

# Women Who Dare: Success Factors for Women Sales Agents of Solar Products in Tanzania

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## Executive Summary

What propels women to be agents of sustainable development in rural communities in the developing world? This study examines critical success factors of female micro entrepreneurship in Tanzania through a series of interviews with saleswomen of solar products who live and work in rural communities. The micro entrepreneurs I spoke with distribute clean energy products through the social enterprise Solar Sister. Solar Sister's mission is to envision a brighter world powered by women entrepreneurs. To date, Solar Sister has trained over 4,000 entrepreneurs who have reached 1.5 million people throughout Africa with clean energy products. In addition, it provides comprehensive business training and ongoing mentoring to their women micro entrepreneurs, promoting women's economic empowerment and giving women the tools that enable them develop sustainable businesses in their communities and become local agents of sustainable development. To understand what makes a successful local entrepreneur, I conducted interviews with 24 SSEs identified as top sellers in their respective districts. Through analyzing these interviews, I identified three key factors that contribute to entrepreneurial success. The first, access to human capital, suggests that women who had the opportunities of an education and/or previous business experience were better prepared for microentrepreneurship. The second, strong community connections, demonstrated the necessity of utilizing social networks to advance entrepreneurial success. Lastly, an entrepreneurial spirit characterized by positivity, resiliency, and grit allowed these women to keep pushing forward and persevere in their business despite challenges. This case study builds upon existing research of women micro entrepreneurship while providing additional insight into women's work in the informal economy specifically in clean energy distribution, uncovering insights about women's journeys to entrepreneurial flourishing that should influence policy and further research in development.

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## Introduction

In the field of international development, women are touted as the key to community nourishing and thriving. In July 2010, the United Nations created UN Women, an entity “dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. According to UN Women, when more women work it is good for business, grows economies, and is key to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (UN Women). Project Drawdown, a nonprofit organization which published the New York Times bestseller *Drawdown*, a leading resource for climate solutions, in 2017 also highlights the importance of women for reversing global climate change. Educating girls and improving family planning are respectively the 6th and 7th top ranking solutions to climate change, collectively projected to reduce 119.2 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> cumulatively between 2020-2050 (Hawkins). Overall, there is increasing recognition that women’s economic empowerment is key to “achieve broader development goals” such as poverty reduction and improving education and welfare (Golla 2011, p. 3).

Many global organizations perceive immense opportunity in women’s leadership. But what, practically, does utilizing the power of women in the developing world look like? And what sets a woman up for success? There are many local, mission-driven, and social enterprise organizations seeking to support women on their journey towards empowerment and agency. Solar Sister is one of these organizations; it trains and supports women to become microentrepreneurs, delivering clean energy products directly to homes in rural African communities. Recruiting entrepreneurs is one of Solar Sister’s Key Performance Indicators - the more entrepreneurs trained through their entrepreneurship program, the more lights and other solar products are sold and distributed, which results in greater impact as the health, financial, and educational benefits of clean energy are spread throughout the community. Knowledge of which factors and circumstances make women successful Solar Sister Entrepreneurs (SSEs) is vital to understanding exactly why women are agents of sustainable development and how they can expand their impact on communities. Research has shown that the impact of educating girls and economically empowering women is substantial and we have seen it grow especially in the last few decades (Kabir 2012). But how do women in the developing world do what they do? By

utilizing Solar Sister as a case study to analyze what makes women successful as SSEs, I aim to discover key success traits and characteristics of women entrepreneurs that can be applied more generally, providing deeper insight into women who dare.

### Research Question

The fundamental question guiding my research is:

*What are the preconditions, skills, and resources that position women micro entrepreneurs to become successful community-based agents of sustainable development?*

By investigating this question I aim to discover what the specific, key factors are that make the Solar Sister Entrepreneurs at the summit successful distributors of clean energy products. I hope to gain a better understanding of how these women micro entrepreneurs leverage their skills and resources for successful business development, compete strongly in markets, and achieve economic empowerment. While this case study focused specifically on the success factors of the Solar Sister Entrepreneurs I interviewed, my findings can certainly be generalized to other women micro entrepreneurs in Tanzania and East Africa, and perhaps throughout the developing world. However, further research would be necessary to justify this claim.

