Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Looking ahead to 2022, I find myself deeply reflective about how much we have overcome in the last two years. The global pandemic has tested our resilience and impacted all of us in ways we could not have fathomed back in late 2019. Throughout the last two years, we have all pulled remarkable strength from within ourselves and dipped into our personal and community reserves.

It has been a sobering experience for many of us—myself included—to come to terms with our own limited capacity and to prioritize taking the time to refill our reserves when faced with complex external challenges beyond our control. I have come to recognize the value of presence over productivity, people over projects, and peace of mind over pace of results as essential to strengthening our resilience.

With the ongoing pandemic forcing entrepreneurs to face difficult circumstances and decisions, our community reached a record number of more than 63,800 new entrepreneurs seeking mentorship between July 2020–June 2021. An additional 16,000 new mentors stepped up to offer their support in the same year. These mentors encouraged entrepreneurs to trust their instincts and provided clear strategies for pivoting businesses to meet new and evolving realities. Their guidance helped entrepreneurs to feel financially secure, supported in their interpersonal relationships, and engaged in their daily lives. Together, we were able to generate and retain an estimated 8,749 jobs in 2020.

When external events threatened to derail our plans, our team was brought back to our North Star and key priorities. We have recommitted ourselves to making mentoring accessible to under-resourced entrepreneurs around the world, such that they can build stronger businesses and create new economic opportunities. As we faced unprecedented challenges, we also continued the work of confronting ongoing and chronic societal inequalities head on. We have prioritized transformative and measured social impact leadership that centers the voices of the people and communities we invest in, pulling from the wisdom of these communities, past experiences, and lessons learned.

“As we faced unprecedented challenges, we also continued the work of confronting ongoing and chronic societal inequalities head on.”

Our team is committed to scaling our efforts to reach over one million entrepreneurs in the coming years. We believe that our mission of democratizing access to social capital through mentoring is more important than ever. We are grateful for the support of our partners, colleagues, and friends, who join us in this commitment to building more resilient futures through mentoring. Thank you for being a part of the MicroMentor community and for supporting this work. I urge you to take a few minutes to read through this report to see how MicroMentor is revolutionizing the mentoring space.

Sincerely,

Anita Ramachandran, Executive Director
Finding Opportunities

When the COVID-19 pandemic and Beirut port explosion exacerbated Lebanon’s existing economic crisis, entrepreneur and lawyer Marie Elia felt the need to step in and support her community. In September 2020, Marie and her sister launched their non-profit business Shop La Fripe, which takes high-quality, donated clothing items and resells them at affordable prices on Instagram. Their proceeds are donated to local charities providing essential items that have become unaffordable in an inflated economy.

Wanting to create a business plan and reach a broader audience, Marie joined MicroMentor after seeing an ad on Facebook. Together with her sister, Marie connected with three mentors, who shared non-profit resources and supported the pair as they developed a business plan, found sponsors, and organized their product and pricing. With their online presence growing rapidly, Marie and her sister are now in the process of building out an e-commerce site to expand their reach.

There are entrepreneurs like Marie all over the world who are fostering innovation, strengthening equity, and creating more resilient communities by starting businesses that address society’s pressing needs. MicroMentor, Mercy Corps’ flagship business mentoring venture, serves these entrepreneurs by expanding access to critical business resources for Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs).

MicroMentor has built a thriving virtual mentorship ecosystem of entrepreneurs, mentors, and program partners, delivering online business mentoring at scale around the world. Our easy-to-use social networking platform enables the world’s largest community of purpose-driven entrepreneurs and business mentors to create powerful connections, solve problems, and build successful businesses together. Since our founding in 2008, MicroMentor has built a global community of over 180,000 entrepreneurs and 50,000 mentors.

An estimated 8,749 jobs were created or retained as a result of the mentoring given through MicroMentor, creating and safeguarding jobs at a rate of $186 per job.

MicroMentor mentors have donated more than $50 million of pro-bono services in the year 2020.

