

Evaluation of the Provincial SHE Incubator Program Expansion

August 2021

Developed by For-Purpose Evaluations
in partnership with SHE Investments





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Executive Summary

SHE Investments builds an ecosystem of support for women entrepreneurs across Cambodia by providing them with the knowledge, skills and tools they need to scale their enterprises. The DGGF funding enabled the expansion of SHE programs from Phnom Penh into Siem Reap, Battambang, Kampot and Kampong Cham. This evaluation confirms the initial overall success of these programs and supports the need for this kind of initiative across Cambodia. However, this success has not come without challenges, necessary adaptations and important lessons for the organisation, its staff and the program participants.

The primary purpose of this evaluation is to test the theory of change and assess the impact and outcomes of the Incubator programs for the entrepreneurs in the provinces. It also explores the process of expansion identifying key success factors challenges and learnings for both funders and the sector. This report begins with an explanation of the evaluation principles, approaches and the mixed-methods used to collect the data that was analysed to produce the findings and recommendations. There is a section dedicated to impact of COVID-19 on both the program outcomes and the expansion operationally.

The Findings section of this report is structured according to SHE's three impacts areas; economic, social and environmental. Using a theory of change we present findings at both the impact and outcome level.

Key Findings

- The most significant impact for the entrepreneurs was an increase in confidence and self-belief.
- While revenue did not increase for all the programs, confidence in financial decision making and financial literacy skills strengthened.
- The investment in improved digital literacy and online programming was a critical decision that ensured the sustainability of not only SHE but many of the entrepreneur's businesses.

The Recommendations of this evaluation are split into three sections and are as follows:

Program Recommendations

1. Review the curriculum content on business networks to ensure alignment between staff expectation and entrepreneur experience
2. Review the curriculum content on environmental sustainability to increase your impact in this area

Organisational Recommendations

3. Understand the most significant change for entrepreneurs is increased confidence self-belief and use this to promote your point of difference
4. Continue to invest in digital literacy and online programming
5. Conduct regular fit for purpose assessments of your technology and software systems and upgrade when required

Measurement Evaluation and Learning

6. Review and improve the indicators for agency and empowerment, participation was found to be problematic.

Evaluation Approach and Principles

This evaluation took a summative approach. However, given the unique contextual considerations of the programs being evaluated, namely that they are the first to be delivered as part of the expansion by new staff with limited resourcing, several aspects of a formative evaluation approach were also included.

Summative evaluations are a good way of determining the *overall value* or impact of a program. As opposed to its relative value compared to other programs. Broadly speaking a summative evaluation takes place at or towards the end of a project and identifies key areas of success and value as well as making recommendations for improvements. Summative evaluations are *not* just about accountability reporting. This evaluation aims to be a source of useful information for understanding what works (is working), what activities have the greatest impact on participants and to inform decisions about how to improve programs in the provinces.

As mentioned, formative evaluation techniques were incorporated to account for the new context of the incubator programs being delivered by new staff and teams in new locations. Formative evaluations are helpful for developing performance appraisal systems that foster continuous learning. For example, accepting that negative results are valuable because they teach you something and from that teaching, improvements can be made.

The evaluation team took a collaborative approach to the work, combining independent evaluation practices with internal expertise and cultural responsiveness.

SHE Investments and For-Purpose Evaluations (FPE) are both guided by feminist values and principles. This evaluation subscribes to the feminist evaluation approach discussed by Batliwala and Pittman (2010) summarised below.

- Design and use tools that are intended to unpack gender inequalities and their systemic social contributors.
- Recognise that no single measurement tool or framework will be sufficient to understand the complex intersection of working within emerging economies, gender-specific barriers, entrepreneurship and business in SE Asia.
- Capture, analyse and privilege women's voices and experiences, rather than treating them as anecdotal evidence.
- Recognise the need to track change against the four quadrants of change: formal laws & policies, informal norms, access to resources, individual beliefs.
- Understand that M&E is not value-free and that it is part of the change process.

Ethical conduct in line with SHE, FPE and DGGF's values, especially pertaining to obtaining informed consent and ensuring the de-identification of data where requested, will be central to the evaluation design and process.

Theory of Change



Gender-focused, culturally tailored innovative business support structures

There is a conflict for women who are encouraged to strive for equal status in the public sphere but are not encouraged to change the unequal gender relations in the private sphere. Any organisation attempting to pursue progress in this area must have a nuanced **culturally-tailored** approach to account for **gender** discriminatory cultural practices. This approach must simultaneously increase women's agency and business acumen while working respectfully within the social order that can often restrict that agency.

Cambodian female entrepreneurs

It is widely acknowledged that women's involvement in **entrepreneurial** activity is linked to the improved status of **women** in society as well as having broader community benefits¹. Women run 61- 65% of the businesses in **Cambodia**, significantly higher than other ASEAN countries, but only 3% of women entrepreneurs have access to formal credit. Women are often restricted from being able to scale up their businesses and are therefore 'shut-out' of the SME market. Programs targeted at transforming the self-perception of women can challenge the gender segregation of **women's entrepreneurial** activities.

Positive economic, social & environmental changes for women, their families and communities

Social entrepreneurship is acknowledged to be an effective mechanism for generating **economic, social** and **environmental** impact. For entrepreneurship to lead to women's empowerment the business process must function largely within the local **socio-cultural** norms. By providing women an opportunity to navigate the complex and corrupt bureaucratic system required to formalise a business in Cambodia, SHE is taking a sustainable and strategic approach. SHE acknowledges the conflicting **socio-cultural** norms placed on Cambodian women who run businesses and adapt to these by using an emancipatory social entrepreneurial (ESE) model.

¹ Haugh, M. H., & Talwar, A (2014) Linking Social Entrepreneurship and Social Change: The Mediating Role of Empowerment, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 133(4): 643-658, Klugman, J (2015) Putting women to work works, *The World Today*, 71(2): 12-17, Sud, M., VanSandt, C. V., & Baugous, A. M. (2009) Social entrepreneurship: The role of institutions. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 85(1): 201-21



Overview of the Incubator Program

The Incubator Program is the SHE inaugural program. First piloted in Cambodia in 2015. It is a 6-month program designed to work with micro-sized businesses with less than 5 paid employees, to help them scale. The program uses gender-specific and culturally tailored business training and mentoring techniques that address the specific barriers female Cambodian entrepreneurs face. The program provides entrepreneurs with the tools and resources they need to overcome those barriers.

Participants in SHE Incubator Programs have both rural and urban based micro and informal enterprises, across all sectors. They can be in the early-stage start-up with a tested product, or they might be an established family business in a rural village.

The program includes 13 days of workshops delivered over 6 months and 1:1, peer and group mentoring sessions. All content is delivered in Khmer language, by Khmer female facilitators, and with gender and cultural lenses applied to all workshops. The curriculum covers the follows topics:

- Financial literacy (home and business)
- Problem-solving skills
- Understanding effective business models
- Goal setting and action planning
- Marketing
- Networking
- People management and communication
- Leadership

The program aims to have an impact in the three areas below:

1. Economic Impact

Formalised business growth leads to economic growth, with increased stability and employment opportunities for communities.

2. Social Impact

Increased revenue and income lead to improved livelihoods for women, their families, and communities.

3. Environmental Impact

Women have greater knowledge of environmentally sustainable business practices and begin to embed this knowledge.

