

Digitally enabled livelihoods in the construction industry:

Building opportunities through digital platform participation and financial services

Authors: Lucia Schlemmer, Kate Rinehart-Smit, Chernay Johnson and Christine Hougaard

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About this case study

This case study forms part of a larger body of work by insight2impact, Cenfri and FSD Africa, which explores [Africa's rising digital platform ecosystem](#), with a focus on labour-intensive sectors, such as [construction](#). This case study was done in partnership with FSD Kenya (FSDK). It focuses on [iBuild](#) (a digital construction platform in Kenya), provides insight into the livelihoods of platform users, considers the role that platforms can play in shaping users' livelihoods and explores opportunities for financial service providers (FSPs) to meet users' financial needs. The consumer research highlights the potential to leverage digital platforms for the delivery of financial services that could better serve income earners in the construction value chain.

The role of platforms in shaping livelihoods

What is a digital platform?

Digital platforms are virtual marketplaces that connect providers of goods and services with consumers and derive revenue (or value) mainly from facilitating interactions between two or more distinct groups of users (providers and consumers of goods and services) (Smit et al., 2019).

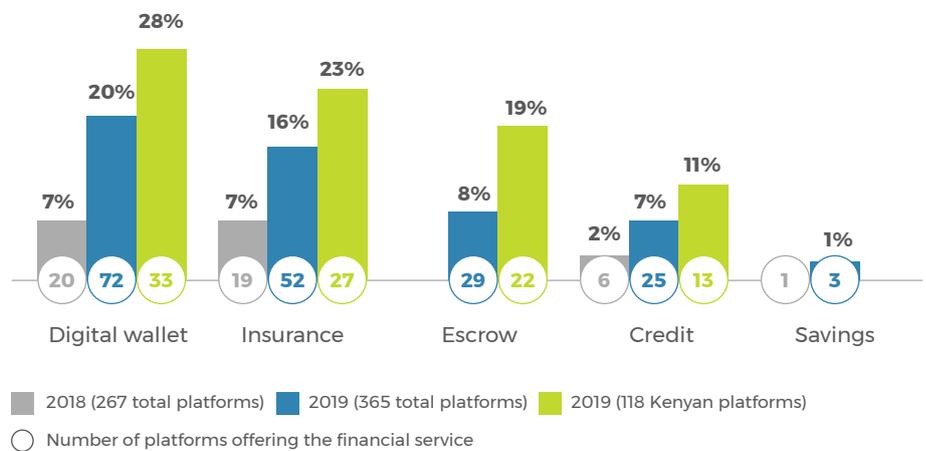


Significance of digital platforms

Digital platforms are emerging across Africa, providing new channels to meet various needs of individuals and micro-entrepreneurs, driving economic opportunities through job creation and supporting financial inclusion.

Between 2018 and 2019 there was a 37% increase in the number of platforms operating in eight African countries¹, from 268 platforms to 365. Just over a third of these provide financial services (Johnson, et al., 2019).

Growth in financial service offerings (as a percentage of total platforms)



Source: Johnson, et al., 2020

10%
(12)

of Kenyan platforms offer both a digital wallet and escrow account



Digital platforms in Kenya:

Kenya experienced the fastest growth in platforms. Kenya is a high-growth market and experienced 71% growth in the number of operating platforms from 2018 to 2019, from 62 to 118 platforms. Just over half of these offer financial services (insight2impact, 2020).

Platforms increasingly important as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Digital platforms' ability to digitally connect demand and supply of goods/services and to facilitate digital payments is a distinct advantage of these technological actors, further made salient through the course of the COVID-19 pandemic (Johnson, Dunn and Janse van Vuuren, 2020).

Incentives for digital platforms and FSPs to partner

Incentives for FSPs

- Established customer base
- Utilise integrated payments infrastructure
- Established communications channel
- Leverage trusted brand
- Leverage frequent use
- Benefit from decision proximity

Incentives for platforms

- Diversification of revenue stream
- Encourage sticky usage by network
- Expand consumer base
- Better manage regulatory requirements for offering financial products

¹ Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia

Source: Smit et al., 2019

Financial inclusion in Kenya



30%

have a bank account



79%

have a mobile money account



76%

have made at least one digital payment



Kenyan context

Financial inclusion

Kenya is a leader in financial inclusion in Africa. 83% of Kenyans were formally financially included in 2019, up from 75% in 2016. This has been driven by increased partnerships and innovations such as mobile banking, agency banking, digital finance and mobile apps (FSD Kenya, Central Bank of Kenya and KNBS, 2019).

Financial inclusion in Kenya



Kenyans use a mix of formal and informal financial services to meet needs and manage risks. Despite the high formal inclusion, considerable reliance remains on the use of informal instruments (FSD Kenya, Central Bank of Kenya and KNBS, 2019).

Overview of financial service usage among Kenyans



Source: FSDK, KNBS and Central Bank of Kenya, 2019

Digitisation in Kenya



Kenya's ICT infrastructure is well developed and the country's stance on technological development is attractive to ICT firms.

Kenya has identified technological innovation as one of the key pillars in their 2030 plan, and the Government has invested heavily to improve connectivity.



Digitisation

Kenya's ICT infrastructure is relatively well developed. Relatively high levels of digitisation and mobile access suggest that digital platforms have the potential to reach various sectors and livelihood segments in Kenya.

Overview of digitisation in Kenya



Mobile connectivity index: 49.4

52

Infrastructure

41

Affordability

59

Consumer readiness

48

Content and services

Source: Wearesocial & Hootsuite, 2019; Frost & Sullivan, 2018; GSMA, 2018

² A Chama is an informal cooperative society or self-help group, whereby members make contributions (monthly, weekly etc.), which are pooled and invested. Members can also take out loans (Njoroge, 2015).

Construction sector in Kenya



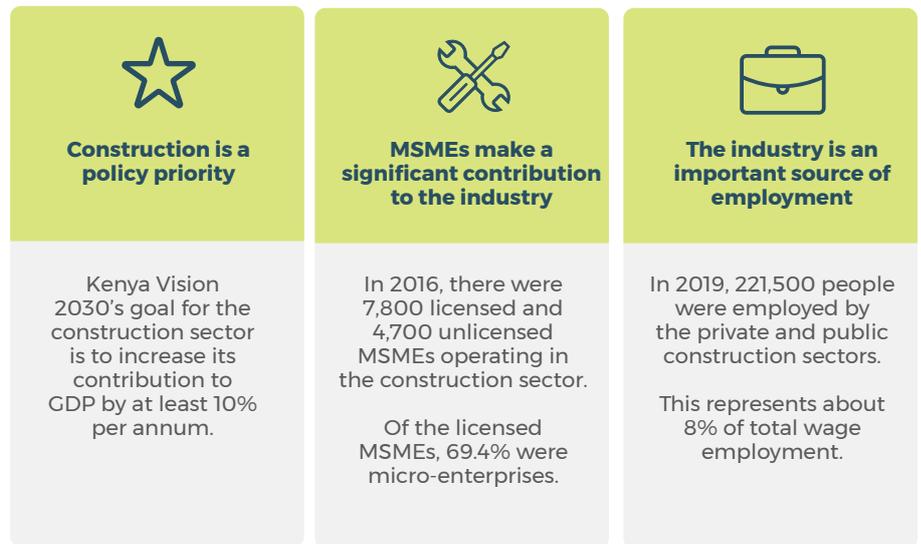
Construction industry contributed KES541.7 million to the economy in 2019 (5.6% of GDP)



Construction sector

Construction is an important contributor to growth and employment in Kenya.

Construction sector in Kenya



Source: KNBS, 2016; KNBS, 2020, Government of Kenya, 2018

However, it cannot keep pace with urban population growth, and various challenges inhibit the sector's performance.

There are various challenges that inhibit the sector's performance



13.2 million individuals (27% of the population) live in urban areas.

The urban growth rate is 4.25% per year, which equates to 0.5 million more people in cities each year.



In 2017 there was a shortage of 2 million housing units...



...and 61% of urban households were living in slums.



Challenges inhibiting the sector's performance



Lack of capital and access to finance



Payment disputes



High building costs and stringent regulations



The sector is unorganised and suffers from information asymmetries and poor collaboration



Poor-quality assurance and safety hazards, unskilled workforce

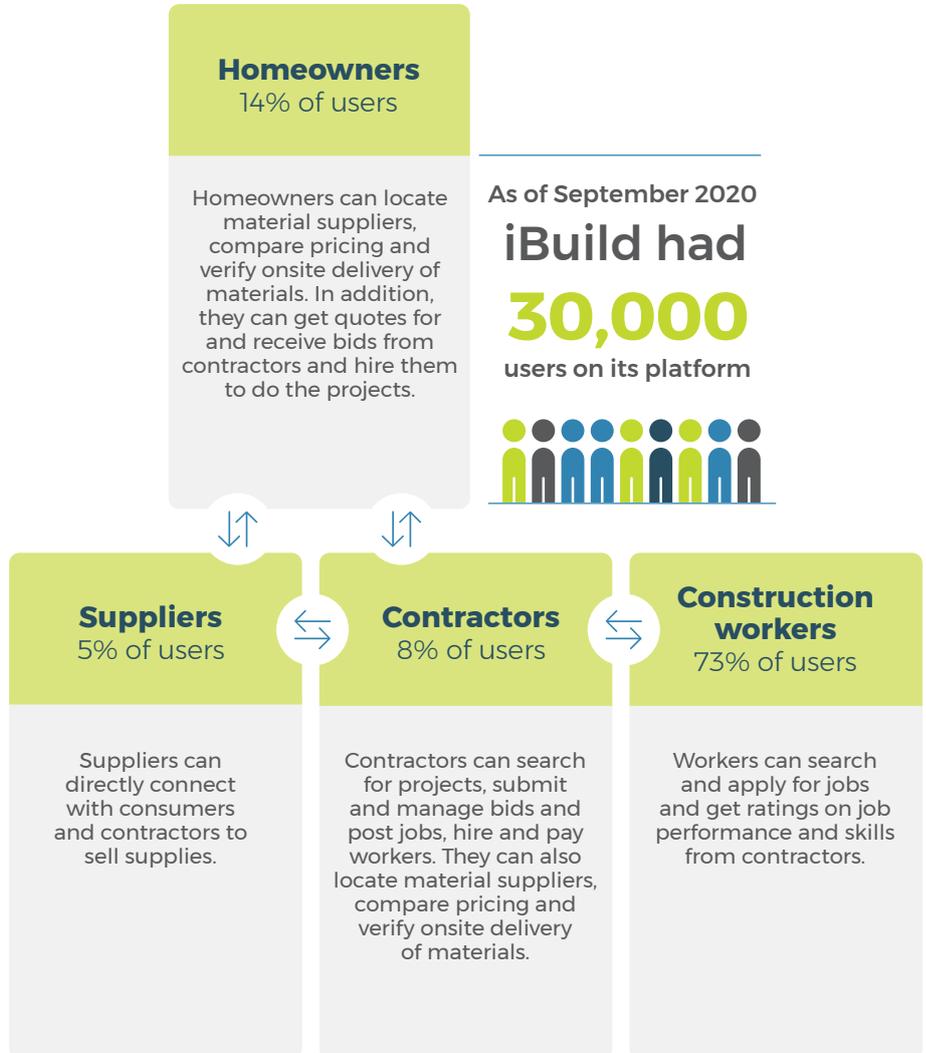
Source: Cloete and Nasila, 2019; iBuild, n/d; World Bank, 2019; CAHF, 2018; World Bank, 2017; Transparency Market Research, 2020; KBA, 2015

