



Business Information Centres

An innovative, pro-poor business model for communities at the base of the economic pyramid

HARNESSING THE POWER OF ICT FOR MSMEs

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has established the Business Information Centre (BIC) programme, as an impact-oriented, pro-poor initiative that caters to the needs of rural entrepreneurs.

The BIC programme builds on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and business development services as a tool to enhance the productive capacity and competitiveness of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), particularly in rural areas where access to information is a challenge.

The BICs provide demand-driven and sustainable ICT-based information and advisory services and training to MSMEs. The innovativeness of the approach was recognized in 2007 with the Africa Investor Award in the category “Best Initiative in Support of Small and Medium Enterprise Development”.

FAST FACTS

CHALLENGE

- Fragmented, out-dated information services for entrepreneurs, especially in rural areas
- Poor access to ICT services and training
- Expensive hardware, software and connectivity

SOLUTION

- Establishment of sustainable, private sector driven Business Information Centres (BICs) to provide ICT-based business information, training and Internet access to rural entrepreneurs on a commercial basis

BENEFITS AND IMPACTS

- Improved decision making through tailor-made business information
- Relevant ICT training, entrepreneurial advice and ICT support
- Unprecedented access to new markets, technologies and services
- Increased competitiveness and productivity



UNITED NATIONS
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

POTENTIAL OF ICT FOR MSMEs

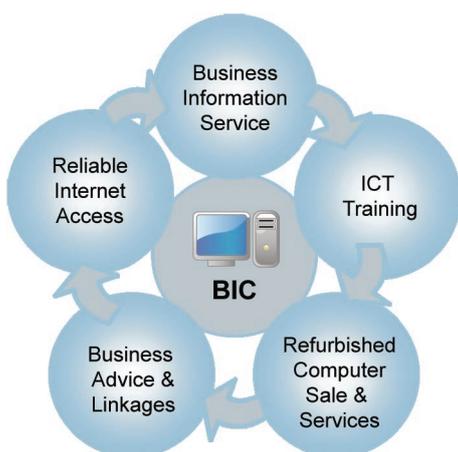
The ability to access information on markets, customers and technologies is critical for any private sector actor. ICT can be a powerful tool that offers unprecedented opportunities to tap into new markets, particularly for MSMEs.

BIC CORE SERVICES

The BICs are based on commercial business models and provide tailored services to MSMEs in areas such as technology sourcing, access to market information and financial services, web site development and ICT training. The services are offered on a fee basis to ensure sustainability.

UNIDO trains two staff members per centre – a business information officer and an ICT trainer. Both are additionally trained in entrepreneurship to assist MSMEs improve their business.

Adjusting to the needs of MSMEs, the BICs also serve as commercial distributors of the UNIDO – Microsoft refurbished computer programme which sells secondary PCs to MSMEs at an affordable price.

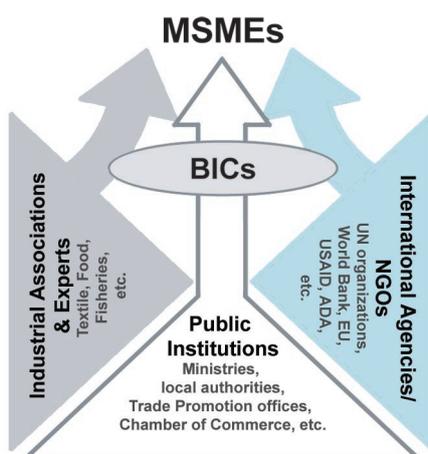


BIC INFORMATION NETWORK

In many developing countries, acquiring relevant business information can be time consuming, costly and inefficient. Information is often only available in an

isolated manner, outdated and difficult to access. The BICs play a pivotal role in navigating MSMEs to the most relevant information sources.

With the support of UNIDO, BICs sign cooperation agreements with institutions that provide information content. Establishing linkages to relevant information sources is the foundation of the BICs' rich information resource base.



SUCCESS IN UGANDA

In rural Uganda, a network of 8 BICs has been successfully established with the support of UNIDO and funding from the Austrian Development Agency. The centres have become a central access point for many rural MSMEs. In 2008, the Uganda BIC project has achieved the following results:

MSMEs trained in ICT	
Males	315
Females	226
Total	541

MSMEs accessing business information by sector	
Food processing	120
Textile	60
Coffee	30
Others	40
Total	250

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

To promote the transfer of state-of-the-art expertise, UNIDO cooperates with further global business players.