## Literature Review: Women as Local Agents of Sustainable Development

### **Women Leading Informal Economies in the Developing World**

Many people in Tanzania live in poverty without adequate employment opportunities. However, those operating in informal economies at the Base of the Pyramid are not only producers, but consumers as well, providing great business opportunity and market potential (Prahalad 2005). In addition, the emergence of an expanding community of women entrepreneurs has been “the most significant economic and social development in the developing world (Henning & Akoob 2017, p. 3). Therefore, many social enterprises have targeted the informal economy, perceiving it as an opportunity to implement new innovative businesses to alleviate poverty and promote sustainable development. In addition, countless studies have shown that when women earn an income, the benefits are exponentially spread beyond the woman herself; her children have better access to education, her family is healthier, and her entire community thrives. In Kenya and Tanzania specifically, over 50% of households are headed by women, due to the recent shift of many men to more urban industrial areas (Henning & Akoob 2017). The informal sector thus provides an important economic opportunity for women who would otherwise be unemployed and confined to the home without their micro businesses.

### **Micro Entrepreneurial Successes and Challenges**

Living in a village in rural Tanzania without access to basic services like running water and electricity is hard. Living as a woman in rural Tanzania without access to many basic services in a culture with strict gender roles is harder. Working as a woman entrepreneur selling solar light products throughout rural Tanzania, taking on the challenge of eradicating energy poverty while pushing against an oppressive patriarchal society seems nearly impossible (Feinstein et. al. 2010). Yet, over 4,000 women across Tanzania, Uganda, and Nigeria have achieved and continue to achieve this amazing feat (Solar Sister). Against these obstacles, how are these women able to do the incredible work that they do?

## **Driven by Social Impact**

Several studies have sought to answer this question, identifying characteristics of success in microentrepreneurs across the developing world. One study in 2017 identified six key characteristics of successful micro franchisees (micro entrepreneurs) serving customers at the Base of the Pyramid (BoP). These six were: being a woman, having a strong and supportive network, working towards their goal like their lives depend on it, sufficiently educated, speaking the local language, and being well trained (van Zutphen 2017). Through analyzing seven case studies, it found that one of the reasons women make the best micro entrepreneurs is because they are more focused on the greater good than their male counterparts. This echoed the findings of another study in 2012 which identified a strong belief in women that an important marker of a successful business is how much it gives back to the community. This belief translates into a motivational desire among women entrepreneurs to engage in business that makes a social contribution. In addition to economic growth, women micro entrepreneur businesses are driven by a caring attitude (Williams & Gurtoo 2012). Furthermore, economic growth is a driving factor insofar as it increases a woman's ability to provide for her family, not in her achievement of profit maximization for personal benefit (Mitchell 2004). Another aspect that sets women entrepreneur's ahead is their "relationships, social networks and social influence... lay the foundation for a solid and personalized customer base" which enhances their ability to expand their business (van Zutphen 138).

## **Reliance on Support Networks**

In general, women entering the informal economy suffer from a deficiency of familial and community support. Typically, their husbands and other men comfortable and confident with holding the majority of power in their patriarchal society, seldom are eager to share the economic sphere with women (O'Neill & Viljoen 2001). Those with economic power do not want to give it up and often feel threatened by women who attempt to start businesses for themselves. These societal barriers make it even more crucial for a women entrepreneur's success when her

husband actually does support her business efforts (van Zutphen 2017). This additional support can ease her transition into the more traditional male gender role of starting a business and improves her chances of success. The patriarchal structure of African society has a negative impact on the achievement, motivation, and self-assurance of female micro entrepreneurs who are working against an uphill battle. In fact, this holistic study of 55 countries found that women in strict patriarchal cultures were less likely to pursue social organization forms than their male counterparts, indicating that gender norms have a significant impact on entrepreneurship (Hechavarria & Ingram 2016).

### **Driving Motivations**

Through conducting 80 in-person questionnaires, a 2017 study in the North-West province of South Africa found three motivational factors in particular to be the driving factors of women entrepreneurs: Destitute Conditions, Entrepreneurial Spirit, and Passion for Product (Henning & Akoob 2017). Destitute Conditions were the highest ranking driving for starting a business and were associated with low incomes and lack of job availability, that is, the extrinsic push due to rise out of poverty. Entrepreneurial Spirit, the second highest ranking factor was also described as “Self-fulfillment; Need for independence and Need for a challenge,” that is, the intrinsic pull to start a business in order to fulfill internal desires. Destitute Conditions were the second highest ranking factor and were associated with low incomes and lack of job availability, that is, the extrinsic push due to rise out of poverty. Lastly, Passion for Product was the third factor associated with “Confidence in the product” and “Develop my hobby,” suggesting a second intrinsic factor with less pull than Entrepreneurial Spirit while still being a significant motivation. In addition to the greatest motivations for starting a business, the researchers also wanted to understand what the greatest challenges were to doing so. A lack of business and financial skills was ranked as the number one barrier and the lack of a business network was the number two barrier (Henning & Akoob 2017). The study recommended providing additional skills training to these women to increase their likelihood of entrepreneurial success, a gap that Solar Sister fills through its thorough business training program for micro entrepreneurs.