In order to contribute to these boarder social impacts the SHE Incubator Program works toward supporting the entrepreneurs to progress towards the below outcomes.

1. Women increase their revenue
2. Women scale their businesses
3. Women build business networks, and are role models and leaders in the business community
4. Women's agency increases, they are more confident to make decisions about family and business
5. Women effectively use digital platforms to promote their business

Program Logic

Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Outcome Indicators	Impacts	Impact Indicators
<p>13 days of workshops delivered over 6 months and 1:1, peer and group mentoring sessions covering the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial literacy (home and business) • Problem-solving skills • Understanding effective business models • Goal setting and action planning • Marketing • Networking • People management and communication • Leadership 	<p># of applicants / graduates</p> <p>Demographics of entrepreneurs, age, address, gender etc</p> <p># employees the entrepreneurs have / jobs they create</p> <p>Amount of revenue</p> <p>Type of business</p> <p>Network size</p> <p>Mentoring engagement</p>	<p>Women increase their revenue</p> <p>Women scale their businesses</p> <p>Women build business networks, and are role models and leaders in the business community</p> <p>Women's agency increases, they are more confident to make decisions about family and business</p> <p>Women effectively use digital platforms to promote their business</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - revenue increases - entrepreneurs separate business and personal finance & pay themselves a wage - # of employees increases or is maintained - use of a financial management tool - business networks increase <p>Entrepreneurs have;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a business mentor - independent access to their money - increased participation in financial decision making - report feeling more confident in business decisions 	<p>Economic Impact</p> <p>Formalised business growth leads to economic growth, with increased stability and employment opportunities for communities.</p> <p>Social Impact</p> <p>Increased revenue and income leads to improved livelihoods for women, their families, and communities.</p> <p>Environmental Impact</p> <p>Women have greater knowledge of environmentally sustainable business practices and begin to embed this knowledge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women have increased financial stability - Women have greater choice and control over financial decisions - Employees have safe and reasonably flexible working conditions - Women make changes to reduce the environmental impact of their business

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data to answer two primary evaluation questions.

Evaluation Question 1

What are the most significant outcomes and impacts of the SHE Incubator program for the entrepreneurs?

Evaluation Question 2

What are the key successes, challenges and learnings for SHE as an organisation after undergoing a national expansion?

Of particular interest in this evaluation the support SHE provided women to adapt to COVID-19 and the introduction of digital literacy skills into the curriculum.

Significant consideration has gone into the cultural responsiveness of the entrepreneur 'facing' data collection methods. All the tools were co-designed with Khmer women to ensure culturally appropriate language and questions were used.

Methods Used

- **Semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs**

16 entrepreneurs were interviewed. This represents 23% of the total cohort across the four provinces. The interviews were conducted in Khmer by SHE staff both online and face to face. Transcripts were then translated to English. The interview data was grouped according to province and coded according to the impact categories: Social Impact, Economic Impact and Environmental Impact.

- **The Impact Score**

The interviews produced both qualitative and quantitative data that allowed the exploration of the three primary impacts of the program. The quantitative data was collected by asking the women to rate on a scale of 0-5, 0 being no impact and 5 being a very significant impact, the extent to which they felt the program impacted them in certain areas. The sum of these scores for all interviewees for an impact area are divided by the total possible score for the impact area, to generate a percentage. This percentage is the 'impact score' for each impact area. The higher the impact score the greater the impact.

0	None	0%	No impact
1	Slight extent	10-30%	Slight impact
2	Moderate extent	31-50%	Moderate impact
3	Considerable extent	51-70%	Considerable impact
4	Significant extent	71-90%	Significant impact
5	Very significant	90-100%	Very significant impact

- **Administration of the SHE Entrepreneur Outcomes Survey (SHE-EOS) at Baseline and Endline**

The SHE-EOS is a customised measurement scale specifically designed to test for the identified outcomes of the SHE Incubator program. There was a 100% response rate for both the baseline and endline, with 70 responses in total. The baseline SHE-EOS was administered at the first workshop and the endline survey was administered at the last workshop, both times the online data collection software KoboToolbox was used. The Siem Reap I (SRI) program used an older version of the SHE-EOS, because the updated version had not developed by the time the program commenced. The questions for both versions of the SHE-EOS were mapped to allow for the aggregation of all the programs.

- **Semi-structured interviews with staff**

There were 10 semi structured interviews conducted with staff online. Interviews were conducted in Khmer for 6 and English for 4. The interviews were used to address both evaluation questions, entrepreneur outcomes and key learnings about the expansion process.

To explore Question 1, the staff interviews took an 'emergent design² approach'. This approach was selected to allow staff to naturally put forward the outcomes they observed the entrepreneurs achieving, rather than strictly ask after pre-determined outcomes. This ensured that unintended outcomes were identified, both positive and negative. It also ensured rigour in the approach as we were able to triangulate to identify alignment or conflict between the entrepreneurs' experience and the staffs' observations and assumptions of this experience.

To explore Question 2, the staff interviews explored the operational and logistical process of the organisation expanding across several provinces. This provided insights into the expansions process identifying challenges, successes and key learnings for both funders and organisations across the sector.

The Entrepreneurs

A total of 153 women applied for the five programs, with 71 (46%) of applicants being successful. The retention rate is very high at 92% with only five entrepreneurs not completing the program in Kampot, one woman from Battambang unfortunately passed away.

The entrepreneurs' primary reasons for applying were:

- 34% to increase my profit
- 17% to grow my business
- 4% to formalise my business
- 4% to grow my network

² Emergent design is an evaluation approach that begins with a clear but broad theory of change that defines the desired outcomes, roles, interactions of those involved, but does not prescribe the evaluation process or 'theory of action' in rigid detail so as to allow for other findings or outcomes to emerge and the evaluation progresses.

- >2% to help my community, to help my family, to become more environmentally sustainable, to increase my confidence

Additional information about the Entrepreneurs

- The average age is 35, the mean age is 33
- 32% of the applicants' highest education achievement was high school and further 58% had a Bachelor degree
- 70% of the entrepreneurs have caring responsibilities for children
- With regards to the nature of the businesses the highest represented industries were
 - food & beverages (26%), beauty (13%), agriculture (8%), handicraft (6%) and guest house (6%)
- 35% of the entrepreneurs had completed or was currently completing another business support course or program.

