MAUA

BioMagazine N°14

WHEN AFRICAN WOMEN RISE

Woman Mining

MECKTILDER MCHOMVU

A youth and woman in Mining
polishing the gems of Tanzania

By Michelle Ndiaye

OP-ED

Africa and the world:
Self- Reliance imposed?

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#WhenAfricanWomenRise
#WeRiseTogether

BEHIND *the scene*

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MAUA
BioMagazine

MAY ISSUE

AFRICA MONTH

Featuring

Mecktilder Mbajo Mchomvu

WHEN AFRICAN WOMEN RISE
WE RISE TOGETHER

It's all about Meq!

In this Edition, we recognise and honour Mecktilder Mbajo Mchomvu, a remarkable young leader from Tanzania who is making significant strides in the mining sector. With a unique blend of leadership, innovation and advocacy, she is driving change and amplifying the voices of women in an industry where they have long been underrepresented.

As the Co-Founder of WOOWME JEWEL, Mecktilder transforms raw minerals into exquisite jewellery, proving that mining is not solely about extraction but also about creativity, craftsmanship and empowerment. Recognised as one of the Top 100 Global Inspirational Women in Mining in 2022, she is a champion of inclusion and youth leadership. In her roles as Executive Secretary at TWiMMI and a key figure in the Council of African Youth in Minerals (CAYM), she is paving the way for the next generation of African leaders in the industry. Her dedication to social impact earned her the prestigious 2022 TZ SHEROES award.

Beyond the mining sector, Mecktilder is at the forefront of climate action, ensuring women's perspectives shape sustainable environmental solutions. Through gender-inclusive adaptation strategies, she bridges the gap between resource extraction and responsible environmental stewardship. As a leading advocate in the #SheIsAMine movement, she continues to challenge norms, redefining what it means to be a woman in mining—bold, visionary and unstoppable.

Mecktilder is not just making history; she is forging a legacy. At Maua Bio Magazine, we are proud to share her story.

Happy Reading!

Hazel Mamponya

Chief Storyteller

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TESTIMONIALS

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MBA, MAPM, CDMP

The Global MBA empowered me to transform strategic insight into action. It sharpened my leadership, deepened my digital transformation expertise, and fuelled my vision to launch a global tech adoption company. This journey connected innovation with impact, enabling me to bridge technology and business for scalable, sustainable change across industries.

ROBYNN NIEMACK

CEO of Impact Africa Strategies & Ducere Global Business School Agent (South Africa)

Completing the Global MBA at Rome Business School transformed my leadership, sharpening my social impact strategies and expanding my ventures into Zambia. Now, I empower African professionals to 'level up' through executive education, driving excellence in agriculture, ICT, justice, and media—fostering a legacy of high-quality thinking and global impact.

DANISA ABIEL

Founder and International Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Consultant (South Africa)

I hit a dead end with my start-up two years ago—until I found Ducere Global Business School. The Rome Business School Global MBA reignited my confidence, equipped me with real-world strategies, and connected me with inspiring global peers. Today, I lead with clarity, courage, and purpose. It's never too late to grow, lead, and learn.

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> *As the continent navigates an uncertain global landscape, it is time to reframe self-reliance, not as isolation from the rest of the world, but as interdependence on Africa's own terms. The struggle continues, but so does the promise.*

In the mid-20th century, as African nations threw off the shackles of colonialism, a powerful vision began to emerge across the continent: self-reliance.

It was more than a policy; it was a bold declaration of identity and autonomy. Leaders like Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana dreamed of an Africa that could chart its own course, rooted in communal values, local resources and a shared sense of destiny. Yet, self-reliance in Africa has always existed in tension, between aspiration and reality and between voluntary choice and external imposition.

Nyerere's Arusha Declaration of 1967 remains a landmark in the voluntary pursuit of self-reliance. It championed African socialism, emphasising collective farming, education and national unity over dependency on foreign aid. Nyerere's policies were not without flaws, but they reflected an authentic attempt to build development from within.

Contrast this with the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s and 1990s, imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These programmes compelled African governments to slash public spending, liberalise trade and privatise key sectors, all under the banner of reducing dependence. In practice, SAPs deepened inequality, weakened public services and often left countries more vulnerable to global economic shocks.

OP-ED

Continued

Today, the pursuit of self-reliance continues to be shaped by both historical legacies and contemporary global shifts. The recent withdrawal of aid by the US administration, along with rising economic protectionism, has triggered both voluntary and involuntary moves towards greater self-sufficiency. Aid has historically played a significant role in many African economies. Its reduction may serve as a catalyst for Domestic Resource Mobilisation, Homegrown Solutions and, more importantly, the dismantling of a Dependency Culture.

In the same vein, US economic protectionism—manifested in tariffs, trade barriers and the reshoring of supply chains—could push African nations to build Regional Value Chains and invest more aggressively in Local Industries. As exports to Western markets become more constrained, there is growing incentive to strengthen manufacturing, agriculture and technology sectors across the continent.

Several countries are already forging this path. Nigeria's "Made in Nigeria" campaign promotes local production and consumption in response to foreign import restrictions. Rwanda and Senegal have made substantial investments in ICT, manufacturing and tourism. Ghana is positioning itself as a regional hub for fintech and industrial development, while Kenya's Silicon Savannah continues to gain global recognition for its thriving innovation ecosystem.

In the mining sector, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia are enforcing local beneficiation policies, requiring minerals to be processed domestically before export. This not only adds value but creates jobs and builds local capacity. Likewise, Tanzania has revised its mining legislation to increase state participation, enforce local content requirements and retain more economic value within the country. The establishment of mineral trading hubs and local refineries aligns with the nation's broader industrialisation and diversification agenda.

At a continental level, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) signals a significant shift towards intra-African trade and industrialisation, a collective expression of self-reliance in action. These developments offer Africa a unique opportunity to assert economic sovereignty and build resilience against external shocks. However, the path to self-reliance is neither linear nor guaranteed. It demands visionary leadership, sound policy reform, substantial investment in human capital and active engagement from civil society.

A Future Worth Fighting For

Africa is home to the world's youngest population, with over 60% under the age of 25. This demographic dividend could transform the continent, if investments in education, skills training and entrepreneurship are prioritised. A self-reliant Africa will not be driven solely by trade policy or financial reform, but by the unleashing of its people's potential. Self-reliance is not a relic of the past—it is a living, evolving ambition, shaped by history and driven by the urgency of now. It requires deliberate, strategic choices, not just reactive responses to external forces. It calls for partnerships built on mutual respect and shared purpose, and, above all, it demands belief in the power of African solutions to African challenges.

As the continent navigates an uncertain global landscape, it is time to reframe self-reliance—not as isolation from the rest of the world, but as interdependence on Africa's own terms. The struggle continues, but so does the promise.

TIMELESS RESONANCE

I had to say my name with conviction and own my story. I am proud of the determined woman I have become

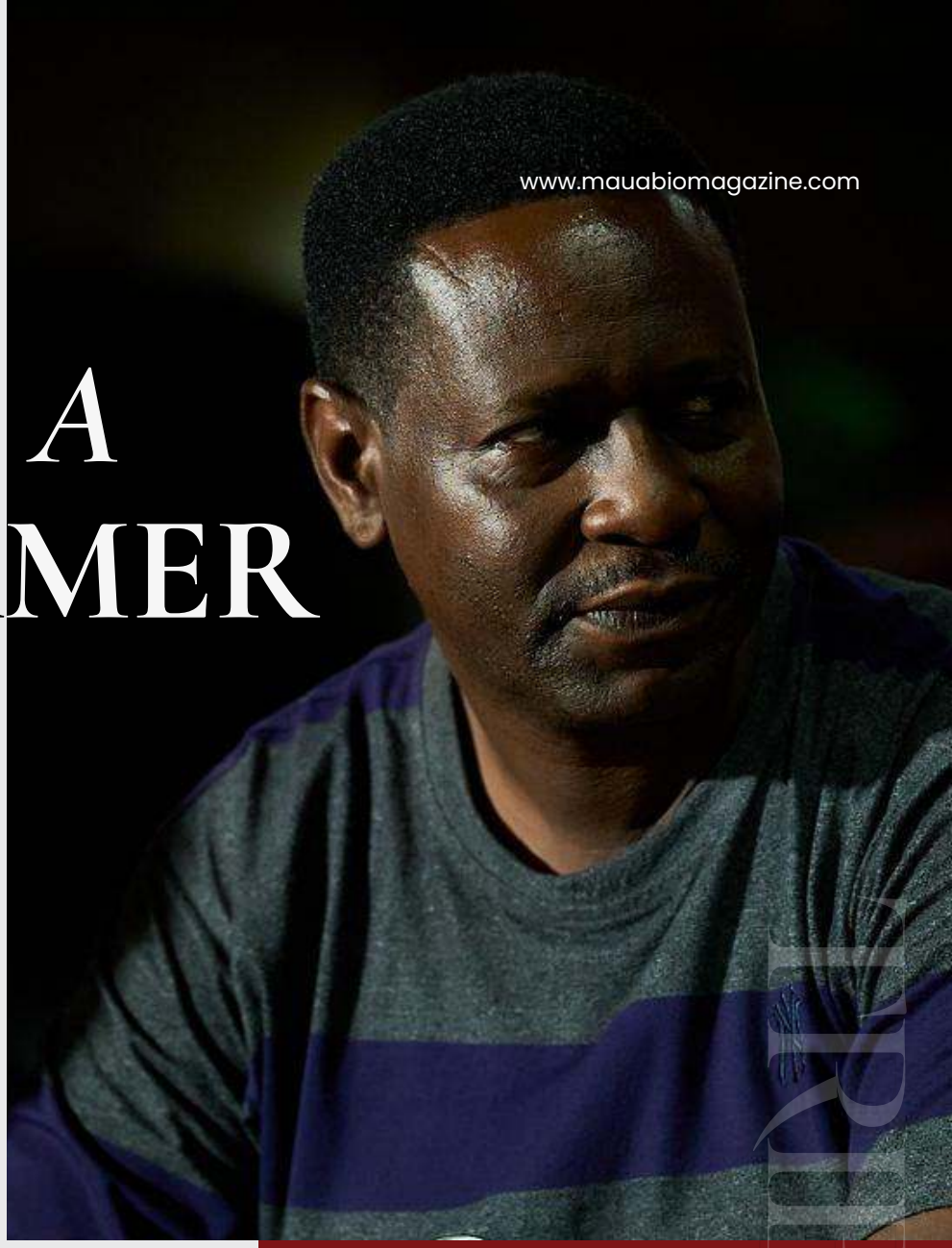
I have become selective about the spaces I enter. Once, a woman who worked with prominent movie production house in the USA visited my starting point.

She didn't believe my story until I took her to the mines. We even found Njoe the man I met under difficult circumstances. Later, I bought his gold at double the world market price—not out of pity, but as a way to close a chapter and honour my journey

In 2023, I was guided to share my story. I started writing, considering platforms like YouTube. But above all, it's about awareness—about embracing the journey.

Raising A DREAMER

— Her Father



From the very beginning, I could see something extraordinary in her. She began her schooling in Dar es Salaam, where she completed her primary and part of her secondary education. Later, she completed both her O-Level and A-Level studies at one of the top schools in Uganda—an achievement that made us incredibly proud. She went on to earn her Bachelor of Commerce degree at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

As her father, I always dreamed of giving her a solid educational foundation. I believed in her potential and I knew that with the right support, she could go far. But what I didn't expect was the depth of her drive, her determination to carve her own path.

While still at university, Mecktilder began dabbling in entrepreneurship. She spent hours studying online, often seated on the floor late into the night—sometimes until morning. I would look at her, both proud and bewildered, whispering quiet prayers: "God, please help my daughter achieve whatever it is she's working towards." At times, I honestly didn't understand what she was building—it almost felt like she was wrestling with something far beyond what we could comprehend. There were moments I worried she was overexerting herself, moments I felt helpless. But we journeyed through the days, the weeks, the months—and now, here she is.

Her path hasn't been easy. She has weathered turbulent times—financial losses, close calls with danger and the unpredictability that comes with forging new ground. Yet, she remained fearless. She ventured into the world of small-scale mining, a space typically dominated by men. She wanted to understand everything: how minerals are processed, what tools are used, who does the work, how value is added, what risks are involved and what authorities require. She was curious, persistent and determined to learn—not just for herself, but for the communities around her.

