

Data collection software to reach the hard-to-reach

By  Lauren Hartzenberg

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Al Ismaili, Shehzad Tejani and Faiz Hirani make up the formidable 'triforce' of [Bamba Group](#), a Kenyan tech startup that has modernised data collection. Bamba's SMS, app and web data collection software is able to run in any country - including emerging markets - and enables clients to communicate, survey and obtain feedback from beneficiaries, clients, suppliers and the public.



Bamba Group co-founders and directors: Al Ismaili, Faiz Hirani and Shehzad Tejani

Bamba Group also happens to be the first East African country selected by prominent US tech accelerator [Techstars](#), as reported [earlier this year](#). In the spirit of #AfricaMonth, the founders share why they believe Nairobi is rife with opportunity and offer some startup advice for aspiring techpreneurs.

▣ Describe your product offering. What makes it unique?

Bamba Group: Bamba deploys technology to help organisations increase their efficiency through data collected accurately and within the timeframes they specify. Bamba's solution helps our customers track their teams' progress against set objectives and to reduce their costs. Our SMS, app and web data collection software enables our clients to communicate, survey and obtain feedback from their beneficiaries, clients, suppliers and the public. The unique feature of the product is the ability to incentivise respondents to reply to surveys.

▣ What are the opportunities and challenges for tech startups in Kenya right now?

Bamba Group: One of the great things about the tech ecosystem in Nairobi is the diversity of the problems local tech startups are tackling. From data collection to the Google Maps-based address system and GPS-tracked boda-boda rides. It is a fantastic environment to work in. The key opportunity is the sheer scale of unaddressed needs in all the sectors of human activity - education, transportation, communications, finance, to name but a few.

Running a startup in an African country comes with challenges such as the lack of funding, which is available for the Silicon Valley based startups, for example. Another challenge every tech startup faces in Nairobi is the relatively small size of the pool of highly skilled developers.

▣ How has Bamba Group been funded?

Bamba Group: Our passion for what we do and our ambition to make Bamba a great company has been the key to our success to date. We have grown in size with many more employees and clients. Bamba began as a team of three. We called ourselves 'triforce'. The triforce team was confident in the company's potential and invested our own money when we started. It took us a year to get our first client whose payments covered our expenses.

■ ***What is your long-term vision for Bamba Group?***

Bamba Group: Bamba's near future plan is to open up offices across the globe and become the leading provider of the SMS-based services.

■ ***What practical advice can you give aspiring African techpreneurs?***

Bamba Group: We have learnt a great deal since the company was founded. Here is the advice we would pass on to any techpreneur:

1. Let the market help you shape your product. Embrace agility if you want to succeed in an industry that is rapidly evolving.
2. Place your employees at the heart of your organisation. Pay them well and treat them well. Help them feel like they're an integral part of the company so that they can clearly see how they contribute to the company's success.
3. Selling is hard especially while the first product is being built. There were many 'nos' before we got our first 'yes' from a client. It took almost a year of persistence before we got our first customer. What also helped was our ability to adjust our course quickly enough when things were not working.

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