Transforming Scrap Metals Into Aluminium Pots

The Untold Story Of A Risky But Rewarding Profession

Aluminium pots are an indispensable component of cookware in Cameroonian households. Cameroon Insider takes you to a site in Yaounde where these cooking utensils are manufactured locally


Inside the "Maccocote" pot manufacturing industry in Mokolo-Elobi, Yaounde


A mixture of soil and sand, as well as a box are used to form the prototype of the pot


The pots and the lids are moulded concomitantly. Powder enables the free circulation of the melted metal


Scrap metal takes hours to melt


The scrap metal is constantly being checked to avoid explosion


It is very risky transporting the melted metal


The melted metal is poured into the prototypes to form aluminium pots


After about 10 minutes, the melted metal in the boxes are transforms into aluminium pots

Nalova AKUA

The sustainable management of solid waste is gradually taking shape in the Cameroonian society of today. Solid waste management is the common term that encompasses a wide variety of activities and practices. The Mokolo-Elobi neighbourhood in the Yaounde II Sub-Division has virtually been transformed into a blacksmith's workshop. Each day, the deafening noise emanating from the area is similar to that produced in industrial sites. This noise is produced by some Cameroonians, both young and old, and drawn from all parts of the country, who are engaged in moulding scrap metals (zinc, steel, iron, etc) to make decorative and everyday items. Cameroon Insider took interest in the workings of the "Maccocote Factory", a group of individuals who make aluminium pots in Yaounde.

Exacting Job

Manufacturing aluminium pots warrants a whole lot of human and material resources. The marathon process begins with purchasing pieces of scrap metals from motor mechanics. A kilogram of this metal is sold at FCFA 400. Some 500kg is required to start the manufacturing process. When this quantity is gathered, the metals are now treated with heat. They tend to become soft and as the heat is continuously supplied from the transformer, it starts to melt. While this activity is being carried out by a worker, other workers are busy using boxes, mixed sand and soil and a pot sample to form different prototypes of the pots to be produced. This activity finishes just in time the metals finish melting. The melted metal is then carefully fitted into the prototypes to form aluminium pots. Within ten minutes, the boxes and the mixed soil and sand are scattered and what is left are shining aluminium pots and lids. The first phase of production is complete. The pots are delivered to wholesalers and retailers at giveaway prices. They are expected to sandpaper the pots. This is to give them a smooth texture. When this is done, the pots are ready for sale. They are displayed openly in different stalls. The prices range from FCFA 3000 for a size one type (about 2 litres) right up to FCFA 15,000 for the biggest size.

Challenges, Health Risks

Solid waste arising from domestic, social and industrial activities is increasing in quantity and variety as a result of growing population. Over the past decade, waste management has developed at a gradual pace in Cameroon, the services in most cases being rudimentary. A study jointly conducted in 2014 by the Education Centre for Development, a Cameroonian NGO, a U.S-based non-profit organization- Occupational Knowledge International and the University of Ashland in the U.S.A; revealed that aluminium cookware made from scrap metal poses a serious and previously unrecognized health risk to millions of people. The researchers tested 42 samples of aluminium cookware made in 10 developing countries including Cameroon, and more than one-third pose a lead exposure hazard. Going by the study, this cookware is common throughout Africa and Asia and is made from recycled scrap metal including auto and computer parts, cans and other industrial debris. Globally, lead accounts for more than 853,000 deaths per year. The team of researchers thus suggested that the scrap metal could always be tested for lead before it is melted down to make cookware. Another recommendation is to have the cookware manufactured with a process called anodization which entails placing a coating on aluminium that reduces the amount of lead and other metals leaching into food.


The pots are sandpapered to ensure smoothness

Interview

"Demand Is High In Neighbouring Countries But We Are Obliged To Sell Our Products Exclusively In Cameroon Because Of Custom Barriers"

Denis Marcheteng Chinchbah, owner, Maccocote company, an aluminium pots factory


Denis Marcheteng Chinchbah: "The government should assist us so that we can expand our business to employ young Cameroonians"

What prompted you to engage in manufacturing aluminium pots locally and how is your trade faring?

Initially I loved going to school. But my parents couldn't afford to send me to school. So they advised me to learn this trade. Today I own my own enterprise known as the "Maccocote" manufacturing company. I use some 500kg of scrap metal to make about 70 aluminium pots each day. I sell them immediately to wholesalers at encouraging prices because they still need to pay individuals to sandpaper the pots. If I deduct the money used to buy the metals and that given to my workers, I end up having at least FCFA 30,000 in my pockets. I currently have five workers. My workers are paid according to the number of pots they produce. A pot is paid FCFA 200. I have already trained many young Cameroonians in the trade. The job is also very risky. If any cold substances touch the melted metal, it can explode and that can kill somebody. But we are always very vigilant to prevent that from occurring. Unfortunately, many young Cameroonians are shying away from the trade because it requires a lot of work. They prefer doing jobs that give them quick and easy money like bike riding. We risk losing professionals in the trade in the future.

The method you use is basically rudimentary.

Don't you think it is wise to close ranks with national or multinational organizations to improve on the technique used and minimize risks associated with the activity?

For now, we don't yet have partners. We produce it locally. The scrap metals are abundantly available all the time. It is our humble contribution to save the environment from harmful substances. Imagine how our environment would have looked like if these scrap metals were littered here and there. But we are looking forward to forming a larger company that will produce aluminium pots in Cameroon and possibly we can upgrade on our techniques. But while waiting for that moment, we are pleading with the government to promote the trade. We need capital to enlarge the business and why not improve on the technique used. By so doing, many young people will take interest in the trade. We pay high taxes, yet we are obliged to sell our products exclusively in Cameroon. Custom barriers can't permit us to sell our products to neighbouring countries like Gabon and Congo where the demand is high. These foreigners used to come and buy the pots but they have stopped coming, we don't know why. We cannot also go there and sell because of lack of free movement of people and goods in the sub region.