## Materials and Methods

### **Background**

Each year Solar Sister holds an annual entrepreneur summit inviting the top selling Solar Sister Entrepreneurs (SSEs) from each region to attend a two day conference providing updated training and mentorship in Arusha, TZ. This study analyzes the 24 surveys we conducted at the summit. The surveys were conducted during the first day of the summit in the same setting and translators, and with one entrepreneur at a time, creating consistency in interview format.

### **Data Acquisition**

My research partner Amanda Eason, our research mentor Leslie Grey, and I developed a google form survey containing interview questions that was administered to Solar Sister Entrepreneurs (SSEs) at the summit on June 28th, 2019. The survey contains around 20 questions (with some conditional, follow up questions) and not all questions were answered in every survey. In total, we interviewed 55 SSEs using this survey. 24 of these interviews took place at the SSE summit in Arusha on June 28th and the remaining 31 took place across seven sisterhood groups in five regions of Tanzania. For the purposes of this study, I will only be analyzing the 24 interviews from the summit for two primary reasons. Because these women had been deemed most successful by Solar Sister due to their higher sales performance in their respective region, they were the best group to analyze for the purposes of this study. I did consider comparing their responses with the 31 responses from the field, however, these surveys were conducted in much more varied conditions and circumstances, ultimately making the data we gathered from them less reliable.

Each interview was conducted through the use of a translator. Most of the interviews at the SSE summit were translated by our primary translator, Lumba, whom we hired for our research. A handful of interviews at the SSE summit were translated by Johnny, a Solar Sister Business Development Associate, to allow us to conduct two interviews at once. We did not record which interviews were translated by the Business Development Associate (BDA) which

could have led to some slight differences in translation that may have affected some of our survey responses.

Before we interviewed each SSE, we secured informed consent to participate in our study, assured them that their responses would be anonymous, and thanked them for their time. This interview introduction was standard for every SSE. Each interview had three sections, the first asking basic demographic questions, the second regarding their employment with Solar Sister, and the third section intended to reveal the overall success of the SSE and pinpoint their success factors. One question was added late to the survey: “what are your main challenges?.” Only 12 of the 24 SSEs interviewed at the summit were asked this question.

## **Full Interview Script**

### *Section one: demographic information*

- What is your age?
- What level of education have you completed?
- What is your region?

### *Section two: Solar Sister employment*

- How long have you been an SSE?
- What did you do before becoming an SSE? (Occupation, source of income, other roles, etc)
- How did you learn about Solar Sister/Who recruited you to become an SSE?
- Where did you get the finances to buy your first lights? (e.g. Socas, VICOBAAs, Farmers Union, husband/family member, etc)
- Where do you get financing now? (e.g. Socas, VICOBAAs, Farmers Union, husband/family member, etc)
- What village organizations do you work with? Do you work with any other organizations?
- How many products do you sell on average per month?
- How many small systems versus larger systems?
- What tactics do you use to sell your products?

- Who do you mostly sell to? Please rank: family, friends, neighbors, open markets, door to door, other.
  - If "other" please specify
- How do you find new customers?
- Where do you sell? Please rank: your village, neighboring village, far village, other (please specify).
  - If "other" please specify

*Section three: Legacy, successes, and challenges*

- Have you inspired and recruited any other women to become SSEs?
  - How many and who were they?
  - Who was the first SSE that you recruited? Where was she from and how far is that from you? How did you know her?
- Who is the person who has been most important to your success?
- What characteristics or circumstances have made you such a successful SSE?
- What are your main challenges?

All interviews at the SSE summit were conducted individually. Questions were asked and recorded by either myself, my research partner Amanda, or our faculty accompanier Dr. Grey and translated by Lumba or Johnny. Because we had access to wifi at the summit, the survey responses were typed directly in google forms and immediately submitted.

## **Ethical Consideration**

Each survey we conducted we did so with the aid of a translator to ensure maximum understanding amongst participants. Our primary translator Lumba helped us formulate the wording of the survey questions, was familiar with the goals of the survey, and worked with us for the entirety of the project. We had one additional translator, a Business Development Associate (BDA) named Johnny who assisted us with a handful of interviews at the Entrepreneur Summit to increase the efficiency of our interviewing, allowing us to conduct two interviews simultaneously. At the beginning of each survey, we thanked participants for their time, asked them for informed consent, explained that their responses would be anonymous, and told them they were free to end the interview at any point. We only began the interview questions after receiving affirmative verbal consent from each participant that they understood what they were agreeing to.

