Women Entrepreneurs in Kenya: Summary Report
Final summary report: 22.4.2020

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1. Introduction

This report is a summary of a larger market study conducted by The Gender Research Alliance in early 2020, for the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women (the Foundation) to support CBFW’s work in Kenya. The purpose of this research was to assess the learning and non-learning needs of women entrepreneurs and to take stock of their entrepreneurial ecosystem. It also profiled women entrepreneurs that may be suited to participate in the CBFW’s Road to Women’s Business Growth (R2G) project, and to provide recommendations for CBFW, including content, delivery formats, target groups and geographies. The R2G project purpose is to empower women entrepreneurs to grow and sustain profitable businesses by building their business management skills, and increase their access to financial services, through technology and face-to-face support – including blended learning training programme, HerVenture mobile learning app and online mentoring programme. The CBFW targets growth-oriented women entrepreneurs at emerging, start-up, and expansion phases of their businesses.

2. Study rationale

Women face gender-based barriers when starting and growing their businesses, for example, in accessing business development support, social capital, and financial services\(^1\). Underpinning these difficulties are gender norms that implicitly or explicitly make the enabling environment more challenging for women in business. Support programmes aimed at women entrepreneurs are important in overcoming the barriers that impact on their ability to start and grow their businesses.

Programmes that offer a more holistic approach to capacity building (for example, through enterprise training, linkages to financial services, confidence building and networking, and promoting women’s agency) are more successful than those that target only one aspect of enterprise support (Donor Committee for Enterprise Development, 2019). In the countries where the programme has been implemented the holistic approach of HerVenture and R2G has proven to have a positive effect on the participating women entrepreneurs and their enterprises, resulting in business growth, enhanced confidence, wider networks, and increased access to finance.

The study will inform the design and delivery of the Foundation’s Road to Growth programme, which aims to provide a full learning journey experience to women owners of small and growing businesses in Kenya. The study will also help other ecosystem stakeholders in informing their initiatives for women entrepreneurs in Kenya.

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**The R2G project:**

The programme’s overarching goal is to enable women’s economic empowerment in Kenya. The key objective is to help women entrepreneurs transform their businesses into thriving enterprises and increase economic empowerment. This programme targets **women owners of new and growing businesses in Kenya**. **HerVenture users** will be digitally literate with access to a 3G/4G smartphone. **Blended learning and Mentoring** participants will have 3-49 staff, a viable business, a strong desire for growth and need additional investment.

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**Figure 1: Road to Growth phases**

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3. Methodology and objectives of the research

Framed around 4 research objectives, the research used mixed methods, involving qualitative and quantitative research. The assignment used purposeful sampling of women entrepreneurs, gathered from existing organisations and institutions that support entrepreneurs in Kenya. The sample of financial and business development service providers and policy makers was drawn from government, the private sector, and non-profit organisations that are involved in enterprise development.

Data collection took place through secondary sources, semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, an electronic survey with women entrepreneurs, and four group discussions with women entrepreneurs and their service providers. Table 1 outlines the research process.

Kenya recognizes that women’s economic empowerment is critical to achieving gender equality and sustainable development (The National Treasury and Planning, 2018). As a result, over the past two decades, Kenya’s private, public, and non-governmental organization (NGO) sectors have promoted the economic and social empowerment of women, including women’s entrepreneurship development (WED) programmes. Despite this momentum, according to the Global Gender Gap Index, Kenya’s performance in ‘economic participation and opportunity’ has decreased in 2020 (World Economic Forum, 2020). This implies that the benefits from growth in Kenya are unequal. National research shows that structural and social barriers hold back women from full participation in, and benefits from the growing Kenyan economy.

The commitment of the Government of Kenya to gender equality is embedded in the Kenyan Constitution (2010), and is reflected in national policies such as the National Policy on Gender and Development (2000), and Vision 2030. The Third Medium Term Plan 2018–2022 emphasizes ‘Equity in access, control and participation in resource distribution for improved livelihood of women, youth and vulnerable groups’ and aims to increase the number of women trained in entrepreneurship skills from 956,493 to 1,632,806 (The National Treasury and Planning, 2018). Within these policies, women entrepreneurs are supported via targeted funding, training, and improving market access. Despite these strong policy and legislative initiatives, the women entrepreneurs who participated in the study suggest that they are challenged by red tape and excessive taxation and cite both these policy level aspects as a barrier to their business growth.

