



**wPOWER**

PARTNERSHIP ON WOMEN'S  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN RENEWABLES

## Best Practices for education and training to advance women's energy entrepreneurship

Available evidence shows, when compared apples-to-apples to similar male business owners, women business owners tend to perform as well or better than their male counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

Existing research suggests that women's entrepreneurship is a promising source of wealth creation, women's advancement, and attention to the social needs of the local community and marketplace, **if women are able to compete on a level playing field.**<sup>2</sup>

The challenge is that in the energy sector – women are not on an equal playing field with men and tend to lack access to key resources and larger, more diverse, weak tie networks associated with business success.<sup>3</sup>

In order to successfully address program deficits, it is important to apply a 'gender-aware'<sup>4</sup> perspective with integrated programming when developing entrepreneurship education and training interventions to address the specific

needs of women business owners.

This type of integrated programming is generally lacking in most energy intervention programs.

Our literature review has identified 3 key advances in education and training, that if well integrated in development programs, can significantly support women energy entrepreneurs, these include;

**Personal agency training** to promote personal initiative and an entrepreneurial or growth mindset.<sup>5</sup>

**Coaching and mentoring** programs to support stronger businesses and long lasting change

**Digital/mobile platforms** and other information, communication technologies (ICTs) that support programming at scale through development of communities of practice

# Education and training programs for women energy entrepreneurs should include:

## Gender Aware Program Focus



- Recognize existing societal norms and expectations that perpetuate women as caretaker, mother, household manager, and provide support within that context
- Recognize existing environmental/institutional factors that influence how women engage, and are encouraged to engage, with household and business financial matters
- Recognize the potential lack education and experience that may interfere with management of her business
- Recognize the potential lack of information on markets, business models, product quality, and the role of the customers experience when engaging with the energy technology
- Provide personalized context specific, targeted support
- Provide support at various levels, business, finance, home life, life skills, networking
- Create women-focused interventions and support programs, such as mobile-based financial support, in-kind donations, etc.
- Understand the importance of role models and expanded social networks
- Address mindset issues such as low confidence, motivation, personal initiative and personal agency

## Mindset training: Personal agency and personal initiative training



- Focus on strengthening an 'entrepreneurial mindset'
- Focus is on building personal agency – or one's capacity to make decisions and take actions
- Reinforce practical action through active practice and repeated actions with emphasis on feedback
- Draw from neuroscience and psychological methods to help individuals understand how their thoughts, feelings, beliefs and past actions can lead to meaningful future actions

## Coaching and Mentoring



- Help women build strong ties to peers, coaches and mentors, individuals with key expertise, good business networks, and access to key resources
- Male mentors and coaches need to include with these characteristics, especially in male-dominated industries
- Promote coaching/mentoring relationships that endure beyond simple education and training course

## Integration of information, communication and technology (ICTs) to scale



- Connect entrepreneurs with peers, mentors, and coaches using mobile apps during and after core program
- Communicate continuous educational content and connect entrepreneurs to a central knowledge center as needs arise
- Use mobile phones to reinforce coaching messages (interactive voice recording/IVR)
- Offer teleconference mentoring sessions via mobile app
- Use digital platforms for research purposes; collect ongoing data on program impact and participants
- Develop alumni network to support expansion of coaching/mentoring engagement

## Types of coaching and mentoring formats

### Face-to-face, one-on-one mentoring

Allows the mentor to focus 100% on the challenges and issues of the individual mentee. The advantage of face-to-face individual mentoring is that the mentor can gather an enormous amount of information from both verbal and non-verbal communication.

### Face-to-face group mentoring, Peer mentoring

Small groups of between six to eight business owners comes together to discuss their challenges and issues. The group acts as a sounding board, taking on the role of the peer mentors to help individual members examine their issues from different perspectives. Advantages of this type of mentoring is that the group of peers can provide a number of different experiences and view points to help and support its members.

### Telephone mentoring

Combined with a blended telephone mentoring, used in tandem with face-to-face mentoring. It is provided on a one-on-one basis, so has the advantage of being focused on the mentee's specific issues.

### E-mentoring

E-mentoring is often part of a blended mentoring approach, and can be used on its own through a digital platform. Provided on a one-on-one basis, this has the advantage of being able to focus on specific issues. The mentee can provide a lot more written information than with other types of mentoring, which may allow the mentor more time to assimilate the information before deciding on potential options for a course of action. One example of this type of mentoring is interactive voice recording (IVR) that has been used in resource poor settings where in-person mentors were not feasible and literacy levels are low.

### Innovation labs and incubators

Innovation labs and incubators provide some combination of a community of peers, mentors, shared resources, and guided curriculum to support new businesses. Incubators can help bridge knowledge, digital, socio-political and even cultural divides and help increase the availability, awareness, accessibility and affordability of financial, human, intellectual, and even social capital, the key ingredients of entrepreneurial success (Kutzhanova et al 2009).

