

With EPF help Sengerema women discard poverty

By a Correspondent

TANZANIA'S new President Dr John Pombe Magufuli came up with a new slogan popularly known as 'Hapa Kazi tu' literally meaning 'It's Just Work.'

To the women of Kabusuli Village, Sengerema District in Mwanza this slogan seems to have come earlier even before anyone could imagine that Dr Magufuli would be the fifth Tanzania's President as by February 2015 they had through the help of Emerge Poverty Free (EPF) and Mwanza based Sustainable Investments and Development Initiatives (SIDI) formed a group known as 'Kazi na Malengo' with 15 women only.

Most of these women had been living in abject poverty and solely relying on their men for almost everything and soon they realised that they could do something about it if they united. When EPF and SIDI approached them with the proposal to form the group and engage in economic empowerment activities, they could not resist and were ready and eager to learn the new ways to success.

SIDI through the leadership of Martin Malongo, who is the CEO, undertook to train the women and tirelessly made them understand the need to be financial independent and soon the women were gathering in numbers to listen to what SIDI had to tell them.

"We made them believe that they could do it because when we came here we

considered to fund the project," says Malongo.

He says at first it was not easy to convince the women as most of them believed that the woman's place was in the kitchen while men went to work. "We went an extra mile to make them believe that things had changed and soon the 15 women that we started with started spreading the message and more and more women became interested and to date there are more than 250 members already," he says.

According to Malongo the women have been equipped with skills in fish farming where they have five big fish ponds, thanks to the village administration that allocated them land to conduct the project. They have also inspired the women into planting trees for environmental conservation in and around their homes. "Over 6000 trees have been planted so far," he notes.

The EPF CEO Jeremy Horner is also present in the village to observe what the women have been doing and he cannot hide his joy following the strides that have been made by the women within a short period of time.

"These women have become great role models in their community as they have proved that everything is possible. Most of them had lost hope but right now they are the ones running their families. We as EPF are pleased by the attitude they have shown towards lifting themselves out of poverty," he says.

Hornersays the project would not have been successful without the support



Women forming the 'Kazi na Malengo' group at Kabusuli Village in Sengerema District get instructions of how to harvest fish from one of the ponds owned by the group, which is now generating them income from the fish they sell. (File photo)

livelihoods and we are glad that it has turned out to be a huge success as more than the 250 that we targeted have benefited from this project," he says.

EPF is an international non-governmental organisation founded in 1995, that operates across east Africa. EPF seeks to empower people to fight poverty themselves by giving them the

resilient, dignified lives that are independent of aid.

Women's voice

The Secretary of 'Kazi na Malengo' Aneta Dodo, says in February this year they said enough is enough and agreed that instead of sitting back and complaining all the time about what the government has not done, they should equip themselves with knowledge

wish was granted. That was the beginning of their success story as they have not turned back since then.

"We told ourselves that other development partners will find us on the way and we are glad that we are indeed progressing," she says.

According to Aneta, the group now rears fish for sale and domestic consumption, plants trees for sale and

they also fight for women and children's rights and encourage women to engage in various income generating activities.

She boasts that the group has been able to record huge successes within a short period and wishes they would have known this secret before.

Among successes achieved is being able to raise over 8m/- million through shares

from selling the fish was used to enrol 30 students in form one, 250 in standard one and 10 have joined VETA," she said adding that they now do not have to depend on men for everything as they too can take care of some of the needs of their families and the men have been so supportive.

She says they already have a group bank account at Equity bank and individual members are now striving to open their own accounts so they can effectively run their businesses, something she says would not have been possible had they not received knowledge from Malongo and his team.

Beneficiaries

One of the members, Asha Malando says she has through the empowerment expanded her shop business at Kabusuli and said the group has greatly assisted her as she was able to secure a soft loan that has helped in running her business. "I also now have a bank account where I can save money...EPF and SIDI have really come in handy, we even wish they could have come earlier," she said.

She is happy that her husband is so supportive and not jealous of her success. "We really assist each other in ensuring that we meet our objectives," she says.

Coleta Masesela says she now runs a food kiosk where she generates income to take her children to school and helps her husband in meeting some of the obligations in the house like buying food and clothes for the children.

She says Kazi na Malengo is everything to her now as the group has transformed her

further," she narrates.

Right at the centre of Kabusuli Village is Asha Malando's shop, which she says has expanded due to the benefits that she received from her group. "I started very low but as days go by the business is growing. I now go to Mwanza to buy more stock and I can comfortably repay my loan without any problem," she says.

She says women must learn to believe in themselves just as they did in their group and urged organizations such as EPF to target more women in other villages so that there is development everywhere. "The government cannot do everything for us we just have to use some of these organisations well so we can develop ourselves.

Mariam Jaluma, who is one of the founders of KazinaMalengo, prides in what she has achieved so far from the group as she says apart from running a food kiosk that generates more than 50,000/- per day, she has been able to construct a house.

"Am now able to take care of my two children and one of them is in school, I really thank EPF and SIDI for helping us and equipping us with skills in fish farming we hope to in future harvest more fish so we can sell and get good profits," she says.

Challenge to men

EPF's presence in Kabusuli has posed a positive challenge to the men and they are now calling on the organisation to also empower men so they can also engage in different activities like the women