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## Reflections on Business in Africa

by Wendy Twycross

In 2001, a book called ***African Friends and Money Matters***, by David Maranz was published. In it Maranz sought to explain

the frustrations regarding money that both Westerners and Africans experience when working with each other. Each has different values and practices with regard to the use and management of money and other resources. Of course, Africa doesn't have a single culture, and is in fact a continent made up of hundreds if not thousands of different cultures from North, South, East and West as well as from within each specific country or region. However, there are many similarities and commonalities that lead to the generalizations made by Maranz. Taking this into consideration as well as the awareness that culture is dynamic and that even since 2001 there have been significant cultural changes, there are certain conclusions we can draw about the cultural obstacles many Africans face when starting a business.

One example is that precision in accounting is avoided in African cultures as it shows a lack of generosity. Related to this is the "one pocket" system where business and personal funds are mixed. In contrast to this, the Business For Life training includes treating one's business as a separate entity, and keeping accurate records of income, expenditures and stock.

There is also a misperception that selling on credit helps to win over customers. But because many customers do not repay their debts and subsequently hide from their creditors, selling on credit results in losing customers rather than gaining them.

These differences in values create many misunderstandings and conflict, but also have been a hindrance to profitability in business for many Africans. Business For Life is committed to implementing business training through African facilitators who have overcome these obstacles and are running profitable businesses. They are doing so in ways that both challenge some of the cultural norms relating to business and money, while at the same time being truly African in every other way.





## Comments from Masai Women

*(upon receiving their Certificate of Competence at the conclusion of the follow up activities)*

*“Through the proceeds of my business I was able to purchase a solar pack for my house. So now we have light and the ability to charge our cell phones.”*

*“I am building a house with the money I am making in my business.”*

*“As my business has grown, I’m now able to move from selling in the open air to selling from a shop that I am renting. So my business is no longer hindered by rain.”*

*“As a result of my business, I am always able to pay the school fees for my children. They are never sent home due to lack of school fees.”*

*“My family is now eating well every day.”*

*“I’m always excited to wake up in the morning. My business motivates me and gives me purpose.”*

*“I am a milk vendor and used to buy milk from others in order to sell it. Now I have my own cow and can supply the milk for my business.”*

*“I don’t need a loan to expand my business. Through farming maize and savings I can fund my own expansion.”*

*“My child has finished school.”*



Peter Twycross addresses the group with trainer Joshua Mwita translating



Irene, wife of local government official, issues Certificates of Competence



Trainer, Robi Damaris speaks to the class leaders.



Left to Right, Course organizer Mike, Trainers Mwita, Robi and Janet



# Courses Update

## Empowering Lives Children's Home Graduates

Students started streaming in to the Ukweli Training and Development Centre at 4pm on Aug 26<sup>th</sup> for the first round of the Financial Understanding Board Game.

With 2 more rounds of the board game on Monday, the students gained confidence in their business decision making skills and became more confident in their ability to keep a cashbook as well as filling out a monthly income and expenditure statement.

Trainer/Facilitator Dennis Kurgat remarked, "I think they are now even more equipped for business ventures and understanding the flow of operations."



## Nairobi Course: Consolata's Story



At 58 years old, **Consolata Omuke** was one of the oldest learners in the Nairobi Business For Life course held earlier this year. She was in business for over 20 years before she signed up for the training.

A mother of 5, Consolata has been trading in secondhand clothes, 'mtumba' in Kiswahili. To date she still does the same business. She was widowed in 2003 and has since raised her family and managed to stay afloat through the 'mtumba' trading business.

Consolata's business is based in Toi Market, one of the biggest open-air markets in Nairobi. In her stall she specializes in selling, children's and women's wear. One of her biggest challenges is competition because all the secondhand clothes businesses are in a particular section of the market selling similar products. She plans to meet this challenge by superior presentation and customer service.

From the training Consolata learned record keeping which has helped her to track sales and expenses. She is also focused on growing her business constantly and steadily.



## How You Can Be Involved

***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, 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 online using your credit card, visit [www.empoweringlives.org](http://www.empoweringlives.org), click on DONATE, select Training and Development and find "Business For Life" in the drop down menu.

*Since your gifts are tax-deductible all funds contributed to ELI are inherently under the control of the board of directors to improve and empower the lives of people living in poverty.*

Community Development organizations working in Africa interested in exploring a partnership with us, may call us at +254 735 479152, or +254 721 179061 or email us at [businessforlife@empoweringlives.org](mailto:businessforlife@empoweringlives.org).



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