



Cherie Blair  
**FOUNDATION  
FOR WOMEN**

Supporting a Woman Entrepreneur in Low and Middle Income Countries:

## **Introduction to EDI**

For women entrepreneurs in low or middle income countries, the entrepreneurial journey comes with a unique set of challenges due to factors such as societal expectations, environmental factors, lack of access to resources, and more. Understanding these unique challenges is crucial for mentors aiming to support their mentees effectively.

These resources aim to familiarise you with the potential challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, empowering you to foster more impactful mentor-mentee relationships. Through a case study and explorations of typical challenges, we'll delve into topics such as loneliness, gender biases, access to finance, cultural influences, care responsibilities, education, and technology disparities.

### **The Importance of EDI in Mentorship**

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) serve as the cornerstone of effective mentorship, facilitating environments where every individual, regardless of their background or circumstances, can thrive. At its core, EDI is about recognising and valuing the unique perspectives, experiences, and contributions of all individuals, thereby fostering a culture of respect, empathy, and empowerment.

In the context of mentorship, embracing EDI principles is essential for creating inclusive and supportive relationships between mentors and mentees. This is especially important when a mentee is a woman from a low or middle income country; she needs to feel safe, respected and understood by her mentor, regardless of their background.

By prioritising equity, mentors can ensure that opportunities for growth and development are accessible to all, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or other dimensions of diversity.

## Loneliness, Decision-Making, and Confidence

In the morning, Maria wakes up with thoughts already running through her head, ranging from excitement for her business's potential to the gnawing sense of isolation that often comes with entrepreneurship. As the sole decision-maker in her business, she struggles with the weight of major choices.

From strategy changes to everyday operational decisions, the loneliness of entrepreneurship can sometimes amplify Maria's doubts and insecurities. There are times she feels uncertain of how to have a conversation, uncomfortable with approaching a potential stakeholder.

Despite this, Maria summons the confidence to navigate her journey as an entrepreneur, trusting in her abilities to lead her business forward.

## Gender Biases and Stereotypes

In meetings with potential investors or during networking events, Maria is all too familiar with the subtle yet pervasive gender biases in the entrepreneurial landscape. Despite her competence and innovative ideas, she often finds herself contending with stereotypes that undermine her credibility.

In one instance, Maria gets an email to her business email from a local business owner in the area who would be interested in working on a collaboration. In the email, the sender is enthusiastic and praises the work that Maria's business has been doing, and highlights the benefit that a collaboration would have to both businesses. Maria is excited by the opportunity and replies to the email eagerly, asking about how the two business owners can work together. When she's done, she signs the email off with her own signature and name.

However, Maria doesn't receive a response to her email and decides to follow up a few weeks later. After waiting for a few more days, she eventually receives a response in a very different tone from the first email. The other business owner is suddenly condescending and says that he's changed his mind about wanting to collaborate with her. He doesn't expressly say why, but Maria understands from the tone of the email and the passive-aggressive remarks that he doesn't want to work with her because of his own bias against her.

Overcoming these preconceptions requires resilience and perseverance, as Maria strives to carve out her place in a predominantly male-dominated sphere.

n navigating the terrain of entrepreneurship, Maria embodies resilience, resourcefulness, and unwavering determination. Her story serves as a reminder of the multifaceted challenges and opportunities that define the entrepreneurial landscape for women in low and middle income countries.

## **Conclusion**

By embracing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) principles, mentors can create supportive environments where every entrepreneur feels empowered and secure both in the mentoring relationship and their businesses.

By dedicating time and energy towards understanding the dynamic challenges faced by your mentee, you will not only ensure your mentee feels supported, respected and heard, but also commit to fostering inclusive relationships and advocating for systemic change, paving the way for a more equitable entrepreneurial landscape where all individuals can thrive.