



# Evaluation Report

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs  
Evaluation Division

## Evaluation of the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs

June 2021



Evaluation Division

BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

Submitted to:

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## ACRONYMS

AWE	Academy for Women Entrepreneurs
CS	Case Study
DB	DreamBuilder
DOS	U.S. Department of State
DR	Dominican Republic
ECA	Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
EQ	Evaluation Question
ET	Evaluation Team
IP	Implementing Partner
ICS	Integrated Country Strategy
KII	Key Informant Interview
P3	Public-Private Partnership Unit
SGI	Small Group Interview
SI	Social Impact
USADF	U.S. African Development Foundation
USG	U.S. Government
W-GDP	Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative
WHA	Western Hemisphere Affairs

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of State's (DOS) Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) established the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) to support women entrepreneurs around the world. U.S. Embassies' Public Diplomacy Sections design and implement their own AWE model based on local conditions, contacts, networks, and needs.

During its inaugural year in 2019, approximately 2,000 women across 26 Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA) and African (AF) countries, as well as Spain and Papua New Guinea, participated in the AWE program. They were selected based on country-specific criteria such as age, years of business experience, and/or type of business ownership or idea, depending on each embassy's target audience. In some cases, embassies targeted more sophisticated businesses and other micro-enterprises. Interested women submitted applications, from which embassies and their implementing partners (IPs) selected participants. The first cohort of AWE participants (alumnae) graduated in November 2019. AWE expanded in 2020 to more than 50 countries worldwide to reach close to 5,000 more women.

## EVALUATION PURPOSE, QUESTIONS, AND METHODOLOGY

In 2020, ECA contracted Social Impact (SI) to conduct an evaluation of the AWE program to determine AWE's success in meeting program objectives. The evaluation provides evidence to inform programmatic decision-making to ECA's Public-Private Partnership (P3) Unit. The P3 unit consists of the AWE implementation team and Senior Partnership Officers. The findings also provide critical information to DOS, U.S. Congress, and other stakeholders such as Arizona State University's Thunderbird School of Management and prospective private sector partners. Evaluation results, analysis, and recommendations may be shared with participating U.S. embassies and consulates and local IPs. The evaluation addresses four questions, each of which has several sub-questions (detailed in the report body). The four overarching questions are:

1. To what extent is AWE meeting its objectives of empowering women entrepreneurs?
2. How has participation in AWE affected alumnae's access to business networks and resources?
3. What best practices of AWE should ECA share with U.S. embassies and local implementing partners as the program continues to expand?
4. To what extent is AWE contributing to the W-GDP mission of increased global peace and stability and economic prosperity?

This evaluation used a mixed-methods design comprised of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The evaluation team (ET) selected and tailored the outlined methodologies to best capture alumnae experiences and AWE program effects to inform programmatic decision-making. The team administered an online survey to 953 AWE 2019 alumnae across all 26 countries (out of 1,636 alumnae contacted), which the team complemented with document review and 109 qualitative interviews in five purposively selected countries chosen collaboratively by the P3 Team and SI: Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Kenya, and

Zambia. Qualitative methods included consultations with ECA and P3, key informant interviews (KIIs), and small group interviews (SGIs) with embassy and IP staff (including facilitators and coordinators), 2019 alumnae, and mentors. Finally, the ET conducted case studies in each of the five focus countries. Data collection efforts accounted for local differences in program implementation.

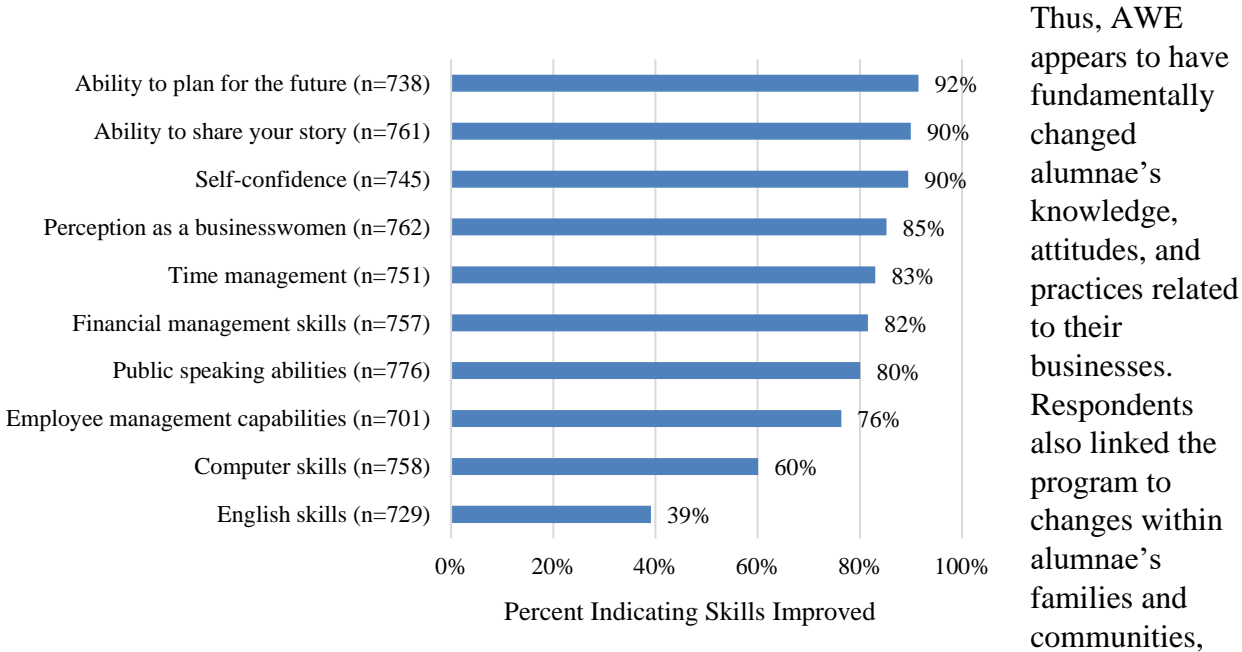
A key limitation of this evaluation is that a lack of a comparison group or baseline data prevents direct attribution of AWE changes. As such, estimates of changes in business metrics, skills, and other conditions are all based on self-reports and perceptions of AWE’s influence. Some claims may reflect a desire to flatter the program implementers. It is also possible that participation rates skew toward those with more favorable views. Nonetheless, findings do permit a reasonable estimation of the program’s influence.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

EVALUATION QUESTION 1: TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE ACADEMY FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS MEETING ITS OBJECTIVES OF EMPOWERING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS?

Survey results identified nine areas in which alumnae noted improved or greatly improved skills due to AWE (Figure 1), with the greatest improvements in various measures of confidence and ability to share stories. A specific factor to which alumnae attributed their increased confidence was realizing that they were not alone; there were other women like them who have succeeded as entrepreneurs. A majority of survey respondents indicated that because of AWE, they improved their marketing and branding, while a smaller, but still sizable number improved their pricing structures, accounting/bookkeeping practices, and employee management practices.

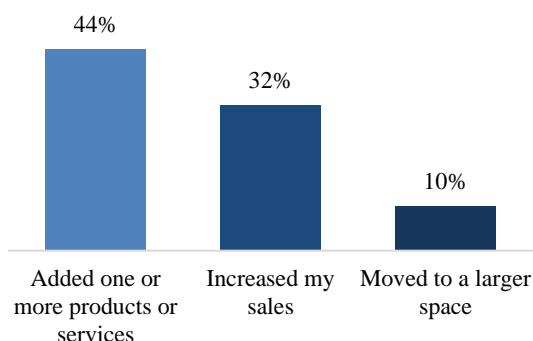
Figure 1. Percent Reporting Skills Improvement from AWE (Survey)



including improved family and community perceptions of them as businesswomen, which sometimes translated to increased support of various kinds.



*Figure 2. Percent Reporting Business Changes as a Result of AWE (Survey, n=823)*



AWE also provided a foundation upon which alumnae could effectively build their businesses. A majority of alumnae interviewees indicated that they were able to expand or scale their business (Figure 2), while only a few indicated starting a new business. Similarly, among those who track business metrics, 74 percent self-reported increased revenue since completing AWE. Twenty-nine percent of alumnae said they had increased their number of employees. Of the 662 survey respondents who own, operate, or manage a business, 91 percent had implemented

at least part of their Business Action Plan, though few had completed it. Many qualitative interviewees are seeking out the additional knowledge and resources needed to implement their plans.

COVID-19 posed a significant challenge for most women, whether preventing them from starting a business or preventing action on their Business Action Plan. Among survey participants, 67 percent agreed that the knowledge gained during AWE helped them adjust to COVID-19, though nine percent disagreed with this. Many qualitative interviewees also indicated adapting to the COVID-19 context by changing sales mechanisms (e.g., shifting to online sales and/or offering product delivery) and/or changing the products they sell. Many credited AWE for increasing alumnae's business acumen, which enhanced their independent decision-making and strategic planning skills, facilitating their ability to adapt to adverse situations like COVID-19. Overall, the ET concluded that AWE appears to have substantially empowered women both by increasing their incomes through business growth and as more self-confident and independent decision-makers.

## EVALUATION QUESTION 2: HOW HAS PARTICIPATION IN AWE AFFECTED ALUMNAE'S ACCESS TO BUSINESS NETWORKS AND RESOURCES?

While almost all embassies created post-program alumnae networks, these varied widely across all countries. Survey results indicate alumnae participating in select activities after completing AWE, but most did not report receiving post-program support, maintaining engagement with the embassy, or serving as mentors for the 2020 cohort. Alumnae identified peer networks, developed through AWE program participation, as the most important, followed by mentor networks. The greatest network benefits, across all types, were sharing business best practices, marketing/networking, and morale and personal development. Alumnae also utilized mentors strategically to build business knowledge and access local resources, perceived as not provided through embassy follow-up and AWE post-program support. Though an overwhelming majority of alumnae indicated a desire to mentor subsequent cohorts, formal mechanisms for cohort-to-cohort mentorship were unclear, as some embassy interviewees indicated this as IPs' purview, while others noted it as a best practice needing formalization. Of the few surveyed alumnae who accessed post-program opportunities and support, the dominant means of support was through external trainings, workshops, and networking events. Only some interviewed alumnae

identified varied levels of access to new markets and financing, with the majority receiving no support.

### EVALUATION QUESTION 3: WHAT BEST PRACTICES OF AWE SHOULD ECA SHARE WITH U.S. EMBASSIES AND LOCAL IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS AS THE PROGRAM CONTINUES TO EXPAND?

The ET identified several AWE best practices for ECA to share with Embassies and local IPs as the program continues to expand, summarized in Table 1.

*Table 1. AWE Program Best Practices*

Activities	Structure	Post-Program
Alumnae preferred activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitated DreamBuilder program</li> <li>• Mentorship</li> <li>• Networking</li> <li>• Speakers/external presenters</li> <li>• Trainings/workshops</li> </ul> Program implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contextualize content</li> <li>• Entrepreneurs as facilitators</li> <li>• Involve DOS alumnae in programming activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-person activities preferred</li> <li>• Cohort size 18–36</li> <li>• More program components for more success</li> <li>• Diverse group of entrepreneurs in cohort</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintenance of alumnae network through continued engagement</li> <li>• Capital/seed-funding access</li> </ul>

In 2019, AWE program configurations across countries (and in some cases specific cities)<sup>1</sup> varied widely. Despite being asked directly, few stakeholders shared specific program configurations that contributed to alumnae business success. Rather, alumnae noted specific program components that supported parts of their business implementation. DreamBuilder (DB), mentorship, and networking activities were the most notable, though the survey found a larger number of program components comprising the blended model may lead to a greater impact on skill development. Speakers/external presenters and trainings/workshops also contributed to business success.

Few alumnae interviewed mentioned program structure and post-program activities as contributing to business success, though alumnae interviewees preferred in-person activities to virtual activities. In-person support, speakers, and classroom discussions all helped clarify DB materials and enhance the content. Alumnae also preferred a cohort reflecting diverse sectors and levels of business experience that is an appropriate size (18–36 participants) to facilitate strong connections, networking, and presenting and receiving feedback in front of their peers.

Program implementation respondents identified best practices such as contextualizing content, hiring entrepreneurs as facilitators, involving DOS alumnae in programming activities, and facilitating access to seed funding/capital. Stakeholders suggested several post-program best practices, including engaging alumnae to follow their progress and continue connecting them

<sup>1</sup> See Annex 3: Focus Country Profiles for details.

with networks and resources to support business development and growth, such as events to expand exposure for alumnae products, and introductions to domestic and international markets.

#### EVALUATION QUESTION 4. TO WHAT EXTENT IS AWE CONTRIBUTING TO THE W-GDP MISSION OF INCREASED GLOBAL PEACE AND STABILITY AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY?

Embassy, IP, and alumnae respondents believed that AWE is meeting its economic prosperity goal. This is most evident in that most alumnae interviewees and almost half of IPs noted AWE benefitted alumnae's communities. However, while some alumnae perceived benefits at the country level (the most important of these is increased employment and economic development opportunities), very few mentioned regional-level benefits. How AWE contributed to the objective of promoting global peace and security was less evident. Most alumnae interviewees indicated that their perception of the United States had improved because of AWE. Similarly, 98 percent of all survey respondents said their view of the United States was more favorable or remained favorable after AWE.

By and large, the evaluation concluded that the AWE program was successful and well regarded.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings and specific suggestions from program stakeholders, the ET offers several recommendations to improve the program's effectiveness in terms of implementation, structure, and post-program support.

#### ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION

1. All country programs should localize or contextualize program content and topics to the local business environment even more than they already do. This includes providing content and guidance on business registration, taxes, insurance, and accessing loans or grants.
2. Maintain basic program components, prioritizing opportunities for formal and informal networking, mentorship, presentations/external lectures, soft skills training, pitch competitions, and, of course, continuing to utilize the DB platform. Likewise, continue to engage experienced facilitators, ideally with entrepreneurial and local business experience. At the same time, consider adjusting some program components to better meet alumnae needs in terms of: a) tailoring DB course material to participant levels; b) setting clear expectations for IPs to design a structured mentorship component that includes regular interaction with mentors who are familiar with alumnae businesses, the local business environment, and have mentorship experience/been trained in mentorship; and c) providing as many opportunities as possible for peer-to-peer networking.
3. Country programs should clearly define the types and role of local business leaders that should be involved in program as part of specific activities.
4. Clearly communicate with in-country teams about seed funding availability and provide more opportunities for AWE participants to win and/or otherwise access funding.
5. Integrate tangible ways to connect participants with new markets, both domestic and international, for their products and services.

6. Where COVID-19 constraints persist, consider providing access to the internet and computers, ensuring that the program is accessible by phone, and ensure the target group's digital literacy.
7. Address identified program gaps in financial knowledge, marketing, publicity, and legal aspects of business ownership by periodically identifying alumnae interests and knowledge gaps.
8. Integrate both AWE and other DOS/ECA program alumnae into program delivery as mentors, speakers, facilitators, and via networking opportunities.

## STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

9. To the extent possible given COVID-19 implications, prioritize in-person over virtual classes and events. This will support the networking component mentioned above.
10. Maintain current cohort sizes (between 18 and 36) to allow for meaningful interactions among cohort peers and between participants and implementors (IP, facilitators, mentors, speakers, etc.).
11. Survey participants ahead of the program start to identify a schedule that will work for the maximum number of participants, including best meeting days, times, and session frequency.

## POST-PROGRAM COMPONENTS

12. Prioritize identifying concrete sources or mechanisms for seed funding/capital for alumnae to start or expand their businesses.
13. Consider allocating resources to maintain and support the AWE alumnae network post-graduation.
14. Consider formally using WhatsApp as the primary vehicle for network outreach, given that it is by far the most widely used app.
15. Identify mechanisms to better capture alumnae contact information to ensure that it is possible to maintain contact with alumnae.
16. Continue to connect alumnae with new markets, both domestic and international, for their products and services.

# INTRODUCTION AND EVALUATION PURPOSE

## CONTEXT

The U.S. Department of State's (DOS) Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) established the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) in 2019 to support women entrepreneurs around the world. U.S. embassies' public diplomacy sections design and implement their own AWE models based on local conditions, contacts, networks, and needs.

The AWE program provides female entrepreneurs with the skills, resources, and networks needed to launch and scale businesses within an inclusive learning community. Key objectives include: i) providing resources for women to engage in U.S.-style online education with guided facilitation and localization using ECA-supported alumnae, local women business leaders, or other local partners; ii) fostering networks that support AWE participants' access to peer-to-peer mentorship, business partners, and scaling opportunities with businesses in the region and the United States; and iii) providing access to resources and ongoing ECA programs that will help women bring their business ideas to life.

The AWE program accomplishes these objectives through i) DreamBuilder (DB), an online learning platform; ii) localized learning with facilitators and business leaders; iii) networking and mentorship opportunities; and, in some cases, iv) access to business capital. DreamBuilder is an online entrepreneurship program for women, developed through a partnership between Arizona State University's Thunderbird School of Global Management and global copper mining company Freeport-McMoRan.

During its inaugural year, approximately 2,000 women across 26 Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA) and African (AF) countries, as well as Spain and Papua New Guinea, participated in the AWE program. Participants were selected based on country-specific criteria such as age, years of business experience, type of business ownership or idea, etc., depending on each embassy's target audience. In some cases, embassies targeted more sophisticated businesses, while others targeted micro-enterprises. Interested women submitted applications from which embassies and their implementing partners (IPs) selected participants. The first set of AWE participants (alumnae) graduated in November 2019. AWE expanded in 2020 to more than 50 countries worldwide, reaching close to 5,000 additional women.

## EVALUATION PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

In 2020, ECA contracted Social Impact (SI) to conduct an evaluation of the AWE program to determine AWE's success in meeting program objectives. This evaluation assesses AWE's influence on 2019 alumnae and their businesses, determines whether and how AWE furthers networking among participants and alumnae from AWE and other ECA-supported programs, and identifies best practices and lessons learned for improving the program (see Annex 1: Evaluation Scope of Work).

This evaluation provides evidence to inform programmatic decision-making to ECA's Public-Private Partnership Unit (P3). The findings also provide critical information to DOS, U.S.

Congress, and other stakeholders such as Arizona State University's Thunderbird School of Management and Freeport-McMoRan, and prospective private sector partners. Evaluation results, analysis, and recommendations may be shared with participating U.S. embassies and consulates and local IPs.

## EVALUATION QUESTIONS

This evaluation addresses the following Evaluation Questions (EQs), which are detailed in the findings sections below:

1. To what extent is AWE meeting its objectives of empowering women entrepreneurs?
  - How, if at all, has AWE influenced alumnae's knowledge, attitudes, and practices in their businesses?
  - How has AWE affected the businesses of program alumnae? In terms of business creation and/or growth? How many AWE participants have created new businesses versus scaled their businesses?
  - To what extent have alumnae implemented their business plans? How has COVID-19 affected AWE alumnae in realizing these business plans?
2. How has participation in AWE affected alumnae's access to business networks and resources?
  - How have AWE alumnae maintained networks with peers from their cohort? With U.S. embassies? With local business leaders? With mentors? How have such networks benefited the alumnae?
  - To what extent are AWE alumnae serving as mentors to 2020 cohorts?
  - What type of support are alumnae receiving post-program?
  - How has AWE contributed to improving the access of women entrepreneurs to business resources such as financing and new markets?
3. What best practices of AWE should ECA share with U.S. embassies and local implementing partners as the program continues to expand?
  - To what extent have the different AWE program configurations contributed to alumnae's business success?
  - Which program components and configurations can be best utilized with the blended model of AWE?
  - What types of local partnerships have U.S. embassies identified to increase resources available to participants and reduce cost?
  - How can ECA and U.S. embassies leverage existing ECA programs, resources, and alumni and U.S. embassy networks to reinforce the business success of AWE alumnae?
4. To what extent is AWE contributing to the W-GDP mission of increased global peace and stability and economic prosperity?
  - How do AWE participants perceive the benefits of AWE in their community/country/region?
  - How do program stakeholders, including U.S. embassies, perceive the value of AWE in meeting mission goals in their country/region?
  - How has participation in AWE affected alumnae's perception of the U.S. Government and its partners?



# EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

## EVALUATION OVERVIEW

This evaluation used a mixed-methods design comprised of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The evaluation team (ET) selected and tailored the outlined methodologies to best capture alumnae experiences and AWE program effects to inform programmatic decision-making. The team administered a survey to AWE alumnae across all 26 countries in which AWE was operational in 2019, which they complemented with qualitative methods in five purposively selected countries chosen collaboratively by the P3 Team and SI. Data collection efforts accounted for local differences in program implementation. The sections below briefly summarize the methodology used and limitations. For more detail, see Annex 2: Evaluation Design and Methodology.

## CONSULTATIONS AND DOCUMENT REVIEW

Following the evaluation “kick-off” call on August 28, 2020, the ET engaged in two discussions with ECA, including one with the P3 team and another with ECA Evaluation Division staff. The objectives of these meetings were gathering program information and generating consensus on evaluation objectives and design. To further understand the AWE programmatic context and inform evaluation design, the ET reviewed priority program documents that illuminated AWE’s design, scope, configuration, and differences across participant countries and helped the ET identify information gaps to be filled through primary data collection. Document review continued throughout the evaluation as part of the in-depth analysis of AWE’s implementation in the five focus countries.

Figure 3. Focus Countries



## EVALUATION COUNTRY SELECTION

As noted above, the survey included alumnae from all 26 2019 AWE implementation countries. In contrast, the evaluation’s qualitative component centered on five focus countries: Dominican Republic (DR), Ecuador, Guatemala, Kenya, and Zambia, which the ET and ECA’s P3 Unit and Evaluation Division collaboratively identified. After a review of program proposals from 2019, the ET proposed potential countries to the P3 unit based on the following criteria: whether AWE was operational in the country during the 2019 period, the total

Academy for Women Entrepreneurs Focus Country Program Components

	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	ECUADOR	GUATEMALA	KENYA	ZAMBIA
DreamBuilder (in-person)					
DreamBuilder (at-home)					
Mentorship (formal)					
Mentorship (informal)					
Site Visits					
Fairs					
Networking					
Speakers					
Workshops					
Bootcamp					
Pitch competition					
Pitch prizes					
Other components					

number of alumnae from each country, whether a country had unique program implementation features, and geographical representation. The P3 Unit reviewed these suggestions and proposed the five qualitative data collection focus countries, intending to learn from the most successful programs to date. As noted previously, AWE was implemented differently in each country. Figure 3 summarizes core program components in each of the five focus countries. See Annex 3: Focus Country Profiles for detailed country profiles.

## QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

The ET collected quantitative data from AWE alumnae via an online survey sent to all 2019 AWE alumnae with functional emails<sup>2</sup> (1,636) using ECA's Qualtrics survey platform. The survey, available in Spanish and English, covered a breadth of topics, primarily addressing EQs 1 and 2. Specifically, the survey collected information on demographics, program configuration, business impacts, networks, mentorship, soft skills gained, and alumnae satisfaction with the program. These thematic areas are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Survey Thematic Areas



## PREPARATION AND LOGISTICS

After translation, the ET and ECA conducted rigorous internal instrument testing in English and Spanish to assess the content, skip logic, and survey functionality. After updates based on these pre-tests, the ET conducted a pilot with a select sample of AWE alumnae and a cognition pilot with AWE facilitators, who provided feedback on each survey question and flagged any issues of understanding or experience that may have inhibited data quality. The ET sent invitations with the final anonymous survey link to all 1,636 emails ECA provided and sent weekly reminder emails during the data collection period to encourage higher responses. This was also supplemented through outreach by embassies who disseminated the survey to alumnae. Additionally, the ET sent two text notifications to a subset for whom phone numbers were available. At survey closing, the survey had a total of 953 out of the 1,636 potential responses, for a 58 percent response rate.

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<sup>2</sup> ECA provided the ET with respondent emails.



Table 2. Quantitative Survey Respondents Key Characteristics

	Number	Percent
<b>Age of Participant</b>		
18-24	67	7
25-34	343	38
35-44	331	36
45+	168	19
<b>Years of Business Experience Prior to AWE</b>		
None	185	20
Less than 5 years	524	58
5 to 15 years	161	18
More than 15 years	35	4
<b>Region</b>		
WHA	521	58
Africa	349	39
Other	32	4
<b>Operate, Own, or Manage Business</b>		
Yes, Prior to AWE	594	70
Yes, After AWE	122	14
Yes (did not disclose if prior or after)	25	3
Does not own, operate, or manage	112	13

## QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

During data collection, the ET monitored incoming survey responses on the Qualtrics platform daily and performed a more rigorous data quality check every four days using SI's high frequency check statistical analysis protocols. After the survey closed, the ET conducted a rigorous cleaning and final data quality review. All data were analyzed using Stata 15 software to ensure transparency and reproducibility of the results. The ET weighted data by country to better represent the 2019 alumnae population. All open-ended responses in Spanish were translated into English and analyzed to add context to quantitative responses. Where relevant, the ET disaggregated data by region, age, education, and years of business experience prior to participating in AWE. Other categories for disaggregation include mentorship, funding, and COVID-related variables, which ECA and the ET identified as of interest. Selected survey results are included in this report, while additional results are available in Annex 6: Full Survey Results.

## QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

### KEY INFORMANT AND SMALL GROUP INTERVIEWS

The ET conducted a total of 109 key informant interviews (KIIs) and small group interviews (SGIs)<sup>3</sup> in the five focus countries to explore alumnae's AWE experiences, perceptions of the U.S. Government (USG), and program impacts on their businesses and soft skills. KIIs and SGIs also examined embassy, IP, mentor, and facilitator program implementation experiences and perceived program impacts. The resulting qualitative data addressed all four evaluation

<sup>3</sup> Key informant interviews refer to when only one participant was engaged in the discussion. In contrast, a small group interview included several people. For example, if more than one person at an embassy was involved in the AWE program, the team conducted an SGI with them.

questions and facilitated lessons learned and best practice identification that could be used to improve AWE program delivery and effectiveness. See Annex 7: Qualitative Tools for interview tools used for KIIs and SGIs.

## SAMPLING

The ET used purposive sampling in each of the five focus countries, working with ECA to identify individuals within each stakeholder group, complemented by snowball sampling to identify additional value-added informants. The sample size was based on maximizing the number of relevant respondents, given logistical feasibility within the evaluation's timeframe. To identify alumnae qualitative data collection respondents, the survey asked alumnae to indicate interest in participating in a follow-up interview, and the ET purposively selected respondents from those who agreed. Alumnae selected for the case studies were excluded from the KII and SGI pool so as not to overly burden them. If alumnae could not be reached and/or were insufficient in number, the ET used a validated alumnae database from ECA and snowball sampling to identify additional participants. Selection aimed to maximize diversity in age, educational background, years in business, and business sectors to the extent possible. However, as these personal characteristic data were not available for all alumnae, this was not always possible. Table 3 documents sampling across data collection methods and stakeholder groups, including the case studies. Figure 5 and Figure 6 show selective sample breakdown for alumnae KIIs.<sup>4</sup>

*Table 3. Sample Size by Country and Data Collection Instruments*

Country <sup>5</sup>	Cohort Size	Alumnae KII	Alumnae SGI	IP SGI <sup>6</sup>	Mentor KII	Embassy SGI	Case Studies
Ecuador	180	12	3	3	4	2	1
Guatemala	75	14	2	3	4	1	1
Dominican Republic	36	11	1	1	1	1	1
Kenya	50	12	3	4	4	1	1
Zambia	100	12	3	2	4	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>

<sup>4</sup> Demographic information were not available for all alumnae, as a small fraction of alumnae interviewed did not complete the alumnae survey, and this information was unavailable from samples provided by ECA.