In addition, we wanted to ensure that our interviews were as minimally invasive as possible. During the Entrepreneur Summit we made an announcement that we would be conducting interviews throughout the Summit and that any woman could come to us at any point throughout the day to be interviewed at her convenience. Most of our interviews were conducted during breaks between sessions or free time so that we did not affect the women's participation in the conference.

## **Data Analysis**

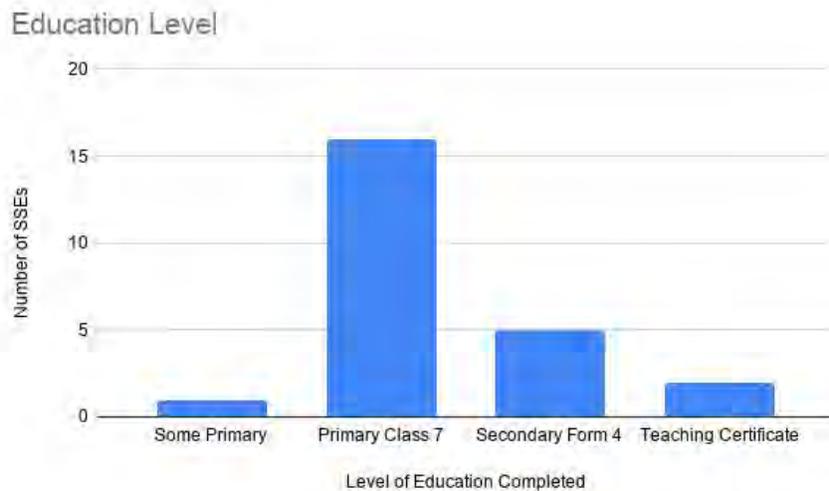
In order to analyze the survey responses, I coded the responses to each question. First, I read over the responses several times, pulling out common themes and categories. Then I went through the responses in detail, tracking the number of times the same response was given that related to each theme or category. Because the questions were open ended, the women often gave long form responses with several distinct pieces of information. For example, for the question “What did you do before becoming an SSE?” some women mentioned only one previous occupation while others described multiple occupations and responsibilities. Each distinct response was counted individually, resulting in more coded responses than the number of women interviewed. The only two questions with an equal number of responses as women were “what is your education level?” and “have you recruited/inspired other women to become SSEs?” Once I had coded all of the responses, I analyzed which responses occurred most frequently in order to identify major trends in the data.

## Findings

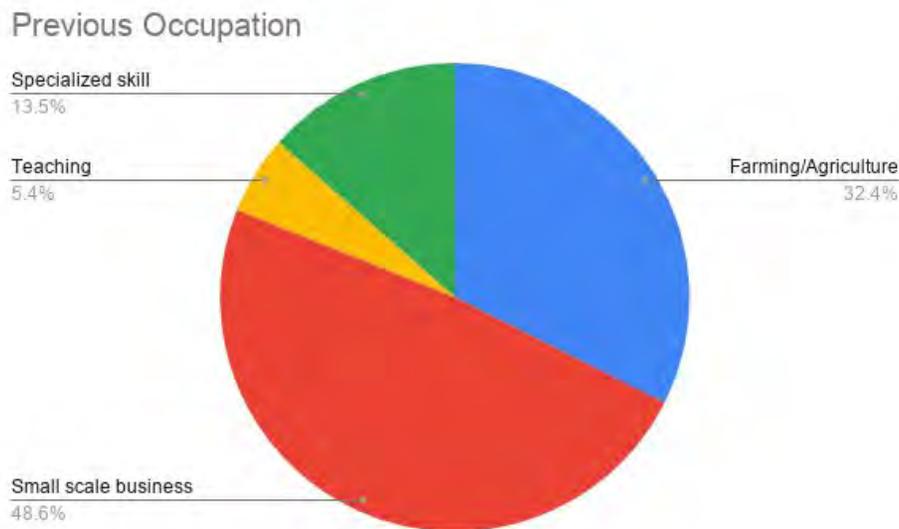
Three major themes emerged from my interview analysis. First, it appears that successful SSEs have access to key resources, particularly human capital and financial capital, which aid in their success as micro entrepreneurs of solar light products. Secondly, this group of women seemed to have strong community connections and networks that facilitated the growth of their solar product businesses. Lastly, their entrepreneurial spirit demonstrated through clear leadership, a positive attitude, and resiliency in the face of challenges is a key driving internal factor which allows these women to accomplish their goals and improve their livelihoods.