Entrepreneurs were 56% more likely to improve their access to business development resources with the guidance of a mentor.
MicroMentor’s Pathway to Impact

When entrepreneurs have easy access to an experienced mentor through MicroMentor, they make better business decisions, experience greater access to resources, and build more resilient businesses. With mentoring, entrepreneurs are more likely to report improved confidence in a range of crucial business-related skills. These entrepreneurs also report increased access to business development resources, like financial capital and professional networks. The confluence of these outcomes is long-term business growth: entrepreneurs experience business expansion, increased revenue, and job creation as a result of the time, knowledge, and expertise invested in them by their virtual business mentors.

Defining Resilience

MicroMentor is committed to promoting resilient leadership—but what does it mean to be resilient? Resilient leaders rise to the challenges that come their way and persevere. Their perseverance inspires them to innovate and pivot to meet the demands of an ever-changing business environment, to foster equity in a world where resources and opportunities are inequitably distributed, and to build strong and sustainable communities that are empowered to participate in meaningful change.

At MicroMentor, we have witnessed these manifestations of resilience time and again. Through the stories of our entrepreneurs, their mentors, and even members of the MicroMentor team, we have come to see the themes that arise alongside resilience. While resilience shows up in the world in many ways, we define entrepreneurial resilience as the confluence of Innovation, Equity, and Community.

MicroMentor supports resilient entrepreneurship and leadership by providing easy access to business mentorship.

1. Entrepreneurs make better business decisions based on increased skills and confidence.
   With mentoring, entrepreneurs are more likely to report improved confidence in a range of crucial business-related skills.

2. Entrepreneurs experience greater access to business development resources.
   Mentorship helps entrepreneurs build access to other business development resources, like financing and professional networks.

3. Entrepreneurs build more resilient businesses.
   Entrepreneurs are more likely to survive the early stages of entrepreneurship, stay in business, and retain employees with the help of a virtual business mentor.

4. And entrepreneurs experience better business outcomes in the long term.
   Entrepreneurs with mentors are more likely to create jobs and increase their revenue.
Innovating for Personal and Community Growth

“Resilience in the face of adversity turns life’s challenges into opportunities.” This is the motto that Kenya-based entrepreneur George Gichuhi Kamau has chosen to live by. Facing financial difficulties, George’s wife encouraged him to monetize his biggest strength—helping others: “She told me, ‘More people reach out to you for help rather than to buy insurance so why can’t you make a living out of helping people?’”

George started his venture modestly, running small errands for a fee, but he soon needed some additional support to meet a growing demand. He decided to take his services online, and thus his business, Errands Guy, was born.

As his business grew, George realized that he could scale Errands Guy into a larger logistics operation. Today, Mzigo Logistics sells its services on a subscription basis, giving small and medium-sized businesses the technology to manage their own business logistics and create youth employment opportunities: “These businesses are the largest source of employment for young people in Kenya.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, George recognized a moment of opportunity and innovation in his community: “It was a time of reinvention and questioning the way forward.” His volunteer work with a community-based organization for people with disabilities led him to found pwdgigs.com, an online platform where people with disabilities can offer their skills in a gig-based marketplace. With the support of one of his mentors, Valeria, George has been able to join an assistive technology incubator, Innovate Now, to continue building out this new venture.

“Innovative leaders like George push themselves to think out of the box to develop novel solutions to individual and systemic problems. MicroMentor supports these leaders by connecting them with business mentors who can support their innovative ideas by sharing the relevant business development tools needed to turn an innovative idea into a lucrative venture.”


Innovation is the driving force for change and resilience-building in the face of adversity and challenge

• Entrepreneurs are meeting challenges within their communities by building innovative solutions to pressing socio-economic problems.

• Mentors participate in this innovation by fostering it and supporting entrepreneurs on their journeys toward making their visions become a reality.

• The MicroMentor team is constantly evolving and innovating to deliver scalable access to business resources to under-resourced communities around the world.

