

Profile: VEF Business Mentor

2005-2008
Village Enterprise Fund



Angelina Mgaya takes her role as a Village Enterprise Fund (VEF) business mentor very seriously.

Angelina is one of the few mentors who has no job or business duties outside of the home, giving her the freedom to see her small business groups as much as twice in a week. Angelina enjoys and believes in what she does, and gladly visits her groups either at their homes or at their businesses as often as she can. By remaining so connected to the communities around her, Angelina is able to stay well-informed about how people are making their way. She is able to spot “humble and hard-working” people easily, and then watches them closely to see if they will be one of VEF’s next potential small business applicants.

For example, Angelina had confidence in Mary John – whose entrepreneurial skills would later make her one of the most successful VEF grant recipients to date – from the moment the two women were introduced. Angelina recalls, “I saw how Mary and her family had moved [from the distant Tanga region] to find a better way of life in Dar-es-Salaam. Mary started cooking pies and chapattis, and then tried buying and reselling charcoal but didn’t have success.”

Angelina continued, “But all of the little money Mary made went to buy food for the family. I knew she was a good person. We have a community, and there are drunkards, and there are people who will spend all their money on clothes or nice things for themselves. Then there are some who want to care for their families truly. Some of these people just stay at home and only do things inside the home, but there are those who want to be active and help themselves. Mary was one of these people. She really wanted to try and *do* something and I knew if she had the right opportunity she would succeed. So then when Mary was looking for help, I found her and told her about VEF.”

Mary’s small business group has taken off, and she has become a leader in her community. However, it is clear that many of Angelina’s teams’ talents - including Mary’s - would not be manifested as fully as they are today if it were not for an extremely available mentor like Angelina. She has spent countless hours “helping to plan the business, observing the local markets, and finding other business leaders in the community to provide business leaders with fresh advice and guidance” beyond what Angelina knows herself.

However, Angelina credits Mary’s extraordinary success to Mary’s own character and hard work. Angelina feels convinced that, while she does work hard for VEF, she simply chose the right leader in Mary. Angelina explained, “I used the training we got from VEF. [VEF Tanzania Country Director] Richard [Mazengo] told me how to find and train the right ones. I find the people who are really in need and who can work hard.”

Richard is pleased. He comments, “We do try to help train the mentors to have a psychological understanding of people, to know how to pick the right individuals to get funding.”

Obviously, Mary was one of these “right people” to receive VEF funds, and business mentor Angelina could not have done a better job nurturing the potential of this budding entrepreneur.

