

# Digitise

Initial results for Hand in Hand's business accelerator in Nairobi: understanding the impact of digital marketing training on enterprise profitability, growth and resilience.



## Project summary

Through a transformative, three-year programme in partnership with Happel Foundation, Hand in Hand is equipping 3,000 existing small business owners in Nairobi (80% women), who live on or around the poverty line, with the skills and resources they need to scale up their businesses and increase their incomes. Results from the first cohort of 1,000 entrepreneurs show that median monthly revenues have increased 77% from \$323 to \$571 (KES 15,000 to 26,500). Median monthly profits have increased by 121% (\$156; KES 7,250).

Building on learning from our pilot with VISA, the project has tested the inclusion of digital marketing training to understand its impact on enterprise revenue and profit. Early results show that participants who received digital marketing and e-commerce training earned \$108 PPP (5,000 KES) more in revenue than those who did not.



**77%**

revenue increase for all business owners



**+\$108**

More earned a month by participants trained in digital marketing



**+1,000**

businesses reached in cohort 1



**95%**

reported improved quality of life

## **The problem**

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In Kenya, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are a critical driver of economic activity, employing 15 million people and contributing 40% of the GDP. Despite this, only 0.2% of businesses are classified as medium, 1.8% as small, and a staggering 98% as microenterprises. These microenterprises face significant barriers, including poor business practices, limited digital and sector-specific skills, and restricted access to markets and credit. As a result, they often struggle with low profits, minimal growth, and high vulnerability – subsisting on or just above the absolute international poverty line.

## **Our solution**

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In partnership with Happel foundation, Hand in Hand is delivering a three-year project, 'Driving Innovation, Growth and Income Through Invigorating Small Enterprise' (DIGITISE). The project, currently underway in Nairobi, will support 3,000 entrepreneurs (over 80% women) through an urban business accelerator programme, focusing on increasing enterprise profitability, growth and resilience. The business accelerator trains women and men in three sequential cohorts in record keeping, formal business registration and compliance, product and customer development and financial management. It also offers personalised business coaching, mentorship, organises visits to established enterprises and provides access to credit and market linkages.

In addition to Hand in Hand's enterprise accelerator model, the DIGITISE project is testing the incorporation of digital marketing training and coaching into its accelerator programme, to understand the impact of such training on enterprise revenue and profit. Using a 'treatment' and 'control' testing method, it trains the treatment group (in cohort 1) in digital marketing, promoting the awareness and use of e-commerce platforms.

## **Results and learnings**

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The results from the first cohort, across all groups, show a median enterprise revenue increase of 77%, with an overall 121% income uplift, reflecting the success of Hand in Hand's business accelerator model. Enterprises earned KES 11,500 (\$248) more in monthly revenue by the end of the project, with a 91% enterprise survival rate and 95% of members reporting improved quality of life.

Our initial results indicate that when entrepreneurs use digital marketing techniques, they see increased profit and revenue. Those who received digital training earned KES 5,000 (\$108) more in revenue than those who did not. However, although those who received digital marketing training increased earnings, only 49% of those who received training actually adopted digital practices such as the use of e-commerce platforms. Armed with

the evidence that digital marketing does increase revenue and profit, we will seek to overcome barriers to the adoption of digital marketing techniques for cohorts 2 and 3 of the project.

## Challenges, and what we've learned

- 1) **Digital gender gap.** Results in the treatment group showed that men were more likely than women to adopt digital marketing techniques (59% vs. 46%, respectively) and more likely to own a smartphone (92% vs. 75%, respectively). In Kenya, there is a 43% gender gap in daily mobile internet use between men and women ([GSMA, 2024](#)), with it being commonly seen as less socially acceptable for women to use digital tools.

**What we'll change in future projects:** One-to-one digital coaching sessions will consider a focus on the promotion of women's digital adoption and confidence.

- 2) **Lack of e-commerce opportunities in agricultural value chains.** Our results suggest retail and service enterprises are more likely to find digital marketing beneficial, as there are more immediately available markets online. By contrast, dairy farmers, for example, would achieve more if they were to sell at volume, via a producer group.

**What we'll change:** e-commerce training will be targeted towards the sectors that will benefit most. This has already been applied in cohorts 2 and 3 of the Digitise project.

*Results for cohort 2 and 3 will be available in early 2026. These will also include an evaluation of cohort 1 enterprises, 12 months following Hand in Hand training. These results will provide valuable insights into the longer-term impact of digital training on profits and revenue, once entrepreneurs have had time to build their brand online and expand their digital market base.*



***“Despite having a smartphone I found the digital marketing and posting online difficult at first but, with coaching, I can do it.”***

Catherine, secondhand shop entrepreneur