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Empowering Rwandans

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." - Lao Tzu

For the one hundred participants of the Business for Life training held in Rwanda during the months of August and September, the opportunity to take this first step in building a business has transformed many of the individuals and their families. This training, sponsored by Compassion International Rwanda, had participants from four villages in the Kamonyi district of Rwanda and aimed to provide them with key business skills that they could use to start their own business ventures.

Following the training and having worked on their businesses for one to two months, the participants were excited to share their business success stories during the follow-up visits in November. Here are a few of their stories:

Festus had been working as a casual laborer before the training. With lessons from Business for Life, he was able to see that there was a business opportunity of selling firewood in the village. With part of his savings he invested RWF 30,000 worth of firewood and sold his first stock for RWF 50,000 making a profit of RWF 20,000. Lessons of cashflow management helped him reinvest the money into the business. He has additional business plans to sell vegetables and then eventually to open a retail shop.

Vestine has been helping her husband in his business selling motorcycle parts. From the time of the training, she has begun her own business where she buys goats and sells them to butcheries in the shopping center. She is now able to buy and sell two goats per week making a profit of RWF 2,000. Lessons from the Business for Life sessions have also helped with their family business where, with more

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promotion and recordkeeping they have seen an increase in clients and sales over the first month.

Mariana wanted to start selling tomatoes after the training. She applied the lessons on market research and opportunities and realized that the tomato market had too much competition so would have poor returns for her. She decided to sell sweet potatoes and avocados instead. Profits from this are helping the family to pay the labor costs in building their family home. The business she began, thanks to the Business For Life training, will help her family finish their new house earlier than they initially had thought they would be able to do.



These, among many similar stories of businesses that began following the Business for Life training, reflect the first step that is bearing fruit for the participants.

The feedback about what key lessons they learned and the difference it made in their lives included:

That one can start a business with less capital than they had always believed. Many could have gotten into business much earlier but thought they could not afford to. With the RWF 3,000 capital they used for the class money-making activity they learned to start small and grow steadily.

They got the courage to start a business. Managing the first month of business and keeping records that showed growth built self-confidence. This demystified what 'Business' is for many of the participants.

A better understanding that

there is a difference between revenue and profit has helped them to manage cashflow. They now have money to restock their products.

Lessons on recordkeeping, customer care, break-even point and understanding competition made running the business easier. They can now see growth in sales and profit.

For many of the participants, 'Business' was not something they ever thought they could do successfully. The Business for Life training opened new possibilities and opportunities that will have a positive impact on their lives and the lives of their family members for a long time into the future.



By Steve G. Muthia, Business For Life Board member

Follow up Mentoring



Benjamin of Mara Rianta began an agrovet business after the training, but due to stiff competition decided to open a shop in the local village. He buys his goods from a wholesaler in the nearest town, which is 3 hours by road. Businesses in Mara Rianta are predominantly owned and run by Somalis, but due to the Business For Life Training, many Masai in the local

community have opened businesses providing healthy competition in the market.



Zabandora (pictured in striped shirt above) heads a group of farmers who have heeded the Rwandan government's call to embrace farming activities. He and other class members have come together to engage in agribusiness. They are taking advantage of their newly learned entrepreneurship skills to make food security sustainable through profitable agribusinesses. In addition to agribusiness, Zabandora and his team each have their own businesses as well, such as selling sorghum and a local drink made from sorghum called "bushera".



Emily, though employed as a teacher, has opened a small restaurant in Mara Rianta as a result of the skills learned on a Business For Life training last year. Teachers earn small salaries in Kenya, and often go unpaid for periods when the government is short on cash or when the teachers are striking. So to have a business on the side provides greater financial security for her and her family.

Emily has received advice from her fellow class members on how to win more customers. She is hoping to do just that this holiday season!

By Joshua Mwita, Business For Life Facilitator

How You Can Be Involved

Please consider a donation towards our 2017 Trainings!

Because the poor cannot afford to pay for this kind of training, we rely heavily on donor funding and community-based partnerships in order to operate this program.

Each Business For Life Training in Kenya requires approximately \$8000. This amount covers the costs for the training and follow-up of 20-25 learners. Courses outside of Kenya incur additional costs.

Courses thus far have been funded by a variety of organizations including US AID, Greater Cincinnati Foundation, The Mission Society, Compassion Kenya, Compassion Rwanda, The 410 Bridge International, Samaritan's Purse, Hope Alive, Freely in Hope, SIM, Empower Africa, World Vision Rwanda, Comza, Servant Partners, Rehema House, and Sentinel Mara Camp, as well as a number of churches and individuals.

We are looking to expand our network of donors as the demand for the course grows. Donations in US dollars can be sent to Empowering Lives International, P.O. Box 67, Upland, CA 91785-0067 and demarcated for the Business For Life Training. To make a tax-deductible contribution on line using your credit card, visit www.empoweringlives.org, click on DONATE, select Training and Development and find "Business For Life" in the drop down menu.

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