



# BPN makes its mark in Rwanda



Alice Nkulikiyinka,  
Managing Director  
- BPN Rwanda

BPN (Business Professionals Network) is a Swiss Swiss Non Profit Organization that helps entrepreneurs to sustainably grow their businesses. BPN is here for you.

BPN believes in entrepreneurs. Real entrepreneurs do not rely on winning quick and easy money off the back of their clients and employees. Instead, they are enthusiastic members of society who are passionate about what they do. They are people who invest a great deal of time and effort in realising their dreams. They are people who take risks where other people shy away from them. They are people who don't give up when circumstances become difficult. They are people who play a leading role in pushing countries forward.

BPN helps businesses to sustainably enter new markets,

realise growth and increase profit margins, all the while taking into account the well-being of their employees and the wider community in which they prosper. BPN clients are SMEs who have already established themselves as successful businesses and who are now ready for the next step.

When growing from 5 or 10 employees to 50 or 80 employees, entrepreneurs find themselves confronted with a whole new set of challenges. Suddenly, the informal negotiations with clients and employees become inefficient, or the biggest competitor is no longer Mister Damascène from the other side of the road, but a Kenyan business man who is bringing his product onto the Rwandan market. These are hurdles that are not easily overcome, and at this point, many businesses fail or stagnate. This is where BPN steps in. From all over the world, our results show that 80% of businesses who enter our programme at this stage become successful in managing this kind of growth. Additionally, 50% of all BPN clients at least double their number of staff within two years, and 30% grow to be exemplary companies and factories employing 80 or more employees.

How do we do this? We at BPN talk about a 4 pillar system: Pillar 1. In our Business Academy, we provide hands-on trainings by international experts on principles that are crucial in regards to managing a business. Pillar 2. Our experienced staff offer long term Coaching services supporting SMEs to aim to the best results possible. Pillar 3. We provide Equipment loans under fair conditions making it possible to expand the business. Pillar 4. We organise businesses into a BPN Network



President Paul Kagame and BPN Founders  
Jürg and Benzli Opprecht, Kigali 2008

where entrepreneurs exchange experiences, join efforts or challenge common problems.

To make things tangible, let me tell you a typical BPN story. Back in 2001, Dilbara, a young woman in Kyrgyzstan - a small country in central Asia - had a small business at home with 2 employees making traditional dresses. Then she decided to join the BPN programme and changed her clothing style, mixing traditional elements with more modern designs. It was a success and after 4 years, she owned a factory and a boutique, employing 40 people. Today Dilbara is running fashion shows in Moscow, London, Paris, and you name it. She now has over 100 employees.

BPN has numerous stories like this to tell from all over the world, involving medical clinics, bakeries, private schools, printing shops, etc. Rwanda's entrepreneurs have joined this trend and have started making their own history. Enjoy reading their testimonies and success stories and visit our website <http://www.bpn.rw> highlighting the path that BPN has set in Rwanda for your success story.

Alice Nkulikiyinka,  
Managing Director, BPN Rwanda

"The Government of Rwanda strongly supports private sector development in Rwanda. This is the best achieved by fostering entrepreneurship. Business Professionals Network (BPN)'s 4-Pillar concept creates a paradigm shift in the thinking of entrepreneurs and assists them in operating professionally- to grow and create new jobs. I therefore welcome and support this initiative."

Paul Kagame  
President of the  
Republic of Rwanda



# A Successful Mindset Change: Entrepreneurs and BPN join forces

BY MINNIE KARANJA

## DIGITEC Lab and Studios

Located in one of the busiest places in the heart of Kigali city, Digitec Lab and Studios is your one stop shop for all your photography solutions. Right from taking a photo, editing, printing and finally getting the photo mounted onto a beautifully curved frame of your choice. It is also **the only studio in Kigali with a workshop making photo frames**. Digitec has got it all together it seems. The truth is, Vincent Mugisha- the co-founder of Digitec - has got it all together when it comes to managing the enterprise. Although he faces various challenges like every other entrepreneur, BPN has taught him to take control and manage them.

It has not always been picture perfect at Digitec. When Digitec started, one of the greatest challenges was access to capital. Vincent and his business partner were turned down by different commercial banks because of lack of collateral. They eventually got a loan from a micro-finance institution with a very high interest rate



and sooner than later they were shrinking under the weight of the debt. In search of a way out, a friend connected them to BPN. Vincent lights up when he talks about BPN. **"My encounter with BPN is one of the most exciting stories of my life."** he said.

