

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR YOUNG WOMEN

A Program Factsheet

March 2021



The issue

Women in Africa are driving local economies and leading vibrant income-generating activities that are keeping their families and communities afloat, despite the disproportionate structural, cultural, social, and economic barriers they face.

But while women's workforce participation is high in Sub-Saharan Africa (61.23% according to the World Bank), most African women are forced to work in low-income jobs in the informal economy. Many women and girls, particularly those in rural and low-income contexts, turn to informal, small-scale entrepreneurship to meet their economic needs.

However, independent entrepreneurship is inherently risky, and even once a woman has been able to launch her own independent small business, there are still significant barriers to overcome to take her business to a level that provides her with sustainable and dignified work.



A Batonga program participant making soap (2020).

HOW WE'RE SOLVING THE PROBLEM



Since 2017, Batonga has been working side by side with rural women entrepreneurs and professionally active women and young women in Benin, supporting them in the acquisition of financial literacy and business skills, as well as providing them with mentoring and tailored accompaniment as they launch and grow their businesses.

We have found that through the intentional creation of social and professional collectives of women-led small-businesses at the community level, vulnerable young women can disrupt the systems and practices that isolate them socially and economically and keep them trapped in the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

How we work to achieve young women's economic empowerment:



Creating and nurturing young women's economic solidarity networks

Batonga's Young Women's Business Circles connect women 18-30 years old with a trained Batonga business expert, Mentor, and a group of 20 to 25 of their peers to build their practical business and financial literacy skills; provide them with safe, low-risk spaces to develop collective or individual small businesses plans; and give them access to small business seed funding to launch their businesses.

Together, young women in their Circles can pool risk and resources to collectively lessen the burdens of entrepreneurship and provide one another with professional, emotional, and financial solidarity as they launch their businesses and careers.



Developing and strengthening connections between young women and the business community

Batonga is working to develop formal relationships with local business communities in and around our host villages to establish apprenticeship and internship pipelines for young women. Batonga Mentors and staff are working to build networks of trustworthy and successful business owners who are interested in partnering with Batonga to offer qualified young women with professional development opportunities. Batonga also organizes an Exemplary Women Speaker Series, which brings local, professionally successful women to SONAFA Clubs and YWBCs to speak about their personal career paths and give advice on working as a woman in Benin.



Offering vocational training opportunities

Since 2019, Batonga has two vocational training centers focused on tailoring. Batonga plans to launch vocational training programs in traditionally male-dominated fields in 2021.

OUR IMPACT

Batonga runs **50** YOUNG WOMEN BUSINESS CIRCLES (YWBCs)

serving just over **1,100** young women aged 18-30

recruited as members across **15** VILLAGES in Benin.

- Each of these 50 YWBCs submitted their business plans for consideration and following several rounds of feedback were each approved to **receive \$200** of small business seed funding to **launch their 50 businesses**.
- **20 Batonga Mentors**, chosen specifically for their expertise and experience with business and entrepreneurship have been trained by Batonga to lead YWBCs and help young entrepreneurs develop and refine their business activities and skills

OUR LESSONS LEARNED

Collective work, as opposed to independent entrepreneurship, is consistently prioritized by young women. At the launch of the Young Women Business Circle project, the small business seed fund was offered to young women as funding that would help them launch their businesses. The members of the YWBCs decided to pursue collective businesses, and to pool and share resources and responsibilities together. The young women in Batonga's implementation communities have made it clear that they much prefer a collaborative, risk-sharing model to that of individual entrepreneurship.

Young Women want to make a positive impact on their communities. When the young women transitioned from our Leadership Clubs to YWBCs, they still had profit from their income-generating activities since 2017: a total of \$3,000 from the 59 Clubs' lock boxes had been saved. Following debate and voting within the new YWBCs, the young women chose to invest their funds in their communities rather than take the income home. The young women of the YWBCs purchased new benches for local schools, repairs for a local well, solar lights for study spaces, among other things needed to help communities. Their initiative, is particularly inspiring and potentially speaks to the impact that participating in Batonga's programs has had on their perception of their role in their community.

