



## BEST PRACTICES FROM YOUTH

who received funds from UNICEF to start/improve their businesses.

## Project: Youth Empowerment in 10 Youth Friendly Centers

DOT Rwanda works at the intersection of youth leadership, social entrepreneurship, innovation, and digital transformation to support young women and men to develop and lead solutions to the problems they face in their communities. We empower youth with Digital, Entrepreneurial and Leadership skills, resilience, and networks to secure and create meaningful livelihoods and contribute to the development of their communities. We work with youth, governments, the private sector and community-based organizations to co design inclusive youth and women-led digital solutions that transform communities and create opportunities. To date over 821 DOT Rwanda youth leaders have trained more than 108,286 youth and women.

In partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Culture (MYCULTURE), Imbuto Foundation, and UNICEF Rwanda; Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) Rwanda is implementing “Operationalization of 10 Youth Friendly Centers & Youth Empowerment,” a project under the Generation Unlimited Rwanda initiative.

Launched on September 3rd, 2020, the Generation Unlimited initiative – or “GenU” – aims to ensure that all young people between the ages of 10 and 24 are in school, training or employed by 2030. Generation Unlimited Rwanda focuses on four key areas:

1. Education and training, helping young people build skills for productive lives;
2. Employment, increasing quality work opportunities for young people;
3. Entrepreneurship as a mindset; and
4. Equity and engagement, promoting equitable access to opportunities, equipping

young people as problem-solvers and engaged members of society, and addressing mental health concerns.

Through the “Youth Empowerment in 10 Youth Friendly Centers” project, DOT and the Imbuto Foundation advanced their shared vision for youth — particularly women and girls — to be at the center of developing an inclusive economy and society. The project targeted digitally illiterate community participants who were either irregular Internet users or are not connected, as well as **unemployed, underemployed, and entrepreneur youth**.

The project, operating from August 2021 to November 2022, operationalized ten Youth Friendly Centers in ten districts (Kicukiro, Kayonza, Nyagatare, Ruhango, Huye, Nyaruguru, Rubavu, Nyabihu, Gakenke, and Gicumbi) and equipped them with computers, connectivity, center mobilizers, and trainers. In addition, it **delivered digital literacy, entrepreneurial, and life skills training to youth to increase their economic opportunities**. Finally, the project **supported girls’ education and skills development by hosting hackathons, outreach events, and community awareness campaigns**.

Through operationalizing the youth centers and addressing accessibility, affordability, and usability challenges, and increasing human resource capacity, the project increased the traffic to the centers, indirectly benefiting 299,210 young people.

## Cultivating Hope and Mushrooms for a Better Tomorrow

Empowering Adeline and the Community Through Sustainable Agriculture and Youth Initiatives.



Adeline Umukunzi, a 28-year-old entrepreneur, mother, and wife, is not your typical businesswoman. Her journey from joblessness to successful entrepreneur engaged in mushroom agriculture is an inspiring testament to determination and innovation.

After graduating in medicine, Adeline faced a challenging job market. Unable to secure employment, she sought opportunities in agriculture. Although her initial attempts were met with obstacles, her determination led her to the world of mushroom cultivation.

"I discovered that mushroom crops were not only fast-growing but also didn't require regular soil. So, I borrowed 5,000 Rwandan Francs from my parents to start with just ten mushroom spawns (the seeds that turn into mushrooms) in basins at home. I bought the mushrooms spawns for 500 Rwandan Francs and would sell 1 kg of mushrooms at 1,500 Rwandan Francs.

I began to see the potential of my investment," she shares.

Adeline expanded her cultivation, renting a house, and eventually securing a larger plot with small houses for mushroom farming.

Today, Adeline cultivates an impressive 3,000 mushroom spawns, a significant leap from her humble beginnings of 10, and sells 1 kg at 2,500 Rwandan Francs.

She provides employment to four permanent workers, most of whom are single mothers. Adeline's mission is not only to create jobs but also to help these single mothers support their children by providing nutrient-rich mushrooms, which are packed with essential vitamins.