Kenya’s financial sector is the third largest in sub-Saharan Africa and makes a significant contribution to economic growth and job creation. Positive developments over the last few years, such as increased MSME ring-fenced loan funds and home-grown banks with extensive outreach networks into the SME space, and specific loan funds for both start-up and growth-orientated women entrepreneurs has improved access to finance. Despite this, the cost of credit for SMEs remains high, access, and utilisation of the loans remains relatively low and there is still considerable room for product innovation in the SME finance space (FSD Kenya, 2015).
The mobile and online banking app market is well developed in Kenya, although there is a significant difference between rural and urban populations having access to mobile banking. However, the majority of women are yet to use mobile financial services extensively for their business rather than only their personal finance needs.

There are well-developed networks of women entrepreneurs in Kenya; businesswomen associations, informal business networks, women grouped into enterprise programmes, group businesses, loans, and saving circles (The Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, 2020). These organizations provide valuable peer support, mentoring, and advocacy activities. There are formal mentoring programmes for BDS such as Growth Africa, StartUp Academy (for women), and the Professional Business Mentors Association. In addition, the use of messaging apps for peer-to-peer support, is popular amongst women entrepreneurs in Kenya. Access to mass online learning courses (MOOCs) in Kenya reflects their availability in other countries, including entrepreneurship focused courses. Although most MOOC courses are free, there are however, expenses involved such as broadband, Information Technology (IT) equipment, and exam fees. Universities in Kenya offer distance learning business studies and/or entrepreneurship courses. This type of learning is particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Box 1 for the implications of COVID 19 on the programme).

**Box 1: The programmatic implications of COVID 19**

**Programmatic implications of COVID 19**

Although the uncertainty of the impact of COVID 19 makes it hard to predict, what is certain, is that the impacts will be felt hardest by vulnerable groups and small businesses. From the perspective of CBFW, it is anticipated that the pandemic will have a threefold impact on the content and appetite for the CBFW capacity building programme.

1. **Impact on profile of women entrepreneurs**: Be cognisant of the business survival mode of most growth-oriented women entrepreneurs when carrying out promotion and mobilisation activities. This may mean more emphasis on the value of the capacity building on business survival and more intense outreach to gain the attention of the entrepreneurs.

2. **Impact on content**: Women entrepreneurs, particularly growth rather than start-up, may have different or more urgent need for cash flow management, working capital, operational adaptations (such as production levels, diversification of products/markets, human resource management). Refocussing on contingency planning and crisis management as an upfront module in HerVenture may have some value.

3. **Impact on methodologies**: Depending on the duration of the outbreak, adapting methodologies for the HerVenture, but mainly, the R2G programme to ensure mentoring and counselling can take place at a distance or implement physical distancing during those activities.

5. **Profile and target group of women entrepreneurs in Kenya**

The research profiled Kenyan women entrepreneurs and their businesses based on personal and enterprise characteristics and attributes with the purpose of guiding target groups for the CBFW programme. These characteristics are summarised in Table 2. During the survey 4% of respondents identified their businesses as prestart-up, 40% in the start-up phase and 57% in the growth stage. 19% of those respondents that identified their businesses as in the growth stage could be considered to be intensive growth candidates (based their turnover). The vast majority of respondents expressed a desire to grow their businesses, no matter what the stage in their business lifecycle, categorised as start-up, growth orientated and intensive growth (which is a category within growth orientated).

**Table 2: Research summary of profile of WE**
### Characteristic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Start Up WE</th>
<th>Growth Orientated WE</th>
<th>Intensive Growth WE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education level</strong></td>
<td>The majority (83%) of women entrepreneurs surveyed in Kenya have a tertiary level education followed by vocational training (9%), with no significant differences between the 3 different categories.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age of owner</strong></td>
<td>The majority of women entrepreneurs surveyed in Kenya are between the ages of 36 – 50 years old. Start-up companies tend to have younger owners and growth orientated tend to have older owners.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual turnover</strong></td>
<td>0 – 500,000 KSh(^2), 500,000 Ksh-5 million KSh, 5 million KSh +</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employees</strong></td>
<td>From 1 (including owner)</td>
<td>More than 2 staff</td>
<td>More than 5 staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age of business</strong></td>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>1-5+ years</td>
<td>5+years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sector</strong></td>
<td>Agriculture, forestry, fisheries sector (24%), manufacturing (15%), wholesale and retail (13%) and accommodation, hotel and food services (12%) and there are no significant differences between sectors based and growth/start-up businesses.</td>
<td>Agriculture, forestry and fisheries (32%), manufacturing (16%), professional, scientific and technical (11%) and accommodation, hotel and food services (11%).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>The majority (78%) of the businesses surveyed are in urban areas in Nairobi (63%) followed by Kiambu (6%) and Kajiado (5%), with no significant differences between start-up and growth enterprises.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RegISTRATION and LICENCING</strong></td>
<td>90% registered and 68% licenced(^3), 98% registered and 94% licenced.</td>
<td>100% registered and 100% licenced.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership, role, and control</strong></td>
<td>Women entrepreneurs surveyed hold significant positions of authority within their companies (90% have ownership 50-100%, 86% leadership position in company) and are involved in the day to day operations of the business.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of technology</strong></td>
<td>The use of technology is high. Ninety-nine percent of women entrepreneurs (WES) surveyed have a computer and 99% have a smartphone of which 81% have an android phone and 18% an iPhone. 99% of WES surveyed have an ok – excellent internet connection and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) Approximately 3,700 GBP at time of writing.