Platforms can help overcome some of these challenges. Digital platforms have the potential to overcome the challenges around information asymmetries and lack of organisation by better connecting users in the ecosystem. In addition, they can establish trust between users through facilitating safe and secure settlement of payments.

Overview of iBuild

iBuild, launched in 2019, is a citizen-to-citizen digital platform that offers a secure method to connect homeowners with contractors, workers and suppliers to facilitate the housing (re)construction process.

Overview of the iBuild business model



% indicates breakdown of iBuild groups on the platform (in August 2020)

What is an escrow account?

Escrow payment mechanisms allow a buyer to submit a payment into a secure account on the platform that, after verification, sends a notification to the seller that funds have been secured “in escrow”. The seller is then authorised to send the goods or complete the services, and once these have been verified and the buyer is satisfied with the goods/services the funds are released to the seller (PYMNTS, 2019).



Digital wallet: Users can make payments securely through the iBuild digital wallet. Payments are issued and completed in sync with the completion of work/project milestones, delivery of material, etc. Funds are supplied to the wallet through lender disbursements, bank deposits, or from trusted financial platforms like M-PESA.



Escrow account: iBuild makes use of an escrow account within the app, which only releases payments once the job/milestone has been completed, or the materials have been delivered.

Source: Authors' own

Methodology

Desktop research and qualitative and quantitative research were conducted with iBuild contractors, workers and building material suppliers to obtain a detailed understanding of the reality and perceptions of these platform user groups, their financial needs and how iBuild can better contribute to their livelihoods.

Between July and November 2019, we conducted a global, systematic review of digital construction platforms and published a [report](#) on the key findings.

Comparable target groups based on FinAccess (2019) data



Urban small business owners

Individuals who own non-agricultural businesses with fewer than **3** employees, are unregistered and do not keep formal records.

- 2.2 million urban small business owners in Kenya
- 55% female
- Mostly 35 to 45 years old
- Wholesale and retail trade largest sector

2% involved in construction (~44,000 individuals)



Urban wage earners

Individuals who live in an urban area and earn a salary from non-agricultural activities.

- 1.15 million urban wage earners in Kenya
- 70% male
- 70% between 35 and 45 years old
- Most common activity: manufacturing (15%)

3% involved in construction (~34,500 individuals)

Qualitative interviews

In September 2019, we conducted qualitative interviews with eight contractors, eight suppliers and eight workers, with a breakdown as follows:

Contractors	Suppliers	Workers
4	4	5
Registered with National Construction Authority (NCA)	Small/medium (<100 supplies)	Skilled (formal qualifications)
4	4	3
Unregistered	Large (>100 supplies)	Unskilled (casual, no formal qualifications)

Quantitative survey

In January and February 2020, we sent out a quantitative survey to iBuild users:

Contractors	Suppliers	Workers
25	30	35
from a sample of 54 who submitted milestones, who had been paid or who had hired workers	from a sample of 57 who had registered on iBuild and had been paid	from a sample of 75 who had been paid for work done via iBuild

It is important to highlight a limitation of the research, namely the small sample sizes. This means that the insights are qualitative and apply to the sample rather than the full target market.

However, to help put these findings in perspective, we contrasted them with those from a financial-needs analysis done by Cenfri, CGAP, FSDK and 71point4 (2019)³ based on the 2019 FinAccess survey, a nationally representative household survey on financial service usage and the livelihoods of Kenyans. Cenfri et al. (2019) segmented Kenyans into various groups, based on livelihoods, two of which are comparable to the iBuild user groups.

³ This uses data from the 2019 FinAccess survey, a nationally representative household survey on financial service usage and the livelihoods of Kenyans.



“

Increase capital by buying assets in the next year, partner with experienced professionals, bid on public tenders.

Unregistered contractor, male, 26

“

Grow my company to international standards [and] look for jobs in other cities and counties.

Registered contractor, male, 27

“

iBuild was advertising themselves as the Uber of construction.

Unregistered contractor, male, 26

“

Mode of payment is good because [I can't take] the money and he too can't take it and when I complete my work and send the pictures on how the project is continuing, the money is released and I get that money and that is good. Now, so far you act like security.

Unregistered contractor, male, age unspecified

“

iBuild has simplified everything, they are calling it milestones. The agreement is per piece of work. The client commits money on iBuild, so when I complete as per the agreement, the client checks and then pays me in stages.

Unregistered contractor, male, age unspecified

iBuild user insights

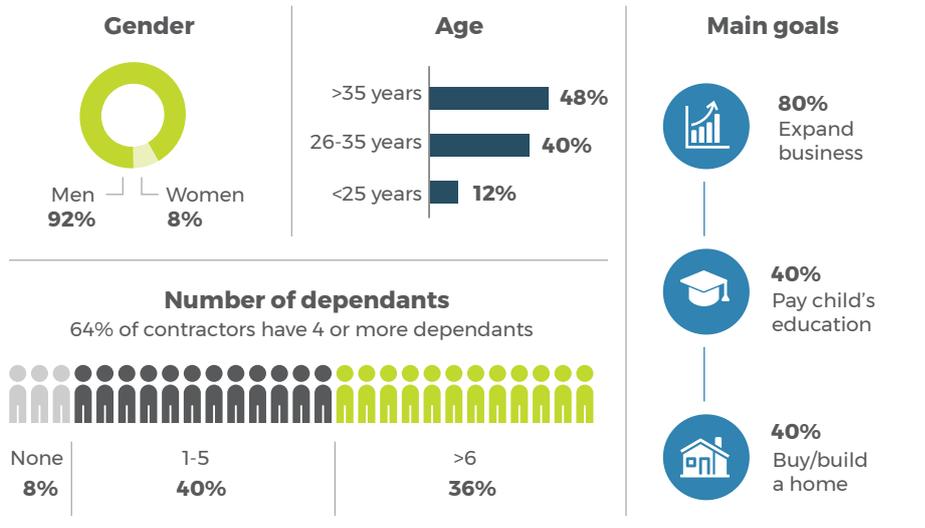
Contractors

The findings in this section are based on the qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys conducted among iBuild contractors. All percentages denote the percentage of the contractors, unless indicated otherwise.

Who are the contractors?



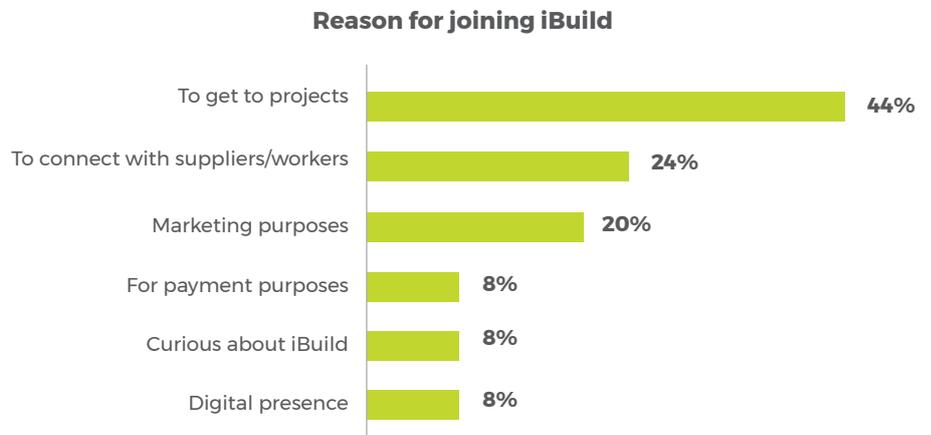
iBuild contractors are predominantly males older than 26, are technologically savvy (all have a cellphone) and tend to have a few dependants. Their main goal is to expand their business, followed by paying for a child's education or to buy/build a home.



N=25

Why they joined iBuild

Seeking work opportunities: When asked why they joined iBuild, contractors mainly said "to get projects". However, the success rate of contractors getting projects was low. Only 16% (two contractors in our sample) of those who applied for projects on iBuild, won a project/bid.



N=25
Multi-tagged⁴

4 Multi-tagged refers to the fact that participants could select more than one response in the survey

Registration of contractors

92%

are registered with the registrar of companies



64%

are registered with the National Construction Authority (NCA)

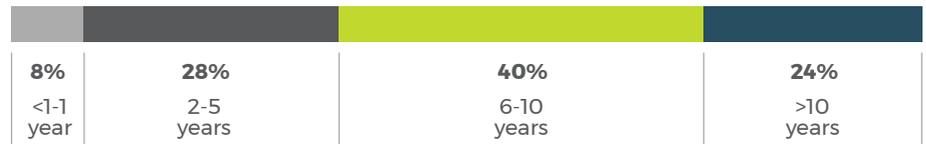
iBuild contractors use more formal payment methods than urban small business owners in general.