Mbajo Pius Mchomvu

Her dream was always bigger than business. She aspired to become a successful entrepreneur who not only built wealth but used it to uplift others, especially the poor and disadvantaged, while serving God with integrity.

Sometimes, I struggled to see her vision in the context of the harsh realities of our world, but she never wavered. Her conviction was stronger than my doubt.

Raising a daughter like Mecktilder demanded a lot from me as a father. It required patience and a willingness to let go—trusting that she was preparing for a world I could not fully imagine. There were moments of confusion, times when I didn't understand her choices, but one thing was always clear: she had a gift for persuasion and her determination was impossible to ignore.

One of the most difficult moments I remember was when she travelled to a neighbouring country to gain hands-on experience in mining. She lost all communication and we couldn't reach her. As a father, not knowing where your child is or whether they are safe is unbearable. That silence felt like an eternity. But she came through, as she always does.

In contrast, one of the most joyful moments was when she registered her own company and made her first sale. That moment symbolised everything she had worked for—the long nights, the tears, the determination—it was all finally beginning to bear fruit.

If I could give her one message from the heart, it would be this: My daughter, the sky is truly the limit. I see a brilliant future ahead of you. If you continue with the same determination, persistence and faith in God, you will achieve even greater things than you can imagine. Your mother and I are incredibly proud of you. Never lose sight of your values or your professionalism—it is the engine that is driving you forward.

And remember, as the firstborn, your siblings look up to you. You've lived the journey—let your story continue to guide them in ways we, your parents, never could.

MECKTILDER'S MUM

MECKTILDER'S MOTHER-IN-LOVE

MUM, DAD & I

TRIBUTE

SHE TELLS HER STORY

I'm Mecktilder Mbajo Mchomvu, though I often use Mecktilder M.M. I was born on the 27th of March 1990.

I was born in the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's tallest mountain.

The Chaggas are known for their business acumen, adept at making money, while the Pares have a reputation for being frugal, skilled at keeping wealth. I like to think I inherited both traits—I know how to make money and how to use it wisely.

Though my family's roots are in Kilimanjaro, I later discovered that my great-grandfather migrated from Taveta, Kenya, to Tanzania following a family dispute. He and his brothers crossed the border, settling on the Tanzanian side of Kilimanjaro. My grandfather was then born in Kilimanjaro, followed by my father and then me. Because of this background, many assume I am Kenyan, but I am proudly Tanzanian. There is always a friendly rivalry between Tanzanians and Kenyans, particularly about work ethic and I often find myself at the centre of that conversation due to my lineage.

The first five years of my life were spent in Kilimanjaro, growing up in a small village. My childhood was filled with the simple joys and challenges of village life—running around barefoot, being surrounded by nature and learning to navigate the world with the wisdom of my elders. At the age of five, my life took a turn when my family moved to Dar es Salaam. This transition came after my father completed his university studies in Dar es Salaam, a seven-hour drive from Kilimanjaro. Until then, I had lived with my grandparents while my mother pursued her education at a teacher's college.

I am the eldest of four children. My brother, Pius, is the reserved and humorous one. My younger sister, Juliet, is a stricter, brighter and more beautiful version of me, while Emmanuel, our youngest, is the kind-hearted and family-oriented one. The age gaps between us created a natural hierarchy of respect and responsibility. My youngest sibling is nearly fourteen years my junior, so I was always the 'dada'—the older sister whom my siblings looked up to and were directed to for guidance.

Growing up with my grandparents shaped my personality and determination. I was a small but stubborn child, dark-skinned like my father, energetic and always curious. My grandmother often tells the story of how, when I was about three or four years old, she left me at home with my grandfather while she went to the farm. She had locked the kitchen, but my grandfather, seeing my restlessness, bent the window grills and pushed me inside to fetch some traditional sour milk stored in calabashes. I ended up spending the entire day drinking it, unable to get out until my grandmother returned. It's a memory we still laugh about today.

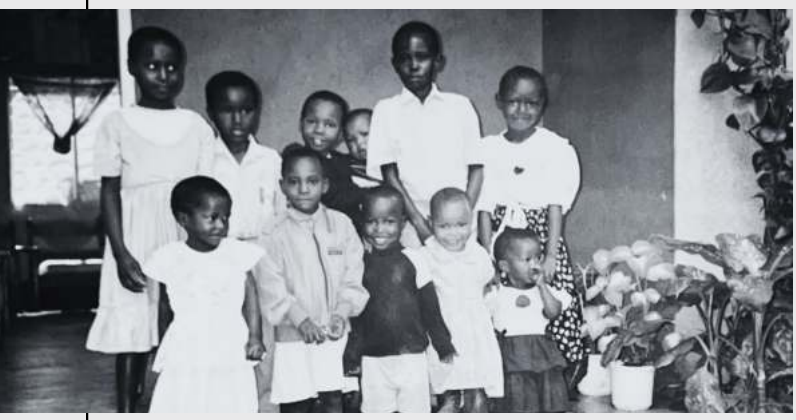
Because I was the first grandchild, my early years were shaped by the influence of older family members rather than peers.

This environment made me grow up quickly—everything around me moved at an adult's pace. I was always included in tasks, whether it was going to the farm or helping prepare food. This upbringing developed my ability to think strategically at a young age. I vividly recall how, at five or six years old, I would wake up early to fetch yams. I quickly learned that taller, older children had an advantage over me, so I started strategising, I would avoid the obvious yam patches where others rushed and instead go for the ones farther away. These small decisions, made in childhood, unknowingly laid the foundation for how I approach challenges today: assessing obstacles, thinking ahead and adapting my strategy to overcome them.

In 1994, my mother got married and by 1995, we had moved to live with my parents in Dar es Salaam. The transition from my grandparents' home to my aunt's and then to my parents' home was a journey of constant adaptation. By the time I arrived in Dar es Salaam, my mother was expecting my younger brother. This meant another shift, going from being the centre of attention as the firstborn to sharing the space with a growing family.

Reflecting on my early years, I realise how much those experiences shaped me. Living among elders, developing survival instincts at a young age and learning the value of pushing on—all of these moments contributed to who I am today. The lessons I learned from navigating childhood challenges continue to influence the way I think, work and lead my life.

From the Village to Dar es Salaam,



When I was five years old, I moved to the city and everything was new to me. Civilisation was unfamiliar and city life felt like another world entirely.

We lived on the fourth floor of a building, something beyond my imagination. Adjusting was difficult, especially since my mother was expecting my younger brother at the time and there was no one to orient me to this new world. In the village, I had been wild and free and that suited me just fine. But in the city, everything was structured and organised in a way I had never known.

Our building housed six families, with shops on the ground floor owned by Indian merchants. We were the only African family there, so from the age of five, I grew up surrounded by Indian neighbours, naturally, my friends were from the community. Living in the middle of the city was chaotic. There was no open space, no ground to touch, just tarmac everywhere. The first thing I saw when I stepped outside was the main road; on the other side stood a police station. Everything was arranged so differently from the life I had known.

Nearby, there was the main bus station, a hub connecting different regions of Tanzania. Dar es Salaam, being a coastal business city, had a port that eased transport between mainland Tanzania, Zanzibar and other countries. People from Zambia and beyond would travel to Dar to buy vehicles and goods, creating a mixed and busy environment.

But despite all this movement, I found myself living far above the ground, confined to a balcony where I would dangle my legs, trying to hold onto the freedom of my village days, not realising how dangerous it was. Adjusting was hectic, but my siblings were there and I took it upon myself to protect my brother whenever he got into trouble.

My STINT AS Robinhood

I was a misguided child who thought sharing meant taking from others.

My mother was a primary school teacher and my father was a banker. Despite their respectable professions, I found myself drawn to the small kiosks around the city, charming my way into the shops with my innocent smile. I would slip a banknote from the shop's drawer, put it in my pocket and then return to buy sweets, Goody Goody, the best sweets of our time. I didn't understand the value of money, so I would hand over a large note for something worth mere cents, leaving the shopkeeper bewildered. I shared my stolen sweets generously, giving them to everyone in the building, our house helper, the security guard, even my neighbours.

When given change, I didn't keep it. Instead, I dropped coins on the road, imagining that someone in need would find them. Sometimes, I would even hide money in flowerpots, hoping that it would grow into something useful for someone else. I repeated this habit until one day, my brother tried to mimic me. Unlike me, he wasn't as discreet. He stuffed his boxer shorts full of coins from our mother's room and as he walked through the corridor, the coins started falling, scattering all over the floor. He scrambled to pick them up, but more kept dropping. Watching him struggle, I realised I had been a bad influence. My little brother was caught in the act, embarrassed and I knew then that my mischief had gone too far.

We lived in a two-bedroom house with a spacious sitting room, a balcony, a corridor, a kitchen and a storeroom.

My parents occupied one bedroom and the other room was divided into two with a cardboard partition—one side for the girls and the other for the boys.

My mother was incredibly resourceful. She found ways to make things work despite our limited resources. If we needed a coffee table, she would stack boxes, add stones for weight, wrap them tightly and cover them with fabric. That became our table. She made sure we never felt like we lacked anything and I carried that ingenuity with me throughout my life. Whatever I have at any given moment, I make the most of it.

Despite my mischievous nature, I was also stubborn and independent. I was a teenager from the age of five, always questioning, always pushing boundaries. In the village, I had the freedom to run wild, but in the city, I was confined to stairwells and balconies.

It felt like a little prison, but I learned to adapt. My mother's school was also my school and being the teacher's child made me even more rebellious. My poor mother had to deal with me both at home and in class.

Looking back, I realise that childhood was a mix of chaos and curiosity. My early years in the city shaped me in ways I never expected. They taught me to navigate different worlds—the structured city life and the freedom of my village roots. My mother's resourcefulness, my father's discipline and my own adventurous spirit all blended to create the person I am today.

> "Looking back now at the Robinhood phase, I understand why I have strong aversion to ill-gotten gains. I take pride in earning my own money and providing for myself and those around me."

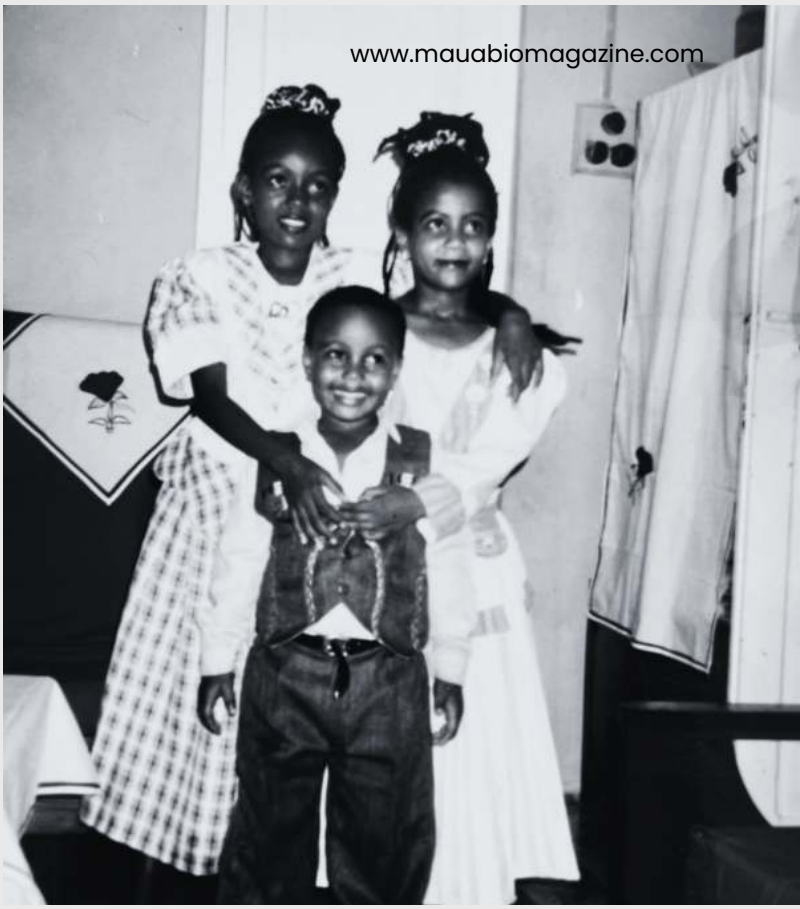
Growing up, I realised that life wasn't easy and I learned this from an early age. My younger brother once got into trouble for taking money and my mother was upset—not because of the act itself, but because he lied about it. I sat him down and explained, "Next time, if you want money, ask me. I will tell you what to do. But don't pick up something that is not yours and then lie about it. If it's a mistake, let it go. Don't carry your mistakes with you." That incident made me realise that I hadn't been there for my brother as much as I should have. He didn't know how to navigate life and I understood that because I had gone through my own struggles.