Entrepreneurs seeking guidance at the idea stage are 25% more likely to launch their business with the advice of a mentor.
Balancing the Scales

While the COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique set of challenges for most of the world, it has also exacerbated existing inequalities by disproportionately impacting marginalized communities. Many entrepreneurs in the MicroMentor community—like Bipana Dhakal of Nepal—are working towards building more equitable societies by redistributing access to otherwise unavailable resources.

When COVID-19 forced the closure of schools in 20-year old Bipana’s hometown in rural Nepal, she felt compelled to step in and make a difference in students’ lives. The lack of internet connectivity made it impossible for many students in Bardiya district to access virtual classes. For many, their education had come to a complete standstill.

A final year student of social work, Bipana started the Learning Fortress in early 2020 to teach soft skills and leadership development to cohorts of students between four and fifteen years old. With access to a formal education disrupted, she could see that students were losing interest in their education altogether. With the Learning Fortress, Bipana works with a group of volunteers who she trains to deliver a variety of classes in hopes of keeping students engaged and interested in learning. “The children are my motivation,” she says.

When she first started The Learning Fortress, Bipana recognized a need for external guidance and advice. She connected with her mentor, Vanessa Robinson, on MicroMentor and the two started meeting virtually a few times a week. With Vanessa’s guidance, Bipana learned about grant writing, fundraising, website building, and building leadership skills. Developing her programming and curriculum during COVID and securing funding for the program were some of Bipana’s biggest challenges—but her mentor was ready to support her through it all. “She was dedicated and motivated to get this done right so I wanted to make it work,” says Vanessa.

With Vanessa’s guidance, Bipana secured a grant to purchase supplies for the students. She also got advice from one of her professors and amassed support from friends virtually to volunteer as teachers and class facilitators. Vanessa loves that Bipana is a quick learner: “In a matter of a couple of weeks, we managed to refine some of the key areas she needed to work on to make the program stronger and get more buy-in from stakeholders.”

“Mentorship has helped me see different perspectives, think professionally, and become more confident in the steps I take for my project.”

 Entrepreneurs like Bipana are 27% more likely to secure grants, equity, or debt financing with the support of a virtual business mentor.

Building Resilience in the Least Resourced Communities

Equity underscores MicroMentor’s vision and mission and describes the goal of many of our users who have dared to dream of a more equitable and just future.

- Many entrepreneurs are fighting against systemic inequalities through their social enterprises by adopting equitable practices and by delivering products that bridge major need gaps in their communities.
- Mentors are expanding access to valuable and critical business resources in a way that is redistributive and disruptive to a system that benefits from entrenched social, economic, and political inequalities.
- Our user stories and survey data highlight that mentorship is a two-way learning process: one that facilitates growth for both mentors and entrepreneurs.

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“Mentorship has helped me see different perspectives, think professionally, and become more confident in the steps I take for my project.”
Supporting Community Through Expression

Amid a global pandemic, American entrepreneur Sabrina Jean Baptiste set out to prove that words can truly heal. Sabrina, a licensed mental health counselor, set out to fight the stigma against mental health and make mental health resources more accessible to the African American and Caribbean communities through her venture, Blackandexxtraordinary Designs. Sabrina aims to promote positive self-care by creating safe spaces for mental health discussions and by giving people a healthy outlet for their thoughts and emotions. “COVID-19 has actually helped me start my business,” she says “the need for mental health services are at an all-time high and I took the opportunity to ‘normalize’ managing mental health as we would do for our physical health.”

In the process of promoting individual mental health, Sabrina hopes to foster collective resilience and well-being in communities where mental health is considered a taboo subject and is otherwise ignored. She has further committed to the goal of resilient community building by launching her podcast “Let’s Talk Mental Health” on YouTube which is linked to the Blackandexxtraordinary Designs website. The podcast covers a range of topics from values and relationships to anxiety and wellness.