According to FinAccess (2019), 97% of urban small business owners transact in cash, while less than 20% of them receive or make digital payments linked to business activities (Cenfri, et al., 2019).

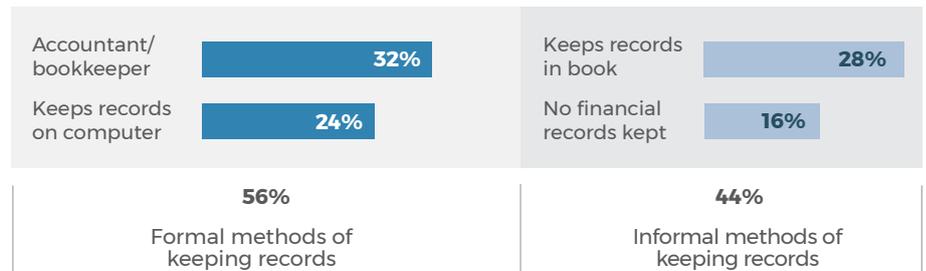
Business operations

Contractors have relatively formal businesses. 64% of the contractors have been working for more than five years, and their businesses have formal aspects. Most contractors are registered, and 56% keep records formally.

Length of operations



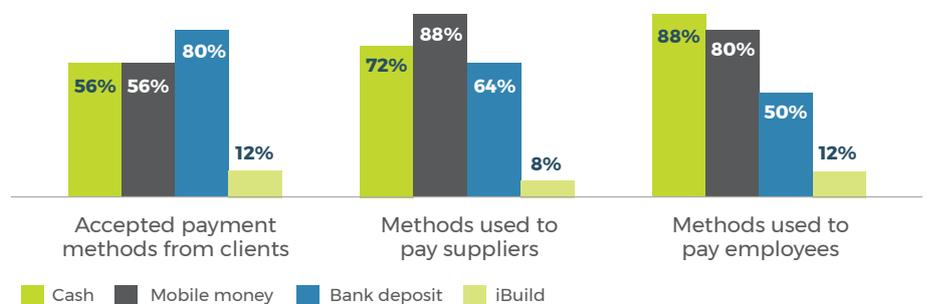
How financial records are kept



N=25

Varied payment methods used, but cash prevalent. Contractors use a mix of bank deposits, cash and mobile money to receive and make payments. The prevalence of cash as an accepted payment method suggests that there is an opportunity for iBuild to add value through their digital wallet and escrow services. Not only does this act as a payment guarantee; it is also safer and cheaper than holding large cash payments on site.

Payment methods that contractors accept and use to make payments



N=25
Multi-tagged

Length of longest contract



N=25

Projects are predominantly of a low value and short duration. Surveyed contractors completed on average at least five projects in 2019, with the value and duration of contracts being relatively low: The majority (60%) of contractors achieved an average contract size of less than KES10 million (USD98,881), typically with a duration of less than a year.

Value of largest contract



N=25

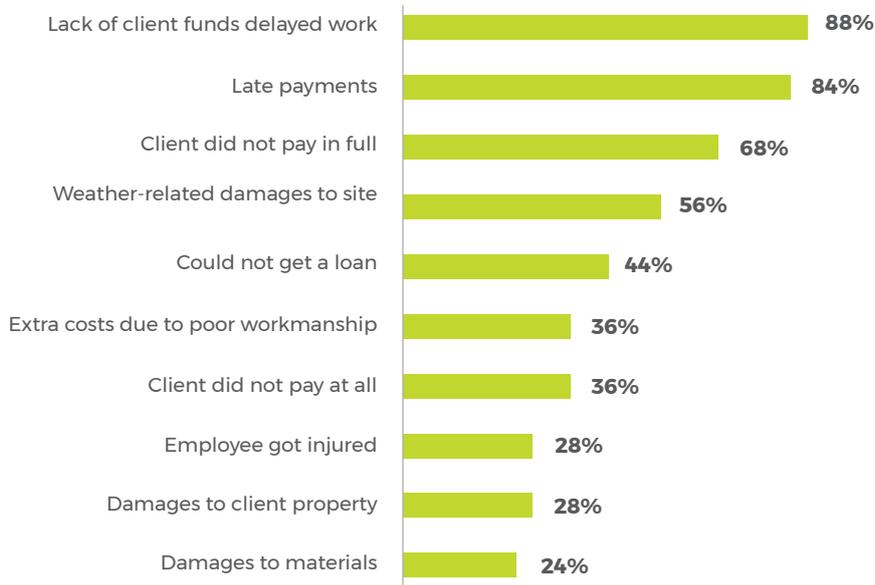
Payment issues were one of the worst risks experienced by contractors. From qualitative interviews conducted, we found that contractors often had to use their own funds to pay workers when experiencing payment delays from clients.



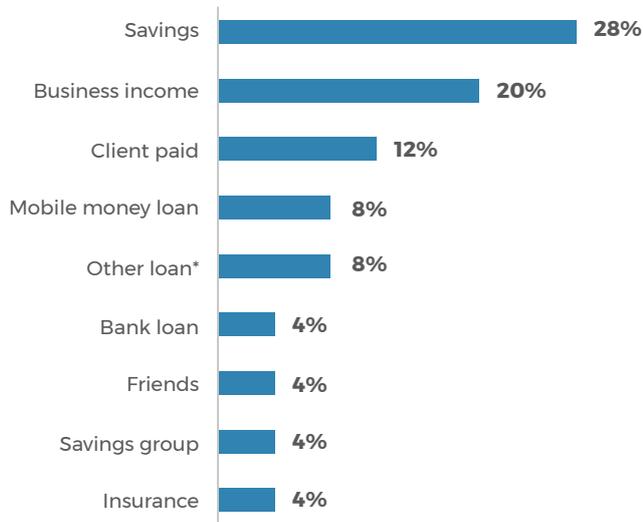
Risks and coping mechanisms:

High business risk experience: 88% of contractors faced more than three business risk events in 2019, mostly related to issues regarding payments and site damages due to weather. They used welfare-reducing mechanisms to cope, including using their savings or their business incomes to manage risks.

Types of business risks faced



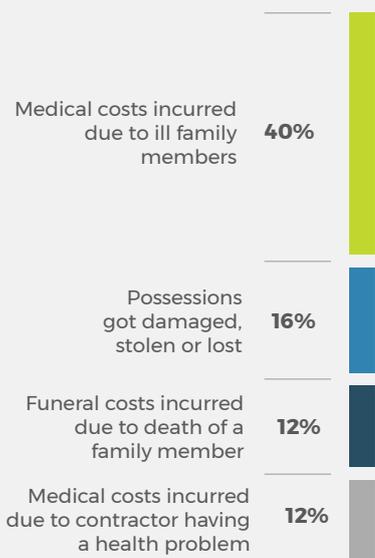
Coping mechanisms used



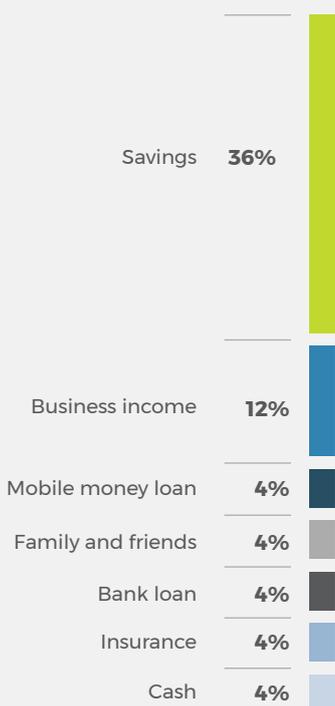
* Other loans - where respondents stated that they used a loan to cope with their business risk, however, did not specify what type of loan.

N=25
Multi-tagged

Personal risks faced



Coping mechanisms used



N=25
Multi-tagged



Range of personal risks also experienced: When asked which personal risks they experienced, 40% of the contractors stated: "illness of a family member", while 16% had their possessions damaged or stolen. Again, they used either their savings or business incomes to cope with these risks.

According to FinAccess (2019), illnesses or health issues were the most common shocks mentioned by urban small businesses, followed by death of a family member. In addition, the two most common coping mechanisms used were relying on friends/family or using savings (Cenfri, et al., 2019).



“

It is difficult to get a loan from a bank. A bank wants to see consistent savings before they give you a loan. It is difficult to do in the construction industry because we are paid incrementally.

Unregistered contractor, male, age unspecified



Financial service usage

Variety of financial services used: Contractors use a mix of formal and informal savings and credit products. Most contractors had a strong belief in value of savings. They also realised the potential value that credit could have in helping them manage cash flow issues, but many struggled to access credit.

Insurance not used as coping method: Contractors were familiar with insurance, with 64% of contractors covered through the National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF)⁵ and 36% covered through private insurance. Despite this, contractors do not use insurance to meet business resilience needs.

Take-up of insurance



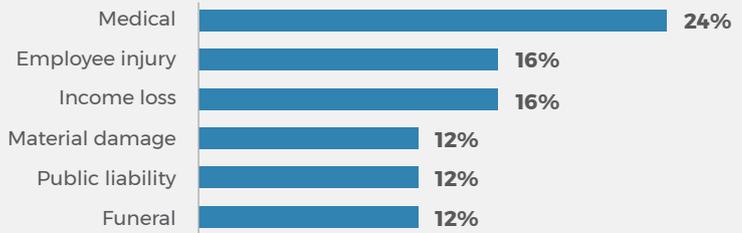
“

Right now, I don't [have insurance] because it is not a big project, so I don't see the need for insurance. It's a small project, it is easy to manage.

Unregistered contractor, male, 26



Types of insurance products



N=25

“

It would be good to have project-based savings, where I can save different amounts for different projects.

Unregistered contractor, male, age unspecified

Appetite for financial products:

Positive view of potential financial services offering. More than half of the contractors said they would be willing to use savings and credit if these services were offered via iBuild, preferably on a project-by-project basis. 44% of respondents said they would take up insurance from iBuild, if it were offered. However, due to a general lack of trust in insurance, the contractors wanted more information about how it would work.

