Progress Report on Empowering 150 young entrepreneurs in Namibia



Current young women’s economic empowerment interventions are not enough to overcome all obstacles facing female entrepreneurs. The emerging evidence from psychology and experimental economics on agency; mind-set, and leadership show that for successful interventions to be transformative, they need to move beyond basic access to financial and human capital and also tackle central psychological, social, and skills constraints on young women entrepreneurs. Emerging evidence from recent pilot on different capital-based, training-based, and gender-based interventions, using randomized control trials, present promising interventions to support young women entrepreneurs.

TEACHING LIFE SKILLSAND PROVIDING TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

The project offered trainings that go beyond financial capital and basic business skills, but teach necessary life skills have shown a small, but positive impact on young female-owned microenterprises. The project, taught general business skills such as how to calculate production costs and product pricing in addition to life skills such as separating business and home finances. The result was a positive, albeit small, impact of the training program on young female-led enterprise revenues.

To summarize, successful interventions, among the project reviewed above, have usually paired basic business skills provision (as we all as basic financial capital) with provision of soft skills such as leadership and mind-set considerations. Moreover, programs that address or work around socially imposed gender roles increase young female understanding of inhibiting normative assumptions.

Finally, a clear measure of success is important. Provision of basic technical business training programs, at best, improved business practice of young women-owned enterprises, often without any significant progress in business performance or empowerment more broadly. While some interventions have improved both economic and subjective welling of young female entrepreneurs, it is generally hard to grow employment in SMEs. Conventional micro-interventions providing access to credit and business training for this poor group have also proven ineffective in bringing major changes in young women’s economic empowerment. Sustaining young women’s empowerment hinges on the longevity and effectiveness of program interventions and on continuous policy and financial support commitment to inclusion and equality.