

iDE Powering
entrepreneurs
to end poverty.



FROM FIELDS TO FUTURES

TRANSFORMING RURAL WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Using human-centered design to uncover key learnings:
New insights on approaching modules, delivery methods and program
structures for incubating rural women agricultural entrepreneurs.

Learning Document

Who is this learning document for, and why should you read it?

Background

Section I - Modules

- Learning 1: Combine technical knowledge with business management skills
- Learning 2: Integrating mental health and wellbeing
- Learning 3: Addressing gender and power dynamics

Section II - Delivery

- Learning 4: Customizing materials for specific needs
- Learning 5: Creating accessible and interactive learning spaces
- Learning 6: Engaging partners and family members

Section III - Program Structure

- Learning 7: Working with the “right” participants
- Learning 8: Finding a comfortable (and effective) pace
- Learning 9: Coaching and mentoring as a tool for enhancing program outcomes
- BONUS: Don't just focus on the participants, spend time working with your facilitators!

So, where do we go from here?

Who is this learning document for, and why should you read it?



IDE prides itself on being an innovator in the entrepreneurship space and that requires constantly reiterating and improving our programs.

Although there are several strong incubation programs that exist for entrepreneurs in urban areas of Cambodia - with offerings of access to training, coaching, networks, funding, and mentorship - they often focus on scalable business models and rapid growth. While these elements are also crucial in rural settings, the approach must be nuanced to address specific barriers such as gender and socio-cultural norms, limited infrastructure and resources, lower levels of financial and digital literacy, and the logistical challenges of reaching dispersed markets.

As an intermediary for the entrepreneurs we power, we're using this public document as a platform to advocate for some of the most important learnings we have uncovered. This learning document is for Entrepreneurship Support Organizations (ESOs) that want to be more gender-sensitive and work in more rural, challenging contexts. It's also for funders who want to partner on truly transformative programs (or those that want to learn more about why it's worth doing).

In this document, we share some real and raw experiences of rural women entrepreneurs, focusing on the agriculture sector, and demonstrate some of the ways in which our programming has been supporting them, as well as areas where we think we can do better.

We're not trying to tell you how to run your programs, but rather share some insights that may resonate with you, especially when it comes to facilitating more inclusive programs that create prosperity and resilience for entrepreneurs, their families, and their communities.

Background

For over 30 years, iDE has been at the forefront of powering rural entrepreneurs in Cambodia, leveraging innovative solutions to improve livelihoods and foster economic growth. Our journey began with recognizing the untapped potential within these communities, where traditional agricultural practices could be merged with sustainable, market-driven innovations to create a significant impact.

iDE's definition of an entrepreneur emphasizes the role of individuals in driving sustainable development. We recognize the potential in every person to contribute to their community's prosperity, regardless of their background or the scale of their enterprise. This inclusive approach to entrepreneurship is crucial in rural areas where the collective effort of many micro, small, and medium, interconnected businesses can lead to significant economic and social improvements. Additionally, this definition broadens the scope of what it means to be an entrepreneur, encompassing those who lead family-run small to medium enterprises and individuals who drive social, and economic, and environmental change within their communities.

The nature of rural enterprises, particularly in the agricultural sector, demands a deep understanding of the value chain from farm to market to customer. It is also important to emphasize that most of them are family-run, requiring further considerations when it comes to gender and family dynamics, and shared responsibilities.

Our incubation and acceleration efforts extend beyond business development to include aspects like product development, improving market access, sustainable agricultural practices, and climate resilience. By doing so, we bridge the gap between traditional farming practices and modern entrepreneurship, creating a unique ecosystems where rural businesses can thrive.



iDE recognizes the immense value female entrepreneurs bring to their communities and the local economy.

There is currently a \$1.7 trillion gender financing gap¹, with less than 2% of global value chain purchases from women-led firms. There are 115 countries where women face legal constraints to entrepreneurship that men do, and women spend 3-5x more time on unpaid care work than men².

Limited access to land ownership, agricultural inputs, and credit facilities restrict their ability to expand their business and invest in new practices. Furthermore, social norms dictating women's roles within the household and community can limit their mobility and access to training and networking opportunities, which are essential for business success.

As part of iDE's new
10-YEAR STRATEGY
we will power
ONE million women entrepreneurs
to foster prosperity in their communities
FOR 100 MILLION PEOPLE 