### **Success Trait #1: Access to Human and Financial Capital**

The majority of the successful SSEs from the summit had leveraged two key sources of human capital that likely set them up for entrepreneurial success: an education and previous business experience. Every woman interviewed had some level of formal education and of the 24 women, only one had not completed their primary education. In addition, more than a quarter of the women had completed their secondary education. 18 of the 24 women (75%) had previous business experience of some sort, whether it be selling grocery items, clothing, or other products. Their previous sales experience certainly gave them helpful background knowledge and skills they could build off of through the Solar Sister's business training modules.



*Fig 1. Educational Achievement.*



*Fig 2. Previous Occupation*

In addition, all of the women at the summit had access to finances allowing them to afford the initial buy-in cost of 10,000 tsh to become an SSE. Half of the women interviewed had this financial capital because of their previous businesses. A third utilized loans either from a VICOBA, savings group, or personal connection. The majority of the women (17 of 24) revealed that their solar business now is mostly self-sufficient, that is, they currently sell enough solar products to continue to purchase more products through their profits. Even still, many explained that they continue to utilize other resources and capital streams to supplement their business,

especially in off-seasons or when sales are down. A third of the women (8) utilize profits from their other businesses to purchase more solar products and seven continue to participate in loan programs.

## **Success Trait #2: Community Networks**

In addition to utilizing human and financial capital, another theme among the SSEs interviewed were their deep community connections and networks as well as the strength of their personal support systems.

When explaining what key sales tactics SSEs used, many women described engaging existing community networks. The most common response tactic was door-to-door sales, which Solar Sister provides direct training on. However, the second most common tactic mentioned by over a quarter of SSEs was the mobilization of their preexisting groups and networks to facilitate sales. The women also mentioned selling at community gatherings, in religious groups, and to friends. Another theme that arose was the reputation of being “well-known” as a sales tactic. A few women mentioned that their customers come to them, rather than seeking them out, suggesting their influence and popularity in the community. Additionally, when asked directly about how they approach customer recruitment, 75% (18) of the women said that word of mouth through their current or previous customers was how they were connected to new customers. This was by far the most common customer recruitment tactic.

Even outside of their customer networks, these 24 women were well connected in their communities. Over 90% (22) women said that they were involved with at least one village or outside organization in addition to their affiliation with Solar Sister. Over three quarters of the women are members of a VICOBA (village community bank), SACOS (a more established self help cooperative), or women's savings group. Other village and community groups the women were involved with included farmers groups, religious organizations, social enterprises, social groups, health education groups, volunteer programs, and village government. While all 24 SSEs were recruited through a Solar Sister BDA, many were connected to the BDA through their existing networks. Five were connected to a BDA through a partner organization that works with

Solar Sister, four through their VICOBA groups, three through village leadership connections, two through a family member, and one through an agricultural group.

