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SUPPORTING ENERGY ENTREPRENEURS THROUGH THE EMPOWERED ENTREPRENEUR TRAINING PROGRAM



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Women play a critical role in the cookstove value chain because of their central responsibility for managing household energy. As primary users of household energy products, such as cleaner cookstoves, women can catalyze the market as micro-entrepreneurs and small-sized enterprise owners through the distribution and delivery of clean energy technologies and after-sales services. However, they need proper support for their role as cookstove entrepreneurs.

WHAT IS THE EMPOWERED ENTREPRENEUR TRAINING PROGRAM (EETP)?



TRAINERS FROM INDIA AND NEPAL PARTICIPATE IN BANGALORE EETP

Through the USAID-funded Developing a Sustainable Cookstove Sector project, Winrock International, in partnership with Johns Hopkins University (JHU) and the Visionaria Network, is rolling out Empowered Entrepreneur Training Programs (EETPs) to help strengthen entrepreneur capacity throughout the clean energy value chain. These programs use the *Empowered Entrepreneur Training Handbook* curriculum, which builds key business, empowerment and leadership skills. Developed by JHU and the Visionaria Network with support from the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, this unique curriculum focuses on agency-based empowerment, which enhances an individual's capacity to create and focus on goals, and take advantage of opportunities when they arise. A randomized controlled trial conducted by JHU and implemented by ESVAK Kenya found that women entrepreneurs who received the agency-based training sold nearly three times as many improved cookstoves as men. Men and women getting the enhanced training were 2.7 times more likely to be high sellers, and women and men who received the agency-based empowerment training were twice as likely to pursue sales leads and continue their business activities when faced with challenges.¹ Although developed for use in the cookstove sector, the curriculum is also applicable to entrepreneurs selling other technologies.

EETPs aim to enhance the agency and abilities of local entrepreneurs, especially female entrepreneurs, so that they can create viable businesses and scale clean cooking and energy solutions globally. The trainings build in-house expertise at local businesses involved in the cookstove value chain so that they can create empowered entrepreneurs with strong business and leadership skills.

The program includes three phases, each with specific objectives:

(1) Empowered Entrepreneur Trainer Certification Program:

- Develop in-house expertise at local enterprises to train sales staff and entrepreneur partners on key business, empowerment and leadership skills; and
- Provide trainers with gender-sensitive tools and facilitation techniques.

(2) Training for entrepreneur networks:

- Roll out training to hundreds of male and female entrepreneurs worldwide.

(3) Monitoring of business, personal growth and well-being impacts of the training:

- Collect gender-disaggregated data on the impacts and share results with the sector.

EMPOWERED ENTREPRENEUR TRAINING ROLLOUT AND PROGRESS

The first EETP included a five-day in-person training of trainers (ToT) in Nairobi, Kenya (August 2015), led by the Empowered Entrepreneur Training Handbook authors Dr. Anita Shankar and Genevieve Smith with participants from Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda. Trainers certified under that first EETP have already rolled out the training to roughly 600 energy entrepreneurs throughout East Africa and Nigeria. The second EETP included an in-person ToT in Bangalore, India (April 2016), with participants from India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Indonesia. Participants from that program recently completed the six-week practicum that includes a certification exam, homework exercises and practice trainings. India ToT organizations began rolling out the training to participants in late July. These two programs have trained 47 trainers from 19 organizations.



TRAINER AT KENYA TOT PRACTICES LEADING AN EXERCISE

These case studies explore the stories of four participating organizations from the Nairobi, Kenya, training program:

AEST, Energy4Impact, LivelyHoods and Solar Sister.

Stories developed from interviews with entrepreneurs, trainers and organizational leaders complement the data collection and survey results being compiled for each organization participating in the program.

¹ Shankar, A. Onyura, M and Alderman, A. Agency-based empowerment training enhances sales capacity of female cookstove entrepreneurs in Kenya. Journal of Health Communications 2015;20 Suppl 1:67-75.

