

# For the young and growing Generation Next

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Beauty  
with a  
purpose,  
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High  
flyer

# Beauty with a purpose

16-year-old Elya Djaffar, a Grade 10 student at Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa designed a range of natural cosmetic products for a school project. She tells ISHAQ JUMBE how the business came to be.

**Generation Next: What was your school project on?**

**Elya:** It entailed creating a range of cosmetic products for young women in Africa by sublimating the renowned rich and diverse flora of selected Indian Ocean Countries. This is how Vanelia Island is born.

**GN: Tell us more about Vanelia Island.**

**Elya:** It is a cosmetic range, highly concentrated with natural, active ingredients from the Indian Ocean region. The Vanelia Island range has 16 products infused with essential oils from 10 countries. This includes shower gels, body balms and body creams.

**GN: Sourcing for ingredients from 9 different countries must have been an uphill task. How did you manage that?**

**Elya:** Having lived in many different countries, I have a network of relatives and friends who helped with the sourcing.

**GN: Where did the inspiration to design Vanelia Island stem from?**

**Elya:** Being born in France, raised in Madagascar and currently studying in Mombasa, Kenya, I am blessed to have experienced rich and diverse cultures. I wanted to appreciate all these cultures together in this project. I realised that Madagascar and Mombasa, both found along the Indian Ocean are known worldwide for their unique spices, plants and flowers with France as the global reference for cosmetics

(branded perfumes). Also, my parents are in the cosmetic business and I developed interest in this field from my very young age, spending afternoons testing new fragrances and using essential oil balms when I was sick or for my own beauty care.

**GN: Have you had a chance to showcase your products anywhere?**

**Elya:** I had the opportunity to showcase my products during two exhibitions organised by the Aga Khan Academy last November and recently this February. The exhibitions provided a good platform to receive feedback which is necessary to better the products.

**GN: Is this a career path you intend to pursue later in life?**

**Elya:** Hopefully. While giving utmost priority to my studies, I plan to enlarge this range of products by designing new products and discovering new fragrances from the Indian Ocean countries' flora. I have officially registered my brand with an objective to sell in supermarkets through my parents' company.

**GN: What else do you intend to achieve with your project?**

**Elya:** Through the product, I intend to give back to the communities that support our livelihoods. It saddens me that Madagascar, where I grew up, is one of the most beautiful countries but among the poorest countries in the world. I also hope to communicate the richness of our Ocean and its heritage to the world. For instance, did you know that the famous YlangYlang of Comoro islands is the base for all perfumes in the world?

**GN: No I did not. All the research for your project must take up a lot of your time, how do you balance between school work and your project?**

**Elya:** I mostly work on my project during the school holidays. If I need to work on my project during school-going days, I prepare a timetable that helps me manage my time.

