



EMORI JOI, KENYA

Mama Jane on being a boss

As a mother, farmer, health advocate, entrepreneur and community leader, Mama Jane is determined to be a role model for her children and, in turn, inspires countless others.

Jane Marindany's ceiling maps her greatest achievements. The homework of her five children has been turned into artwork over many years, the lined pages of their notebooks cut into intricate designs of squares, stars and triangles and then strung from one corner of her living room to the other. To her, this signals her children's academic growth, a tribute to countless hours spent on math equations and geography classes, English lessons and science formulas. It's proof of every grade passed in a house built by Jane's hands—her own great accomplishment.

Mama Jane, as she is affectionately known, is a titan among leaders, a trailblazing lady boss whose family-first approach, work ethic and business prowess transformed her life and the lives of her neighbors.

She was born in Emori Joi, one of the first communities WE Charity partnered with in Kenya's Narok County. Mama Jane not only witnessed her community's transformation as a result of its partnership, she also actively ignited many of the changes. "I was taught first how to be a leader in my own home and family, then how to be a group leader here in my community," she says.

In 2004, WE Charity started to build new classrooms for the primary school and improve access to quality education, later bringing in health, water, alternative income and food security programming. Mama Jane watched as the new classrooms were constructed, and she encouraged her kids to reach beyond her own Grade 4 education.

She lived in a *boma*, a one-room hut made of mud and thatch, with her husband, Julius, and children, and sometimes their goats and sheep. After attending WE Charity's health training, Mama Jane began to transform their home, building a latrine and installing a chimney so her family no longer breathed in smoke when they were inside. She set up an outdoor drying rack and designated a place for handwashing. She hoped to one day build a new house, one that reflected how she'd come to see herself.

PILLARS

♥ **HEALTH**

♀ **OPPORTUNITY**

★ **EDUCATION**

Jane Marindany: woman of influence



Jane's merry-go-round group pooled their savings and invested in goats for each member.

WE Charity's opportunity programming provided training on how to generate more income through the local merry-go-round group, a micro-savings practice common in rural Kenya where there is no access to banking. This provided her with the entrepreneurial know-how to hammer out her dreams.

Each week, Mama Jane and her neighbors brought a small amount of money, KSh50, or about US\$0.50, to a meeting. The combined sum was given to a different woman at the end of each meeting with no requirement to pay back the full amount, but with the understanding that each woman would continue to contribute on an ongoing basis. With guidance from WE Charity trainers, the women started to increase their weekly contributions to KSh100, then KSh200 and more. When Mama Jane was elected chairwoman of her merry-go-round circle, she advised the women: "Start small. Don't compare yourself to others and get discouraged. Be patient and consistent and save as much as you can."



TOP: Jane built a dish-drying rack at home after attending WE Charity health training, where she learned that drying dishes in the sunlight helps keep them bacteria-free. The training promotes small changes that make a big difference in the health of families.

ABOVE: Nancy Tanguis, Jane's friend and neighbor, lights her stove. She installed a chimney to channel smoke out of her home, on the advice of WE Charity's health mobilizer.

RIGHT: Nancy is part of a dairy cooperative with over 500 micro-entrepreneurs who sell their cows' milk to a mainstream market.



ABOVE: Jane with her dairy cow, Daisy.
FACING PAGE: Nancy picks fodder for cattle feed

Plans to start a dairy cooperative were developed. More than 500 micro-entrepreneurs across 32 women's groups wanted in.

Soon all the women in the group had built toilets and installed chimneys in their compounds, their health and opportunity training merging together. Other women's groups, also supported by WE Charity, followed suit. Next the groups decided to buy every member chickens, the profits from egg sales going toward school supplies for their children. Then they purchased goats, their kids acting as an insurance policy in times of need. Determined to further finance their futures, the women decided to invest in dairy cows.

In 2010, Mama Jane's group started to buy one dairy cow for every member. It took 24 months. Only after everyone else had one would Mama Jane accept her cow. The women now had milk for their families but nowhere to sell the surplus. Mama Jane consulted her friend Nancy Tangus, chairwoman of another women's group facing a similar predicament. Jane and Nancy, with the support of WE Charity, assembled chairwomen from all the women's groups in the area to discuss how to maximize their earnings.





Jane's new house stands as proof of what is possible.

“I wanted to show my husband and all the men in my community that the small savings from our women's group could build something big.”

Plans to start a dairy cooperative were developed. More than 500 micro-entrepreneurs across 32 women's groups wanted in. Mama Jane was elected chairwoman. “All the woman stood up and started singing. I was in shock.” They all saw her drive, determination and success. Soon the co-op was generating so much milk they were able to find a wholesaler who in turn helped them tap a larger market. People in urban centers across Kenya were buying cartons of milk from the women's dairy cows. For the first time, the women received a monthly salary.

Slowly but steadily, Mama Jane built her dream house. At first, Julius didn't take her seriously. Only men built concrete houses, he told her. “I wanted to show my husband and all the men in my community that the small savings from our women's group could build something big,” recalls Mama Jane, who consulted with a builder and mapped out dimensions. She gradually amassed materials and laid the foundation. Julius saw the progress and started to wake earlier to help his wife with the construction.

After four years, the family moved into their new home, the house that Jane had built. Jane slept late the morning after moving in, reveling in her family's newfound comfort. Her children no longer struggled to find a place to study. And after they passed their exams, their mother hung their homework overhead, a reminder of what's possible with hard work, support and perseverance.

WANDA O'BRIEN



ABOVE LEFT: Julius, Jane's husband, joined a men's opportunity group created with WE Charity support after seeing the success of his wife's group.

ABOVE RIGHT: Growing up, Joyline, Jane's daughter, shared what she learned at school each day with her mom, including teaching her how to spell her name. Joyline graduated from a primary school built by WE Charity and received a scholarship to attend high school at the Kisaruni Group of Schools.

LEFT: Jane's property. Her chicken coop sits in front of the one-room boma (pictured in the background) that once housed the whole family but now serves just one function, as the kitchen.

A special thank you to Peter Cordy for his vision, stunning photography and financial support in bringing this book to life.

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