Starting a new venture during a pandemic presented its own set of challenges, especially since Sabrina did not have a background in business, marketing, or branding. A simple Google search brought Sabrina to the MicroMentor program and connected her with her mentor, Dr. Vanessa S. O’Neal, who was able to guide her down the right path. Vanessa understood Sabrina’s vision and worked with her to build a solid business foundation including setting up an LLC, trademarking the brand, and revamping the website to increase traffic. Through mentorship, Sabrina built confidence—not just as a therapist, but as a businesswoman as well.

“COVID-19 has actually helped me start my business. The need for mental health services are at an all-time high and I took the opportunity to ‘normalize’ managing mental health as we would do for our physical health.”

Finding Prosperity Together

As a digital tool to bring entrepreneurs and mentors together, community is at the core of MicroMentor’s mission. Mentoring supports communities around the world, both through digital connection building and the work accomplished by our entrepreneurs. We truly believe that resilient leadership requires a commitment to collectivism and a “stronger together” attitude.

- Many of our entrepreneurs are working to build stronger communities through social entrepreneurship. When they share their vision on MicroMentor, the voices of the communities they represent and serve are amplified.
- Mentors and entrepreneurs form a robust online community that engages in an exchange of resources, ideas, and experiences.
- Our diverse global programs and curated partner programs are central to MicroMentor’s community-building impact.

30% of entrepreneurs cited emotional support and/or stress management as one of the ways their mentors provided support in the face of COVID-19.

We find that mentorship significantly contributes to the well-being of entrepreneurs, who reported that they were more financially secure, had an increased sense of purpose, and had supportive relationships when they had a mentor.
Building Transformative Relationships

Since 2008, more than 60,000 mentors have donated their time, knowledge, and insight on MicroMentor; guiding entrepreneurs on their journeys and supporting small businesses through challenging times. Yet entrepreneurs aren’t the only ones that stand to benefit from a business mentoring relationship. Giving back brings mentors a sense of purpose and meaning, hones their leadership and management skills, and provides a way to make a direct contribution to overcoming the economic effects of the global pandemic.

Winning Together

When seasoned management consultant Valeria Alarcón first learned about MicroMentor through a friend, she jumped at the opportunity to support social entrepreneurs. With over 20 years of experience as an executive, Valeria provides innovative business solutions, coaches on high-level and organizational management, and provides comprehensive facilitation services in strategic planning with an intersectional and equity-based framework.

To support as many entrepreneurs as possible, Valeria mentors as many people as she can, reaching out to potential mentees and responding to those who connect with her. Her mentorship mantra is simple—work together holistically and comprehensively, in a way that people, planet, and profit are all part of the equation. Valeria believes that a successful mentoring relationship is beneficial to both parties. As the mentor, she brings the tools, resources, knowledge, and expertise to the table. In return, she finds a sense of satisfaction, inspiration, and empowerment of her own: “When we work together, we win together.”

Her advice to other mentors is simple: “You are making a difference with every connection you make and conversation you have, providing guidance and support to individuals who are burning with the desire and intention to show up and lead change.”

Developing Leadership Skills

The experiences of the MicroMentor community challenge the traditional notion that mentorship is a unidirectional learning process where the mentor teaches and the mentee learns. Mentorship is, in fact, a two-way learning experience that benefits both parties involved. A majority of mentors on the platform have reported improving the following skills by volunteering with MicroMentor:

- Collaboration
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Ability to develop innovative solutions
- Communication
- Leadership and coaching
- Project management

Of those mentors who gave mentoring, 75% felt they had a greater sense of purpose as a result of their participation in MicroMentor. 76% felt that mentoring was relevant to their professional and personal growth.

“Who we are and what we believe in are inseparable from how we show up in the world and how we make a difference.”
Building a Network of Support through Partnerships

Employee Engagement
Corporations offer MicroMentor to their employees as a skills-based volunteering and professional development opportunity.