Impact of COVID-19

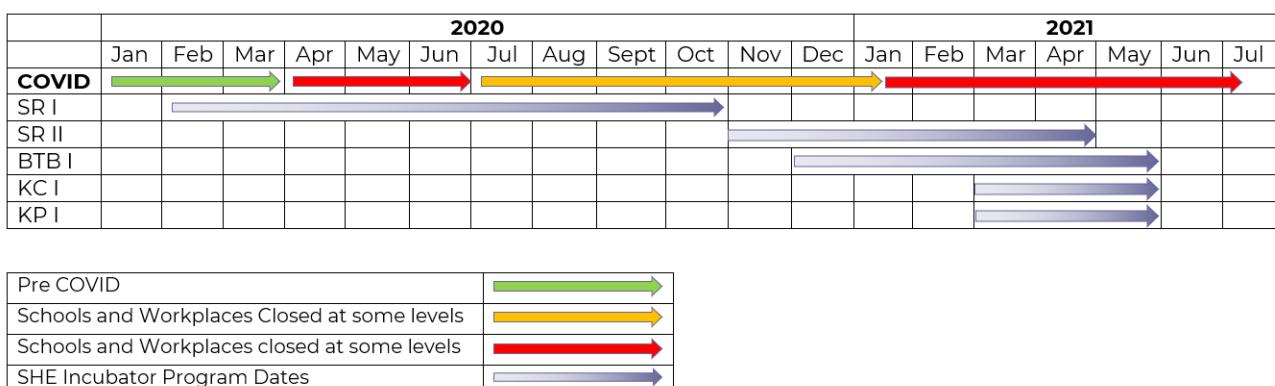
Cambodia has seen two significant 'waves' of COVID; the 'first wave', which occurred in March 2020, and a 'second wave', which had a small ripple in December, and a much more significant impact in February/March 2021. In March 2021, Cambodia imposed its first full city lockdown with strict measures, leaving many without food or access to basic services³. At the time of this report (August 2021), according to Reuters Covid-19 Tracker⁴, Cambodia is experiencing another surge in cases and many people are required not to leave home, attend school or operate businesses.

The COVID fluctuations can be split into Four "Phases":

- Phase 1: Pre-COVID (Pre-April 2020)
- Phase 2: First Wave (April 2020 - June 2020)
- Phase 3: First Recovery (July 2020 - January 2021)
- Phase 4: Second Wave (February 2021 - today)

Below is a timeline of the COVID-19 restrictions and the program duration dates. This shows the program operation in relation to the level of restriction.

COVID -19 Restrictions in Cambodia and Incubator Program Delivery Period



³ "Thousands of Cambodians go hungry in strict lockdown zones", *Guardian*, 2021

⁴<https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/cambodia/>

The negative impact of COVID-19 on the entrepreneurs' businesses and lives was and continues to be significant. The impact of the school and work closures on the women is reflected in several finding of this evaluation. The key effects have been found to be:

1) A reduction in revenue and financial stability

NB: for a more detailed discussion on revenue please see the Revenue section of this report.

An evaluation conducted by Youth Business International (June 2021) found that, "Quantitative data from SHE's program data indicated that of the applicants who joined the program in 2020, there was an overall decrease of over 50% of participants' business revenues as a direct result of COVID (between March and July 2020)". This reduction eased somewhat in Phase 3, but Phase 4 and the second wave devastated several businesses and livelihoods with it. SHE Facilitators observed that women whose businesses had survived the first round were struggling because they had already 'spent their savings recovering from the first wave'.

"Obviously now as you know, the Covid situation hit hard, causing all the income to fall sharply same as in the community condition as the whole too." – Entrepreneur, Kampot Incubator

2) Increased financial instability

The entrepreneurs frequently commented in interviews about the impact of reduced revenue due to COVID had on their financial stability, spending habits and lifestyle.

"In the past, I spent a lot on entertainment and health, but now due to COVID-19, I cut down some of my expenses." Entrepreneur, Battambang Incubator

"During this time of Covid-19 situation, my family expense has some changes. We spend on basic necessities such as food, water, electricity and other daily expenses and try to save more money. At the same time, we try to cut down on unnecessary expenses such as buying new clothes, traveling...etc"- Entrepreneur, Kampong Cham

"In this situation of Covid-19, my family's expenses have changed a lot. I only spend on basic necessities such as food, water, electricity, children's education and others daily expenses as we try to save more money and reduce unnecessary expenses." Entrepreneur, Kampong Cham

Economic Impact

The Economic Impact score across all programs was 74%, a significant impact.

Economic impact is measured for the SHE program in terms of financial stability and by how impactful the women report found the program to be.

With regards to the entrepreneurs' financial stability, this was difficult to ascertain given the destabilising impact of COVID on their business revenue. However, the entrepreneurs identified that for them having a balance between income and expenses is key. They linked the financial management skills they gained through the program to increased financial stability for both their families and communities in the future.

“In terms of improving our financial stability, for my family and community, it is important to have a clear understanding of real cash flow, understanding income and expenses. We now have better control [because we have a] spending plan.” -Entrepreneur, Kampong Cham

“Our current financial stability is not in very good due to COVID-19. But now we know what we can do to not worry about lacking of money. We will have enough money to spend on things anytime we need.” – Entrepreneur Siem Reap II

“When we have stable financial conditions, the community will develop more and they have money to spend on their children's education rather than letting their kids doing farming. This is why good and decent jobs in business are important.” -Entrepreneur Siem Reap II

The Entrepreneurs were also asked what extent they feel they have more freedom when spending money as a result of the SHE Program.

“It [The SHE Program] means that I can spend on things that I need. For big things that I want but could not purchase, I have clear plan to save money to buy it in the future. This is what I think financial freedom means. I believe in myself and confidence in getting everything I wish to get.” -Entrepreneur Siem Reap I

“Now we know how much cash we have in our hands and how much money it will take to do something else. Now we know how to have a steady income that is stable or regular income, we will know exactly how much we have and our spending is freely.” – Entrepreneur Battambang

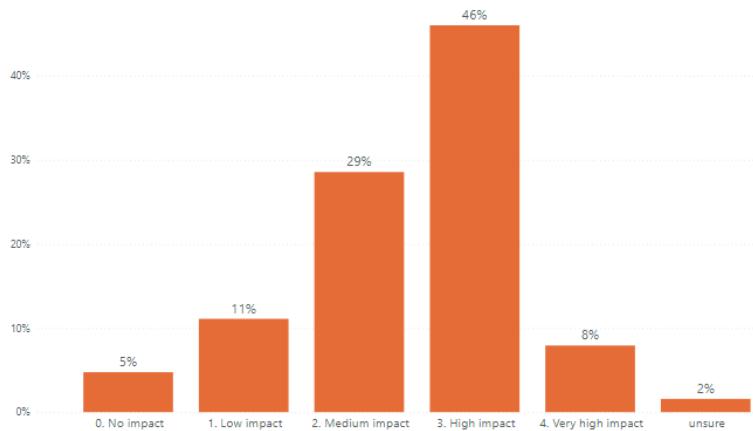
The baseline SHE-EOS (Survey) asks at the first workshop 'Rate your family's level of financial stability', the women are then provided seven options;

We have money to last; 1 Day, 1 Week, 1 Month, 3 Months, 6 Months, 6+ Months, Unsure

The process is repeated at the endline SHE-EOS. The greater the length of time the family has money for indicates increased financial stability. The data tells us that there is a slight trend towards women having greater financial stability at the end of the program than at the beginning, but not significant. However, perhaps more relevant is that the majority of the women fall into two categories at both the beginning and the end of the program, those with money for one month and those with money for 6months.

With regards to the impact the program had on the women's' revenue, despite the fact that for the majority of women neither increased the sentiment is majority positive. 52% of entrepreneurs report the SHE Program had either a high or a very high impact on their revenue.

Rate the impact the program had on your revenue



Outcome 1. Women increase their revenue

All but the BTB program, which ran from December 2020 – June 2021, saw a loss in recorded revenue in the 6month time frame. The total loss across all programs for 6months was \$13, 537 USD.

The 12months period tells a similar story, with only three from 5 increasing revenue with a total increase in revenue of \$ 1,076,229 across all programs. SRI and KC made a loss in the 12month period, while KP increased by only \$800.