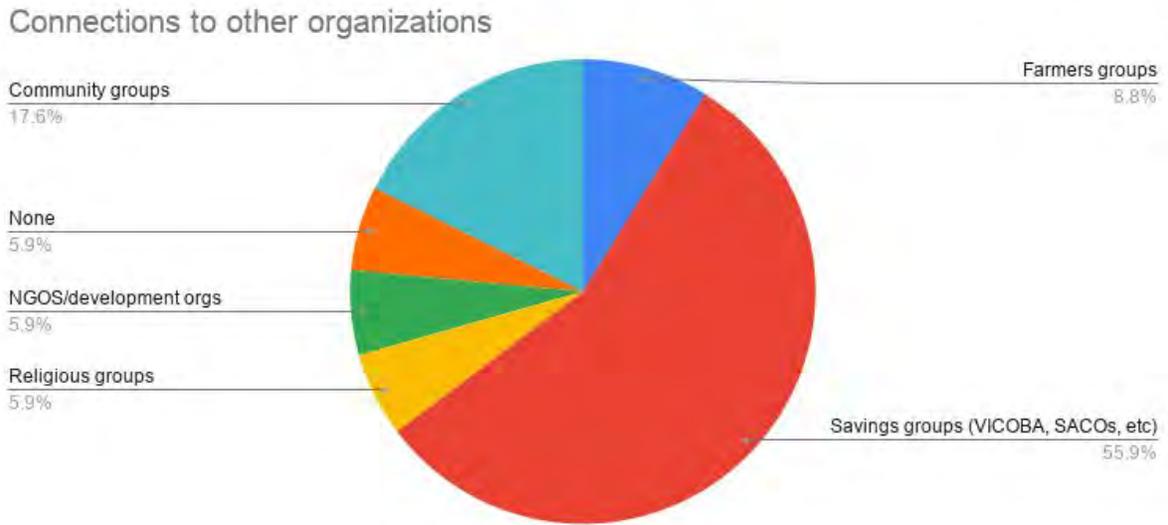


Fig 3. Community Organization Involvement

In addition to being recruited through their existing networks, the majority of the SSEs at the summit spread the opportunity of micro entrepreneurship back into their community. Nineteen of the 24 women had successfully recruited at least one additional SSE since becoming an SSE themselves.

Have you inspired or recruited other women to become SSEs?

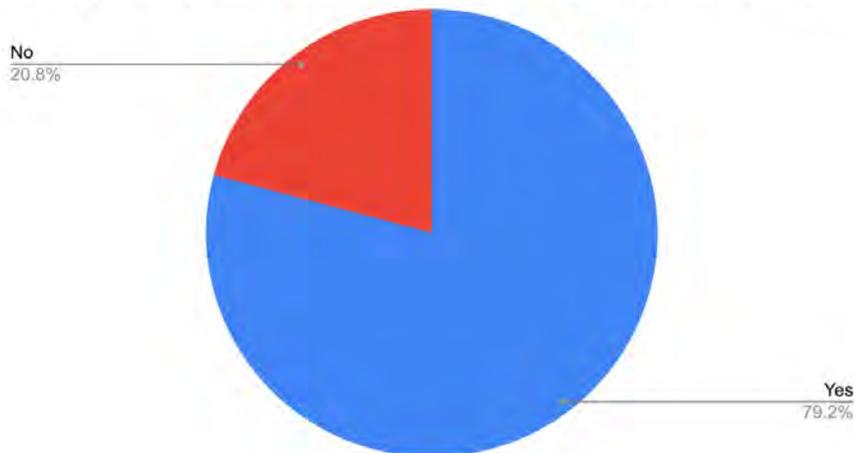


Fig 4. Recruitment

The women at the summit not only relied on their community for business development, but for personal support as well. Over 40% (10) of the women interviewed identified their husband as one of the people most important to their success. Several women explained how their husbands support their businesses by supplying them with capital when they are struggling or help them find customers or transport their products to the market. Parents and other family members were also commonly mentioned as significant supporters. In addition to family, another one of these support networks is the Solar Sister community itself. Over a third (9) of the women named a Solar Sister employee as one of their biggest supporters.

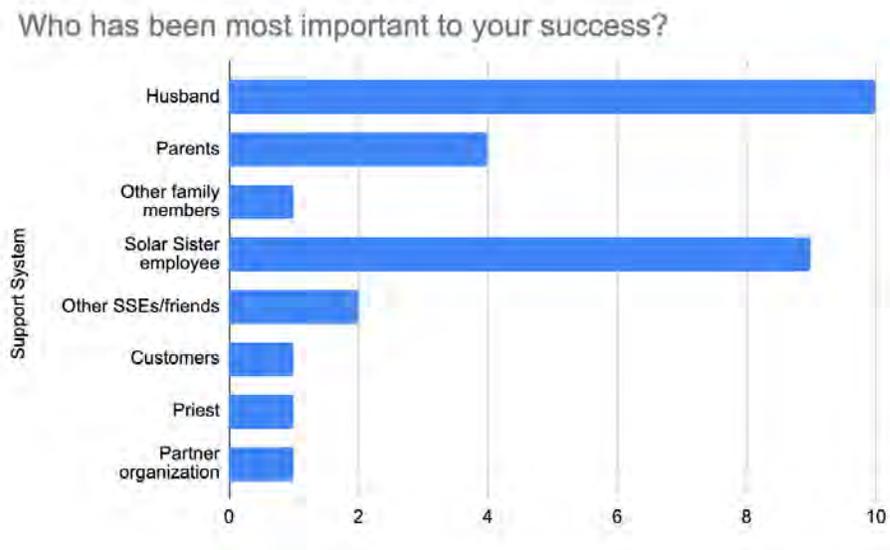
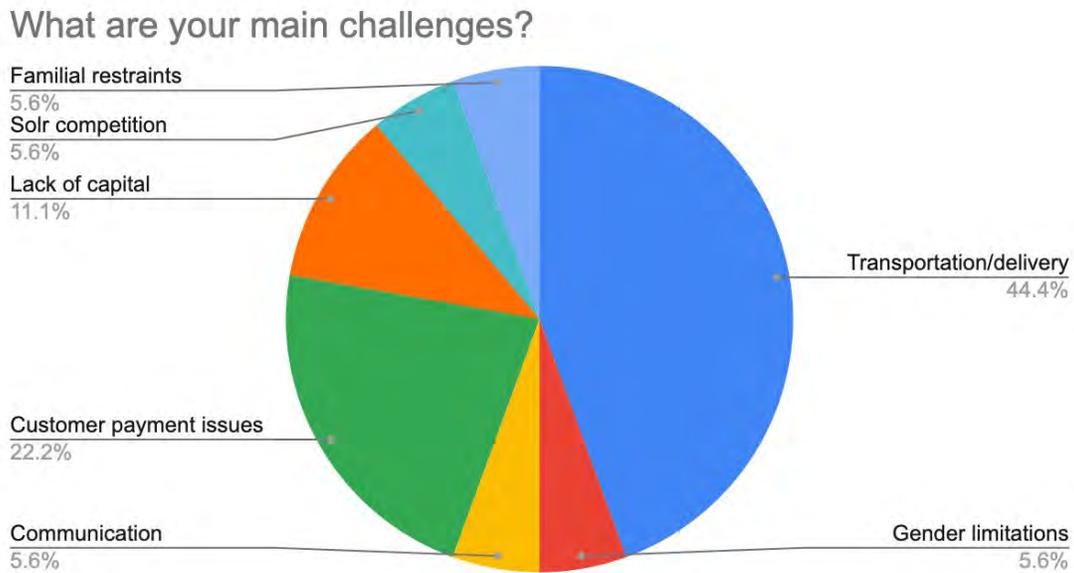


