

Social Innovation supporting Female Entrepreneurship

Women in developing nations are facing many challenges in order to become entrepreneurs. Inequalities are common both in the working environment and the society. As organisations and development programs across the world are trying to address these challenges, the relevance of social innovation has grown in the last years. However, the challenges that women face are complex and organisations have so far struggled in how to use and benefit from the methodologies of social innovation.

The unemployment among women is a widespread problem in many developing countries, including Uganda in East Africa. The Ugandan women face more challenges in entering the labour market than men. Noticed is that entrepreneurship is one of few ways to support women in extreme poverty to gain income and independence, including a more active role in the community. For organisations over the world to solve challenges such as youth economic empowerment and equality for women, the relevance of social innovation has grown in the last years. It is discussed to have several possible benefits that could be applied to the developing context but there is limited research in this field and several challenges with implementation.

The study, based on qualitative interviews with Ugandan women and management teams at Plan International Uganda, shows that methodologies around social innovation can help addressing challenges that women face and presents suggestions of how development programs can benefit from implementing the methodologies.

The study identifies ten challenges that affect the women the most: limited access to finance and saving possibilities, underinvestment in education, limited access to social networks and mentorship, lack of employability and business skills, sexual harassment, low self-confidence, work restrictions from husband or family, limited access to and knowledge of technology and internet, seasonal nature like rainfall and

dry spells, and cultural and social norms. It was found that by deeply looking into the needs and challenges of the beneficiaries of a development program, it becomes more efficient and successful. Thus when conducting development programs, the needs and challenges for female entrepreneurs should be studied and used as foundation when developing the programs.

The key success factors that allows succeeding with implementing social innovation and in particular design thinking, have been identified as understanding the local context and the users and engagement with the community and private sector. A severe assessment of the local context and needs of the beneficiaries is something that all organisations should take into consideration when conducting a development program. Challenges found most important should be in focus. It is important to look at the needs of both the beneficiaries and the market, as the women might not always know what challenges that affect them the most and hence which solutions that are best for them.

In addition, partnerships with the private sector should be analysed and developed further in order to create more efficient and sustainable collaborations. By offering partners gained value through participating in a project, not only asking for funds, the partnerships can be stronger and more effective.

Through addressing the most affecting challenges and implementing methodologies of social innovation, development programs can be even more effective in empowering female entrepreneurs.