

Entry for GIZ Gender Competition 2024

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Employment and Skills for Development in Africa (E4D)/Promotion for Women for the Green Transformation in Africa (WE4D)- OE 1700

Empowering women entrepreneurs for employment creation in Sub-Saharan Africa

Context

Women are vital for the economic development and social progress of Sub-Saharan Africa. They contribute to the creation of jobs, income, and innovation, as well as the empowerment of women and girls. However, women entrepreneurs face many challenges and barriers that limit their potential growth. Some of these challenges include lack of access to finance, markets, skills, networks, technology, and mentorship. Moreover, many women entrepreneurs often encounter social and cultural norms that discourage them from pursuing their entrepreneurial aspirations or constrain their decision-making power. In order to support women entrepreneurs for job creation in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is pivotal to address these challenges and create an enabling environment that fosters their entrepreneurial paths.

Approach

The 'Women Entrepreneurship for Africa' Initiative unleashes the potential of women entrepreneurs and supports them in a holistic way. The initiative strengthens networks and ecosystems, which support women entrepreneurs to create solid relationships with each other and other stakeholders, such as clients, suppliers, investors, mentors, peers, and policymakers. Pursuing such an approach can assist in their access to information, resources, opportunities, and markets, as well as share experiences, challenges and best practices.

Through various interventions, women entrepreneurs are supported in enhancing their skills and capacities through training, mentoring, and coaching, and access to Business Development Services. This has supported the women in improving their business management, financial and digital literacy, innovation skills as well as their self-confidence and leadership capabilities. In addition, women have been supported with direct finance, ranging from 5,000 USD to 50,000 EUR, and with access to investors for further funding. In addition to tangible support for women entrepreneurs, the initiative has raised awareness, changed mindsets, challenged stereotypes, and has advocated for more representation of women entrepreneurs in public and private spaces.





The Initiator
Entrepreneurship programme and seed financing for African women entrepreneurs



The Enabler
Catalyzes the entrepreneurial ecosystem to support African women entrepreneurs



The Accelerator
Accelerates the growth of African women entrepreneurs and second-stage financing



Linkages to National Entrepreneurial Ecosystems



1. Promoting gender equality (40% of marks)

The WE4A initiative was designed to empower women entrepreneurs by addressing the unique challenges they face, including skills gaps, access to finance, and market entry barriers as well as hindering social norms. Empowerment of women entrepreneurs is a complex matter and goes beyond the capacity development we have focused on in recent years. Social norms and beliefs about the role and capacity of women are holding back the full development and opportunities of women entrepreneurs. Therefore, the initiative has pursued an approach that showcases that gender equality among entrepreneurs and MSMEs needs to be addressed holistically.

In the pilot, selected women entrepreneurs have been supported within a period of 35 months that included different aspects starting from training and skills development, such as digital skills, problem solving skills, entrepreneurial skills, access to markets, network building, creation of safe space and access to finance. Thereby diverse methodologies have been applied including virtual programmes that provided technical assistance and direct finance to women entrepreneurs across the African continent, and country specific programmes in the partner countries Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana and Mozambique. In these countries, the team developed a unique and flexible approach to support individual women entrepreneurs as well as support the ecosystem with the aim to address overarching barriers for women entrepreneurship.

Expected Impacts expected and achieved

In the short and medium term, it was expected to facilitate increased business growth, access to finance for women entrepreneurs and the creation of decent jobs in African societies.

The initiative has exceeded its target figures considerably by creating more than 6,000 additional decent jobs in supported businesses, securing more than 10,000 jobs, increasing the business capacities of more than 2,000 women entrepreneurs and supporting more than 500 businesses with second-stage financing. But beyond the measurable results, the initiative has created a wide network of women entrepreneurs across Sub-Saharan Africa who support each other personally and professionally by building each other's confidence, acting as role models, raising their voices, and become agents of change.

In the long term, the initiative is expected to contribute to a significant change in social norms towards women as entrepreneurs and to increased economic development through growing and thriving women-led businesses. For the ecosystem, changing perceptions of women entrepreneurs' capabilities will lead to more supportive and adopted services for women entrepreneurs, including gender-responsive financial products.

2. Gender as a quality feature of our work (20% of marks)

Alignment with GIZ Values: The WE4A's commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women entrepreneurs is a direct reflection of GIZ's values. Through targeted interventions, the programme has made significant strides in providing equal opportunities.

