

1. CASE STUDY – East African Women in Business Platform

Name of Project:	East African Women in Business Platform (EAWiBP)
Country, Region:	East Africa
Duration:	April 2011 – June 2013
Total Funding:	An estimated USD 265,000 for 2 years (this includes personnel and administration costs)
Donors:	TradeMark East Africa
Implementer:	East African Business Council
Case Study Author:	Talitha Bertelsmann-Scott, Consultant – Imani Development
Contact:	talithascott@gmail.com ; 0845545961
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4.1 Context

The East African Women in Business Platform (EAWiBP) was established with TMEA funding in April 2011 and was a forum that brought together businesswomen from across the East African Community. Its membership and Steering Committee rested on partner states' national apex bodies, associations and networks of businesswomen (including associations of women formal and informal cross-border traders); professional women associations; and civil society organisations working to promote businesswomen and women's socio-economic advancement.

Drawing its mandate from the Treaty for the Establishment of East African Community, particularly under Article 121 and 122 that emphasises the role of women in socio-economic development and in business as core issues for the effective cooperation and development of partner states, EAWiBP's vision was to become "A Women's Centre of Excellence for Intra and Extra-EAC Trade". Its mission; "Position and Catalyse the Participation of Women in EAC's Integration Process." It represented over 3,000 businesses and professional women in the region.

4.2 Issues

Throughout the African continent women are still disadvantaged in daily live, may that be due to access to education and health, legal standing, access to finance and more. However, research has shown that equal access to economic opportunities for both women and men contributes to growth in countries' economies and result in better development outcomes. Globally, women enterprises comprise about a third of all enterprises and contribute significantly to employment generation and socio-economic development, therefore affirming that increased investment in economic advancement of women is 'smart

economics¹. Building a platform that could uniquely advance the priorities identified by women's groups and work specifically for their needs was considered very relevant in a region where women are still at a disadvantage when it comes to the entry into the trade market.

EAWiBP's three strategic objectives were: increased effective participation of women in business in the EAC integration process; improved economic contribution of women in business in the EAC and increased progression of women-owned enterprises in the EAC from informal to formal status. By joining the platform therefore, women entrepreneurs, through their associations, have had an opportunity to raise regional visibility around the issues they face, get their voices heard at the highest decision making level in the East African Community and also influence policy. Membership of a regional platform also brings with it unique regional and international opportunities that may be just out of the reach of a national association. *(From the EAWiBP materials)*

4.3 Method

The EAWiBP had specific intervention areas in which their work was focused, including the development of trade related knowledge amongst women traders; policy research and advocacy on issues related to trade participation and women's empowerment; business to business linkages; business development skills including on the use of ICT; and, business advisory and dissemination of information and business intelligence.

The Steering Committee members were drawn from organisations from all the partner states, including the Association of Media Women in Kenya, the Association of Women in Agri-Business Network Kenya and East Africa, the Burundi Women Entrepreneurs Association, Eastern African sub-Regional Support Initiative for Advancement of Women, Federation of Women Entrepreneurs Association in Kenya, Rwanda Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs, Tanzania Women's Chamber of Commerce and the Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association Limited.

4.4 Results

The EAWiBP has approached policy advocacy from an evidence-based approach by first commissioning and validating a regional report on Barriers facing Women-Owned Businesses in the EAC Region. A position paper was subsequently developed and used in advocacy campaigns. As a result the EAC Secretariat has drafted the EAC Policy on Promoting Business Women.

EAWiBP collaborated with other donors and organisations to offer business specific skills to women participants and invited members to participate in networking meetings as well as international trade fairs. It was further, very successful in linking with other women's networks in North and Southern Africa and managed to get an elected member on to the Arab-African Business Women Union. With aim of increasing business opportunities and visibility for business women, the Platform developed a Regional Business Directory for Women-Owned Businesses . In addition, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the International Trade Centre on the Global Platform for Action on Sourcing from Women

¹Catalysing the participation of women-owned businesses in intra-EAC trade through Evidence-based policies and programmes. Study commissioned by EAWiBP.

Vendors, which aims to increase the share of corporate, government and institutional procurement secured by women vendors.

The EAWiBP further built a strong partnership with the Chamber Trade Sweden, which assisted EAWiBP build capacity of its members in policy advocacy focused on the harmonization of policies, investment in green technologies and assist EAWiBP members to participate in commercial and economic delegations.