Fig 4. Support Systems

### Success Trait #3: An Entrepreneurial Spirit

Although the women at the summit were the most successful saleswomen in their respective regions, they still face significant difficulties working in the rural areas. To better understand what their barriers to success might be, we had the idea to incorporate a question asking them what their perceived challenges were. Unfortunately we were only able to ask the latter half of the women interviewed this question, receiving twelve responses rather than 24. Of these twelve, eight women mentioned difficulties with transportation and product delivery as one of their biggest challenges. Four explained that customers being unwilling or unable to pay for solar products was a significant challenge. Other challenges mentioned included restrictive

gender and familial expectations, communication issues and dealing with customer complaints, competition with other solar product suppliers, and lack of capital to finance further business investments. Despite these challenges, the women expressed an optimistic attitude. One woman explained that many of her smaller challenges are easily solved through reaching out to her BDA for support and another woman told us that she views her challenges as opportunities.



*Fig 5. Challenges*

In addition to overcoming various challenges, we asked each woman “what characteristics or circumstances have made you such a successful SSE?” Through this question, the women were able to identify the traits in themselves that made them high achieving micro entrepreneurs. I identified three main themes that were most frequently identified by the women. The most common theme was being kind, loving, and humble towards others. The second was remaining motivated despite challenges and being hardworking. Being passionate about the work and its community impact was the last frequently identified theme. One woman explained that Solar Sister was not a separate organization that she worked with, but a core part of her. Another reiterated one of Solar Sister’s key training advice, to turn challenges into opportunities. Several women also mentioned belief and confidence in themselves which gave them the strength and courage to continue in their business. Overall, these women truly exemplified an ambitious yet humble and steadfast entrepreneurial spirit.

## Discussion

### **Access to resources: why human and financial capital are a prerequisite to success**

My research has identified three key factors that influence women's micro entrepreneurial success. My first success factor, “access to resources” highlights the importance of education and work for women. While Solar Sister provides business training to its recruited micro entrepreneurs, those who have been educated or who have run a business are at an advantage right away because of their previous experience and knowledge. This suggests that development organizations and other social enterprises who provide business and educational opportunities for women are of utmost importance. In addition, access to the capital necessary to buy their first lights is a key financial barrier that must be overcome. Half of the microentrepreneurs at the summit had access to this capital because of their previous businesses, reiterating the importance of income generating opportunities for women which not only supply them with business skills but with finances as well. Women are more likely than men to use their income to grow their businesses, support their families, and put money back into the community and this was demonstrated by many of the women micro entrepreneurs at the summit. Loan programs were also a common resource these women relied upon, especially because Solar Sister itself does not provide direct loans. The women we interviewed accessed loans from a variety of programs including Village Community Banks (VICOBA), religious organizations, women’s savings group, more formal organized banks, and personal networks. Again, my findings highlight the necessity of loan services as a reliable resource women can use to jumpstart their businesses. My interviews show that these loans are crucial to entrepreneurial success. The high achieving micro entrepreneurs were those who took the human and financial capital they were given and utilized them strategically to grow their businesses.

