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Somo Newsletter: August 2015


1 message

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Somo Newsletter
August 2015



Dear Somo Partners,

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

- In this issue:**
 - Big Ideas@Berkeley
 - Our Entrepreneurs
 - Co-Working Facility
 - GES 2015
 - Going Forward
 - Video Project
 - Crowdfunding



The Somo team in Kibera

Big Ideas@Berkeley

We were thrilled to receive our first institutional support this past spring with a grant from UC Berkeley. We won first prize in Berkeley’s Big Ideas social innovation competition, and in the process gained a long-term oriented partner who we believe will help us for years to come, both financially and strategically. Big Ideas focuses on supporting innovative and high-impact organizations aimed at solving problems that matter to this generation.



Our Entrepreneurs

We are extremely proud of the progress our entrepreneurs have made with their social enterprises. Each one is working hard to bring social change to their community. Some highlights:

Rita (Founder of Ritra’s Grocery) signed contracts with two Kibera schools on July 15th, Changing Times School and KAG Olympic Academy. Most schools in



Stanley has launched his application process for Stantech. Youth in Kibera will now be able to learn high-level computer programming languages in their own community. The training will open up highly skilled and high paying potential work opportunities to Kibera youth through platforms like Elance, Upwork, and iWriter.

Stanley will be using the [codeacademy.com](https://codecademy.com) platform to help model his curriculum. To get started, The Somo Project has provided Stanley with ChromeBook laptops and we are in the process of building out our physical container space, which will serve as a Kibera tech center and workshop for Stantech. We are excited to work with Stantech to bring education change and job opportunities to Kibera.

Kibera have very basic food programs that are heavily carbohydrate-based. Ritra's is offering schools alternative nutritious foods at competitive prices to existing meal programs.

Ritra's indigenous vegetables are high in protein, iron and vitamins, and will contribute to the health and the learning potential of the children in these schools.

These partnerships have dramatically increased Ritra's customer base (the two schools serve over 800 kids together!), and we believe Rita can partner with many more schools in Kibera over the coming years.



Carol has founded Weecare to educate young mothers on the importance of early childhood education, a relatively new concept in Kibera. She has met with eight different women's groups to discuss the importance of early childhood education, with a focus on reading to children while balancing busy schedules.

As of August, Carol is looking after twelve children (up from seven at the beginning of July). She has partnered with one young mother's group to hold regular information sessions about education, nutrition and care of young children. We believe Carol has a significant opportunity to build a large and important early childhood center in Kibera and are excited to be partnered with her.



Somo's Co-Working Facility

We officially broke ground on our container space in Kibera this July. We signed a 15-year land lease in the Olympic Area, among the densest in terms of commercial activity and foot traffic. Think of Olympic as the equivalent of Main Street, bustling with commercial activity and we believe a great location for our first physical office space. The facility will host Stantech and KCEO, and serve as co-working space for Somo entrepreneurs to access the Internet and connect with each other.

We purchased a high-cubed 40-foot shipping container, and built it out with doors, windows and partitions. The next phase is painting and electrical wiring. By using a shipping container, the facility is both very secure and movable—both important qualities for a facility in Kibera.



Global Entrepreneurship Summit

The Somo Project was invited to attend GES 2015 in Nairobi in late July. GES 2015 brought together entrepreneurs and investors from all over the world to collaborate on entrepreneurship in Africa.

The Summit was started in 2009 by President Obama. This year was the seventh annual gathering of entrepreneurs, business leaders, mentors, and high-level government officials, and a significant event for Kenya and U.S. relations, as it was the first time in history that a sitting U.S. president visited Kenya. The energy in Nairobi was electric, as the local population treated it like a homecoming for President Obama.

During GES, we had an opportunity to connect with investors and entrepreneurs building Africa-focused enterprises. It was exciting to learn about the ideas and dreams many of these entrepreneurs have in building companies and technologies that will undoubtedly transform the African continent over the decades to come. Events like GES help put Somo on the map, and it was a privilege to be one of the Nairobi-based organizations invited to participate.



Going Forward

We knew when we set out to build Somo that it would be a constant learning process as we developed the organization. One of our focus areas will be to specifically look to identify high potential women and youth in informal settlements. We want to reach the populations that are often overlooked and for whom business opportunities are scarce.



Over the next two months, we will be looking to reach fifteen high schools in Kibera to help young potential entrepreneurs begin to think about how they can change their own communities. While 15 through 18 seems young to start a business, research and our own experiences confirm that this age demographic is the most creative and motivated to change the world around them.

We will also be expanding our Mentorship program. We have made some changes to facilitate communications between mentors and entrepreneurs, and will be building an expert network for our entrepreneurs to tap into. Entrepreneurs will be offered either a personalized mentor and/or can use the Somo expert network to leverage specific expertise relevant to their business.

Video Project

We have been invited to participate in a video project at UC Berkeley, and were given filming equipment to capture our entrepreneurs in action. A team at Berkeley will help with editing and creating a video about Somo's entrepreneurs from the extensive filming we did this summer. Stay tuned for a release this fall, to be presented through the Blum Center at Berkeley.






Crowdfunding Berkeley

We have been invited to participate in a Crowdfunding platform run through UC Berkeley. Through the Crowdfunding initiative, we will be a featured organization through a mailing that will be sent to the UC Berkeley student base and alumni network. The campaign will start on September 11th. Our goal is to raise \$10,000. This a big opportunity for us to grow our network of supporters. We hope you can consider supporting the campaign!



Sincerely,
Amelia, George and Joshwa

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