



Mama Kahasa

A Case Study in Local Leadership

A leader emerges.

Mavuno's mission is "empowering local leaders to end extreme poverty in eastern Congo. But what are we talking about when we say "local leaders?"

We're talking about people like Mama Kahasa.

Kavira Kahasa, known to her family and friends as "Mama Kahasa," is an agricultural entrepreneur in the village of Mundubiena, eastern DRC. She is a mother of 9 and a talented farmer, having grown rice, palm oil, cacao, beans, and cassava. But it's her work with plantains that exemplifies her leadership qualities.

Kahasa's village, Mundubiena, is a small settlement 35km (22mi) northwest of Beni, Mavuno's headquarters. Like many villages in the area, it is populated predominantly by smallholder farmers, and suffers from high rates of extreme poverty. In 2016, several residents of Mundubiena began attending trainings and other activities that Mavuno was holding in a nearby village. Within a year, Mundubiena had organized its own "**Grassroots Organization (G.O.)**", the fundamental community structure through which Mavuno delivers all of its



programming. After her initial skepticism, Mama Kahasa joined this G.O. “I was still suspicious of Mavuno,” she said. “I needed to be convinced by its actions.”

Mavuno’s model includes vertically integrated businesses, owned by Mavuno itself, that purchase materials from the G.O.’s and create



value-added food products. The first of these businesses, **a plantain flour company, was launched in 2017**, creating a demand for dried plantain chips to mill into flour. The G.O. in Mundubiena requested capital assistance for the construction of a plantain drying oven in their village, to which they contributed their own materials and labor.

Mama Kahasa emerged as a leader during this endeavor. A born entrepreneur, she quickly realized the potential for profit that the plantain dryer provided. She began purchasing plantains and organizing her neighbors to slice and dry them, selling the dried chips to Mavuno at a price of \$0.70 per kilogram. She distributed some wages and profits, but encouraged her coworkers to reinvest much of the initial revenue back into the business, enabling them to scale their production.

After Mavuno purchases dried plantain chips, they are milled into a flour that is packaged, branded, and sold for personal consumption. The flour, marketed as “Unga Ya Ndizi,” comes in 1kg and 2kg bags of ready-to-cook flour. It can be easily prepared into a nutritious porridge as an alternative to corn- or cassava-based staples. Most importantly, the profits are passed on to the supplying farmers like Mama Kahasa, who have a reliable market for their transformed, value-added goods – quite an improvement over selling raw plantains.

“This business is good because Mavuno facilitated our access to the market,” says Kahasa. “We produce and we’re sure of the market.”

The G.O. structure that Mavuno uses relies on people like Kahasa. Her drive, entrepreneurial spirit, and charismatic leadership are emblematic of the qualities we see in communities throughout eastern Congo. Mavuno’s entire approach is underpinned by the idea that our partner communities already have the resources they need to thrive. Investing in leaders like Mama Kahasa is the key to launching businesses that can transform lives, and ultimately, the entire region of eastern Congo.

