



A Helping Hand For Disadvantaged Businesses

Challenge

Namibia gained independence in 1990, following a long period of South African rule and apartheid policies that discriminated against the country's majority black population. Many blacks still live in the poor communities where they were confined during apartheid, such as the townships outside of Swakopmund. Now empowered and encouraged to engage in business, new black businesses often fail due a lack of education and expertise.



Photo: Jamie Raile/Sigma One

Program participant Charlotte outside her tourist business

“Without ‘SMEs Compete’, I would not have managed to market and expand my business, learn entrepreneurial skills, and be in a position to help children from the township where I have lived all my life.”

Results

Over the past year, over forty-seven new jobs were created through USAID's small and medium enterprise development program. Charlotte, a program participant, is an example of how the program has empowered entrepreneurs while benefiting the community overall. Her company's business has tripled. With improved business skills, Charlotte has increased exposure for her business, Mondesa Township Tours, and made a township visit a "must" on the agenda for larger tour operators in the area. Charlotte has hired a full-time tour guide who was also trained under the USAID program. Charlotte believes in reinvesting in the township - she donates thirty percent of her profits to help fund an after-school activity center for children, and teaches crafts and embroidery skills to the students.

Initiative

USAID-funded 'SMEs Compete' is a four-year, \$9 million initiative designed to help small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) owned by disadvantaged Namibians to improve their business skills and to develop new markets, thereby increasing their incomes and job creation potential.

The program helps entrepreneurs by providing a competitive analysis of different business sectors and exploring ways to create linkages in the market. An information communications technologies (ICT) component focuses on supporting business centers in order to increase computer access for small businesses. USAID is also providing grants to business service organizations to implement training, mentoring and business plan development for their SME clients. The grants also provide funding to SMEs for attendance at relevant trade shows.

