



BUILDING ENTREPRENEURIAL CAPACITY FOR WIDOWS IN KENYA'S LAKE REGION

WAJANE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION
Empowerment of widows and orphans through development of sustainable business enterprises

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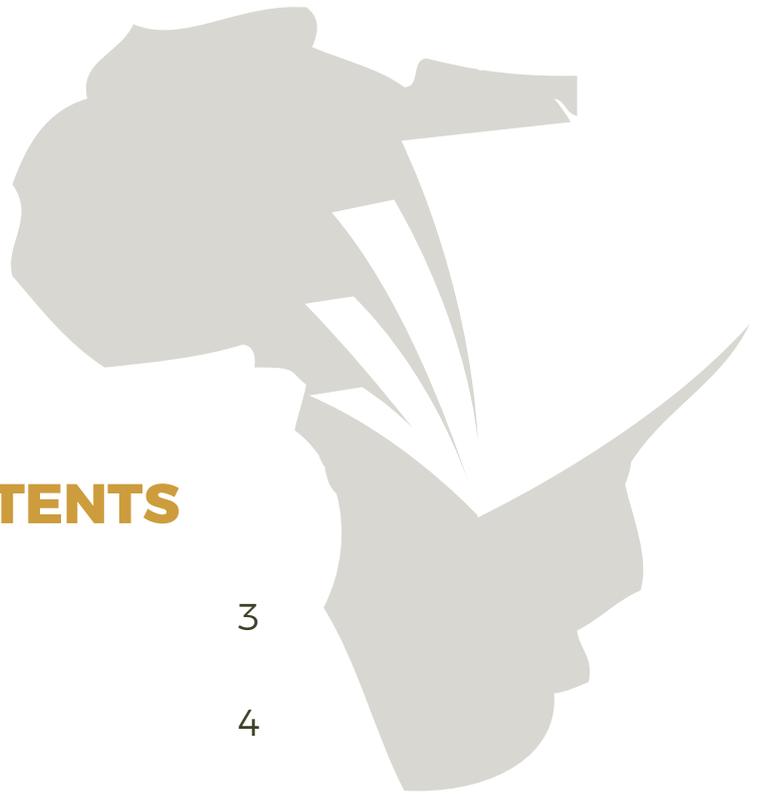


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors wish to express their gratitude to the Wajane International Foundation Inc for their financial support in ensuring the Widows in Bondo, Siaya County have received the entrepreneurship training.

The authors also wish to express their gratitude to Prof. George K'Aol and Mrs. Sarah Ondego for providing the training facilities as well as the African Inception for Agribusiness Research (AIAR), without whom this training and report would not have been possible.

INTRODUCTION

Widows in Africa are often faced with traumatic experiences, for instance, losing their husbands through death, which in most cases is followed by inhuman treatment which varies from one culture to another. Most of the treatments are geared towards dehumanizing their victims, a painful and psychological experience that has the potential of scaring the victims throughout their lifetime (Edialu 2012). Widows are also confronted with other challenges such as the burden of raising their children alone, economic exploitation, and denial of rights to remarry men of their choice, fear of excommunication and lack of mutual respect. (Miruka 2015). The Kenyan Luo culture, for instance, is patrilineal in the sense that life is centered on the male lineage. It is argued that “The belief that death brings corruption and the dead still have contact with the living, especially their closest partners in life, is one of the reasons used for subjecting widows to inhuman and humiliating customary practices”. (WITW STAFF, 2016)

With the passage of Kenya’s 2010 constitution, women now have the right to own and inherit land. Practically speaking, however, experts say that women’s status in the country is much the same as ever – in part, perhaps, because cultural attitudes are so ingrained that many Kenyans remain unaware or indifferent to the fact that women now have equal land rights. “In African culture, a woman has no say when it comes to property. Her views aren’t valid and cannot, therefore, influence a man’s decision in any way,” explained David Mugambi, a natural resource management expert at Chuka University. “Even at the household level, a woman cannot own a cow, a goat or a sheep since she has no collateral when it comes to a loan guarantee as she isn’t even the legal owner of the farm.” (WITW STAFF, 2016)

This report, therefore, presents the outcome of the entrepreneurship simulation training that was carried out to the widows in Bondo county in Kenya, by African Inception of Agribusiness Research (AIAR) in partnership with Wajane International. The scope of the partnership was to design and plan an entrepreneurship simulation training program, prepare training materials, facilitate the training and develop a report highlighting the outcomes of the training. Wajane International is a faith based organization whose mission is to reach orphans and widows in the third world, specifically Africa, Asia and the Caribbean islands. It is through their work with the widows from Bondo District in Kenya while being sensitive to their needs that brought out a necessity for them to learn entrepreneurial skills in order to facilitate their empowerment.

AIAR on the other hand seeks to carry out developmental research using a customer centric approach to provide opportunities in urban markets for the African agricultural communities. This is done through simulation training as well as commercialising research and providing student placements in youth and women agribusiness boot camps. In partnership with Wajane International Foundation, AIAR carried out a one-day simulation training package for widows that involved simulating the agri-business sector with fundamental entrepreneurship concepts.

So, what is the entrepreneurship simulation? This is a carefully constructed business skills development tool masquerading as a game. It simulates real market conditions and business scenarios in the training room.