Recognition and Reflection: The success and impact of the WE4A programme have been recognised by partners and beneficiaries. This is reflected in the increasing number of women participating in the initiative and the positive feedback received, indicating a tangible impact on their businesses and communities.



Furthermore, close collaboration of mutual trust has been established with African and European partners to challenge the issue of gender inequality in the corporate world, especially with our implementing partners the Tony Elumelu Foundation, the Swiss Association for Entrepreneurship in Emerging Markets, but also numerous stakeholders on country level such as business associations, governmental bodies, Business Development Service Providers, Incubators and Accelerators, Financial Institutions and alike. Our contribution to women entrepreneurship is highly regarded by our partners, but above all we have greatly appreciated the unfailing efforts of our local and regional partners to tackle the barriers of gender equality.

Regular exchange has taken place during the period with our funding partners, particular with the European Union. Appreciation of our funding partners have been expressed on many occasions during implementation, leading to an upscale of this initiative in terms of continuation of the initiative and funding volume.

3. Implementing feminist core principles (20% of marks)

The WE4A initiative actively seeks to reduce gender disparities in the entrepreneurial sector. By providing targeted support to women entrepreneurs exclusively, WE4A fosters an environment where women can thrive equally alongside their male counterparts. The initiative is designed to be inclusive, addressing the needs and perspectives of diverse groups of women, ensuring that various socio-economic backgrounds are represented and catered to. Furthermore, it addresses broader systemic issues that create barriers for women entrepreneurs, such as limited access to finance and challenges in market entry, thereby fostering a more equitable business landscape.

Aligned with the new feminist foreign strategy and feminist development strategy, WE4A strengthens the “three Rs” of German Development Cooperation- *representation, resources, and rights*. The initiative provides women with platforms to exert influence and advocates for women to be equally represented in decision-making. The initiative further promotes women’s right to life-long education and their rights to economic self-determination and participation. Through the measures the women gain confidence to develop their full potential regardless of their gender. But most predominantly, the initiative allows for extensive access and control over various resources. Besides access to formal financial systems, women entrepreneurs gain access to wide range of knowledge and networks that will enhance their competitiveness and improves their access to (international) markets.

4. Cooperation (20% of marks)

Gender equality needs to be understood and felt by all stakeholders to truly develop and implement measures that lead to change. Change, in mindset and in existing social norms and behaviours, takes time and persistence. WE4A cooperated at different levels:

- Cooperation among colleagues: the different country teams offered diverse contexts for women entrepreneurs, differing needs and varying expertise. To ensure that we all learn from each other, share ideas and support each other, regular virtual team meetings and annual face-to-face workshops took place to better understand the reality of another in a different context.
- Cooperation between women entrepreneurs: The most important is to listen to the voice of the entrepreneurs and give them space to interact with each another. Through in-depth interviews and surveys, we ensured to identify the actual needs of the entrepreneurs. We also created chat groups for the entrepreneurs, where they regularly exchanged business opportunities, needs and personal stories.
- Cooperation between different stakeholders on country level and regionally: to ensure that the entrepreneurial ecosystem addresses the needs of women entrepreneurs, relevant stakeholders have been invited to networking and dialogue events on topics such as access to markets and access to finance. Here they had the chance to listen, interact, discuss and seek solutions with all stakeholders involved.

Challenges

Major challenges included addressing deeply ingrained social norms within the horizon of the duration of the initiative. The change in existing social norms will take time and will need a strong inclusion of male partners, collaborators, influencers. The continuation of this initiative will expand on this. Furthermore, limited funds hinder the expansion the initiative’s reach to more women entrepreneurs – allowing the same intensive support. Another challenge is to achieve a balance between the time required to participate in support measures and the limited time available to women entrepreneurs.

Success factors

The key success factors were the adoption of a holistic and flexible approach in empowering women entrepreneurs (technical assistance, direct funding, access to networks, etc.), strong partnerships with experienced international, regional and national actors, that not only delivered a comprehensive support system that addressed business needs but also addressed psychological and emotional aspects of entrepreneurship. Finally, the most important success factor is the remarkable women entrepreneurs themselves, who have consistently served as role models. WE4A provided a platform to be able to constantly listen to their voices and opinions and a space to drive the agenda forward.