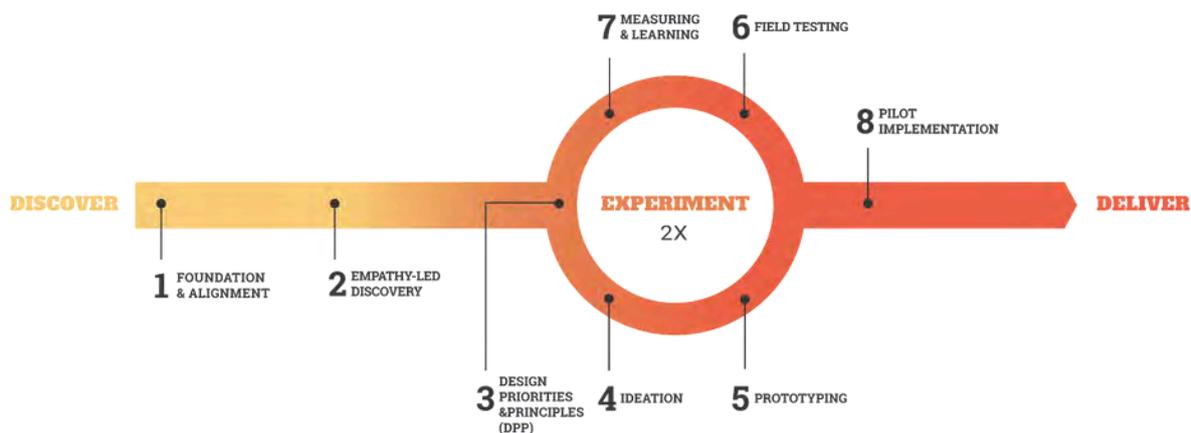
¹ World Economic Forum (2023) [The finance gap for women entrepreneurs is \\$1.7 trillion. Here's how to close it](#)

² Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (2022) [The Case for Investing in Women Entrepreneurs](#)

In 2023 we set out a simple mission - **use existing programs, curriculums and tools to create a refined incubation program for women entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector.**

We had 3 key questions:

- How might we enhance, add to, or adjust the existing SHE curriculum **modules** that are relevant and actionable for rural female agri-entrepreneurs, empowering them to navigate challenges to achieve sustainable growth?
- How might we **deliver** the curriculum in a way that is accessible, interactive, and contextually appropriate for rural female agri-entrepreneurs, maximizing their learning and engagement while considering their diverse needs and limited resources?
- How might we design a **program structure** or roadmap for the curriculum that is flexible, adaptable, and contextually appropriate for rural female agri-entrepreneurs, increasing their engagement and learning outcomes while considering their lived realities?



The design process at iDE

Our team applied a human-centered design (HCD) process to achieve the goal of this project. We put people at the center of the design process to solve complex problems, using a variety of approaches, including qualitative research, co-designing, and rapid prototyping to develop a deep understanding of their needs, motivations, and behaviors.

Through rigorous research, dialogue, and collaboration with local communities, the iDE team gathered invaluable insights into the specific needs of female rural agri-preneurs. This learning document is a culmination of these efforts, designed to share our findings with a broader audience of stakeholders, donors, partners, and other ESOs in our ecosystem.

Modules



LEARNING 1

Combine technical sector-specific knowledge with business management skills

Working with rural women agricultural entrepreneurs requires much more than copy-pasting a standard incubator program. We know that tailoring to the sector helps in various ways, which requires an understanding of the sector more broadly.

The impact of environmental changes on rural entrepreneurship, particularly in agriculture, cannot be underestimated. Agricultural commodities fluctuate wildly based on season or the unexpected influx of products from neighboring countries. There are different dynamics to consider, such as the existence of informal agreements between traders and suppliers, the power held by brokers, as well as various dynamics that exist within the sector, such as agricultural cooperatives, producer groups or family-run smallholder farms.

“Small, family-run agriculture businesses are the backbone of economic growth, yet women juggle their enterprises with household responsibilities, facing sector-specific challenges and the impacts of climate change. Supporting rural women agricultural entrepreneurs goes far beyond a standard incubator program. It demands a deep understanding of sector dynamics—like fluctuating commodity markets, informal trade agreements, and the vital role of cooperatives and smallholder farmers. Tailoring solutions to these challenges, while combining technical agriculture training with business management skills, is essential to navigating the complexities of environmental changes and driving sustainable growth.”

- Dr. Kim Hian Seng, iDE Agriculture Director

How we've applied this: iDE's agriculture program has been running in Cambodia for 30 years, and has evolved over time to include climate-smart practices. One of the key learnings during that time was the value of adding business incubation training into the mix. After receiving a Training of Trainers (ToT) from the SHE team, our agricultural team was able to combine its agronomic technical know-how with sectoral knowledge and business training best practices to help agripreneurs to run viable businesses.

This involved:

- Combining training on sustainable agricultural practices with business acumen.
- Improving access to climate-resilient technologies.
- Providing guidance on diversification strategies to reduce vulnerability.
- Conducting field visits to businesses that are participating in the program to increase exposure and mutually beneficial business-to-business relationships.



Supporting entrepreneurs in this way is not only critical for their individual businesses but also for the sustainability of the broader agricultural sector and rural communities.



LEARNING 2

Integrating mental health and wellbeing

A particularly insightful aspect of our interviews involved discussions with psychologists, addressing the often-overlooked importance of mental health and resilience in entrepreneurship. These conversations underscored not only the psychological challenges faced by entrepreneurs, especially women in rural areas, but also the critical need for programs that cultivate health and wellbeing, self-confidence, inner strength, and the will to seize opportunities and drive one's own success.

