



International
Labour
Organization



Women's
Entrepreneurship
Development

Business Upgrading for Women Entrepreneurs

Q and A Session Responses

wed@ilo.org

SME | Women's Entrepreneurship Development Programme

1. Apart from direct consumption of milk, have you found out if there are opportunities for yoghurt production?

Yes, opportunities for the production of value-added dairy products like yoghurt seem to exist, although the processing of livestock products in Somalia is minimal and well below pre-war levels (World Bank & FAO, 2018). Despite its record production of milk, Somalia imports dairy products while exporting none. Importation of dairy products ranged between US\$60 million and US\$82 million annually in the past years, mostly for milk powder and long-life packaged milk, indicating the existence of a large market.

Milk processing thus has considerable value addition potential in the country. In addition, demand for fresh milk and other processed dairy products will continue to increase in all states beyond the natural population growth, which alone will provide over a million new potential consumers in the next decade (Ministry of Planning, 2019).

There are currently emerging commercial dairy systems in peri-urban areas of most cities (such as Bosaso, Garowe and Galkayo in Puntland; Mogadishu and Kismayo in Southern Somalia). The market-oriented peri-urban camel and cattle dairy systems are driven by growing demand in ever more expanding towns and cities (Ministry of Planning, 2019).

2. When it comes to strengthening the voice of women in the country, in addition to the Chamber of Commerce which is typically male-dominated, are there Women Entrepreneurship Associations and other organizations genuinely promoting women's voice?

The Somali Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) is still largely male dominated (registered female-owned businesses represent less than 10% of registered enterprises within the SCCI, and the percentage of current elected officials within the SCCI is 20%), however, a Somalia Business Women Association was recently created within the SCCI. Other women associations (Somali Women Entrepreneurs Association, Women in Renewable Energy Somalia, Puntland Business Women Umbrella) exist throughout the country, but linkages with the SCCI are weak and the assessment we conducted recommends that these links be reinforced and strengthened.

3. How has the assessment addressed the gap of women representation in higher management of organizations such as the Somali Chamber of Commerce?

The assessment recommends several ways to reduce this gap and enable women to participate in decision making:

- Implement an awards programme to recognise and celebrate the achievements of women entrepreneurs in the agriculture and renewable energy sectors;
- Support women associations to advocate for the inclusion of the principles adopted in the Somali Women's Charter in the new constitution. The principles are especially relevant for the provision of financial services and new technologies and the participation of women in government tenders;
- Reinforce the representation and participation of women entrepreneurs and their associations in the SCCI and sectoral associations (agriculture and renewable energy), to better ensure that the concerns and interests of women entrepreneurs are raised in public-private sector dialogue.

4. Have you tested this approach in forced displacement settings?

We have not tested this approach in forced displacement settings as a whole, but several components of the approach have been implemented in these contexts. For example, the [Approach to Inclusive Market Systems \(AIMS\) for Refugees and Hosting Communities](#) starts with a selection and analysis of sectors that have a high potential for inclusive growth for refugees and hosting communities. Depending on the findings of this analysis, the project designs interventions to build the capacity of the target group, and facilitate access to support services and market opportunities. As such, both approaches aim to develop evidence-based and holistic intervention models to support specific target groups in establishing and growing successful businesses.

5. What challenges have women faced when entering the traditionally male-dominated off-grid energy sector and how did the programme address these challenges?

The sectoral assessment identifies two main challenges in the solar energy value chain.

- Lack of technical skills: Both men and women lack technical skills to operate in the renewable energy value chains. However, opportunities for upskilling exist and can help women entrepreneurs enter and grow in this field;
- Health and safety: A widespread issue in the sector is poor wiring which poses a risk to those working in the sector.

In addition, general challenges related to gender stereotypes, informality, access to finance and business management skills were highlighted.

The PPDP/WEE programme is working to address these challenges by:

- Conducting a gender-sensitive value chain analysis of the off-grid solar value chain to detail the challenges across the value chain and inform programme activities that will take place in 2021 and 2022;
- Establishing local partnerships, for example with the organization Women In Renewable Energy Somalia (WIRES) which works to enable Somali women to create sustainable clean energy. WIRES is conducting a [Women Entrepreneurship self-assessment \(WE-Check\)](#) to help them provide more gender-sensitive business development services to women in the sector and expand their client-base. The organization also supports the programme with data-gathering, analysis and skills-training to ensure the voices of women in this field are well represented.

6. What are your recommendations to overcome challenges in access to finance and capacity gaps of women entrepreneurs in the renewable energy sector and influence local policies?

Recommendations from the sectoral WED Assessment related to access to gender-sensitive financial and business development service (BDS) include:

Financial services:

- Encourage financial service providers and build their capacity to target women entrepreneurs with gender-sensitive credit and loan products that take into account gendered challenges and can support women to launch and grow their enterprises;
- Implement women-focused training and information programmes to educate women about sources of financing, the criteria used in making funding decisions, and how to prepare proposals and plans to secure financing. This training should also include components on financial literacy;
- Link women entrepreneurs to existing financial services, including the ones supported through guarantee and revolving fund schemes.

