

# POWERFUL MEANS INITIATIVE INCUBATOR

## *NINE MONTH PROGRESS UPDATE*

The Powerful Means Initiative has continued to make strides in the past three months in the ongoing management of the Incubator. Key activities during this third phase have been ongoing followup interviews, data collection and evaluation, and considering potential improvements to better support the participants.

### Achievements and Progress:

- **Saving Habits:** All 12 participants reached are actively making daily, weekly, and monthly savings through their various Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) groups. Most of these participants expect that year-end disbursements will enable them to fully pay off the loan.
- **Business Growth:** Three participants have done particularly well and have demonstrated steady growth, resulting in the distribution of a smartphone to support enhanced and expanded business operations.

### Challenges:

- **Repayment Avoidance:** More participants have become unreachable, indicating potential avoidance of loan repayments.
- **External Factors:** A few entrepreneurs have temporarily or permanently closed their businesses due to health challenges, marriages or relocations.

These learnings have generated several recommendations for improving the Impact Incubator. Communication remains a key area for opportunity, as the program looks to facilitate more conversations with the families of the participants, as well as between participants. Similarly, cooperative businesses provide a potential opportunity for cost-sharing between participants. Notre Dame students on the upcoming winter break immersion trip will leverage these learnings – and generate new insights – to refine the 2026 incubator structure.



*Incubator participants pursuing tailoring businesses with their startup kits, including a sewing machine and other tailoring materials.*

# INVESTMENT

Financial support will continue to be directed towards key activities, which currently include: conducting ongoing followup interviews, organizing skills workshops for the participants and providing phones to those who are demonstrating success. Additionally, collecting and tracking repayments from participants requires consistent management. Repayments are based on the value of the startup kit participants were provided at the start of the program, and entrepreneurs are expected to repay 50% of the value of the startup kit.

**24**

**alumni supported** in this year's incubator, including entrepreneurs in tailoring (13), hairdressing (9) and catering (2).

**1M**

**the average startup kit value** is just above 1M Ugandan shillings, or about \$275 US dollars.

**11%**

**loan repayment rate** as of November 14, as a percentage of the total outstanding loan value across all incubator participants.





*Ongoing workshops and engagement opportunities help share knowledge and experiences between incubator participants.*

# ENGAGEMENT

A core component of this incubator is its commitment to ongoing engagement with the entrepreneurs it supports. Part of this strategy is developing a network designed to provide ongoing peer support and professional development opportunities. Furthermore, the initiative includes field support visits and alumni engagement activities, along with the establishment of class partnerships between Notre Dame students and Saint Bakhita alumni, to ensure continuous interaction and data collection.

**21%**

**of entrepreneurs met  
with a Notre Dame  
summer fellow in August  
for in-person interviews.**

**71%**

**of entrepreneurs are  
actively running their  
business, often alongside  
other family commitments.**

**50%**

**of entrepreneurs are in  
regular contact with  
students, staff and other  
participants.**



*One of the Incubators' entrepreneurs poses in her hairdressing shop during interviews with Notre Dame students in March 2025.*

# IMPACT

By empowering alumni to establish sustainable businesses, the incubator seeks to create employment opportunities and stimulate local economies. The incubator program is designed to drive entrepreneurial success, strengthen alumni networks, and develop crucial skills in financial management and entrepreneurship. Ultimately, the initiative envisions a transformative impact, fostering a data-driven model for combating poverty through strategic micro-investments and mentorship.

**75%**

of participants are saving money on a daily or weekly basis, with 58% having saved a total of 50,000 UGX (~\$14 USD) or more.

**63%**

of participants are leveraging a community-based savings group to build accountability and access further capital.

**13%**

of participants have taken on students or trainees, while 50% have purchased additional supplies to further grow their business.

# IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS

## AUGUST 2025 SUMMARY

During the summer, Notre Dame student fellow Hope Adero interviewed 25 SBVTC alumni, including five who are currently part of the Impact Incubator. Her research aimed to assess the graduates' post-school experiences, including their employment outcomes, the challenges they face, and their future goals. Beyond tracking vocational success, the study specifically sought to understand how SBVTC's education has contributed to their personal empowerment in a challenging socioeconomic environment. Her work generated the following insights:

- **Family Investors:** Initial business stability often comes from family support, such as parents covering the first few months of rent or siblings providing immediate micro-loans to keep the business afloat.
- **Shared Prosperity:** Most expressed a desire for continued mentorship and business support, along with access to loans or cooperatives to scale their work. Their dreams are not only economic but deeply social. Many wish to employ others, especially young women, to “lift others as we were lifted.”
- **Customer Care:** Every single interviewee emphasized that "kindness," "respect," and "professionalism" are their primary business strategy for attracting repeat clients and standing out from competitors.
- **Holistic Education:** Graduates consistently describe the SBVTC education as both practical and formative, equipping them with hands-on vocational skills alongside a strong moral compass. This builds a reputation for quality, leading one graduate to note: "The name St. Bakhita earns you respect. People trust you because they know you were trained well."
- **Digital Marketing:** Alumni specifically recommended the need for ongoing training in digital marketing to help graduates stay competitive and attract a wider customer base.