

Background

Gender equality is one of the Millennium Goals. An important step towards that objective is the promotion of women's participation in economic life of their countries. Although the share of employed women is growing, the majority of them have badly paid jobs with no career options. Often the step into self-employment is a suitable way for women to generate an income and develop their individual skills. Female entrepreneurs who want to be economically successful require know-how, information, services and access to networks, all of which are offered by Business Membership Organisations (BMOs). The BMOs, in turn, require a special type of Capacity Development in order to gear their activities to the demands of business women companies more effectively.

Promotion of Business Women through BMOs

Product Description

Female entrepreneurs basically have the same business interests and service requirements as their male counterparts. However, they are considerably less present in chambers and associations than men - not only in developing countries; this especially goes for board levels. The reason: the still existing gender-specific access barriers to the social and economic participation of women. Even after they have taken these hurdles and become



Members of the "First International Business Women Forum" 2010 in Berlin

Foto: Philipp Treudt

successful, female entrepreneurs also feel insufficiently understood and represented in questions of management, communication and business methods in the male-dominated BMOs. This is the reason for growing emergence of initiatives to found BMOs which are solely targeted at female entrepreneurs. With regard to the Capacity Development of BMOs promoting business women sequa has therefore developed two approaches:

Capacity Development for „mixed“ BMOs aims at creating changes in an existing BMO to attract and activate more female members. This can be achieved via special services on the one hand and through initiatives targeting advocacy activities which mainly concern the interests of business women on the other. Eventually, however, the presence of female entrepreneurs should also be reflected in the internal structures of a chamber or association as well as in relevant full-time and honorary positions so that businesswomen, too, feel they are well-represented by the BMO.

In the case of Capacity Development for women-only BMOs it should be kept in mind that these organisations usually have considerably fewer members than "mixed" BMOs and thus also less income and weaker structures. Firstly, the number of women who launch a business is much smaller than that of men. Secondly, the percentage of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) among the businesses founded by women is larger and their income consequently lower than for companies run by men. And thirdly, because of traditional role patterns (e.g. the double burden of work and family affecting the participating business women or their lower participation in civil-society activities), female-run BMOs usually only reach a much lower organisational level. If female-run BMOs are to establish sustainable foundations for their activities, they require longer periods of time to create the resilient self-concept necessary for a well-functioning advocacy group for female entrepreneurs and to establish a stable membership base. The respective lengths

of those periods depend on their environment and clientele. The development of structures which can be financed with own income therefore generally takes more time for these organisations than for mixed BMOs and requires more intensive support in regard to Capacity Development.

Product Impact

BMOs support the entrepreneurial success of women via access to contacts, services and the representation of interests. Successful business women strengthen the role of women in society and tap into many often unused potentials for the economic development of a country.

Product Application Examples

sequa promotes business women through BMO development. This is done both in BMOs that include male entrepreneurs as well as in associations that accept women only. The following examples from sequa's projects show that the promotion of female entrepreneurs is not just a cross-cutting issue:

- The Business Women's Association of Uzbekistan, Tadbirkor Ayol, received support to improve its service portfolio and boost its membership figures. Subsequently, the association made its experiences available to their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. The intra-regional network of Central Asian Business Women's Associations has set up, among other things, a joint trainer pool which is used cross-nationally.
- In the Caucasus, the number of member companies lead by women that are part of employer associations has been increased through dedicated events (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia).
- The initiative of Southeast European crafts organisations has resulted in the establishment of the Balkan Association of Women in Crafts. Today, the association has developed national structures in Albania, Bulgaria, the Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Romania.
- Egyptian business women's associations are running a joint Internet portal for female entrepreneurs. In Alexandria, an annual business women conference has been organised since 2007 which also attracts international participants. The Egyptian business women organisations have considerably expanded their contacts with other international BMOs.
- The Burkina Faso crafts umbrella organisation has established the working group "Women in Crafts", added gender-specific topics to its service portfolio of the association and organised appropriate road-shows.
- Four Indian business women's associations and committees from chamber organisations have received support in setting up the Women Entrepreneurs' Chamber and Associations Network India (WeCAN).
- Initiated by the Egyptian business women associations, the "First International Businesswomen Forum" was organised in Berlin in 2010. It included representatives from 24 countries. One workshop laid the basis for the future communication between the female entrepreneurs in social networks such as Facebook. This contact with other countries was extremely important for business women from the MENA region during the soon-to-follow Arab Spring. In the new political environment, the desire arose to exchange experiences with BMOs from MENA countries. The „Second International Businesswomen Forum – MENA Focus“ in September 2012 served as a platform for this.