"It makes me so happy to help these women. I seek out and employ single mothers who often struggle to find work due to childcare

responsibilities. As a young person, I understand their challenges and strive to make a difference in their lives,” she happily shares.

Adeline received a significant funding boost of 800,000 Rwandan Francs from UNICEF Rwanda, (Ministry of Youth and Culture)MYCULTURE, and the Imbuto Foundation. This funding supported the ‘Operationalization of 10 Youth Friendly Centers and Youth Empowerment’ project as part of the Generation Unlimited Rwanda initiative. The project, which ran from August 2021 to November 2022, successfully established 10 Youth Friendly Centers across ten districts (Kicukiro, Kayonza, Nyagatare, Ruhango, Huye, Nyaruguru, Rubavu, Nyabihu, Gakenke, and Gicumbi), providing them with essential resources such as computers, connectivity, center mobilizers, and trainers.

It enabled her to acquire storage facilities for her mushrooms and secure a bank loan for additional purchases. UNICEF’s training and support further enhanced her confidence in marketing her enterprise.

With these funds, she purchased another plot for cultivation, further increasing her harvest. Her monthly profits have grown to 150,000 Rwandan francs, a significant improvement from her earlier earnings. The funds also enabled her to expand her market, delivering mushrooms to Kigali, Rubavu, and 13 local hotels in Musanze.

“Funds played a pivotal part, but also the training I received from UNICEF helped me a lot. I was trained in digital literacy and marketing which greatly improved my operations. I embraced technology to streamline my business, using a tablet to record harvest and sales data. When training others, I use projectors, leveraging technology for educational purposes and efficient marketing,” she indicates.

Despite her successes, Adeline faces several challenges.

“One major obstacle is the limited shelf life of mushrooms, which must be harvested and sold on the same day they grow.



Transport is another issue, making it difficult to deliver mushrooms to various markets," she states.

Additionally, the scarcity mushroom spawns, essential for cultivation, remains a hurdle. Adeline dreams of having her own factory to produce these rings, offering a potential solution to this problem.

Adeline's commitment extends beyond her business. She contributes to improving nutrition in her region, where fresh vegetables are scarce, primarily consisting of potatoes.

"I deliver mushrooms to the community kitchen in the village in the form of flour to children under five to combat malnourishment. Pregnant women, who require increased iron intake, also benefit from the iron-rich mushrooms," Adeline says.

According to Adeline, working with Community Health Workers in the community kitchen, ensures that malnourished children, pregnant



women, and vulnerable individuals without means for healthy food receive nourishing meals. This collaborative effort has contributed to a proximate 60% decrease in malnourishment.

She educates people on how to cook mushrooms, making this nutritious food accessible to those who can't afford it. Adeline's generosity extends to providing mushrooms to those in need, even giving them away for free in some cases. Her initiatives include establishing communal kitchens where villagers can access and prepare mushrooms for their families.

Furthermore, her business success has enabled her to pay for her university school fees, continuing her personal growth and development. She managed to build houses, some she rents to people, and she was also able to pay for everything for her wedding.

"My message to young people, especially women, is to be resilient. To think out of the box and understand they can even create jobs even from the things they didn't study and create jobs for others," she advises.

Adeline Umukunzi's story is one of resilience, innovation, and compassion. Her journey from joblessness to becoming a thriving mushroom farmer and entrepreneur has not only transformed her life but also contributed to her community's well-being.

A young man with a bright smile, wearing a blue work jacket over a striped shirt, stands outdoors. He is holding a large, round, silver metal cooking pot in his left hand and a basket filled with scrap metal pieces in his right hand. The background is a clear blue sky with some light clouds.

## From Electronics to Entrepreneurship: The Inspiring Journey of a Young Rwandan Entrepreneur

**An inspiring journey of resilience, empowering a community through the creation of locally crafted cooking pots.**

Starting a business requires taking risks, and Jean de Dieu Niyomugabo, a 29-year-old father of three, embarked on a journey that many might have deemed unlikely to yield income but ultimately proved to be a successful means of livelihood.