<sup>5</sup> Figures 5 and 6 show the demographics of the alumnae who were part of KIIs. Only 60 alumnae are included in these figures because the ET did not have demographic information for one of the 61 alumnae.

<sup>6</sup> This category includes not only implementing partners, but program coordinators (Ecuador) and facilitators.

Figure 5. Alumnae Respondents by Business Experience

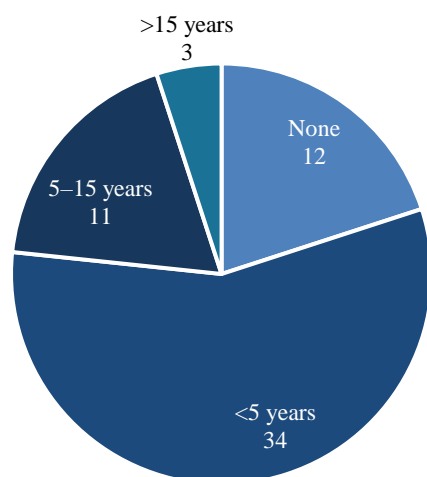
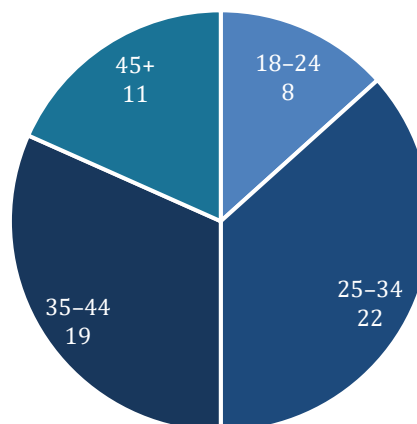


Figure 6. Alumnae Respondents by Age



## DATA ANALYSIS

The ET analyzed data through an iterative process during and after fieldwork. The team employed methodological data and researcher triangulation, an analysis strategy that uses various data collection methods. Several researchers first analyze multiple data sources independently, then in parallel to understand whether and how findings differ by key variables, such as program configuration, program language, and country. The team analyzed all data collected and then used a findings, conclusions, and recommendations matrix to triangulate findings across multiple data sources (quantitative and qualitative) and stakeholder groups, which facilitated checking for trends, consistency, affinity, and contradiction across the entire data set, to fully answer the EQs.

## CASE STUDIES

To further enrich the findings and illustrate AWE's influence on program alumnae, SI was tasked with developing one CS featuring an alumna from the 2019 AWE cohort in each of the five focus countries of the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Kenya, and Zambia. The CSs provide an in-depth illustration of the AWE's program on the alumnae and their businesses.

## CANDIDATE SELECTION

The five CS participants were selected in consultation with AWE program facilitators. Selection criteria in the approved Data Collection Instruments and Administration Plan for participation included:

- Part of a cohort that started in 2019
- Demonstrated growth of an existing business or start-up since completing the AWE program
- Ongoing participation in AWE networks

- Willingness to participate in the case study
- Availability to participate in mid-March 2021

Originally, “accessibility regarding the COVID-19 ongoing challenges” was a part of selection criteria, but the ET removed these criteria and took a country-by-country approach given country guidelines at the time of the CSs. Additionally, the ET only considered women who had not participated in other qualitative data collection activities.

The ET proposed two names per country per ECA’s request. To facilitate this selection, the team communicated with the focus countries’ IPs in English and/or Spanish to share the selection criteria and details on the CS process. These criteria included the woman’s name being shared publicly, as well as the CS candidate’s expressed consent and agreement for information usage captured in discussions with the ET or photos taken during the interviews. Each IP was asked to recommend three to four alumnae with unique stories and varied profiles that fit the criteria, and who were open to case study participation.

The ET received between one to eight recommendations per country. The ET conducted an additional selection round utilizing a brief survey to capture demographic and business information. The final candidates were selected based upon diversity of business demographics.

## IMPLEMENTATION

During the week of March 1<sup>st</sup>, the ET conducted 2-hour trainings with the local consultant teams in each region to introduce the CS objectives, review relevant tools, and solidify data collection logistics. All interviews with alumnae and associates were conducted the week of March 8<sup>th</sup>. The following lists the four main CS steps:

1. Document review: Prior to in-person activities the local consultants requested basic business metrics from alumnae (e.g., sales, revenues, and other financial data they may be tracking) and their business plan. This was with the knowledge that alumnae may decline sharing certain information or may not have certain records available.
2. Alumnae Interviews: Local consultant teams scheduled and conducted interviews (lasting no more than two hours) with selected alumnae to learn about their AWE program experience, personal growth, AWE’s impact on business endeavors, and business impacts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Associate Interviews: Local consultant teams requested recommendations of up to four individuals from alumnae (e.g., professional mentors, business advisors, or family members), who may have observed the AWE program effects on their lives and livelihoods. These individuals were contacted for an interview of up to 1.5 hours, discussing how they have observed the alumna’s business change post-AWE program. The number of recommended associates ranged from 2 – 4.
4. Site visits: Because observation is a useful supplement to interviews and can provide additional context to confirm or negate information generated through interviews, where possible, local consultants spent approximately half a day on-site with the alumna to observe her business structure – including how she manages her business/start-up, how she interacts with her staff, and other key behaviors.

## LIMITATIONS

Evaluation findings should be viewed with key limitations and biases in mind. First, though respondents at times attributed outcomes directly to AWE, the lack of a comparison group and potential for response bias do not permit definitive causal inference, as it is not known what would have happened to these women without AWE or whether some respondents felt compelled to respond positively to questions about the program. In addition, the evaluation scope did not include a baseline to compare pre- and post-AWE practices directly. Data are all based on self-reports, and the ET could not verify claims of improvements to business practices and metrics. Some claims may reflect exaggerations or a desire to flatter the program implementers. Nonetheless, findings do permit a reasonable estimation of the program's influence.

The unique blend of program components and structures in each focus country, and in some cases in each city within a specific country, prevented determination of which interventions were the most effective, in general, within and among focus countries. It also constrained the ET's ability to conduct cross-country comparisons. During its analysis of qualitative interviews, the ET also realized that alumnae refer to certain program components interchangeably, such as the DB Platform and AWE as a whole, whom they perceived as mentors (official mentors, facilitators, external speakers, etc.), and how they defined networks. Therefore, when findings refer to one of these components, other components may be entangled in this finding.

Selection bias likely affects how representative survey and interview participants are of all AWE alumnae. The ET could only reach participants with working emails or phone numbers, which may have excluded women who are less technologically connected. These *may* be women who are poorer, further behind in terms of business acumen, or less engaged, in general, in the program. In addition, participation rates may skew toward those with more favorable views of their AWE experience or away from those most affected by COVID-19 and, therefore, unable to dedicate time to participating. The ET expects the overall skew to be toward more favorable views, but, unfortunately, it is not possible to determine the extent or direction of this bias.

Though the ET had access to personal and business characteristics of qualitative interview respondents identified through the survey, these characteristics were not available for respondents identified through ECA's alumnae database. Therefore, disaggregation of qualitative analysis by certain demographics, such as education and business age, was limited. Other expected biases and limitations typical of qualitative data collection and analysis are detailed along with mitigation strategies in Annex 2: Evaluation Design and Methodology.

Finally, due to COVID-19, the ET was able to only carry out in-person interviews with alumnae and associates and conduct site visits in the Dominican Republic and Kenya. In Ecuador, Guatemala, and Zambia, CSs were conducted remotely, and site visits were not feasible. In these instances, local consultants requested that alumnae share photos to be used in the CSs.

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

In response to the definitional issues noted above, this section clarifies the terminology used throughout this report:

- **Mentorship:** For the purposes of this evaluation, mentoring is broadly defined (as it was by alumnae) to include getting advice/guidance/feedback from: (1) structured mentorship programs; (2) informal mentorship (through external speakers/trainers and IPs/facilitators/coordinators that were not formally mentoring, but played a mentorship role during the program); and (3) peer-to-peer mentorship, which often overlaps with networking between peers during and after the program.
- **Networking:** For the purposes of this evaluation, networking is also broadly defined (as it was by alumnae) to include making connections for businesses/sharing ideas/getting feedback/finding new clients and partners via the following mechanisms: (1) formal (expos, fairs, opening and closing events), (2) informal (with speakers, facilitators), and (3) between peers in a cohort.

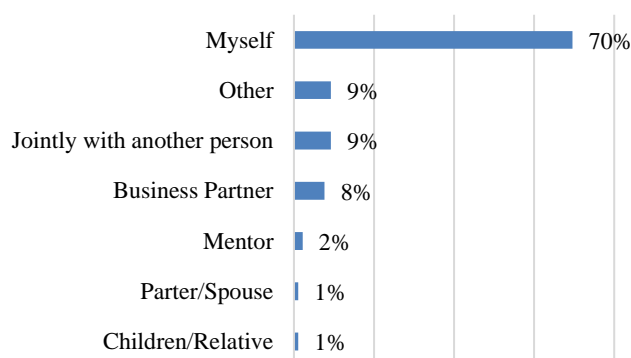
## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This section presents findings according to each evaluation question and sub-question, typically beginning with survey findings, followed by qualitative findings that provide more detailed context. Under each main question, the ET presents conclusions that draw on findings across all sub-questions. While the report focuses on higher-level survey findings, readers are encouraged to view detailed data disaggregation in Annex 6: Full Survey Results.

### EVALUATION QUESTION 1: TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE ACADEMY FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS MEETING ITS OBJECTIVES OF EMPOWERING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS?

Findings for EQ 1 indicate that stakeholders generally felt that **AWE met its objectives of empowering women entrepreneurs**. Specifically, sub-questions (detailed below) highlight that alumnae largely felt **AWE increased their ability to develop and grow their businesses and increase their income**. Although AWE’s definition of women’s economic empowerment prioritizes increased income and business growth, other definitions also highlight independent financial decision-making as fundamental to empowerment.<sup>7</sup> As Figure 7 shows, the very small proportion of AWE participants who received it had primary decision-making power over their seed funding.

Figure 7. Percent Reporting Primary Decision Maker Regarding Seed Funding (Survey, n=184)

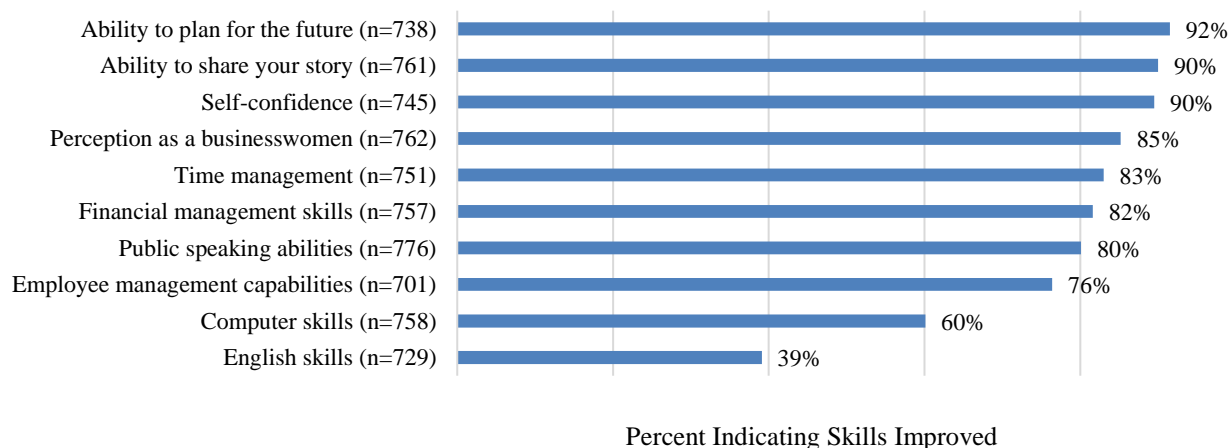


<sup>7</sup> Women’s economic empowerment includes women’s ability to participate equally in existing markets; their access to and control over productive resources, access to decent work, control over their own time, lives, and bodies; and increased voice, agency, and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions. (Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment | UN Women – Headquarters).

## FINDING EQ 1A: HOW, IF AT ALL, HAS AWE INFLUENCED ALUMNAE'S KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICES IN THEIR BUSINESSES?

As shown in Figure 8, survey results identified nine areas in which alumnae noted improved skills due to AWE. Alumnae rated each area in terms of AWE's effect from 1 (greatly worsened) to 5 (greatly improved). On average, alumnae noted improvement across all categories, with the greatest improvements in various measures of confidence and ability to share stories.

Figure 8. *Percent Reporting Skills Improvement from AWE (Survey)*



### Knowledge

Qualitative interviews in the five focus countries confirmed this sentiment, as most stakeholders (alumnae, embassies, IPs, mentors) mentioned AWE increasing alumnae knowledge. Alumnae specifically mentioned finance and marketing as the top two skill areas about which they learned the most through AWE. One common finance theme many alumnae mentioned was how to calculate their expenses, profits, and losses, as well as proper bookkeeping. As one African alumna put it, “It was nice how simplified it was in the DB platform, where they explained to you about invoices and statements and the importance of your profit and your losses and being able to calculate and balance your books. That was very, very important.”

Another WHA alumna noted, “My expenses were a mess because I wouldn’t write down what would come in; I didn’t know how much I’d buy, sell, or spend. They really helped me get organized.”

Alumnae also connected learning proper financial management with ensuring proper pricing, including accounting for their own time. As one African alumna explained, “Now if I price it like this, maybe people will say it’s too expensive, but you look at how much you’ve put in to produce that product and how much profit you get from it. I learned all those things.”

Two other recurring themes were the importance of paying oneself and separating business and household money. As one WHA alumna explained before the program, she was losing money by ignoring her own salary calculation, transportation, and other expenses for the business. Now, with the knowledge AWE provided, she estimates how much she spends on transportation, salaries, and administrative costs, like accounting.