“

Credit should be per project. Treat every project like a limited company. Problems from one project should not spill over to other projects

Unregistered contractor, male, 27



Whether contractors would take up financial products if iBuild offered them



N=25

5 NHIF membership is mandatory for everyone who is (i) ordinarily resident in Kenya, (ii) over 18 years old and (iii) has a monthly income of more than KES1,000, whether derived from employment or self-employment (Kenya Employment Law, 2018).

Product recommendations:

Financial products offered through iBuild can help contractors meet various needs. Contractors can become more resilient if they make use of insurance that helps them manage site damages, injury to workers and personal health risks. In addition, working capital credit and targeted savings products can help contractors manage their cash flow issues and meet their long-term goals. Thus, beyond financial products, there is a need for iBuild to also incorporate risk management strategies to help contractors mitigate their main risks, for example through providing tarps to protect their materials from weather-related risks.

	Why does this need exist?	How big is this need?	What products could meet this need?
 <p>Injury to workers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inexperienced workers Lack of appropriate safety mechanisms Risky nature of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 28% experienced injury to self or worker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worker's compensation, on an on-demand or pay-as-you-go* basis.
 <p>Material damage to site: Theft, loss or damage to tools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate change impacting weather patterns and damaging sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 56% experience site damages to weather 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contractor's all risk. However, given that this is likely to be expensive, might be worth exploring whether part of these risks can be covered through niche products.
 <p>Payment risks leading to cashflow issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Client paying late, partially or not at all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Late payments (84%) Partial payments (64%) 44% found it difficult to access loan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working capital credit
 <p>Inability to save for long-term goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competing demands for income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80% want to expand their business 40% want to build a home 40% want to pay for a child's education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted savings
 <p>Personal health risks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inexperienced workers Lack of appropriate safety mechanisms Risky nature of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 22% of urban small business owners in Kenya faced a major health risk 44% experienced an illness of a family member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health insurance, with the option to include family members.

*On-demand and pay-as-you-go insurance products provide more flexibility in cover, allowing consumers to purchase insurance whenever and wherever they want, usually for a specific time period (National Association of Insurance Commissioners, 2020).



Suppliers

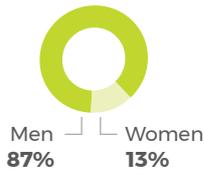
The findings in this section are based on the qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys conducted among iBuild suppliers. All percentages denote percentage of the building suppliers, unless indicated otherwise.

Who are the suppliers?

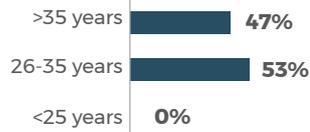


iBuild suppliers are predominantly males older than 26 and have relatively high asset ownership. Their main goal is to expand their business, followed by buying/building a home and to buy land.

Gender



Age

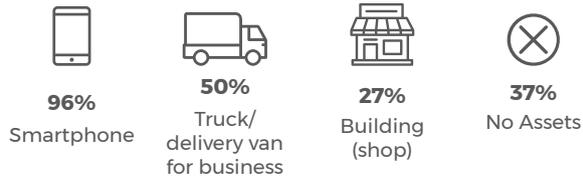


Main goals



Asset ownership

Four (13%) own both a delivery van and the building where their shop is.



(multi-tagged)

(multi-tagged)

N=30

“

To have a one-stop construction and building materials centre.

Large supplier, female, age unspecified

“

In 5 years I think I'll be far. I think the company will be big in terms of supply - I can supply large-scale.

Small/medium supplier, male, age unspecified

“

Everybody is going digital and if you are left behind you can become obsolete in the market.

Large supplier, female, age unspecified

“

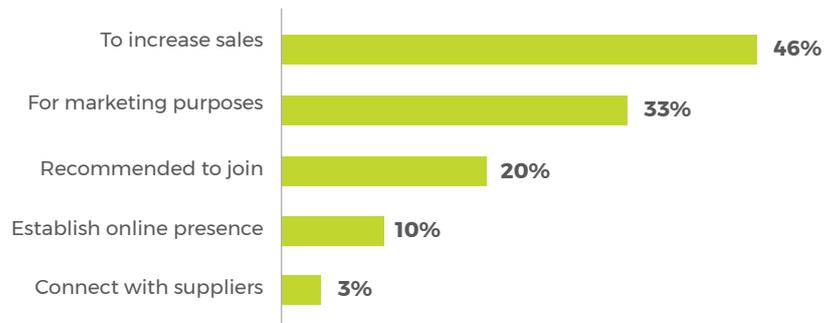
I joined because I was interested in joining social media platforms that can help me get clients so that I can run my business smoothly.

Small/medium supplier, male, age unspecified

Why they joined iBuild

Joined iBuild to expand digital presence. Suppliers typically joined iBuild to expand their access to markets and indicated that they see value in having a digital presence.

Reason for joining iBuild



N=30
Multi-tagged



Registration of suppliers



80%

are registered with the registrar of companies.

Type of shop

53%

A variety of construction materials sold



47%

Only one type of construction material sold

Materials sold:

Timber (10%), glass (7%), concrete (7%), sand and ballast (7%) most common.

This is similar to the findings from FinAccess (2019), where 84% of urban small businesses tend to have one employee only (Cenfri et al., 2019).

Business operations

Relatively young businesses, with both formal and informal features.

67% of the suppliers had been working for less than five years, sell mainly to individuals and keep records informally. However, most of their businesses are registered.

Length of operations



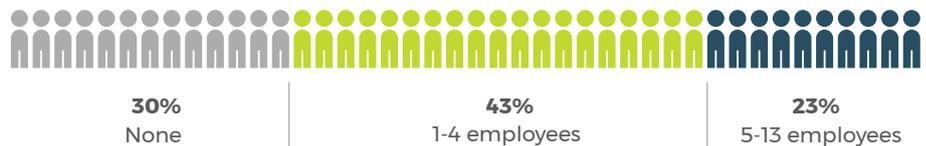
How financial records are kept



In contrast to the findings from FinAccess (2019), registration levels among iBuild suppliers were much higher than those of urban small business owners, where only 29% of businesses were registered (Cenfri, et al., 2019).

All suppliers classified as MSMEs. 83% of suppliers are micro-enterprises (fewer than nine employees⁶).

Number of employees



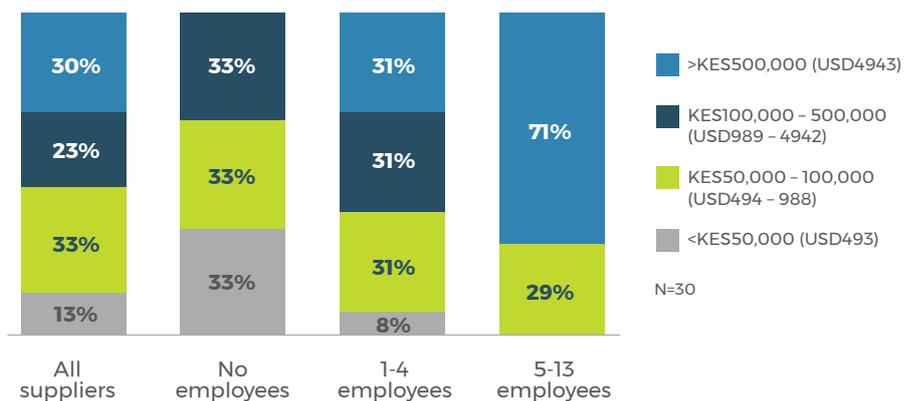
N=30

* 2 suppliers were unsure of how many employees they had

Monthly earnings vary, but smaller businesses earn less on average.

About 60% of suppliers earn between KES50,000 and KES500,000 (USD494 to USD4,900) per month.

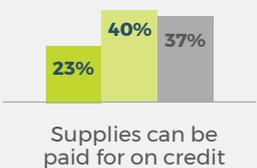
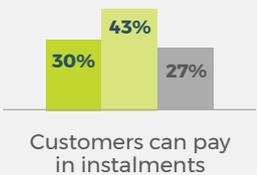
Monthly income from sales according to business size



6 Classification according to the KNBS (2016)



Suppliers' payment terms



Always Sometimes Never

N=30
Multi-tagged



Sometimes you lack funds because you have a lot of deliveries but not enough capital, so you find yourself losing business.

Small/medium supplier, male, age unspecified

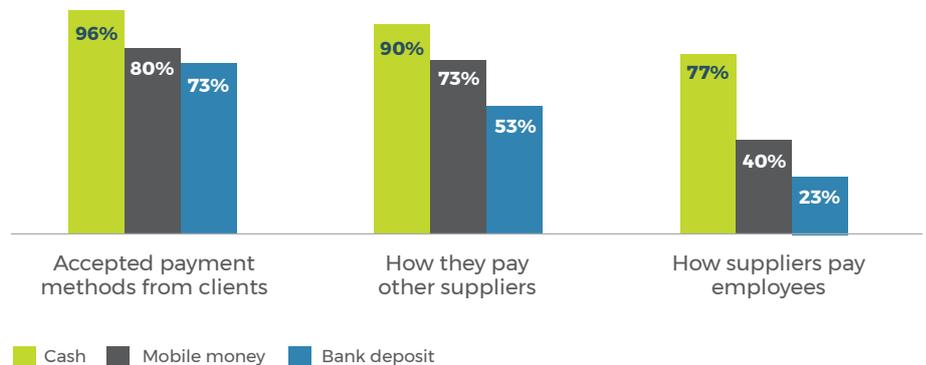


The only challenge that I fear for now is [not] being unable to sustain this business because of low customer or low sales. Paying rent may become difficult.

Small/medium supplier, female, age unspecified

Varied payment methods accepted, but cash most prevalent. Suppliers accept and use a mix of bank deposits, cash and mobile money to receive and make payments.

Payment methods that suppliers accept and use to make payments



N=30
Multi-tagged

Suppliers have flexible payment terms. Most suppliers allow customers to purchase on credit and pay in instalments or pay their own supply stock on credit.