It is important to note that the revenue increases of BTB and SRII account for over 99% of the total increase across all programs. Further to this, within the BTB program one woman accounts for 74% of the total 6month difference as she had an 83% revenue increase in 6months. SRII is similar because one woman accounts for 76% of the total 12month revenue difference with an 85% revenue increase.

Summary of revenue figures for all programs 6months before program, 12months before program and at program end.

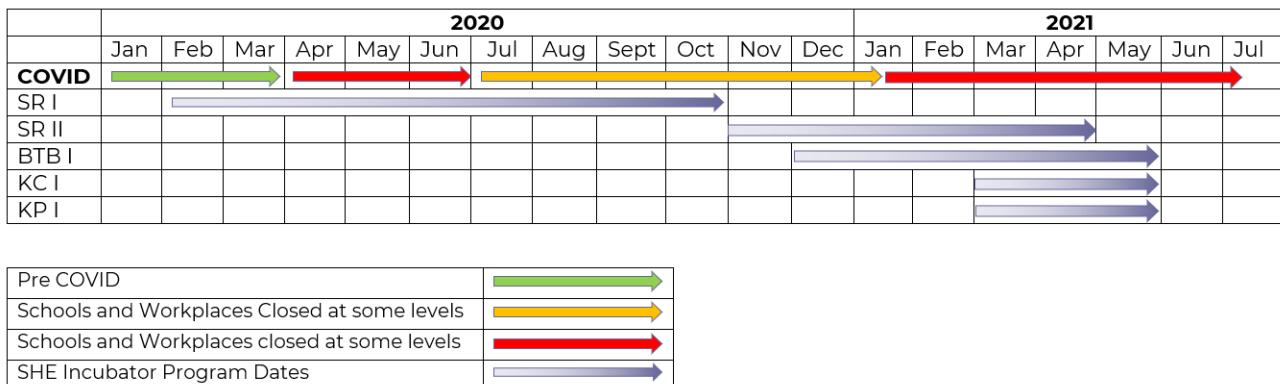
	6mth Baseline	6mth Endline	6mth Difference	12mth Baseline	12mth Endline	12mth Difference
BTB	\$ 311,372	\$ 758,092	\$ 446,720	\$ 626,866	\$ 1,293,060	\$ 666,194
SRI	\$ 453,820	\$ 101,100	-\$ 352,720	\$ 777,040	\$ 535,400	-\$ 241,640
SRII	\$ 603,290	\$ 554,754	-\$ 48,537	\$ 243,830	\$ 1,045,105	\$ 801,275
KC	\$ 149,400	\$ 114,050	-\$ 35,350	\$ 290,800	\$ 223,400	-\$ 67,400
KP	\$ 16,800	\$ 14,150	-\$ 2,650	\$ 28,400	\$ 29,200	\$ 800
Total	\$ 1,555,682	\$ 1,542,146	-\$ 13,537	\$ 2,049,936	\$ 3,126,165	\$ 1,076,229

On average (per participant) the programs combined made a small loss of \$2000 or -6% for the 6months timeframe. When compared to 12months prior to the program they made an average revenue increase of \$19 190.26 or 53%.

When these revenue figures are considered in the context of COVID, further analysis is needed, see the COVID-19 Timeline below for reference. SRI, the program with the largest loss of revenue for both time periods, appears at first to be the least effected by COVID. However, it is possible that because the program commenced in the Pre-COVID Phase the revenue rates were higher overall, when compared with the other programs that had already experienced a reduction in revenue and were under financial strain by the time

they commenced. BTB's apparent lack of impact from the COVID closures could be due to the industries that the entrepreneurs operate in and how dependent they are on movement between provinces and or international travel such as the tourism trade.

COVID -19 Restrictions in Cambodia and Incubator Program Delivery Period

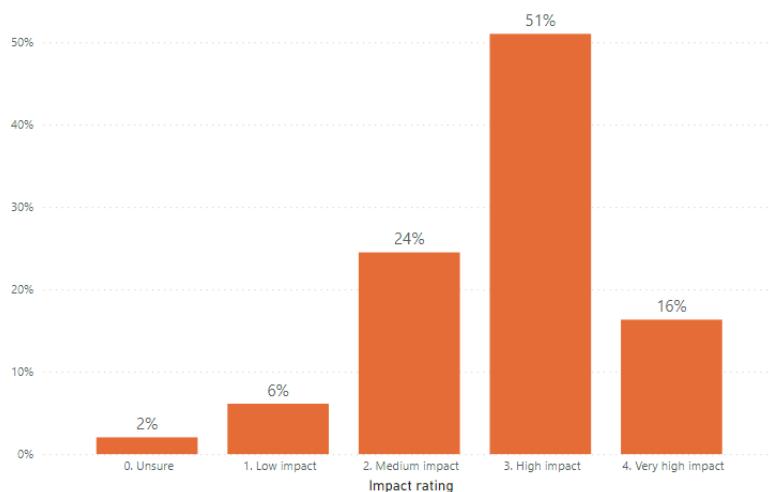


Outcome 2. Women scale their businesses

Women scaling their business is an outcome that is considered to contribute to the overall economic impact of the program.

Majority (67%) of the entrepreneurs indicated that the SHE program had a High or Very High impact on their business size and scale.

'Rate the impact of the program on your business size and scale'

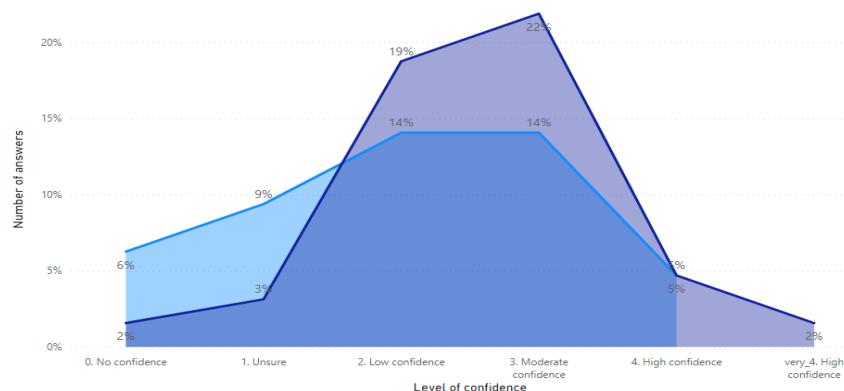


In addition to the subjective impact measure, the indicators used to measure business scale or increased readiness to scale are; confidence to formally register their business, the act of recording their business revenue and separating business and personal finances. Another significant indicator that a business has scale is the number of jobs created or people employed. Please see the charts and figures below for the performance against each of these indicators.

Level of confidence to register their business before (baseline) and after (endline) the program.

Note the slight trend of increased dark blue to the right of the chart, this indicates an increase in confidence.

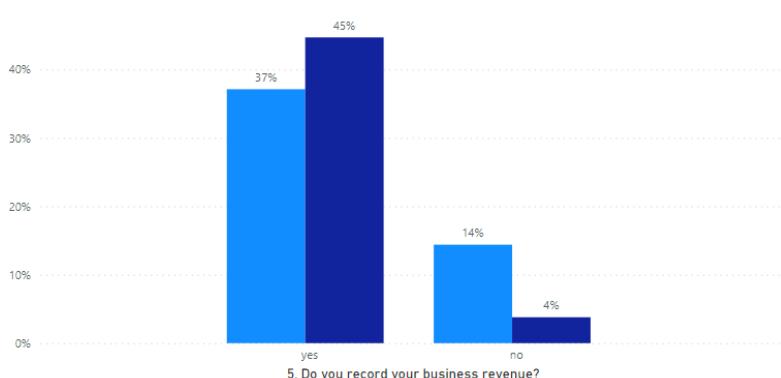
● Baseline ● Endline



Percentage of entrepreneurs who record their business revenue

There was a **20%** increase in the number of entrepreneurs who record their business revenue.