Technical Assistance
Financial service providers see the value in offering their small business clients individualized support through MicroMentor.

Global Programs
MicroMentor and Mercy Corps build country and regional replication models to bring scalable and localized access to mentoring for MSMEs.

Economic Development
Governments and nonprofits add value to their entrepreneurship and small-business development programs by integrating MicroMentor into their suite of support services.

MicroMentor is a global network powered by a high-class technology. Critical to scale and impact, we partner with a diverse set of organizations from civil society, financial institutions, corporations, governments, and replication partners to deliver country-specific, regional, and global mentoring programs that promote economic development and skills-based volunteering.

The diversity of MicroMentor’s partnerships and programming alongside the expertise of our global staff has an impact on entrepreneurs that is both broad and deep. MicroMentor has proudly worked alongside partners to deliver the following programs in 2021:

- 3 country and regional programs in partnership with Mercy Corps
- 10 economic development and technical assistance programs
- 8 employee engagement programs

As a social enterprise, MicroMentor experts deliver curated mentoring programs to promote economic development, technical assistance, and employee engagement. Our partners use the platform to add value for their small business clients, connect stakeholders, and build supportive mentoring ecosystems that reach beyond place-based initiatives. MicroMentor’s partners enrich the virtual community, contribute to our global mission, and support operational sustainability.
Strategic Regional Focus

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)
Supported by Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth and Google.org.

Since 2019, MicroMentor Jordan has been the MicroMentor headquarters for the entire MENA region. MicroMentor launched its Arabic platform in early 2020, expanding virtual business mentoring access to thousands of entrepreneurs in the region.

3,500 entrepreneurs
1,100 mentors
1,970 connections

Somali Region
In partnership with Mercy Corps Ethiopia, and supported by the World Bank, RIPA, and STEDE.

MicroMentor launched a Somali language platform in late 2020 with the mission to provide under-resourced entrepreneurs, with a focus on female entrepreneurs, in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia with virtual business support.

2,400 entrepreneurs
200 mentors
1,060 connections

Indonesia
Supported by Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth and PT Bank Commonwealth.

MicroMentor launched in Indonesia in partnership with Mercy Corps Indonesia and Indonesia’s Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs. MicroMentor Indonesia launched in 2019 with a dedicated local team working diligently to serve Indonesian entrepreneurs and offer business training and educational resources to entrepreneurs and mentors.

1,600 entrepreneurs
400 mentors
780 connections

Zahra Omar launched her fashion platform, Boutique, in 2020 to help small businesses in Egypt reach new customers. Zahra had already created business and marketing plans when she joined MicroMentor, but she did not feel confident in them and worried her business wouldn’t be able to reach her intended audience.

After seeing an ad on social media, Zahra joined MicroMentor’s online community and was excited for the opportunity to network and find mentors. Zahra connected with a female mentor who she worked with to develop her business plans and gain confidence in herself as an entrepreneur. Boutique is now available on Google Play and Zahra is continuing to work with mentors to increase their reach and bring more users to the app.

Rizkia Shafarini launched her business, myproperty.id, a property advertising platform, while a full-time university student. Though she eagerly wore many hats when she launched her business, Rizkia realized that she needed some additional assistance with her business development.

Rizkia joined MicroMentor Indonesia in 2020, and soon met her mentor, Fariz, who she worked with to better understand strategies for developing her business. Working with Fariz on her business development and internship strategies, Rizkia successfully launched her platform in October 2020 with more than 200 listings registered on the platform.

“MicroMentor made it easy to find a business mentor. Even though my mentor explained and taught me everything from basic to advanced, I did not have to compromise my original vision. I really like to learn new things and build relationships, especially in terms of business, that’s why I really appreciate MicroMentor,” said Rizkia.
Curated Partner Programs

Economic Development
The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (USCCF) integrated MicroMentor into its Coalition to Back Black Business program to complement small business grants with one-to-one business mentoring support for entrepreneurs facing the unique financial and business challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Irvin “Prince” Lynch is the co-founder and owner of Conquest Empire, a lifestyle brand. He had already built an audience in his New York community through word of mouth but recognized the opportunity to reach a larger audience by freeing up capital to fund his marketing efforts and joined MicroMentor through USCCF’s 2021 Coalition to Back Black Businesses program.

