



From Migrant Worker to Restaurant Owner: Bigeni Maina's Journey to Success

Bigeni Maina, a 38-year-old Kenyan married woman and mother of four, has gone on an entrepreneurial path following a challenging experience as a migrant worker overseas. Bigeni didn't finish high school and prior to her overseas experience as a domestic worker, she used to work at a restaurant in Bamburi, Mombasa, Kenya.

Coming from a humble home, Bigeni needed to provide for her family. Due to lack of opportunity locally, she seeks for overseas employment. Accordingly, she worked as a domestic worker in the United Arab Emirates (Dubai) and Qatar for 7 years in total. In 2019, Bigeni travelled to Oman and experienced inhumane treatment from her employer. She encountered difficulties and mistreatment from her boss, prompting her to return to Kenya after just two months. This negative experience led her to seek support from her parents to open a restaurant, which she has been running since then.

"I had positive experiences during my time working in Dubai and Qatar. Unfortunately, I encountered a very difficult employer in Oman, which led me to return to Kenya early. After just two months in Oman, I cried for help and was repatriated back to Kenya. This incident convinced me to never seek employment outside Kenya again."

Motivated by a desire to provide a better life for her family, Bigeni participated in the Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) training organised by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Better Regional Migration Management (BRMM) Programme funded by the UK FCDO, hoping to expand her restaurant business to increase daily sales and revenue. Before beginning entrepreneurship training, Bigeni saw it as a way to learn business essentials, such as profit and loss calculations, tracking progress, and identifying areas for improvement in her restaurant.

"I would like to grow my business to the point where it not only meets but surpasses the financial requirements of my family, ensuring stability and security for us all" says Bigeni.

Upon completing the entrepreneurship training, Bigeni expressed satisfaction with how her expectations were met. She found valuable insights in bookkeeping, inventory management, profit and loss calculation, budgeting, and market research, which she plans to apply to her business. Although Bigeni has not yet started a new business based on the training, she credits the program with assisting her in developing a comprehensive business plan. She emphasizes the importance of continued support for returned migrants, suggesting more frequent visits from trainers.

Looking ahead, Bigeni envisions growing her restaurant into a renowned brand in Mombasa. She believes that the entrepreneurship training has equipped her with the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve this goal, affirming her commitment to remain in Kenya and focus on her business endeavours.

"With the knowledge obtained from the training programme, I foresee that my restaurant will enhance its reputation to become a renowned name in Mombasa. With this foundation, I anticipate moving closer to my ambition of owning a large hotel," says Bigeni with confidence in her face.

Bigeni Maina's journey exemplifies the life-changing impact of SIYB entrepreneurship training in empowering returnees to achieve their dreams while contributing to economic development. With her newfound skills and determination, she is poised to make a lasting impact in her community while ensuring a brighter future for her and her family.