Marketing was another area alumna noted as among the most important about which they learned during AWE. This was especially notable among those with a university education. As one WHA alumna explained, “They taught me how to ... have higher quality in my product, have good looks with the products, ... it taught me how to make my product known, how to sell my product in the market.” One specific area many highlighted, as articulated by an African alumna, was “just understanding our target market.” Another key area mentioned was learning how to expand their markets. For example, as a WHA alumna explained, “Know the customer, what else does the customer want, what else can I sell to the customer, to make new customers every day.”

The third most important aspect of marketing alumnae mentioned in qualitative interviews was communicating about their products and services. A WHA alumna framed this specifically in terms of “the elevator message ... that you have to show your entrepreneurship to someone else just in the time it takes an elevator to go up.” She went on to explain that learning helped her feel more comfortable approaching people.

Alumnae also mentioned: understanding and learning from their own and others’ mistakes through AWE, perseverance/rethinking and how to overcome their fears; business strategy/plan development, including thinking about partnering, where/how to develop next, various business models, taking a step-by-step approach, and the importance of maintaining a network; knowing when to ask for help; the importance of having a mission and vision for their business; and understanding “their why.”

### *Attitudes*

Survey data revealed that 65 percent of all respondents said that AWE greatly improved their self-confidence. This was consistent with alumnae interviews that showed a clear majority across all five focus countries stating the same. This pattern held true regardless of alumnae age group, level of education, or years in business. Two embassy and all seven IP interviewees also indicated that AWE increased women’s self-confidence. As a WHA IP interviewee noted, “Their self-esteem and empowerment are very important. I think that is the most important part: when one believes in the idea and says, ‘I think I’m not wrong,’ or ‘I think I’m on the right path.’ That is what gives confidence to these women, which is the most important thing in the program.”

Alumnae qualitative interviewees attributed their increased confidence to AWE. For example, an African alumna commented, “[my] confidence has tripled.” She went on to explain that the program gave her confidence to shift from a “what if it fails” mindset to more positively consider “what if it succeeds?” A specific factor to which alumnae attributed their increased confidence was realizing that they were not alone; other women like them have succeeded as entrepreneurs. As one WHA alumna explained, her self-confidence was affected by seeing “that there are many people like me, not that we are all unique, but many of us are in similar situations and that it can be done. That you are capable of generating all this [starting a business].”

In addition to increased levels of self-confidence, qualitative interviews from all five focus countries indicated that AWE increased alumnae drive and ambition. This was particularly notable among the 25–44 age group. A related theme was the need to persevere and work to overcome challenges. As an African alumna noted, “I think it’s just giving me morale that I



should not give up, but rethink on where I went wrong. If it is the marketing strategy or it's change of the business idea.”

Almost half of IP qualitative interviewees and most mentors also noted increased drive and ambition among alumnae. As one African mentor commented about his/her mentee, “I think the program helped her to understand her inner underlying potential. Since then, I’ve seen a different entrepreneur... Just getting out there and trying what she can do without the fear of failing.”

Another common theme was that AWE participants could and should aspire to greater things. As a WHA country alumna put it, “There was a dynamic they did there. I remember clearly that we should fly like eagles, to be different. That is what I like. I was thinking once: Yes, I can fly higher, I can do different things. And not to stay on the same things but try to innovate.”

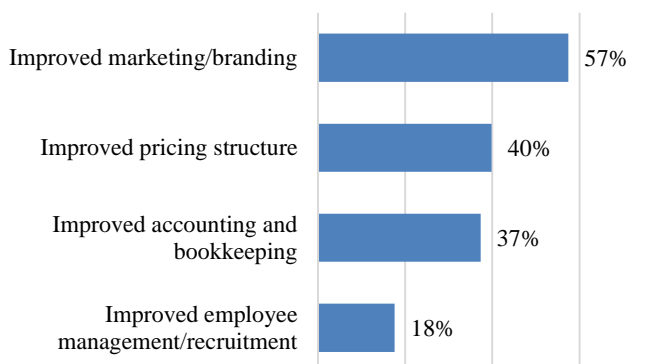
### Practices

As Figure 9 shows, more than half of survey respondents indicated that because of AWE, they improved their marketing and branding, while smaller, but still sizable fractions of alumnae improved their pricing structures, accounting/bookkeeping practices, and employee management practices. Likewise, in qualitative interviews, alumnae in all five focus countries noted that the knowledge and experience they gained through AWE changed their practices—especially those related to business processes such as financial management. In this regard, a WHA alumna said, “I had no plan or starting point for everything we would sell monthly, daily, or weekly. Now we do a grid and write down each month’s expenditures, how much we made, and how much we sold. I even write down the family budget because we have to calculate how much the family contributed to the [company’s] proceeds.” In some instances, alumnae are seeking professional bookkeeping assistance from fellow cohort members with skills in this area.

Alumnae mentioned additional changes in business practices related to marketing/branding, customer service, and strategic planning. A WHA alumna stated, “During the DB training, I found that my Achilles heel was customer service due to the many problems I had faced. That’s what I took from DB: customer service. That’s one of the main things that has helped me gain my clients back and continue with my business.”

Similarly, 50 percent of survey respondents said their public speaking greatly improved, and 66 percent said their ability to share their stories with others greatly improved. Alumnae in all five focus countries also noted this as a changed practice. As a WHA alumna shared, “In AWE, I learned to communicate better, speak in public without being nervous.” Similarly, another African alumna explained, “It’s easy now for me to approach someone and maybe urge them into trying my products or my service.” Likewise, a WHA IP commented, “They lost that fear in

*Figure 9. Percent Indicated Changes in Practices Attributed to AWE (Survey, n=823)*



terms of presenting themselves, speaking, selling. You know, some of them had excellent products, but they would say, ‘I’m too shy to sell things. I can’t do it.’”

Many alumnae and some mentors also noted changes in their strategic planning and decision-making. As one WHA mentor explained, “[A]fter AWE, we’ve seen more mature entrepreneurs in the sense that they have better judgment and critical thinking regarding business...They are not like, ‘I’m going to do it just for the sake of it’ without planning, without a business vision, without a route.” A WHA alumna put it this way, “We had certain protocols that helped me open in a more organized way, and I think it was part of the tools I had in the program, organization, planning, and all that that helped me there.”

### *Family and Community Changes in Perception*

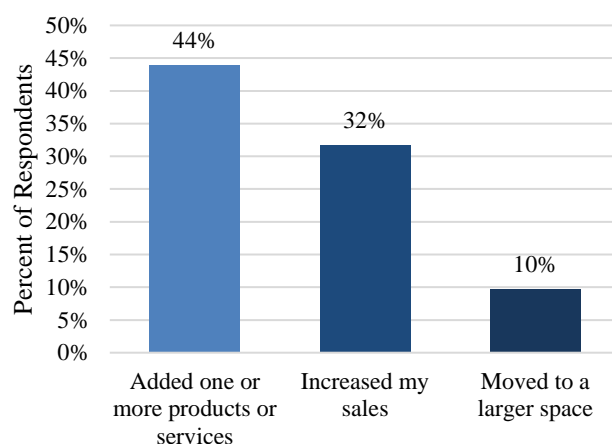
As noted above, some definitions of economic empowerment are somewhat broader than AWE’s and include many factors, including how women are perceived in their households and communities. While addressing this was not a direct AWE objective, it has had an indirect and positive impact across the board. Among survey participants, 85 percent said the way they are perceived as a businesswoman by family and community either slightly or greatly improved, while 15 percent indicated no change in how they are perceived, and two survey respondents (less than 0.2 percent) indicated their perception worsened.

Moreover, many alumnae qualitative interviewees, as well as a few mentors and IP respondents, reported positive changes in the attitudes and support of their husband or other family member(s). Several alumnae mentioned different ways in which their families supported them and/or their businesses during or after the program. A WHA IP interviewee described an alumna who was marginalized by her family and community. They observed changes in her self-esteem and family dynamics as she “found her voice” through the program. Similarly, a WHA alumna noted, “[my] family didn’t believe that I can achieve success in my idea. Now, my family has another perspective.” A few alumnae shared that family members have been inspired to become entrepreneurs themselves. Some alumnae also mentioned more favorable male attitudes regarding women’s earning capacity and household contributions. Some noted they are no longer financially dependent on their husbands and/or are able to provide for their family.

## FINDING EQ 1B: HOW HAS AWE AFFECTED THE BUSINESSES OF PROGRAM ALUMNAE? IN TERMS OF BUSINESS CREATION AND/OR GROWTH? HOW MANY AWE PARTICIPANTS HAVE CREATED NEW BUSINESSES VS. SCALED THEIR BUSINESSES?

As Figure 10 shows, approximately 44 percent of all survey respondents indicated they had added one or more products or services because of AWE, while a smaller fraction noted increased sales or moved to a larger space. More than half of all alumnae qualitative interviewees indicated that they were able to expand/scale their business due to AWE, while only a few alumnae indicated starting a new business, a majority of whom were in Africa and in the 25–34 age group. As one African alumna explained, “When I came to AWE, my business was still an idea... We had a business model and everything... I had the mentality that I was starting to network, plan, and earn. I participated in the pitching competition; I won [prize money] that was crucial for my business. I then applied for United States African Development Foundation grant, which made me win the \$25,000 that actually went to leasing the factory space...procuring a machine, a performance contract agreement.”

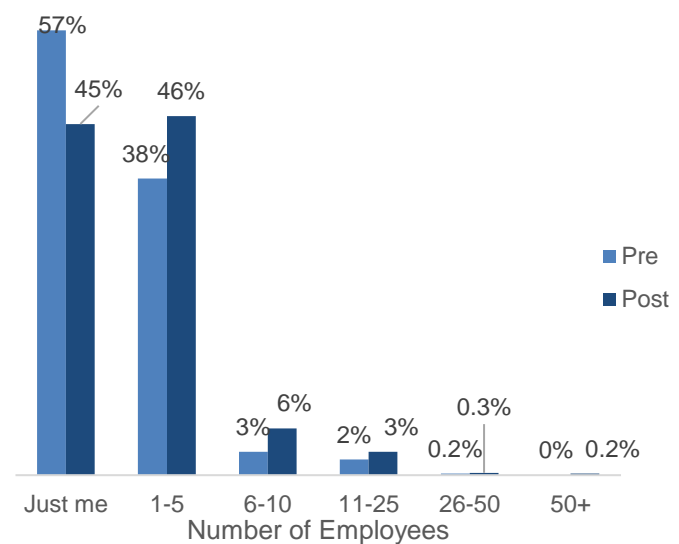
Figure 10. Reported Business Changes as a Result of AWE (Survey)



While Figure 10 identifies changes women attributed directly to AWE, other survey questions gauged changes to business formalization, revenue, and staff size that occurred after participation in AWE without necessarily attributing those changes to the program. Among all survey participants who own, operate, or manage a business, 20 percent formalized their business after participating in AWE, while 32 percent do not have formalized businesses (48 percent had formalized their business prior to AWE). As a WHA alumna explained, “AWE academy grew my business because I had the idea, but did not know how to run a business.” Many alumnae interviewees also noted formalizing their businesses during/after AWE. Those that had not yet formally registered their business faced a number of barriers, including COVID-19. As one WHA alumna explained, “I was in the process of registering my business; the pandemic situation has delayed the process.”

Among those who track business metrics, 74 percent self-reported increased revenue since participating in AWE. Alumnae who track metrics were asked if their number of employees increased since participating in AWE: 29 percent said they have increased the number of employees post-AWE, seven percent reported a decrease in employees, and 65 percent reported no change. As illustrated in Figure 11, 12 percent<sup>8</sup> of respondents reported one or more employees after their AWE participation compared to before AWE, with most experiencing small or modest growth. It should be noted that such changes could not be verified, and they may be due to several factors. The ET does not have data to

Figure 11. Percent Reporting Number of Employees Pre- & Post-AWE (Survey, pre-n=712, post-n=684)



attribute revenue, employment, or other business improvements to AWE, though a majority of alumnae interview respondents attributed their recent business successes to AWE. As one WHA alumna noted, “Before and after AWE we increased our sales just when we finished the program in January, January and February went very well, we had a lot of sales, in March we had a lot of sales, but it also helped us a lot to reinvent ourselves to continue trusting in our business as well, as I was saying, we have already implemented a new [product] line ... so we are reinventing, we are improving it. I can't say that we are as we were in January or February, which was after we finished the academy, but we are doing well, every day we are growing a little more, we are selling.” Likewise, several alumnae qualitative interviewees reported of having increased employees. Another WHA alumna stated that “My business also underwent through a great change after my experience in the program.... for example, the number of employees went from two to five people.”

In contrast, only a few alumnae interviewees mentioned actual increased profits, while others anticipated future profit increases. As one WHA alumna said, “I think the profitability came with proper pricing and increased customer lines.” In contrast, an African alumna commented, “I wouldn't say that I have benefited from the profit at the moment... I'm sure as we continue, we will have more income and at that time I would be [able]...to count on the profit.” A few mentioned that the program helped them access new funding opportunities to grow their businesses. However, 80 percent of survey respondents reported that participation in AWE did not help them secure funding for their business after the program ended.

Many attributed their ability to scale their businesses to AWE lessons in improving their marketing and branding, accessing new markets and/or clients, and/or developing new and/or improved products/services. As one WHA alumna explained, “The [course] to create my brand was super cool and helped me a lot. I went from making simple cards to cards with better

<sup>8</sup> 8 percent additional respondents reported 1-5 employees, 3 percent additional respondents reported 6-10 employees, and 1 percent reported 11-25 employees for post-AWE metrics. This totals a 12 percent difference.

presentation, more specific, with more straightforward messages, more comfortable.” Similarly, one Africa alumna explained that she has been able to export her product to other regions. She works with farmers throughout her country and is able to package the product differently based on its origin so as to promote product differentiation. Likewise, another African alumna noted, “In terms of new products, I introduced [3-Dimensional] design, which most of my clients are looking for. And in terms of new markets, my business has changed because my reach has expanded since the establishment of my Google website. It has attracted people from outside my country.”

