



Rwanda Learning Brief A study of occupational and economic well-being among marginalized women in Rwanda



Photo credit: Alison Wright, 2014

Introduction

Since 1997, Women for Women International (WfWI) has provided social and economic empowerment training to more than 68,000 marginalized women who survived the 1994 genocide in Rwanda that killed more than 800,000. Rwanda is now a stable, peaceful nation with the goal of transforming into a middle-income country by 2020. The government supports gender equality in economic development, yet Rwandan women still work predominantly on their own farms or in the informal sector and for lower pay than men.

Rwanda is one of the stronger post-conflict economies in Africa, compared to other countries where WfWI works. Our monitoring data from 2013 pointed to strong average improvements in graduates' economic well-being over baseline levels (close to doubling), but also raised indications of possible limits to sustaining gains in earnings among some of our graduates two years after graduation (see sidebar). This presented a quandary, so we commissioned this study in 2015 to identify deeper patterns and challenges to sustaining improvements to the economic well-being of graduates in Rwanda.

Methodology

WfWI's holistic 12-month training program aims to provide marginalized women with knowledge and resources that will empower them to sustain an income, improve their health and well-being, increase their influence at home and in their communities, and connect to social networks for support.

To provide a careful understanding of how women graduates continue in the occupational paths that they start during the WfWI training and how their economic well-being sustains over time, WfWI commissioned FATE Consulting Ltd to conduct an in-depth study of the current economic status of a sample of women graduates from two cohorts: those who completed WfWI's training program between 2010-2011, as well as a more recent cohort of graduates from 2014. The study included:

- A survey of a sample of 351 graduates designed to assess their current occupational activities, use of vocational and business skills, household expenditures, and assets.
- Life history interviews with 16 graduates from 6 districts, evenly divided between women who were actively using their training and women who were not.
- In-depth interviews with 5 key informants, including WfWI program staff, local leaders and women heads of cooperatives/associations.

The assessment was conducted and analyzed using the following thematic areas:

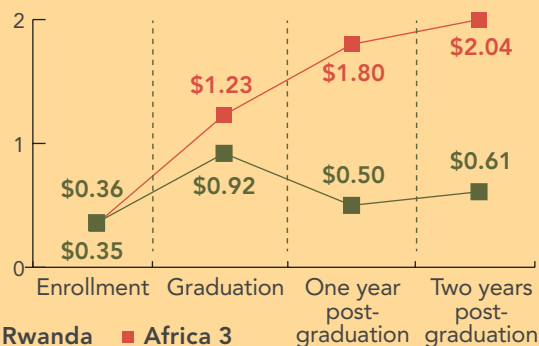
- Family life, including insights into household consumption expenditures and asset levels
- Occupational activities and returns
- Entrepreneurship, market conditions and influencing factors
- Human capital/managerial capital
- Gender norms

Starting point

Internal monitoring results from a longitudinal sample survey of graduates conducted in 2013

- 96% had completed a maximum of primary schooling or less (Africa 3-country avg: 88%)
- 26% could not read or write (Africa 3-country avg: 47%)

Reported average daily personal earnings:



452 WfWI Rwanda graduates surveyed two years post-graduation in 2013; Africa 3-country average figures represent 1521 graduates from DRC, Nigeria and Rwanda surveyed two years post-graduation in 2013.

Acknowledgements: This study was conducted in 2015 with funding provided by the Millby Foundation. WfWI's programs in Rwanda are implemented through the generous support of several institutions including the Cartier Charitable Foundation and the Rwanda Hope Foundation.

Results

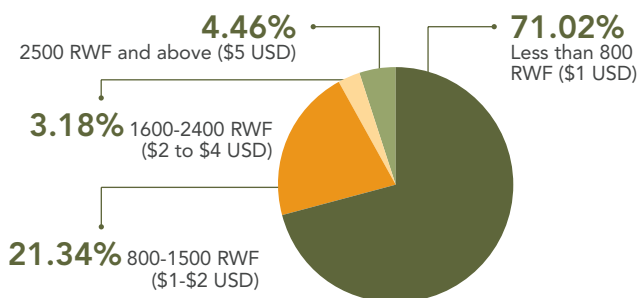
Barriers Persist to Economic Empowerment

WfWI's core program aims to economically empower those women who start out with very low levels of formal education. They learn how to earn and save money and build and grow a stock of assets. WfWI trains them in vocational and business skills and links them with support networks. The survey found that while several graduates had maintained a strong growth trajectory post-graduation, many graduates had not been able to sustain increases to their income over time, and a number of graduates did not continue to use their specific vocational training to generate income.