A Study was commissioned by the EAC Secretariat and the platform, with the financial support of GIZ, on access to finance for women-owned businesses in the EAC region, which proposed a specific model of financing of women. Based on this report the EAWiBP lobbied financial institutions, especially the East African Development Bank, to adopt the model.

Sharing information and business intelligence was one of the key functions of the platform and to this end the platform regularly shared information on the EAC trade regime and customs regulatory framework. In 2013, the Platform held an unprecedented regional workshop on EAC customs regulations, which resulted in knowledge strengthening of 50 business women. Participants at the workshop continue to disseminate the knowledge gained in different ways.

Information dissemination through social media continues to be a key strategy for EAWiBP. The Platform has a very active Facebook page, which remains active even after the close of the programme. Opportunities in business, in training, in trade missions and news on regional integration are shared with followers.

The platform was further able to fundraise from African Women Development Fund (AWDF), GIZ/GOPA and the Ford Foundation, showing broad interest and support for the work done.

4.3.5 Impact

The voice of women in business in East Africa became coordinated and well recognized, with the EAC Secretariat having a focal point with which to work on issues affecting women in business in an effort to increase their numbers and increase their business reach. The evidence-based research and resultant advocacy resulted in the specific issues affecting women, like access to finance, to be brought to the attention of policy-makers and their resultant interest in wanting to resolve the issues.

During the short time in which the platform was operational, it managed to achieve some concrete results. It successfully lobbied the EAC Secretariat for the recognition of the specific concerns of businesswomen in the regional strategy regarding the promoting of women in socio-economic development. The platform coordinator was able to play a leading role in the development of the EAC strategy in this regard, and was recognized for her useful input. The platform itself was acknowledged by the EAC Secretary General, who has publicly recorded his support for its continuation and has included representatives from the members of the platform in his official delegations when he travels.

The platform not only provided a useful networking opportunity for women's organisations in the region, but also developed concrete proposals for activities that would enhance the participation of businesswomen in intra-regional trade. For example, the platform worked with the East African Development Bank to design a financial facility that could be accessed by businesswomen in order to assist them in improving the competitiveness of their

companies. This is particularly crucial, given that access to finance is widely recognized as one of the primary constraints for the private sector in Africa.

4.3.6 Innovations

Key innovations of the Platform since its inception include;

1. EAC network of business women; the platform pioneered the formation of this unprecedented network. The platform has guaranteed collective actions and voice of business women in the region, resulting in effective policy advocacy to address business environment challenges.
2. Business Directory of women-owned business; while many business directories have been published in the region, the platform successfully gathered information and developed the first-ever EAC business directory of business women. This directory not only links potential investors and partners to the business women but also quantitatively demonstrates the large number of business women operating in the region.
3. Inclusion of business women in trade missions and business women in trade negotiations and policy formulation processes; from the onset, EAWiBP successfully advocated for the inclusion of business women in trade negotiation fora. It is noteworthy, that the Secretary General of the EAC continues to include business women in EAC trade missions. Further, Ministry of Trade in Rwanda and Tanzania have begun including business women in trade negotiation fora and trade missions.
4. Strategic Partnership; EAWiBP was able to successful forge strategic partnerships with the EAC Secretariat as well as non-EAC based networks such as South Africa based Leading Women of Africa and Chamber Trade Sweden, resulting in effective policy influencing, business linkages and improved flow of business information between the networks.

4.3.7 Challenges

The key challenges faced by the Platform during the implementation period are as follows:

1. Slow and bureaucratic processes of EAC Policy organs; this resulted lengthy policy advocacy processes. For example, advocacy towards development of the EAC policy on business women took one and half years due to bureaucracy of EAC policy organs.
2. Inadequate and late disbursement of implementation funds; key interventions especially on knowledge and capacity strengthening could not be conducted as project funds were inadequate. Additionally, project funds would often be disseminated late and this negatively affected project implementation.

4.3.8 Who Benefits

The primary beneficiaries of the Platform's initiatives are business women across the EAC region. Secondary beneficiaries are the business women networks, the East African Business Council and the EAC Secretariat as they are know in a better position to articulate the priorities of business women in the EAC.

4.3.9 Long-term Effects

Once adopted by the EAC policy organs, the EAC Policy on Business Women will be the regional blue print to address behind and at the border constraints faced by business in the region. This will result in increased intra-regional trade and competitiveness of women-owned businesses. Further, platform will continue to offer an organised and strategic avenue to link business women to business opportunities (including opportunities in regional value chains), investors, skills, technology and financing.