## Case Study 1



Energy 4 Impact (E4I) is a non-profit organization that works with local entrepreneurs to ensure sustainable energy access in Africa. The NGO has several regional offices, which operate in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Senegal. Their aim is to expand the clean energy market, impacting the livelihoods of millions and provision of enhanced financial prosperity. Due to lack of job opportunities, local residents initiate their own businesses, which E4I believes can offer the best solutions to prevailing energy access issues. Financial constraints, product distribution channels and available technology are some of the crucial challenges, which hinder the growth of the businesses. To overcome these limitations, E4I provides a bridge by enabling entrepreneurs to build clean energy products and markets supported by a strong system of business and personal agency training and continued use of coaching and mentoring support for their entrepreneurs.

One of their sales agents is highlighted below:

### ESTHER GATHONI, SOLAR DEVICE SALES

Esther Gathoni is a 54-year-old community worker and an agent for solar companies. She distributes commercial products like small and big solar lights and lamps, solar cookstoves as well as solar home system that contain a photovoltaic panel, batteries, charger for small devices as well as lamps. One of her home system solutions is powerful enough to provide electricity for a small TV. Esther has a small shop, which is well located along the main street of Naromoru, a little village in Nyeri County in Central Kenya within viewing distance of Mount Kenya. Her shop only functions as a place to display the products.

Usually, she receives orders by telephone and then delivers them directly to the customer's houses. She is trained and certified by two solar product manufacturers. Esther wants to be a "champion of change" for other women and enable them to have better livelihoods.

Esther's working spirit is truly inspiring. In her free time, she teaches farmers about time management and other topics. When presenting a mobile solar lamp, she showed how they make it possible to work and even do farming/gardening at night, after sunset, which she has done every day for many years. When asked about the secret of her business success, she mentioned this hard-working attitude. Esther does not have any employees but has business partners who help her acquire new customers. A functioning business network is very important for the viability of her business, and Energy4Impact is very supportive in this regard, as the organization connects different stakeholders and makes business even possible in the first place. Energy4Impact workshops, such as the Empowered Entrepreneurs Training as well as regular business development support through their local mentors were regarded as critical to her success.

The case of Esther is crucial because it shows very important aspects of a successful entrepreneur. She is living in a quite secluded area, but still managed to acquire a solid customer base and build up a viable business. The community profits highly from her teachings and time she spends sharing her knowledge and experience. Furthermore, the model seems like a pathway to bring commercially available products from the world market to people in rural areas of East Africa. The community profits from the affordable, large-scale produced products and the manufacturing companies profit from her knowledge of the local market structure and society.

## Case Study 2

Livelyhoods is a non-profit social enterprise, headquartered in Kenya. It was established in 2011, with the aim to eliminate poverty by providing job opportunities to the youth, especially women. Livelyhoods has more than a dozen branches spread in the major cities and towns of

Kenya, where they have a network of approximately 120 sales-agents. Each branch has a local branch manager, who makes sure that the training sessions, branch sales trends and daily supports to sales-agents, are provided properly. Livelyhoods recruits sales-agents, who operate in Kenyan slums and are responsible for distributing clean energy products. The product line generally includes energy efficient cook-stoves, solar lamps, and kitchen equipment, which are sold at affordable prices to the locals. The sales-agents are youth and women, who are trained to gain necessary skills. The coaching and mentoring sessions are used to explain the technical details of the products to the sales-agents, life skills, entrepreneurship, customer approaching technique and challenges, sales and marketing skills. These sessions crucial for sales-agents to best conduct the sales.

LivelyHoods understands that women sales agents at are often faced with numerous challenges, such as lack of spousal and family support, harassment by local government authorities that impede their work and the potential social stigma they may face from selling in the streets. To address these challenges and increase retention rates, sales agents are required to attend daily team meetings and engage in a structured group mentoring program. In the daily meetings, sales agents get the opportunity to refresh their skills and receive additional feedback and guidance on effective sales techniques. In addition to this, sales agents attend an individualized performance review, which involves goal setting and co-development of working strategies. Women attend a three week long structured group education and training as well as on-going mentoring and support aimed at addressing specific challenges.

## References

- <sup>1</sup>(Du Reitz & Henrekson, 2000; Zolin, Stuetzer, & Watson, 2013; Robb & Watson, 2011)
- <sup>2</sup>(Kobeissi, 2010)
- <sup>3</sup>Renzulli et al 2000 <https://academic.oup.com/sf/article-abstract/79/2/523/2234007>
- <sup>4</sup>(Brush et al 2009)
- <sup>5</sup>(Shankar, et al 2015, 2018; Campos et al 2017; Frese et al 2016)

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