



SUCCESS STORY

Building Dignity and Respect with Livelihoods Training



After honing her skills in a DBSP business course, a woman markets vegetables in Eldoret.

OTI/KENYA

“Present people with positive opportunities, and they start treating one another with respect and dignity.”

—A participant in the DBSP business skills training course

December 2008 – Eldoret is a town in western Kenya that suffered from the post-election ethnic violence in early 2008. In the months following the violence, Eric, of the Kalenjin tribe, struggled with an unprofitable milk-vending business, often forced to sell on credit or return home with unsold milk. His enterprise was suffering, and he needed business skills, particularly when he wanted to seize an opportunity—despite ongoing social tensions—in the neighboring Kikuyu residential district of Munyaka.

Eric was able to improve his business skills at a recent business training course in Eldoret run by the Dynamic Business Startup Project (DBSP) and supported by the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI). The training brought together 21 people from a number of communities, including members of the Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Luhya, and Luo tribes. And while the project’s primary goal was to increase skills, it also sought to bolster struggling local economies while bridging social divisions.

After the training, the participants encouraged each other to rebuild their lives and feed their families through income-generating activities. The partnerships established during the training are going beyond business interactions and creating lasting relationships founded on mutual understanding and respect.

Since participating in the skills course, Eric is seeing more than \$200 a month in profit. However, he has gained something even more valuable than money: Eric has overcome the stereotype that says Kalenjins are no good at business. He said, “I believed I couldn’t succeed in business, [that] business is not in my blood.” But he was encouraged by the trainers and participants from other tribes to believe in his abilities.

Recently, as Eric shared stories with his colleagues, the men—two Kikuyu and one Luhya—laughed out loud, illustrating how the training and resulting business associations have helped overcome barriers. Less than a year ago, the three groups were at war with each other.

“When positive opportunities like these come our way,” one of the men said, “we forget about tribe.”