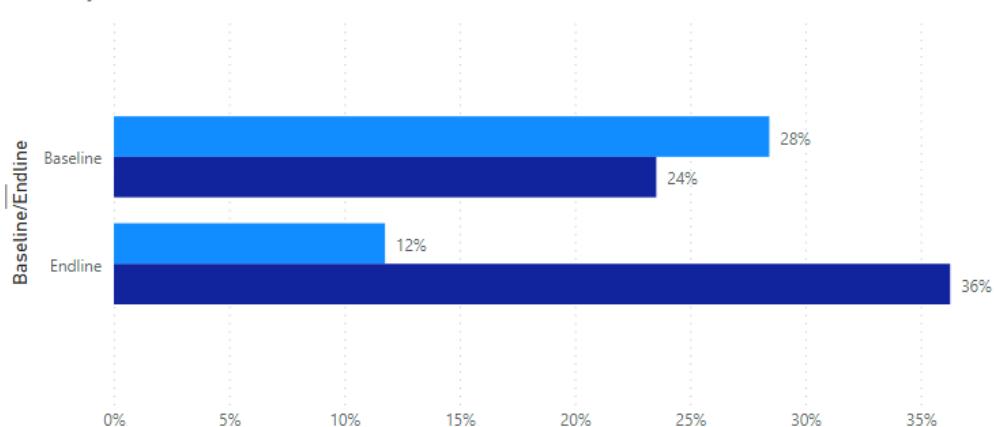
● Baseline ● Endline



Percentage of entrepreneurs who separate their business and household finances

There was a **54%** increase in the number of entrepreneurs that separate their finances.

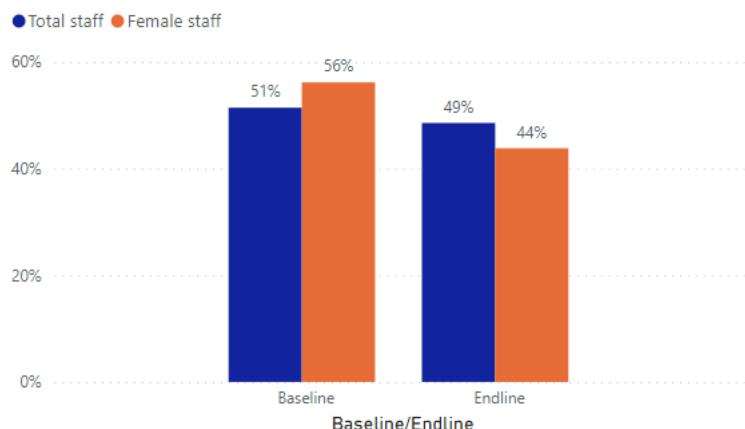
● no ● yes



Jobs maintained and created

The entrepreneurs managed to maintain 94% of their employees, a total of 272 jobs, for the duration of the programs despite the challenges of COVID. The data shows that of the people who lost their jobs, more of them were women. Women working for the entrepreneurs lost their jobs at a rate of 1.3 times more than men. At baseline, women made up 56% of total employees, at the end of the program women made up 44% of total employees.

Change in total and female staff employed from baseline to endline



Social Impact

The Social Impact score across all programs was 75%, a significant impact.

The entrepreneurs are very aware of their role as both employers and business owners and the positive impact of this on their communities and the economy. At the end of the program several women were enthusiastic about providing decent jobs with good conditions for employees and positively contributing to their communities.

“For my business, I provide jobs to people in the community. Chief of village asks me to help him like a donation of the rice bags and anything I can donate so I always contribute to my community to help poor people. For the female workers, since they came to work with me, they are happy to do their work because I have clear working rules such as having day off for them to rest, having the right time to rest, and OT [payment] for working overtime.” – Entrepreneur Battambang

“My business helps elder people around my neighbourhood who don't have a job. I hired and gave them money for a day. I help to buy agricultural products such as sprouts from farmers.” – Entrepreneur Siem Reap

“I try my best to provide job opportunities to women even just one staff to help her to earn a living and provide her with decent working condition” – Entrepreneur Kampong Cham

“I still provided employment opportunities to young people and provided skill training to them, provided a place for workers or meetings.” – Entrepreneur Kampong Cham

“My business provide job to widows and other staff. We provide skill training to my staff. We hope that in the future they can use skills learnt from us to create their own business” – Entrepreneur Kampot

“I want to provide good jobs to local people.” – Entrepreneur Kampot

Outcome 3. Women build business networks, and they are role models and leaders in the business community

Increasing the size and relevance of entrepreneurs' business network is a key item in the SHE curriculum. There is strong evidence in the literature to suggest that a diverse and large professional network leads to business development and career progression.⁵

The SHE staff placed a significant emphasis on the value of a network for the women. 100% of staff interviewed agreed that an increased network size is one of the most significant impacts of the program for the entrepreneurs.

“With SHE they have the opportunity to share their ideas and their fears. To discuss their business ideas with each other. This is very unique in the province because these opportunities do not exist in the provinces.” – SHE Staff

*“With SHE they will start to form a network in the province that they didn't have before.”
– SHE Staff*

“I could see they could build a network within the class and SHE events. This makes them more confident and braver.” – SHE Staff

“It is so important for them to build a network of close connections with other women as a sisterhood in class and a having a space for women to share such their challenges.” – SHE Staff

“There are a few women whose business have shut down now but they keep coming and attending because they want to stay in touch with the network.” – SHE Staff

In contrast to this the entrepreneurs did not discuss a network as being of significant value to them. Entrepreneurs from only two programs, Kampong Cham and Kampot, reference a business network being something they took away from the Program.

“I have more confidence than before by getting to know many other business owners.” – Entrepreneur Kampong Cham

“I gain knowledge to strengthening my business because I had more classmates to share with. In the past, I had only my husband to share with” -Entrepreneur Kampot

While 65% of women indicated that SHE had a high or very high impact on the growth of their business network, there was no significant increase in the women identifying they have a larger network over the course of the program in the data. However, the

⁵ Villesèche, F., & E. Josserand. (2017) 'Formal women-only networks: Literature review and propositions', *Personnel Review*. 46(5): 1004-1018.

number of women who indicated they had a business mentor increased by 57%, and the number of women who indicated they now mentor someone else in business increased by 58%. This indicates that the entrepreneurs perhaps value the nature and depth of the relationships they formed over the number of people or size of their network.

The discrepancy between the staffs' assumption that a larger network is a positive thing contrasting with the lack of emphasis placed on this by the entrepreneurs, may indicate that the value or purpose of a large business network may not be emphasised enough in the curriculum. This concept is discussed further in the Recommendations section of this report.

Outcome 4. Women's agency increases, they are more confident to make decisions about family and business

This outcome has been split into two concepts for the purposes of exploring the findings more meaningfully. The first section discusses the entrepreneurs' confidence to make decisions, the second discussed the entrepreneurs' agency.