Risks and coping mechanisms

High business risk experience: 70% of business suppliers faced more than three business risk events in 2019.

The most common risks faced include payment risks and cashflow/liquidity issues, experienced by 83% and 80% of suppliers respectively. iBuild's escrow services can help overcome payment risks.

These findings are similar to the FinAccess (2019) survey results, where liquidity issues were experienced by more than 56% of urban small business owners in Kenya (Cenfri et al., 2019).

Suppliers used a variety of coping mechanisms in the face of risks, including using their savings or their business incomes as a fallback strategy.

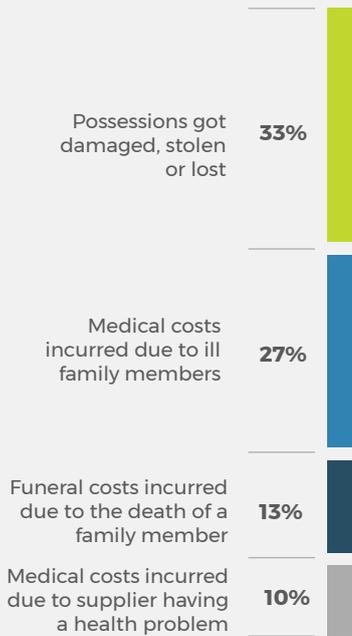
Business risks faced



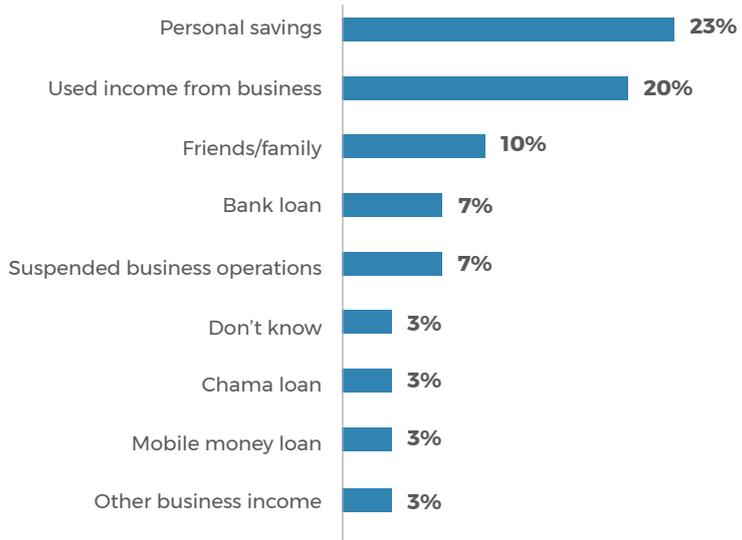
N=30
Multi-tagged
n/a responses not included



Personal risks faced

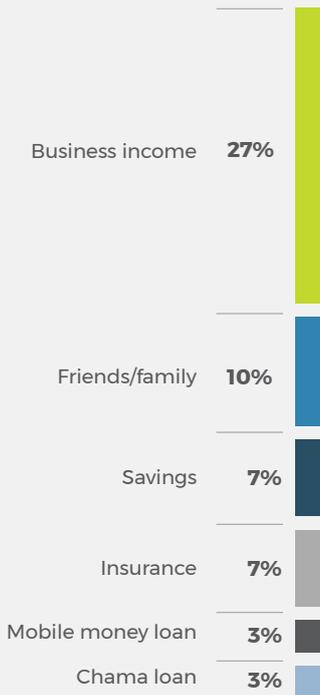


Coping mechanisms used



N=30
Multi-tagged
n/a responses not included

Coping mechanisms used



N=30
Multi-tagged

Range of personal risks also experienced: 33% of suppliers had their possessions damaged, lost or stolen, and 27% of suppliers experienced illness of a family member. Again, they used either their savings or business incomes to cope with these risks.

Financial service usage

Strong belief in reinvesting savings in business. The qualitative interviews suggest that, although quite a few suppliers saved in their personal capacity, most thought that profits from the business should be ploughed back to grow their business.



Let me tell you something about businesses: when you're running a business you don't focus so much on savings, you focus on maximizing the profit and most of this profit is ploughed back to expand the business.

Small/medium supplier, male, age unspecified

Reluctance to use credit. From the qualitative research, most respondents considered credit to be risky, but several suppliers still made use of credit. Some would approach family or friends before they used formal credit products, while others used banks.



Taking a loan is not the best option because what would happen if you took a loan and your business fails? How would you repay that loan?

Small/medium supplier, male, age unspecified



No, no. Even if the lending agent came to me and gave it to me in my hands, I wouldn't take it.

Small/medium supplier, female, age unspecified



“

I have trust that it's all in the hands of God... when you leave your home, you pray that God will bring you back but the next moment you never know what's happening.

Small/medium supplier, female, age unspecified

“

We handle it when it comes.

Small/medium supplier, male, 37

“

Savings will be so good, however I'm not certain if it's true... nowadays many Kenyans who are scrupulous take advantage of unsuspecting, innocent, hardworking Kenyans.

Small/medium supplier, female, age unspecified

“

It will depend on the interest rate... If it is favourable, then I have no problem... You know there is still this fear of people nowadays. How trustworthy is iBuild?

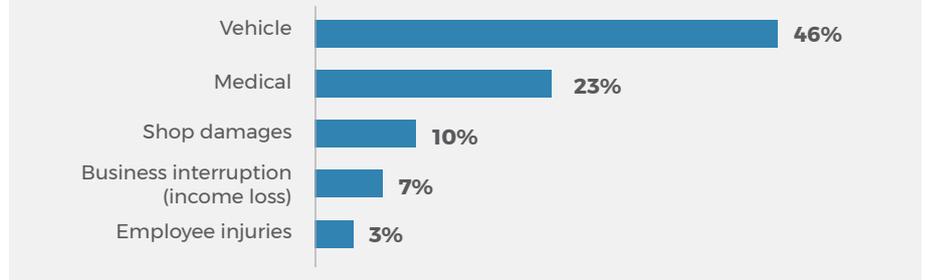
Small/medium supplier, male, age unspecified

Insurance not used as a coping mechanism. As with contractors, insurance uptake is relatively high: 77% of suppliers had NHIF, while 33% had private insurance. The qualitative interviews show that, although respondents could envisage the potential value of insurance, some, especially the smaller suppliers, could not see the benefits of having insurance for risk events that are unlikely to happen. Others were either in denial about potential risks or confident that they could themselves handle the expenses associated with risk events.

Take-up of insurance



Types of insurance cover



Types of vehicle insurance



Appetite for financial products:

Open to financial services being offered. Suppliers were relatively positive about taking up an insurance product if iBuild were to offer it, but less so about savings products, given their belief that profits should rather be re-invested in the business and due to certain trust issues. Most suppliers indicated that they would want more information about the terms and conditions of credit products before considering uptake.

Whether suppliers would take up financial products if iBuild offered them





Product recommendations:

Financial products offered through iBuild can help suppliers meet various needs. Insurance can enable suppliers to become more resilient by helping them to manage workers' injuries, damage to their shop and damage to/theft of materials. In addition, working capital credit or lay-bys can help suppliers manage cashflow issues. Lastly, targeted savings products can help suppliers meet their long-term goals.

	Why does this need exist?	How big is this need?	What products could meet this need?
 Injury to workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inexperienced workers Lack of appropriate safety mechanisms Risky nature of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17% said their employees got injured on the job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worker's compensation insurance
 Damage or theft to stock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited security on premises Location of premises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 43% faced damage/theft of stock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business property insurance
 Shop damaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fire, natural disaster, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10% had damages to their shop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business interruption insurance
 Payment issues resulting in cash flow issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customers not paying on time or at all Inability to access cash flow issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 70% experienced late or partial payment 70% said they struggled with cash flow 47% found it difficult to access a business loan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working capital credit Lay-bys
 Desire to save for long-term goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competing demands for income But have clear aspirations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80% want to expand their business 40% want to build a home 40% want to pay for a child's education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted savings
 Materials damaged in transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor handling of goods in transit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20% said that their supplies were damaged due to poor handling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goods-in-transit insurance

What is a lay-by? A lay-by is an arrangement whereby a seller allows a consumer to pay for goods in installments over a specified period. Once the price of the goods has been paid for in full, the seller releases the goods to the consumer (Western Cape Government, 2020).



Workers

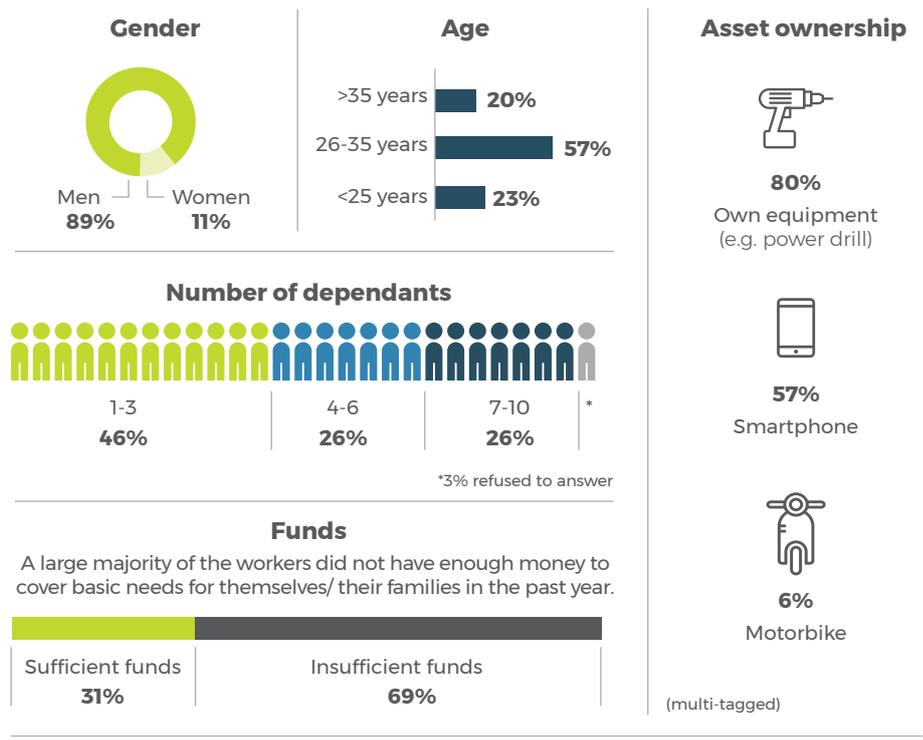
The findings in this section are based on the qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys conducted among iBuild workers. All percentages denote percentage of the building suppliers, unless indicated otherwise.