## FINDING EQ 1C: TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE ALUMNAE IMPLEMENTED THEIR BUSINESS PLANS? HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED AWE ALUMNAE IN REALIZING THESE BUSINESS PLANS? HOW HAS AWE HELPED ALUMNAE ADAPT TO COVID?

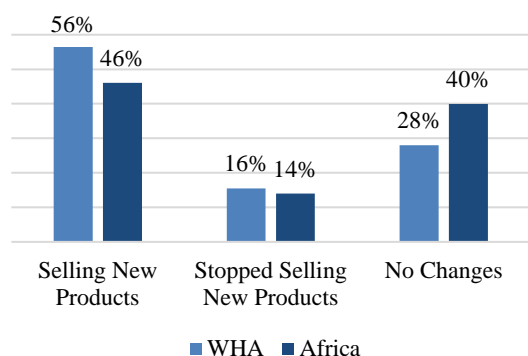
### *Business Plan Implementation*

Survey results showed 91 percent of the 662 survey respondents who own, operate, or manage a business have implemented at least part of their Business Action Plan. Although very few alumnae interviewed indicated fully implementing their business plan, many discussed future plans for implementation, and a majority had at least partially implemented their business plans. Many qualitative interview respondents linked their business plan implementation to growing their business. As one Africa alumna explained, she had a business plan which lacked detail, so it was helpful to develop it further through DB. This alumna subsequently used the plan to pitch at a bank, where she received financing to buy a van.

Of the 52 respondents who do not own, operate, or manage a business, 71 percent cited a lack of funds, and 50 percent cited the COVID-19 pandemic reasons (addressed below) for this lack of ownership—the survey did not ask directly about barriers to business plan implementation. In interviews, many alumnae noted various business plan implementation barriers, chief among these was lack of capital and/or equipment such as packaging material. As an African alumna explained, “I need extra financial support, without a doubt. If I can’t get it from the Americans again, I need to get it from somewhere, so that’s my only thing.” Another critical barrier for some was meeting government regulations. As an African alumna explained, “At the moment we don’t have the [country] Bureau of Standards, so we can’t sell to the retail shops and the supermarkets, because there’s not something to back us up. If we can get the [Standards], then we can actually sell to the supermarkets, but at the moment, we are finding it difficult to showcase that our product is proven.”

Other challenges alumnae faced in implementing their business plans included lack of time and/or employees because they were still working independently. In some cases, this was because their entrepreneurial activity was still a “side hustle.” Another critical challenge was accessing new markets, especially international ones. As a WHA alumna explained, “Yeah, the biggest challenge is to keep going...And the goal is to reach international markets. That is the main challenge. And for that, I have to invest in training, in promotion, in infrastructure, on the Internet, because if I want to get there, I have to hire more people and carry all those things, the thread of the whole company. That would be the challenge.”

Figure 12. COVID-19 Adaptations (Survey, n=612)<sup>1</sup>



Finally, alumnae mentioned access to technology and/or digital tools as critical barriers to business plan implementation. This ranged from access to basic internet to specific kinds of digital tools about which alumnae felt they needed to learn more. For example, an African alumna requested assistance from a Young African Leader’s Initiative mentor to learn more “about digital systems, how to use Facebook, Instagram, and create a WhatsApp Business page to better publicize [her] products.”

To address at least some of the identified barriers limiting business plan implementation, some alumnae sought or planned to seek out additional resources. While many accessed capital or credit or purchased equipment, including transportation (e.g., purchasing a car or motorcycle), others addressed challenges through continuing education and/or tapping into additional networks. As a WHA alumna explained, “If it wasn’t for AWE, I wouldn’t have entered another program, which was a business accelerator. But within this business accelerator we had the opportunity...to have an investment of two million dollars. So, we already have the resources and now we are making all the strategies that are going to be done with those resources.” Learning interests ranged from proper inventory procedures to accounting to specific market research. An African alumna hoped AWE could connect her with an Aid to Artisans program that involves travel to the United States to learn about product trends.

### Effect of COVID-19<sup>9</sup>

Half (51 percent) of survey respondents reported that COVID-19 prevented them from starting or continuing a business. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of the 635 respondents who own, operate, or manage a business reported that COVID-19 prevented them from enacting steps in their Business Action Plan. Despite the difficulties, a few alumnae were positively affected by COVID-19; very few were neither positively nor negatively affected. As a WHA alumna explained, “During the pandemic, I had to close my business for 30 days. At first... I was glad to have the extra time to spend with my children.” Following that period, “I was able to help a lot of people during the pandemic with our natural products. I gave them plants, sprays, and home remedies that they could make themselves. I was always there to explain to them which plants would work and how to use them correctly. Despite everything, the pandemic was a good opportunity to make my service and business known.”

Figure 12 depicts, by region, COVID-19 adaptations among survey participants who own, operate, or manage a business. Many qualitative interviewees indicated similar adaptations such as changes in sales mechanisms—for example by shifting to online sales and/or offering product delivery—or changing the products they sell. A WHA IP summarized the situation: “One woman ...used to make jewelry (before COVID), but her business is practically dead, and she is now selling houseplants. [Another] woman who has a butcher shop is now thriving. This is interesting because during the program she had super low self-confidence. No one expected her

<sup>9</sup> This question focuses on alumnae adaptations to COVID-19. For information on how Embassies/IPs adapted their programs to COVID-19, please see the Focus Country Profiles in Annex 3: Focus Country Profiles.



to do that well, but COVID has ... really helped her. Another woman ... had an old, very established business selling party and Quinceañera dresses, which has now shut down.”

Among survey participants, 67 percent agreed that the knowledge gained during AWE helped them adjust to COVID-19; nine percent disagreed that AWE helped them adjust to the pandemic. A quarter said that they neither agreed nor disagreed. For example, one WHA alumna explained that “In the pandemic, I was putting out cold salads...I started focusing on people who live alone, which are expensive to produce for one person, but you always crave. You always want to have in the refrigerator beans, guacamole, cold salads, the spicy tomato-based sauces without chopping. I made sauces that are very typical of my region, and I started selling them... I learned that through the academy.”

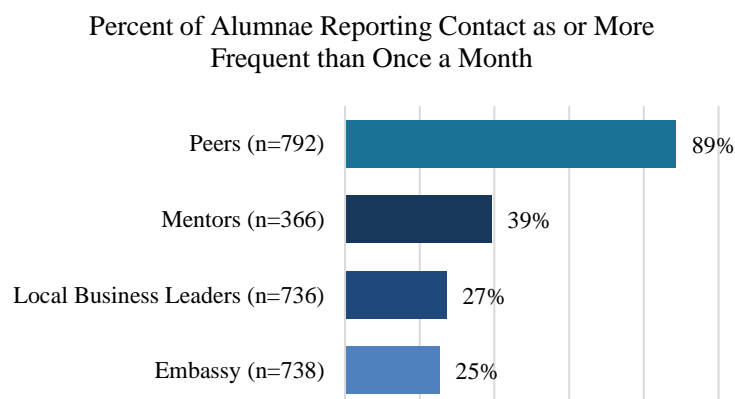
## CONCLUSIONS

AWE appears to have fundamentally changed alumnae’s knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to their businesses. Respondents also linked the program to changes within alumnae’s families and communities. Moreover, AWE provided a foundation upon which alumnae could effectively build their businesses after the program. Thus, while only a few alumnae have fully implemented their business plans, many recognize their value and have at least partially implemented them and/or have plans to fully implement. Importantly, many are seeking out the additional knowledge and resources needed to implement their plans. Finally, many credit AWE for increasing alumnae’s business acumen, which, in turn, enhanced their independent decision-making and strategic planning, facilitating their ability to adapt to adverse situations like COVID-19. In so doing, AWE appears to have substantially empowered women not only by increasing their incomes through business growth, but also as more self-confident and independent decision-makers.

## EVALUATION QUESTION 2: HOW HAS PARTICIPATION IN AWE AFFECTED ALUMNAE’S ACCESS TO BUSINESS NETWORKS AND RESOURCES?

Although some alumnae surveyed reported participating in select activities after completing AWE, most did not report receiving post-program support, maintaining engagement with the embassy, or serving as mentors for the 2020 cohort. **The most common type of network maintained post-AWE were those with fellow alumnae,** with 89 percent of alumnae reporting contact at least once a month with their cohort peers (see Figure 13). Post-program networks varied widely across all countries as almost all embassies attempted to create post-program alumnae networks, either through Facebook/WhatsApp groups or email

Figure 13. Contact with Networks Post-AWE (Survey)



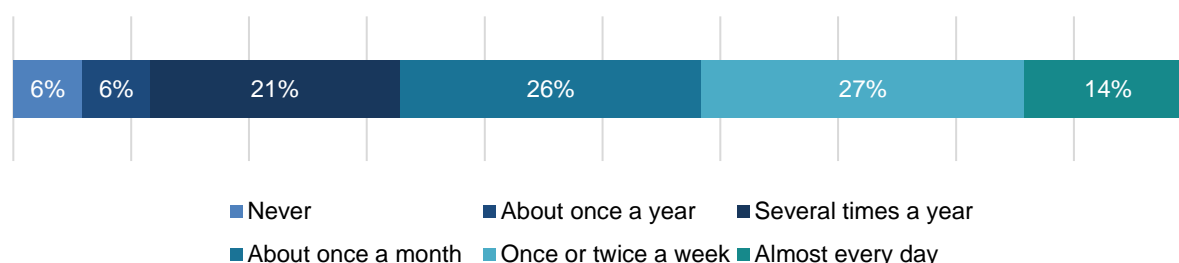
listservs, though all embassies noted consistent and in-depth follow-up was conducted through IPs. In Zambia, a local alumnae association was utilized, with introduction and induction completed following program conclusion. In the DR, the IP provided free membership to their network and resources and connected alumnae to other entrepreneurs following the AWE program. In Kenya, the embassy relied on its alumni network (including Fulbright and Mandela Washington fellows) and utilized their public affairs office for potential connections to other women entrepreneurs.

## FINDING EQ 2A: HOW HAVE AWE ALUMNAE MAINTAINED NETWORKS WITH PEERS FROM THEIR COHORT? WITH U.S. EMBASSIES? WITH LOCAL BUSINESS LEADERS? WITH MENTORS? HOW HAVE SUCH NETWORKS BENEFITED THE ALUMNAE?

**Peer-to-peer networks were the strongest networks that alumnae maintained**, either through formally created WhatsApp/Facebook groups or informal check-ins to discuss personal and professional dilemmas and/or successes. The second most important networks were with mentors and local business leaders, with the latter group often mistaken for the formal mentorship program or identified as mentors due to their informal engagement. **The least maintained network was with embassies; few respondents indicated being a part of this network.** Consistent with alumnae interviews, survey results indicated that 94 percent of respondents used WhatsApp as their primary method of maintaining network contact, particularly with peers. Alumnae indicated that the greatest network benefits, across all types, were sharing business best practices, marketing/networking, and morale and personal development, particularly through peer networks or mentorship.

### Peer Networks

Figure 14. Percent Reporting Frequency of Contact with Cohort Peers (Survey, n=792)



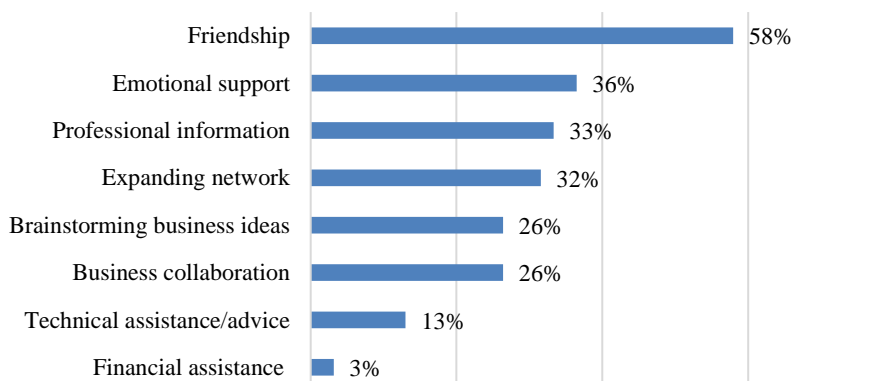
As the most utilized network, alumnae frequently cited the many opportunities for business growth among peers, as well as the friendship and camaraderie provided by these networks. Alumnae shared resources included funding sources—even creating a *cuchubal*<sup>10</sup> microfinance network in one instance—and courses for learning and feedback on marketing techniques. However, these informal WhatsApp groups also allowed for continued personal and professional connections. With more than half of alumnae interviewed citing friendship as the most common form of support and a third citing emotional support, the peer-to-peer networks were vital in building confidence and connection as women entrepreneurs. An alumna in WHA described

<sup>10</sup> Community savings groups (like microloan financing) wherein each participant contributes a certain amount of money each month, which is then distributed to a single member at random.



their WhatsApp group as a way to keep up with fellow alumnae personally (e.g., sending birthday greetings) and a place where they share product ideas for input or business news their fellow alumnae can share on their networks.

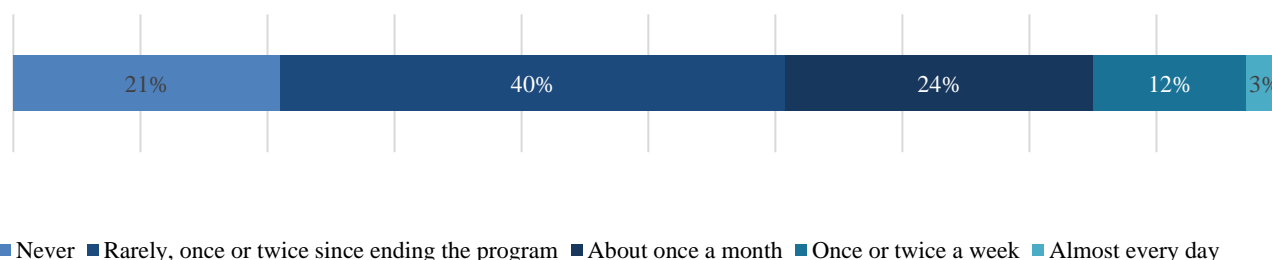
Figure 15. *Most Common Types of Support Received from Peers (Survey, n=792)*



Usage and peer-to-peer networks' importance after the program align with findings in EQ 3A and B below, specifically regarding the importance of networking with peers as a program component.