Moreover, the conversations with entrepreneurs highlighted a significant gap in support for building self-confidence, resilience, and the entrepreneurial mindset needed to leverage opportunities and drive personal and business growth. There are several unique stressors that come from working closely with family members, making it especially important to maintain healthy relationships for the business's success.

When speaking to an agricultural cooperative, they shared the collective challenges faced by smallholder farmers and how using collaborative models can enhance market access, improve bargaining power, and share resources more efficiently. These discussions emphasized the value of community-based approaches in supporting rural entrepreneurs, especially to female agripreneurs striving to overcome traditional barriers.



“

I'm afraid that joining the program can make me lose my face in the community if my business ends up in failure. I am afraid I cannot make it.”

- Woman entrepreneur in Siem Reap

The importance of 'critical consciousness':

Measuring critical consciousness entails measuring awareness and agreement with patriarchal norms. It evaluates the ability of program participants and entrepreneurs to recognize societal inequalities, and the ability of family and community members to influence their own personal empowerment.



Integrating mental health support into incubation and acceleration programs involves creating safe spaces for entrepreneurs to discuss challenges openly, access to counseling services, and workshops focused on developing personal strengths and coping strategies in order to effectively manage stress. These initiatives should aim to destigmatize mental health issues, promote self-care, and underscore the importance of mental resilience as a key driver of business success. By equipping entrepreneurs with tools to manage stress, overcome adversity, and maintain a positive outlook, programs can empower them to seize opportunities more confidently and navigate failures.

Here's what we're going to do differently:



Add workshops on building a growth mindset and stress management.



Provide more one-on-one coaching sessions focused on personal development.



Facilitate access to local mental health resources and support networks.



Include more questions focused on 'critical consciousness' in our baseline surveys to assess the knowledge, attitude, behaviors and practices for decision making that lead to women's empowerment.

THE GOAL

is to ensure that rural female entrepreneurs are not only equipped with the necessary business skills, but also the psychological tools to thrive in an ever-changing and often challenging entrepreneurial landscape.

Furthermore, fostering a community of care among entrepreneurs where experiences and strategies for maintaining mental health can be shared is vital. Peer support can play a transformative role in building resilience, as entrepreneurs realize they are not alone in their struggles and provide sympathy and support for one another. This collective learning environment not only strengthens individual entrepreneurs but also reinforces the overall resilience of the entrepreneurial community.

LEARNING 3

Addressing gender and power dynamics

When talking about gender and power, one of the key things we have learned is that it's important to address these topics head-on in our workshops.

To create truly gender-transformative programming, we focus on increasing agency by creating dialogues that support women entrepreneurs. When it comes to working with family-run businesses, we have also understood the importance of mapping out key roles and dynamics to understand who influences business decisions, how this is shared across the family, and how this might change over the course of the program. Addressing these dynamics can also have an impact on their children - empowered women are more likely to invest in their education and health, expanding human capital prospects for their country³.

As part of the SHE Incubator Program, we invite the entrepreneur and their partners to create a vision board for their business on the first day of the workshops, creating a space for collaborative ideation. We then run a session on "Gender and Women's Economic Empowerment" as well as "Socio-Economic Rights", asking questions that enable the participants to reflect on the inequalities they might face and what they believe to be the root causes. This sets the stage for future workshops, where gender becomes a lens through which the women entrepreneurs evaluate their business and explore opportunities for growth.

“

I always share what I learned from the training with my husband. One thing we have been doing now among some other practices is having our own salary."

- Woman entrepreneur in Siem Reap



Increasing visibility through case studies:

While conducting interviews with a female farmer who has never participated in training programs before, she seemed hesitant. She explained that it was due to her low level of literacy and that she did not even consider herself to be an agri-business woman. As part of the testing in the field, we asked her to watch an inspirational video on the SHE YouTube channel. After watching the video with keen interest on her face, she told us she would love to participate in the program and wished to be as successful as the role model entrepreneurs in the video who faced similar challenges to her.

³ Brauner-Otto, Baird and Ghimire (2022) [Women's employment and Children's education: Longitudinal evidence from Nepal](#). Note: this study also finds that if mothers are employed in roles outside the home that this can actually lead to boys dropping out of school.



Just like we see
Entrepreneurship
as a way to **end poverty**

we see
INCUBATION
PROGRAMMING as a way to

INCREASE EQUITY WITHIN THE HOUSEHOLD

We will share more on how to effectively engage partners and family members in Learning 6

Delivery



LEARNING 4

Customizing materials for specific needs

A foundational insight from our research is the importance of tailoring support programs to the unique and specific needs of rural female entrepreneurs in Cambodia. In practice, this means initiating each program with a thorough assessment of what participants need to learn and grow. Our findings strongly suggest that complex concepts or frameworks, which are often abstract and difficult to relate to, are less effective than simple, practical, and actionable insights.