\(^3\) Business registration in Kenya implies the legal registration of a business form and name with the Registrar of Companies. Whereas a business licence(s) is issued at county level and indicates that a business complies with the established rules for that specific type of a business in that geographic location.
over 85% of WE have installed apps such as WhatsApp, Mpesa and Facebook.

6. WEs learning and non-learning needs

The survey in Kenya found that women entrepreneurs are able to identify their personal, business, and financial learning needs. There is a coherence across all women entrepreneur informants about the importance of learning more on: financial management, business planning, technology for enterprise growth, and market opportunities (see Figure 2).

Other learning areas identified in the study were the women entrepreneurs lack of self-confidence and the skills to negotiate in the household, along the value chain, and with service providers. The impact of climate change was highlighted as a constraint to growth, particularly from those in larger businesses and the agricultural sector.

Figure 2: Learning needs by type of business

The survey showed that overall, more than 55% of WEs in Kenya think there are great opportunities for me in e-commerce. Whereas, in the intensive growth category the percentage is higher, at 87%. The general impression from secondary and primary research is that there is limited outreach to women entrepreneurs in accessing, developing, and implementing e-commerce strategies.

Based on the findings of the study, the learning tracks already used in HerVenture and R2G remain relevant. Additional or augmented topics that are indicated through the study are:

• using technology for business and e-commerce
• climate change
• confidence building
• negotiation skills

There is invariably a gender dimension to all the leaning needs identified. Those internal to women entrepreneurs and their businesses are ultimately influenced by external social and cultural norms, roles, and responsibilities. Respondents reveal that WEs lack confidence in certain aspects the
market system; not only in the legal and fiscal frameworks, but also in trusting in the intentions and capacity of service providers to offer real value and effect change in their enterprises.

The role of the Road to Growth programme in bridging the gaps between women entrepreneurs’ needs and service provision is based in supporting women entrepreneurs to advocate for change. In addition, establishing reliable trusted sources of information about finance, business development services, and market opportunities supports the demand and supply of finance and services tailored to WEs needs.

7. Business growth finance

Financial services, products and behaviours are central to the growth and sustainability of women owned enterprises no matter what stage of establishment or growth. The financial trends of the CBFW survey are further detailed in Table 3 below.

Of the WEs surveyed, 42% were successful in raising the finance, of which the vast majority was growing businesses (82%). With regards to the amount of finance secured, growth orientated businesses are more successful in securing finance and the amount raised tends to be larger. In the intensive growth category, the ability to raise finance was better, with 82% of enterprises applying for finance to fund growth their businesses, of which 74% were successful.

Table 3: Summary of financial services, products, trends, and behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Start Up WE</th>
<th>Growth Orientated WE</th>
<th>Intensive Growth WE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current and savings accounts</td>
<td>Over 85% of the WEs surveyed had a current account for the business (82% start-up and 89% growth) as a transactional account. More than 60% of WEs separated business and personal finances (59% start-up and 68% growth).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial needs to grow</td>
<td>The primary need for both start-up WEs and growth orientated WEs is working capital (87% start-up and 92% growth). This is followed by credit to purchase assets (58% start-up and 61% growth), followed by supplier credit, and invoice financing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied for finance</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success rate in accessing finance</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for being unsuccessful</td>
<td>The main reason where WEs were unsuccessful in securing finance was, that the collateral requirements were too high, and that the lender did not understand the business opportunity.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Savings account.  
2. Savings account.  
4. Credit cards.  
5. Supplier credit. |
3. Table banking loans and Chama loans.  
4. Loans from family and friends.  
5. Credit card.  

Table banking is a group based funding strategy in which members save and borrow immediately during their meeting times. A Chama is a type of cooperative society that is normally used to pool and invest savings and provide loans.

