



Empowering FemPreneurs in Togo through digital offline learning

A joint initiative by atingi & ProDeD

Abstract

'Empowering FemPreneurs in Togo through digital offline learning' is a collaborative initiative by the atingi project and ProDED in Togo, addressing gender inequality, particularly in the economic realm. Facing challenges such as limited entrepreneurial and digital skills among women, the FemPreneur program was developed to empower aspiring female entrepreneurs through digital learning and community engagement. Key success factors include the training of trainers model, co-creation approach, and localization strategies. The young program's initial impact has been positive, with high participant satisfaction and a multiplier effect in peer training. Future plans include online provision of the FemPreneur programme as well as promotion, translation, and adaptation for different contexts, aiming to contribute to the growth of female-owned businesses and enhance women's economic well-being.

1. Background

According to the World Bank, Togo still ranks 91st out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap 2022¹. The gender inequality the country experienced is prominently manifested in the economic sphere, with a noticeable lack of entrepreneurial and digital skills among women². Despite the prevailing gender inequality, a substantial number of women in Togo exhibit resilience by sustaining themselves and their families through various micro-businesses. However, many of them are not future-oriented due to women's focus on day-to-day sales. Limited financial resources and entrepreneurial skills further constrain their ability to engage in strategic business and financial planning, hindering sustainable growth.

Developing an entrepreneurial skillset poses a considerable challenge due to the limited availability of training and educational opportunities. This challenge is exacerbated by the limited internet access experienced by many women residing in remote areas. Moreover, internet accessibility is hindered by high costs and the prerequisite need for a certain level of digital literacy, a skill set that is often lacking. This lack of digital connectivity not only restricts their access to information but also hinders their ability to market products or participate in online business activities.

In essence, addressing gender inequality in Togo's economic sphere requires a comprehensive approach that includes targeted initiatives to enhance entrepreneurial and digital skills among women. Bridging the digital divide and providing adequate support for business planning can empower female entrepreneurs to break free from the constraints of day-to-day survival and build sustainable, future-oriented businesses.

The initiative described in the following is conducted by the atingi project, which is part of the global programme digital transformation, in cooperation with the ProDED project in Togo (Pro Développement économique durable; ProEmploi+ since November 2023).

¹ Affoum & Dry (2022) Reforming Discriminatory Laws to Empower Women in Togo. Global Indicators Briefs No. 12. World Bank Group. Published <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099527109292258758/pdf/IDU0294c15ca02d3a04a8f08846021668035ffc8.pdf>, last accessed 30.11.2023.

² The World Bank (2023). Togo Digital Acceleration Project (P179138). Available via: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099060423220042299/P179138079305f0b0bf820086b358419c5.docx#:~:text=Overcoming%20such%20barriers%20is%20challenging.and%20acquisition%20of%20digital%20skills>. Last accessed 30.11.2023.

2. Objectives

The primary goal of this initiative is to **empower and equip (aspiring) female entrepreneurs in Togo with the essential skills to establish and sustain their own businesses**. The initiative aims to contribute to the economic empowerment of women, thus fostering their active and influential participation in societal development and advancing gender equality. The key focus areas are:

- **Skill Development:** Provide a relevant and contextualized e-learning programme focused on enhancing entrepreneurial skills of women in Togo.
- **Access to Digital Infrastructure:** Facilitate access to digital learning resources through the central provision of micro-servers (atingi-in-a-box) and corresponding hardware enabling offline learning. This also includes skills building on how to use the technology.
- **Community Engagement:** Foster peer learning and peer support that encourages collaboration and knowledge sharing among female entrepreneurs by leveraging local networks and women's collectives (e.g. saving groups). This will not only strengthen individual businesses but also contribute to the overall economic landscape in Togo.

3. Implementation

The initiative was kicked-off in December 2022 as a joint effort between atingi and ProDED. In the collective pursuit of advancing gender equality, several local actors were identified as key partners including female savings groups, the African Women and Entrepreneurship Programme (AWEP), and the University of Kara. To ensure an engaging and effective digital learning programme, a co-creation process involving representatives from all key partners was undertaken. During a two-day workshop, participants collectively identified training needs, defined programme content, and set learning objectives under the guidance of a co-creation expert. Based on the workshop outcomes, three interconnected courses addressing digital and financial literacy, business management, and leadership skills were developed (hereafter called: FemPreneur programme³). The self-paced, interactive courses feature bite-sized modules and relatable personas and stories. Thoroughly reviewed and tested by women involved in the co-creation process, the courses also include video testimonials in local languages, in which women share their experiences as entrepreneurs in Togo.