A FUNDER'S PERSPECTIVE: ENERGIA

ENERGIA supports five organizations that work with women energy entrepreneurs as part of their Women's Economic Empowerment Program. Soma Dutta, Program Coordinator of the Women's Economic Empowerment Program at ENERGIA, recognizes that many training programs fail to teach soft skills, and that motivating women entrepreneurs is key: "You can train people until the cows come home, but unless the drive is there, things aren't going to move." The five ENERGIA partners were quick to join the EETPs. Dutta notes, "We did not have to convince organizations to join the EETP... Demand was already there." She has heard from organizations they support that among women entrepreneurs who participated in the training, there is a "feeling that they have more agency... [there's been a change] in decision making and engaging with people... Even women who are illiterate and think they can do nothing feel enlightened, and begin to see their strengths and potential to do something with their lives." She says that their partners "unanimously loved it."

ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE USAID/WINROCK EETPS

- Appropriate Energy Saving Technologies – AEST (Uganda);
- CARE Kenya and CARE Tanzania;
- Center for Rural Technology Nepal (CRT-N);
- Envirofit (Kenya, Nigeria, India);
- ESVAK Kenya;
- Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves (India, Bangladesh);
- Greenway Appliances (India);
- Energy4Impact – formerly GVEP (Kenya, Senegal);
- Golden Services Organization (Kenya);
- Kopernik (Indonesia);
- LivelyHoods (Kenya);
- Pollinate Energy (India);
- Practical Action (Kenya);
- SCODE (Kenya);
- SNV (Kenya);
- Sola Yetu (Kenya);
- Solar Sister (Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria);
- Swayam Shikshan Prayog (India);
- VERC (Bangladesh).

AEST

AEST is a social enterprise founded and run by women in Uganda. It produces charcoal briquettes made from recycled groundnut husks, which women entrepreneurs then distribute and sell along with fuel-efficient cookstoves.

Before AEST trainer Helen Ekolu went through the Empowered Entrepreneur training program's certification process, she would have described herself as "someone who was disabled by fear, fear of making mistakes." But the program helped her learn "how to work from the inside to the outside. ... To be [someone who is] proactive and takes action... who plans, sets goals, and so on." Now Ekolu conducts trainings for AEST, sharing the benefits she has personally experienced.



AEST TRAINER HELEN EKOLU LEADS A LEADERSHIP EXERCISE

AEST has conducted three Empowered Entrepreneur trainings for a total of 56 entrepreneurs since the EETP training of trainers in Kenya in August 2015, and has found that participants have increased their sales and gained confidence. Take record keeping, for instance. In the past, trainees were afraid to jeopardize relationships by asking for credit to be paid back. But now they've gained important knowledge on how to keep accurate records. They've learned that if customers fail to pay, they can take written documents to the local authorities. One of the trainees says she has "learned to face fear" she had around this issue. Another, who used to confine herself to selling briquettes and cookstoves at a single market, expanded her business by travelling "far and wide" to sell them elsewhere. Another trainee, a widow, had previously considered herself "a nobody," but with the training, "learned I still have my life." This woman is now one of the most successful sellers for AEST.

AEST CEO Betty Ikalany says that the training has "helped women to believe in themselves. ... [Before the training, the women] were not confident, but after the training they became self-starters. The [Empowered Entrepreneur Training Handbook] is like a Bible to us."

AEST has also benefited. The trainers who went to Nairobi have learned "new skills that they have been able to pass on to staff in addition to entrepreneurs," Ikalany notes. As part of the EETP certification process, Ekolu and Betty Kongai (another AEST certified trainer) gave a one-day practice empowerment training to the AEST staff.

"Everyone was touched," Ekolu says. "One person said they needed to give this to her brother, and another to her husband." A staff member of a sister organization, also founded by Betty Ikalany, who went through the training, shared one of the handbook's empowerment activities called "Tree of Life" with 400 girls at a local school during empowerment outreach sessions. The activity uses the analogy of a tree to reflect on life experiences, accomplishments and dreams, and was so successful that she has been asked to return to conduct more activities. Ikalany observes that the training has empowered their staff (predominantly women) as managers too, so that "they can run a company just like men."