### Mentorship

Figure 16. *Percent Reporting Frequency of Contact with Mentors (Survey, n=366)*



Survey data among the 366 respondents with a mentor revealed that alumnae do not have as much regular contact with mentors as they do with peers. Only 39 percent of alumnae speak with their mentor at least once a month (see Figure 16). In contrast, most alumnae qualitative interviewees who had mentors highlighted this component. However, this only applied in some countries (see EQ 3 and Focus Country Profiles for more information). For example, most IPs interviewed indicated the AWE countries had group mentorship, with two programs including post-program mentorship as a program component. Only one AWE program of those interviewed indicated providing one-on-one mentorship to alumnae through in-program sessions and speed dating activities.<sup>11</sup> Alumnae continued mentor relationships from the formal mentorship component within the AWE program. Alumnae also identified additional mentors,

<sup>11</sup> Speed dating connected alumnae in a rotating format with local business leaders and select speakers to gather quick feedback on topics such as business plans, implementation, and formalization. Each rotation was timed, allowing participants to meet with multiple persons through the exercise.

either through speakers from the AWE program, local business leaders, pitch competition judges, or other means, to provide additional support following their program completion. Those that maintained communication beyond the AWE program did so through Facebook groups, WhatsApp, Slack, IP Membership, or Instagram.

Interviewed alumnae identified various benefits resulting from mentor networks. Many believed mentors increased opportunities for networking, branding, marketing or reach, and advertising. One mentor who was an event spokesperson at public fairs got her mentee access to offer products and services there. Alumnae cited examples of mentors who provided contacts for business growth, feedback on marketing, and sector expertise. Still others utilized mentor networks for business best practice consultation, motivation and encouragement related to business expansion, or connection to community programs.

A common theme for post-program mentorship was the benefit of personal life encouragement. Alumnae who were struggling with personal or familial concerns were able to benefit from mentors' expertise and motivation. An alumna in WHA said, "...a [local business leader] who has been [in the business world] for quite some time, I consider her to be a leader in this field, she is the one I have the most contact with... I solve my doubts, or she can simply listen to me about what I want to talk about."

#### *Local Business Leaders and Embassy Networks*

Alumnae interviewees often fluidly defined local business leaders as mentors, with many highlighting the benefits of this network to include client identification, marketing/networking, subject matter expertise, mentorship, normalization of business fluctuation due to COVID-19, and conference/event invitations. An alumna in Africa said, "I usually consult when it comes to some stages of the business or some challenges that I might be going through." However, the survey data indicated 60 percent of respondents have had no post-program contact with local business leaders.<sup>12</sup>

Alumnae seldom used embassy networks, with 60 percent having no communications following the program and 15 percent having communicated only once a year.<sup>13</sup> Less than half of qualitative respondents interviewed who maintained contact mentioned any benefits of maintaining this network. EQ 3D findings below provide suggestions for continued Embassy engagement with AWE alumnae.

### **FINDING EQ 2B: TO WHAT EXTENT ARE AWE ALUMNAE SERVING AS MENTORS TO 2020 COHORTS?**

Though an overwhelming majority of alumnae indicated a desire to mentor subsequent cohorts, it is unclear as to the formal methods for cohort-to-cohort mentorship.<sup>14</sup> Some embassies interviewed indicated this is under the purview of IPs, while others noted this as a best practice that needed formalization. It appears to be a joint decision between embassies and IPs for

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<sup>12</sup> n=425.

<sup>13</sup> n=432.

<sup>14</sup> The ET did not collect data on 2020 cohorts, but believes it is a reasonable assumption that 2020 cohorts would be begun by the start of the evaluation data collection, though most likely would have been online.

mentorship selection and design. **Survey data indicated only 13 percent of respondents served as a mentor to new AWE participants.** Among the few qualitative respondents who were serving as mentors (<10), many are participating in online webinars, sharing best practices during DBs, informally mentoring 2020 participants, or are simply “ambassadors” respondents for the AWE program.

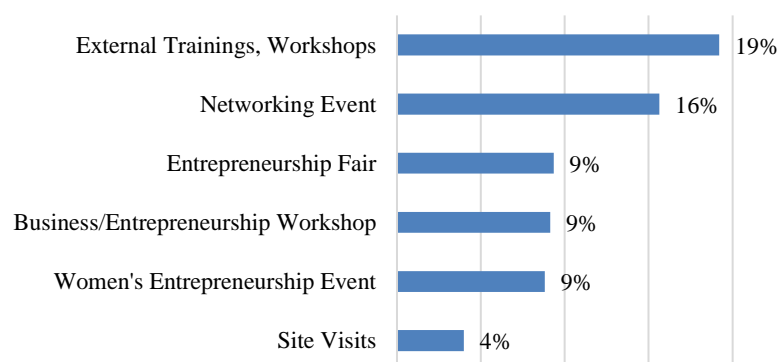
Embassy and IP interviewees cited several reasons for lack of mentorship participation in 2020, including delays in recruitment, COVID-19 implications, and/or lack of broader experience as perceived by embassy or IP personnel (e.g., formal education, sector expertise, etc.). As an IP in WHA described, “To be a mentor, you need to more than just have a business... It’s not always related to the topic at question, but wider topic, help with relationships, personal relationships etc.”

#### **FINDING EQ 2C: WHAT TYPE OF SUPPORT ARE ALUMNAE RECEIVING POST-PROGRAM? (SEED FUNDING, CONTINUED MENTORSHIP, ETC.)?**

As indicated in Figure 17, **few alumnae reported participating in either AWE, U.S embassy-sponsored, or external events related to entrepreneurship.** Of those reporting participation in post-program activities, the majority attended external trainings, workshops, and networking events. Post-program support varied across countries, often with alumnae simply added to an alumni network or listserv for access to events and relevant opportunities. Two of the five focus countries provide post-program support through the IP networks, including membership and access to ongoing programs/facilitator support.

Many alumnae interviewed indicated a strong desire for increased seed funding and funding application assistance. One African mentor noted, “the hard fact is that we give them all this training, but at the end of the day, it will not help them...get the funding to...scale their businesses because the challenge that we have...is not exactly the fact that the businesses are not viable, but it is because the financial institutions are not interested in [financing] the [small and medium enterprises] because of the inherent risk that is associated with them.” Survey data revealed only 20 percent of respondents received AWE’s assistance in securing seed funding after the program finished, although most alumnae interviewed had a misconception of seed funding being automatically secured because of program acceptance (see EQ 3B findings below).

Figure 17. Percent Reporting Activities Attended after AWE Ended (Survey, n=953)



Similarly, while only a few alumnae interviewees mentioned post-program follow-up and support, such as event invitations, seed funding, support for loan and grant applications, and formal/informal mentorship, approximately half of alumnae interviewed noted that they did not receive any support at all. While some

African alumnae applied for U.S. African Development Foundation (USADF) funding, only about 10 percent of alumnae interviewed received it. Program participants were informed of this opportunity near the close of the AWE program, with support provided for the application process provided to alumnae indicating a desire for submission. However, the method of information dissemination was unclear, as several alumnae interviewed noted they did not apply for funding due to a lack of knowledge.

## FINDING EQ 2D: HOW HAS AWE CONTRIBUTED TO IMPROVE THE ACCESS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS TO BUSINESS RESOURCES SUCH AS FINANCING AND NEW MARKETS?

**Overall, AWE did not greatly improve women entrepreneurs' access to financing and new markets, with some of the interviewed alumnae indicating they received no support at all.** Many of these interviewed alumnae mentioned expectations of access to financing as a result of program acceptance, in addition to new markets being provided through means such as site visits, local business leaders, and/or speakers. However, some alumnae interviewees indicated varied levels of access to new/improved financing and/or markets. As one alumna in Africa said, "Opportunities to apply for funding are posted in the alumnae group, but sometimes they have cost implications. You have to spend money to participate."

This finding is corroborated by EQ 3D findings below, where alumnae request support with access to both international and domestic markets post-program.

## CONCLUSIONS

Alumnae identified peer networks, developed through AWE program participation and mostly maintained through WhatsApp, as the most valuable post-program benefit because they fostered improved business best practices, opportunities for business growth, referral networks, and moral support. Alumnae additionally utilized mentors strategically, building business knowledge and accessing local resources (e.g., Chamber of Commerce membership, university courses, etc.) perceived as not provided through embassy follow-up and AWE post-program support. Most alumnae did not serve as mentors to the 2020 cohort, with various barriers to inclusion cited as primary causes by embassies and IPs. Of the few alumnae surveyed that indicated they accessed

post-program opportunities and received support, the dominant means of support was external trainings, workshops, and networking events. Only some of the alumnae interviewed identified varied levels of access to new markets and financing; the majority received no support.

### EVALUATION QUESTION 3: WHAT BEST PRACTICES OF AWE SHOULD ECA SHARE WITH U.S. EMBASSIES AND LOCAL IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS AS THE PROGRAM CONTINUES TO EXPAND?

The ET identified best practices from all stakeholders for AWE program implementation, which are summarized in Table 4 and detailed under the evaluation sub-questions. Stakeholders frequently mentioned the importance of contextualizing content to the audience, which should be emphasized when sharing best practices identified in this evaluation with other AWE programs.

Table 4. AWE Program Best Practices

Activities	Structure	Post-Program
<p>Alumnae preferred activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitated DreamBuilder program</li> <li>Mentorship</li> <li>Networking</li> <li>Speakers/external presenters</li> <li>Trainings/workshops</li> <li>Pitch competitions</li> </ul> <p>Program implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contextualize content</li> <li>Entrepreneurs as facilitators</li> <li>Involve DOS alumnae in programming activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-person activities preferred               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cohort size 18–36</li> <li>Diverse group of entrepreneurs in cohort</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintenance of alumnae network through continued engagement</li> <li>Capital/seed-funding access</li> </ul>

### FINDING EQ 3A: TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE THE DIFFERENT AWE PROGRAM CONFIGURATIONS CONTRIBUTED TO ALUMNAE’S BUSINESS SUCCESS? (BOOTCAMPS, SMALL/LARGE COHORTS, DIFFERENT/SIMILAR PARTICIPANT LEVELS OF BUSINESS EXPERIENCE, EXPOS, SITE VISITS, ETC.)

Alumnae reported through the survey and interviews that the DB platform, mentorship, networking, presentations/lectures, soft skills training, and the pitch competition contributed most to their business success, while no structural components emerged as key to this success. In 2019, AWE program configurations across countries (and, in some cases, specific cities)<sup>15</sup> varied widely. Despite asking directly, few stakeholders shared specific program configurations that contributed to alumnae business success. Rather, alumnae noted specific program components that supported parts of their business implementation. These

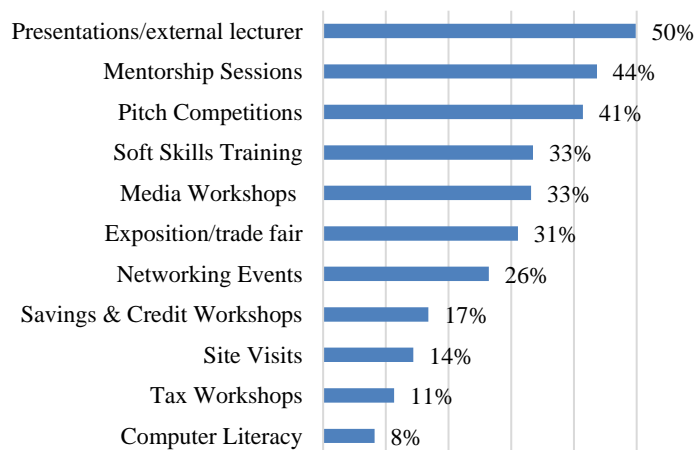
<sup>15</sup> See Country Profiles for details.

components are presented below, categorized by activity, structural component, and post-program activity. Other significant findings relevant to EQ 3A are also discussed in subsequent sections.

### Program Activities

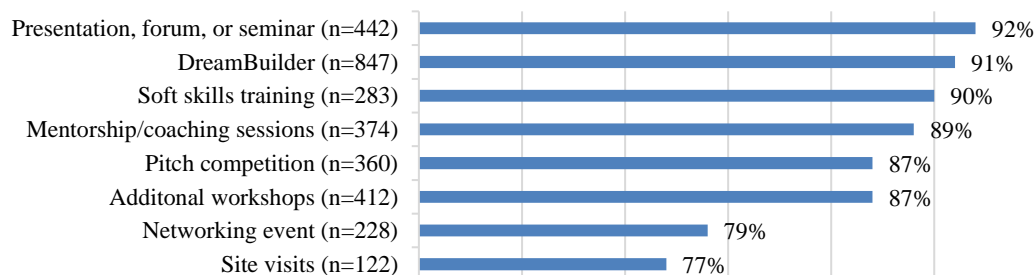
Figure 18 depicts the range of program components in which alumnae participated during AWE. Figure 19 shows which program activities respondents found the most helpful in growing their businesses. Over 90 percent of alumnae surveyed found presentations/external lectures<sup>16</sup> and DB helpful in growing their businesses, closely followed by soft skills training and mentorship and pitch competitions, all of which more than 85 percent of alumnae found to be helpful. In the focus countries, alumnae most frequently mentioned that DB, mentorship, and networking<sup>17</sup> contributed to their business success.<sup>18</sup> Many alumnae also mentioned training and workshops.