Confidence

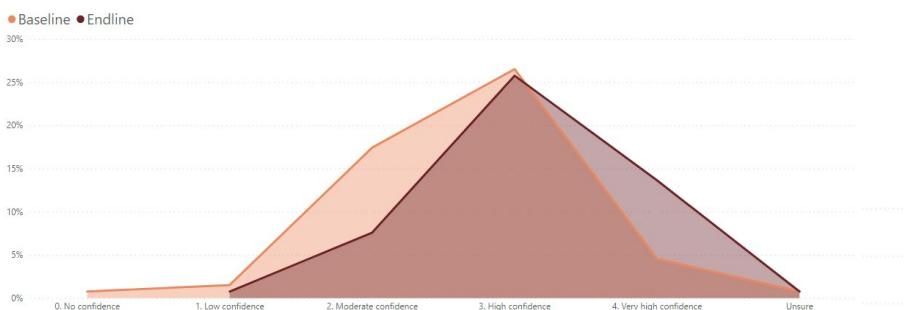
Confidence is defined in the SHE Impact Measurement Framework as,

"When a woman has certainty in her decisions and choices. When she is increasingly self-reliant, believes in herself and feels more independent. When she has increased self-esteem, self-respect and understanding of her inherent value."

The increase in the entrepreneurs' confidence in decision making and self-belief as both business owners and women is the most significant finding of this evaluation. This finding is supported by the participant interviews, staff interviews and the SHE-EOS. The survey shows a **56%** increase in the entrepreneurs' confidence in business decision making.

Entrepreneur's level of confidence in business decision making at baseline and endline.

Note the weighting of the endline result on the right hand side of the chart, this indicates an increase in confidence.



The following comments made by entrepreneurs indicate the level of impact the SHE program had for them as business owners.

"Before I joined the courses, I had no confidence at all. Because in the field of business, I have no experience and lack things. I became better at planning and start doing things with my ideas." -Entrepreneur Siem Reap II

“This confidence gives me a better self-control. I have a clear plan and work on that plan, I make it happen. In the past, I procrastinated a lot. Now, I get better distribution of income and expenses. I have clear expense record, cash flow. I am able to notice the trend of my customers whether it is increases/decreases.” -Entrepreneur Kampot

“I feel more clear on how to manage my business. How to sell, how to find customers, marketing, recording revenue. SHE teaches me a lot. I feel confident that I can do anything.” -Entrepreneur Battambang

“I am so happy now. I used to have concern and worry about my business. Now I feel more grounded and realize a clear plan. I have more confidence on what I decided. In the past, I was always skeptical about my decision.” - Entrepreneur Battambang

The following comments made by entrepreneurs indicate the level of impact the SHE program had for their confidence and self-belief.

“This confidence makes me feel that I can go through something we do not know. I believe that I am able to control a situation. I have the ability to solve problems.” -Siem Reap I

“It makes me feel like we always had something in ourselves. That we know what to do and can take control of a certain situation.” -Siem Reap I

“I believe in myself. In the past, I always afraid of failure. Now I feel more confidence and very clear in what I am doing. I’m very happy now as before when I did anything, I was afraid that I might do something wrong.” -Entrepreneur Battambang

“Having more confidence in the business will help strengthen my mind, eliminate some fears, know what to think and have to act without hesitation.” -Entrepreneur Kampot

The staff also observe changes in the entrepreneurs' confidence and decision making ability.

“After the program, they are able to make decisions on their own.”

“Some participants who were shy and not talkative started to talk, share and discuss in the class more. They told me that “I am happy to share more at SHE since people at here willing to listen to me and encourage me to talk unlike at home no one listen to me.”

“They were happier to talk and share unlike before that they were shy and often kept silent.”

“After a few workshops, women were not afraid to come to present and share their idea in front of the class as we encouraged them that there was no judgement.”

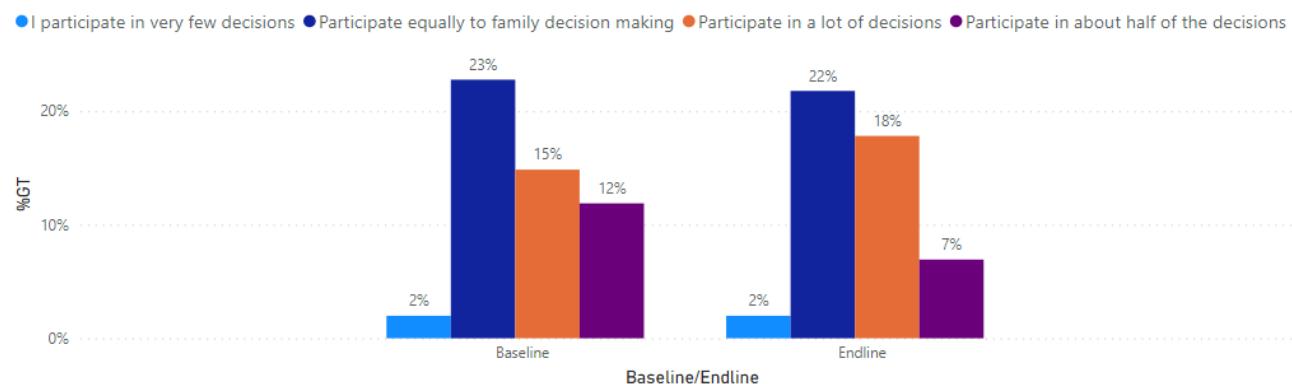
Agency, Empowerment, and the Cognitive Load

Agency and empowerment, for which there is no corresponding words in Khmer, is defined in the SHE Impact Measurement Framework as,

“A woman’s freedom to choose her circumstances through deliberate actions and choices and with a need for permission from others.”

The data collection methods for this evaluation used ‘increased participation in financial decision making in business and at home’ as an indicator for empowerment and agency. It was found that there was very little change in the amount of participation entrepreneurs had in decision making, over the course of the program. The entrepreneurs who take part in the SHE program say they already have either equal or greater financial decision making *responsibility* for both their business and home lives than their families and partners/husbands/. (Note responsibility is not necessarily influence.)

Level of participation in household financial decision making



However, upon analysing the data, it became apparent that *participation* in decision making is not an appropriate measure for empowerment or agency in this context. This is thought to be because financial ‘participation’ and responsibility are tied to the concept of ‘cognitive labour’ or the colloquially termed ‘mental load’.

Cognitive labour includes tasks like anticipating your own and others’ needs, identifying options for filling them, making decisions, and monitoring progress. Cognitive labour is a gendered phenomenon and women have been found to do more cognitive labour overall, including managing a household budget. This evaluation posits that using participation as the sole metric for agency and empowerment does not account for the cognitive load that ‘participation’ takes. For example, a woman may *participate* in cooking more, however this would not be understood as an appropriate metric to determine her agency or empowerment within the household.