"At BPN I learnt that our problem was not money or the lack of it. We really wanted money to be able to pay off our debt but

through the BPN trainings I learnt that more money would not necessarily mean more success for our business. The success of our business depended on us, our attitude towards our business and our products, how we treated and valued our staff and clients as well as how we managed our time. I learnt that managing my time is managing my life. To save our business, we needed to clean and sweep it, so to say." he added. A short 6



Vincent Mugisha - the co-founder of Digitec Lab and Studios

months after, following BPN's advises, a good friend realized the potential of their business and paid off the micro-finance loan.

Business plan training was one of the first trainings that Vincent attended and since then he has attended many other trainings on marketing, Time Management, Finance Management and Project Management. Vincent has found the trainings at BPN so vital to the growth of his business that already 10 of his staff have gone through some of the trainings.

While the inspiration to start the business was to make a living, today the inspiration to get up every morning and head to work is different. **"Seeing the lives of 25 people transformed is satisfying for me.** Seeing them being able to make a living, having the means to go back to school, get married and so on. That makes me very happy that I have the opportunity to impact their lives positively."

To his fellow entrepreneurs, Vincent says "The success key to any business is the attitude of the entrepreneur. We should desire to be proud of the organisation we are leading, rather than the property we possess; Please let us grow our people, our employees and leave a good legacy to the coming generations."

This year, Digitec is preparing to open up a branch in Rubavu and in mid-next year, they will open yet another branch in Kisimenti. **Over the next 5 years, Vincent targets to have 50 well trained staff and a vibrant internet presence.**

## Maza Hair Saloon

Meet Josette Komezusenge, the Managing Director of Maza Hair Saloon and a woman with a lot of passion for African natural hair. Josette studied Business Management and accounting in Belgium. Thereafter she worked for 5 years with a Belgian firm that was manufacturing and retailing beauty products. She was then inspired to start her own business which she set up in Belgium. **During her vacations in her homeland, Rwanda, she would usually observe just how busy the Rwandan woman was;** working, looking after her children and engaging in many other activities that left her with little time to care for her hair. She thought to herself that had a solution for the African woman: dreadlocks.

After working for herself in Belgium for 5 years, she returned home in 2006 with a mission. **She wanted to be among the people who would contribute towards rebuilding the Rwandan nation by providing jobs and passing on vital skills.** She trained a few women - who would later join her in starting Maza saloon - the art of caring for natural African hair, specifically she taught them how to do dreadlocks.

Dreadlocks is the specialty service that is offered in all the **5 Maza saloons that are located in Kigali and Huye.** Dreadlocks is not a new technique of hair dressing especially among Africans. "In ancient times, Africans used to do dreadlocks, it is how they dressed their hair." Josette explained. She has however reinvented the art of dreadlocks. While many saloonists twist hair in order to lock it, she instead crochet's it. In addition, she has developed hair additions



Josette Komezusenge, the Managing Director of Maza Hair Saloon (R) attends to a client

that can be used to make dreadlocks longer.

Josette encountered BPN in 2014 at a time when her business was booming. She could not keep up with the speed at which her business was growing. As she plainly put it to me, she was extremely stressed. Managing her finances and staff was the most difficult part of it all. It is at this crucial stage that most businesses either make it to the next level or all together crumble down depending on how the growth is managed. When BPN staff visited her office, they offered to take her in for one of their programs which would help her manage her business better. She later joined BPN in May 2015. A decision that she is very glad she made.

Time management and Business Management are some of the trainings that Josette did



Josette Komezusenge, the Managing Director of Maza Hair Saloon

and immediately applied the lessons in her business. With the coaching received from the BPN team, she learnt how to manage her employees as well as her finances. Josette is grateful for BPN, "In addition to the technical knowledge I receive, **BPN provides an atmosphere for entrepreneurs to reflect on**

**the direction of their businesses.** Sometimes we entrepreneurs are so involved in the day to day running of the business so much, so that we do not have the time to sit and reflect on the bigger picture in terms of the growth of the business. The trainings are impactful for me because they always include other entrepreneurs from other sectors so I get to learn a lot through exchanging knowledge and information. My employees also have the opportunity to attend the same trainings I have been to and this is very crucial because that way my employees and I grow the business together. When employees are empowered, the business benefits more."

Josette is now more relaxed and has time to think about the future direction of her business. Soon she will open Maza Saloon in Rubavu. **Within the next 5 years she wants to position Maza Saloon as a franchise with presence in Paris, Belgium, Pittsburgh and North America.** Already she has been training hair dressers in these locations and more people keep asking her to train them. She also wants to export the hair additions that she invented and she already started the process to get a patent certificate for them. She has also set up a workshop to manufacture and package the hair extensions. As she explains her dreams to me, she is proud of what she has been able to achieve. "BPN taught me how to develop a concept for my business. Before that, I used to think success is about opening many saloons but it's not. I have branded all my saloons and harmonized operations and all my employees have understood the concept of Maza saloon. This is important for the long term growth of the business." She proudly explains.