



Driving mobile money innovation and empowering women entrepreneurs in Sudan



Introduction

This narrative tells the story of Rosemary Justin, a resilient entrepreneur from Yei County, South Sudan. It illustrates how Inkomoko's integrated support (combining business training, market linkages, and financial access) is helping Rosemary transform from a street vendor into the Managing Director of a registered company. Her journey reflects the power of entrepreneurship to ignite economic empowerment in one of the world's most fragile contexts.



CHARACTERS FEATURED

01

Rosemary Justin,
entrepreneur from South Sudan

02

Robert Loitte James,
local community member

03

Keji Betty,
Rosemary's niece and household member

04

Pony Rachel Peter,
one of Rosemary's employees

05

Doreen Lugor,
an Investment Manager at Inkomoko

ACT I

FROM SURVIVAL TO START-UP

When conflict erupted in South Sudan in 2016, Rosemary fled to Uganda, leaving behind her banking career and stable life. She returned to South Sudan three years later with her family and settled in Gudele in the outskirts of Juba. There, she faced a harsh reality: no jobs, rising costs, and insecurity.

“I initially struggled, selling mangoes and soap on the streets to survive,” she recalls.

Her turning point came when she noticed foreigners nearby exchanging cash. She quickly recognized an opportunity to offer safer, faster transactions through mobile money, a service still new in South Sudan but with enormous potential for growth. Around this time, Rosemary discovered \$300 in an old bank account. With this seed capital, she launched a small mobile money business from a container.

About South Sudan and mobile money

South Sudan’s financial system is extremely fragile and under-developed. Fewer than 10% of adults have a bank account and banking infrastructure is concentrated in Juba, leaving most of the country underserved. Cash transfers and traditional banking are the norm but are far from ideal: they often require long and risky travel to bank branches, expose people to theft, involve queues and delays, and exclude communities without financial infrastructure.

Mobile money is a basic, phone-based wallet accessible to almost anyone. It offers a safer,

faster alternative to cash and traditional banking. It improves financial inclusion because it does not require a bank account. It supports small businesses by enabling them to receive and send payments instantly across the country, manage cashflows digitally, and easily access credit savings. Mobile money remains quite new in South Sudan: by reducing the need to carry physical cash, it enhances security, expands access, and makes transactions quicker and more reliable – critical in South Sudan’s fragile economy.

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ACT II

FROM STRUGGLE TO STRENGTH

Rosemary first learned about Inkomoko through a loyal customer who regularly used her mobile money services.

Attracted by Inkomoko's low interest rates and practical support, she enrolled in training on Investment Readiness and Bookkeeping.

The training improved the financial skills of Rosemary and some of her employees who also participated. She secured contracts with Inkomoko to manage transport refunds and loan disbursements for its clients, which boosted her daily sales. "Inkomoko's support propelled my business to handle transactions far exceeding my initial operational capital," she says.

However, Rosemary faced many challenges with her start-up: security risks, liquidity shortages and strict withdrawal limits made growing her business very difficult.

Pony, one of Rosemary's employees explained: "When the business operated in Gudele, it experienced break-ins and theft. This was addressed by hiring security personnel and setting up daily bank deposits to avoid keeping cash on the premises overnight. Another issue is market fluctuations; when rates drop sharply, the business incurs losses."

Keji, Rosemary's niece added that Rosemary's mobile money account was once hacked, causing a small financial loss. "She recovered the money by confronting the individual involved and threatening legal action," Keji said.

Rosemary herself highlighted ongoing challenges: "Cash scarcity is a big issue because customers prefer physical cash over mobile money, while banks impose strict withdrawal limits. Direct cash transactions are difficult due to cash scarcity, so we often rely on cross-border transfers (e.g. to Uganda or Kenya) and



market connections to source South Sudanese pounds for loan repayments."

An unexpected challenge came when Rosemary experienced issues with city council business permits and ground rent. "It forced a temporary business closure at one point, and intense stress."

Despite these challenges, Rosemary's resilience and work ethic shone through and her business grew rapidly. She expanded her staff, formalized operations by registering her business, moved to a better location, and diversified into microfinance services. She continues to receive market linkage support and coaching from Inkomoko on business management topics such as fraud prevention and resolving transaction issues.

ACT III

RIPPLES OF CHANGE

Individual transformation

For Rosemary, success is as much about identity as numbers. “I have transitioned from a ‘saleswoman’ to a ‘Managing Director.’ I now delegate tasks and focus on strategy,” she says with pride.



Her confidence soared as she learned new skills and strengthened existing ones: managing large sums, keeping accurate records and planning for growth.

Robert, one of Rosemary’s long-term customers and local entrepreneur, attested: “Rosemary used to struggle with managing large transactions, which frequently caused delays for customers but now she is stable. Her service became noticeably faster and more adaptable, especially when handling bulk money transactions”.

