

**Mentorship in Slum Entrepreneurship: A study on the factors that make experiential learning the most viable option in training entrepreneurs in Dandora, Kenya**

Objectives

Why do small businesses fail in developing countries? The World Bank, non-governmental organizations and national governments have spent over \$9 billion from 2002 to 2012 in an attempt to provide skills training, among other forms of assistance, to aspiring entrepreneurs in developing countries. This training includes workshops in bookkeeping, economic evaluations, marketing and many other essential business skills. Notre Dame economists Kevin Donovan, Terence Johnson and Wyatt Brooks conducted a randomized control trial comparing the performance of entrepreneurs who attended month-long skills training workshops by university professors to those who received mentorship (i.e. the businesswomen were partnered up with other entrepreneurs in the same region who had been successful for a longer period of time). The results showed that business owners who were in the mentorship program performed almost twice as well as those who only received skills training. The researchers analyzed the results using various quantitative tools and came up with different hypotheses to why mentorship would be more successful.

My objective was to conduct in-depth interviews with a subset of mentorship pairs sampled from the participants in the study in order to gauge the factors that contribute to the success of mentor-mentee relationships. Results of the study had showed that there was variation in performance among all those who received mentorship. Therefore, I sought to evaluate the differences that existed within the mentorship groups, with a special focus on the type of skills that the mentors were imparting on the mentees, the specific information that mentors

transmitted to mentees and whether and how the mentor-mentee relationship resulted in higher self-esteem for the mentees. Ultimately, I wanted to establish the key factors that led to successful mentorship pairings. On the flip side, I wanted to establish the reasons why classical training is not as effective as mentorship. This would enable me to form a good picture on how an effective program can be designed to encompass both training and mentorship.

To achieve this end, I conducted 44 in-depth interviews and three focus groups in the time I was in Dandora. These interviews included women who were mentors, mentees and participants in the class training.

### Findings

The interviews I conducted provided fascinating insight to how mentorship goes a long way to help young business owners improve their standing. Most of the mentees I spoke with talked of how important it was for them to learn by observation. Hence, the mentors having them over at their businesses very frequently was a fruitful exercise. The mentors also taught them the best practices in product marketing, managing debt effectively and in some cases, showed them where to purchase goods at lower prices. Some of the mentors went out of their way to ensure that their mentees' business was thriving. For instance, I heard of a mentor who ran her mentee's shop when the latter was hospitalized for two weeks and did not have anyone to stand in for her. Most talked of the lifelong friendships they had established with the people whom they were partnered up with - extending beyond business to being more like family. Some of the mentors spoke about how grateful they were to be able to have a chance to impart their wisdom and knowledge on the younger generation, or "daughters", as they described the mentees. On the other hand, most of the people who were involved in the classical training program were very grateful for the chance to be taught some skills that most of them did not possess before.

While very reluctant to speak negatively about the program at the onset, I was able to prod most of them into telling me how they thought the classes could be structured to be more effective. Because the participants attended four classes within one month, the effect of the teachings tend to wear off after a while, and some of them reverted to their old practices that did not result in profits. Also, there appears to be a significant difference between having one-on-one interactions with a mentor as opposed to a 15-1 ratio in a class where one may be too uncomfortable to ask questions or receive personal attention.

### Challenges

As a Kenyan who grew up in a middle-class family with minimal interaction with people like the ones in Dandora, it was jarring to hear the stories of financial difficulties and strain. Most of the women I spoke to faced many challenges, ranging from physical abuse by their spouses to violence by the unemployed youth who robbed them of their hard-earned profits. I struggled to think of ways that I could impact their lives more positively. Listening to their stories, I realized how minimal but well-structured efforts can have massive positive impacts on the lives of many people in the margins of the society.

Another issue while I was in Kenya was the political unrest. With the general elections fast approaching, there was an uptick in the negative rhetoric and attempts by political parties to realign the electoral bodies to ensure that the elections were conducted in a free and fair manner. This included the protests each Monday to have the electoral body removed. These protests discouraged business people from going into the city and sometimes ended in destruction of the business for some of the people who I had to interview. It also disrupted the transportation system leading to many of the taxis hiking up their prices. Nevertheless, this helped me

understand some of the deep institutional problems that many of my compatriots face in their day to day lives.

Another challenge was the fact that most of the participants were very unwilling to speak of the negative experiences they had with their mentors or in the class sessions. From personal experience, I understood that Kenyans are very courteous and are less likely to say something negative about someone while in the presence of a complete stranger. Thus it forced me to look for creative ways to make the people trust me enough so as to speak about experiences that they did not enjoy or find appealing.

### Future Plans

My research findings will be used for my minor in International Development Studies capstone this fall semester. I also plan on presenting my findings at the 2017 Notre Dame Kellogg Institute Human Development Conference and seeking other opportunities to share my findings; for example, Syracuse University's Africa Business and Entrepreneurship Conference.

In addition, I intend to submit my capstone for consideration to Notre Dame's Journal for Undergraduate Research. Furthermore, my plan to identify the mechanism that makes mentoring more successfully than other interventions in the context of Dandora will go a long way to inform the mostly quantitative project done by professors Kevin Donovan, Wyatt Brooks and Terrence Johnson.

The opportunity to go back to Kenya this summer also gave me the chance to reflect on my Notre Dame education and how I hope to use it for the greater good of the society in the future. Living in a hostel was conducive to the discernment process that I went through as I sought to understand whether I should go into the private or public sector in order to use the knowledge and skills I have acquired appropriately.