Other ideas worth trying:

- Increase the use of simplified visual aids.
- Adapt digital tools into simple templates that can be completed by hand.
- Work with facilitators who are familiar with the specific target communities.
- Provide entrepreneurs with case studies and examples to make connections with how they manage their own business.
- Create simplified workbooks that participants can use to track their learning and progress.
- Develop materials that specifically address the needs of family-run businesses, such as templates for family agreements for the household and business.



“

This is my first time joining such a program, and I'm truly thankful. I've gained valuable knowledge, even though I don't have a high level of literacy. The training has been incredibly clear, and I've grasped concepts well.”

- Woman entrepreneur in Battambang

“

This lesson was crucial for me. The case study was similar to my business. I used to not understand the difference between cash and profit, but now I can explain both. If my business is profitable, I can pay myself, invest in future projects, hire staff, open a new shop, and increase production. Proper cash flow management is essential to keep my business running.”

- Woman entrepreneur in Banteay Meanchey

What does it mean to be participatory?

We believe that the process of customization should involve the entrepreneurs themselves, incorporating their feedback and insights into the program design. Taking this approach not only ensures that the programs are aligned with the entrepreneurs' actual needs but also increases their investment and engagement in the learning process. It is also important to ask questions in different ways to address inherent power dynamics (without recreating them) so that clients and entrepreneurs tell us what they truly need, and not just what they think we want to hear.



By focusing on simplicity, relevance, and direct applicability, support programs can significantly enhance their impact, empowering rural female entrepreneurs to make meaningful advancements in their businesses and communities.



LEARNING 5

Creating accessible and interactive learning spaces

Creating accessible and interactive learning spaces requires a deep understanding of participant needs.

Let's talk about logistics:

- Ensure the physical infrastructure does not hinder individuals with disabilities.
- Instead of asking entrepreneurs to travel to urban centers for regular workshops, consider how you might conduct workshops in a local community hall or use the business space of an entrepreneur in the program (and consider compensating them).
- Identify spaces where they might be able to bring their child/ren and/or those they have a caring responsibility for.
- Co-create community agreements to ensure psychological safety⁴ for all participants.
- Consider encouraging several women in a community to participate together to increase levels of safety during travel.

Being sensitive to these needs can ensure that entrepreneurs can benefit from support without the barriers of distance, time, or personal comfort impeding their progress.

But space isn't just about the physical aspects, it's also about the atmosphere.

When it comes to adult learning, it's important to consider multiple learning styles⁵. For example, active learning methods enable participants to "learn by doing", through games, activities or exercises. This enhances their learning because they are more likely to remember a topic if they were able to practice it instead of trying to memorize and remember it later.



Additionally, utilizing "peer-led problem-solving" techniques also teaches participants how to support each other to solve problems. Witnessing peers navigate similar challenges and share their learning journeys fosters a culture of mutual support and validation from within the community, not just from external experts. This environment encourages entrepreneurs to take ownership of their learning process, becoming more self-reliant and proactive in seeking out knowledge and applying it to their businesses. Additionally, it creates a closely-bonded cohort that is more likely to support each other into the future, after the training program ends.

“

"I was surprised by how the game itself was presented and implemented by the facilitators. It was useful - enjoying and learning at the same time which was the benefit of a participatory approach."

- Noeum Sinuon, iDE CSmart Facilitator

How do we ensure that we are not creating barriers for entrepreneurs who are interested in participating in our programs?

At SHE, from the proposal development stage, we include additional budget in our proposals for accessible venues and child-friendly spaces. For programs with an online recruitment process, we ensure that our advertisements depict women from diverse backgrounds. In more rural contexts, we run an "Awareness Day", inviting local entrepreneurs, Village Chiefs and other stakeholders to an event where we share information about basic entrepreneurial concepts. Once the final entrepreneurs are selected, we ensure that we ask them about any dietary, accessibility or financial needs they might have to actively participate in the program. Additionally, we work with the cohort to identify the best venue for the workshop that isn't too far away from their home.



Creating interactive learning environments where entrepreneurs are encouraged to experiment with new ideas and reflect on these experiences in supportive settings will increase confidence and engagement.

⁴ A shared belief that it is okay to take risks, express ideas and concerns, ask questions and make mistakes.

⁵ As part of the SHE methodology, these are just two of several [learning styles](#) used in the classroom to maximize adult learning.

LEARNING 6

Engaging partners and family members

Engaging only women entrepreneurs is not practical. As many businesses in rural Cambodia are family-owned and operated, the success of these enterprises often hinges on the support and involvement of family members, particularly spouses. Programs that engage not only women entrepreneurs but also their spouses and other key family members can enhance the effectiveness and long-term application of the training and support offered. Partners need to have an understanding of how gender stereotypes may unconsciously be reinforced at home and within the business. Being aware of this can help them create more equitable spaces for their partner to fully engage in the business, while improving decision-making within the household. This inclusive approach acknowledges and leverages the influence of family dynamics on business decisions and operations.