Raising my siblings

My childhood was not typical. Unlike children who had time to sit around and watch TV, I was always on the move—working on the farm, running errands, constantly engaged in something.

That shaped my understanding of life early on. I realised that if one is not prepared to work hard, life will be even tougher. From a young age, I knew that being an elder sibling meant more than just sharing a home, it meant being a protector, a mentor and a guide. If my brother made mistakes in public, I defended him. But in private, I corrected him. This role of protector came naturally to me because I had been doing it for as long as I could remember.

When my mother had Juliet, our third-born, I was nine years old and very aware of what was happening. I saw my mother's belly grow and I understood that a new baby was coming. By the time Emmanuel was born, I was 13, turning 14. I knew the process, my mother would go to the hospital and return with a baby. From the time Juliet was baptised, I was the one changing her diapers, attending to her needs. By nine years old, I knew how to care for babies. I could tell when a child was unwell or needed something. This skill carried over into my adulthood. Even now, I instinctively know how to handle children, not because I have my own, but because I had raised several before I was even a teenager.



THEN: MECKTIDER, TINA & PIUS

NOW – SIBLINGS : MECKTIDER, PIUS AND JULIET

I was just a small child when I caught my first glimpse of what maturity truly looks like—and it came wrapped in candlelight and chaos.

My sister, who is nine years older than me (and at the time, practically a grown-up in my eyes), was due to travel to Uganda the next day to start Form Three. But she hadn't prepared a thing. Let's just say… Dad didn't take it lightly. Several strokes of the cane later, she was left teary-eyed and sore, with a suitcase still empty and the clock ticking.

That evening, the power went out—as if the universe had decided to dim the lights for dramatic effect. I remember watching her, sniffling quietly, packing her things by the soft, flickering glow of a paraffin candle. No tantrums. No shouting. Just steady, tired hands and the soft thud of folded clothes landing at the bottom of a bag. I didn't have the words back then, but now I know: that was determination. She had every reason to crumble or snap at those around her—especially me, the tiny, nosy observer. But she didn't. She simply carried on.

That night taught me that maturity isn't about having everything together. It's about owning your mess, feeling your feelings, and still doing what needs to be done—power cut or not. Now, whenever I'm overwhelmed, I remind myself: *If she could pack for Uganda in the dark, I can definitely reply to that email.*

PIUS & JULIET MCHOMVU - MECKTILDER'S SIBLINGS

from Juliet Mchomvu

Growing up with Mecktilder has been a front-row seat to the making of a trailblazer.

It has been like watching a spark quietly grow into a steady flame - the quiet strength. As her brother, I've had the rare privilege of witnessing, up close, how grit, compassion, and vision can shape a person into a force for change. From her curious younger years to becoming a respected name in the mining industry across East and Southern Africa, she's stayed true to herself, grounded, determined, and full of heart.

One memory that still stays with me is the day she came back from a trip to a mining site deep in the Tanzanian interior. She didn't come back talking about deals or milestones. Instead, she spoke with so much emotion about the women she'd met, working long hours with their bare hands, no protective gear, often exposed to harmful chemicals like mercury.

But what moved her most were their stories, their laughter in the face of hardship, their hppes and dreams. She spoke about them not just as miners, but as wives, mothers, grand mothers, daughters, and sisters with so much untapped potential. I remember how her voice trembled—not out of pity, but from a burning desire to do something meaningful. That moment crystallized the "why" behind her mission. This wasn't about building a name for herself, it was about building people up.

Watching her bring TWiMMI and Woow Me Jewelry to life has been nothing short of inspiring. Even when things were tough—when funding was tight or progress felt slow—she kept pushing forward, always focused on her bigger vision: adding value to locally mined gemstones and creating a platform for women to shine, literally and figuratively.

Mecktilder isn't just breaking ground in a male-dominated field—she's building bridges, nurturing dreams, and opening doors for others to walk through. She's taught me that real leadership isn't about being in the spotlight. It's about lighting the way for others.

She may be my sister by blood, but the legacy she's shaping belongs to so many more and I couldn't be prouder.

from Pius Mchomvu

EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY

I refuse to let the world diminish me. I am honoured, humbled and grateful for every opportunity. I am ready for whatever comes next.

During my school years

I THRIVED IN MY OWN UNIQUE WAY.

My school years were interesting. I was always small and tiny. I skipped Standard 7 and went straight to secondary school.

School was strict. In government schools, we had to carry either a broom or a jerry can of water every morning for cleaning duties. Since my mother was a teacher, I was assigned to clean the headmaster's office. That turned out to be an advantage. I had access to exam books and I realised I could improve my scores by filling in answers while I cleaned. I wasn't failing because I was unintelligent, I was just a bit lazy. I found ways to make things easier for myself and that habit stayed with me into adulthood.

As I got older, I grew more confident in finding ways to work smarter, not harder. I skipped Standard 7 because I convinced my mother that I was ready for secondary school. She didn't believe me at first, but when my final exams came, I scored straight As. She was shocked and that was the moment I knew I had proven my point. I had learned how to navigate life in my own way, taking shortcuts where I could but always ensuring I met the final goal.

Growing up, I wasn't particularly fond of reading or writing. In fact, I often struggled to read my own handwriting.
There was an incident with a classmate named Louis. He had caught me speaking Swahili, which meant I had to report to school on a Saturday as punishment. However, I struggled to defend myself in English, so I stayed silent, repeating his name without actually explaining my side. Eventually, I went to see the academic teacher, Madam Veronica Sarungi, but she insisted I explain everything in English. Since I couldn't articulate myself properly, I had no choice but to accept my fate and come to school on Saturday.

On day of the punishment, I had to read and summarise five books. I quickly figured out a shortcut—I copied the summaries from the book covers and the prefaces. I pieced together paragraphs from these sections and presented them as my summaries. No one was really going to read through them all in detail, so I got away with it. It was all about survival.

Despite my struggles with English, I was quite resourceful. I loved music, though I was too shy to dance in public. I would get song lyrics from magazines and memorise them, even though I couldn't introduce myself properly in English. My friends knew me as the one who always had the latest song lyrics. To make it fun, I would insert my name into songs, just like artists did and my friends would sing along using my name. It was my little trick to keep people engaged and also trade favours—if you were good at a subject like biology, I would lend you my lyrics book in exchange for help with my studies.

Sports were another part of my life. I tried netball but didn't enjoy it—I didn't understand why we had to stand still after catching the ball. Football also didn't make sense to me; the idea of so many people chasing one ball seemed chaotic. However, tennis felt elegant to me. The movement, the attire and the pace made sense, so I took to it with enthusiasm.

A life changing moment

I was always a strong-willed child. My parents often thought I was stubborn, but I was simply determined to stand my ground. One of the most defining moments of my childhood involved my younger brother. We used to fight like all siblings do, but one day, things escalated. I pushed him away from me, not knowing the impact it would have. He fell and bit his tongue so badly that there was nothing the doctors could do to repair it.

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A teenager

IN A NEW COUNTRY AND NEW SCHOOL

As I grew older, my journey took me beyond my home country. In 2005, I must have been about 15 years old, my father decided to send me to Uganda for school.

He had a friend who helped arrange placements for students and that's how I ended up in Masaka, deep in Uganda. The journey was long and exhausting, taking 36 hours by bus through Tanzania, Kenya and into Uganda. The school I attended was Catholic called St. Theresa Secondary School, Bwanda. The transition was both challenging and liberating. English was the main language and unlike back home, no one knew my history or struggles with the language. It felt like a fresh start. I made new friends and embraced the academic environment. I performed well in my final O-level exams and was even invited to continue my studies at the same school. However, I chose to move to a different school for my A-levels in 2007, where I studied Mathematics, Economics, Geography and Swahili. Swahili was an easy choice because it was my native language —I saw it as an extra subject that wouldn't require much effort.

I passed my O-levels with Division I and moved on to high school at Uganda London College. High school was a different experience altogether. This was around the time when Kenya had riots, so many Kenyan students came to Uganda to continue their education. They had already covered much of what we were learning, making the competition intense. Nearly 70% of my classmates were Kenyan.

I chose Mathematics because I preferred numbers over writing. Economics fascinated me because of my love for trade and business. I had been selling cakes and trading music since I was young, so the principles of demand and supply resonated with me. Geography was another favourite, largely because of my teacher, Mr. Lugano from Loyola High School, who believed in me when others didn't.

There was a moment when our class was performing poorly in Mathematics. Our teacher, Janarius, was furious and started reading out our test scores. One by one, he called out names followed by zeros—dozens of them. It was demoralising. Then he reached David Maitho, the best student, who had scored 56 or 65. Still, the atmosphere remained gloomy as more zeros followed.

Finally, he called my name: "Mecktilder—21!" I jumped up in joy and shouted, "Hallelujah! There is God in heaven!" Everyone laughed, even the teacher and no one was sent to the dreaded 'art students' section as he had threatened. That moment changed something in me. I realised I wasn't a failure. From then on, I started teaching my classmates Mathematics. I wasn't the best, but I understood enough to help others improve. Years later, one of my classmates, who is now in politics in Uganda, thanked me for helping him pass his final exams.

"I chose Mathematics because I preferred numbers over writing. Economics fascinated me because of my love for trade and business."

University - What a whirlwind!

University was a significant chapter in my life. Before that, my schooling in Uganda had been tough.

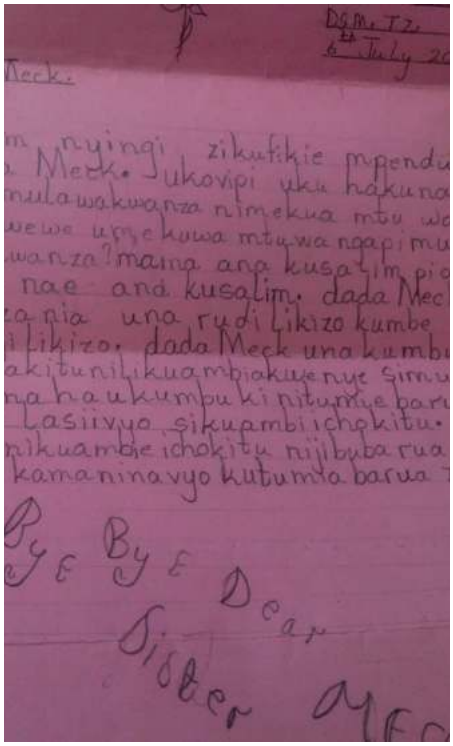
During the holidays, most students would go home, but a handful of us stayed behind because our parents couldn't afford to send us back. Staying at school year-round was challenging and, at times, traumatising. However, during my final year of A-levels, I was fortunate to live with a wealthy Ugandan family who were family friends. Before that, what kept me going were my brother's letters. He would write to me, narrating how my favourite TV shows, like La Mujer de Mi Vida and Sunset Beach, had ended. His letters took months to arrive, but they were my lifeline. He would also send pictures, updating me on everything back home. I still have those letters.

When I finally returned home, I found that much of what he had written was true. I had a keen sense of discernment and I would often point things out to my parents about people around them. I wouldn't outright tell them what to do, but I would present my observations, nudging them to see things from a different perspective. Even today, my mother says, "When Meq tells you something, just know she knows more than what she's telling you."

In 2010, I enrolled in university, pursuing accounting because I thought I loved numbers. But once I started, I realised that numbers weren't "numbering" for me. Those financial statements and balance sheets just didn't make sense. Still, it was a three-year course and I decided I could endure it.

During my first year, I ventured into network marketing with Global Nutrition Limited- GNLD, a company that sold supplements. It was a business that required recruiting others to build a network. Within two weeks, I became a senior manager. In four months, I was a director. Within six months, I had built a team of 200 people. I wasn't just signing people up; I was developing them to be like me. My philosophy has always been that if I make a mistake, I don't want others to make the same one. I tell people, "Learn from my mistakes so that it doesn't cost you. Make your own and I'll learn from you too."