However, decision making (not necessarily financial) has been found to be a cognitive labour component that is *more closely linked to power and influence*. Therefore, men tend to be more involved in decision making thus, it is usually done more equally between women and men. Women are more likely to perform tasks such as budgeting, bill paying and daily purchasing for the family. These tasks evidently require decision making. Men on the other hand tend to be involved decision about when and what to spend money on, with less participation in understanding of financial stability or monitoring budgets.⁶

The lack of nuance in the interview and SHE-EOS questions on this topic have resulted in a finding that suggests the entrepreneurs participate equally or even more than their

⁶ Daminger, A., (2019) The Cognitive Dimension of Household Labor, *American Sociological Review*, 84(4):609-633

partners in financial decision making. However, for the entrepreneurs decision making is likened to financial management and responsibility and this was seen as a burden or a 'cognitive load' for many, but not necessarily an empowering task.

"Before joining the program, I was solely control over financial decision making and my husband does not involve much. After the program, I changed to accept more ideas, discussion and respect others to contribute to any financial decision making, especially for big expenses, we normally discuss as family before spending." -Entrepreneur Siem Reap II

"I always had a big contribution in financial decision making. My husband always allowed me to take part. Now I [have] become better at making decisions wisely." -Entrepreneur Battambang

"I am always in charge of the first daily expenses. Bank loans because I built a house, run a business and have no savings, daily meals, pay for my children's education and some travel expenses, my husband does not much." -Entrepreneur Siem Reap II

"We don't have any problems with money because I am in charge of this. My husband decides what he wants to spend on, but I make sure there is enough for everyone. We would not have enough if I was not doing this." – Entrepreneur Kampot

It was found that, while the participation in financial decision-making rates did not change, the program did impact the process of business decision making. Based on the financial skills the women learned at SHE the decision making became more informed, more considered and more collaborative with families and partners/husbands. These indicators are considered to be more effective metrics for agency and empowerment than participation in this context.

"This changed my family for the better. In the past spending was always up to me. I had full control and the job of our money. After learning with SHE, I am clearer in spending properly and we do it together more." -Entrepreneur Kampot

"After learning with SHE, when I talk to my husband, I speak with reason and we listen to each other during our conversation." -Entrepreneur Battambang

"Generally, my husband plays the role as the decision maker in a family, but I do the jobs about the money. But now, after learning financial skills from SHE, my husband understands about gender that he gives me the right which means that we have equal rights for men and women in the family." – Siem Reap II

"My family now respects and prioritizes my decision as well. My family has more confidence in me to do more. Now when it comes to spending money on something big, we have a discussion, but most of the time they give me the opportunity to make a decision, not only for the daily things." – Entrepreneur Kampong Cham

Outcome 5. Women effectively use digital platforms to promote their business

With the outbreak of COVID-19 SHE made an impressively quick pivot to delivering all of their programs online. According to staff across the organisation this was initially a challenging and destabilising undertaking. Nevertheless, the results appear to be:

- a staffing group that can operate effectively in both online and in person environments,
- an improvement in the entrepreneurs' digital literacy,

- a new suite of programs focuses solely on digital literacy and business management.

This positive outcome would not have been possible without the agility and flexibility of the SHE Senior Leadership team who supported several staff initiatives to overcome challenges such as; the entrepreneurs not having access to laptops, the prohibitive cost of telephone internet, unreliable power and internet connection in the provinces.

“9 months after the project started COVID hit and this was such a significant change management project, in addition to the expansion. It highlighted the serious digital literacy gap for staff and entrepreneurs. We had no choice but to build everyone’s capacity quickly. This was so resource intensive and exhausting for everyone.”

“Moving things online has been really hard in the province because they are using smart phones not computers. We spend one whole day training them on how to use zoom. We also pay for their internet for the workshops.”

“Participants were panicked when COVID happened. They used the program to adapt their businesses, they used us to help them adapt.”

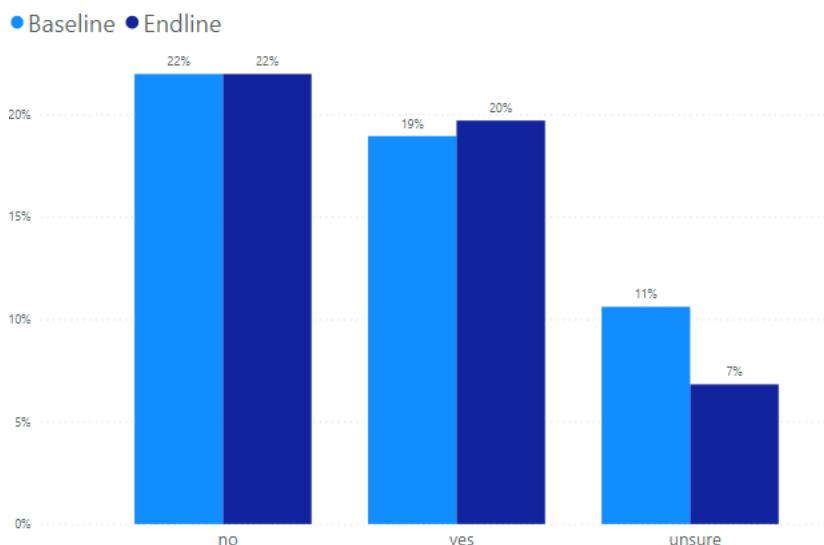
Environmental Impact

Women have greater knowledge of environmentally sustainable business practices and begin to embed this knowledge.

The Environmental Impact score across all programs was 64%, a considerable impact.

While the majority (92%) of the entrepreneurs considered a healthy environment to be important, and 81% rated themselves as having a moderate or higher understanding of environmental issues in Cambodia, only 20% considered the negative impact their business has on the environment. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the SHE Program effects either environmental knowledge or awareness. 21% women indicated their awareness of environmental issues in Cambodia was high or very high at baseline, this remained similar at 25% at the conclusion of the program. The rate of moderate understanding of environmental issues, also remained the similar at 42% at baseline at 44% at endline.

Entrepreneurs’ responses at baseline and endline, Do you think your business has an [negative] impact for the environment?



There is some evidence to suggest there is some shift in inspiring entrepreneurs to act to reduce environmental impact. When answering the question, 'have you made changes to reduce your environmental impact business because of what you learned at SHE?' 44% said yes, 8% said no and a further 47% said they intend to make changes. However, without the support of data showing increased knowledge and awareness the correlation of the program impact here is not strong.

"There are things that I want to make change on my business. But for now they are just plan, not put in practice yet. I plan to compost our waste from food catering, prepare better packaging to reduce plastic wrap, and reduce water bottle by providing refill station." – Entrepreneur Battambang

"Through SHE, I don't change much. What I practice today is how I always do long time ago. What I learn from SHE is also something that I already aware long time ago." – Entrepreneur Kampot

Evaluation Question 2

What are the key successes, challenges and learnings for SHE as an organisation after undergoing a national expansion?

This evaluation question was addressed through the interviews with staff across the organisation.