Here is what we have tried in our programming:

- Conducting a pre-workshop session that demonstrates the learning outcomes and value of the program with relevant family members.
- Inviting spouses/partners to join relevant workshop sessions, without compromising the safe space created for the women entrepreneurs.
- Holding a program graduation/completion event and inviting family members to celebrate the achievements of the program participants.
- Include questions about decision-making for both the household and the business to understand how these dynamics change before and after participating in the program.
- Include “conflict resolution” as a core part of our module on Leadership.



“

We focus on those entrepreneurs that are able to scale, importantly, we need to include the entire family. If we don't include the husband we are less likely to succeed.”

- Senghorng Tout, iDE Climate-resilient Horticulture Manager

“

I don't want this program to end. It's my first time joining and learning from a community. Before, I stayed at home doing housework with little communication and confidence. After joining this program, I learned that age is not a barrier to learning. With commitment and goals, we can change ourselves. I gained knowledge on managing a small business, bookkeeping, making independent decisions, and attracting target customers. I am thankful to everyone, especially my husband, who motivated me to complete this program. Receiving a certificate for the first time is my proud moment.”

- Woman entrepreneur in Banteay Meanchey



Creating interactive learning environments where entrepreneurs are encouraged to experiment with new ideas and reflect on these experiences in supportive settings will increase confidence and engagement.

Program Structure



LEARNING 7

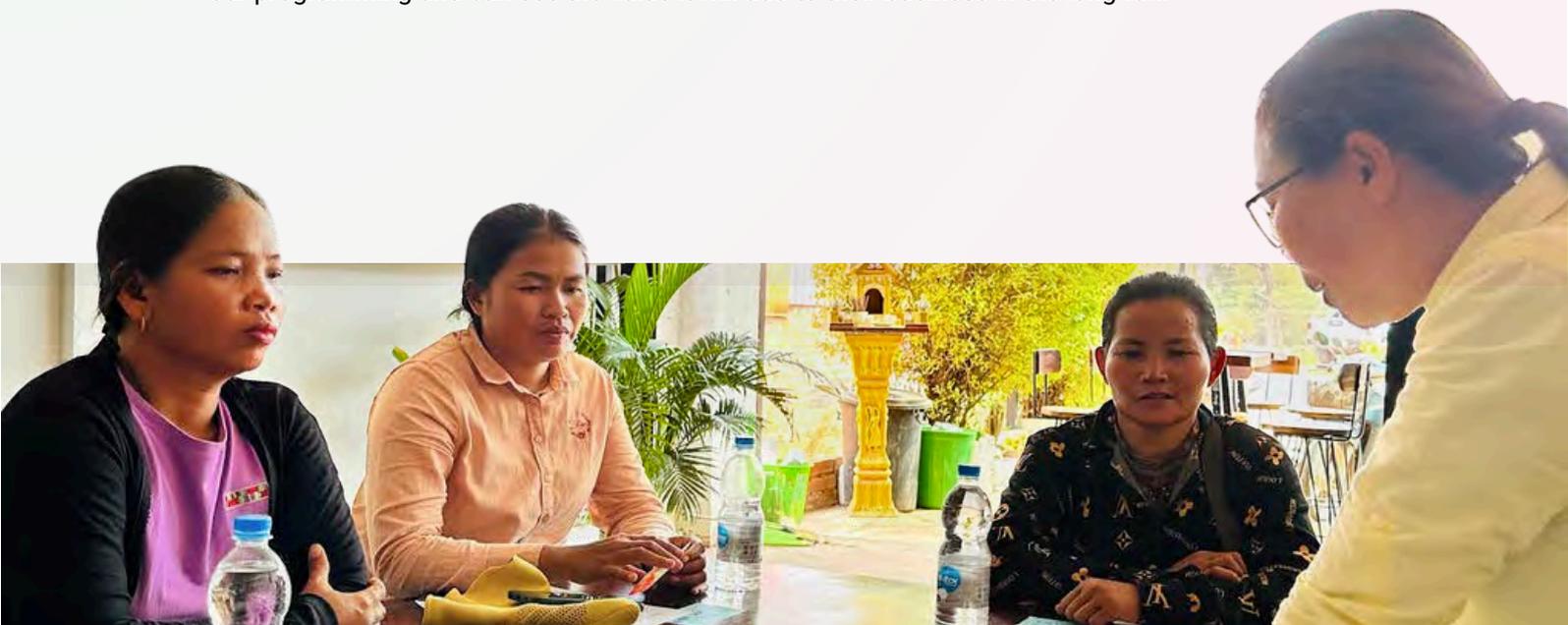
Working with the “right” participants

Every entrepreneur is unique, but many of them face similar challenges. so, how do we put together a great cohort?

When recruiting participants, we realized how important it was to spend enough time ensuring that we understood the precise strengths and needs of each entrepreneur, while selecting similar profiles for each cohort.