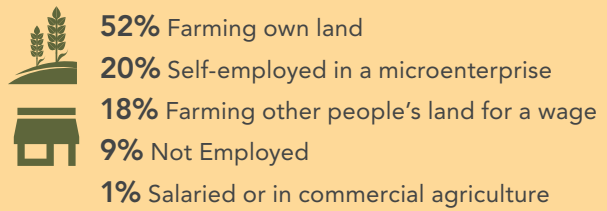
Reported reasons for observed economic pathways

- Only 29% of surveyed WfWI graduates reported average personal earnings of more than \$1 a day. More than 86% said they had earned less than 15,000 RWF (~\$20) from their primary occupation in the 4 weeks prior to the survey.
- A number of graduates had returned to previous occupations. While 53% had engaged in employment related to their vocational training immediately after graduation, 62% had worked in their current primary occupation for more than 7 years. This indicates that a number of women returned to their initial occupation at some point after graduation. For most (52%) this means working on their own farm.
- Lack of capital, profitability and market linkages emerged as key barriers to work and growth in their field of training. Most graduates (73%) who were not working in their field of training said they lacked capital to invest in the work. Others said the vocation was less lucrative than their prior occupations, there was too much competition, they lacked access to markets, the length of training in new fields was insufficient, or there were management issues that prevented sustained cohesion of business cooperatives.

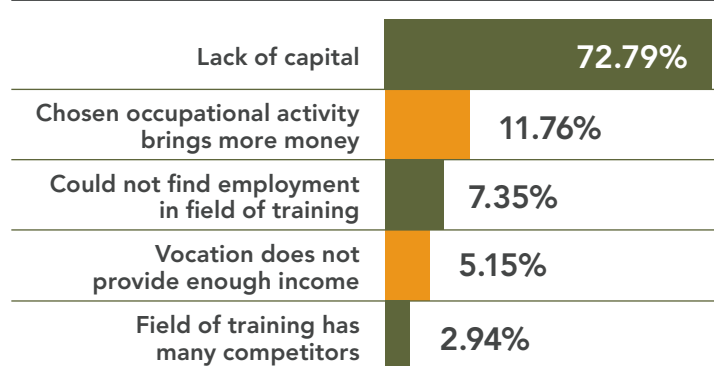
DAILY PERSONAL EARNINGS



Current Primary Occupation



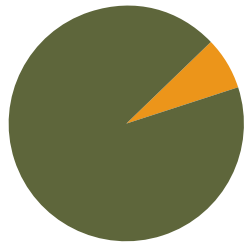
STATED REASONS FOR DROPPING OUT OF THE FIELD OF TRAINING



Structural reasons for observed economic pathways

- High dependency ratio. The majority (53%) of respondents are sole providers with 4.89 being the average size of their households, which means over half of our respondents have to support around 3.89 dependents each as the sole working adult in the household. This appears to be a key limiting factor in many women's ability to actively pursue income-generating activities and to invest in higher-risk entrepreneurial activities compared to ensuring subsistence, particularly when the dependents are very young children.
- High incidence of chronic illness and exposure to crises. Close to half of WfWI graduates (42%) reported having a disability/chronic illness, and 22% reported having had the disability for more than 7 years. Of those who reported missing at least one day of work due to the disability/chronic illnesses, 22% did not work during the 30 days prior to the survey. The crises most frequently experienced by respondents in the 12 months prior to the survey were severe illness (70%) and bad weather/poor harvest (78%).
- Household responsibilities remain the work of women. WfWI graduates remain responsible for most of the housework, spending 2-5 hours each day on unpaid care work, i.e. cooking, cleaning and caring for children. The modal number of hours spent on income-generating activities was therefore between 4 and 7 hours per day. Almost all respondents (93%) report that the division of labor at home did not change following their training, although graduates do share in household decision making.

HAS THE DIVISION OF LABOR AT HOME CHANGED?



6.84%

YES

93.16%

NO

PARTICIPATION IN HOUSEHOLD DECISION MAKING

Household spending

Major expenditures

16.74%

Minor expenditures

38.63%

Family planning

Jointly with spouse

65.67%

On her own

22.32%

Use of personal income

Jointly with spouse

56.65%

On her own

32.19%

Effects of Social Empowerment Training Persist

Survey findings suggest that elements of the social empowerment components of WfWI's training have persisted and have been effective in influencing not just social outcomes, but also economic outcomes. New skills have been put into practice, and graduates have positive attitudes towards these gains.

HEALTH SKILLS HAVE BEEN INTEGRATED INTO DAILY LIFE



75.78% report boiling water before drinking



44.40% use nutrition skills in planning meals

WOMEN'S CONFIDENCE HAS IMPROVED



59.03% attend community meetings regularly



19.37% ran for leadership roles in their communities

GRADUATES EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS OVER PROPERTY



66.67% of women report owning their houses jointly with their husbands, which is a positive indication of their awareness of their rights to property as per succession laws in Rwanda.

