

# SUCCESS STORY

## The Story Behind the Face of the Trade Hub

### Women's career advancement and skill-building supported by the USAID Trade Hub



Photo: Southern Africa Trade Hub

*Women's formal labor force participation is generally lower than men's at all stages of the life cycle worldwide. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the female labor force participation rate is 62% compared to 80% for men. Within the Southern Africa region, the service sector accounts for up to 70% of women's employment. Vertical segregation, in which women and men are employed at different levels, grades or positions within the same occupation, exists in almost all occupations, with women occupying the lower end of the spectrum. (United Nations, 2010)*

From cleaner to receptionist to star-award recipient, Joyce Madimabe's journey at the Trade Hub reads like a workplace-Cinderella tale for any woman who has ever felt limited by her lack of education or professional skills. Instead of a prince, Joyce relied on her own personal drive and desire to learn. In place of a fairy godmother, Joyce had a cadre of female Trade Hub employees as mentors.

Joyce's father passed away when she was only eight. As the fourth child in a family of six, money to pay for school fees was hard to come by. Joyce was forced to leave school after ninth grade, which was extremely painful. Limited education meant limited career options. For several years, Joyce sold fat cakes on the street to make extra money.

In March 2011, Joyce was hired by the USAID Southern Africa Trade Hub as a cleaner. A few months later, she was promoted to receptionist. When Joyce was first told of her promotion, she was nervous. "But then I told myself, *I can do it*. I realized they saw potential in me," says Joyce. She had one condition: that she be given the opportunity to learn new skills continually in her new role.

Since then, many staff members at the Trade Hub have served as mentors to Joyce. Through informal skill-building sessions with a number of female employees, Joyce has learned a range of new skills such as managing expense reports and keeping inventory. According to some of her mentors, Joyce has proven to be a fast learner and quickly masters tasks. She has also sought to further her education by taking secretarial, administrative, and business courses.

In January 2013, Joyce received the first-ever Trade Hub Star Award. According to the Hub's Chief of Party, John James, the award recognizes that "passionate people make the biggest difference between success and mediocrity in the development work we do." To Joyce, who is now widely regarded as the face of the Trade Hub, the award meant that her hard work was recognized and the entire project supports her.

Asked what advice she has for other women, Joyce advised women to not feel limited by their education and background: "Learn from others. It really works." Intent on practicing what she preaches, Joyce now acts as an informal mentor for her colleagues at the Hub and passes on the training she has received.