Who are the workers?



iBuild workers are predominantly males between the ages of 26 to 35, are less technologically savvy but have relatively high asset ownership. They tend to have a few dependants and are a vulnerable group - more than two-thirds of workers struggled to make ends meet.

FinAccess (2019) analysis highlighted that workers across Kenya are vulnerable, with 41% of urban wage earners noting that they had trouble making money last between the times they get paid, and 46% experienced a time when they could not meet their regular spending needs (Cenfri, et al., 2019).



N=35



I am happy for the job opportunities and the payment system. I will always get paid with iBuild.

Skilled worker, male, 38



Why they joined iBuild

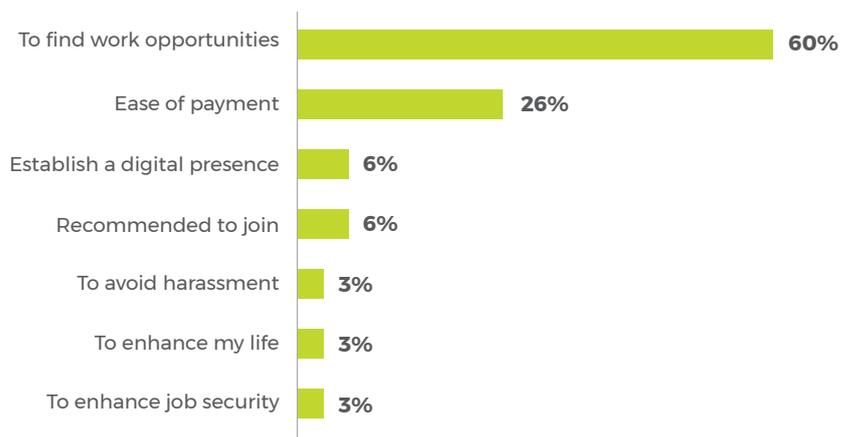
Joined iBuild for work opportunities. Workers typically joined iBuild to get work and for ease of receiving payment from contractors. The success rate of landing a job on iBuild is much higher for workers than it is for contractors, with 68% of workers who applied for one or more jobs landing at least one job on iBuild.



It is a good platform due to payment. Even if the money delayed, it didn't get lost.

Unskilled worker, male, 19

Reason for joining iBuild



N=35
Multi tagged
n/a responses not included in visual



Workers' registration status



20%

Registered with NCA

9%

Registration in progress

71%

Unregistered

Business operations

Workers have generally been working in the construction industry for less than five years and are unregistered.

Years working in industry



Relatively low earnings and limited work opportunities. Most workers get paid less than KES1,000 per day (USD10), which suggests that some might be earning less than the minimum wage. The minimum daily wage for ungraded artisans is KES839 (USD8) but can go up to KES1,400 (USD13) depending on qualifications (MyWage, 2018). Our qualitative interviews suggest that unskilled workers earn only 60% of what skilled workers do. 37% of workers had no work the previous week.

Daily worker wage



Days worked per month	Monthly income	Monthly income
22 days	KES11,000 - 22,000 (USD101 - USD203)	KES22,000 - 44,000 (USD203 - 406)
30 days	KES15,000 - 30,000 (USD139 - 277)	KES30,000 - 60,000 (USD277 - 554)

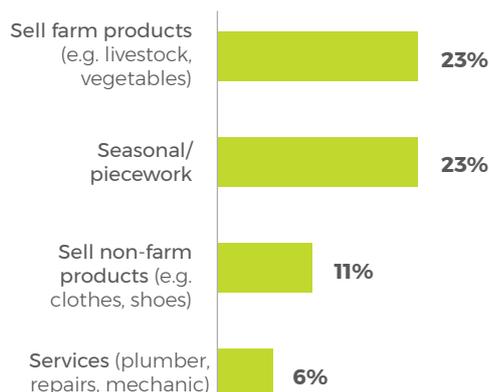
N=35

Number of days worked in past week



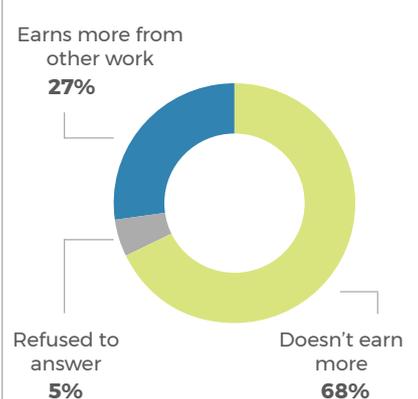
Engage in other activities to supplement their income. Workers typically also have another source of income, with 63% engaging in other forms of work like farming and seasonal or piecework. However, construction work is generally their primary source of income.

Type of additional work



N=35

Earning from other income



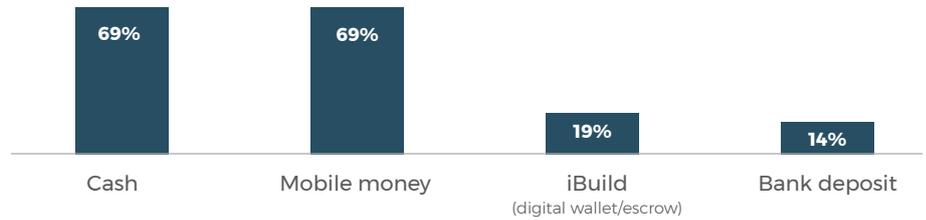
N=20

When translating the workers' daily wage into monthly income, the earnings are similar to those found for urban wage earners in Kenya in the FinAccess (2019) survey: 63% of iBuild workers earned between KES11,000 and KES30,000 (USD101 to USD277) per month, depending on the number of days worked, while 67% of urban wage earners earned between KES7,500 and KES30,000 (USD69 to 277) (Cenfri et al., 2019).



Workers receive payments through multiple channels. Just over two-thirds of workers get paid via cash and via mobile money, while bank deposits are less common. More workers than suppliers and contractors accept iBuild-specific payment methods.

How workers accept payment



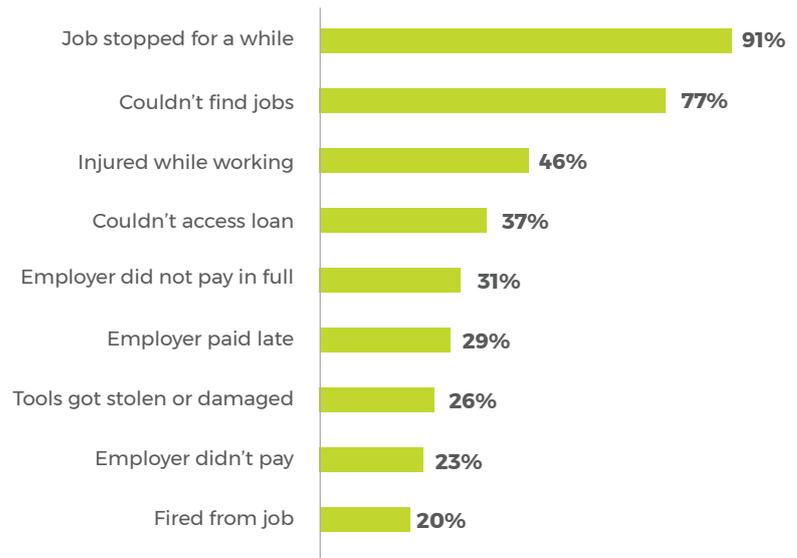
N=35
Multi-tagged

These findings stand in contrast to analysis done on FinAccess (2019) where most (71%) urban wage earners receive their incomes directly into their bank accounts, and less than 20% of them receive their incomes in cash or via mobile money (Cenfri, et al., 2019).

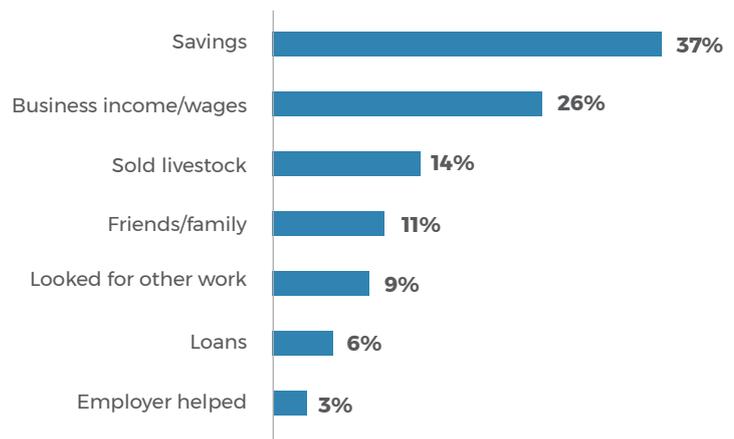
Risks and coping mechanisms

Business risk experience of workers is high: 69% of workers faced at least three business risk events in 2019.

Business risks faced



Coping mechanisms used



N=35
Multi-tagged
n/a responses not included



The only challenge are the foremen since before we joined iBuild, some of them were cunning. They used to pay us very little money. They offer you a job you do it, but if you go for shopping the money is finished. And you have done a lot of work, and they can also get money and lie to you that they haven't been paid.

