

Enterprise Development Training Course

DAY SIX - SESSION TWENTY TWO

Women and Micro-Enterprise

Objective: to enable participants to identify the particular problems which face women in micro enterprises and suggest actions to overcome them.

Time: One to one and a half hours

Note

The guide for this session is written on the assumption that there are at least some women participants on the course and that there are also some men. If there are no women at all or if there are only women, you will have to make some changes.

Session Guide

1. Ask participants who are the most numerous owners and workers in micro-enterprises in their areas: women or men? Their answers will of course differ according to local circumstances but in most places women play the most important part. Stress again that we are concerned with the very smallest enterprises. Participants may even now tend to think of the more visible formal businesses, where men certainly predominate, rather than the smallest economic activities of the poor.

Compare the importance of men and women in micro-enterprises to the relative proportions of men and women on the course. If (as is all too common) men make up the vast majority of participants, ask whether this matters. Stress that the proportions of men and women employees in NGOs, and even more so in larger firms, banks and government, reflect the imbalances in society at large. This session is designed to examine the situation in the context of micro-enterprises and to help participants identify ways in which they themselves can make a difference.

2. Ask each married male participant to say whether his wife earns an income, either through employment or self-employment. Ask those whose wives do not earn an income to say why. If there are no married men or all their wives earn an income, ask why so many women do not.

Suggestions may include:

- Too much work at home.
- The children need their mother's care.
- Husband's income is enough.

3. Ask each participant to think of a poor woman with a family whom he knows well or, if they do not know a poor woman, to think of their own wives or mothers. They should write down a typical day's schedule for the woman they have thought of, starting with the moment she gets up until the time she goes to sleep at night. Allow five minutes for this and then ask them to think of a poor man and allow the same time for them to write a similar schedule for his day.

Ask a woman participant to read out what she has written about a woman's day. Write a summary with times and tasks on one side of the board and ask other participants to add items. Then do the same for a typical poor man's day on the other side of the board.

Ask participants to compare the two schedules. Relate them to their earlier explanations of why their wives do not earn an income, which is largely because of the household workload that is mainly undertaken by women.

4. Ask participants to put themselves in the position of the poor men and women whose daily lives have been described. If they need to earn more money, which are more likely to be able to find jobs, the poor men or the poor women?

Discuss the answer that although jobs are scarce for everyone, men are more likely to get some form of employment than women. Identify reasons for this, e.g.: men are more likely to have the necessary skills; men can leave home and travel to find work.

However, many poor women are the only or the main earners for their households. If they cannot find jobs with other people, what option remains for them? Come up with the answer that self employment is often the only option, for reasons such as:

- Micro-enterprises can often be run from home and can be combined with domestic work.
- Micro-enterprises can be run on a part-time or seasonal basis and, thus, they can fit in with domestic and farm work.
- Women lack formal education, which is necessary for getting jobs.

Women are, therefore, often forced to employ themselves and to start micro-enterprises. So although women's enterprises are not always the most visible and are certainly not the largest, they are usually the most numerous, even in communities where women are expected to remain at home.

5. Write the following brief assignment on the board:

Imagine you are the manager of an NGO and you have to decide which of two possible micro-enterprise support projects to start.

Project A will enable 1000 of the poorest men in a community to add \$10 a week to their incomes and Project B will enable 1000 of the poorest women to do the same.

Both projects will cost the same and you can only choose one. Identify as many reasons as possible in favour of A and of B, and then decide which you will choose and why.

If time allows, divide participants into groups, each including some women if possible, and allow them up to twenty minutes to discuss this together. If there is not enough time for group work, allow participants ten minutes to complete the assignment on their own.

6. Ask each group or individual to state which of the two projects they will support. Divide the board into two sections, one for each project, and write the total numbers in favour of A and B above its respective half of the board.

Participants may support Project B because the session relates to women and they think they should but be sure to elicit arguments in favour of both projects. Explain that participants must be able to understand both points of view, if they wish to be able to argue in favour of one of them.

