

EMPOWERING CHANGE AGENTS:

Lessons
learned
in building
a female-led
sales force



FIVE YEARS OF LESSONS & GROWTH

“Empowerment training was a great eye opener for me; that the power to change my circumstances was within my reach. That I can no longer go through life as a passive participant, but I can influence the change I want to see.”

-Beatrice Ayoro, Kenya

The Envirofit Women's Empowerment Program (WEP) was founded on the belief that women, as primary users of cookstoves, must be involved in both their design and distribution in order for stoves to be adopted and for women's needs to be fully met. The WEP was first developed and funded in conjunction with the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves (GACC) in 2012.

In 2013, Envirofit partnered with Johns Hopkins University and ESVAK to conduct a randomized control trial, and pilot a women's empowerment training program in Nairobi and Meru, Kenya to enhance the sales capacity of female entrepreneurs. Envirofit's training was designed to increase self-knowledge and guide women to develop an actionable growth strategy towards achieving personal goals while building a thriving cookstove business. The results of the first pilot demonstrated that women sold three times as many stoves as men after completing the empowerment program.

Through another grant from GACC, Envirofit was able to test and adapt the training module for women's empowerment to include agency and skill based training components for a pilot in Nigeria.

In 2016, Envirofit was able to adapt and implement the WEP training in India through support from Winrock International. The training was demonstrated to be successful in improving business habits, selling strategies, earning capacity, and self confidence.

Over the past two years, grant funding from the Energy & Environment Partnership helped Envirofit further expand the pilot program in Kenya and test parameters required to build a scalable, replicable model. It also aided in refining the WEP's programmatic model for empowering female change-agents to sell clean cookstoves.

Through Envirofit's efforts to empower women within the sales and distribution areas of the clean cooking value chain, Envirofit was able to build a scalable model, inspire others to deploy empowerment programs of their own, and create opportunities for women to participate and grow within the sector.



LESSONS LEARNED

1. Selling clean cookstoves is a full-time job.

When Envirofit first started two years ago the main focus was to recruit established entrepreneurs with a track record for selling household goods. Through this model we found that women would add the stove to their existing stock but often wouldn't go above and beyond to try to sell cookstoves. Even with extended training on marketing and sales, most entrepreneurs waited for new customers to come to their shop instead of seeking them out. While the fostering of entrepreneurs using this model could be successful for pull products or fast-moving consumer goods, a sustainable cookstoves business model requires consistent and frequent sales, which is difficult to maintain when people are also responsible for selling other products. As a result, Envirofit shifted our focus from working with established, independent entrepreneurs to hiring and investing in female sales agents who sell cookstoves as a full-time job.



4. Focus on providing skills not answers.

The women's empowerment training program Envirofit has developed and adapted for our use is unique because of the focus on personal agency. This requires that participants ask difficult questions of themselves, evaluate their own ability to reach their goals, and confront limiting beliefs in overcoming the barriers to reach their goals. Every woman who enters the program has their own story and challenges, and some are closer than others to having that "Aha!" moment that the WEP is designed to achieve. However, some implementers want to move the class along faster, and end up giving women answers instead of tools.

This means that our trainer's job isn't to give participants suggestions or solutions to the problems they're faced with, but instead to teach them how to find and create the solutions for themselves. The trainer needs to be empowered to deliver empowerment trainings. Envirofit hired multiple trainers before finding the right trainer who could deliver the empowerment program effectively and all trainers completed a train-the-trainer course offered by Winrock to practice their training skills. Enlisting trainers who can act as guides, as opposed to just teachers, is the way to achieve lasting results.

2. Logistical support can replace the need for finance.

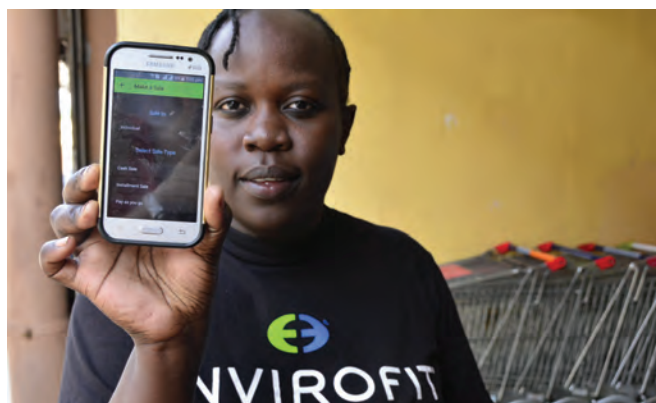
Entrepreneurs working in low and middle income countries often say that access to finance is the limiting factor to their success. However, underlying logistical issues can play a larger role than they realize. Most entrepreneurs need financing for taking stock of products, and for transporting and delivering them to customers. Rather than treating these logistical challenges as a finance issue, Envirofit addressed them by offering delivery to the customer. Fulfilling customer deliveries reduced barriers to buying and selling by freeing the entrepreneur from having to commit resources for purchasing and transporting stock. They were only responsible for making the sale and collecting commission. As a successful global social enterprise that is invested locally in the communities we serve, Envirofit gives small entrepreneurs access to world class logistical support that allows them to focus on sales and building strong customer relationships.

3. Mentorship is more important than the training.

Many empowerment programs stop at the training and check the box. When Envirofit's training program first started we offered 2 days of sales and marketing training, followed by a month of trial-selling the stoves. Afterwards, the empowerment program was given to those still interested in selling stoves full-time. Envirofit found the trial period between the sales and empowerment training to be essential in learning who is committed to the program before making the bigger investment in a 3-day training. We also found that the initial mentorship after the sales training was not enough, as we saw high levels of drop-out between trainings. In response, we extended the mentorship program so that it continued for longer than a week. Women spent their first week shadowing an experienced sales agent, and then checked in with the trainer to track progress and overcome challenges. At these meetings we address common barriers they're likely to face and walk them through the process of addressing their own barriers. It's helpful because they have a chance to talk with other people who are going through the same challenges, and share information about what works for them.

5. Point-of-sales technology and consumer financing can help entrepreneurs sell.

Selling high-quality, high-performing stoves is difficult because it means selling something with a 1000% price premium compared to the product customers usually buy. This is the equivalent of trading in your bicycle for a motorbike. Consumers need financing to make it work. While different microfinance companies are working with customers to make financing available to them, entrepreneurs also need to offer consumer financing to successfully sell stoves. Envirofit has been working to support entrepreneurs with point of sales tools that allow them to directly extend financing to customers. With these tools, Envirofit sales agents increased their daily sales by 91%.



JACKLINE BAKHOYA

Jackline Bakhoya is a 33 year old single mother of three. Growing up, she didn't have many privileges. Despite this, her father - a civil servant - still endeavored to provide her with the best life he could.

Jackline completed her high school education in 2000. She was married a year later, and moved to an estate called Jericho in Nairobi. Things were great at the start, but over time the relationship became rocky. She and her husband started having marital problems that culminated in their separation two years ago.

Now tasked with raising their three children by herself, Jackline chose to view this challenge as an inspiration. Her children became her motivation to succeed in life, and she was determined to work hard to provide for them the same way her father had done for her.

"Before I joined Envirofit I was mostly involved in the catering business. When the opportunity came through a friend to join Envirofit, I was most enthused. From April this year to date, I must admit that I have had a great opportunity to learn skills and knowledge that have helped me perform at my job.

"I was always a shy person, but since I went through the Envirofit trainings, I have gained confidence and honed my pitching skills. By this I have been able to initiate and cultivate relationships for new business - a quality that has led me to perform well."



@Envirofit/ Adriane Ohanesian Jackline Bakhoya