BDS:

- Reinforce the capacity of local service providers to offer gender-responsive entrepreneurship development training and support;
- Develop business support infrastructures for women, notably, online and physical women's desks where they can easily access information, referrals, and advice on how to access finance, business support and markets;
- Support women entrepreneurs' associations and sectoral organizations to establish mentoring schemes for women entrepreneurs;
- Establish and expand entrepreneurship and cooperative training programmes for women entrepreneurs.

7. What are the institutional options you have identified for women to exploit economies of scale beyond cooperatives?

Currently, we are conducting a cooperative needs assessment as part of the PPDP/WEE programme. The results of this study will inform us on how to address this question, which the project seeks to answer. We can share the results later on.

8. How is the programme addressing women's skills and confidence gaps and encouraging them to enter the male-dominated off-grid energy sector?

The PPDP programme's component on renewable energy focuses on skills training in the renewable energy and on solar PV sectors, including for women. Training of Trainers have taken place where over 40% of trainers were women. This is a male dominated sector, but we are also working towards a change of mindset so that women can participate meaningfully in the sector.

The work of local organizations such as Women in Renewable Energy in Somalia (WIRES), is also key to address these issues. Organisations like WIRES can help women transition into the renewable energy sector and provide capacity building support.

9. Women milk producers use jerrycans to keep milk which is not sustainable and consumers complain that it contributes to health complications, what can you do about this?

Stay tuned for the value chain analysis that will take a deeper look into occupational safety and health issues and will provide recommendations for the two value chains.

10. While it is great to see the pan-African insights from panellists, I believe that discussing Somali women without bringing them to the table in such a forum is a missed opportunity. While valuing the incredible work you all have done and are doing, as a Somali woman, I cannot help but feel like I am looking in through a window into a conversation about me.

Thank you for the insightful comment we will take note of this for future webinars. The voices of Somali women are of paramount importance to the PPDP/WEE programme. The assessment conducted was informed by a survey with 500 Somali women entrepreneurs and interviews with associations and organizations of women entrepreneurs.

Our future webinars, where we want to look closer at the outputs and outcomes of our work, will put Somali women at the forefront. We will highlight their journeys, challenges and achievements during 2021 and 2022 when we start seeing some of the results of our work. As we move forward and engage with more women entrepreneurs, we will have them at the table in these knowledge sharing events.

10. Were the challenges in facilitating women's access to entrepreneurship skills and sector-specific technical skills training different in urban compared to rural contexts?

The PPDP/WEE Programme focuses on Mogadishu and Garowe – both urban contexts. While the project does not reveal insights in the urban-rural divide in terms of access to skills, the project will ultimately benefit rural areas, as these areas are milk-producing areas, and can stand to benefit from energy access.

In general, access to entrepreneurship and technical skills is much easier in urban areas, as it is more likely that organisations providing these services are concentrated in urban areas where there is a clear demand and market in close proximity. Access to such skills in rural areas proves to be a challenge, as there are not as many local organisations that can provide such services. In these cases, building on incentives for organisations to provide services for rural areas can be key, as well as working with existing organisations that already have a presence in rural areas.

11. Does the programme also address potential continuous learning needs, for example in the case of the application of new technologies?

The programme's sustainability beyond its end in 2022 is one of our priorities. A sustainability strategy has been outlined to ensure current partners, stakeholders and entrepreneurs in Somalia are being capacitated to continue to progress and trained to mobilize further resources.

Examples of how the programme is addressing continuous learning and new technologies are:

- a. Developing a directory for women entrepreneurs to increase their visibility and market opportunities. It will be managed and maintained by the Somali Chamber of Commerce (SCCI);
- b. Certifying business development service providers in ILO tools such as Start and Improve Your Business and Improve Your Exhibiting Skills. By entering this network of trainers they stay updated on any future enhancements including technological advancements;
- c. Including a digital component to the access to markets training delivered to entrepreneurs covering digital exhibitions and the use of social media to ensure the application of new technology.

12. Do you have any insights so far on how to address the issues of social protection outlined in your presentation to ensure business continuity after the other interventions help upgrade businesses?

This component of the PPDP/WEE programme has not yet started, however, social protection is key, as it can offer a buffer for entrepreneurs in cases of economic or other shocks, reduce risks, and ultimately contribute to decent work. For women entrepreneurs who do the lion's share of unpaid care work, for example, social protection can mean the difference between business continuity or closure.

Social protection access can be facilitated through government initiatives and policies, as well as by establishing linkages with local organisations and institutions offering social protection services. Stay tuned for how this plays out in practice as we move on to the next stages of project implementation.