"So many people have the background, but not the ability to change their own lives. Empowerment gives you a push to utilize the skills that you have," Ekolu says. "One can have lots of skills but just sit on them. ... Reframing the way you think, that is important."

Ekolu and Ikalany say this is "just the beginning" for AEST and the women it serves: "The knowledge we are armed with [helps us to move] forward... This training has given [us] confidence and we will hear more success stories." AEST will be scaling the training as they expand their program into four more districts.

ENERGY4IMPACT

Energy4Impact (previously GVEP International) is a nonprofit organization that works with local businesses to extend energy access in Africa. It conducts programs that provide business development support (BDS) training and mentorship, as well as access to loans to clean cookstove entrepreneurs in East Africa. The organization has extensive experience conducting trainings, and was a consultant in the development of the business section of the Empowered Entrepreneur Training Handbook.

Nereah Nyagol, a long-time cookstove seller active with Energy4Impact for the past five years in western Kenya, used to sell cookstoves in only one location. But since attending the Empowered Entrepreneur training, she has been selling cookstoves in new markets and areas. “Before I used not to go outside to sell products on different market days,” Nyagol says. “But now, on Saturdays, I go to a different market. On Wednesdays too... That has increased my sales, I’ve now found it easy.” If she wants to go somewhere beyond walking distance, Nyagol hires a public vehicle. She also took out a loan to expand her business. The loan allows her to cut costs by doing her own assembling, instead of buying and selling complete stoves. Finally, she has been networking with other training participants, including one who lives close by and with whom she’s collaborated on sales. She wants to expand her business further, and is thinking of also selling solar lanterns. All of this has paid off for Nyagol. Before the training, her monthly sales rarely went above KES 150,000 (USD \$1500), but after the training, for the first time in more than 6 years of selling stoves, her sales topped USD \$2000, and did so consistently for the months of June (\$2190), July (\$2500) and August (\$2480) in 2016. She now has a goal of USD \$3000/month by December 2016.

“Most people realize there are so many limiting beliefs that directly apply in business and even in everyday lives,” Nyagol says. “We were taught to overcome them. Process by process [the training program] went through this.” The program also helped her see that other people go through similar problems, and that she should persevere. The training “made me look into life — not just me but all the participants,” Nyagol says. “We left there a happy lot.” Nyagol says this training was different from others, that it had “more student participation” and that she and the other participants would like more of the empowerment training because “attitudes are important to change. Constant reminders do the trick.”

Energy4Impact has conducted two Empowered Entrepreneur trainings for 49 participants (42 women and 7 men) in Kisumu and Kisii, Kenya. Because participants had already undergone the Energy4Impact business cur-



ENERGY4IMPACT TRAINING PARTICIPANTS

PHOTO CREDIT: ENERGY4IMPACT

riculum, the training focused on the empowerment and leadership topics of the Empowered Entrepreneur Training Handbook.

The participants were excited about the training due to its unique nature, and described the training as “something they have never done before,” says Sammy Kitula, a certified Empowered Entrepreneur trainer for Energy4Impact. The participants were able to forget about stereotypes and remove inhibitions for business success by overcoming fear and gaining confidence. Kitula says that participants “realized they could do anything they wanted to do.” In fact, participants wanted to extend the training for a week or more, believing that further training would help them conduct their businesses even better.

Participants responded well to the Tree of Life activity in particular, as it enabled them to reflect on their past and current activities and to realize that their future is not dictated by their past. Other notable activities included Developing Visions, in which participants think about what they want for their lives and their businesses, and EPIC Communication, in which participants learn about public speaking. Participants in Kisii said they could use the communication techniques to market cookstoves to a bigger forum, such as a church and weddings. Tribal stereotypes, which say that women are not meant to be leaders in the community, often leave Kenyan women scared of public communication. However, the training and activities related to overcoming fears have helped the women build courage. The EPIC Communication topic prepared the women entrepreneurs to engage local leadership and articulate issues on clean cooking. During public gatherings referred to in Swahili as ‘baraza,’ women cookstoves sellers have advocated for the adoption of clean energy and openly explained the dangers of cooking on an open fire. According to Kitula, “there seems to be more energy in championing for this than ever before.”

