

SUCCESS STORY

Empowerment through Poultry



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A Value Girls Mentor, Zachia Hamisi holds up her three week old chicken which she will sell in the local market once it reaches its full weight.

Passing through the small beach town of Kaugege in Mbita, Kenya, one can observe the small omena fish from Lake Victoria drying out in the sun and the small tin houses lining the shores of the beach. But listen closely and a strange sound emerges from these small houses. The high-pitched, chaotic chirps of nearly 201, three-week-old chicks reveals that some of these structures are not really houses at all, but chicken coups. A woman emerges from one of them and shows off a large proud smile, just as a mother would upon seeing her child for the first time.

Zachia Owaga Hamisi is a strong resilient woman from Kaugege Beach who was selected as a Mentor for the Value Girls Program. The Program works with women aged 14 to 24 along the beaches of Lake Victoria in Kenya. Funded by Nike Foundation and USAID, and implemented by Cardno Emerging Markets USA, Ltd., the Value Girls Program helps young women increase their savings, income, and self-confidence through small enterprise development in poultry and vegetable farming, to reduce their dependence on the fishing industry.

Most men and women in this part of the country rely solely on fishing to support their family, and Zachia is no different. As a wife and a mother of four, she used to wait patiently for fishermen to bring a large catch from the lake which she would then sell to traders who took the fish to local markets. However, in recent years, the supply of omena and tilapia – two of the most common types of fish in Lake Victoria – has been rapidly decreasing. Zachia and her husband found themselves unable to pay for basic daily needs to support their four children.

In 2009, Zachia was just 25 years old when she heard about a program working with young women to increase their incomes by helping them launch poultry and vegetable farming businesses. She jumped at the opportunity to join. Although the Program was targeting women 24 or younger, there was a large role for more experienced and mature women to mentor the younger girls and lead by example. Zachia went through an intensive five-day mentoring training where she developed her skills through skits and role playing. She learned how to recruit and mobilize young women, mediate conflicts, boost self-esteem, and motivate and counsel the girls.

In collaboration with the young women, the Program conducted a thorough analysis of potential enterprises which the girls could undertake and then identified the most suitable and viable businesses for their unique situation. The two business options selected were poultry and vegetable farming. When given the choice to select an enterprise, she decided on poultry without hesitation. Zachia learned how to raise poultry and grow vegetables like kale and spinach through hands-on trainings provided by local poultry and horticulture experts who were identified by the Program and linked with the young women. She built a chicken house, mixed feeds made from local materials, and learned how to take care of and market the chicks. In addition to the technical training, she participated in business skills and financial literacy training given by local organizations working with the Program.

Zachia led by example. She mentored ten younger women (between 18 and 23 years old) in raising poultry and met with them on a weekly basis to monitor their progress. She guided them through challenges, taught them how to manage their money, and even contributed to their savings if they were unable to do so.

“I would tell them that if they keep saving, they can expand their enterprises,” Zachia explained. She also counseled the girls on life skills, encouraged them to stay in the Program and work as a team, and helped to sell their birds at the local market.



Top: Zachia and her husband smile as they show their pride for what they have accomplished. Bottom: Zachia tends to her 201 chicks as she puts more water in her hand made feeder.



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“I would go to the market and do research on potential buyers,” she said. “I would identify those who were willing to buy, negotiate a price, and return to the beach to gather the girls and bring them to the identified suppliers so they could sell their birds.” Zachia helped her girls build relationships with local traders and market vendors so that they could eventually do it on their own. In a place where trust is hard to come by, Zachia earned the trust of these young women and empowered them to be independent. “I love mentoring,” she says, “and I still continue to be a mentor for new girls who want to learn.”

Zachia helped the young women realize their own capabilities and the Program helped Zachia to achieve her full potential as well. After saving over 1,000 KES through the merry-go-rounds (saving circle) at weekly group meetings, Zachia opened her first bank account through Cooperative Bank, and took a loan of 18,000 KES. Through her savings and loan, she bought her first batch of 25 chicks along with the necessary inputs including feeds, vaccinations, and other drugs. With the income she received selling her chickens, she bought a goat, put money into savings, paid off her loan, and took another loan to purchase more chicks.

Zachia currently has 201 three-week-old chicks – eight times her initial batch – and is repaying her third loan of nearly 42,000 KES. She has not missed a payment to date. Once her chicks reach full weight, she will sell them in the market for around 350 – 450 KES a piece and plans to make a profit of 18,000 KES. With this money she will buy more chicks, pay her children’s school fees, and will only need to take a small loan for feed and vaccinations.

Zachia explains that her husband is supportive as well. “He encourages me and sees that the business helps me, so he wants to help,” she says. She explains that even if she has to leave town, her husband takes care of the chicks. They share ideas and strategize on how to improve the business. After 11 years of marriage, Zachia and her husband are finally making enough money to support themselves and their family. A true partnership.

Before the Program, Zachia was unable to save anything. In the early stages of the Program, she was able to save 80 KES/month. Now, she saves between 300 and 500 KES/month and has even been able to give her children a private education. Having not completed primary school herself, Zachia explains that giving her children an education – let alone a private education – is one of her greatest achievements. “I can maintain a continuous business and pay for my children’s school fees,” she says. “I can even afford to save, which has empowered me to know that I am different from someone that is not doing anything.”

Zachia’s business has grown eightfold – from 25 chicks, to 200 – and she is still expanding. She explains that although she has been able to make money, human beings are not easily satisfied. “I want to save enough to build my very own chicken coup where I can house even more birds,” she says.

Although there are challenges in the poultry business, including the rising cost of feeds and a high rate of inflation, Zachia takes the good with the bad and pushes through – as any successful entrepreneur would. And what a successful entrepreneur she is. “Even if I can’t go on keeping poultry, the Program has empowered me to know that I am capable enough to do something else that can help me and my life...I love the job,” she says. “I now have enough self confidence to go meet people I don’t even know and educate them about what I’ve learned.”

If it weren’t for the Program, Zachia does not know where she would be today. Zachia is the type of woman who already knows she is successful, but she also knows that money isn’t everything. “The best success has been knowing what I have been able to do and what I have learned,” she says. To Zachia, knowledge is power. “Yes, I have been educated and empowered,” she explains, “but the financial aspect is not enough. A teacher can always learn more.” As her final request, she asked that the Program continue its work, as there are more people out there – like her – that are willing to work and learn. They just need to be given the chance.