

Stephen Mwapesile, 38.

Working at Neema meant I could stay with my wife and get married. Both her family and my family didn't want me to be with her before I had a job. To marry you have to be in a good position financially, which I wasn't and both our families could see I wasn't going to be able to provide for her. Her father told me I could not marry her. But when Neema appeared and I joined as one of its first workers, their views changed, because they saw I could earn a good living, and we were allowed to marry soon afterwards.

I was thrilled and very excited. I had earned respect from my family, which felt like winning a massive victory. Before, they had practically despised me for the burden I was on them and my home life was really unhappy. I felt isolated and constantly left out because of my disability. I never had enough power in my leg or arm to do the things other youngsters did, because of polio and growing up I felt like a waste of space, it was so difficult to get employment.

Neema has helped me integrate into society and has improved my life hugely. It came along all of a sudden and just at the right moment for me too. I started making paper, then moved onto necklaces, bracelets and the solar panel workshop. It was much more profitable than my previous job selling vegetables and stamps. I learned so many new skills and I was able to be among other workers in society. I think it's shown both the people and the government our talents.

I stayed in the workshop for two years before becoming an out-worker. I made the decision to do so because I was still struggling to support my family and this meant I could sell other items besides the jewellery I was making. I have two children to support, plus my wife and mother and father and her parents. I'm now selling jewellery plus sweets, books and Neema micro-solar panels on a stall in town as well as making jewellery for Neema and I'm getting good money.

I'm saving up so I can buy some farming equipment one day to cultivate crops and I'd also love to build my own house.