*Figure 18. Percent Participating in Activities (excluding DreamBuilder) (Survey, n=953)*



Regarding DB, alumnae specifically mentioned that the platform assisted with business plan development, expressed appreciation for the program's step-by-step process, and noted the DB/AWE program's overall practicality and real-life application. Alumnae also frequently mentioned mentorship<sup>19</sup> as a program component that either contributed to their business success or that they found particularly helpful.

*Figure 19. Percent of Alumnae Rating Program Components as Very or Extremely Helpful (Survey)*



<sup>16</sup> In interviews, alumnae also referred to mentorship received from this program component. See definition of mentorship in Terms of Reference section.

<sup>17</sup> See Terms of Reference section for definition of networking.

<sup>18</sup> Many alumnae interviewees used DreamBuilder and the AWE program interchangeably, so it was not always clear if they were referring to the overall program or the DreamBuilder platform exclusively. Mentor and speaker interviewees in the five focus countries similarly used these terms interchangeably.

<sup>19</sup> See Terms of Reference section for definition of mentoring.

Alumnae credited mentorship/mentors with supporting the development of business plans, providing motivation and encouragement, and offering guidance in marketing and finance. An alumna in Africa said, “[My financial expert mentor] helped mentor me in this area. I used to have challenges with my financial aspects of the business. He looked at this part of my business plan in the pitch training and advised me. He literally tore apart my financial projections and put it together again.”

Many referenced cohort peer-to-peer networking in both class sessions and after the program. Alumnae shared advice and ideas with each other both during and after the program, which helped solve problems and move businesses forward, resulting in partnerships/collaborations, and even becoming each other’s clients. As an alumna in WHA noted, “...Our group made a beautiful relationship. In my case, I was networking and continue to do networking in a very direct way. To this day, I am a supplier for many of them, and they are for me as well.”

### *Program Structure*

Few alumnae interviewed mentioned program structure and post-program activities as contributing to business success. Survey respondents reported that 35 percent participated in in-person DB sessions, 36 percent participated in a combination of in-person and virtual sessions, and 30 percent completed DB sessions on their own. Few alumnae interviewed mentioned program structure and post-program activities as contributing to business success.

## **FINDING EQ 3B: WHICH PROGRAM COMPONENTS AND CONFIGURATIONS (BOOTCAMPs, SMALL/LARGE COHORTS, DIFFERENT/SIMILAR PARTICIPANT LEVELS OF BUSINESS EXPERIENCE, EXPOS, SITE VISITS, ETC.) CAN BE BEST UTILIZED WITH THE BLENDED MODEL OF AWE?**

**Alumnae identified DB, mentorship, networking, and trainings/workshops as the most valuable activities as part of the blended model, also showing a preference for in-person classes and small, diverse cohorts. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of contextualizing the program and DB platform to the local context and continuing alumnae engagement after the program’s end. Stakeholders shared suggestions on program gaps and improving mentoring.** As mentioned earlier, the AWE program required use of the DB platform as a base for learning under AWE, but country programs had the freedom to tailor complementary activities to the needs and context of each country in a “blended” model of programming. EQ 3B explores the preferred activities and structural components utilized in the blended models of AWE. Similar to the findings of EQ 3A, interviewed alumnae identified DB, mentorship, networking, and trainings/workshops as the most valuable program components of the blended model, with structural elements such as business experience level, cohort size, and in-person classes also receiving positive feedback. These elements are included as best practices for program design in Table 4 at the beginning of the EQ 3 discussion. A few alumnae said either no changes were needed to the activities and/or structure or that everything about the program was useful.

### *Program Activities*

Alumnae credited DB with helping them develop their business plans through tools and practical exercises. Even alumnae who already had a business plan benefitted from DB’s guidance on



organization. One alumna in Africa shared, “When you’re filling the template,<sup>20</sup> it becomes so real to you. Now it’s your business, now you’re trying to work on it. It’s not now about the Dream Builder, it’s now ‘what are you doing?’ How many customers are you going to bring in? How many have you talked to?” It becomes so specific. To me, it was so practical, and it’s made a lot of sense, yes.”

Alumnae also valued the in-person support that complemented the online activities. They also shared suggestions to improve the platform, including fixing technical issues and introducing options to tailor/filter the content for new versus experienced entrepreneurs. Alumnae also suggested adapting the DB platform itself to reflect the context of the country where it is delivered. For example, a few noted that the English version of the platform was geared toward an American, European, or western business context that was not relevant to the local business environment reality, and others suggested that the platform be translated into local languages.

Given that the mentorship model varied by country<sup>21</sup> and alumnae described mentorship opportunities broadly,<sup>22</sup> alumnae in each country had slightly different feedback about the merits of this component. In the DR, alumnae spoke highly of the one-on-one and group sessions that Pretty Busy Club<sup>23</sup> provided. In Ecuador and Guatemala, alumnae were motivated and encouraged by mentors and liked learning from experienced entrepreneurs.<sup>24</sup> In Kenya, most alumnae spoke of the importance of hearing the experiences of entrepreneurs,<sup>25</sup> with a variety of other positive feedback. In Zambia, though no trends were evident in the data, alumnae felt that mentors supported them with specific aspects of business plan development, motivated them to move forward, and clarified DB concepts. Alumnae across countries valued the experience of receiving advice, guidance, and training from entrepreneurs, believed that mentorship helped reinforce DB concepts, and found mentorship motivating. A few alumnae specifically appreciated marketing guidance/advice. A few, such as this alumna in Africa, also mentioned appreciating one-on-one or group mentoring: “Interacting with the mentors really helped because these are people who have gone through a lot. Hearing their journey really helped a lot and also getting to interact with some of the women who were selected for the program also helped since they had run businesses. I was able to learn a thing or two.”

Conversely, several alumnae interviewed noted dissatisfaction with the mentorship component. Many believed the mentors provided were irrelevant to their business, often providing subject matter information in group settings without consulting with participants to ensure comprehension, relevance, and potential for implementation. A few alumnae indicated a lack of mentors that were relevant to their sector, such as more mentors with service industry experience versus agricultural backgrounds. An alumna in Africa suggested, “It’s better next time [participants] inquire from the DreamBuilders which kind of mentor [participants] would want and then they’re given that particular mentor so that the help that [participants] want is given to their satisfaction.”

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<sup>20</sup> This refers to templates provided through the DreamBuilder platform.

<sup>21</sup> See Annex 3: Focus Country Profiles for details.

<sup>22</sup> See earlier definition of mentoring.

<sup>23</sup> Pretty Busy Club was the Implementing Partner in the DR. See Annex 3: Focus Country Profiles for more details on the mentorship component in the DR.

<sup>24</sup> Both mentors and speakers

<sup>25</sup> Both mentors and speakers



In addition, some alumnae indicated not receiving any mentorship support throughout the program at all, hinting at a lack of organization and structure within the program. As one African alumna noted, “[I] didn’t get any mentorship. It was poorly covered. In fact, [I] feel like [I] mentored some of [my] peers, it’s like they were mentoring each other. To [me], [I] felt it was poor and not structured.” Mentors offered a variety of best practices for their role, the most common being noted in Box 1.

**Box 1: Advice for Good Mentorship**

Be humble (and clear) about what you know and don’t know as the mentor. This helps create a safe environment for discussion. Approach interactions and guidance with empathy.

Know your audience/mentee well including their business area, specific needs based on where they are located and their motivation for the business/decisions they have made.

Alumnae overwhelmingly mentioned the benefits of peer-to-peer networking during and after the program. Alumnae across countries learned from their peers’ business experience, felt supported and less alone in their experiences, and valued the network as a platform to discuss ideas, receive advice, and make new connections. Alumnae also noted peer-to-peer and formal networking increased their confidence, self-esteem, and morale around their businesses and networking abilities.

Over half of alumnae perceived gaps in program content, skills, and resources, with many suggesting additional financial knowledge was needed, as well as publicity and/or advertising, particularly in digital media, and the legal aspects of owning a business. Many alumnae believed AWE should provide access to some kind of funding, and many alumnae suggested that AWE offer seed funding in the form of loans and grants. Embassy staff, IPs, and mentors echoed this sentiment. A few alumnae alluded to potential miscommunications around access to funding. Three mentioned that they understood there would be some access when they entered the program and were surprised to find out this was not the case. For example, one said that her and her friends expected funding because they had been chosen out of a large number of applicants to attend the program. Another said that there were discussions of financial support for businesses at the program onset, but it was not clear until later what this consisted of and that it was not for everyone, also suggesting that the financial support component was used to attract participants and that was a key reason why she had applied to the program. Three other alumnae, in WHA and Africa, shared that even though they had won a pitch competition in early 2020 where the prize was funding, they still had not received this money at the time of the interview, despite following up. An alumna in WHA said, “I was supposed to get a seed funding actually...but it hasn’t been given yet.” Many stakeholders discussed the inaccessibility of funding in their countries for small business owners and women in particular. These findings align with those found in EQ 3D.

### *Program Structure*

Some alumnae mentioned the benefits of learning from a diverse group of entrepreneurs, both by sector and level of business experience. A handful noted that those with less business experience benefitted from the wisdom of more seasoned entrepreneurs. One country program in WHA noted that the program started with a diverse range of educational backgrounds, but the participants with education levels higher than high school dropped out because they were not

learning. Feedback about cohort size (generally between 18–36 across programs) was generally positive, noting it was right for networking, interacting, and learning from one another. Qualitative analysis did not show particular trends by country. Some alumnae extolled the virtues of the in-person program, citing various reasons why meeting in person was important: networking and in-person interaction was more organic than through virtual platforms; alumnae were motivated by their peers’ stories and businesspeople who came in as speakers; feedback could be received in person; and the in-person classes were crucial to reinforce DB concepts. As one alumna in WHA said, “Yes, I honestly liked more [than] anything that [it] was in-person; I loved when I could see the diversity of businesses and sectors that were also there with me... and see that I was probably ‘drowning in a glass of water’<sup>26</sup> and how my classmates were of some relief for me at that point because they were probably at a more advanced stage.”

This echoes EQ 1A findings. **Discussions about the frequency and duration of sessions, as well as the program length, were not overly positive or negative.** Less than half of alumnae qualitative interviewees made positive statements about the class frequency, duration of sessions, and the length of the program overall. These alumnae said the course frequency was appropriate for learning, completing tasks for the next class, and/or being able to implement concepts and then receive feedback. Interviewed alumnae also spoke positively about the session length and duration of the entire program. Nonetheless, **over a third of alumnae offered suggestions for improvement to the class session length and frequency and/or program duration.** The most common changes desired were more frequent meetings (e.g., meeting twice per week instead of once) and longer sessions, though a few alumnae also suggested fewer and shorter sessions. Alumnae also mentioned the convenience of class schedules and frequency relative to managing other duties such as work and household roles. There were no clear trends by country.

**An additional suggestion for improvement identified by interviewed alumnae was the adjustment of program material for incorporation of broader sectors.** It was commonly mentioned within African alumnae interviews that those who worked within agriculture did not feel the material was readily transferable to their sectors. As one alumna said, “I’m trying to venture into even other things...let’s say somebody that does pig farming. I already have knowledge but I’m building some livestock training on this, so maybe there’s additional support directly related to what I’m doing. Not just which is...general.” There were no clear examples within WHA countries.

### *Program Implementation*

Embassy interviewees and IPs offered a variety of best/most effective practices for implementation and post-program support, with both groups strongly emphasizing the importance of maintaining the AWE alumnae network post-program because it is one of the strongest program components. This finding echoes alumnae support requests in EQ 3D, along with the following embassy suggestions: the importance of contextualizing the program to the country and location, engaging/partnering with DOS alumnae who are already familiar with the embassy, and engaging experienced entrepreneurs who can relate to participants and are well connected with the local business network. One embassy interviewee also noted the importance of COVID-19 adaptability by ensuring participants have access to the internet (even including

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<sup>26</sup> Spanish saying meaning being overwhelmed/disproportionally worried.

this in the budget) and program accessibility by phone. Embassies and IPs noted program components they thought should be continued, including speed dating/networking, the Women in Business International Congress event, a Leadership and Empowerment Certification for coordinators, and pitching practice.

### FINDING EQ 3C: WHAT TYPES OF LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS HAVE U.S. EMBASSIES IDENTIFIED TO INCREASE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO PARTICIPANTS AND REDUCE COST?

**Local partnerships varied by country, but the most frequently mentioned were those with municipalities,<sup>27</sup> universities, and financial institutions.** Stakeholders discussed partnerships established and partnerships they were cultivating for future cohorts, in some cases with an eye toward long-term program sustainability. Table 5 summarizes local partnerships.

*Table 5. Partnership Examples by Type in Each Country (C= Current, F= Future ideas)*

Country	Municipalities/ Local Governments	Financial Institutions	Universities	Other
Ecuador	C: Space, in-kind donations, publicity, investments F: Co-financing between private sector and prefectures	C: Loan application workshop (banks) F: Financing for alumnae (banks, DFC, IDB, WB <sup>28</sup> )	C: Digital catalogue, speakers, internships, space for fairs F: Thunderbird University (non-specific)	C: Connecting alumnae with potential clients (Ministry of Cultural Heritage) Places to meet, Internet (Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion)
Guatemala	none	none	C: Exposition and class space, a mentorship program, library English classes, speakers, support with branding topic	C: Ministry of Economy program that provided advisors to alumnae
Dominican Republic	none	C: Alumnae sponsorship (State Bank)	none	C: Space, publicity, final event host (name not given)
Kenya	none	C: Financial literacy training and tax education (KCB Bank, Kenya Revenue Authority)	none	C: Kenya Chamber of Commerce, local innovation hubs, and the USG African Women Entrepreneurs program
Zambia	none	C: Mentors/facilitators/judges seed competition (bank), special insurance rates for alumnae (insurance company)	none	C: Business linkage opportunities and available resources (Zambian Development Bank)

<sup>27</sup> Note that Ecuador uniquely had several partnerships with local governments and municipalities.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, Inter-American Development Bank, World Bank

## FINDING EQ 3D: HOW CAN ECA AND U.S. EMBASSIES LEVERAGE EXISTING ECA PROGRAMS, RESOURCES, AND ALUMNI AND U.S. EMBASSY NETWORKS TO REINFORCE THE BUSINESS SUCCESS OF AWE ALUMNAE?

