

Bread Power: How Bakeries Are Sustaining Livelihoods in Rwanda

North, Meg

East Africa Program Officer, The Women's Bakery, Rwanda, meg@womensbakery.com

The Women's Bakery is an education-centric social enterprise committed to empowering women and developing women-owned businesses. At our core and in our services, we are women-centric. We strive to provide women with:

1. An educational foundation;
2. Sustainable and gainful employment;
3. Opportunities for improved health.

As a social-enterprise start-up we have learned a lot since we began operations in 2015. One of the most important learnings has been that though impactful, our skills development training is not always enough to guarantee improved livelihoods. Thus, in addition to our 150+ hours of vocational training, we have developed a unique, business model that we call a "Bakery In A Box." This model aims to provide not only skill-based training, but also launches trainees into direct employment opportunities in bakeries. This packaged program emphasises the collective opportunity for education, gainful and sustainable incomes, and health.

ABSTRACT PITCH

The Women's Bakery believes that providing sustainable and gainful opportunities for women will have a multiplying effect that will help achieve the SGDs developed by the United Nations. With consistent income, women will invest in education and healthcare, improve their own autonomy, and create a strong sense of community. From our baselines surveys, pre-and post-tests, and focus groups, we are able to collect powerful indicators that amplify expected (and unexpected) outcomes of our work. Feedback loops from our evaluation process continues to inform our decisions to refine our programming and model.

Using both quantitative data and qualitative reflections from TWB's East Africa based team, The Women's Bakery would like to present on how data directly informs programming. And, the challenges and success of expanding programming while we simultaneously refine our model. Instead of fearing what it means to pivot and grow, TWB seeks to promote boldness in issues of change in how programs are delivered. Too often, other non-profits or social impact groups are fearful to change how they implement programs é but if we can trust the data we collect, we have an opportunity to understand the highly integrated processes of what it means to change lives, communities, and the world.

We believe in the power of bread to change the lives of individuals, their families, their communities, and the world - and we look forward to sharing this with the ICSD community – one slice of bread at a time.