Skilled male worker, 36



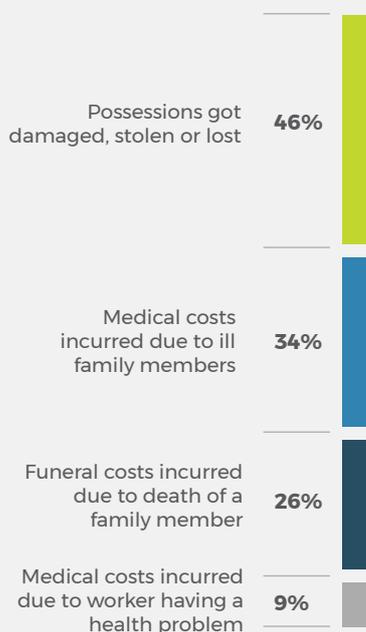
Right now if I got hurt, I would maybe seek help from a certain client whom I know. When I get better, I will compensate him in terms of work and he will deduct his cash and give me the balance.

Skilled male worker, 38



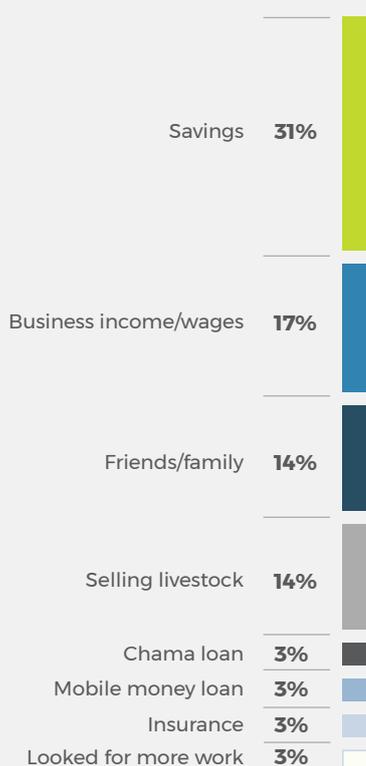
Range of personal risks also experienced: 69% of workers faced at least one personal risk event in 2019, with the main risk faced being their possessions being damaged, stolen or lost.

Personal risks faced



In contrast, the analysis done on FinAccess (2019) suggests that health issues are the most common risk events faced by urban wage earners (Cenfri, et al., 2019).

Coping mechanisms used



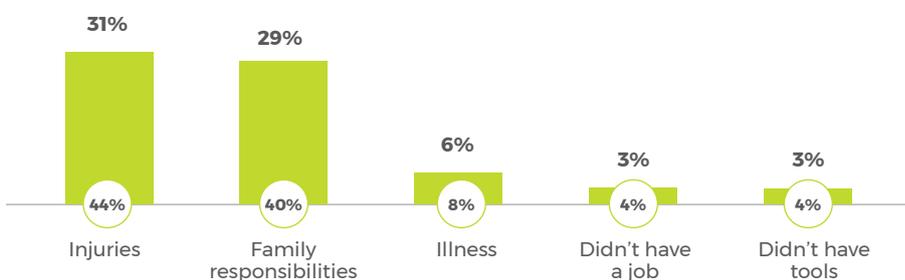
Nearly all of the surveyed workers experienced risks related to job insecurity, such as jobs being terminated or being unable to find work. These risks were the most prevalent and had the most negative impact on workers' livelihoods. iBuild has the potential to help workers overcome such risks by better enabling them to find additional work opportunities.

37% of workers experienced payment issues. iBuild has the potential to enable workers to manage these risks through the escrow account, which is linked to project milestones and will help to ensure that they be paid in full and on time.

Workers used various coping mechanisms to manage risks, including using their savings or their business income. Again, coping in this way reduces welfare.

Risks experienced led to loss of income. 71% of workers were absent from work for more than three days in a row, predominantly due to injuries, and experienced loss of income.

Reason for absence from work for more than 3 consecutive days



N=35

○ = 24 (% of those who were absent from work)



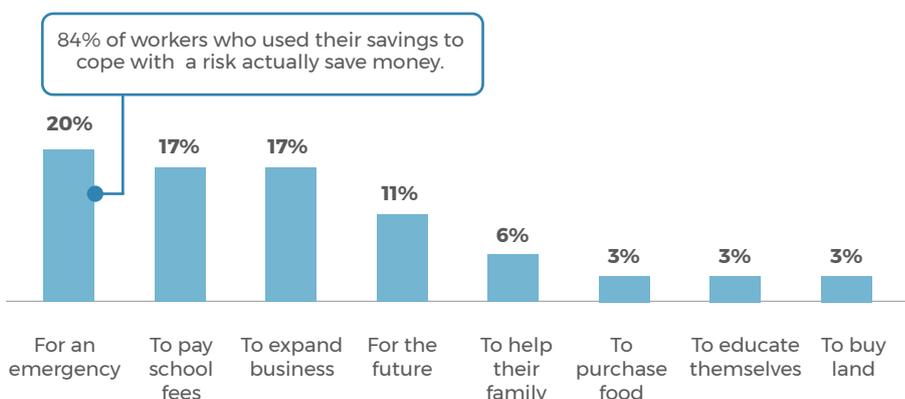
In 2010 I fell from [the] 3rd floor [of a building]. [The client] paid the bill for the three days I was admitted in the hospital, but I was fired. I stayed home for 3 months; it is hard to get jobs.

Skilled male worker, 35

Financial service usage

Most workers save but find it difficult because they often do not have enough funds. 66% of workers save, predominantly for emergencies, for school fees and to expand or start a business. However, some, especially the unskilled workers, struggle to save.

Why the workers save



84% of workers who used their savings to cope with a risk actually save money.



If I can manage to save something little, maybe after some time I can manage to start a small business.

Unskilled female worker, 39



“

I have [a friend], he lends me money with conditions... If he gives you today, then maybe he wants it back by Saturday. [There's] no interest, it's just like that.

Skilled male worker, 30



Credit is used, but with reluctance. Most workers are wary about taking out loans. However, 37% of workers also mentioned insufficient access to credit as a reason for not taking up loans. From the qualitative interviews, workers mentioned that they could rely on family and friends when they needed money.

“

I have never liked asking for loans. I have not reached a place of hardship in life where I'm required to take a loan.

Skilled male worker, 38

Very limited insurance uptake. Workers have low levels of insurance uptake, including the NHIF, and often rely on other coping mechanisms when they are faced with a risk event. No workers reported taking up voluntary private insurance cover, indicating that workers are vulnerable to risk events.

Take-up of insurance



Only 37% of construction workers surveyed report having NHIF cover, which is significantly lower than the average cover for urban workers in Kenya. According to analysis done on FinAccess (2019), 92% of urban wage earners have NHIF (Cenfri et al, 2019).

“

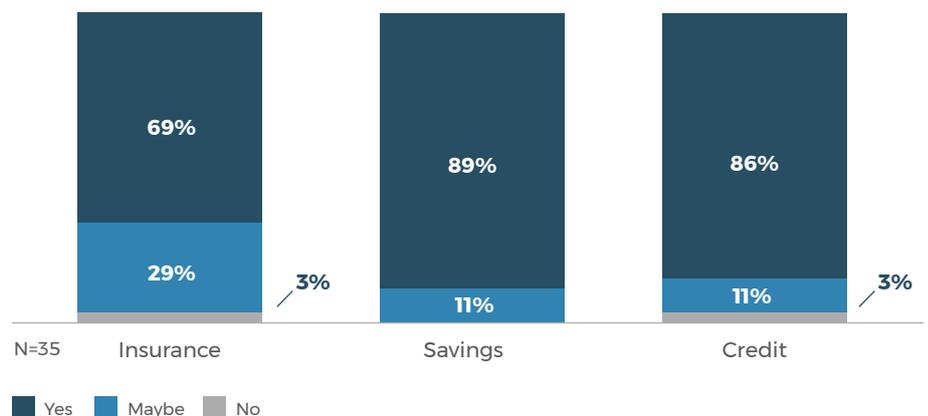
From what I have heard about it, it (insurance) has benefits and I see its importance... I would like to have it. I haven't known how to acquire it.

Skilled male worker, 38

Appetite for financial products:

Open to financial services being offered. Workers were relatively positive about financial services being offered through iBuild. However, they also showed a strong preference to remain in control of their finances. From the qualitative interviews, workers reported that they would not want iBuild to make automatic deductions from their income without them knowing or without sufficient explanation to service credit, insurance or savings products. They also stated that they would want sufficient flexibility around when they save or repay, for example.

Whether workers would take up financial products if iBuild offered them



“

Yes, I have heard about insurance, but I don't understand what it is about.

Unskilled male worker, 19

“

... as long as I receive a message showing the money has gone to insurance [premiums] it (insurance through iBuild) would be okay.

Skilled male worker, 36

“

I see no problem with it (iBuild offering savings) as long as they explain it to me because the savings will help me.

Skilled male worker, 38



Product recommendations

Financial products offered through iBuild can help workers meet various needs. iBuild can reduce the vulnerability of their workers by offering insurance to help them manage injuries and replace lost income. In addition, iBuild can help workers overcome income volatility and meet daily needs by allowing workers early access to their wages⁹. Other financial services that would be beneficial to workers include micro working capital credit, to help them purchase tools/materials required for work, and targeted savings products to help them meet their goals.

	Why does this need exist?	How big is this need?	What products could meet this need?
 Being injured on the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inexperienced workers Lack of safety mechanisms Risky nature of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 46% injured on the job 31% could not work for 3 consecutive days or more due to injury 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss-of income product, on an on-demand basis due to nature of work
 Loss of income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inability to work due to sickness or injury which might have required them to be hospitalised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 31% of workers were absent from work for 3 consecutive days or more due to being injured and 8% due to illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hospitalisation loss of income product
 Homeowners property being damaged, or items stolen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inexperienced workers leading to poor-quality build 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not mentioned, but this type of product could increase trust between contractors, homeowners and workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accidental damage to or theft of property [for iBuild], on an on-demand basis
 Inability to find jobs due to not having the right tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competing demands for income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4% were absent from work for 3 consecutive days or more due to not having the necessary tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Micro working capital credit
 Not enough money for daily expenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volatile income patterns Competing demands for income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 69% of workers did not have enough money to pay for basic daily expenses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early access to wages
 Desire to save and volatility of income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competing demands for income Clear aspirations and savings behaviour already present Volatile income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 97% faced risks of job insecurity 66% already save; mostly for expanding their business, paying for education, and future events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted saving product

⁷ See Wagestream, for example

Opportunities

iBuild value proposition

iBuild solves various challenges within the construction industry.