I was the youngest director in East Africa at the time—only 20 years old. If you made me believe in something, I would commit fully and execute it well. But then something shifted. I had always been deeply rooted in my faith. One day, the leader of the fellowship told me he had been praying and felt it was time for me to move on from my business. I dismissed it, thinking, "If someone is telling you to tell me something, let them tell me directly." Then my mother spoke to me. She told me she felt I needed to leave the business. Again, I resisted. "Mama, with all due respect, tell God to tell me himself." But deep down, I knew something was stirring. It was a battle between my success and my faith and it was only a matter of time before the path ahead became clear to me.



"I enrolled in university, pursuing accounting because I thought I loved numbers. But once I started, I realised that numbers weren't "numbering" for me. Those financial statements and balance sheets just didn't make sense. Still, it was a three-year course and I decided I could endure it."

MAUA BioMagazine

AFRICA MONTH
WE CELEBRATE

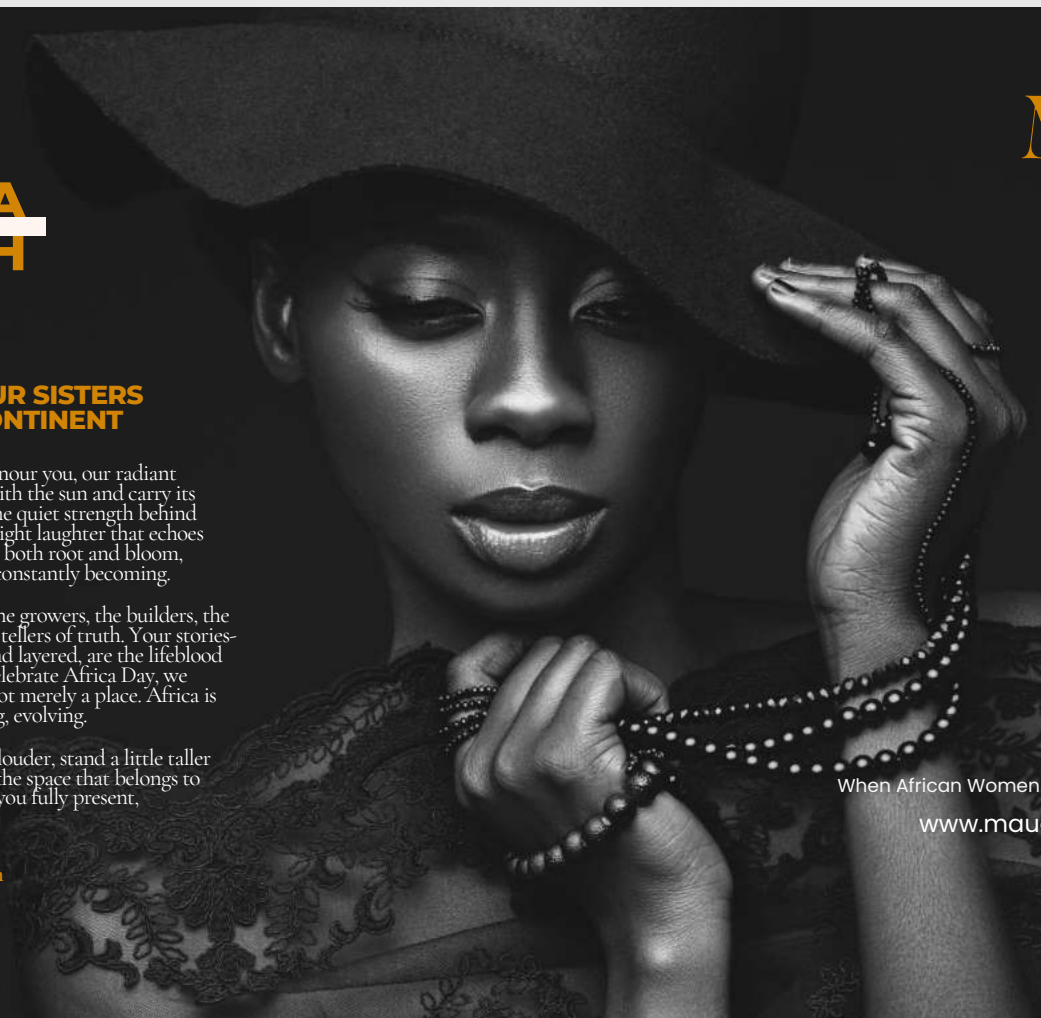
MESSAGE TO OUR SISTERS ACROSS THE CONTINENT

This Africa Month, we honour you, our radiant African sisters, who rise with the sun and carry its warmth within. You are the quiet strength behind transformation and the bright laughter that echoes through hardship. You are both root and bloom, grounded in wisdom, yet constantly becoming.

We see you. The healers, the growers, the builders, the protectors of heritage, the tellers of truth. Your stories- honest, powerful, joyful and layered, are the lifeblood of this continent. As we celebrate Africa Day, we remember that Africa is not merely a place. Africa is you, living, loving, creating, evolving.

So this May, speak a little louder, stand a little taller and take up every inch of the space that belongs to you. The continent needs you fully present, unapologetically yourself.

With love,
Maua Bio Magazine Team



Yes, God did speak

THE CRASH LANDING

In 2011, I conceived a business idea called HDNA—Heavenly DNA. The concept behind HDNA was to sell time back to people. Time was my product.

I envisioned it as a holding company with multiple subsidiaries, each dedicated to different aspects of people's lives, freeing them from mundane tasks so they could focus on what truly mattered to them.

One of the subsidiaries was Healthy Me, inspired by my childhood experience selling vegetables with my mother. This business would deliver fresh vegetables to people's homes, saving them the time and effort of shopping. Over time, it could expand into a full-fledged healthy food service.

Another subsidiary was Elegant Me, building upon what I had done with Hidayah—designing custom dresses for clients. My goal was to create a seamless process where clients could stay at home while I handled everything. I would research the best materials suited to different climates, create image boards and ensure the final product was tailored perfectly to each individual's needs. The idea was that people could reclaim their time while still enjoying quality, personalised fashion.

Then there was WOOME Me, conceived by my brother Pius. This was a service for orchestrating surprises for loved ones. Clients would provide us with important dates, birthdays, anniversaries, special occasions and we would take care of all the planning and arrangements. The goal was to support and strengthen relationships by delivering thoughtful, unexpected gestures throughout the year. Handie Me was another aspect of HDNA, focused on jewellery and accessories. This brand catered to people who loved stylish yet meaningful adornments.

The idea of HDNA was extensive, covering every aspect of life that could be made more convenient. Eventually, I planned to expand into wedding planning, a natural extension of my background in cake-making and wedding decor with my mother. Beyond that, the business would grow to include services related to education, domestic staff management and home maintenance. I envisioned a system where families wouldn't have to worry about hiring tutors, finding reliable house help, or coordinating household maintenance. Everything would be taken care of seamlessly.

At first, I was excited. I even paid a friend in Uganda to create a logo and branding materials for the business. But when I shared the idea with a few people, they thought I was crazy. They found it too ambitious, too abstract. I kept explaining that I wasn't just selling vegetables or clothes, I was selling time. That was my product. But many people couldn't grasp the vision.

Realising that the full concept was too overwhelming for people, I decided to start with what was possible. I focused on delivering vegetables, then moved on to Elegant Me. The surprises from Woow Me were another exciting aspect and my brother Pius was particularly good at selecting thoughtful gifts. By the end of my first year at university, I had put these elements into practice.

But as I entered my second year, reality hit. Barely making it through having struggled with three supplementary exams in my first year. The challenges of entrepreneurship were different from those of network marketing, where there was already a structured system in place. I started questioning my path, if people didn't understand my idea, what was my next step? I was just 21 and considering whether I should pursue formal employment instead.

I looked at family members who had built stable careers. One of my uncles was a director at a pension fund and another was a permanent secretary in Home Affairs.

My father worked in banking, but I never found that appealing. Despite his busy schedule and constant travel, I didn't see the financial returns that justified the sacrifices. My experiences had already shown me how even a little money could solve significant problems around me, so I wasn't convinced that a conventional job was the answer. I have always felt a deep sense of favour in my life, a belief that things would work out for me. Even as a child, I would strategise how to secure my next meal and now, as an adult, I applied the same mindset to building my future. I knew success was a matter of time and persistence.

My second year was a period of deep contemplation. I was torn between business and employment, unsure of which path to fully commit to. I was still weighing my options, trying to balance my ambitions with the realities of life. Amidst all this, my faith remained a constant. I attended Bible study classes twice a week and questioned everything, eager to deepen my understanding.

One day, I had a conversation with my pastor that changed my perspective. He had been preaching to my mother about salvation and I wanted to understand it fully. I asked him, *"Saved from what? What will take me to hell?"* I wasn't a thief. I didn't lie. I didn't engage in immoral behaviour. I was honest about everything—even when I avoided answering a question directly, I never lied.

In my third year at university, I received another A and my confidence soared. However, there was a catch—if you had to do a supplementary exam, your grade would have a C with a star next to it, marking you as someone who had taken supplementary. I already had six of those and I knew it would break my father's heart. He had always seen me as brilliant and now these stars were tainting my academic record. But as fate would have it, in my final semester, the rule changed. They stopped putting stars next to supplementary grades. That was a moment of relief for me —I knew God was watching over me. It felt like things were falling into place. I had made it through.

> That conversation with my pastor made me reflect on my faith and values even more. My life was a continuous learning process, filled with trial and error, but always driven by a deep belief that I was meant for something greater. Every challenge, every idea, every setback was a step toward something bigger. And I was determined to see it through.

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Third year-final exam and three supplements

DIDN'T STOP ME FROM MY MINING ADVENTURES

In June 2023, I had been saving money but hadn't reached my goal of $250. I turned to my friend Thomas Nkoma, who had helped me study before and was now working at KPMG.

. I had finished my exams in May and by June 24th or 26th, I was home, trying to figure out how to present my transcripts to my parents. I had avoided collecting my transcripts for three years because of those stars. Now, I was waiting for my final year transcript, one that would be free of those marks, before showing them.

I was determined to go to the mines, so I spent a month selling the dream to my parents. They were hesitant, but eventually, they agreed. Before that, my pastor had connected me with someone in the village where he had gone to minister. I had saved about $250 which I had handed over to the pastor the previous year, with a request for him to pass it to someone who could start working on something for me until I was ready to go.

When I finally told my father about my plan, he asked how much money I had. I told him $250 and he offered to match it and add another $500 as a safety net. But I could tell he wasn't entirely comfortable with the idea. However, I had made up my mind—his approval was nice but not necessary. Life isn't always perfect and I had learned to move forward regardless of challenges.

The pastor was kind enough to travel with me to the mines. At this point, I had completed my third year but had not yet graduated. My final exams were in June and graduation was scheduled for November. The results would come out in August, allowing students to do their supplementary exams in September if necessary. I was confident that I wouldn't have to retake anything. I had even received an A in my core course, which was a significant achievement.

In August, I went to examination centre to check my results and to my shock, I had three supplementary exams. That brought my total to nine. I had to look up the spiritual meaning of the number nine because this had to mean something—something bigger than just failing. Maybe it signified completion, or something related to God. Otherwise, it simply didn't make sense.

My heart sank. By then, I was already in the mines, fully immersed in village life. I had been there since July, adjusting to a new routine. I saw my results just two weeks before the supplementary exams. The delay was due to internet issues. I realised I had limited time to prepare and I needed a plan. I decided to go back to town with something to sell so I could make money while studying.

During my time in the village, I had learned how charcoal was made. With the money I had left for gold, I decided to invest in charcoal instead. I cut down trees, burned them and packed 81 sacks of charcoal. Each sack could sell for 30k, which was about $15. I didn't have permits or licenses, I was just figuring things out with the local men who helped me produce the charcoal. Once it was ready, I needed to get it to town.

At the same time, my friend Sauda was getting married and had a kitchen party. In her culture, this was an important event where women gathered to prepare the bride for marriage. She needed decorations and I saw an opportunity. I offered to do the decor for 1 million Tanzanian shillings (about $500). Without even checking my schedule, I took the job. Only later did I realise that the event was scheduled for a Sunday and my supplementary exams were on Monday. But I had already committed.

She transferred the money in advance so I could prepare. I had never done a full decor job on my own before, but I was determined. Normally, I worked with my mother, but this time, I wanted to handle it alone.

I coordinated everything, I had the charcoal, the event decor gig and a plan to get to town. I arranged for a truck to transport the charcoal, convincing the driver to take it on credit, I would cover the fuel and once we sold the charcoal in town, I would pay him. My friend Eric was also on standby in case I needed support.