Kitula shares the benefits he personally experienced. The ToT process allowed him to build confidence and reflect on what he believes. It was “an awakening for him” and he now feels that “everything is possible. ... Failure is not my part.” As a trainer, he thinks this training is an additional tool for him that he can also apply elsewhere, such as in his church and community.



ENERGY4IMPACT TRAINER SAMMY KITULA LEADS A BUSINESS TRAINING ACTIVITY AT THE KENYA TOT



ENERGY4IMPACT ENTREPRENEUR / TRAINING PARTICIPANT

LIVELYHOODS

LivelyHoods is a not-for-profit social enterprise that seeks to create livelihood opportunities for youth and women in urban slums. They do this through training and hiring unemployed youth and women to sell environmentally friendly and socially transformative products – including cleaner cookstoves, solar LED lamps and sanitary products – in their communities.

John² is a short, soft-spoken man who has struggled with alcoholism and unemployment. Shortly after joining LivelyHoods, he took part in an Empowered Entrepreneur Training Program (EETP). Now his colleagues describe him as confident and professional. His sales have increased and he has joined the mentorship program, where he is one of the top sellers. “He has even sold [eye] glasses to the manager of GIZ,” says Claire Baker, LivelyHood’s director of development. “[He] serves as a huge example to young men. ... Taking part in the training was a big part of the process for him.”

Baker explains that the EETP participants “haven’t given up or decided that sales isn’t for them.” In fact, she continues, the training has resulted in higher retention rates. “The proportion [of agents] that have continued with the organization is much higher than those who have not done the training,” Baker says. The average tenure for a LivelyHoods agent who has gone through the EETP is 50 to 100% longer than average, according



LIVELYHOODS TRAINER MILLICENT CHEPKEMOI LEADING AN EXERCISE

PHOTO CREDIT: LIVELYHOODS

to Baker. Furthermore, many of the participants have become senior sales agents and entered the LivelyHoods mentorship program for high-potential sales agents. Thirty-five percent of those that received the training became trainers, branch managers or assistant trainers/branch managers. This is compared to an overall average of 5% of the total LivelyHoods agents who have received these types of promotions.

LivelyHoods has conducted the EETP for approximately 40 sales agents over five consecutive weekends and in two different groups since trainers attended the Training of Trainers (ToT) in September 2015. The participants say they enjoyed the training and want more.

“[It] opened their minds,” says Alex Beru, a LivelyHoods trainer and ToT participant. “[It helped them] believe in themselves [enough] to start their own businesses [and believe that they] can make it.” While LivelyHoods leadership has seen positive effects on the sales agents who went through the training, the ToT has had an impact on staff. Baker says that the training empowered Beru with essential skills and tools and the impacts on him have been “huge.” “Even the way he talks about it, he’s proud,” Baker continues.

The ToT has not only helped Beru become a better trainer but has also given him personal empowerment skills. Beru wants to continue to work on the empowerment concepts for himself and to learn more over time. He now regularly talks about empowerment and stresses the importance of doing follow-up and refresher training with the agents.

While LivelyHoods has been training women and young people since 2011 (with a heavy focus on sales), the training program did not include any content around leadership or empowerment. But the EETP made them concentrate on going beyond traditional sales training, and they have since invested more time and resources into how they structure trainings and analyze training effectiveness. The EETP has enabled LivelyHoods to integrate personal and professional development into their training as a key pillar. “This [Empowered Entrepreneur] training was the turning point,” Baker says. “The ethos of what we are doing has changed.”

LivelyHoods is now hiring a full-time training manager and will continue conducting the EETP. Their aim is to establish a formal six-month training program for sales agents and to expand the Empowered Entrepreneur curriculum by integrating it with additional subjects.