Construction challenges solved by iBuild

Challenge	Solution
 Skilled labour shortage	iBuild matches labour demand and supply
 Low technological adoption	iBuild digitises certain processes, which can help businesses streamline operations and improve collaboration, which will increase productivity
 Payment disputes	iBuild offers payment security, which is a significant risk faced by all participants
 Lack of capital and finance	iBuild improves cashflow with the escrow account and has the potential to improve liquidity if they offer credit services
 Poor-quality assurance and safety hazards	iBuild acts as an intermediary helping to enforce safety standards

Financial service partnership opportunities

There are clear incentives for digital platforms and FSPs to partner to provide financial solutions that meet the needs of platform users and workers.

Financial service providers



Aggregator of clients

- iBuild has a large user base, with over 30,000 Kenyans registered on the platform.
- These individuals are aggregated on iBuild, which makes them more easily accessible for FSPs.



Digital infrastructure and payment channels

- FSPs can distribute financial services cost-effectively by using the digital infrastructure that iBuild has established and the wide variety of payment mechanisms it allows for.



Communication channel

- iBuild can easily communicate with its users through the app, which would enable FSPs to engage with these groups.



User insights

- iBuild has a myriad of data on its customers and holds unique insights into the financial needs of its users and their behaviour.
- FSPs can leverage this data to develop fit-for-purpose financial services.

iBuild



Diversification of revenue stream

- iBuild can earn more revenue by offering financial products, for example through commissions earned on transactions between its users and the FSPs.



Increase participation

- By offering financial services, iBuild can improve its chances of attracting and retaining participants on the platform.
- iBuild can also negotiate more favourable terms for its users, since they aggregate a large client base.



Increase trust

- iBuild can leverage financial services to build trust and certainty regarding payments and making sure that certain risks that emerge during the matching activities are mitigated (e.g. injuries and poor-quality work).



Build an ecosystem

- iBuild can also build an ecosystem that offers broader value to participants, by providing value-added services to claim a greater share via the network effect. This can make iBuild more attractive to a broader set of participants and diversify its revenue stream, while ensuring the resilience of existing participants.

Financial product and product feature recommendations

Users can benefit from a range of financial services offered through iBuild. The qualitative and quantitative survey indicated that a mix of savings, insurance and credit products can help users become more resilient, meet their goals and assist with liquidity.

Summary of recommended financial product offerings

	Contractors	Suppliers	Workers
 Transfer of value	<p>All iBuild users experienced challenges around the reliability of payments. iBuild overcomes this market failure through its digital wallet and escrow service, which reduces payment uncertainty and allows participants to safely store and access their funds. In addition, these tools offer additional security to the users by ensuring that everyone adheres to the amount agreed. This, in turn, builds trust and adds significant value to all users on the platform.</p>		
 Resilience	<p>Contractors would benefit most from insurance products that cover worker injuries and products that protect their site materials from weather damage.</p>	<p>Suppliers would benefit most from insurance products that cover damage or theft of stock.</p>	<p>Workers would benefit the most from insurance products that protect them and their income against injuries.</p>
 Liquidity	<p>Contractors and suppliers often experienced issues with cash flow or struggled to access credit. Working-capital credit can help contractors and suppliers cover short-term, operational needs. This can ease their cashflow constraints and unlock productive capacity.</p>		<p>Workers also struggled to access credit, and most had insufficient resources to cope with emergencies and meet daily needs. Micro-credit can help them cover emergency costs and to finance asset purchases/tools for work.</p>
 Meeting goals	<p>All users would benefit from targeted savings products, which could help them build up their finances, reduce financial stress and meet long-term goals.</p>		

Financial services must be fit for purpose. There are clear challenges in each insurance, credit and savings market. iBuild and its partner FSPs can design product features that help to overcome some of these challenges.

Insurance product recommendations

Challenge	Solution
Insurance is a grudge purchase	When selling policies, use social framing. For example, if it's a product for contractors to cover their workers, clearly draw on the fact that Kenya is a collective society and make it clear that this product would benefit their workers.
Individual policies often more expensive than group policies	Sell group insurance policies, where iBuild is the group policyholder. This would allow iBuild to negotiate for lower premiums on behalf of its users. iBuild can either pay the premium on behalf of the individuals (incorporate the cost into the platform fee) or it can collect premiums from individuals, in which case we suggest premium payments be flexible.
Individuals may not need cover all the time, due to nature of work	Create flexible on-demand or pay-as-you-go products. For example, if iBuild took out a group product for workers, they could pay-as-they-go and only provide coverage for the number of individuals who are active on its platform on that specific day.
Individuals may miss premium payments or may lack the funds to pay their premium all at once	Ask individuals whether they want iBuild to deduct a portion of their earnings on the app to go towards their insurance premiums. The amount due at the end of the month for the insurance premium therefore depends on the amount they have already paid. Use SMS reminders to remind individuals about their premium payments.
iBuild participants have low levels of insurance understanding	Ensure user-friendliness. Use simple communication, make all product information available on the app and ensure products do not have tons of T&Cs. This will assist with overcoming some of the trust issues that participants have. Ensure that the claims process is seamless. Participants should be able to easily submit claims through the app/via USSD and be able to request assistance if needed. Support from tech intermediaries could help.

Source: Authors' own

Credit product recommendations

Challenge	Solution
Users are wary of using credit, have low levels of trust and are worried about being taken advantage of.	Ensure products have strict and clear T&Cs, which can be easily understood. Ensure all product information is available in the app, including "help/Q&A" pages that can provide further assistance and can help reduce uncertainty.
There are high defaults among digital borrowers in Kenya.	Ensure that repayment is seamless, i.e. deducted from iBuild wallet. However, further discussions needed around whether repayment is automatic or not, given the concerns raised by participants around not having control over their finances. Frame credit repayments in terms of the number of jobs or hours worked required to pay off. This could help individuals feel like the repayment is more manageable and know what actions they need to take to pay it off.

Credit product recommendations (continued)

Challenge

Solution

Participants face difficulties in accessing credit because they are informal and they lack necessary documents.

Ensure that participants can access the credit quickly but also clearly assess whether they could pay the amount back.

Good examples: Branch and Jumia (credit within minutes), JUMO in Tanzania and Faulu in Kenya.

Use iBuild data to generate digital credit scores. This is an alternative source of data which can be leveraged to help credit institutions make more informed lending decisions.

Participation is currently still low on the platform.

Consider linking credit to platform use, which could act as an incentive to increase participation.

For example, credit can only be used on the platform, to pay workers, buy supplies, etc., or consider linking it to savings performance (i.e. how well they manage to save money).

Source: Authors' own

Savings product recommendations

Challenge

Solution

iBuild participants struggle to save due to the irregularity of their income flows.

iBuild should conduct further research on whether participants want automatic deductions from weekly earnings (or project earnings). This could be beneficial because it removes a behavioural barrier (friction) of individuals having to make the same choice over.

Alternatively, consider allowing participants to contribute flexible amounts based on their income flows.

iBuild participants were concerned about losing control of their funds.

iBuild should consider offering two types of savings products:

1. Short-term savings where individuals could easily access them
2. Long-term savings that gain interest, but still with some ability to access funds

People tend to focus on the present and may not think to save for the future.

Use behavioural tools to encourage savings, for example:

- In the form of a prompt when they reach a milestone or an SMS to “top up” their savings account by making a deposit.
- Send savings reminders through iBuild and allow individuals to watch their savings grow. This could help them realise the value of saving and encourage them to save more.
- Use goal-directed interventions to frame individuals' savings goals as they relate to their aspirations, e.g. “you have saved x amount towards buying new tools, only x amount to go!”

Source: Authors' own

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About



iBUILD Global

The iBuild mobile application is a citizen-to-citizen (C2C) housing market disruption tool that empowers people to build, reversing their housing plight through small-scale construction based on each individual's unique needs. The iBuild mobile and web application is designed to lower the transaction costs of construction by providing citizens direct access to a dynamic ecosystem of competitive housing construction services and by creating transparency of transactions across all stakeholders throughout the entirety of a project.

Ronald Omyonga
ronald.omyonga@ibuild.global

Lew Schulman
lew.schulman@ibuild.global

Nancy Welsh
nancy.welsh@ibuild.global



Cenfri

Cenfri is a global think-tank and non-profit enterprise that bridges the gap between insights and impact in the financial sector. Cenfri's people are driven by a vision of a world where all people live their financial lives optimally to enhance welfare and grow the economy. Its core focus is on generating insights that can inform policymakers, market players and donors who seek to unlock development outcomes through inclusive financial services and the financial sector more broadly.

Kate Rinehart-Smit
kate@cenfri.org

Lucia Schlemmer
lucia@cenfri.org



FSD Africa

FSD Africa is a non-profit company that aims to increase prosperity, create jobs and reduce poverty by bringing about transformation in financial markets in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and in the economies they serve. It provides know-how and capital to champions of change whose ideas, influence and actions will make finance more useful to African businesses and households. It is funded by the UK aid from the UK Government. FSD Africa also provides technical and operational support to a family of 10 financial market development agencies or "FSDs" across SSA called the FSD Network.

Thomas Wiechers
thomas@fsdafrica.org



insight2impact

insight2impact is a resource centre that aims to catalyse the provision and use of data by private and public-sector actors to improve financial inclusion through evidence-based, data-driven policies and client-centric product design. insight2impact is jointly hosted by Cenfri and FinMark Trust and is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in partnership with The MasterCard Foundation.

Chernay Johnson
chernay@i2ifacility.org



FSD Kenya

The Kenya Financial Sector Deepening programme (FSD Kenya) was established in early 2005 to support the development of financial markets in Kenya as a means to stimulate wealth creation and reduce poverty. Working in partnership with the financial services industry, FSD Kenya's goal is to significantly expand access to services among lower-income households and smaller-scale enterprises.

Michael Mbaka
michaelm@fsdkenya.org

James Kashangaki
james@fsdkenya.org