The journey to Dar es Salaam was three hours long and we had no permits for the charcoal. I prayed the entire way. At every checkpoint, I played innocent, pretending not to know about the permit requirements. I would smile and ask, 'What permit do I need?' and listen as they explained the process in detail. Somehow, they let us pass at every stop.

At the final checkpoint, an officer stopped us and explained everything thoroughly. After he finished, I thanked him for the lesson and handed him a small amount for tea. He let us through. By the time we reached town, I had learned more about the permit process than I ever would have through research.

The stories of what happened next, especially in those three months at the mines, are for another time. But one thing is certain life has been a series of lessons and I am determined to keep moving forward.

> “Looking back, I realise that my journey has been a combination of faith, determination and a willingness to take risks. Every challenge has been an opportunity to learn and despite the setbacks, I have always found a way forward.”

Mining wasn't as simple as buying and selling

A HARD KNOCK LESSON

I found myself embroiled in small scale mining complexities – a hard knock lesson

I found myself in Mozambique while waiting for my exam results. It was an unexpected turn, but it was part of my journey.

I had attended baby showers, bridal showers and gathered some money, which left me with about $150. That was just enough to take me back to the mines to continue my gold business.

When I first thought of entering the gold trade, it seemed simple—buy, sell, reinvest and grow my profits. My goal was to reach my first $100,000 within seven months, starting with just $250. But when I got to the mines, the reality was quite different. I stayed for days without seeing any gold. I explored the mining sites, learning where everything happened, yet the gold remained elusive. Over a week later, I finally saw someone buy some gold, but I still couldn't buy it.

I had sent my initial capital ahead of me, expecting to buy gold immediately upon arrival. I imagined the process would be straightforward: buy the gold, make my rounds and turn a profit. Mr. Mwenda, an older man working at the mines, had received my money. He informed me that my initial $250 had grown to about $350 - $400 due to reinvestment. He had used the money to buy supplies and continue mining, promising that when he processed the next batch of gold, I would receive my share. However, that money never materialised. Mr. Mwenda later passed away and with him, the hopes of recovering my investment.

At the time, I believed that since my initial investment had grown, I should add more to increase my returns. I contributed more funds and moved around different mining areas, but days turned into weeks and still, I hadn't acquired any gold.

The miners had a system I hadn't understood before arriving. Mining wasn't as simple as buying and selling, it was deeply rooted in relationships and dependencies.

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The miners were receptive. They shared insights about their struggles, explaining the costs involved in mining and why quarters controlled the flow of gold. I learned that food and transport were just a fraction of the expenses. The real financial drain was in the support system needed to keep mining operations running. Once I understood the game, I changed my approach.

One day, after spending time with the miners, I asked if I could buy a small amount of gold. My consistent presence and engagement had earned me some trust. They decided to give me more gold than my money could afford, with the understanding that I would return for future transactions. I took the gold to town and sold it to a buyer named Macha, earning my first real profit of $5 per gram.

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Selling gold in town involved navigating a market filled with buyers, mainly jewellers and independent traders dealing in precious metals. Some had small shops on specific streets, while others operated licensed businesses outside the main trading areas. In Tanzania, the gold trade was well-regulated. The country had clear policies for small and medium-scale mining, currently, there are more than a hundred market points. These structures made it easier to trade without fear of being cheated. Licensed brokers could even buy and sell gold without needing a physical office.

> The miners didn't have the financial means to sustain their operations. They needed food, water, electricity, blasting materials, sacks, chemicals and tools. To buy these necessities, they depended on financiers called 'quarters.' The quarters provided miners with financial support and equipment on faith, without charging interest.

Looking back, entering the gold trade was an eye-opening experience. What had seemed like a simple buy-and-sell operation was, in reality, a complex system where relationships, trust and insider knowledge determined success. My journey into the mines was filled with lessons—about business, people and the importance of understanding the landscape before diving in.

My **baptism** Into Mining.

The process of extracting gold is intricate and demanding. The pan, where the mercury is, must be moved carefully to ensure that the mercury spreads evenly.

Just as I was switching on the weighing machine, a giant man named Njoe appeared. He walked in and grabbed the gold from my hands, I stood there, frozen. I had spent six weeks working, endured the rain, exhaustion, hunger and discomfort, only for this moment to be stolen from me. I hadn't showered in days; I smelled awful and I was beyond exhausted. The shelter lamps flickered in the dim light. Everyone stared at me, but no one did anything. Njoe leaned in and, in Swahili, said something that translated to, "Little girl, go back home. This is no place for little girls."

The magic of it is that the mercury captures both the gold and the silver. As I moved my hand around, the silver and gold fused with the mercury, forming a fluid-like ball that danced in the pan. If you've seen Terminator, that liquid-metal effect—that's exactly how mercury behaves.

I would add water, continue panning and remove impurities until only the mercury-gold mixture remained. This had to be done for all the mud collected in the basins. Once the mercury absorbed the gold, I used a piece of cloth to strain it. Since gold is solid while mercury is liquid, squeezing the cloth allowed the mercury to escape while the gold remained. At this stage, it looked whitish and silverish due to the mercury still coating it. The next step was to burn it, using charcoal and fire, to evaporate the mercury and leave behind the purified gold. If the burning process wasn't done properly, the remaining material would still contain mercury, giving a false weight—what seemed like 10 grams of gold could actually be only 5 grams of gold.

This entire process was meant to take a single day, but it took us three because of the rain.

The rain complicated everything. With our money tied up in the work, we couldn't afford to leave. Sleeping meant keeping an eye on our sacks, waiting for them to dry, hoping the weather would clear. For three days, we were stuck. Then, we realised we could use charcoal to dry things faster, but charcoal, being carbon, affected the recovery of gold. By the fourth day in the evening, we finally reached the stage of extracting the gold.

During that time, our meals consisted mostly of sugar canes, local donuts and chapati. But I have never been a fan of anything with flour—baked goods don't appeal to me. Still, that was what we had. When my turn came to burn my gold, the others told me, *"Dada"—which means sister— "go and burn your thing, you are the owner of it."* I did as they said. The burning was complete and someone handed it to me, still hot and said, "Dada, go and weigh it." Since the area was mountainous and windy, I had to find a spot without disturbances to ensure an accurate measurement.

Just as I was switching on the weighing machine, a giant man named Njoe appeared. He walked in and grabbed the gold from my hands, I stood there, frozen. I had spent six weeks working, endured the rain, exhaustion, hunger and discomfort, only for this moment to be stolen from me. I hadn't showered in days; I smelled awful and I was beyond exhausted. The shelter lamps flickered in the dim light. Everyone stared at me, but no one did anything. Njoe leaned in and, in Swahili, said something that translated to, *"Little girl, go back home. This is no place for little girls."*

I didn't cry, but tears just rolled down my face. It wasn't the kind of crying where you make a sound; it was the kind where your mind, body and soul are too shocked to comprehend what just happened. My entire being was in limbo. The people I had worked with for weeks just watched in silence. Most of the women had already left and those remaining were finishing up before heading back to the village. I had no money left. I needed to get somewhere safe.

I approached a boda-boda rider and asked him to take me home. When he told me the price, I realised I had nothing to pay. But I insisted, "Just take me, I will pay you later." He hesitated but eventually agreed. I told him, "I don't have cash right now, but I'll pay you when I get money." That night, as I lay on the rocky floor in my small village mud room, reality hit me. The house was made of mud, meaning anyone could push the door in if they wanted to. For the first time, I realised just how vulnerable I was. What if someone broke in? What if they hurt me?

Later, I learned what had happened. Njoe was a financier and he had been giving the miners money in advance. For example, if he gave them $1,000 for work, they would extract 10 grams of gold worth $250. That meant they still owed him $750. But they couldn't repay him unless they continued working and producing more gold. When I worked with them and produced my own gold, Njoe saw an opportunity to recover his money. Instead of asking me how much I had invested, so we could work out a fair solution, he simply took everything. Just like that, the first real money I had sweated for, the gold I had extracted with my own hands, was gone.

This happened between July and September. At the same time, I was preparing for my supplementary exams. That's why I tried different jobs, burning charcoal, wedding decorations, anything to raise money. But even those ventures failed. My friend and I were supposed to get around Tzs. 2 million from charcoal sales—over $1,000. But I never saw that money. The money I made from wedding decorations was only Tzs. 500,000 and I gave half of it to a friend who never returned it. On the journey back to the mines, I cried. I kept asking myself, why? Why was this happening? Why was I failing when all I wanted was to succeed and build something for myself?

MY EXPEDITIONS IN MOZAMBIQUE

If Chinese could move from China to Mozambique, why couldn't I move from Tanzania to Mozambique?

I had a vision, but I didn't know how to monetise it. When I returned, I only had Tzs. 150,000 instead of the Tzs 1.5 million I had planned for. I found another opportunity near Mindu, a dam built by the government in Morogoro. While talking to people over local coffee, I learned that the sand there had 99% gold purity. That's when I began understanding the power dynamics in the mining world. In places like that, information was everything and being smart enough to grasp it meant survival.

There were sapphires. For me, gold was never the ultimate prize. I thought, why wait to walk on golden roads in heaven when I could use gold right here? But then, people started telling me that gold was failing. Even though I wasn't the foot, I was the head, or whatever that means, I could see that gold wasn't working out. But the sapphires? They weren't failing. I saw sapphires, rubies, amethysts, precious stones. So, I found ways to spiritualise everything because sometimes, that gives you the energy to keep going.

I learned that sapphires were being mined in the southern part of Tanzania, in places like Songwe. At the same time, there was a ruby rush happening in Mozambique.

The Chinese and Thai gem traders had moved from Thailand to Mozambique, settling in Montepuez and people were selling to them. I thought to myself, if the Chinese could move from China to Mozambique, why couldn't I move from Tanzania to Mozambique? What did I have to lose? I had already lost so much—what more could possibly go wrong? Besides, the miners I knew like Bona, were all leaving for Mozambique. That's just how miners operate. If a gold rush happens in Tanzania, miners from Kenya will pack up their hammers and head there.

I had a Nokia phone and it had Google Maps and I could use it to navigate. That Nokia was a blessing. So, I decided to go back home to prepare, but I couldn't ask my parents for money. My father, no matter how much he loves me, would have questioned everything. We had already argued about why I didn't want to work at a bank despite having a degree in accounting. But I had a vision. I told him, "Daddy, give me five years. Let me try this. If it doesn't work, I'll even take a job as a bartender or a bar accountant. Just five years." He agreed, but with the condition that I had a room and food at home, nothing more.

We had a beautiful house with a big compound and my cozy room was still there. When I returned home, I took up some small tenders, made some wedding cakes here and there and saved up Tzs. 300,000, about $150 at the time. But I had crossed borders before; I had studied in Uganda, so crossing into another country felt like nothing. Mozambique was right next to Tanzania. I thought, if people could cross into Kenya and Uganda, why should Mozambique be any different? With my $150 and Nokia phone, I told my parents, "Baba, Mama, I'm going to Mozambique." My father asked if I knew anyone there. I told him yes – mean while I was simply following the miners heading there.

I wasn't familiar with the buses that went south. I was used to heading north. So, I had to ask around and eventually found where to catch a bus to Lindi. Google Maps directed me there, but when I arrived, I realised the actual border wasn't in Lindi—it was in Mtwara. I had to spend the night in Lindi, surviving on chips, eggs and Coca-Cola. The next day, I caught a bus to Mtwara, but when I arrived at midday, I found out that the border was even farther. I was exhausted and starving, so I grabbed some rice and fish before heading to the border.

I sat in the front seat of the bus, checking my Nokia to make sure I was on the right track. When I reached the immigration office, I realised my phone was gone. It must have slipped and I suspected the bus driver had taken it. I panicked because that phone was my only way to navigate Mozambique. I didn't memorise anyone's number except for my mother's.

I asked the immigration officers to let me call my mother. She gave me my father's number and he contacted my cousin, who worked at the Namanga border. My cousin then spoke to the immigration officers at my location. They took my situation seriously, tracked down the bus and somehow, my phone miraculously appeared. But I had wasted three hours. Still, I couldn't have continued without that phone.