After the production phase, the FemPreneur programme was delivered offline using micro-server technology (atingi-in-a-box) in November this year.⁴ In trainings of trainers (ToTs) across five cities (Kpalimé, Kara, Dapaong, Atakpamé, Sokodé), 50 women, identified by our key partners, were equipped with skills on handling the hardware and utilizing the learning

³ The courses can be found in the atingi content library following these links:

[Cours : Introduction au marketing numérique \(atingi.org\)](#)

[Cours : Introduction à la gestion d'entreprise \(atingi.org\)](#)

[Cours : Introduction à la gestion financière \(atingi.org\)](#)

⁴ atingi-in-a-box is a microserver to which mobile and other digital devices can be connected to access selected e-learning content.

program for peer training. Subsequently, the micro servers and other hardware has been securely stored at the chambers of commerce in each city, facilitating convenient access for women as needed. In the future, the chambers will regularly submit reports on the participation of women, including data extracted from the atingi-in-a-box micro-servers.

In the current phase, the FemPreneur programme is made available and advertised to a larger audience, also outside of Togo. This includes publishing the programme on the atingi e-learning platform as well as adapting it for usage in neighbouring francophone countries. Future plans include translating the program into English. Our promotional strategies involve social media and online campaigns, along with engaging relevant partner networks. To facilitate the implementation of the FemPreneur program by GIZ projects and partners in various contexts, a comprehensive localization manual was developed and is about to be published. This manual underscores the significance of co-creation and human-centred design. Once published, it will serve not only as a guide but also as a learning resource, illustrating the implementation of offline digital learning through co-creation processes.

The **challenges** we encountered during project implementation were mainly related to the complexity of the project which required coordinating a multitude of different stakeholders and service providers, while operating from different geographies. This complexity was compounded by language barriers, as not all team members understand and/or speak French or English. Moreover, it proved very challenging to find a female expert from Togo to conduct the co-creation workshop and ToTs. Regrettably, our efforts to find a female expert capable to fulfill both financial and didactical roles, along with expertise in micro server implementation, were unsuccessful. This was also due to time constraints we were facing.

Despite facing challenges, we identified three **key success factors** in collaboration. Firstly, opting for a training of trainers model resulted in continued peer learning, with six women trainers facilitating the training of approximately 500 more female entrepreneurs (please refer to the next chapter for further details). Secondly, adopting a co-creation and human-centred design approach ensured that the program was customized to meet the specific needs and preferences of the women involved. Lastly, success was reinforced by localizing learning content to the region and context, incorporating highly specific graphics, videos, and audios. This comprehensive strategy contributed to the program's promising outcomes and ensured a successful partnership between atingi and ProDED.

4. Results and expected impact

Among the women trained in the ToTs, the overall satisfaction with the FemPreneur programme was very high. For example, with only one exception, all participants indicated in an anonymous survey that the topics covered were relevant to the development of their own business and equally found that their knowledge on the subject had increased thanks to the participation in the workshop. Furthermore, the multiplier effect has already manifested, with a group of 6 women trained in the ToT, subsequently trained 500 women. Accordingly, only one month after start of the roll-out, a total of 550 women have been trained through the FemPreneur programme. Many more of these types of peer-to-peer trainings are expected in the near future, as we keep planning and discussing further engagement strategies with our key partners.

By featuring the FemPreneur programme on the atingi digital learning platform's online content library in both English and French, engaging in targeted campaigns, and activating relevant partner networks, we anticipate reaching a significantly higher number of female online learners, aiming for 2500 in the coming year. Additionally, there are expectations for the learning program to be adapted and introduced in various country contexts by interested GIZ projects and other atingi partners in the next year.

The long-term vision of the FemPreneur programme is to contribute to the rise in the number of female-owned businesses, fostering a more vibrant entrepreneurial landscape as well as enhancing the economic well-being and independence of women.

5. Feminist core principles and a gender-differentiated approach

By empowering women economically, the initiative described here tackles one of the most fundamental components of achieving gender equality. Enabling women to participate in existing markets and effectively controlling productive resources increases their voice and agency with spill-over effects into social and political spheres. Furthermore, the economic empowerment of women challenges traditional gender stereotypes, specifically those associating men as the “provider” and “breadwinner” of the family. This challenge is indispensable for breaking down systemic barriers that impede progress toward a more equitable society. Women's empowerment, in this context, emerges as a powerful tool for dismantling patriarchal power structures. Moreover, by opting for a co-creation process in developing the FemPreneur programme, women gained ownership of their learning journey. This approach also allowed them to contribute their unique perspectives and experiences through video recordings in their respective local languages. Empowering female voices in this manner is crucial for challenging stereotypical notions that confine women to the domestic sphere.

Furthermore, in establishing the initiative at hand, we carefully analysed the intersecting disadvantages and discriminations faced by our target group that could impede their participation in the FemPreneur Programme. This is the reason we opted for an offline learning approach, incorporating digital tools to facilitate the acquisition of essential digital skills. The creation of a localization manual is an additional effort to raise awareness about the importance of contextualizing learning materials to address issues related to intersectionality.

Lastly, the very high satisfaction levels revealed in learner surveys for the FemPreneur programme strongly indicate the appreciation of our gender and female empowerment efforts by the target group. Additionally, the proactive support from our key partners for a significantly expanded program rollout—training an additional 500 women shortly after the initial ToT implementation—further underscores the positive impact and endorsement of our approaches.