried out by women using simple household utensils, and it is widely sold in local markets, schools, car parks, and resorts.

Food Processor

Sarah Majin is the youngest of ten children, with both of her parents serving as pastors. Her educational journey began later than most of her peers, as she started primary school at the age of ten. After completing primary education, she attended junior secondary school in Kwara State, then transferred to Bida, and later moved to Maryam Ibrahim Babangida Government Girls Science College in Minna, where she completed her secondary education in 1991.

Following secondary school, she enrolled at a polytechnic in Bida before eventually returning to Minna. It was during this time, in 1997, that she learned how to make kunun-zaki from her elder sister. She would watch her prepare the beverage and occasionally lend a helping hand. This early exposure sparked her interest in the craft.

In 2006, she secured employment with the Federal Information Service. However, her passion for kunun-zaki remained strong. Inspired by church construction projects in the 1990s, in which students took part, she offered to make kunun-zaki for them, initially as a volunteer: providing the drink freely at the church and later during community events.

Five years ago, she decided to turn this passion into a business. She began selling kunun-zaki at church services, evangelism events, and to individuals who placed orders. Today, her business continues to grow, driven by the skills and inspiration she gained from her sister and the supportive community around her.





Value Chain

FARMERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform multiple critical functions that span from production to initial marketing. • Select and apply quality seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides to maximize crop yields. • Responsible for land preparation, planting, crop care, and harvesting. • After harvesting, farmers often engage in drying, shelling, and winnowing to prepare crops for sale or storage. • Sell the produce to traders, processors, or directly in local markets. • Interact with input suppliers, traders, cooperatives, and processors, often for finance, inputs, and market access.
TRANSPORTERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement of grains from production sites to storage facilities, markets or processing centres. • Ensure that harvested grains are efficiently and safely delivered to local storage, collection centres, warehouses or mills. • They link farmers, traders, processors and other actors in the value chain, enabling smooth flow of grains from farm to market or processing units.
GRAIN TRADERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy maize from farmers and aggregate produce from multiple sources to create larger volumes suitable for trading. • Provide storage facilities to hold the grains, helping to manage supply timing and reduce post-harvest losses. This process is influenced by market risks, including climate, spoilage and conflict. • Some traders also engage in basic processing activities, such as cleaning and sorting to improve grain quality before sale.
PROCESSORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raw material preparation. • Processing and fermentation. • Sieving and filtration. • Quality control and flavouring. • Packaging and distribution.
MILLERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process the soaked and fermented millet and spices by wet-milling them into a fine slurry. This breaks down the raw materials to release the starches and other components needed to achieve the characteristic texture and flavour of kunun-zaki. • By milling the materials efficiently, the processor adds value by transforming them into a form suitable for further fermentation and eventual consumption.

Quote

” I learned to make kunun zaki from my elder sister in 1997, watching and helping her prepare the beverage. That early experience sparked my passion, which I turned into a business five years ago. I started selling at church and to individuals, and today my business keeps growing, inspired by my sister and supported by my community. My customers love it, and my next step is to register my product.



Gallery of Pictures

↓ Examples of harvesting, drying, storage, milling, fermenting, cooking, cooling and packing , as part of the process.