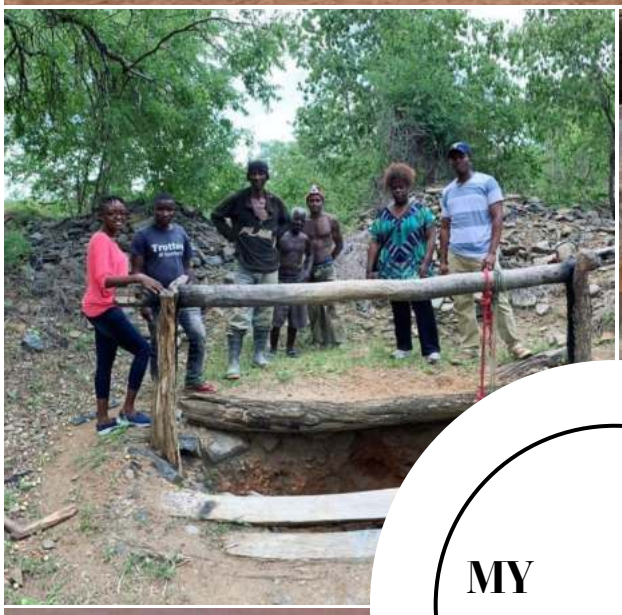
While waiting, I exchanged all my money into Mozambican meticais. I assumed I would cross over immediately, but then I learned that I had to cross a river. Google Maps hadn't shown me that! Worse, the last boat had already left while I was dealing with my lost phone. I had no choice but to sleep there. However, after exchanging my money, I was left with only Tzs. 6000, about three dollars. I found a shanty place to stay, where I even had to buy my own soap. I drank a Coca-Cola and slept.

The next morning, I boarded the first boat. As I sat there, I questioned my life. What was I even doing? But I took a picture of that moment and posted it on Instagram: "It's me and the Holy Spirit in this journey. #TotiAndHolySpirit." That gave me some courage.

I told him, *"Daddy, give me five years. Let me try this. If it doesn't work, I'll even take a job as a bartender or a bar accountant. Just five years."* He agreed,

That evening, James was heading out for dinner and invited me to join him. I declined, telling him I was full, though that wasn't the truth. I knew how these things worked I didn't want to go out for food and then feel obligated to spend time with him later. I had nothing to offer and I couldn't afford to pay for my meal.

MECKTILDER M. MCHOMVU



MY EXPEDITIONS

The river crossing wasn't straightforward. It wasn't just hopping into a boat and sailing across. The water was shallow in some parts, so I had to get out, walk and board another boat in different sections. By the time I finally reached the other side, I was drained, but I had made it to Mozambique.

I remember the day vividly. I had remained with Mt.50 (Mozambican Metical), which was about $2 or $3. I was starving, but I knew I had to make that money stretch. I went to the nearby shop and bought a frozen bottle of water. The reason I chose frozen water was simple, when you're extremely thirsty, if you drink a glass of water all at once, it's gone. But if it's frozen, you drink it slowly, sip by sip and it lasts much longer. It forces you to pace yourself. That bottle of water could last me two days. My body had to adjust. Even though I could see the water, there was nothing I could do but wait.

I also bought two packs of biscuits, one for that day and one for the next. I planned it all out. A little bit of water today, a biscuit today and then the same for the following day. That was my survival plan.

As I made my way back to my room, I ran into James. He was also staying there. We exchanged a few words and I asked if he had a laptop or internet connection because I needed to send an email to my parents. He offered me his phone to make a call. James was a businessman involved in the seafood trade, he had boats. He showed me how to use his app to call home and I told my parents I might need money for my graduation. I explained that I didn't have proper internet access but would let them know how to send the money directly to the university.

That evening, James was heading out for dinner and invited me to join him. I declined, telling him I was full, though that wasn't the truth. I knew how these things worked. I didn't want to go out for food and then feel obligated to spend time with him later. I had nothing to offer and I couldn't afford to pay for my meal. I just couldn't put myself in that situation.

Before he left, James said, "Okay, I'll leave you my laptop so you can watch a movie while I'm gone." I agreed. Later, he returned with a surprise, a whole kilo of cashew nuts. He tossed the bag to me and said, *"Here, throw these in as you watch your movie. I don't have popcorn, but this will work."*

That was my miracle meal. To this day, I always travel with cashew nuts. It has been 12 years, but the habit has never left me. Those cashews saved not just my day but my life. I rationed them carefully, eating a little at a time, keeping myself just full enough. Cashews have oil and fat, so they sustain you. A handful makes you thirsty, so you drink more water and the cycle keeps you feeling semi-full. It became a survival strategy.

The next morning, I woke up at 2 a.m., got ready and boarded the bus. I had a window seat, but Ismail, who had booked the tickets, had taken it. I let him have it and sat in the aisle. As the journey went on, we stopped at a tea break spot. Ismail went to get food and asked if I wanted to join him. I declined, waiting for everyone to leave so I could eat my cashew nuts, biscuits and water quietly.

When he returned, he knocked on the window and called me to come outside. Reluctantly, I stepped off the bus. To my surprise, he had bought food for me, chicken soup, chapati and Fanta Orange. That was the first proper meal I had eaten since Lindi, where I had spent my first night. As I ate, I could feel the nutrients reviving me, spreading through my body like warmth. It was a meal from heaven.

I asked Ismail if the bus would stop at Nanyupu, my destination. He explained that it wouldn't, but we would get off at a different stop and take a smaller bus to Nanyupu. I was apprehensive, but I had no choice.

On the next leg of the journey, I found myself sitting on a wooden bench near the front, surrounded by other passengers. The conductor came around, collecting fares. I had a leather wallet, a second-hand one from university but inside, I had no money. I pretended to search for something, praying silently for a solution. Just as I was about to confess that I couldn't pay, Ismail handed the conductor a note and said, *"Get for that young lady as well."*

That was how my fare got paid. No one on that bus knew I was completely broke. At every point in my journey, God had shown up—through food, transport and even small moments of kindness from strangers. When I finally reached Nanyupu, I felt relieved but also overwhelmed by the generosity I had received along the way.

Nanyupu was a beautiful place. The mining operations were in full swing. Unlike gold mining, where you sift through sand manually, ruby mining was different. You just collected the sand, carried it back and washed it. Every morning, miners would leave for the fields with sacks on their backs. By evening, they returned, heading straight to Montepuez to sell their rubies. The transformation was unbelievable. I saw people leave in the morning as ordinary miners and return in the evening with enough money to buy trucks and Mercedes-Benz vehicles. They were paid in US dollars—small pieces of ruby fetching millions. I saw it with my own eyes.

But I didn't have the money to even enter one of the mining camps, known as "Matanda." I had come to this place, full of riches, but with nothing in my pocket. Still, I had faith. Every step of my journey had shown me that somehow, I would find a way.

She built, lost everything, tried again, failed again, and just when life seemed to have scripted her downfall, she rewrote the ending.

That relentless spirit birthed WOOWME Jewel and TWiMMI (Tanzania Women in Mining and Minerals Industry), which now empower women and youth in the mining sector.

By the time she finished speaking, I knew two things: one, this woman had just altered the course of my life, and two, I needed to talk to her. So, I walked up to her, told her how much her story had moved me, and casually mentioned that I worked in business development at Raddy International—a company providing safety and security services in the mining sector.

Now, some people would have smiled politely and moved on. But not Mecktilder. Without hesitation, she pulled out contacts from the Tanzania Chamber of Mines and said, "You should attend one of their meetings. I'll open that door for you." Just like that. Like it was nothing.

Fast forward a few weeks, I attended the meeting. And let me tell you, I landed connections I had been chasing for months. Clients who had seemed unreachable were suddenly within arm's length. All because of one conversation with Mecktilder. But the story doesn't end there. One random day, my phone rang. I saw her name on the screen and felt a little thrill (because when Mecktilder calls, something big is about to happen). She invited me to the Papoja Initiative training. And though I didn't remember applying, I figured—if a door opens for you, walk through it.

Turns out, she had mistaken me for another Lightness... but by the time we figured that out, I was already signed up. And let me tell you, that training was life-changing. It reshaped my perspective on the mining sector, shattered my misconceptions and helped me discover my true purpose. During the training, I saw a different side of Mecktilder, the tireless worker, the humble leader, the behind-the-scenes fixer who makes impossible things happen with effortless grace.

She secured the best trainers, arranged sponsorships for gemstone identification equipment and PPE, and ensured every detail was flawless. She moved with power, yet with the humility of someone who just wants to see others succeed.

Then, as if fate wasn't done aligning our paths, I found myself searching for ways to serve women and youth in mining. One call to Mecktilder, and she immediately said, "TWiMMI needs a Head of Communication. You'd be perfect." And just like that, another door swung open. Since then, my life has been a whirlwind of opportunities, purpose, and passion.

She is a woman who builds bridges where others see walls. A woman who doesn't hoard opportunities but shares them freely. She sees what you are meant to be—sometimes before you do—and nudges you toward it. I don't know if she fully realises her impact, but I do. And now, so do you. If you've read this far, here's what I want you to do: Go support her business, WOOWME Jewel. Buy something, wear it, and when someone asks, tell them it's from a woman who is out here making destinies happen.

MECKTILDER MCHOMVU,
MY DESTINY HELPER

Some people walk into your life like a soft drizzle on a warm day, you barely notice them until you feel their impact. Then there are those who crash into your world like a thunderstorm, rearranging everything, watering the dry places, and leaving you forever changed. Mecktilder Mchomvu is the latter. I first met Mecktilder at the Tune of Lilies High Tea event, hosted by Minister Bahati Joyce of Phaneroo Ministries.

There she was, one of the speakers, sharing a story so raw, so deeply moving, that the entire room hung onto every word.

Lightness

TRIBUTE

WOW ME

www.woowmejewel.com

PRECIOUS

JEWELS

The mining operations were in full swing. Unlike gold mining, where you sift through sand manually, ruby mining was different. You just collected the sand, carried it back and washed it. Every morning, miners would leave for the fields with sacks on their backs. By evening, they returned, heading straight to Montepuez to sell their rubies. The transformation was unbelievable. I saw people leave in the morning as ordinary miners and return in the evening with enough money to buy trucks and Mercedes-Benz vehicles.

RADIANT CUT RED GARNET AND CUBIC ZIRCONIA X SPLIT SHANK

From Mozambique

TO GRADUATION!

I passed after all!

My time in Mozambique did not work out, so I journeyed back home in time for my graduation. When I received my transcript, it showed only C's and no supplementary exams.

I handed it to my father, who had been eagerly waiting for it. He was proud at first—until he looked closer. My father had always believed his daughter was brilliant, a top student. But my transcript didn't match his expectations. He saw my GPA—2.7, just above failing. *"This is not my daughter,"* he said and he was right, in a way.

I am brilliant, but brilliance is measured differently. If you give me tasks, I love, I will excel. But force me into something that doesn't inspire me and I will struggle. My father couldn't understand that. He went to my mother, frustrated. She came to me, disappointed. But I stood my ground. "Mama, look," I said. "Do you see any F's? Show me". There are none. Just C's and B's.

My GPA says 'pass.' What more do you want?" I have learned to embrace my own path. I am not defined by grades or by conventional success. I measure my achievements in my own way, knowing that every failure is a lesson and every challenge is an opportunity. That is how I live my life, fearlessly, with faith, always moving forward.

I have always believed that even when life fails, I never truly lose. That belief was tested when we secured a mining licence, purchased land and set out to build our venture, without ever visiting the site beforehand.

OUR *NEXT* VENTURE

bought land but got Fools Gold

Our operations were set to begin on 13 June 2014, but heavy rains prevented us from reaching the exact location, but along the way, we found sand speckled with what looked like gold.

With the assurance that it was real gold, excited, we collected sacks of it, only to later discover it was pyrite—fool's gold. It was a devastating setback, but we refused to give up.

Over time, more team members left and with Julius and I remaining, Julius sold one of his farms for $400. We reinvested, this time researching market demand before mining. We found a buyer for specific gemstones, but by the time we returned with our haul, the buyer had moved on. Undeterred, Julius sold his second farm for $600 and we reinvested once more—only to face the same outcome.

Despite relentless setbacks, we kept pushing forward, fuelled by determination, faith and an unshakable belief that failure was never the end, we bottled this as just another lesson on the road to success

We finally started making money … only to lose it all

When I first started in the mines, I had nothing. We arranged accommodation for Julius in a paid guesthouse while I found a spot to sleep in the sitting room of the family house of a colleague who had studied with a university acquaintance. At the time, Julius and I had a purely business relationship, we were simply business partners, working together to build something from the ground up.

