



## Tamu by Jane

**ENTREPRENEUR:** Jane Nshuti

**ESTABLISHED:** 2020

**TEAM:** 3 full-time employees, 2 interns

**LOCATION:** Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa

**CONTACT:** janenshuti@gmail.com



Through her business, Tamu by Jane, Jane Nshuti hopes to raise awareness about much of Africa's forgotten food culture. Through various forms of education and development, she aims to raise the profile of African food, including many ancient grains and traditional fermentation processes.

“There is a lack of global understanding of what can and can't be eaten. For me its lack of awareness and lack of documentation. African food is not documented.”

# ABOUT THE BUSINESS

Jane is on a mission to change the way Africans – and the world – think about African food. She is doing this by highlighting aspects of our food culture and heritage which have in great part been forgotten. “Right now in South Africa you can order a pizza in seconds,” she points out. But try to find cassava leaves or curry with sorghum and you’ll have a difficult time.

“I want to put real African food on the map,” she says. “By not sharing our food, we’re robbing the world of something great, and we’re robbing ourselves,” she adds.

Jane’s passion for food started when she was young. “It wasn’t the easiest childhood,” she reflects. After the tragic loss of her parents in Rwanda, Jane and her siblings struggled to make ends meet in a refugee camp in the Democratic Republic of Congo. “I had to stay home because I was too young to work. So whatever they brought home, I would make into a meal,” she remembers. “When I say we didn’t have much, I mean we didn’t have much. I had to be creative.” In these painful years, her love of food only grew.

Moving around various African countries during her childhood, Jane struggled to connect with other children due to language barriers. Instead of playing

with her peers, she often found herself in the kitchen. “Everywhere I’ve been, food has been the connector for me,” she says. “I understood what it meant to be hungry, I understood food insecurity. But I also had an opportunity to taste foods from all over Africa”.

Now, as a food entrepreneur based in South Africa, Jane says that food security is at the forefront of everything she does. She believes that the answer to much of Africa’s food insecurity lies in our backyards. “For example, I focus on African grains which we have neglected for so long,” she says. Grains which are healthy, which grow well in African climates (like many which are drought resistant) and which don’t require costly transport halfway across the globe.

“Sometimes it’s not about lack of food, it’s about lack of awareness because people go to bed hungry while having food in their backyard,” she says. Through her work, Jane hopes to document and share aspects of African food culture that have been forgotten in an ever globalizing world, like ancient grains and preservation methods.

Through her business, Tamu by Jane, she runs cooking classes on preparing African food, sells at markets, hosts feasts and experiments with storytelling.

*“The earth has become global, but our gut has not. I believe that where we are placed, the food that grows there, is what speaks well to our bodies.”*

She also develops recipes which feature ancient African grains. “I want to normalize something that’s not only good for us but for the environment,” she says. Jane also spreads the message to larger audiences by working with organisations like Bertha House, a space for activists in Cape Town, where she heads up a food security program. Here they teach cooking to children and sell healthy, affordable food. She’s also focused on teaching African methods of fermentation to preserve food and minimize waste. “It’s one of the biggest culprits of food insecurity,” she says.

Jane believes that “...health should not be a privilege for the rich but a right for all,” and that returning to our diverse African food culture can make a huge difference. “Food is a connector. Food brings people together. Food tells you who you are. Ultimately, I believe that food is the most political thing in the world,” she says. “If we want to reconnect with our ancestors, with ourselves, we have to reconnect with our food.”

## VISION FOR THE FUTURE

“I’ve written a book which is really stories and food. The idea is to tell a story about my movements from Rwanda going through war, living in refugee camps and coming to South Africa and about how food carried me along. I’d love to publish it and keep teaching people about real African food.”



**ADVICE ON CIRCULARITY FOR ENTREPRENEURS**

*“It’s hard. It’s much easier to do things purely for money, without any moral stance. But, if you want to do things for ethical reasons, it’s harder.”*

A lot of times, because of the way the world is structured, you will be set back by your ethics. But you need to look at the bigger picture. I wish I’d known that pioneering something is not easy, I’ve almost given up so many times, especially in the beginning. I wish I’d known that it gets really hard before it gets better.”