On MicroMentor, Prince connected with Edmund Chien, a business coach based in Toronto. Meeting regularly over video calls, the pair explored pathways for Prince to increase capital and discussed sales tactics. Throughout the calls, Edmund and Prince bounce ideas off of one another, and Edmund guides Prince through the challenges that he is facing. According to Prince: “The conversations are about him opening up my mind to things that I don’t think about.” Together, Prince and Edmund are conquering New York fashion’s market, one business question at a time.

Employee Engagement
Tripadvisor employees engage in a meaningful volunteering opportunity through MicroMentor, investing their knowledge, talent, and time to support small business growth.

France-based Tripadvisor employee, Guillaume Maugin, connected with Ugandan entrepreneur David Elungat, founder of Voice for Humanity Uganda. David’s non-profit organization works with refugee women and children to meet their emotional and physical needs. Guillaume signed up with MicroMentor to share his expertise in website design, e-commerce, and leadership—exactly the skills that David was looking for as he built a new website and developed his online fundraising tactics.

With Guillaume’s guidance and feedback, David was able to build a new site and enroll his organization on the Benevity portal to start accepting online donations. Guillaume noted that while he advised on the paperwork, David took the initiative to do the work himself. He just needed the encouragement and tools to gain the confidence to believe he could do it. The pair continue to work together and David has even invited Guillaume to sit on his newly founded board of directors.

Technical Assistance
The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is offering MicroMentor in the MENA region through its existing small business programming and select partner financial institutions.

Hassan El-Meligy is an Egyptian Development Consultant who enjoys supporting start-ups, small enterprises, and nonprofits to achieve financial sustainability. This drive to give back inspired him to sign up as a MicroMentor volunteer mentor and connect with entrepreneurs in his region through the EBRD MicroMentor Business Mentoring Programme.

Many of the entrepreneurs Hassan has mentored are already achieving tangible levels of success in developing and growing their businesses, particularly in Egypt and Jordan. Hassan also focuses on social entrepreneurs and companies that are supporting special needs. He is now working with small business owners in Cairo, Assuit, Aswan, Ismailia, and Amman, providing them with tools and templates for success and is optimistic that these businesses will move into a profitable phase very soon.
At MicroMentor, we implement a rigorous evaluation framework, known as the Business Outcomes Survey, that combines MicroMentor’s proprietary research with a body of peer-reviewed research on entrepreneurship, volunteerism, and mentoring.

Through more than a decade of learning and research, we’ve identified the process by which mentoring helps entrepreneurs grow themselves and their businesses, thereby moving them towards the goal of greater economic opportunity. The above infographic shows how these outcomes develop and the evidence MicroMentor has gathered from our platform that supports it.

**Better Evaluations Through Continuous Improvement**

Each year, we refine our evaluation methodology and each year our process gets more rigorous and more precise. Here are a few examples of how we improved the Business Outcomes Survey in 2021:

- Added a peer-reviewed questionnaire assessing entrepreneurs’ psychological well-being.
- Replaced revenue and finance questions with new questions that don’t rely on respondent recall and allow for broader comparison across regions and industries.
- Altered the wording of the question on self-employment to ensure that it was interpreted more consistently across different cultural contexts.
- Added a question on household income to determine the need level of respondents.
Thank you!

Interested in partnering with us? Get in touch with us at partnerships@micromentor.org

2021 Funders and Partners

Partners

Association for Enterprise Opportunity
Business Mentor New York, a program of Empire State Development
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Funders

Google.org
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USAID Feed the Future through RIPA
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Mercy Corps COVID-19 Resilience Fund
PT Bank Commonwealth

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