FOOL'S GOLD

PYRITE—FOOL'S GOLD

We quickly learned the ins and outs of the trade and I realised I had a knack for navigating the mining world. I would ask questions, gather information, buy and sell minerals and then move on to the next mine, repeating the process while Julius managed the operations. For a time, money flowed effortlessly. We could stash cash in a laptop bag and even send tithes to church every week. It was a golden period—life was good and everything seemed to be running smoothly.

But after six months, things took a turn. Julius fell seriously ill and was hospitalised for a month. Suddenly, I had to manage both his mine and my own while also looking after him. Each day, I ensured his mine was operating, then did the same for mine, all while battling exhaustion and fatigue that comes from using a bicycle to move around all mines. I cooked and took the food to the hospital, determined to keep everything afloat

By the end of that month, the cracks started to show. I had a notebook filled with figures, money loaned out, purchases made but I had lost track of our finances. The cash reserves had dwindled. By the time Julius recovered, we were left with just $400 or $500—our once-thriving business nearly wiped out.

“Each day, I ensured his mine was operating, then did the same for mine, all while battling exhaustion and fatigue that comes from using a bicycle to move around all mines. I cooked and took the food to the hospital, determined to keep everything afloat. By the end of that month, the cracks started to show.”

The Birth of

WOOW ME Jewel

Reinventing Mecktilder

That last $5 became the foundation for everything we built.

Living in the mines changed me in ways I didn't realise at the time. Hygiene was a challenge, proper bathrooms were non-existent and communal areas were filthy. As a clean freak, I preferred washing in the bushes. For years, I bathed in the wild and relieved myself outdoors. Sometimes, a full week passed without a proper wash. The environment, the people, our conversations and the mindset all shaped me without me noticing.

By the time I left the mines, I was a different person. I hadn't been sexually abused—no, that never happened, but the experience transformed me. I could no longer introduce myself in a full sentence in Swahili nor English. I had forgotten how to eat with a fork and knife, sleep in a bed, or walk in heels. I had been shaped by survival.

Not long after Julius recovered, I fell seriously ill. Malaria hit hard and I endured 32 quinine injections. One day, I burned with fever; the next, I shivered uncontrollably.

For a month, I lay sick while Julius tried to salvage what little we had left. By the end, we couldn't even afford bus fare back to Dar es Salaam.

To survive, I decided to learn tailoring. A kind woman taught me and I practised on fabric scraps. My first dress, made from what was essentially rubbish, sold for $7.50, the next for $5. He saw potential and suggested we revive the business, but I wasn't convinced. To me, it felt like failure. Eventually, Julius borrowed $35 for my bus fare to Dar, which cost me $25, I arrived with just $5 because half went to food during the journey.

I used that $5 to make our very first bead necklace. From that small beginning, the business began to grow steadily, so much so that Julius had to return to town to help manage the momentum. Before long, we were receiving orders from Ghana, Italy and France. The demand became so great that we had to employ other members of the community to help us keep up.

MY FIRST BEAD DESIGN

> I remember one day, as I sat on the floor working, completely immersed in the beads, I heard a quiet voice whisper, "Don't you think one day you'll be playing with real gold like that?"

It made no sense at the time—but the words stayed with me.

My dad, ever the concerned parent, worried about my back. I could sit for 24 to 30 hours straight, bent over the beads, determined to perfect each design. But for me, it never felt like work—it felt like purpose.

As our skills in beading grew, so did our desire to share what we'd learned. We began training others, eventually developing a full curriculum that covered both bead design and the business side of things. The money started coming in and for a moment, it felt like we'd made it.

But I quickly realised that financial success without structure is short-lived. I turned to my business partner and said, "Let's set up pension funds—one day, we'll have families to support and we need to plan for that now."

THE ACCIDENTAL JEWELLERY BUSINESS

During this time, I reconnected with an old school friend from Uganda, Vivian. When she learned about my mining background, she was fascinated and told her friends. One of them, Susan, was heading to the UK for her master's degree and wanted Tanzanite and gold earrings for her mother. Without hesitation, she placed an order unaware I had never done this before.

ONE OF MY DESIGNS

ONE OF THE WHOLESALE ORDERS – 300 TO ITALY

I didn't tell Julius immediately. I thought, *we know where to source gold, tanzanite and diamonds. If she gives us the money, we can buy the stones and find the right people to cut them.*

We had contacts with miners, stone cutters, gold buyers and manufacturers. The missing piece was a jewellery designer. But could I fail at that? No way. With Susan's money, I told Julius, *"Let's find Tanzanite."* We sourced diamonds from Mwalami, had them cut and moved forward. Julius, sceptical, asked, *"What are we doing?"* I replied, "*We've taken this woman's money—we have to deliver."* I quickly sketched a design and we pressed on.

Julius worried. Meq, you love taking risks. Don't we have enough problems with the orders from Ghana?" But my philosophy is simple: If it won't kill me, why not try?

I took my design to an Indian jeweller, Rajesh, with confidence, I walked into his shop and said, *"I need this made."* He required payment upfront, which I made. When he told me to return in four days, I asked, *"Can I watch you work?"*

Watching them work changed everything. I saw how strategically they protected their trade secrets—machines had no labels, ensuring processes couldn't be easily replicated. Determined, I sketched everything I observed and had Julius research the machines online.

That first order was a success. From there, we expanded to make custom jewellery made from Chinese beads and chai seeds and got our first order for gold jewellery. We started posting our work under a brand initially called Handie Me a business idea from 2013 that had never materialised.

At first, our goal was simple, make enough money to return to the mines. So, we brainstormed ways to generate income. I suggested teaching. There was demand for jewellery-making knowledge, so I posted on Facebook: *Who wants to learn?*

At first, our goal was simple—make enough money to return to the mines

People were interested, but there was concern—would we be saturating our market? I saw it differently. More makers meant more demand. Others would market for us without us investing in advertising. We launched a ten-day training programme at $75 per person. With ten students, we made $750. Teaching was easy—they needed materials and we saw an opportunity. Since locally available beads were low quality, we travelled to Uganda and brought back three bags full of unique stock.

Our students thrived. Ana, a single mother abandoned by her husband, regained her confidence and now runs a factory. Consol incorporated beads into her tailoring business. Others branched into cosmetics. Many had advanced degrees but sought additional income. In 2019, we left beading behind and fully committed to jewellery-making, passing on our old resources to students.

We later rebranded Handie Me WOOWME Jewel in 2020.

In this industry, adaptability is key, *I had to navigate a space where access is tightly controlled. The jewellery trade is dominated by a select few,* making it difficult for outsiders *to break through. Yet, despite the barriers, I found a way to carve out my own place in an industry* not designed for me.

I met Mecktilder during our college years, when she was involved in network marketing, selling products and inviting others to join the business.

Later, she ventured into various small businesses, including buying and reselling goods, and sewing affordable clothing for the community.

After graduating in 2013, she turned her focus to gemstone research, with the ambition of building a mineral trade business by sourcing and crafting precious stones. Drawing on her creativity, she began designing bracelets, earrings, necklaces, scarves, wallets, and hair accessories using beads she sourced from local entrepreneurs in the mining sector.

With a clear vision, she partnered with close friends to research and invest in the gemstone market. However, many of them eventually gave up due to the harsh working conditions and challenges found at mining sites. During this period, Mecktilder also tried her hand at vegetable farming, but after limited success, she decided to focus solely on the mining industry.

As a woman, she faced rejection—a common bias in Tanzania, where women are often perceived as lacking knowledge or being too weak for demanding industries like mining, But Mecktilder stood firm. She has always stood for what she believes in and is willing to do whatever it takes to turn her vision into reality. Today, she is thriving through WOOWME Jewel, a rising star in Tanzania's gemstone industry. She continues to support small-scale entrepreneurs—particularly women in mining—helping them work towards economic independence.

I can confidently attest that WOOWME Jewel products are not only high-quality, but truly unique. Each piece showcases exceptional craftsmanship and creativity, standing out in both design and durability.

FROM BEADS TO BRILLIANCE

from Garda Urio

FROM LEFT
MEQ & HUSBAND JULIUS
EMMANUEL, PIUS & JULIET

LOVE STORY

from friendship, to business partners, to doing life together.

Bound by trust, driven by purpose, and journeying through life as one.

In our first year which was around 2016, we had about ten clients. We attended exhibitions, refined our craft and expanded steadily. Then, in the midst of it all, Julius turned to me and said, "Meq, can you do life with me?"

I laughed. *"What do you mean?"*

I SAID YES AND WE DID!

And just like that, life took another turn.

MEQ, CAN YOU DO LIFE WITH ME?

BUILDING A JEWELLERY EMPIRE

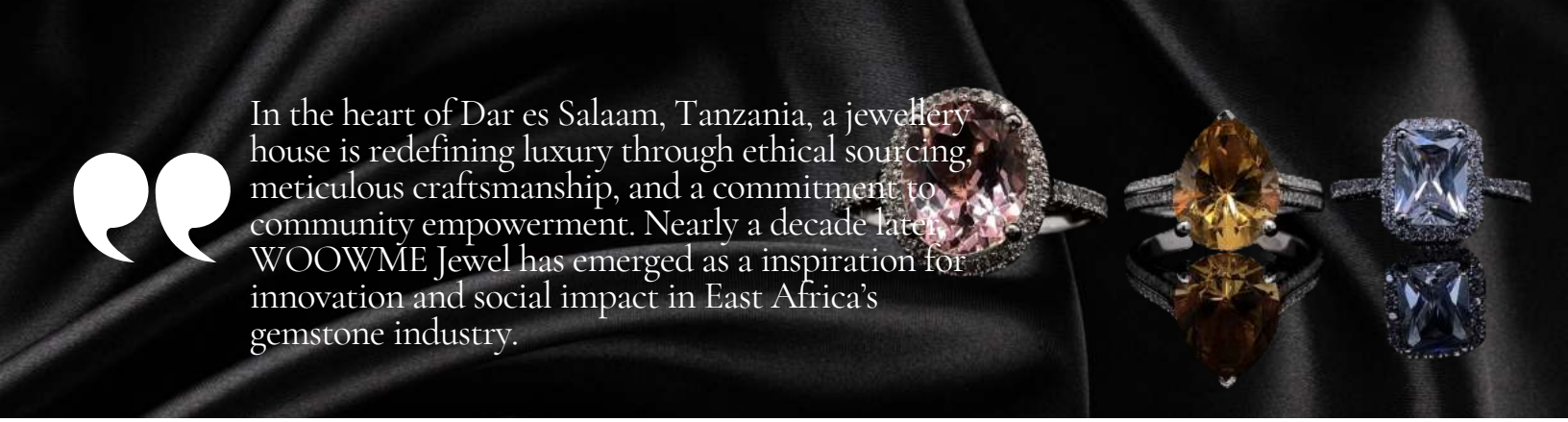
Business grew fast. Rajesh, seeing my determination, gave me advice: "Always measure clients yourself—don't bring them here. Bring me the design and I'll give you a good price." That changed everything. I started taking my own measurements, estimating costs and sourcing gold directly. He even introduced me to his supplier.

We met clients under trees, convincing them to trust us. "Believe me, I can make your ring," *I'd say. "Even if we're sketching under a mango tree, your love story will endure, just as we are enduring now."*

As we grew, we reinvested in tools. Our first major purchase was a ring adjuster, solving sizing issues caused by band width. Then came a polishing machine. We offered free polishing for first-time clients, then charged $2.50 per gram —half of what the Indian jewellers charged.

INVESTED

As we grew, we reinvested in essential tools. Our first significant purchase was a ring adjuster, and today we manage the entire value chain, from ethical sourcing all the way through to value addition.



In the heart of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, a jewellery house is redefining luxury through ethical sourcing, meticulous craftsmanship, and a commitment to community empowerment. Nearly a decade later, WOOWME Jewel has emerged as a inspiration for innovation and social impact in East Africa's gemstone industry.

A Vision Rooted in Empowerment

WOOWME Jewel's journey began with a mission to showcase Tanzania's rich gemstone heritage while uplifting local communities. Central to this mission is its partnership with the Tanzania Women in Mining and Mineral Industry (TWiMMI), through which gemstones are sourced exclusively from Tanzanian women miners. This initiative not only ensures ethical sourcing but also promotes gender equity in a traditionally male-dominated sector.

From Rough Stone to Radiant Jewel

Every gemstone at WOOWME undergoes a transformative journey. GIA-certified experts meticulously analyse each rough stone, determining the optimal cut to enhance its natural beauty. The lapidary process, carried out by skilled artisans, combines agility, precision, and patience to reveal each gem's full potential. This dedication ensures that every piece is not only visually striking but also a testament to superior craftsmanship.