Rosemary said that she found the training on Readiness for Investment particularly useful. “It taught me how to properly invest, focusing not only on timely repayment but also on achieving business growth, which purpose of the loan is for us to grow.”

Today she speaks with conviction: “I am proud of the progress my business is making. Not only is my business thriving, but I am also proud that I am able to provide jobs for others. I am no longer a job seeker; in fact, even if a good opportunity for employment arose, I would decline it. I take pride in being self-sufficient now.”

Her ambition doesn’t stop there. Rosemary has diversified her income by investing in property rental: “I currently own nine rental rooms that generate monthly income, and I have plans for future construction”.

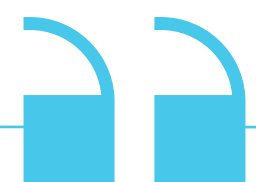
Household impact

Rosemary’s success has reshaped her family’s life in many ways. With her growing income, she has secured quality education for her four children and sponsored her niece’s university studies. “This business has helped my family a lot. I can now afford good schools for my children and to plan for international holidays.”

Her financial stability has allowed her to upgrade her home, support extended family, and pay for her late parents’ medical care. These achievements have strengthened her role as the family’s main female provider and leader. “I have consistently borne the majority of the financial and familial responsibility since I started working,” Rosemary explains. “Despite being the first wife in a polygamous marriage, my co-wives are not employed, which means I primarily shoulder the burden of caring for the children.”



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Community empowerment

Rosemary's impact reaches beyond her own household. Her business has become a source of opportunity and inspiration in her community.

"Rosemary has created significant opportunities for young people, particularly women, by training and employing them in mobile money and transaction services." said Robert.



I personally have gained from Rosemary's business, borrowing money from her to fulfill purchase orders when I lacked sufficient funds.



Pony, who works as Rosemary's accountant, has felt this firsthand. She said: "Working here has significantly impacted my life. Financially, I am much better off. The job has helped me meet my basic needs, and earlier this year I was able to acquire land which I hope to develop in the future. Beyond income, I have gained a lot of knowledge, including through training and by visiting clients in the field."



Reflecting on Rosemary's commitment to others, Pony added: "Rosemary actively invests in training young women, including former volunteers. These individuals started as volunteers, gained knowledge through training, and some are now operating their own money transfer businesses."

This dedication to empowering others has earned Rosemary deep respect in her community. Keji highlighted this broader influence, saying: "She is known for her generosity and compassionate nature, frequently offering educational and other forms of support to those in need. She also actively mentors others in business."

Across the community, Rosemary's efforts have improved people's access to mobile money services, making transactions faster and more reliable. Clients and families using these services for everyday needs, such as paying school fees, are highly satisfied with Rosemary's improved services.

Local entrepreneurs are also benefitting. Robert explained: "I personally have gained from Rosemary's business, borrowing money from her to fulfill purchase orders when I lacked sufficient funds. Rosemary's business has made mobile money and transaction services more convenient and smoother, alleviating previous challenges encountered with other services".

ACT IV

SYSTEMS SHIFT

Rosemary's journey unfolds against the backdrop of one of the world's most fragile financial systems. Entrepreneurs in the region have historically relied on informal savings groups and family loans, while high interest rates and collateral requirements kept formal credit out of reach. Mobile money, introduced over the last decade, has offered a lifeline, but adoption has been extremely slow and uneven, with fewer than 1% of adults in South Sudan reportedly using it. Poor network coverage, liquidity shortages, and documentation barriers have made access difficult, especially for women, refugees, and internally displaced persons.

Inkomoko plays a critical role in this fragile financial landscape, working in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, to help entrepreneurs overcome systemic barriers. Its integrated approach combines training, finance, and advocacy - a model designed to unlock opportunities for those who would otherwise be excluded.

Clients begin with training and digital literacy, learning how to open and manage mobile wallets, send and receive money, and keep digital records. This builds confidence and reduces fears of misuse.

To tackle documentation barriers, Inkomoko partners with UNHCR and local chiefs to validate identities, ensuring displaced populations can access services.

As entrepreneurs adopt mobile money, they start building financial profiles - transaction histories that strengthen their eligibility for future loans.

Finally, through advocacy and partnerships with providers like MTN and banks such as Equity, Inkomoko works to expand service reach and functionality, addressing infrastructure gaps that have long held businesses back.

This holistic approach addresses systemic barriers (documentation, literacy, and infrastructure) while linking entrepreneurs to digital finance tools that enhance security, efficiency, and long-term inclusion.

"South Sudan has one of the lowest rates of financial inclusion in sub-Saharan Africa. Our work is about more than loans; it's about building confidence, overcoming documentation barriers, and creating pathways for entrepreneurs who would otherwise be excluded," says Doreen Lugor, an Investment Manager at Inkomoko.