² Name changed to maintain requested anonymity of participant

SOLAR SISTER

Solar Sister is a not-for-profit organization utilizing a women-centered direct sales network to distribute and sell clean energy technologies, primarily solar lights and cleaner cookstoves, to communities in rural and Africa. Solar Sister has engaged over 2,500 entrepreneurs to sell products affecting over 700,000 people in Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Sarah³, a recently widowed Solar Sister Entrepreneur (SSE) in Uganda, has been having difficulty selling products due to the stigma and isolation of her social status. “She had everything needed to run a business, but did not have a voice,” says Rebecca Asilo, a Solar Sister Business Development Associate (BDA) and a certified Empowered Entrepreneur Trainer who trained and continues to mentor Sarah. The Empowered Entrepreneur Training helped Sarah “to start breaking the ice around her.” Asilo says she is “approaching people that she never thought she could approach, is going hard with the sales, and monitoring her savings and purchases.”

Solar Sister was drawn to the *Empowered Entrepreneur Handbook* in looking for ways to overcome one of the main challenges that the organization faces with its network of Solar Sister Entrepreneurs (SSEs): lack of motivation or confidence that prevents women from succeeding. Solar Sister particularly relates to the handbook concept of overcoming “limiting beliefs,” which, along with “problem solving,” it sees as critical.

Solar Sister has had 12 BDAs attend Training of Trainer programs (two BDAs attended the Nairobi program, and 10 attended a Solar Sister-hosted program in Uganda). Solar Sister is rolling out the Empowered Entrepreneur training in a one-day empowerment and leadership training (designed with handbook authors Shankar and Smith). The organization is also integrating the remaining select handbook lesson plans into its monthly “Sisterhood” meetings, hosted by the BDAs for small groups of SSEs. Thus far, 49 SSEs have gone through the one-day training.



PHOTO CREDIT: SOLAR SISTER

SOLAR SISTER PARTICIPANTS SHARING DURING TREE OF LIFE ACTIVITY

“Before and after the training, there is a difference,” said Asilo, who hosted the one-day training with a group of 20 top SSEs in her region. “There is more involvement in problem solving and they are now doing it fully by themselves.” The “Tree of Life” exercise was a particularly effective one, she noticed. After the one-day training, Asilo had the participants share their experiences with fellow SSEs at their Sisterhood meetings. She saw the participants act “like role models” and notes that the peer learning has piqued the interest of other SSEs.

Solar Sister seeks to provide a support system to entrepreneurs, which the handbook has helped. “[We] wanted to empower BDAs to take journeys with the entrepreneurs and connect more one-on-one with them,” Abby Mackey, Solar Sister Grants and Impact Manager, says. “[The handbook] has been great at teaching BDAs to be coaches and mentors.” From her perspective, the main observable change is the quality of the relationships between BDAs and SSEs. Anecdotally, the SSEs who participated in the training now feel more supported by and comfortable reaching out to BDAs, resulting in better communication and overall heightened trust. In addition, SSEs are more positive and enthusiastic, and feel more a part of Solar Sister and the Sisterhood.

Solar Sister has noticed a change in motivation from SSEs following the training. Many of the SSEs who attended the one-day training were able to kick-start their businesses and express a renewed interest. “They expect a business bump,” Mackey says,

In addition, the BDAs’ skills in running and planning trainings have increased, and they take training organization and delivery more seriously. “[The training process] has given me the confidence, courage and bravery I need,” Asilo says. “I pretty much feel like I can do anything. It has also widened my knowledge scope and given me better ways to solve my problems.”

Mackey agrees. “It has helped us in thinking through as an organization how we can be effective at problem solving and looking at our own limiting beliefs,” she says. It has also affected how the organization thinks about training. “It has taken us to another level with our training and has been a great process in having our leadership team think through what our training program needs,” says Mackey. Solar Sister is moving toward the agency-based approach in thinking about engaging with SSEs and BDAs. The handbook “has catalyzed this.” Moving forward, Solar Sister will likely move away from the one-day empowerment training and take concepts from the empowerment, business and leadership sections to make more of a training package.

Meanwhile, Asilo is planning a training using the empowerment and leadership components for girls aged 15 to 20 in her local church. She says “it’s very necessary for girls [their] age to get a training like this so they can be more empowered and go out in the world to do good things. ... Also to have the opportunity to pass the knowledge on to others that need it.”

³ Name changed to maintain requested anonymity of participant



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