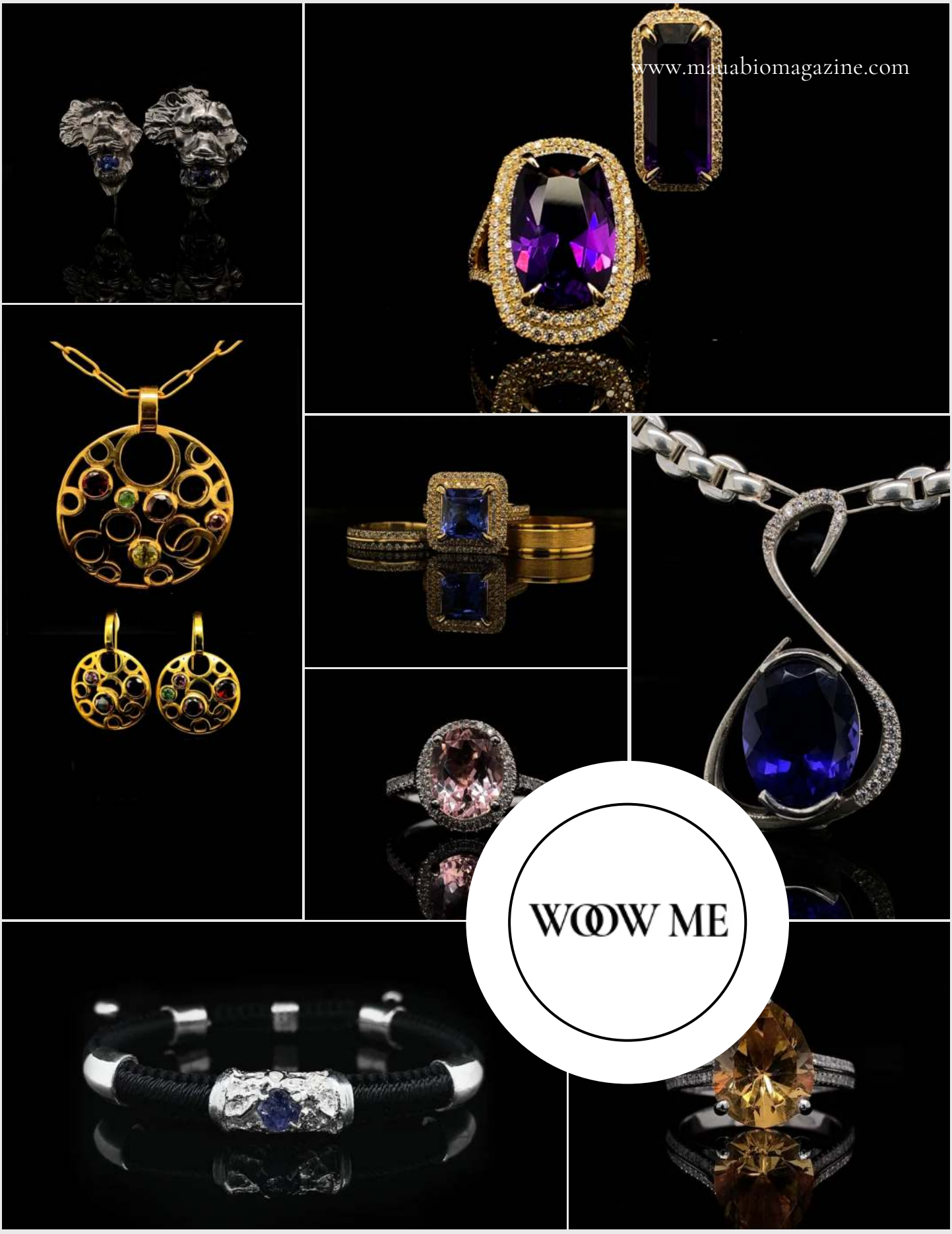
DESIGNS THAT TELL A STORY

WOOWME's design philosophy marries traditional techniques with modern innovation. Its collections feature a range of jewellery, from engagement rings to fine jewellery pieces, all characterised by deceptive simplicity, perfect balance, and harmony. The engagement rings, in particular, showcase some of Africa's most magnificent gemstones—including tanzanite, morganite, and amethyst—set in designs that exude elegance and sophistication.

RECOGNITION AND CUSTOMER ACCLAIM

In 2023, WOOWME Jewel was honoured with the Best Mining Company of the Year award at the Tanzania Women Industrial Awards, recognising its commitment to excellence, innovation, and sustainable practices within the mining industry.

"By prioritising ethical sourcing, championing women in mining, and delivering exquisite jewellery, WOOWME has carved a niche that resonates both locally and internationally. Its story is not just one of adornment but of creating lasting value—for communities, artisans, and customers alike."



I have known Mecktilder Mchomvu for more than a decade, since the days when she was just a young, ambitious university student with dreams bigger than most would dare to imagine.

Even then, she was different. While many of her peers pursued safer, more conventional career paths, she set her sights on the mining industry, a sector dominated by men, hardship, and relentless challenges.

I watched her struggle firsthand. She didn't just enter the industry; she fought for her place in it. I remember the stories of her sleeping in rough conditions at mining sites, enduring the harshest environments, facing discrimination, and hustling her way through an industry that was never designed for women like her. There were moments when I asked her, "Why all this struggle? You are well-educated, and your family can support you. Why put yourself through this?" But she never wavered. She would always say, "I have a vision." And today, I have seen that vision unfold before my eyes.

I believe I am one of the few who truly witnessed her journey, from a determined young woman fighting for space in the industry to a powerful force advocating for other women in mining. Her growth and transformation over the years have been nothing short of inspiring. She has not only carved out a successful career for herself but has also made it her mission to uplift others. Through her work, she is opening doors for women who once thought the mining sector was beyond their reach.

Seeing her today, championing women in mining, leading advocacy efforts, and pushing for inclusivity, fills me with immense pride. She has become a beacon of hope for many young women who aspire to break barriers in the industry. And as she continues to rise, I want to remind her, Mecktilder, remain strong. Your journey is proof that perseverance and vision can change the world. The sky is not the limit for you; it's just the beginning.

A VISION REALISED

from Donald Kongwa

THE DARK SIDE

Betrayal & Hidden Agendas

In any professional journey, challenges are inevitable. Unexpected obstacles often test integrity, decision-making and the ability to navigate complex situations. At a critical moment, I found myself in a situation where transparency and trust were compromised, forcing me to make difficult decisions.

Managing a major project for the first time required adaptability, quick learning and strategic leadership. Faced with resistance and isolation, I chose to approach the situation with professionalism and a commitment to excellence. Instead of yielding to pressure, I equipped myself with the necessary skills and ensured the project's success against all odds.

There are moments when one realises that growth requires stepping away from environments that no longer align with their values. When circumstances became unsustainable, I made the choice to leave—with gratitude for the lessons learned and a vision for something greater. This transition was not without its challenges, but it reinforced the importance of standing firm in one's principles and seeking spaces where true impact could be made. From this experience, a new path emerged. Recognising the need for a supportive and inclusive platform, I connected with like-minded individuals who shared a vision for empowering women in mining. Together, we laid the foundation for an organisation dedicated to creating opportunities, advocating for equity and driving meaningful change in the industry. That is how Tanzania Women in Mining and Mineral Industry (TWiMMI) was born.

SOURCE: **TWiMMI**

Building Something Greater

TWiMMI serves women in mining, mineral trading, service providers, mining professionals, value addition and related professions. We also mentor young people.

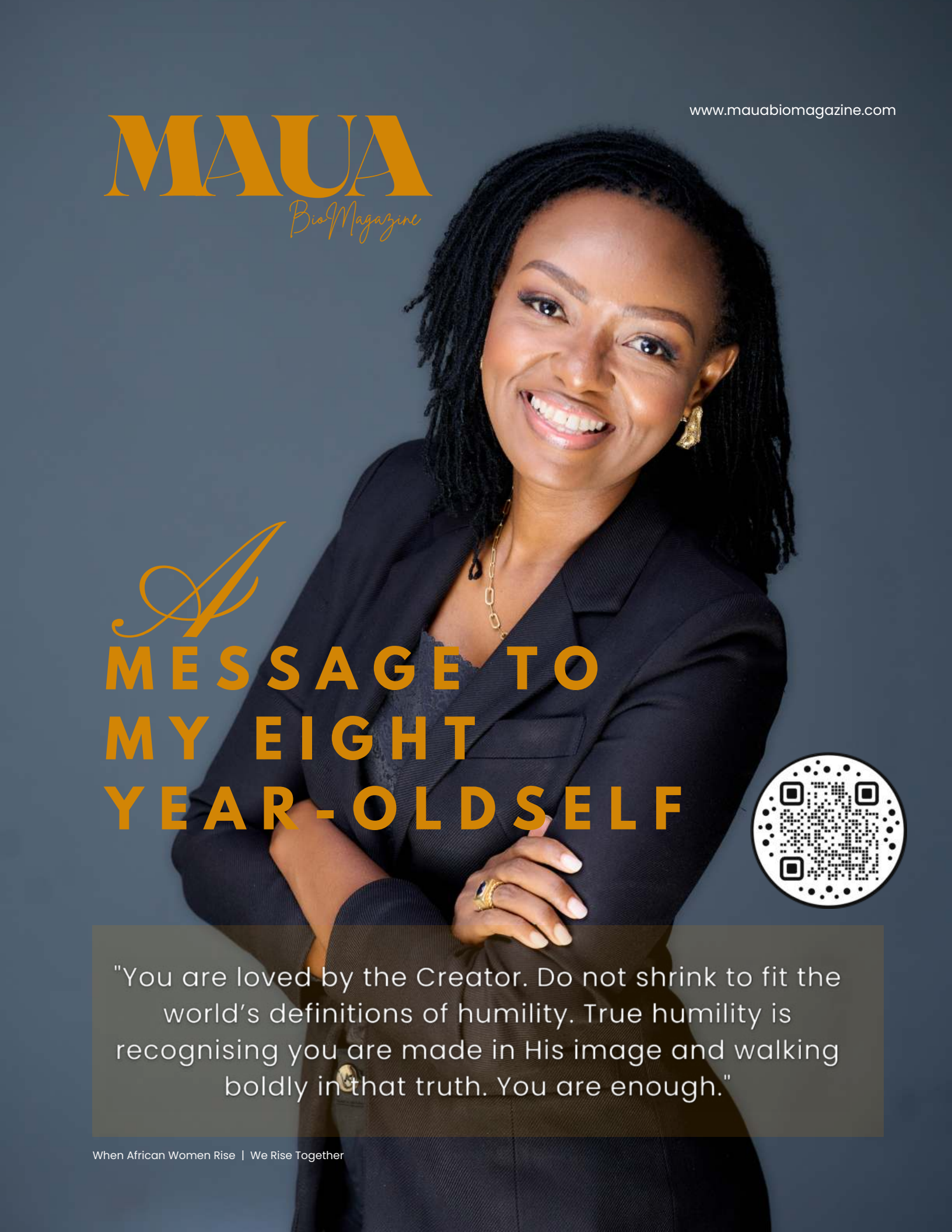
Our vision is to create a structured platform where banks support women and major industry players recognise and engage them. We are making significant strides, proving the power of determination and purpose.

I have always believed in creating opportunities, not just for myself but for others. Drafting strong motivation letters that help others secure sponsorships is a success to me. I remember Rosie, who received a full sponsorship to attend the Natural Resource Governance Institute in Ghana (NRGI). She was so grateful, saying, *"I thank God and you for making this happen."* But I reminded her—it's about creating platforms for collective benefit.

Pushing Forward Despite Challenges

At TWiMMI, we work quietly, behind the scenes. We are only two years in, with July 2025 marking our third year. We have no funding yet. TWiMMI is volunteer-run and has impacted 3,900 people in two years through financial literacy training, health and safety workshops, PPE distribution and capacity building on mercury use and disposal. We train young people in value addition and support professionals in career growth. Whether we have money or not, we get the work done.

MAUA
BioMagazine
www.mauabiomagazine.com



A MESSAGE TO MY EIGHT YEAR-OLDSELF

"You are loved by the Creator. Do not shrink to fit the world's definitions of humility. True humility is recognising you are made in His image and walking boldly in that truth. You are enough."