### **Sales, recruitment, and support in community networks**

In addition to recognizing the importance of key human and financial capital resources to micro entrepreneurial success, strong “community networks” were critical as they provided

several key points of support. First and foremost, most women were recruited by a Solar Sister Business Development Associate through one of the community groups and networks they were already a part of. Being well connected helped expose women to the opportunity of micro entrepreneurship. Secondly, the women were able to utilize their connections to facilitate clean energy distribution and solar sales. This was the most obvious and expected use of their networks. However, their community networks provided even more important roles. These networks were not only utilized to make sales and spread clean energy, but to spread the opportunity of entrepreneurship as well. The overwhelming majority of the top selling women recognized the significance of the opportunity they had as a Solar Sister micro entrepreneur and utilized the same community networks they used to grow their business to share it - empowering other women to start their own microbusinesses through Solar Sister. I found this to be a particularly telling finding; successful micro entrepreneurs are aware of their success and want to share it with others, furthering community growth and development. This finding also reinforces the importance of networks in both initial and subsequent entrepreneur recruitment on Solar Sister's end. Having current micro entrepreneurs recruiting new micro entrepreneurs also takes pressure off of Solar Sister Business Development Associates whose primary job is recruitment. If preliminary recruits in a new village are well-connected and involved in the community these women will be more successful at recruiting others due to their positionality as trusted and well-connected community members than a Business Development Associate would be.

Lastly, community networks provided an important area of support for women micro entrepreneurs. Husbands were commonly identified as a key supporter by the women interviewed. This is especially important because in many Tanzanian communities women are not expected or even in some cases, permitted to work outside the home. Having a supportive husband can be the difference between a woman generating an income for herself and her family or remaining in poverty. One woman mentioned in her interviews how she felt lucky that her husband supported her business because other women's husbands restrict them from working. Another woman told us that initially, her husband was hesitant to let her work while she was still breastfeeding but came around to the idea once she proved how successful she could be. Changing the cultural expectations about women working outside the home and starting their

own businesses is key to allowing them to be successful. Children, parents, and other family members were mentioned as well suggesting that a tight knit and encouraging family, the closest community network most women have, is fundamental to their success because it provides them with necessary support to encourage their business development.

### **The entrepreneurial spirit: women who dare**

Being a Solar Sister Entrepreneur in a rural village in Tanzania is inherently challenging. Despite the common and significant challenges of lack of or unsafe transportation, solar product competition, defaulting or disgruntled customers, lack of capital, and restrictive gender expectations, women micro entrepreneurs continue to persevere and dare. The attitude the women interviewed had towards their businesses was incredibly hopeful and inspiring. They spoke with humility and attributed their success to the kind, gentle, and loving way they treat their customers. Their genuine respect and care for their customers was so evident as was their love of Solar Sister and their passion for the organization. They understand well the impact their solar business has not only on their own lives by providing them with an income generating opportunity, but on their customers by improving the health and wellbeing of their entire community. Because they truly believe in Solar Sister's mission, and support the clean energy products they sell, they are able to be genuine and authentic saleswomen which amplifies their success. Solar Sister's high quality training, resources, and support for their micro entrepreneurs positions them to be strong sales women but it is the entrepreneurial spirit within the women that keeps them grounded yet ambitious, daring, and optimistic which is key to their high achievement.

## Conclusion

This study was based upon survey data collected from 24 of Solar Sister's best selling, highest achieving women micro entrepreneurs. The survey responses for each woman were analyzed to determine their common success traits. Three key success traits were identified: access to human and financial capital resources, the utilization of tight knit community networks, and an entrepreneurial spirit. These success traits reveal important findings for how to facilitate and support successful female micro entrepreneurship in rural communities. Solar Sister provides critical training and mentorship to their micro entrepreneurs which other development organizations should learn from. In addition, access to schooling, business opportunities, and formal loan groups for women are absolutely necessary to help women micro entrepreneurs kick start their businesses. The surveys also revealed the importance of community networks and the varied ways women micro entrepreneurs utilize them which provides further insight into the importance of shifting cultural norms towards accepting women in the workforce. It also illustrated how women entrepreneurial opportunities are shared and spread throughout communities. Lastly, understanding what intrinsic motivations drew these women to Solar Sister highlights their connection to impact-driven work and their overwhelming resiliency despite the many challenges which further research and policy making must work to alleviate.

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