

Charting New Horizons: Mary Wanjiru's Entrepreneurial Evolution



Mary Wanjiru, a 33-year-old single mother from Kenya, has embarked on an astounding path from migrant worker to aspiring entrepreneur. With a diploma in Food Production and a son to support, she began pursuing overseas employment aiming for a better future. After completing her diploma in Food Production, she struggled to find employment opportunities locally for months. As a result, in 2015, she found

employment as a domestic worker in Dubai, where she spent two years sending money back home to support her son. However, upon her return to Kenya, she discovered that her mother had used the remittances for her younger siblings' education.

"Upon my return to my country following a two-year stint as a maid in Dubai, I found out that all the money I had been sending to my mother to support my son had been spent on the education of my younger siblings. This realisation shattered my dreams of settling in my country with my accrued savings, forcing me to return abroad to earn and save anew." Says Mary

During her second venture to Dubai, Mary worked as a salesperson at a shop. As the position required her to communicate with clients, articulate product features, negotiate sales terms, and ensure customer satisfaction, it allowed her to engage with a wide range of people while also developing her communication and persuasion skills. Accordingly, after three years of working in Dubai in her second round, she returned to her home country in 2020.

"While my initial experience in Dubai as a domestic worker was positive, my second experience, working as a salesperson was challenging. I faced racial discrimination, primarily from Filipino supervisors, and there were limited opportunities for career growth. Accommodation posed issues as I was placed with women from various nationalities in one room, jeopardising my privacy. Moreover, the high cost of living in Dubai made it difficult to save as much as I had planned. Consequently, I concluded that returning home with whatever savings I could accumulate was the best course of action."



After returning to Kenya, Mary used her savings to start an onion-selling business. Despite her best efforts, the venture did not succeed, prompting her to switch to the restaurant sector, where she is currently working. Recognising the potential of her restaurant, Mary aspired to expand it even further and took out a loan from Longitude Finance.

"My restaurant has a potential," says Mary with pride in her eyes. "The SIYB entrepreneurship training I have received opened my eyes to expand my restaurant further and I took a step forward by receiving a 20,000-shilling loan from Longitude Finance, which I am currently repaying."

While working in her restaurant, Mary heard about the Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) entrepreneurship training for returnees organised by the International Labour Organization (ILO) through the Better Regional Migration (BRMM) Programme financed by the UK FCDO decided to participate in the training program, motivated by a commitment to gain the required skills to take her restaurant to new heights of success. She indicated that she used to run her business in a rudimentary manner and recognised that she lacked the expertise in calculating profits and losses. Thus, acknowledging the significance of sound business management skills in fostering business growth, Mary saw the training as an opportunity to bridge this knowledge gap and gain a vital understanding of effectively managing her restaurant. Accordingly, the training equipped her with invaluable skills in record-keeping, market research, and goal orientation. These skills enabled her to secure a loan and increase her restaurant's stock, laying the groundwork for future growth.

"I learnt various life-changing skills from the training for my business including record-keeping, market research, and goal orientation. Learning to maintain detailed records helps me assess my business's condition, while market segmentation guides targeted marketing efforts. Moreover, strategic planning has provided a roadmap for expanding my restaurant."

Looking ahead, Mary sees herself as a successful businesswoman, owning a chain of restaurants and employing numerous individuals. She credits the entrepreneurship training with shaping her future decisions and actions, propelling her towards greater success in the business world.

"I would like to own a large hotel with branches throughout Kenya and the capacity to distribute food to most areas of Nairobi. I'd also like to employ more young unemployed youths in Kenya. Currently, I have 2 employees (a lady and a male). I would also like to establish a large chicken farm that can produce lots of eggs for my hotel(s) and a wider supply for other clients." says Mary.

Mary Wanjiru's story demonstrates the life-changing potential of SIYB entrepreneurship training in empowering returnees to pursue and achieve their dreams and contribute to economic development. With her newfound skills and determination, Mary has the opportunity to make a lasting impact in the business world while also improving her community and providing for her family's future.