We have learned that:

1. Rural women entrepreneurs from the agriculture sector do not often identify themselves as being an “entrepreneur”. As such, **ESOs need to clearly articulate who the program is for**, avoiding jargon (largely borrowed from urban programming in the Global North), to ensure that they are not missed.
2. Although it’s possible to combine participants who come from various parts of the agriculture value chain, it is important to **select those with similar levels of knowledge and literacy**, ensuring the program is adequately tailored to meet their needs.
3. It is also important to consider motivation and **ensure that selection is done based on the goals** the entrepreneur seeks to achieve by participating in the program.
4. Finally, **commitment is key** - we often work with entrepreneurs who are excited to participate in our programming and can see the value it will add to their business in the long-run.



Another significant insight from our exploration is the profound impact of community-based approaches when powering rural women entrepreneurs. By engaging communities as a whole rather than solely focusing on individuals, these approaches not only foster a culture of mutual support and shared prosperity but also amplify the effectiveness of the support provided. In rural settings, where isolation can hinder individual entrepreneurial efforts, leveraging the collective power of the community encourages a more robust exchange of knowledge, resources, and support.

“

I prefer to have some women in my community to participate in the training alongside me. I feel safe traveling in groups, having support or learning with other female peers after class. I cannot ride the motor to the training alone.”

- Woman entrepreneur in Siem Reap



A communal learning environment accelerates the dissemination of best practices and innovations, facilitating a more widespread and equitable economic uplift within the community.



LEARNING 8

Finding a comfortable (and effective) pace

We believe that the pace of a program should be determined by the goals the entrepreneurs are seeking to achieve, rather than based on available budget. As the entrepreneurship ecosystem has evolved, we have seen a rise in requests to run shorter programs at lower costs, but we know that working with rural entrepreneurs takes more time, and money, and effort - there are extra costs associated with further travel, it's not possible to conduct virtual sessions to achieve scale, and the need for more printed materials due to lower levels of digital literacy.

A critical learning from our project is the significance of aligning support programs with the agricultural calendar and ensuring they are conducted during times when rural female entrepreneurs are most available, typically the off-season or less busy periods. This consideration respects the cyclical nature of agricultural work and ensures that entrepreneurs can fully engage without the added stress of managing peak season demands.

Instead of delivering all the content over the space of 1-2 weeks, we deliver 1-2 days at a time and spread out the training over a few months.

Most importantly, **consulting with entrepreneurs** to determine a schedule that works for them has always been our priority. This enables us to build in enough time between sessions that give participants adequate opportunities to practice and apply what they have learned. We often use the first workshop to schedule future program sessions - this builds a greater sense of flexibility, ownership and accountability.



Many female participants, even in peri-urban and rural communities, have a basic smartphone, moderate internet connectivity, and access to YouTube and Tik Tok to view different videos, as well as apps such as Facebook and Telegram that can support what they learn during the workshops. Sharing existing learning materials has created opportunities to connect and strengthen their knowledge in between sessions. This can inspire other women entrepreneurs to utilize practical tools in their own time and at their own pace.

“

I am feeling grateful to learn some new things about digital tools. Being able to practice at the same time helps me to catch up with the lessons. Before, I just learned theory without opportunities to practice like this. I can explore more functions on my smartphone too.”

- Woman entrepreneur in Siem Reap.



This approach highlights the need for program designs that are not only sensitive to the unique temporal rhythms of rural life but also adept at delivering prompt, visible success to sustain interest and participation.

LEARNING 9

Coaching and mentoring as a tool for enhancing program outcomes

A vital insight from our research is the transformative impact of enhanced coaching and mentoring and sustained follow-up for rural female entrepreneurs.

Coaching

One-on-one or group sessions led by a facilitator, where participants have the opportunity to reflect on individual and/or shared experiences and make an action plan.

Mentoring

One-on-one sessions led by someone who has experienced technical knowledge in a specific area that can guide a business through challenges they are experiencing.

Support programs must go beyond traditional skill and knowledge transfer, focusing on building entrepreneurs' confidence in their ability to learn, adapt, and apply new concepts independently.

Regular check-ins and ongoing mentorship create opportunities for entrepreneurs to reflect on their progress, troubleshoot challenges, and celebrate successes. This sustained support helps to build a resilient mindset, encouraging entrepreneurs to remain committed to their growth journey even in the face of setbacks. It also allows program facilitators to gather feedback on the practical application of the curriculum, enabling the fine-tuning of program content and delivery methods to better meet the needs of future participants. Facilitators should emphasize critical thinking and problem-solving skills, guiding entrepreneurs to trust their judgments and learn from both successes and failures.

“

I never had a dream before, I just think about what I want to do, then I do it without any plan. I am happy to be inspired by expressing my goals and dreams that I set.”

- Woman entrepreneur in Kampot



Continuous engagement beyond the conclusion of formal training sessions plays a critical role in ensuring that the knowledge and skills acquired are actively applied and further developed. This approach not only aids in the reinforcement of learning but also provides a safe space for entrepreneurs as they navigate the complexities of implementing new strategies in their businesses.

