



**Microsoft Unlimited Potential  
Case Study: Unlocking Human  
Potential in Nairobi's Eastlands Slums**



## Unlocking Human Potential in Nairobi's Eastlands Slums

*"Of the 9 million people working in Kenya, 7.2 million work in the informal sector — people who create their own employment outside of the official business economy. Many of these people are in survival mode, earning a maximum of \$500 per month to feed and clothe their family."*

—Andrew Olea  
Director, Informal Sector  
Business Institute

Home to about 1.6 million people, the Eastlands of Nairobi is an expanse of housing estates and corrugated steel rooftops. It is the most populous, and among the poorest, of the city's four sections. It is also a place where enterprise abounds.

Because so few traditional jobs are available to Eastlands residents—a large proportion of whom have not completed secondary education—they pursue all manner of commerce to earn income and support their families, from building furniture to selling food, sundries, or crafts.

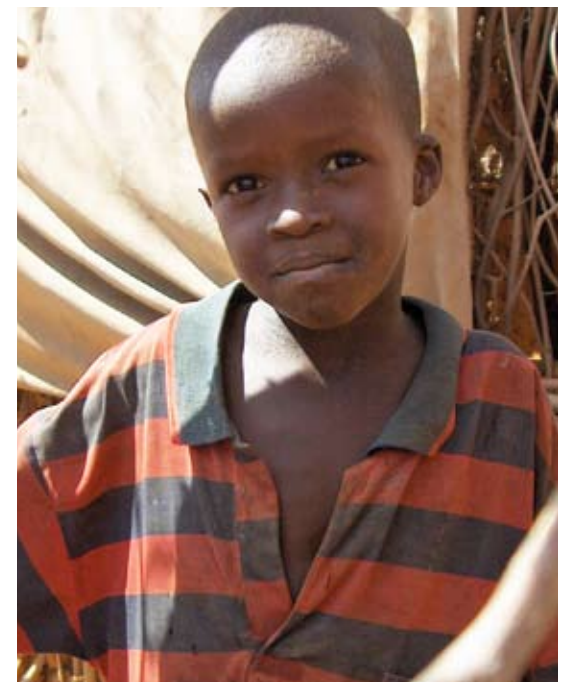
This cash-based economy in Kenya—*jua kali* in Swahili, which means "working under the sun"—is referred to as the informal sector and supports about four-fifths of the country's working population.

According to Andrew Olea, director of the Informal Sector Business Institute (ISBI), formal-sector employment is actually shrinking by about 10,000 jobs per year, while the informal sector is expanding to accommodate the growing population.

"Of the 9 million people working in Kenya, 7.2 million work in the informal sector," Olea said. "Many of these people are in survival mode, earning \$500 per month at most to feed and clothe themselves and their family."

Recognising the need for fundamental business skills among this huge segment of Kenya's working population, ISBI was formed to support micro-entrepreneurs—primarily those who have been self-employed for a period of time and who are eager to expand their opportunities.

In 2006, Microsoft entered into a partnership with ISBI to add computing skills to ISBI's training programme. As part of its Unlimited Potential initiative, Microsoft has contributed software, teacher training, and its Unlimited Potential curriculum to ISBI. One of ISBI's goals is to help bring informal-sector businesses into the formal sector as stable, registered companies that are better able to grow.



## Supporting Micro-Entrepreneurs

Emmanuel Mbithi Musyoki is an ISBI graduate who lives and works in the Lumumba/ Jericho estate in the Eastlands. A thoughtful, enterprising man, he tutors local primary and secondary school children, offers writing and typesetting services, and is chairman of the Eastlands Environmental Youth Group, an organisation that employs young people to haul away residents' garbage for a small monthly fee.

*"The problem we have is idle hands, not idle minds. Young people don't have jobs or any way of earning money, and the source of their frustration comes from seeing more affluent people on the economic ladder, with no opportunity for themselves."*

—Emmanuel Mbithi Musyoki  
Chairman, Eastlands  
Environmental Youth Group



Within six months of joining the Eastlands Environmental Youth Group in 1998, he took over the operation, which was on the brink of collapse, and through door-to-door marketing turned the business completely around. Today it serves about 5,000 customers. Meanwhile, he began selling plastic rubbish bags, which today generates twice as much income as garbage collection.

In 2006, when Emmanuel learned from a friend about a business course that was being offered by ISBI, he was enthusiastic. In addition to the basic accounting, management, marketing, and business English modules of the training, the ISBI programme included 50 hours of computer training.

"At the time, I was already using a computer but I didn't use all of the software," Emmanuel said. "When I learned about Microsoft Excel, a whole new world opened up to me. I have been using it to organise my records, do calculations, and compile and store my business information."

After completing the course and applying his record-keeping and analysis skills to his plastic bag business, Emmanuel was able to increase his sales by 35 percent to 50,000 shillings per month.

## Cultivating Opportunity for the Least Fortunate

Not everyone has the drive or the educational advantage that Emmanuel has (he holds a certificate in French and is a trained writer). Chronic unemployment and poverty weigh heavily on the local population, as do the recent outbreaks of political unrest.

However, Emmanuel doesn't see politics as the underlying cause. "The problem we have is idle hands, not idle minds. Young people don't have jobs or any way of earning money, and the source of their frustration comes from seeing more affluent people on the economic ladder, with no opportunity for themselves."

ISBI and Microsoft are therefore working together to create a new training curriculum that helps people learn how to manage their business in times of extreme change—and to secure funding to help people rebuild their businesses following the political unrest. Over time, it is hoped that informal-sector businesses will grow and formalise as stable, profitable employers for the long term.

### **Fast Facts**

**Partner:** Informal Sector Business Institute

**Country:** Kenya

**Website:** [www.eitkenya.org](http://www.eitkenya.org)

### **Partner Profile**

The Informal Sector Business Institute (ISBI) is a grassroots business organisation (GBO) sponsored by Educational Initiatives Trust, a public charitable trust incorporated in Kenya.

With the collaboration of Strathmore University and the sponsorship of the Institut zur Cooperation bei Entwicklungs-Projekten (ICEP), an Austrian NGO, ISBI has prepared and run courses for *jua kali* artisans and micro-entrepreneurs since February 2004. Over 300 people have benefitted from these courses. A programme for mentoring using volunteer business mentors from Strathmore University alumni has also been established.

***Microsoft***<sup>®</sup>