The goal of the training was to:

- Help the widows to acquire the modern concepts and practices of entrepreneurship and product differentiation.
- Help the widows to explore tested and innovative strategies for marketing and promotion of their products.
- Help the widows to acquire knowledge for improved human resource management and customer oriented strategies for their businesses

THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING

Objectives

The main objective of the program was to conduct a one-day business simulation training to a maximum of twelve widows within the Luo community in Bondo region in Kenya, with specific deliverables to include;

1. To develop a detailed training program for validation before training
2. To deliver a one-day entrepreneurship training
3. To share a detailed report on the training outcomes and discussions.

Training Delivery

The simulation training took place in October 2016 at Bondo region in Kenya. The training materials were validated and approved by Wajane International Foundation to ensure an emphasis on skills that would empower and build the entrepreneurship capacity of the widows in the Luo community. The Bondo widows group are mainly producers of agricultural products as well as various handicraft artifacts, mainly beadwork, and other such household items that are sold both locally and internationally.

The training participants were recruited from Wajane's Amani widow's group in Bondo region from the western part of Kenya. The training materials were reviewed and validated by AIAR and a training schedule developed and approved. Three groups were formed from 12 participants, to represent businesses that would be competing against each other during the one-day's training.

The simulation training process got the participants to weigh up information from both the market and their businesses, make decisions based on their business environment and react to market dynamic forces. Participants saw the results of their actions and experienced the thrills and spills of real life business activity. The materials were also designed to ensure the widows were sensitized on ethical issues such as selling counterfeit products to customers. A case study was also used to reinforce the business concepts and growth strategies for a micro-enterprise.

The modules covered were;

- Introduction to Entrepreneurship
- Customer Service Investment
- Business Concept Development and Forming Linkages

The simulation exercise mainly involved decision making of participants with direction and support from the facilitators, discussions and debrief sessions. This helped the participants to share collective insights and to draw from the diverse experiences of other fellow participants.

The session kicked off with an exercise on communication to ensure that there is effective communication between the facilitators and participants and to set the pace of the business training which would culminate to how participants communicate with their customers and employees. This was followed by formation of four groups which would serve as the micro-enterprises competing against each other during the one-days' training.

When asked what their main challenges are during a brief focused group discussion, the entrepreneurs stated the following as the main gaps to be addressed in their businesses;

- The need to gain knowledge in marketing their products,
- The technical know-how on running a business,
- Accounting for their finances before trading, during and after trading

The participants were taken through an orientation module and module on customer service strategies. The main objective was to train the participants on the importance of gaining customer service knowledge that are geared towards attracting and maintaining customers. The facilitators also addressed the importance of differentiating their products to cater for different customers' needs and understanding the customer requirements. During the debrief session participants were encouraged to take a customer oriented approach in product development and in businesses operation as this would guarantee a demand for the goods and services they provide.

The participants also carried out an exercise of increasing their customers. The different groups noted that once they increase their customers, their sales increased and thus the need for increasing their stock. This was a reality that hit them during the trading period and most appreciated the fact that they were able to pay all their expenses and make profits. The major outcome for this session was the need to reinvest in systems that can protect the entrepreneurs' business and help attract and retain their customers.

Training Outcome

The 2 major outcomes that were actualized during the one-day entrepreneurship training are;

(i.) Increased awareness of possible linkages and businesses to be formed and actualised amongst the groups

The widows of Bondo group appreciated the fact that they were in a group and could form linkages amongst themselves and other widow groups for trading. This brought an increased realization that the participants needed strategic partnerships for them to grow their businesses. The women appreciated the importance of working together as

business partners and supporting each other's businesses that were actualized from the discussions initiated by the women to use their table banking funds to open a shop to supply fast moving consumer goods in the community.

(ii.) The participants demonstrated the ability to borrow from financiers and pay back with interest, make profits, satisfy their customers' demands and pay all their expenses

Each group was given a start-up loan as capital, customers, and stock to begin their business. The teams at the end of the simulation paid off all their expenses and loans, met customer demands and made profits. During the debrief session, each team gave their experience they had during the simulation session. It gave them an awareness of the importance of recording keeping, cash flow management, stock management, customer management, the ability to cover business expenses, strategic partnerships (in the internal and external environment) and a structural approach to their business operations as opposed to an informal approach without much planning. Risk and financial management were discussed at length.

CONCLUSION

The outcome from the exercise has given an indication that entrepreneurship training yields better results in supporting widows when linked with opportunities for mentorship as well as other topics like accessing markets, records-keeping, and financial management. AIAR, therefore, recommends that follow up should be made to gauge the impact of the knowledge and skills acquired in the agribusiness simulation training as well as the personalized mentorship of their business ventures. This will be crucial to capture the gaps and needs for widows and provide skills that can help propel them to be more self-reliant and more independent.

From the success of the training as testified by the widows' feedback, the entrepreneurship training has proved to equip women with the much-needed business skills for their micro-enterprises. AIAR, however, acknowledges that this is not a one-shoe-fits-all kind of training and therefore recommends that a customized simulation curriculum to be designed specifically for widows who are in other businesses such as basket weaving and bead work.

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