

Somo Newsletter: January 2016


1 message

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Somo Newsletter

January 2016



Dear Somo Partners,

The last few months have been exciting ones for the Somo Project, and we are excited to update you on the progress of the organization and our entrepreneurs!



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Co-working Space

The Somo co-working space is up and running! This past July, we purchased a shipping container that we had delivered to Kibera and converted into a facility. A converted shipping container creates a facility that is both very secure and movable. Instead of each of our entrepreneurs having separate office space, we have designed a facility for them to all work. This has given our team an important community atmosphere in which they can collaborate and brainstorm together—which we believe are key in fostering partnership and entrepreneurship. Our entrepreneurs look to each other for help and inspiration as they build their businesses. Furthermore, it gives our team a convenient space to hold meetings and access reliable, high-speed Internet.

We have now provided Chrome laptops to all of our entrepreneurs, and are in the process of setting up high speed Internet through a partnership with Argon Telecom. Argon is a UK-based company that provides high speed Internet to under-served communities. We are participating in their pilot program.



Entrepreneur Highlight: Antony Kiema
ChicBanda



Antony started ChicBanda to sell chickens and teach poultry farming in his community. He currently works with two schools to teach them how to include poultry farming in their curricula. In exchange, these schools buy the organic feed he makes. By teaching schools how to rear chickens, Antony gives them both a way to introduce protein into students’ diets and a stream of revenue to support the school.

Antony’s business is thriving, and in December alone he sold 300 kgs (over 650 pounds!) of chicken, making about \$1,000 in revenue. He is also recycling the chicken droppings and selling it as fertilizer, and growing aloe plants that he uses as a medicine for the chickens.



ChicBanda is a family enterprise, as both Antony’s mother, Jane, and brother, Victor, are key to the start-up’s success. They are extremely thoughtful and innovative in creating ancillary revenue streams from a variety of different sources. ChicBanda is also a valued contributor to the community, hiring local labor and fostering a strong community presence.

Antony recently launched his Facebook page, with the goal of teaching healthy chicken rearing. Check it out at <https://www.facebook.com/ChickBanda>.

Next Class

We are looking to launch a new class of entrepreneurs in July of 2016. One of our focus areas is to identify high potential women and youth, populations that are often overlooked and for whom business opportunities are scarce. While our class will include a range of demographics, we have implemented an outreach program to identify women and youth entrepreneurs in our target communities, working directly with secondary schools, youth groups and womens' groups.

Furthermore, while Somo’s pilot was focused on the Kibera slum, going forward we will be doing outreach in the other informal settlements of Nairobi. We plan to always keep our classes small (up to 10 people) and will continue to be very selective in our application process. So far we have received 61 applications.



Investor Training

During January, two Somo investors, who are entrepreneurs themselves, spent time with the Somo team in Nairobi. Liz Beinfield and Jason Chaifetz shared stories of their own start-up journeys with the Somo entrepreneurs, and their successes and failures were both humbling and inspiring. We are looking forward to welcoming other local and international entrepreneurs who are interested in sharing their stories with the Somo entrepreneurs.



Market Advisory Network

During our pilot program, each of our six entrepreneurs was paired with a personal mentor from the UC Berkeley Haas or Columbia Business School. While this mentorship program looked great on paper, the program was difficult to implement because of issues with Internet connectivity and general technology constraints. We switched over to a stipend system to facilitate mobile phone calls (at no cost to the entrepreneurs) -- however, while this helped with communication, we have found that not all of our entrepreneurs need personalized attention each month.

Going forward, we will be developing a market advisory network that our entrepreneurs can tap into when they need individualized help. The network will offer areas of expertise such as marketing, finance and management, and will be launched with our next class to help entrepreneurs formulate their ideas and get started implementing their businesses.

Impact Investing/ Unleashed

We are excited to announce the start of a partnership with Unleashed -- a social impact investment group at Notre Dame University. Together, we are in process of creating a system of tracking social metrics to measure the impact of each of the businesses we support. One example is looking at how improved nutrition in schools (provided by Ritras Grocery) impacts school attendance, learning outcomes, and health. With health, for example, Ritras is collecting students' height and weight charts over interval periods throughout the course of the meal program. We will do an impact evaluation to measure the difference in height/weight changes of children in the Ritras schools vs. children in other Kibera schools.

We will be working with youth groups around Kibera to collect the data for each business and using software to aggregate and analyze data. Unleashed has assigned a group of six to compile the data collected for each business.



Big Ideas@ Berkeley's Video Project

This past fall, we were invited to participate in Big Ideas @Berkeley's 10th anniversary celebration by making a video about the Somo Project. Check it out on their website at <http://bigideas.berkeley.edu/2015/12/21/the-somo-project-learning-lessons-in-kibera/>

News & Updates

The Somo Project: Learning Lessons in Kibera

Dec 21, 2015

Blum Center News




Business Update

As of December 31, 2015 Somo portfolio companies generated over \$10,493 of revenue since May 2015. In the month of December alone, Somo companies generated \$4,579 in revenue, representing an increase of 286% since June of 2015!! While we are proud of the early results, we are just getting started and look forward to updating you on our progress (the ups and downs) in our next newsletter and in person.

Should you be coming through the Bay area or Nairobi, please let us know-- we'd love to hear from you!

Sincerely,
Amelia, George and Joshwa

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