LEARNING 10

Don't just focus on the participants, spend time working with your facilitators!

We always put the entrepreneur at the heart of what we do, but our programs will only be as good as our facilitators.

Providing continuous training and mentoring for facilitators and trainers who play a pivotal role in the delivery of support programs for rural female entrepreneurs is critical. Ensuring that these key personnel are not only well-versed in the latest business concepts and practices but also sensitive to the unique challenges faced by rural entrepreneurs, particularly women, is essential for the success of these programs. Continuous professional development for facilitators helps keep the program content relevant and engaging and equips them with the necessary skills to effectively address the diverse needs of participants



“

Training and mentoring are crucial aspects for equipping facilitators with the necessary skills to create safe, inclusive environments that incorporate gender perspectives, and to foster a supportive community that better supports women-led businesses.”

- Lida Loem, SHE Head of Learning Design

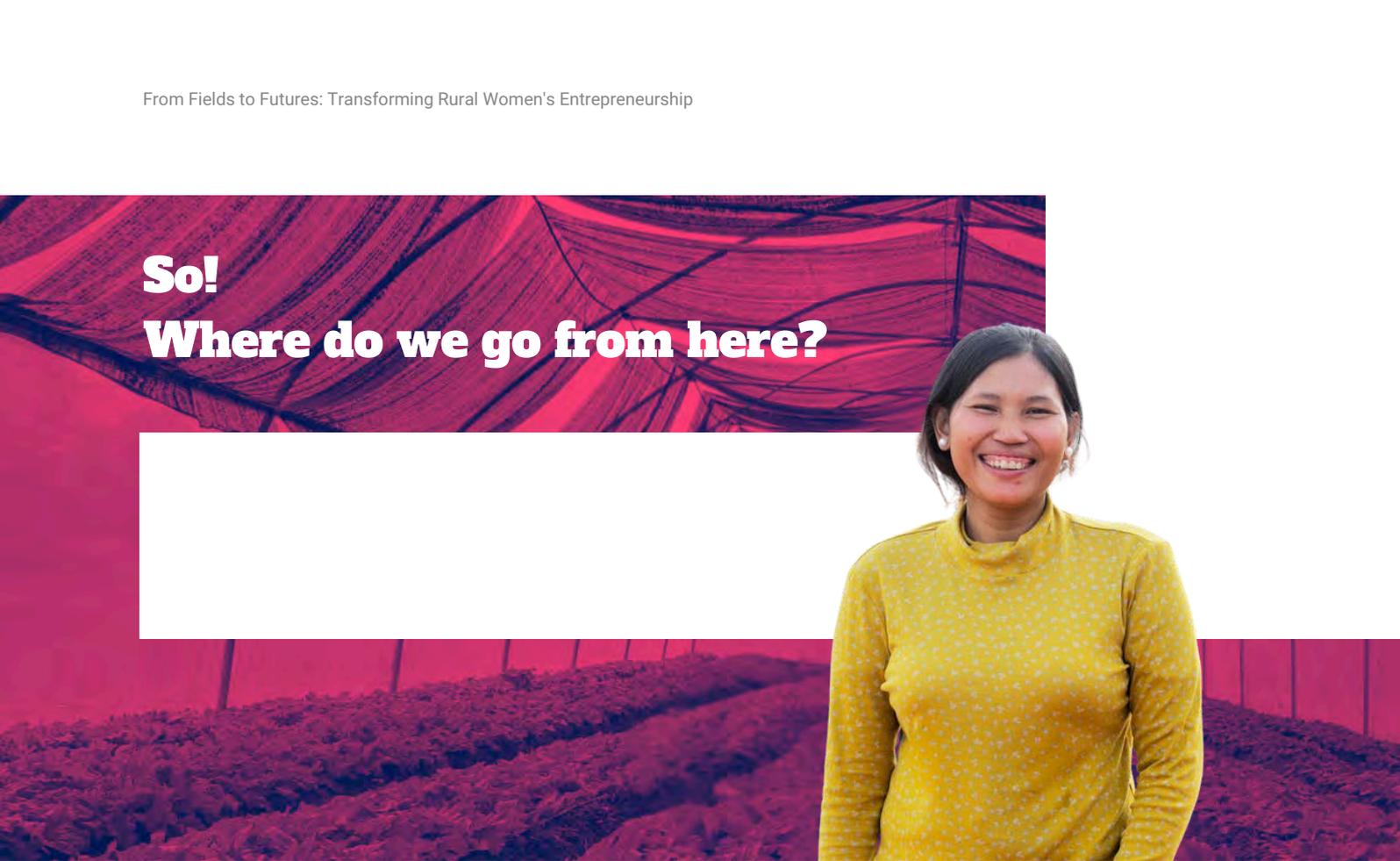
When asked what skills they think are most important, facilitators shared the need for training in soft skills such as empathy, active listening, and effective communication to better connect with and support entrepreneurs. This training should include strategies for fostering inclusive environments that encourage participation from all members of the community, regardless of their background or level of experience. Additional important skills include conflict resolution, pedagogy, adult learning theories and techniques, which can set facilitators up for success. Moreover, mentorship for facilitators, provided by experienced professionals, can offer valuable insights and guidance, ensuring that they remain motivated and effective in their roles.

