Kinshasa streets are full of street vendors who stand in the public space, making the city similar to a gigantic market. Fruits and vegetables street vendors, telephone sellers or shoe-shine men, they all rely on those small informal activities to support their families. **How can we best help these most vulnerable entrepreneurs?**

**Improving the daily life of the most vulnerable entrepreneurs**

**THE TOP SELLER TRAINING**

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), repeated wars and the socio-economic downturn led to the collapse of the economy and the overall rise of the level of poverty. DRC now ranks 176th on the Human Development Index (HDI)\(^1\). Because job opportunities in private corporations or public administrations are too scarce to absorb all the Congolese workforce seeking employment, an important web of informal businesses has emerged, marked by a great precariousness.

In order to address their needs, RDCED and the other RED members are strengthening entrepreneurs’ skills and building their capacities, including with the Basic Management Training, tailored to very small businesses.

Since 2014, while delivering trainings to bread sellers, trainers identified new specific needs. Indeed, those small entrepreneurs are mostly women with a lower education level than the usual participants beneficiaries; they are generally not used to attend long trainings and they are faced with business issues regarding mainly sales and short-term cash-flow. Trainers noticed higher drop-out rates, as they faced difficulties to maintain the participants’ interest, who were quicker to get discouraged.

Based on this observation, RDCED and RED partners decided to design a new training curriculum, called “Top Seller”, specifically destined to street vendors and vulnerable entrepreneurs.

\(^1\)UNDP, Human Development Report 2016, HDI rank 2015
The Réseau Entreprises Développement set up a working group on the subject: in each country, one trainer or more, with a confirmed experience dealing with this public, listed the identified problems and needs of street vendors. To design the curriculum, partners mobilized the expertise of a training engineer, a writer and an illustrator, as well as referring trainers on the field, so as to match the needs of the beneficiaries at best.

This led to the creation of a customized training for street vendors: it features simplified management notions focusing on sales, using games, cards, objects handling and experience sharing between participants. The emphasis is put on illustrations and comics strips rather than texts and tables. Besides, individual follow-up visits to participants allow trainers to address the potential problems of understanding of the notions taught in the different training units, and to make sure they are adapted and applied to each specific case.

RDCED has already ran 3 Top Seller trainings, allowing 46 bread vendors to improve their management skills. Trainings are held twice a week, at 3 PM, at the end of their working day. The firsts results are obvious: participants are more dedicated, they keep their focus during the 2-hour session, ask questions and remember the notions taught. Lauriane and Philip, the two trainers in charge of Top Seller, comment on it: “They are so involved in the training and taking part in the activities, sometimes it feels like we are in the middle of the market, we often have to channel their energy!”. But they do not complain about it; both participants and trainers enjoy this lively atmosphere. By the end of the training, already 40% of street vendors have achieved the SMART goal they set at the beginning of the training, and many operated a change in their management practices.
AT A GLANCE

**In Vietnam**, since 2013, IECD trains each year 120 Ho Chi Minh City street vendors in basic management. In addition to this activity, IECD recently published a white paper on the role of street vendors in the urban development of cities. In preparation for this report, a round table was organized and gathered over 115 participants: local authorities’ representatives, corporations, local associations and street vendors. IECD in Vietnam is currently adapting the Top Seller training materials and is currently launching the first training sessions.

**In Ivory Coast**, CIED (Côte d’Ivoire Entreprises Développement) trained and accompanied 66 street vendors (of bread, cheese, eggs, fruits and vegetables, etc.) in 2016. Trainers also noticed the need to adapt the BMT to a public who is largely illiterate. This year, 3 Top Seller training sessions have been launched in Yamoussoukro and Bouaké, delivered to women making attiéké (a dish made from fermented cassava).

**In Madagascar**, MED team translated the Top Seller materials to Malagasy language last August and started prospecting entrepreneurs. Trainers received support concerning the Top Seller content and materials, and were trained in the pedagogical tools used for the training. 14 entrepreneurs – including bread sellers, vegetable vendors, Internet café managers and shopkeepers – registered for the first training session.

*40% of trained sellers achieved their SMART goal at the end of the training*

**46 bread sellers** trained in Top Seller in 2017

**101 entrepreneurs** trained in the BMT by RDCED in 2017
Why did you decide to be an entrepreneur?
At first, I started my business because I wanted to have a job, keep myself busy. But when my husband died, my family and I struggled, then I realized that my business could help me support the household.

Why did you join RDCED’s training?
I wanted to learn how to better manage my business and make savings. Above all, I wanted to increase my bread sales.

Is there anything you noticed in RDCED’s methodology?
The training really takes into account issues we encounter, it looks like it was studied beforehand. I also appreciated the follow-up visits during and after the training. They are really practical. Thanks to the training, I can now tell the difference between my household’s needs and my business’s, anticipate, plan and control the household budget and the business budget.

What are the problems you face on a daily basis?
I have to get up early every morning to get supplies, the vendors who arrive first at the market are given a great advantage over the others, because they manage to sell of their breads before 10 AM. And then, I need to do the housework and take care of the kids... Besides, there is always a risk of not selling all the bread I have!

How to do envision your future?
Better, despite the increasing competition and the economic crisis that is worsening. Thankfully, the knowledge I acquired during the training help me compete with other vendors.