

Empowering Women Entrepreneurs across Kenya

“I came from having nothing to owning and running my business,” says Charity Njeri Kachanja, a 34 year-old business woman and farmer, who has four daughters, and lives on the outskirts of Muran’ga town, in Central Province.



At a young age, following the trend of rural-urban migration, Charity moved to Nairobi looking for a better life. Faced with high standards of living and scarcity of jobs, along with her husband she soon returned to Central province. On their small plot of land, they grew just enough food to feed themselves, hardly making ends meet. In 1995, they began a *jiko* (traditional stove) manufacturing and pottery business hoping to increase their income. The business barely broke even, and Charity felt that it could only reach its full potential if they sought formal training on business management.

Through UNDP’s *District Business Solutions Centres (DBSC)* and the *Women in Business and Investment* project, Charity was able to receive training on entrepreneurship, finance, literacy skills, marketing, production and managerial skills. The DBSC also provided her with links to micro-finance and raw material suppliers.

Additionally, Charity accessed technical training on the proper construction of energy saving stoves through UNDP’s partner project, the *Promotion of Energy Friendly Technologies*, run by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

“I now understand how to confidently manage my money and my people,” Charity comments, as she prepares lunch for her 10 full-time employees. She personally trained all her workers on how to hand craft energy saving stoves, a simple and efficient product widely adopted across Central province and other parts of the country. In an area where trees are rapidly becoming a scarce resource, these simple technologies help relieve the dependency on wood-fuel and paraffin, reduce carbon dioxide emissions, and contribute to cleaner, safer homes.



Women being the backbone of rural economies in Kenya and Africa as a whole, play a significant role to ensure their families’ well being. One of the objectives of the *Women in Business and Investment* project is to increase capacity and motivation of women to take on new and challenging roles at higher levels coupled with the zeal to perform satisfactorily. Charity has performed beyond expectations, producing 500 *jikos* a week and making a monthly revenue of Kshs. 600,000 (\$7500) from the sale of her energy saving stoves alone.



Instinctively, women opt to invest their earnings in the education of their children. They understand the value of a good education especially of the girl child having learnt from their own experiences. Two of Charity’s daughters have completed their secondary education. She smiles at the thought that all her children shall be able to go on to university, which was once an unattainable dream.

“To fight poverty in Kenya, women need to be accepted and supported,” remarks Charity. UNDP has endeavoured to contribute to these efforts through capacity building and training in functional business areas. In line with MDG 3, the ultimate goal is to promote the social and economic empowerment of women, as they constitute a vulnerable social category that is critical in sustainable development endeavours. This

project is also fast-tracking the achievement of MDG 1 and 7.