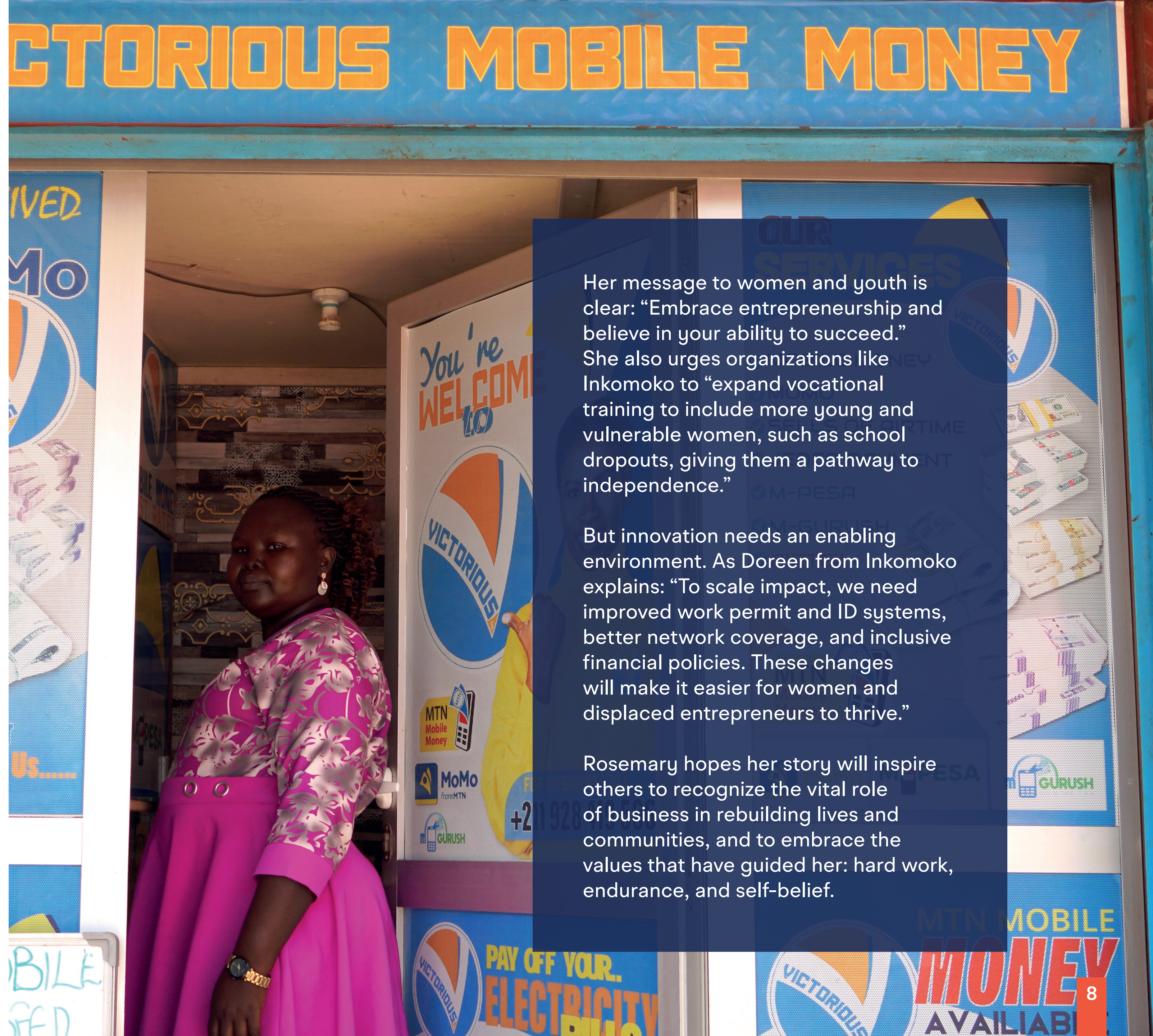
Rosemary's story illustrates the impact. Her mobile money business has helped give her economic independence while reducing her community's reliance on physical cash. Digital wallets allow safer storage of income, privacy in household finances, and better tracking of transactions. "At first, I was hesitant," she admits, "but now I see how mobile money makes everything easier and safer."

At the community level, mobile money has improved liquidity and made transactions faster and more predictable. Traders and customers can pay directly without visiting agents, reducing delays and fostering trust through SMS confirmations. Women's visibility in the marketplace has grown, and savings groups are integrating mobile wallets for accountability. There is a long way to go to, but these changes are gradually making the market more efficient and inclusive, with entrepreneurs at the center of this transformation.

