

YAKHA

Country: Zimbabwe

Nominating College: Bryn Mawr College

Project Leader: Minolta Ndlovu

OVERVIEW

YAKHA is an initiative that provides business training, digitization, and grant investments to women-led informal businesses in Zimbabwe. The project aims to enable economic independence for women in Zimbabwe.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Barriers to entry into formal employment have pushed women in Zimbabwe to start businesses and find jobs in the informal sector. However, informal businesses do not get a good return on profits and the women operating informal businesses remain trapped in a cycle of poverty despite their hard work. The low returns are due to a lack of access to:

- Financial loans for business growth, which are costly and require collateral
- Business training and market insights for strategic planning
- Digital tools to reach customers

My goal for the summer was to identify five women entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe to train on sustainable business practices and give grants as a form of business investment. I took the outlined steps to achieve this goal:

1. I sent out a survey to women entrepreneurs in Bulawayo to learn about their business ideas, the challenges that they face and business needs.
2. From the list of women who completed the survey, I selected five businesses to take part in YAKHA. The selection was based on their ability to commit to the program, and business idea's potential
3. Once part of YAKHA, participants attended weekly training meetings for seven weeks and completed assignments for each training topic. The topics included problem-solving in entrepreneurship, financial education, social media marketing, networking, and building business proposals.
4. After completing the training, participants took two weeks to work on their business ideas and develop business proposals to qualify for grants
5. During the final meeting, participants went to Hillside Dams, a national monument in Bulawayo for a retreat. During this time they got to know each other outside of training and presented their final business proposals and the next steps in their business journey.

Some challenges that we faced during the ten weeks of running the project were:

Challenge	Mitigation
Internet Outages Zoom meetings were often interrupted by poor internet connection	I recorded lectures and shared them via WhatsApp for participants to watch at their own time.

Travel Restriction My trip to Zimbabwe got canceled at the last minute due to immigration issues and I completed the full project online.	Collaborated with my colleagues in Zimbabwe to facilitate the meetings and I joined via zoom.
Lack of access to mentors Finding and collaborating with mentors for the program was too expensive.	Collaborated with my friends in Zimbabwe and the United States to lead some of the trainings that we did and help the ladies with styling their business proposal using Canva.
Coordinating meeting times The different time zones made it hard to find a suitable meeting time. One of the participants did not manage to attend the in-person meetings because of time conflicts.	Recorded sessions and shared the material in the WhatsApp group chat. Also made follow up phone calls to ensure all participants fully understood the material.

NEXT STEPS

- Continue to work with YAKHA entrepreneurs throughout the year to ensure the sustainability of their businesses in the long term.
- Raise funds to support more entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe.
- Build a team to work permanently on YAKHA in 2023.

REFLECTION

To me, peace is the absence of poverty, violence, and injustice. YAKHA is a project inspired by my own experiences growing up in Zimbabwe. I saw a lot of women who led lives dependent on men for economic survival and those who did not have men to support them suffered in poverty. I want to change this status quo. YAKHA is a big step towards reducing poverty, violence and injustice for Zimbabwean women by providing a guided path for women to achieve economic independence. The women that I worked with over the summer are all set to grow their business and continue to support their families. One of the participants, Faith, has been tailoring for 23 years. Through YAKHA funds she is going to buy more sewing machines and open a training center to teach young women how to do tailoring and start their own businesses. During the summer, I worked with only five women but in the future I want to work towards making YAKHA's impact reach thousands of women entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe and Africa.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Working on YAKHA taught me the value of hard work and perseverance. One particularly inspiring story is of one of the participants who took her two daughters through university by tailoring work. Her story is true to many African children raised by single mothers. YAKHA provides an opportunity for women to learn how to grow their businesses to provide for their families without working themselves to death. Women always sacrifice and work hard for their children, but it doesn't always have to be sweat and tears. We need to intervene and bring resources for growth and efficiency to the women who need them the most. -

Minolita Ndlovu