Digital Finance  
Mobile and online banking app market is well developed in Kenya. Of the WEs surveyed in this study, over 75% used digital financial services in their businesses, using their mobile phones or computers.

Barriers to finance  
1. The inability of women entrepreneurs to meet financial product requirements. For example, collateral requirements, complete financial records, and legal documentation.  
2. If the products are adapted or are flexible to the needs of women entrepreneurs’ growth plans.  
3. If women entrepreneurs are investor ready.

Business Finance learning needs  
In business finance learning needs, the top three necessities cited in the survey were:  
1. financial projections  
2. cash flow management  
3. controlling costs.  
The differences between emerging and start-up, and growth-oriented entrepreneurs differ slightly due to the varied needs of the two types of business.

8. Interventions and call to action  
There is an opportunity for the CBFW capacity-building programmes to fill gaps in the BDS market in Kenya. Error! Reference source not found. Figures 3-5 illustrate the gaps and opportunities for each of the HerVenture and Road to Growth capacity-building programmes. In summary:

- There are online and app-based training products available for women entrepreneurs, although, mainly their target groups are different to HerVenture.
- At the time of writing, there are no mobile apps available in Kenya, specifically designed for women entrepreneurs at the start-up stages of their business lifecycle like HerVenture.
- While there are blended methodologies available to women entrepreneurs, the modality of blended learning is still underdeveloped by BDS providers and there is space for a product that ensures personalisation.

8.1. Learning needs and topics  
Women entrepreneurs are able to identify their personal, business, and financial learning needs. There is coherence across all women entrepreneur respondents about the importance of learning more on financial management, business planning, technology, and market opportunities.

The learning tracks already used in HerVenture and R2G remain relevant. Additional or augmented topics that are indicated through the study are:

- using technology for business and e-commerce
- climate change
- confidence building
- negotiation skills

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4 Table-banking is a group based funding strategy in which members save and borrow immediately during their meeting times. A Chama is a type of cooperative society that is normally used to pool and invest savings and provide loans.
Figure 3: Gaps and opportunities – HerVenture

**SERVICES**
Gap: Existing services are concentrated around face to face training through intermediaries. Time poor women have difficult attending face to face delivery.

Opportunity: Offer services directly and freely available, good communications strategy will maximise impact. Services are “From Home”, do not require an established network.

**CONTENT**
Gap: Content tends to be standardized focused around “business basics”, with no customization around needs. There are limited trainings available on climate change, technology. All other modules are relevant.

Opportunity: Mainstream technology and climate change into existing content whilst customizing other content. Including content on COVID (cashflow management, e-commerce also should be considered here).

**TARGET GROUP: START UP**
Gap: Negligible mobile apps exist, standardised content, face to face primarily offered, technology allows for social distancing.

Opportunity: More entrants wanting to start businesses, trending younger, have smart phones, technologically savvy, multiple roles, financially constrained. Relevant to user.

**METHODOLOGIES**
Gap: No mobile learning apps focused on business start-up in Kenya.

Opportunity: To rollout BOS training through mobile learning. Infrastructure, technology and connection exists. Market will require some development however with social distancing, home business and the need for SME developing in Kenya. Methodology good fit.

**PRICING**
Gap: Target group hesitant, but willing to pay for specific services.

Opportunity: HerVenture offers product free of charge, good fit with market and ability to pay, unless content becomes highly trusted/valued, specialized or industry specific; this is unlikely to change.

Figure 4: Gaps and opportunities – Road to Growth/blended learning

**SERVICES**
Gap: Services are concentrated around intermediaries (BOS providers), mostly as individual consultants and mentors. This seems uncoordinated and largely followed by word of mouth. Other programmes focus more on market access and trade. Gap for growth and investment readiness.

Opportunity: Will need to establish trust in programme and benefits. Services should be centred around needs for growth, technology, financial access and literacy.

**CONTENT**
Gap: Technical and industry specific content is not widely available outside of paid for consultants.

Opportunity: Strengthen content related to investor readiness, access to finance, accounts financial planning, networks, access to markets, confidence and negotiation.

**TARGET GROUP: GROWTH**
Gap: Majority of service providers focused on trade, market access. Fewer products focused on investor readiness. Growth in general and business development. Target market has limited trust, time and services need to be specific and focused.

Opportunity: Offer services focused on business planning, financial literacy planning and access to finance, technology for business and e-commerce, negotiation and climate change.

**METHODOLOGIES**
Gap: Majority of services are face to face with same blended.

Opportunity: To rollout BOS training using blended learning methodology was the widely preferred methodology of the target group.

