

Executive Summary

Evaluation Overview

Since 2010, the U.S. Department of State has sponsored the African Women's Entrepreneurship Program (AWEP), an outreach, education, and engagement initiative that assists women entrepreneurs throughout sub-Saharan Africa. One component of AWEP is an International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), which brings approximately 30 African women entrepreneurs to the United States each year for a 3-week professional exchange. In 2015, the Evaluation Division of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) contracted GDIT and The District Communications Group to conduct a study evaluating the extent to which the AWEP-IVLP program met the following U.S. foreign policy goals:¹

- Increase trade both regionally and to U.S. markets, including through the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)
- Promote the growth of businesses owned by African women entrepreneurs
- Create better business environments for African women entrepreneurs
- Empower African women entrepreneurs to become voices of change/social advocacy in their communities

The study used a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods. In-country fieldwork was conducted in four countries in East and West Africa (Benin, Ghana, Kenya, and Madagascar) between June and July 2016. Each fieldwork visit included site visits to AWEP-IVLP participants' businesses, as well as in-depth interviews with participants, impactees (employees and others who were impacted by the participants' follow-up activities), local professionals with expertise in women's business and entrepreneurship, and U.S. Embassy officials and staff. The fieldwork was supplemented by telephone in-depth interviews with 20 participants from various countries in Central and Southern Africa, as well as a telephone survey, to which 87 participants across sub-Saharan Africa responded (with a response rate of 48%). In total, the study collected data from 133 of the 181 AWEP-IVLP participants (from the 5 cohorts between 2011 and 2015), as well as 35 impactees, 8 experts, and 10 Embassy personnel.

Key Findings

IMPACTS OF AWEP-IVLP ON U.S.–AFRICA AND REGIONAL TRADE

As a result of AWEP-IVLP participation, 72% of surveyed participants *expanded into new local, regional, and/or international markets*. Interviewed participants attributed their success to their expanded networks, improved product quality, and improved marketing strategies. In particular, staying in touch with fellow AWEP-IVLP alumnae via social media networks has given participants opportunities to export or introduce their products to other African countries. These new networks have contributed to *increasing trade regionally*.

Only a third (35%) of surveyed participants gained *access to U.S. markets* through the program, largely due to difficulties meeting export requirements, paying fees, and

¹ Adapted from the AWEP Mission Statement: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs. "African Women's Entrepreneurship Program." <https://www.state.gov/p/af/rt/awep/index.htm>. Accessed June 19, 2017.

completing necessary paperwork. Nonetheless, several interviewed participants were able to capitalize on contacts made during the program. Success stories include:

- ❖ A Beninese participant began supplying soaps to Whole Foods in Washington, DC, after meeting a store representative at the AWEP-IVLP business fair.
- ❖ A Kenyan participant established a contract with Walmart for her crafts, and said she was planning to build a warehouse in the United States to fulfill anticipated orders.
- ❖ A Malagasy participant received an unprecedented order for 600,000 hats and bags from a U.S. customer met at a trade show during the program.

IMPACTS OF AWEP-IVLP ON WOMEN'S BUSINESSES IN AFRICA

Most surveyed participants felt that AWEP-IVLP had *improved their key business abilities* (much/very much), including communication with employees and customers (90%), branding and marketing (84%), and sales strategies (81%).

- **Impactees:** Nearly all interviewed impactees also benefited from learning new skills from the participants.

Thanks to the program, 9 in 10 surveyed participants felt *more confident* about their business abilities, more optimistic about their futures, and better equipped to deal with potential uncertainty.

- **Impactees:** Many interviewed impactees also felt more confident in their skills thanks to encouragement and training from the participants.

More than 80% of surveyed participants *expanded their business networks*, including fellow women entrepreneurs from their AWEP-IVLP cohort across Africa, U.S. women entrepreneurs and other business representatives, and U.S. Embassy contacts in their countries.

- **Impactees:** Some interviewed participants also have shared new contacts with impactees.

After the program, participants used their new abilities, ideas, and networks *to improve their businesses*. The majority of surveyed participants developed new management procedures (72%); made better use of technology, e.g. social media (71%); improved their marketing (68%); improved their business plan (66%); and adopted industry standards for quality (66%).

Interviewed participants emphasized the importance of employing a *more inclusive leadership style* that involves training and empowering employees, as well as *marketing via social media and internet*. Whereas many of them had no digital marketing platform prior to the program, most interviewed participants reported that afterwards they began using WhatsApp, Facebook, and/or company websites to promote and sell their products.

Most surveyed participants (86%) agreed that AWEP-IVLP had helped them *grow their business* (much/very much). Most notably, more than 60% reported both *increased sales and increased revenue or profits*. A few interviewed participants said they had doubled or tripled their sales thanks to improvements and expansions made since the program. By exposing participants to new marketing techniques, product quality improvements, and management procedures, the program supports the foreign policy goal of *promoting the growth of businesses owned by African women entrepreneurs*.

- **Impactees:** Some impactees accessed new customers for their businesses thanks to new contacts that participants shared with them or business improvements made with skills learned from participants.

IMPACTS OF AWEP-IVLP ON AFRICAN WOMEN'S BUSINESS ENVIRONMENTS AND COMMUNITIES

After the program, nearly all the surveyed participants felt motivated to *become leaders in their communities* (98%) and encouraged business partners and peers to help their communities (95%).

Most interviewed and surveyed participants agreed that the AWEP-IVLP program had encouraged them to employ *corporate social responsibility* practices in their businesses. More than two-thirds of surveyed participants reported that the program had influenced their businesses' environment-friendly practices (70%); procedures to improve employees' work-life balance (69%); and policies ensuring fair treatment and pay for workers (69%). In addition, more than 50% of surveyed participants reported that their businesses had given away free products to help people in their communities.

The program is effective in *empowering women entrepreneurs to become voices of change*. Nearly all surveyed participants (97%) felt encouraged to *advocate for African women* after the program. Indeed, interviewed participants described becoming vocal advocates for women in business both through new and established organizations (82% of surveyed participants) and by advocating for changes in laws (53%). Impactees confirmed that many participants have come to be seen as role models among girls and women in their communities.

The program also influenced 85% of participants to *volunteer or do community service for women*. In particular, many interviewed participants have provided training and/or mentoring to women and youth, as well as helped women in the business world, *creating better business environments for women entrepreneurs* in their communities.

IMPACTS OF AWEP-IVLP ON WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Two-thirds (67 percent) of the surveyed participants reported that the AWEP-IVLP program had motivated them to pursue additional educational opportunities. Interviewed participants most commonly mentioned pursuing higher education or professional training.

- **Impactees:** Some of the interviewed impactees—particularly participants' employees—also obtained professional training thanks to the participants' encouragement. Furthermore, thanks to the business and communication skills learned from participants, some impactees were able to obtain new jobs.