Jean de Dieu's business venture revolves around the manufacture of basic iron and steel products, a niche that has not only earned him recognition but also contributes to sustainability. His remarkable journey begins with the transformation of discarded aluminum steel into sturdy cooking pots and exquisite gate decorations.

His vision is clear: to ensure that every household in Rwanda possesses one of his distinctive cooking pots. These pots, unlike the mass-produced imports from elsewhere, are known for their strength and durability.

"My hope is to inspire young people to believe that no job is beneath them, and they, too, can

become successful entrepreneurs rather than facing unemployment," Jean de Dieu excitedly says.

Niyomugabo's journey began after he completed high school when he initially worked as a phone repair technician and installed electronic devices in homes. His background in General Electronics provided him with valuable skills, and his journey took an unexpected turn when he began repairing television sets. This new venture introduced him to a special type of steel used in TV repairs, a unique opportunity that he decided to explore further.

"There is a kind of steel in the type of roofing that we used in repairing televisions, they were crafted by an elderly man from Congo, who possessed unique skills in its fabrication. I wanted to learn more about it so that I could craft them and use them because they were hard to find in Rwanda. I decided to approach the old craftsman with a request to become his apprentice.

The seasoned artisan agreed to teach me the art of crafting the steel," he recalls.

Jean de Dieu's commitment to learning this trade took him from his hometown of Rubavu to the heart of Congo, where he dedicated six months to mastering the craft. Despite the intended three-month duration of the apprenticeship, Jean de Dieu persisted in his pursuit of expertise, determined to absorb every ounce of knowledge.

Upon completing his training, Jean de Dieu faced a new hurdle: the lack of funds to acquire the necessary machinery for steel fabrication.

"I had to return to Congo, working alongside my mentor for a daily wage of 2,000 Rwandan Francs. From my earnings, I diligently saved 1,000 Rwandan Francs each day, with the aim of owning the equipment required to embark on my own steel fabrication journey," he shares.

Niyomugabo bought potato seeds with the 2,000 Rwandan Francs he earned from his job in Congo and cultivated them. He sold the potatoes, generating a profit of 150,000 Rwandan Francs, which he used to buy his first machine.

"The money I obtained from selling potatoes allowed me to purchase my first machine.

I sold 1 kg of potatoes for 800 Rwandan Francs, and I would also set aside some money as savings. Since I was earning 2,000 Rwandan Francs per day, and sometimes I couldn't work due to border delays and transportation costs, I developed a habit of saving 1,000 Rwandan Francs from each payment. With these savings, I was able to buy the necessary materials for making cooking pots and decorations," he says.

Niyomugabo participated in a business competition organized by UNICEF for ten centers, where 50 participants received seed funds to improve their businesses or start their business from ideas to action. He won and received 800,000 Rwandan Francs.

The fruits of his labor eventually bore fruit, and he acquired the machinery needed to produce steel products independently.

Like any other person starting a business, Jean de Dieu faces some challenges.

"There is a certain type of soil we use when manufacturing these pots and decoration, it is hard to find. But that can't stop us from working, we may struggle but we try and acquire that soil whenever possible," he shares.

Today, Jean de Dieu employs six individuals in his business, providing them with not just jobs



but also the opportunity to learn and grow alongside him.

“The people that I employ today are able to earn a decent living, put their children into school, and maintain their homes,” he proudly shares.

His enterprise produces an impressive output of 150 cooking pots monthly, and this number can exceed the initial estimate. This generates monthly revenues of 800,000 Rwandan Francs, with a profit of approximately 120,000 Rwandan Francs.

