



International
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Women's
Entrepreneurship
Development

WE Check Webinar

Summary of Experiences from the Field

wed@ilo.org

SME | Women's Entrepreneurship Development Programme

Algeria: Organizational Ownership

Project: TA'EHYL¹: For the promotion of young women and men's entrepreneurship development in Algeria, funded by the Netherlands.

In Algeria, WE Check was implemented with the National Youth Employment Agency (ANSEJ), a government agency that aims to promote youth employment through entrepreneurship development.

ANSEJ observed that at the entry of their entrepreneurship development programmes, 80% of candidates were young women. However, at the exit, only 17% of business plans developed were defended by young women. When the ILO held initial discussions on the WE Check process with ANSEJ's Senior Management, their objectives for WE Check were clear: They wanted a process that would produce an evidence-based Action Report to inform affirmative actions towards increasing female participation in their entrepreneurship development schemes from 17% to 40%. Senior Management also wanted the Action Report to propose concrete approaches to encourage meaningful representation of young women from disadvantaged areas in priority and productive growth-oriented sectors.

With clear guidance from Senior Management and organisational commitment to the WE Check process, ANSEJ appointed an Internal Task Team (ITT) comprised of 10 mid-level managers to undertake the assessment. Each member allocated one working day per week over a three-month period to collect and analyse data and produce the WE Check Action Report. The ITT received guidance from Senior Management, support from the External Process Facilitator (EPF), and technical supervision by the ILO.

¹ Project web page: https://www.ilo.org/africa/countries-covered/algeria/WCMS_705812/lang--fr/index.htm

At the end of the self-assessment phase, the ITT produced a detailed Action Report outlining strategies for meeting Senior Management's objectives at each of the three key assessment areas. Recommendations included the development of gender-sensitive communication strategies, sensitization of management and key staff on gender-responsive BDS provision, and mainstreaming gender across training and support services and monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

After Senior Management validated the report and prioritised proposed actions, ANSEJ allocated internal resources to pilot inception activities stemming from these recommendations. The Agency is currently integrating lessons learned from the pilot, preparing for certification by the ILO and has engaged in further resource mobilization internally and externally, to implement the full Action Report, with the support from ILO.

The experience of ANSEJ demonstrates the importance of engaging Senior Management and having a dedicated ITT with sufficient time, resources and guidance to conduct the assessment. Part of the success of WE Check in ANSEJ stems from having the organisation take ownership of the process, resulting in clearly defined objectives, a committed team, and adequate resources.

Sierra Leone: Tailored Technical Support

Project: Small and Medium Enterprises Development Project, funded by the ILO's internal resources and Creating Peaceful Societies through women's improved access to management of natural resources, land tenure rights and economic empowerment in Sierra Leone funded by the United Nations' Peacebuilding Fund.

In Sierra Leone, WE Check was implemented with the National Youth Commission (NAYCOM) and with Simbaru Community Bank. NAYCOM is a government institution established with the objective to institutionalize the involvement of young women and men at all levels of decision-making and also has a mandate

to contribute to the creation of employment opportunities for youth and build their entrepreneurial skills. Simbaru Community Bank is a community bank under the Apex Bank umbrella, which aims to extend financial services to rural communities.

In initial stages, the support provided by the External Process Facilitator (EPF) was mostly delivered remotely within a specific timeframe and coordinated by the project team. However, WE Check at times conflicted with priorities and challenges of BDSPs on the ground, including delays in organising field research and, more recently, the COVID-19 context. For example, while NAYCOM counts with an impressive nation-wide presence, the organisation could only dedicate two of its staff members to lead and undertake the WE Check process. Despite having a smaller-than-recommended ITT, the organisation and members of the ITT were clearly motivated and wanted to make the WE Check process as comprehensive and impactful as possible. On the other hand, Apex Bank has needed more time to set up institutional arrangements and identify relevant branches to conduct the WE Check process.

In order to provide adequate support to these two organisations, ILO adopted several approaches to maintain communication and coordinate remote support. WhatsApp groups were created to better coordinate amongst stakeholders involved and to provide timely support to NAYCOM and Apex Bank as needed. In addition, emailing and teleconferencing were used to provide technical support to NAYCOM. The ILO took into account lessons learned from providing remote support to NAYCOM throughout the WE Check process for implementation with Simbaru Community Bank. The ILO has partnered with a local CSO – Community Aid Network Sierra Leone (CAN SL) to act as an EPF with Simbaru Community Bank and provide in-person continuous support.

Experiences in Sierra Leone demonstrate that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the WE Check process. Depending on the organization and the ITT, the level of support required from the EPF and from project teams will vary. It is the role of the ILO to make sure that the process adopts adaptive management

principles throughout, to ensure that motivated organizations can successfully undertake WE Check. Furthermore, support to undertake WE Check can be provided remotely, which is particularly relevant to the COVID-19 context. However, in-person support can be more effective.

Somalia: Catalysing BDSP Sustainability

Project: Public Private Partnership for Development (PPDP) Women's Economic Empowerment Component, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

In the context of protracted conflict, drought and instability, Somalia continues to make steps towards progress. However, gender inequality is persistent, and women lag behind on all development indicators, particularly in terms of economic activities and representation. At the same time, the majority of BDSPs in the country are donor-driven, rather than demand- or market-driven, as they have to compete for scarce resources and donor funding. In many cases, their accountability is focused upwards towards donors rather than downwards to meeting the demands of women and men entrepreneurs. These market distortions can be detrimental for private sector development interventions and to the entrepreneurship ecosystem, as top-down interventions may fail to provide targeted services to entrepreneurs.

The ILO has launched the WE Check process with 10 financial and non-financial Business Development Service Providers (BDSPs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the cities of Mogadishu and Garowe. The ILO has taken specific measures to incentivize and enable BPDSPs to adopt more market-driven approaches to service provision, using WE Check as a key tool to identify the needs of women entrepreneurs, as an emerging and high-growth potential market, and develop more targeted products, services and processes.

First, the participation of BDSPs in the WE Check process was voluntary. BDSPs were identified through a competitive call for expression of interest. Those who submitted applications were selected based on their technical capacity to conduct the WE Check process. Second, no financial support or compensation is being provided to BDSPs other than to support the WE Check process. This ensures that the organization retains ownership over the process and encourages organizational commitment. Finally, the ILO is providing non-financial support following the assessment so that BDSPs/CSOs can implement the WE Check Action Report and achieve sustainability at three key levels: financial, technical and organizational.

To achieve financial sustainability, finalized Action Reports are presented in a public event attended by women and men entrepreneurs and potential donors and investors to introduce the improved and market-driven products, processes and services. BDSPs can then launch a marketing and fundraising campaign to expand their client base and mobilize resources. To achieve technical sustainability, the ILO is supporting BDSPs to develop relevant financial and non-financial services using ILO tools and approaches. The ILO further supports BDSPs to meet quality and certification requirements. Finally, at the organizational level, the ILO is also providing technical advice for implementing the Action report and developing more gender-sensitive and market-driven business models. This support includes guidance on adaptive management, balancing economic and social outcomes, and risk and business continuity management, which is essential for the context in Somalia.