

Cartier

WOMEN'S INITIATIVE



2019 FINALIST FOR SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

MANKA ANGWAFO

Grassland Cameroon Ltd. - CAMEROON

www.grassland-africa.com

**"I love the adventure and the self-discovery that comes with being an entrepreneur.
The uncertainties that go with it are of course unsettling,
but constantly strategising for survival is where you see true growth. I like that!"**

When Manka Angwafo was visiting her grandmother on her farm in Cameroon in 2013, she went out into the fields to help her harvest her maize. "I realised how very labour-intensive the process was. We broke a lot of kernels and lost good grain. I knew it could be done differently," Manka explains. In discussion with her grandmother, Manka realised that a big issue was a lack of funding to purchase quality resources, including farm equipment. "Access to finance is difficult for most farmers and even the little that is available comes with an interest rate of 25-35%," says Manka. Moreover, Cameroonian women rarely own the land they farm and laws forbidding ownership of agricultural land before the age of 40 exclude young farmers.

UNLOCKING FARMING POTENTIAL

Manka, 33, decided the answer would be to offer financing to farmers, which can be reimbursed in grain. Founded in 2015, her company, Grassland Cameroon, offers smallholder farmers asset-based financing, tools, training and market access. Working with NGOs to select vulnerable farmers capable of repaying them in maize, it then offers a loan at a marginal interest rate for a period of four months, i.e., one maize-growing season. Repayment is made at harvest-time and Grassland

Cameroon buys up to 70% of the remaining crop, offering farmers crucial access to market. Thanks to its contacts and consistent grain quality, Manka's company can sell directly to its corporate clients.

INCREASED YIELDS

Extra support for farmers comes in the form of advice in areas such as production planning, pest control and water management. "Teaching them how to use the assets we're lending reduces the risk of credit default and ensures they have high enough yields to pay us back," says Manka. Grassland also offers machinery for hire on credit. To date its actions have helped farmers double their yields, reaching 4.6 tons per hectare, boosting their income by 200%.

"Post-harvest losses are a devastating barrier to productivity," Manka observes. Maize, for example, is harvested in the rainy season, so is prone to spoilage due to lack of storage and adequate drying. So far her company has helped 373 farmers, with a repayment rate of 97%. To ensure repayment goes smoothly, farmers are organised into groups, with the full group liable for each member's repayment.

"Focus on your goals and don't let the world move you."

WOMEN WITH IMPACT

"I feel every African family has to be somewhat entrepreneurial to survive," notes Manka, who did not initially plan to start up her own business. After studying economics and then international relations, she started her career in mergers and acquisitions and then worked with the World Bank. Coming from a family of farmers gave her insight into the challenges facing smallholder farmers, so many of whom are women, and she is intent on doing her part to help. "Their untold tales suggest ways of unlocking the sector's vast potential. It is here that the greatest impact on rural African communities will be felt."

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