ACT V

BUILDING FORWARD

Rosemary is determined to expand her mobile money business into other states and diversify its services, building on the momentum she has created and advancing what mobile money can achieve in Sudan. For her, growth is not just about scaling her enterprise; it's about widening pathways for women follow in her footsteps.

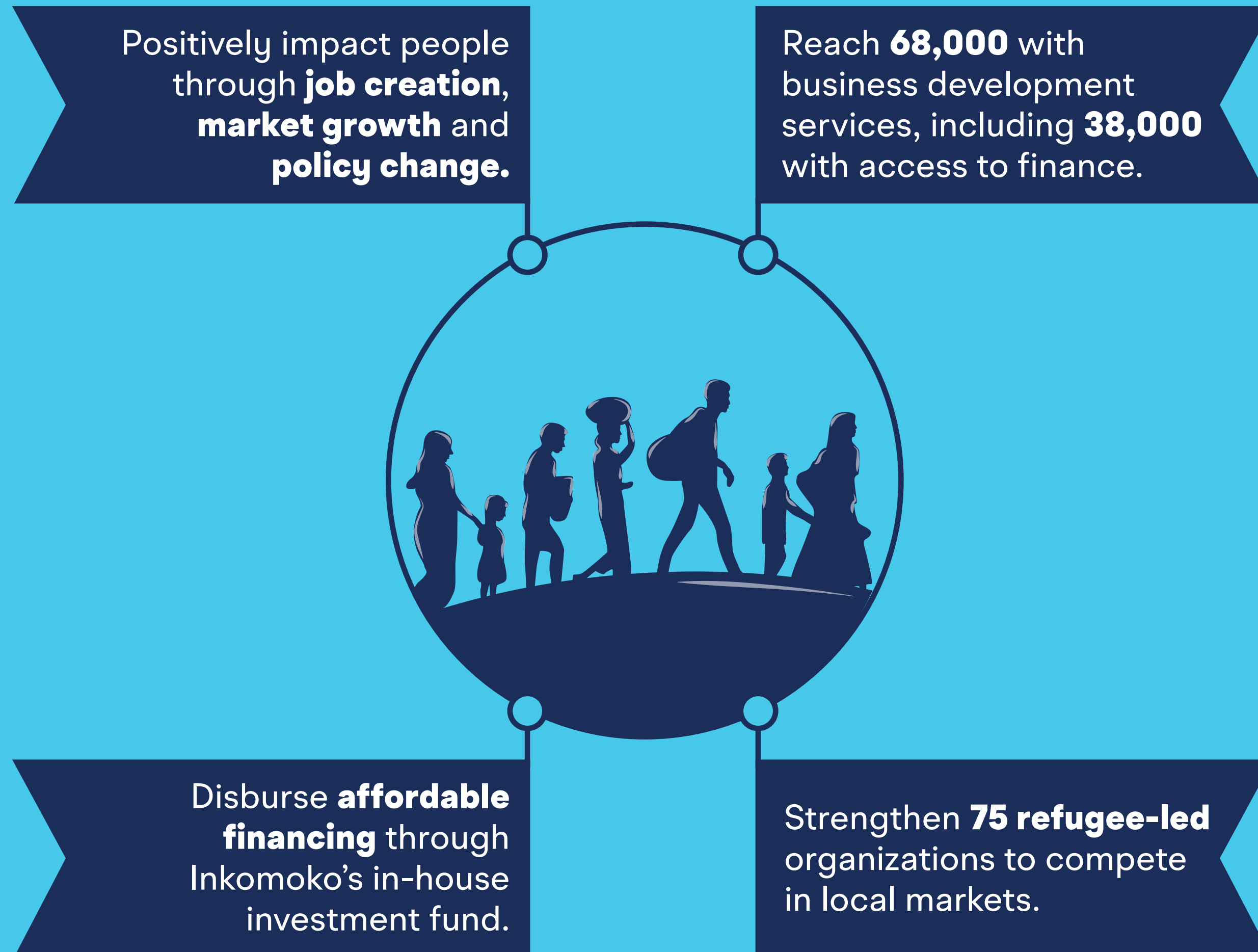


Her message to women and youth is clear: “Embrace entrepreneurship and believe in your ability to succeed.” She also urges organizations like Inkomoko to “expand vocational training to include more young and vulnerable women, such as school dropouts, giving them a pathway to independence.”

But innovation needs an enabling environment. As Doreen from Inkomoko explains: “To scale impact, we need improved work permit and ID systems, better network coverage, and inclusive financial policies. These changes will make it easier for women and displaced entrepreneurs to thrive.”

Rosemary hopes her story will inspire others to recognize the vital role of business in rebuilding lives and communities, and to embrace the values that have guided her: hard work, endurance, and self-belief.

Inkomoko's Private Sector Approach to Economic Development for Refugee-Displaced Populations and Host Communities is an initiative delivered in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation from 2022-27. The program seeks to:



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