Women face barriers to successful entrepreneurship

Of the 351 graduates surveyed, 70 women can be considered self-employed micro-entrepreneurs, in that they earn an income directly from sales to customers. More than 97% work alone, with reselling local food items such as dried beans, matoke, cassava flour and Irish potatoes being the main trade for nearly 69%. Most transport goods on their heads (33%) or by bicycle (17%). Lack of starting capital (50%) and bad weather (20%) are common challenges to starting a business. Competition is also tough, as 60% of women report businesses of similar quality in their communities. These barriers serve to limit women's entrepreneurial success. More than half of businesses owned by WfWI graduates were self-valued at less than 60,000 RWF (\$75), and most women (79%) felt their profits were insufficient, although few took steps to address the issue.

WOMEN EXERCISE CONTROL OVER INCOME THEY GENERATE

The revenue women bring home:



60.00% Belongs to the household



35.71% Belongs to the woman

PARTICIPANTS ARE SAVING MONEY FOR THE FUTURE



62.68% personal savings



38.75% family savings



41.63% keep personal savings at banks/SACCOs

57.01% keep personal savings with savings groups

WOMEN ARE CONNECTING TO SOCIAL NETWORKS



73.50% of graduates belong to a Village Savings and Loan Group (VSLG)



54.70% belong to women's groups formed by graduates



21.31% belong to an agriculture and animal rearing group

Key Recommendations

Deepen links with government priorities and support

Engaging in deeper policy and gender analysis during the market assessment process will help increase support for interventions from local authorities and contribute to the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS). For instance, WfWI graduates in a vegetable farming cooperative sought support from local authorities to rent swamp land to use for growing vegetables, particularly during the dry season. Such alignment with government resources and investments can provide the much needed low-cost larger-value capital investment for sustaining and growing the cooperative businesses that WfWI graduates set up.

Develop transformative advanced trainings aimed at business management, business growth, market linkages, and target agriculture training to different levels of the value chain

Develop advanced programs that target depth of training and linkages for graduate microentrepreneurs, in cooperation with technical partners where necessary. Further examine local crop intensification plans, hone in on lucrative cash crops and locate skills gaps and unmet demand. Create programming categories that, for example, focus on multiplication of planting materials, fresh food, production and/or processing, and links to financial institutions, transport, and markets.

Consider the household context of beneficiaries and intervene to create an enabling environment in the family and community

Marital status, the dependency ratio and disability/chronic illness status affect beneficiaries' ability to engage in the field of training. Consider factors that may prevent graduates from continuing in the trained areas at the selection stage and in the development of programming. Directly engage in gender strategic programming in the wider communities in Rwanda and refresh trainers on how they can help women challenge unequal power dynamics.

Leverage women's ownership of mobile phones

Many women graduates in Rwanda reported owning mobile phones independently from others in the household. Find ways of using these devices to access information, help respondents reach the market and serve as a monitoring tool for regular data collection from graduates.

Consider extending the length of vocational training; a year is not always enough.

Extend the time devoted to vocational training for new, special and technical skills. If the graduate is learning numeracy, a year may not be sufficient for her to also learn a trade and be able to later approach a formal financial system.

Consider creating sustained non-monetary incentives to motivate graduates

Creating non-monetary incentives, such as supporting graduates' with their Community Based Health Insurance (CBHI) payments, assisting graduate VSLGs, rewarding functioning groups, and meeting regularly with graduates to discuss their challenges would help motivate graduates to maintain active relationships with WfWI staff and seek advice and support as needs arise.

Translation of Study Recommendations into Programmatic Improvements

WfWI Rwanda has initiated a number of improvements to their programmatic work in response to the recommendations of this study, including the following:

- **Introducing Advanced Business and Vocational Training programs for select graduates.** A suite of more intensive advanced trainings (including using mobile phones for enterprise activities) have been designed and are being rolled out to select graduates who are poised and intent to take their microenterprises, whether individual or group-based, to a larger and more profitable level. Appropriate links with technical partners (such as IITA and SENASEM) and functional markets are being pursued. Studying the effects of providing micro-business capital kits/transfers for graduates' enterprise is a priority area for evaluation.
- **Deepening Access to Finance.** While access to banks and SACCOs has always been facilitated, WfWI Rwanda is now strengthening popular semi-formal savings and credit channels like VSLGs, linking these channels to our training program and graduate cooperatives, and supporting VSLGs as stepping stones to long-term, low-cost, formal finance.
- **Initiating Men's Engagement Programs.** While other WfWI country programs have developed programs targeting male leaders and male relatives of women participants to improve the enabling environment for women, Rwanda initiated training of a first batch of such male household and community allies in 2015, directly addressing a key constraint to graduates' expanded pursuit of economic opportunities.

Women for Women International



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