DO NO HARM

It is crucial that all initiatives and interventions in our programs are designed and implemented in a manner that avoids causing harm or exacerbating existing inequalities, particularly for marginalized and underserved groups. This begins with creating effective policies, processes and training to safeguard staff (and participants) who may be confronted with disclosures of gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, and other forms of trauma. This is especially important in contexts like post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, and other countries where past conflict continues to negatively impact current and/or recent generations.



Finally, facilitators should have the opportunity to connect with their peers in order to practice, understand gaps in their knowledge, and see different styles of facilitating. Having co-facilitators can also maximize energy spent during workshop delivery.



So! Where do we go from here?

At **IDE**, our mission is to transcend traditional support mechanisms, moving beyond generic strategies to design and evolve programs that adapt to the intricacies of rural agricultural entrepreneurship and women's roles within it. We believe that good, impactful, inclusive entrepreneurship support programs that reach marginalized communities are hands-on, high-touch, time-intensive, and participatory.

We recognize that to power these entrepreneurs and increase prosperity, we need to appreciate the complexity of their challenges—from cultural and social barriers to logistical and financial constraints. This means rethinking our approaches, tools, and resources to ensure they are not only accessible but also meaningful to the women we aim to support.

As entrepreneurship support programs, we need to stop the “race to the bottom” in our efforts to attract more funding - we need funders to give us more time and money to continue running effective programs that enable women entrepreneurs within the agricultural sector to thrive on their own terms.

We hope that these learnings can be applied to the programs of other ESOs that may be reading this document and that this serves as a call to action for ecosystem stakeholders and donors to engage more deeply with the unique challenges and opportunities of rural female entrepreneurship in Cambodia. It is an invitation to join forces in adapting future programs, ensuring that they are effective and equitable, addressing women's specific needs to drive sustainable development and economic growth.

Are you with us?



ARE YOU WITH US?

iDE Powering
entrepreneurs
to end poverty.

 **EMAIL ADDRESS**
cambodia@ideglobal.org

 **Linkedin**
iDE Cambodia

 **WEBSITE**
ideglobal.org/country/cambodia

KEVIN D. ROBBINS
iDE Cambodia Country Director

 **EMAIL ADDRESS**
krobbins@ideglobal.org

THANK YOU!

Acknowledgements

We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who participated in the interviews—our clients and sector stakeholders. Your insights and perspectives were invaluable. We also wish to express our gratitude to all who took part in the ideation workshop. Your contributions were instrumental in shaping our outcomes.

Contributors

iDE : International Development Enterprises (iDE) is an international NGO dedicated to powering entrepreneurs to end poverty and provide in agriculture, climate, gender equity, nutrition, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), including solid waste management. iDE has been active in Cambodia since 1994, facilitating the development of inclusive and resilient market ecosystems. To date, our programs in Cambodia have reached over 6 million people.

Innovation Lab: Established within iDE in 2011, the iDE Innovation Lab is the first design shop of its kind in Asia and Africa. The iDE Innovation Lab is a non-profit consulting practice within iDE, based in Phnom Penh and Lusaka, which provides human-centered design services to iDE's programs globally, as well as external clients.

Paul Polak Innovation Fund: Inspired by the legacy of iDE's founder, Paul Polak, iDE's Innovation Fund aims to unlock new opportunities for scale and impact. It provides the space to test novel ideas that could be transformative. Without the constraints and pressures of traditional project funding, we have the flexibility to fail fast, to learn, and to pivot.

SHE: Support Her Enterprise (SHE) integrated with iDE in January 2024. The same talented team delivers evidence-based curricula and methodologies to support iDE programs and external clients. Over the last 10 years, SHE has delivered incubators, accelerators, and standalone training to over 1,500 women entrepreneurs across 10-plus provinces of Cambodia. We believe that by providing gender-focused, culturally tailored innovative business support to women entrepreneurs, we can power women to create positive social, economic, and environmental changes for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Researchers and Writers:

Keisha Gani, Program Director, SHE

Lida Loem, Head of Learning Design, SHE

Phearak Maksay, Senior Design Manager, Innovation Lab

Sascha Schneider, Entrepreneurship Venture Expert, Innovation Lab

Vandy Moung, Design Strategist, Innovation Lab

Graphic Designer:

Saopanhasy Kret (Jason), Communications Officer

Advisors :

Kevin Robbins, Country Director, iDE Cambodia

Lauren Riley, Director of Gender Equity and Social Inclusion, iDE Global

Michel Dauguet, Senior Director of Social Enterprises, Impact Investments, Alternative Finance, iDE Global