Key Success Factors

Investment in developing sustainable processes and change management

"We realised we would need business support roles. We needed a finance manager, we needed office 365 and moved to a new office in PP. We planned for growth and put a strategy in place." -Staff

"As we grew, we realised that we couldn't 'know' or have that personal connection or rely on a few people's skills. So, we built processes for accountability, quality and performance, like the MEL Framework." -Staff

Establishing connections and building relationships with local authorities

"SHE performed really well in setting up partnerships with local government." -DGGF

"We are building a new brand and new reputation in the province. We do presentations, we reach out to government local, the provincial governor. We ask them to share the program with the community. We are building confidence and trust with the community and the women themselves." -Staff

"We now write a letter to inform the government what we are doing. We build a connection with them. Before for Battambang and Siem Reap we did not do that, we didn't know we needed to inform the provincial authorities. If I could do things differently, I would have researched more around what we need to do to inform local authorities. We now know to complete and prepare all the necessary documents before we start in these areas." -Staff

“The final step is getting a local person to deliver the program. There is a power imbalance in that Phnom Penh staff are travelling to the province. It needs to be locally sustainable.” -Staff

Flexible, pragmatic and adequate funding

“We had flexibility within the spending. This is lacking in the sector, governments don’t take risks on start-ups in the same way investors do. We had ‘permission’ to be all in. We can hire people we can afford. We can start to find the right people, be competitive in the market.” -Staff

“There is a lot to be said for a partner that comes in and gives you breathing space for 3 years and enough money to do things right. It makes all the difference. People don’t realise the toll these short funding cycles and KPIs take on us as individuals.” -Staff

“We understand that enterprises need space and time to develop things, and let a couple of cohorts go through.” – DGGF

“You begin a 3-4 year engagement and there are a lot of assumptions, but things change. If there are major changes, we will bring it up with the investment committee and decide whether it should continue. But we connect to milestones, not timeframes, with more money being released as the enterprises achieve their milestones.” - DGGF Funder

Operating with agility and adapting well to challenges

“We see SHE as a very pragmatic and lean organisation. They adapt well to challenges, particularly during COVID they made quick changes, they saw the need for digital literacy courses, for example.” -DGGF

“We have now adapted our curriculum to focus on the skills they [the entrepreneurs] need now, online skills for example.” -Staff

“We adjust the schedule because they are at home, they are interrupted by their children this makes it hard to keep them fully engaged.” -Staff

“We spent one whole day training them on how to use zoom. We also pay for their internet for the workshops.” -Staff

“In Battambang when we opened [applications] only online, we only got 5-6 applications. Then we just approached women in the community. We had a flyer and our phone to show our video, we give them our card and left flyers in their shops. In one day we got 6 more women from face to face applications.” -Staff

Key Learnings and Challenges

It takes time to recruit and train the right staff

“If we do this again, and for other businesses doing this, I would think about the timeline of recruiting the team. In the provinces it is hard to find staff, in PP it is easier. In the province it is hard to find a good quality team. For example, it has taken almost 4months to put a team together in Kampot.”

"It takes 6months from recruitment to have someone ready to facilitate a program. The skills that we need to develop the most is the facilitator skills. They receive 6months of coaching before they do it on their own, they observe and assist. Then they run the sessions and get observed and received feedback. Lots of resources go into getting them ready. This makes turn over a big risk for us."

"I understand it took us a long time to find the right people, hire and train them. They [SHE] invest a lot in us [staff] to make sure the programs are all the best they can be."

"Both we and SHE didn't realise how difficult it would be to find the right people, the right staff." -DGGF

Participant recruitment in the provinces

"Generally, in the province, women did not feel it was right to develop themselves. So it was very hard to persuade them and recruit program participants."

"In Phnom Penh we usually do a face book page but in the provinces they don't use Facebook or so many online tools so we needed to think about what channels we use to contact the women and get their attention in those communities."

"Next time, we will open recruitment earlier for the participants. This takes longer than we thought, and we need a longer time line to get enough participants for the programs."

Maintaining quality programs and organisational values across a geographically dispersed team

"It can still be difficult to make sure everyone feels connected. Since I don't often meet my team members physically, it's a challenge to know what is going on in their day to day."

"The challenging that I've been experienced in this role is more about: managing a big team with eight people in total, this requires lots of supports and planning to make sure that the team can work independently and be able to do their job effectively and achieve the common goal of the program together."

"They [SHE] could have had more focus between having strong ties between HQ and the provinces." - DGGF

Recommendations

Program

1. Review the curriculum content on networks

The emphasis the staff place on building and growing networks is not reflected in the entrepreneurs' reasons for applying nor in their comments around what they found most valuable. While the entrepreneurs speak positively about their 'classmates' and feeling supported they fall short of identifying this group as a useful instrumental business network. It appears that the entrepreneurs view the network development as an almost incidental or unplanned benefit of the program. They also view their networks as amorphous or without structure or purpose. This is in contrast to the staffs' assessment that a professional networking opportunities offer not only emotional support but business guidance was a key outcome of the program.

SHE should consider including some information on how to develop and purposefully utilise a network for professional success in addition to the more organic benefits of feeling and being emotionally supported.

2. Review the curriculum content on environmental sustainability

The environmental impact was the least significant of the program. There was no significant change in environmental knowledge or awareness as a result of the program. Nor was there any conclusive evidence that SHE impacted the entrepreneurs intention to act more sustainably. The staff indicated that environmental sustainability makes up a small component of the curriculum.

If achievement in this area is a priority for the business consider reviewing the curriculum content and placing a greater emphasis on practical thing the women can change in their operations that go beyond the health of their employees and reducing plastic.

Organisation

3. Understand the most significant change for entrepreneurs is increased confidence self-belief and use this to promote SHE's point of difference as an ESO

The most casuistry (as opposed to contributory) and significant outcomes of the programs were the improvements in self-belief, confidence, increased resilience, and ability to overcome challenges. This is interesting when viewed with the understanding that over 50% of the entrepreneurs applied with the intention to increase profits and grow their business and it is the last objective listed on program page on the website.

Increased confidence and self-belief, unlike many of the other outcomes of the program, such as revenue or financial skills, is not only difficult to achieve but also challenging to measure. SHE should consider using the evidence of this significant impact when establishing their point of difference from other ESOs, particularly given the feminist approach of their work.

This also establishes a value proposition for the program and business that exists beyond revenue, profit and scale; all of which are vulnerable external factors such as COVID, making them less reliable metrics for a successful program.

4. Continue to invest in digital literacy and online programming

The effective pivot to online programming and the swift upskilling of the SHE team and entrepreneurs in digital literacy is a testament to the leadership teams' capacity for change and to overcome challenges. This was recognised as an investment in sustainability by both staff and funders and was received positively by both.

It is recommended that this level of investment and innovation in the online service space continue to be a priority for SHE. Continued prioritisation of this will also assist in addressing the challenges the organisation faces in keeping staff connected and ensuring quality of programs.

5. Conduct regular fit for purpose assessments of your technology and software systems and upgrade when required

A significant operational challenge in the expansion was upgrading and implementing Office 365 systems along with other programs used across the business. As the organisation continues to grow the technology requirements will change. It is recommended that SHE conduct a fit for purpose assessment of their technology systems and software at regular intervals to ensure the organisation is well placed to ongoing growth.

Measurement Evaluation and Learning

6. Review and improve the indicators for agency and empowerment

Participation is not an appropriate indicator of agency and empowerment in the context of financial decision making. It is recommended that the MEL team review the literature on 'cognitive load', consider the cultural and contextual relevance of this concept and update the metrics for empowerment and agency to include those suggested in the discussion that addresses [Agency, Empowerment, and the Cognitive Load](#) in this report.

Conclusion

This evaluation of the Incubator Programs in Seam Reap, Battambang, Kampong Cham and Kampot provides an exciting opportunity to gain impartial insight into key strengths and improvement areas of the Incubator programs in this new context. The evaluation has presented the impacts and outcomes of the programs alongside learnings from staff and funders about the process SHE Investments underwent to successfully expand into a national organisation.

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