An example of such a player is Microsoft. In cooperation with Microsoft, UNIDO is actively engaged in helping local businesses and communities benefit.

“Information and Communication Technology is a key development tool - it contributes to increased productivity and helps stimulate a competitive knowledge-based economy that brings down poverty levels.”

**Dr. Kandeh K. Yumkella,
Director-General of UNIDO**



Sucess Stories

The Uganda Business Information Centers

AGRICULTURE AND AGRO-FORESTRY COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATION

BEKOA is a local Community Based Organization (CBO) that teaches local farmers skills in agriculture and agro-forestry.

The BIC in Soroti assisted the staff of BEKOA to enhance their business through developing their ICT skills. Services offered included guidance in the set-up and use of both corporate and staff e-mail accounts, training in the development of a basic website, and better access to information. Through the training provided by the BIC, BEKOA was able to manage contacts with its foreign-based partners with greater ease, as well as establish new contacts with clients.

The BIC also assisted BEKOA to develop a website to forge a new corporate identity and better enabled the promotion of their activities. Finally information obtained at the BIC permitted BEKOA to explore new business opportunities and expand their current product portfolio.

To date, the organization is in the process of securing a market for groundnuts produced by its members, thereby increasing profitability.

“The BIC enabled us to sell more of our products with ease”



JIMTEX FURNITURE AND CONSTRUCTION COMPANY LTD

Jimtex Furniture and Construction Co Ltd. is a furniture workshop that produces office and domestic products such as windows, doorframes and decorative items.

At the BIC in Mbale, Jimtex was able to source information on Chinese-made multi-purpose furniture machinery, Internet access enabling direct communication with the manufacturer.

Based on this exchange the Chinese manufacturer provided local contacts in Uganda for the supply of the specified machinery. The machinery allowed a greater sophistication in the joining and sanding of timber leading to products of a superior quality.

The cost incurred by Jimtex in obtaining the initial information was much lower than those encountered when travelling to Kampala to look for similar information. This initial interaction with the

local BIC has motivated staff at Jimtex to gain basic computer training. Future plans include the installation of a PC within each workshop to better facilitate communication and maximise productivity and profits.

“I am proud of the furniture I create. The new machines I sourced from the Internet allowed me to produce higher quality products”.



MR. CHARLES TULIMULUGENDO'S ALOE VERA PLANTATION

Charles Turimurugendo is an Aloe Vera farmer who was struggling to find the right market for his products.

When Charles learnt that there was a BIC located in Municipality of Jinja, he went there to access information concerning micro finance services. Further, the BIC provided him advice on how to process Aloe Vera leaves. He quickly realized that the BIC also offers a wider range of business information. Charles was able

to access information on machinery and equipment, and research the number of farmers in the area with whom he could form a cooperative to sell Aloe Vera plants and its products.

“The BIC allowed me to add value to my business and enhance my income opportunities”.



PRIVATE MEDICAL CLINIC IN JINJA MUNICIPALITY

Information about the local BIC and its services spread to a private clinic in Jinja via word of mouth. The clinic employs four people working full time, including a medical officer, a nurse, a laboratory technician and the co-director in charge of day-to-day operations. On hearing of the BIC the clinic staff were eager to receive PC training. The management of the centre was responsive to this as they felt that the respective fees were affordable.

Training provided by the local BIC has raised the computer literacy level of all the clinic's staff, including the management. The clinic now relies on PCs for the electronic storage of clinical records and

MS Excel to manage drug inventories and patient information.

In an effort to increase outreach of medical services, staff are using Power Point presentations to aid volunteers in community projects. Further, a database has been established to keep records of the daily attendance and treatment of patients. This has brought about more accurate and effective treatment, especially in cases of rural patients where medical cards detailing past treatments are often lost. ICT training has enabled the clinic to increase its overall performance and the clinic's management aim to eventually computerise all the

their activities including financial management.

“Due to our new ICT skills we can serve our patients more effectively and efficiently.”



For more information on UNIDO's ICT programme, please visit:
www.unido.org/ict

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