

# SPOTLIGHT

## on Inclusive Business

### Mrs Phiri's Classroom, Zambia

Since the iSchool programme began, Mrs Phiri's classroom has been full.

Like at most schools in Zambia, there are very few books in Mrs Phiri's classroom. But since the start of 2011, her class has had access to all the learning materials they need, thanks to the set of little white laptop computers, which have been provided by iSchool, a local enterprise supported by UK aid from the Department for International Development. These laptops are connected to the Internet, through which learners download stories and activities created especially for Zambian pupils and tailored to the local curriculum.

The children are not the only ones learning. With schooling expanding rapidly in Zambia, many in the teaching profession are young and inexperienced, but the structured lesson plans provided by iSchool make the job straightforward – “everything is there at your disposal” – and ensure that no topic is missed. Even Mrs Phiri, a teacher with 20 years' experience who aspires one day to run her own school, has discovered

new and better ways of teaching. Together with her pupils, she has also learned for the first time how to use a computer. At first it was a challenge, but the support she received from iSchool encouraged her to persevere, and now she is able to share her skills with other colleagues. “We came here through experience, through consultation with our friends,” she recalls. “Then we started teaching.”

So far this technology is being trialed by around a thousand pupils in eight schools, in and around the Zambian capital Lusaka, but iSchool has big plans: the aim is to reach 400 schools within the next few years. Not just poor urban schools like Mrs Phiri's, but also isolated rural ones, where the introduction of computers and Internet access could transform not only the school but the entire community, allowing villagers to trade and communicate with distant relatives and business contacts without making the arduous journey into town.

**“Before, the children in the compound would absent themselves,” says Mrs Phiri, referring to the township district around the school where she teaches. “They could be away for a month. But now they come to school nearly every day.”**

**“I told him to stay in but he can't,” said the mother of one boy who refused to stay at home even when feeling unwell. “He just wants to come and learn.”**



*Pupils at Kalingalinga Basic School learning with the iSchool laptops*

**Inclusive Business Spotlights** shed light on specific topics concerned with the development of inclusive business. They are generated from the project and advisory work of the Business Innovation Facility and Innovations Against Poverty.

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*Mrs Phiri in her classroom at Kalingalinga Basic School, Lusaka, Zambia*

iSchool has been able to plan this expansion – working out how many computers will be deployed, what support network needs to be put in place, and how the necessary funds can be raised – thanks to the Business Innovation Facility, which has provided advice and support for the development of the product. In iSchool’s case the product is interactive learning: not just cheap laptops, but an integrated package of content, training and support that will allow teachers and pupils to use them effectively in their classrooms. iSchool believes that this innovative package can be made affordable to the large numbers of ordinary Zambian schools whose teachers currently lack the resources or training to provide a high-quality education.

At the schools where the iSchool programme is already underway, the benefits are clear. Schools are more self-reliant, teachers are better motivated, attendance is up, and everybody is learning new skills – including iSchool’s own lesson-writers and technicians, who are discovering through experience how to overcome the challenges of delivering state-of-the-art learning in poor and under-resourced schools. Parents are impressed, as are heads and sponsors at other schools, several of which have already approached iSchool and asked to join the programme. One discovery made by everyone who has tried out iSchool’s lessons is summed up by Mrs Phiri, “Learning is more interesting with computers and iSchool content”.

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**iSchool** is an online multi-media eLearning package designed to cover the Zambian school curriculum. This includes both plans for teachers and interactive learning for the students. iSchool has been built in Zambia using local examples, and all early grade material is available in eight local languages as well as English. iSchool can provide the resources necessary to make use of the material anywhere in Zambia, including IT equipment, internet access, teacher training, mentoring, and technical support.  
**[www.ischool.zm](http://www.ischool.zm)**

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**The Business Innovation Facility** supports companies as they develop and implement inclusive businesses. The Business Innovation Facility supported iSchool in setting up a sustainable and scalable business model to offer services on a commercial basis and in determining the optimal revenue generating model for their services.

The emerging business model will generate insights on some increasingly common challenges in inclusive business: how to harness the internet to expand access to services for low-income consumers in a commercially viable way and how to structure a revenue system that works for sustainable expansion.



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Practitioner Hub on Inclusive Business: **[www.businessinnovationfacility.org](http://www.businessinnovationfacility.org)**

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**[www.businessinnovationfacility.org/page/projects-and-progress](http://www.businessinnovationfacility.org/page/projects-and-progress)**

This Spotlight is based on the work of **Andrew Gray**, who worked with iSchool as part of Business Innovation Facility support in 2011.

The Business Innovation Facility (BIF) is a pilot project funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). It is managed for DFID by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP in alliance with the International Business Leaders Forum and Accenture Development Partnerships. It works in collaboration with Imani Development, Intellectap, Renaissance Consultants Ltd, The Convention on Business Integrity and Challenges Worldwide. The views presented in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of BIF, its managers, funders or project partners and does not constitute professional advice.

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