This success story is not limited to Jean de Dieu’s business acumen alone. He now owns a home, affords his children’s education, and operates a motorbike, which serves as an additional source of income. With an eye on the future, he aspires to expand his operations further and acquire state-of-the-art machinery. His products have already found their place in markets both in Kigali and Rubavu, marking a significant milestone in his entrepreneurial journey.

Jean de Dieu explains, “Before we used to produce only two cooking pots per day, but after receiving UNICEF support, we now craft up to ten cooking pots on a daily basis. They also helped us secure a plot to expand our operations.” The impact of the training and support rendered to his business is evident, and Jean de Dieu’s success story is a testament to the organization’s commitment to youth empowerment.

Looking ahead, Jean de Dieu is eager to share his knowledge with fellow Rwandans, especially the youth, to foster entrepreneurship and job creation within the country.

“I want to share my knowledge, especially with the youth because I want them to be self-reliant and actively contribute to Rwanda’s growth. I want them to realize that even a simple business can be a life-changing opportunity for their communities,” he passionately expresses.

Niyomugabo’s entrepreneurial journey is a shining example of what determination, resilience, and community support can achieve. From humble beginnings to a thriving business owner, he not only transformed his life but also became a source of inspiration for countless others. His mission to create high-quality, locally made cooking pots is not just about business; it’s about empowering the youth and fostering economic growth in Rwanda.





# Seeds of Success: Alphonsine's Inspirational Journey



**UNICEF supports young entrepreneurs in bringing their dreams to life and creating business opportunities from the challenges they face.**

Alphonsine Twizerimana, a 31-year-old entrepreneur, wife, and mother of two, embodies resilience and determination in every sense. Her remarkable journey, from humble beginnings to a thriving businesswoman, revolves around her Potato Seed Multiplication project, aptly named "Hope and Future for Women Development."

Born into a family grappling with significant financial challenges, Alphonsine's upbringing was marked by hardship. Her mother, the sole provider in her father's absence, sustained the family through potato farming. It was the meagre income from this modest potato farm that paved the way for Alphonsine's education, a journey filled with its own share of obstacles.

The pivotal moment in Alphonsine's life arrived when she witnessed the struggles faced by farmers working alongside her mother in the fields. Their crops fell prey to insect infestations, leading to substantial losses that directly impacted her education.



“The sight of my mother and those struggling farmers deeply affected me. At a young age, I made a promise to myself that when I grew up, I would find a solution to their struggles. I vowed to master the art of seed multiplication and offer a lifeline to these farmers,” Alphonsine recalls.

Her determination remained unwavering as she pursued her education. In her final year of high school, Alphonsine took a significant step toward her dream. She leased a plot of land from her grandmother and started cultivating vegetables.

“I saved my earnings in a Local Savings and Loans group. While I was back in school, my mother diligently supervised the field and managed my savings. By the time I completed high school, I had amassed 53,000 Rwandan Francs,” she shares.

With her savings, Alphonsine embarked on her mission. She sought knowledge from esteemed agricultural institutions like the Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB) and INES Ruhengeri.

Furthermore, she used her savings to purchase potato seeds and secured additional land for her potato seed multiplication venture. Alphonsine’s dedication and hard work bore fruit, as she successfully sold certified seeds to local farmers. Her initial harvest of 400 kilograms of potatoes marked a significant milestone in her journey.

“I sold these seeds to farmers, and they thrived because they were sourced from reputable research institutions. Many people began to express interest in buying from me. However, I ran out of seeds, which led me to venture fully into the business,” she recalls.

Challenges were an integral part of Alphonsine’s journey. A devastating flood once inundated her potato stocks, causing her hard-earned produce to rot. However, Alphonsine’s resilience shone through.

“I approached fellow farmers to learn from their experiences, and they assured me that they also faced such struggles at the start of their farming activities. They encouraged me to invest in insurance to safeguard my future endeavours, which I did despite the difficulties,” she says.

Alphonsine even earned a scholarship to study Electrical Engineering at university while managing her business.

