

Venture Capitalist: Emiliana Aligaesha

A Tanzanian farmer is leveraging a tiny investment of US foreign aid to ensure the success of early-stage, high-potential start-ups.

US foreign aid works best as a tool in the hands of the right local leaders—those trying to solve their own problems in their own nations and neighborhoods.

Emiliana Aligaesha was a primary school teacher when she became a widow. Though she values education above all, she found her salary wasn't enough put her eight children through university. She began experimenting in agriculture, and found that farming helped her pay the bills better than teaching.



After teaching herself to farm—she now boasts a rich harvest of coffee, bananas, beans and maize—Aligaesha found herself facing a lack of reliable markets, changing weather patterns, and a shortage of farming equipment. Aligaesha joined forces with fellow farmers in her community in Karagwe, Tanzania to make sure they got the best prices for their produce. They formed a successful private company known as Kaderes Peasants Development, from which USAID and the World Food Programme purchase coffee and beans. This partnership with local farmers saves the money and time it might take to bring the same goods from the US, and, more importantly, ensures a market for hardworking and innovative farmers like Aligaesha. These purchases have a multiplier effect – as the group uses their profits to support other farmers with training, access to agricultural tools, and information on markets.

Foreign Aid Fact or Fiction?

Myth: The US spends a significant proportion of the federal budget on foreign aid to poor countries.

Statistic: Foreign aid that's poverty-focused is less than 1 percent of the federal budget.

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Aligaesha owns six cows, operates her own irrigation systems, and also supplies quality seedlings to other villagers. Even though she has had little formal agricultural training, Aligaesha has become a kind of researcher in the village, testing out new agricultural techniques for others to follow and encouraging other women to be more involved in agriculture.

“My mother told me, ‘If one goes to the farm and finds weeds choking the banana trees, then harvests a banana and proceeds with cooking, one should consider herself a thief.’ I have always remembered this principle,” Aligaesha says.

In other words, any farmer worth their salt in Tanzania ensures that their banana trees were well-tended, free from weeds, showing their skills and the pride they have in their craft and their livelihoods. You do not take from the land, unless you have upheld your responsibility to it. Aligaesha and her fellow community members know this principle well.

In recent years, the US government launched policy reforms that make US foreign aid more accountable to you, US taxpayers, and local leaders like Emiliana Aligaesha.

Aid works best when it supports local actors to take action and change the circumstances which place or keep them or their fellow citizens in poverty. Supporting effective aid now reduces the need for more aid later.

That’s why Oxfam America is working to deepen the US government’s efforts to making aid more effective.

Tell Congress: Don't cut aid. Keep the US in the corner of people like Emiliana Aligaesha.

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