Arguments in favour of each project may include the following:

Project A

- Men are more likely to be able to get loans for later expansion.
- Men have better access to materials and to customers.
- Men are better educated and have more skills.
- Men are physically stronger.
- Men are free to travel as their business requires.
- Men are more likely to have had business or employment experience.
- Men dominate society; change will be difficult and disruptive.
- Men's enterprises are more likely to be able to expand in the future.
- Men are not diverted by child birth and family care.

Project B

- Women need self-employment more than men.
- Women save more regularly
- Women repay loans more reliably.
- Women work harder and are more committed.
- Men are less likely to work hard for a small sum of money.
- Women spend their earnings on their families, not on liquor.
- Women desperately need to be 'empowered'.
- If group action is needed, women are better collaborators.
- Men can get jobs; women have no other options.
- Women need to be able to earn money at home.

7. Encourage discussion leading to the general conclusion that the decision must, to an extent, depend on the objectives of the NGO. If the intention is to help people establish enterprises with growth potential and to employ more people and earn more money, it may, although this is by no means certain, be better to support Project A.

Ask participants to state what the objectives of their own NGOs are. If an NGO wishes to work towards changes in society and to correct social injustice, it should probably support Project B.

8. Women's 'empowerment' differs from one country to another and between different communities and income groups within countries but, generally speaking, women's economic, social and political position is worse in poorer countries than it is in rich ones.

Ask participants to guess the average life expectancy of women and of men in the poorer countries of the world. In 2000 the figures¹ were:

	Men	Women
Poorer countries	60	58
Richer countries	75	81

If possible, compare these and the following figures with figures for participants' own countries. Ensure that participants recognise not only that the average is higher in richer countries, but also that women have shorter lives than men in poorer countries but live longer than men in rich countries.

Encourage discussion as to why this is the case and elicit suggestions such as:

- Unequal access to health care facilities
- High mortality rates in childbirth
- Harder working lives

9. Women usually share with their families whatever income they earn but they have less opportunity to earn good incomes. Ask participants to guess the female proportion of the employed labour force in poorer and richer countries. The 2000 figures¹ were:

	Men	Women
Poorer countries	62%	38%
Richer countries	57%	43%

One reason for this is women's lack of education. Ask participants to guess the percentage of adult men and women who are illiterate in the poorer and richer countries. The 2000 figures¹ were:

	Men	Women
Poorer countries	29%	49%
Richer countries	4%	5%

10. Participants should conclude that women everywhere, and particularly in poorer countries, are seriously disadvantaged. They do a large part of the world's work, but receive a very small part of the rewards of this work, in terms of money which they can control, wealth and social position.

This is not only unjust, but it is also uneconomic, since resources, such as food, capital and education should be allowed to flow to the people who can make best use of them. Self-employment can help to correct this situation, and NGOs can help women to become successfully self-employed. There are therefore strong reasons for giving preference to women in enterprise development programmes.

11. The requirement in the earlier exercise to choose between Projects A and B was clearly unrealistic, since most projects deal with both men and women. Nevertheless enterprise development workers, like anyone else in development, often have to choose between different options, some of which may benefit women more than others.

Ask participants what they themselves can do in their work, in however modest a way, to correct the inequity of women's position in society.

Suggestions may include:

- Allow and encourage women clients to speak for themselves
- Arrange meetings at places and times which are convenient for women
- Hire more women as field workers and in senior positions
- Facilitate women's access to finance and other resources

12. Participants may feel that these policies will necessarily involve greater costs and lower success rates. Stress that women are generally better clients than men, particularly if an NGO is involved in savings and credit. Its programme is more likely to achieve self-sustainability if some part of the transactions can be delegated to client groups, and if repayment rates are high. Women clients are much more likely to be able to help a programme achieve this than men.

¹ Statistics taken from Gender Stats, a World Bank Group database.

Note

At the end of this session remind participants that they must complete the accounts for their Enterprise Experience businesses and hand them to you by a specified time in the evening. At that time you should also indicate that you will be available for loan repayments to be made.

They should also be asked to prepare a simple presentation for the first session next day, summarising their financial results and identifying the lessons they have learned.