“I didn’t want to give up. After completing my studies, I obtained a license for seed multiplication for potatoes, beans, and maize. I used my knowledge in Electrical Engineering to find a long-lasting solution to store potatoes so that they don’t rot,” she explains.

Alphonsine’s vision extended beyond her potato seed multiplication business. Recognizing the crucial role of nutrition in education, she began cultivating vegetables for local children, ensuring they had access to a balanced diet.

Her primary goal was to reduce school dropouts stemming from malnutrition and illness, a cause close to her heart.

Having experienced the hardships of malnourishment during her own childhood, which made her education challenging, she had set this goal at the tender age of 7. Her determination to make a difference led her to cultivate vegetables for those in need.

“My primary goal was to reduce school dropouts stemming from malnutrition and illness. Many children in my community suffered from malnutrition and depression due to being born into families that didn’t plan for them. To address this, I started providing rabbits and chickens to children born from unplanned pregnancies, offering both a balanced diet and financial support for their education,” she states firmly.

Alphonsine’s journey was supported with a significant funding boost of 500,000 Rwandan francs from UNICEF Rwanda, MYCULTURE, and the Imbuto Foundation. This funding supported the ‘Operationalization of 10 Youth Friendly Centers and Youth Empowerment’ project as part of the Generation Unlimited Rwanda initiative.

“We were given training on how to create solutions from the problems that surround us and turn them into a business opportunity. We learned about customer care, how to track what enters and leaves our business, and much more. We also had a competition where 50 participants received seed funds to improve their businesses or start their business from ideas to action. I placed third in the business idea competition and received 500,000 Rwandan Francs,” she shares.

The project, which ran from August 2021 to November 2022, successfully established 10 Youth Friendly Centers across ten districts (Kicukiro, Kayonza, Nyagatare, Ruhango, Huye, Nyaruguru, Rubavu, Nyabihu, Gakenke, and Gicumbi), providing them with essential resources such as computers, connectivity, center mobilizers, and trainers.





The impactful project came to life, running from August 2021 to November 2022, establishing ten Youth Friendly Centers across ten districts (Kicukiro, Kayonza, Nyagatare, Ruhango, Huye, Nyaruguru, Rubavu, Nyabihu, Gakenke, and Gicumbi), providing them with essential resources like computers, connectivity, center mobilizers, and trainers.

“In addition to the funds, I received valuable training in digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and life skills. These training sessions were instrumental in boosting my confidence in marketing my business and taking calculated risks,” she recalls.

Furthermore, Alphonsine created employment opportunities for teenagers and single mothers within her community, established small-scale poultry farming operations, and cultivated seeds on a one-hectare plot. Her dedication to her mission led to the employment of three permanent staff members and fifteen casual employees.

“Today, I have my own house, my children can attend school, I have my own office, and I’ve secured storage for my potatoes.

I am empowering teenage mothers by employing them and playing a role in reducing malnutrition among children in Musanze. I am also able to provide potatoes to dozens of farmers,” she proudly shares.

Alphonsine’s message to young people, especially women of her age, is one of inspiration and empowerment. She advises them to be proactive problem solvers in their communities, to think creatively, and to execute their ideas with determination.

“I urge young people, especially young women, to become part of the solution to problems in their regions. Think outside the box and act on your ideas. Understand that any business you start can be a life-changing opportunity for your community,” she advises.

In conclusion, Alphonsine’s story is a testament to the transformative power of determination, resilience, and community support. Through her Potato Seed Multiplication project, she not only secured her own future but also became a source of inspiration and hope for countless others in her community.



## **For every child**

Whoever she is.

Wherever he lives.

Every child deserves a childhood.

A future.

A fair chance.

That's why UNICEF is there.

For each and every child.

Working day in and day out.

In more than 190 countries and territories. Reaching the hardest to reach.

The furthest from help.

The most excluded.

It's why we stay to the end.

And never give up.



Published by UNICEF Rwanda.

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), May 2023

Illustrations and Layout: [rightventurecreative.com](https://www.rightventurecreative.com)