

PitchFace Group – a case study of a Kenyan Social entrepreneur

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Abstract

The New York Times International edition published an article, “ The Future of Not Working,” the day a team of Medgar Edgar College students and faculty were leaving Kenya. In summary the article reinforced the concept that automation and high productivity of new systems may reduce the global demand for labor in the future and alternatives income sources for the poor may be needed. The article went on to describe a proof of concept testing universal income currently piloted in one of Kenya’s poorest villages. Why Kenya? Paradoxically, Kenya is a leading contributor to the FinTech revolution in mobile application innovation and development. Yet Nairobi, where many multi-national corporations are based, is home to the world largest slums. Rural villagers migrated from farms hoping for an improved quality of urban life. What many often find is a lack of a capacity for the local economy to absorb the increased labor in the market and many have few options for survival.

One may argue that those most affected are the youth with the highest national unemployment rates; lack of marketable skills and experience yield a continuing trend in poverty. During our visit to Nairobi we observed and interviewed one social entrepreneur whose mission is to rescue Kenyan youth economically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually through business development. Sylvanus Osoro’s company, PitchFace attempts to solve a dual problem of training and experience by providing opportunities for a workforce of 2000 unemployed youth in Kenya.

Our presentation will discuss Osoro’s journey becoming a social entrepreneur; his development of his core business processes for youth training; and why training youth may produce entrepreneurial skills that yield returns greater than other approaches to developing alternative sources of income streams for the poor.

I. Introduction and Background

Who is Sylvanus Osoro and why should we study him? There are not many success stories where a parentless child, grows up in the streets, becomes educated, embraces entrepreneurship, and then trains others to dream the impossible dream. Osoro is a true modern day rags to riches story complete with sorrows and challenges of many but fortified with the perseverance and determination of few.

Osoro grew up in the streets of Nairobi until he was seven when he found shelter in the #Mukuru slums. Sylvanus started his entrepreneurship journey as a street vendor selling biscuits in the streets of Nairobi. Gradually Sylvanus continued his sales career eventually brokering real estate and in parallel he studied law. At 19, Sylvanus earned his first million and continued to grow.

II. PitchFace

PitchFace’s core business and Corporate Social Responsibility, (CSR) missions are all related to rescuing youth economically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. In his core business under PitchFace group, he purchases goods from global partners including #China for wholesaling

and retail; his army of 2000 youth are trained to sell the goods to local merchants. During the process of professional development of the youth there are social and rehabilitation services; the youth are counseled on drugs and other substance abuse; taught about the importance of professional dress and etiquette; and assisted with other life challenges.

Pitchface marketing focuses on reducing the rate of joblessness in Kenya. Osoro provided these comments on the mission, strategy and focus of the company:

“We recruit, hire and train young people under a system I call "5 & 8" ...The 5 stand for the five steps of Making as sale, which are ;

- Introduction,
- Short Story,
- Presentation,
- Sizzling and Closing
- finally rehash...

The 8 stands for the Eight Good Working habits and they are;

- Great Attitude,
- Be on Time,
- Be Prepared,
- Work Eight full hours,
- Work your territory correctly
- Don't lose your attitude,
- Know why you are here and what you are doing,
- Take Control

The training is done daily plus other motivational stories and encouragement then targets are set..

One gets promoted to the next phase of the business upon meeting sales targets...

Discipline is key in the office.”

II. Goals, Challenges and Outcomes

Youth unemployment is a worldwide challenge, and in Kenya as in many developing countries the double digit rate is tragically high. Therefore, recruiting for entrepreneurially minded youth is not the challenge. The challenge is capital to fuel the army of over-achieving entrepreneurs who go from door-to-door marketing retail goods from world-wide manufacturers.

PitchFace has partnered with several Chinese manufactures due to low product price points, quality, and accessibility to ports of entry. The challenge is cash flow and access to capital for ordering products to market.

In spite of the limitations of capital, PitchFace continues to bootstrap by buying, selling, and reinvesting in inventory. The company's slogan is “Opportunity is real.” The goal is to partner with investors that will increase the flow of product available to the youth to sell.

PitchFace is also developing a bottoms up leadership with youth who have been successful in the company and are being mentored personally by Osoro.

So what is next for this young 29 year entrepreneur and his company? Osorio plans to expand operation into other parts of east Africa, currently he already has a team on the ground in Kampala, Kenya. Osorio plans to continue the firm's CSR activity by supporting local orphanages; he personally has emotionally adopted Susan, a 4 month old orphan that was abandoned at 2 days old. Finally, Osorio is running for MP in his hometown district of Kenya; this is not his first time seeking political office. During his tenure as a resident in the slums he ran for office and lost; the electorate told him he was too poor and to run again when he was wealthy.

As for PitchFace, the leadership team and the army of youth are hopeful that an investor will support their demonstrated, “proof of concept” that young lives can be transformed with discipline,

process, and hard work – not handouts.

III. Summary

The PitchFace story demonstrates that solutions for youth unemployment must be holistic. Urban youth have many emotional, sometimes spiritual challenges; the healing starts from within. The youth are conditioned to believe in themselves, the family team, and their spiritual guide. The positive messages are reinforced daily, supported by caring mentors, and the knowledge that they do not face the streets alone.

PitchFace is a homegrown Kenyan solution to a perplexing and complex problem of youth employment and development. Social entrepreneur Osoro has demonstrated that one need not be a multi-national corporation to deploy CSR that has major impact on the community you serve.

Many solutions for income re-distribution come from the outside looking in; Osoro knew what it meant to wake up hungry; how it feels to walk the streets clothed in the hope that someone would care; and in the end, Osoro learned how to hustle for his survival. Today, he “hustles” for the survival of many with the knowledge that one life can make a difference for many. Today Osoro trains his army of youth to look inside out, and build a new future from the bottom up.

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