

A committed relationship

By **DR ZUHEIR SAEED**

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DR ZUHEIR SAEED holds a doctorate in food technology from the National College of Food Technology at Reading University. With a strong technical background and almost 35 years of business experience he has consolidated the Saeed Group and implemented a strategy of fortifying historic core competencies, strategic horizontal expansion, and diversification into new sectors. He is an active Rotarian (being a past President and Rotary Foundation Chairman for Sudan) and is currently President of the Sudan Archaeological Society.

Saeed Industrial & Commercial Group, or Saeed Group was established in Khartoum, Sudan as a trading house in the 1940s. In the 1970s, after three decades of successful trade operations, and as Sudan began to open economically to the world, we decided to add agro-industry to our portfolio. In doing so, we hoped to support the vision of Sudan as the breadbasket of the region. Thus, we built Saeed Food Factory, one of the first private agro-processing complexes in East Africa.

Saeed Food Factory was, and remains to this day, a standard of high-quality manufacturing excellence for East and Central Africa. Its management included one of Sudan's first food technologists and the director of the Food Research Centre. Its products, which range from tomato paste to jam, are household names across the country – synonymous in fact with the very spirit of being Sudanese. To this day, Saeed Food Factory products dominate their respective markets in Sudan both in terms of market share and penetration.

With the advent of Saeed Food Factory, the family established a reputation for responsible and sustainable manufacturing. Building on this, in the early 1980s, we expanded first into biscuits and then into snacks, under the Baraka brand. In building Baraka, we applied the same principles that had guided Saeed Food Factory, namely an insistence on nutritious and affordable food products. Today, Baraka Biscuits equal breakfast for many families in Sudan, a tremendous responsibility that we will strive to maintain for generations to come.

In the 1990s, to serve our Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) producing factories, we first established

a corrugated cardboard factory, Middle East Packaging (MEP), and then a plastics manufacturing plant, Mabco. Both new ventures were built using the same robust manufacturing principles that had ensured the success of Saeed Food Factory and Baraka, making the two new factories highly successful businesses in their own right. Today, MEP has a solid reputation for high quality, reliable carton supply. Using advanced machinery and world-class technology, MEP serves a wide range of sectors, including the FMCG industry, the motor oil industry, fruits and vegetables export sector, and local food restaurant chains, just to name a few. Our highly-technical approach to MEP, combined with our strong understanding of market demands and trends, means that we provide our customers with a dynamic comprehensive service which includes designing, manufacturing and delivering products to meet our customers' precise demands.

In 2012, Saeed Group decided to build further on our FMCG strength by expanding into pharmaceuticals with the acquisition of MEDICA Import & Distribution Company, a Sudan-based company which had held a well-respected presence in the pharmaceutical distribution sector for over fifty years. Today, MEDICA holds the exclusive distributorship for a broad range of respected pharmaceutical companies, including Reckitt Benckiser (Dettol), Novo Nordisk (Insulin), Pfizer and Beiersdorf AG (Nivea). The result of this strong portfolio, combined with our comprehensive country-wide distribution network, means the group has been able to consolidate MEDICA's position as one of the leading companies in its field.

For decades our FMCG food brands and plastic products have had a presence in markets in neighbouring countries. Recently we have embarked on formalising this presence through agency agreements and new industrial ventures in East and Central Africa. We are keen to find ways to make the high-quality, affordable products we manufacture more readily available to the wider African market.

Five years ago, we decided the time had come to revisit the original dream of our forbears, to harness Sudan's tremendous natural resources in an ethical and sustainable manner, so as to contribute to the development of the nation. Thus, we decided to expand our strategic investments in the agriculture sector and additionally, in the mining sector. This expansion reflects ►



Baraka products, integral to everyday Sudanese life

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► our belief that the future of Sudan is in the responsible and sustainable use of its rich natural resources.

The Saeed Agricultural Project is a multi-faceted scheme that seeks to develop Sudan’s agrarian resources for both domestic and overseas consumption, tapping into the high-demand markets of the Arabian Gulf. It features a state-of-the-art cattle-fattening facility, high-tech fish farming and modern agricultural techniques such as cold-house and pivots. Our respect for the fragile ecosystem of the Nile Valley is an integral part of our production methods which are engineered to ensure the least possible impact on the environment.

In the 1970s, my uncle, a hydro-geologist, began to study the mineral resources of Sudan. Through the oil boom of the 1990s, he impressed upon me his idea that the Group was neglecting the true treasure of our country, its incredible mining potential. His words struck a chord within me and mining in Sudan became, not only a potential business for me, but a new passion altogether. When we founded Saeed Mining Company, we did so with a particular social mandate, to assist some of the most neglected of the Sudanese people. This resulted in our decision to take a concession not in the more well-known northern parts of the country, but rather in one of the most under-developed areas of the country, Blue Nile State. Our aim was never a get-rich quick scheme; on the contrary we were determined to create not just a world-class mine, but one which reaps dividends not today, but tomorrow, and not just for our children and grandchildren, but for the children and grandchildren of those whose ancestors had inhabited that land for centuries.

My great-grandparents came to this country more than a century ago, and to this day we are struck

by the generous and welcoming nature of the people of Sudan. We have sought over the decades to emulate these principles, and to make them intrinsic to our own way of life.

From the early days of the 1940s, our holistic approach to corporate social responsibility

has always been and continues to be a fundamental part of our businesses, including financial contributions and stakeholder engagement with local communities. We strongly believe that this ethos has and will continue to contribute to our success and longevity in Sudan.

Annual contributions from each Saeed Group Company support community-based initiatives including food distribution, scholarships and grants, educational infrastructure, medical treatment

and health clinics, and apprenticeship programmes across all areas of our operations.

Furthermore, we were amongst the first in East Africa with awareness of the environmental impact of manufacturing. We consistently take action to minimise and/or mitigate any negative environmental impact from our businesses.

Saeed Group companies are well-known for their equal opportunities’ human resource hire practices. In fact, for decades more than 50 per cent of the workforce in all of our businesses are women. In all our businesses, where possible, we draw our employees from the surrounding communities. We are one of the few conglomerates in Sudan to have virtually no foreign staff.

Over the years, our deep roots into Sudanese society have encouraged us to do our part to preserve and protect the cultural heritage of our nation. As president of the Sudan Archaeological Society, I along with my fellow Society members, have striven to protect and, promote and restore Sudan’s unique archaeological treasures.

We believe that we have a responsibility to this boundless country that has given us so much, and we are optimistic that our next eighty years in Sudan will be at least as fruitful for us as the last eighty years have been. **F**

Tomatoes on trial at the Saeed Agricultural Project



Raw materials preparing for processing at the Middle East Packaging’s corrugated cardboard factory



Alsadig Alkhatim, one of the company’s many long-time employees, who oversees the state of the art canning line