**PRICING**
Gap: Growth oriented women entrepreneurs are willing to pay for specific technical/industry services. This is based on a value/trust/price proposition.

Opportunity: Launch R2G as a highly subsidized programme, advertise the “true cost”, benefits and develop trust. This will drive the sustainability of the product.
8.2. Non learning needs and barriers addressed with R2G

The role of the Road to Growth programme in bridging the gaps between women entrepreneurs’ needs, and their service and finance provision, is based in supporting women entrepreneurs to advocate for changes. In addition, establishing reliable trusted sources of information about finance, business development services, and market opportunities supports the demand and the supply of finance and services, increasing choice, and competition between providers.

- On supply side, work with women-entrepreneur advocates to negotiate with financial institutions and business development organizations – to encourage product flexibility and women-friendly operations.
- Establish reliable, trusted sources of information regarding finance, business development services, and market opportunities.

8.3. key programmatic recommendations

The study highlighted some key programmatic recommendations from the primary research and Kenyan experiences, briefly outlined below:

- Establish strong local partnerships in BDS: The programme should establish partnerships for the products to well-respected member-based organizations and use this to endorse the products and services; this will assist with increasing efficacy of the product/brand and will allow the project to scale more quickly. These partners should have capacity in women’s entrepreneurship development and promoting gender equity, with clear synergies so as not to create competition – but rather offer complementing services/products.
- Establish strong local partnerships in finance: Institute a finance partnership to work with, to support the programme target markets, and to support systemic change in the finance sector. The research showed that one of the primary mechanisms to reach WEs by financial institutions is to leverage on existing BDS providers and offer tailored products.
- Product positioning: As the Kenyan BDS environment has established service providers of similar products, there should be a marketing focus on the differentiation factors in content and methodology.
- Sustainability: Develop a sustainability strategy (exit strategy) from the outset to guide the partnership and relationships around the programme, and to manage the expectations of project partners in Kenya.
- Marketing: There are low levels of trust in general from WEs in Kenya regarding new products/services. Some focus should be placed on emphasizing the success of the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women products.

9. Conclusions
There is an opportunity for HerVenture and R2G to fill gaps in the BDS market in Kenya. There are online and app-based training products available for women entrepreneurs in Kenya, however their target groups, in the main, are different. Although there are well regarded blended methodologies available to women entrepreneurs, at the time of writing, there are no mobile apps like HerVenture available that are specifically designed for more growth oriented women entrepreneurs at the start-up stages of their business lifecycle. The modality of blended learning is underdeveloped by BDS providers and there is space for products that ensure personalisation. Because the Kenyan BDS environment has established service providers for similar products the CBFW should focus on the differentiation factors in content and methodology of HerVenture and R2G.

The role of the CBFW in bridging the gaps between women entrepreneurs’ needs, and service and finance provision, ought to be based in supporting women entrepreneurs to advocate for changes. The research suggests that it will be important to work with women entrepreneur advocates to negotiate with financial institutions and BDS providers to encourage product flexibility and women-friendly processes. In addition, establishing a reliable trusted source of information about sources of finance and BDS would be extremely valuable for women entrepreneurs at all stages in their business lifecycle.

Women entrepreneurs are able to identify their personal, business, and financial learning needs. There is coherence across all women entrepreneur respondents about the importance of learning more on financial management, business planning, technology, and market opportunities.

Emerging from the Kenyan research, the profiles of women entrepreneurs offer three categories of women’s enterprises. As illustrated in Table 4, guided by WEs stage of business growth, needs, and characteristics the Kenyan CBFW programme has a basis on which to target content, methodology and approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Must have</th>
<th>Her Venture</th>
<th>Blended Learning</th>
<th>Intensive support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Must have: 50% women owned and managed, Desire for growth, turnover less than ksh.500 000, Urban and surrounds based, owns an Android Smartphone.</td>
<td>50% women owned and managed, registered, and licenced, generating turnover for 2+ years, access to desktop/tablet, Turnover ksh.500 000 plus, desire and plan for growth, urban and surrounds based.</td>
<td>50% women owned and managed, registered, and licenced, generating turnover for 2+ years, making profit for at least 1 year, turnover ksh.5 000 000 plus, desire and plan for growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice to have: Registered, Decision making power in business, Based in Kenya.</td>
<td>More than 2 staff, looking to finance growth in plan, based in Kenya, decision making power in business, owns an Android smartphone.</td>
<td>More than 5 staff, looking to finance their growth plan, based in Kenya, decision making power in business.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Women entrepreneur’s criteria for participation in the CBFW programme
Bibliography