**According to stakeholders, ECA and embassies can provide access to financing for alumnae to start and expand businesses, as well as leverage their networks and resources to expand alumnae networks and market access.**

Respondents shared many suggestions of how embassy networks and financial resources might be leveraged to support AWE alumnae business success. Alumnae frequently reiterated that financial resources were a barrier to starting and expanding businesses. Alumnae most frequently suggested ways that the embassy might help connect them to financing, including providing grant funding or loans or supporting better access to financial partners and institutions to access funding.

*"How can they support our success? By enabling our business, making it easy for us...First, potential additional knowledge could help us make our business more marketable...They could help us, too; instead of borrowing money from a bank here, they could provide us with direct help. Even if we end up having to return it to them, without demanding as much as banks here in the country do." (Alumna, WHA)*

Many alumnae also suggested the embassy provide contacts and networking opportunities through various avenues and support alumnae to increase their products' exposure (domestically and internationally) through embassy networks, events, and other forums. Alumnae also shared a desire for embassy follow-up, both to share new opportunities and to keep in touch, though only a slight majority of survey participants have registered on the DOS website (see EQ 2 for additional information about follow-up). Mentorship and additional training were also suggested as part of this continuous follow-up.

According to select country embassies, some alumnae suggestions are already being implemented. For example, in Ecuador, the embassy is "promoting the brand of AWE online, and people buying AWE [products] online. We are also collaborating with the econ bureau (EB) to connect women in STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math] to penetrate the market in Ecuador. Then we are also trying to make a name for the USG to support the development of micro-entrepreneurship."

Several embassies mentioned the benefit of AWE alumnae being part of the wider DOS alumni network and how they are working to link them with other ECA programs or alumni. The U.S. Embassy in Zambia introduced alumnae to American Spaces and the American Chamber of Commerce. As one embassy interviewer explained, "The chamber has provided information business linkages for American companies at the stage they're seeking that support." IPs largely echoed alumnae suggestions, most commonly around catalyzing the entire DOS alumni community as resources for AWE alumnae through networking, providing tangible resources, mentoring, and learning opportunities. IPs also mentioned the need for seed capital/financing.

See the conclusions and recommendations sections for stakeholders' specific suggestions about how ECA and embassies can reinforce AWE alumnae business success.

## CONCLUSIONS

The ET identified several AWE best practices for ECA to share with embassies and local IPs as the program continues to expand. DB, the mentorship component, and networking activities all contributed to alumnae business success and work well with the AWE blended model. Pitch competitions, speakers/external presenters, and trainings/workshops also contributed to business success. No structural components emerged clearly as contributing specifically to alumnae business success; however, alumnae preferred in-person activities. In-person support, speakers, and classroom discussions all helped clarify DB materials and enhance the content. Alumnae also preferred a cohort reflecting diverse sectors and levels of business experience that is small enough (18–36 participants) to facilitate strong connections, networking, and presenting and receiving feedback in front of their peers.

**Best practices for program implementation include contextualizing DB content to the local context, hiring entrepreneurs as facilitators, involving DOS alumnae in programming activities, and facilitating access to seed funding/capital.** Stakeholders suggested several post-program best practices, including engaging alumnae to follow their progress and continue connecting them with networks and resources to support business development and growth, such as events to expand exposure for alumnae products, and introductions to domestic and international markets.

## EVALUATION QUESTION 4: TO WHAT EXTENT IS AWE CONTRIBUTING TO THE W-GDP MISSION OF INCREASED GLOBAL PEACE AND STABILITY AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY?

While it was outside the scope of this evaluation to measure the outcomes objectively or precisely, the evaluation gauged stakeholder perceptions about the program’s value. These perspectives are drawn largely from the qualitative interviews. **With only embassy interviewees directly addressing the overarching evaluation question, virtually all stated AWE was meeting the goal of increased economic prosperity. However, only a couple embassy interviewees mentioned increased global peace and stability:** “[O]ne of our [Integrated Country Strategy (ICS)] goals is economic goals and increasing [country] economic strategies and goals. These women definitely gained skills they wouldn’t have otherwise gotten from other sources...When you’re empowering them and building their entrepreneurial capabilities then you’re building the democracy and stabilizing within the country.” Sub-question findings detailed below validate embassy interviewee perceptions about AWE’s contributions to meeting economic prosperity goals.

### FINDING EQ 4A: HOW DO AWE PARTICIPANTS PERCEIVE THE BENEFITS OF AWE IN THEIR COMMUNITY/COUNTRY/REGION?

Most alumnae interviewees and almost half of IPs noted AWE benefitting alumnae’s communities. In addition, some alumnae perceived benefits at the country level. However, very few mentioned regional level benefits. One alumna in Africa said, “For example, AWE program has given opportunities to different people across the country... It means development of their businesses and, if they have been provided with an opportunity to do their business, it means

giving opportunities to other youth, women, or whoever they are employing. That’s a plus to the region and the country at large.”

In contrast, another African alumna indicated that more work is needed across several AWE cohorts before its impact could be determined. As an African alumna explained, she was not sure how her cohort has affected her country because her cohort was made up of almost 50 participants. “We can wait for at least five cohorts to determine the impact of AWE to the country.”

**The three main AWE program benefits interviewees identified were increasing employment, mentoring youth, and sharing knowledge, particularly with other women entrepreneurs.** One WHA alumna noted, “[AWE] gives tools and opportunities for women with small businesses to create jobs. In my case, for example, right now here there are 10 people, and their families are supported by this [business]. The fact that the business is maintained, continues to sell, continues to produce, and can feed those families is already a result, in part, of [my] participation in that program.”

Many alumnae mentioned how they extend benefits to their communities by sharing the knowledge they gained through AWE with others, whether as mentors or in less formal ways.

#### **FINDING EQ 4B: HOW DO PROGRAM STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING U.S. EMBASSIES, PERCEIVE THE VALUE OF AWE IN MEETING MISSION GOALS IN THEIR COUNTRY/REGION?**

**Most embassy interviews indicated that AWE’s value relative to meeting ICS mission goals was in promoting economic development.** As one WHA embassy interviewee noted, “Programs focused on entrepreneurship and leadership really resonate in the media. Graduates are best advocates. We don’t have to give them talking points.” Likewise, an African embassy interviewee said, “We have a particular goal of promoting inclusive economic growth. That’s a benefit to the country. A strong prosperous [country] purchases more U.S. goods” and would, therefore, be strong in the region and a force for the United States. These statements also demonstrate that one value in promoting economic prosperity is increased bilateral economic and political ties.

A couple of WHA embassy interviewees also mentioned that AWE’s contributions facilitated limiting China’s power in the region, which they also connected to strong bilateral ties. As one WHA embassy interviewee explained, “Helping to counter penetration of China, promoting prosperity, promoting social and economic inclusion. There are little pods of leadership who have allegiance to us... More people now see the U.S. as an ally and not an enemy.”

The last benefit that a few WHA embassy interviewees mentioned was that AWE contributed to migration mitigation. As one WHA embassy interviewee explained, “These factors, which are positive, result in a collateral decrease in other factors, which are negative. For example, ...a decrease in migration.” A few WHA alumnae echoed this. As one explained, “The United States Government seeks well-being for [country] families because the deaths and separations that occur between relatives when moving between Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States are terrible and sad.” Another stated, “It is very admirable to have this initiative [AWE



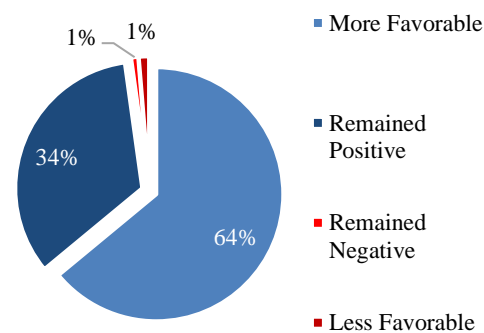
academy] of wanting to support countries like ours. I understand that, perhaps, it is because of migration issues, so that people do not risk their lives anymore, do not leave their country, their family, their roots.”

The discussion about AWE’s benefits to alumnae’s communities, countries, and regions also demonstrates its value, particularly in terms of promoting economic prosperity. This is explicitly clear in a WHA alumna’s statement, “The United States is the giant of the world. It’s in its interest to do projects like this, where it’s going to strengthen an economic area of countries that are then going to have a greater relationship with it and thereby also benefit. That’s pure geopolitics. So, it didn’t surprise me. I applaud it, but I wasn’t surprised that it did.”

#### FINDING EQ 4C: HOW HAS PARTICIPATION IN AWE AFFECTED ALUMNAE’S PERCEPTION OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT AND ITS PARTNERS?

When asked “How did your views of the United States Government change as a result of your participation in AWE?” **98 percent of all survey respondents said they were more favorable or remained favorable towards the USG**, as depicted in Figure 20. The proportion of WHA and African respondents who felt this way was virtually the same.

Figure 20. Favorability toward U.S. Government (Survey, n=716)



**Likewise, most alumnae interviewees indicated that their perception of the United States had improved because of AWE.** Alumnae attributed these changed views to a lack of previous awareness that the USG was interested in countries like theirs.

For example, one WHA alumna noted, “I feel that through this program, a genuine interest in supporting the growth of the region could be noted, specifically the growth of women and of the job opportunity for women, which has had a positive impact on my perception of them.” Similarly, some alumnae did not realize the USG supported women/youth, especially entrepreneurs, or provided support programs. As an African alumna explained, “Before, I just knew them as a first world, but did not expect that they could be good to the women in...Africa, in general, and even collaborate with them. This did not occur to me before joining AWE.” A WHA alumna made a similar comment, “Not even our country takes the time to educate us or give us this information that really helps, contributes.” Some also did not realize the USG was involved in economic development/fighting poverty.

Although most alumnae reported positive favorability changes, two percent of survey respondents reported that their views of the United States remained unfavorable or changed to be less favorable as a result of AWE participation. Though a small overall percentage, all respondents who reported that their views changed to be less favorable were from Africa: nine percent of survey respondents in Uganda, five percent in Zimbabwe, five percent in South Africa, and three percent in Zambia. None of the qualitative interview respondents reported negative favorability changes.



## CONCLUSIONS

Based on stakeholders' feedback, AWE is contributing substantially to broader mission goals, particularly those related to promoting economic prosperity. Moreover, while stakeholders perceived a direct tie between AWE and economic prosperity goals, the connection with global peace and stability goals was seen as largely indirect, as a function of meeting economic prosperity goals. Finally, AWE is increasing participants' positive views of the United States overall.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are structured by activity implementation, structural components, and post-program support. Recommendations are based on findings and specific suggestions from program stakeholders.

### ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION

- 1) All country programs should localize or contextualize program content and topics to the local business environment even more than they already do. Though the DB platform is offered in two languages, and facilitators, participants, and other program stakeholders offer supplemental information to contextualize the modules, program stakeholders suggested further contextualizing the DB platform to align with the specific realities of starting a business in each respective program country, as well as providing content and guidance on local business registration, taxes, insurance, and accessing loans or grants.
- 2) Maintain basic program components, prioritizing opportunities for formal and informal networking, mentorship, presentations/external lectures, soft skills training, pitch competitions, and, of course, continuing to utilize the DB platform. Likewise, continue to engage experienced facilitators, ideally with entrepreneurial and local business experience. At the same time, consider adjusting some program components to better meet alumnae needs:
  - a) *DB*: Tailor course material (DB and training/workshops) to participant levels, if possible (i.e., offering the option to skip more basic modules and learn more advanced information for those with more experience); fix technical glitches in the DB program.
  - b) *Mentorship*: ECA/Embassies should set clear expectations for IPs to design a structured mentorship component that includes regular interaction with mentors who are familiar with alumnae businesses, the local business environment, and have mentorship experience/been trained in mentorship to the extent that budget and IP capacity allow. However, AWE implementation should also continue to support and encourage informal and peer-to-peer mentorship opportunities.
  - c) *Networking*: Peer-to-peer networking is a crucial, albeit informal, program component. Therefore, programs should provide as many opportunities as possible for participants to connect, provide each other feedback, and have in-person unstructured discussion time to ensure these opportunities are well integrated in the program (see also recommendations for program structure for more details).
- 3) Learning from experienced entrepreneurs, fellow participants, external speakers, and other

AWE stakeholders is beneficial to participant learning from real-life successes and failures. Country programs should clearly define the types and role of local business leaders that should be involved in the program as part of specific activities.

- 4) Clearly communicate with in-country teams about seed funding availability and provide more opportunities for AWE participants to win funding. Likewise, IPs could further develop relationships with local financial institutions and host country government programs that support women's entrepreneurship to enhance the participants' access to funding opportunities.
- 5) Integrate tangible ways to connect participants with new markets, both domestic and international, for their products and services. For example, more structured networking events such as expos and fairs will facilitate participants' connection to local business leaders and other entrepreneurs.
- 6) In contexts where the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect implementation, consider providing access to the internet and computers, ensuring that the program is accessible by phone, and/or ensure the target group's digital literacy.
- 7) Address identified program gaps in financial knowledge, marketing, publicity, and legal aspects of business ownership by identifying interests and alumnae's knowledge gaps periodically throughout the program. One possible approach would be to integrate brief assessments at regular intervals throughout program implementation to assess any possible knowledge gaps.
- 8) Integrate both AWE and other DOS/ECA program alumnae (who are already familiar with the embassy) into program delivery as mentors, speakers, and facilitators, and via networking opportunities. Alumnae have diverse backgrounds, networks, and experiences that can support AWE program participants in developing their businesses.

## STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

- 9) Include as wide a variety of program components as possible to complement DB, tailored to the context and alumnae's specific needs.
  - a) To the extent possible, given the implications of COVID-19, prioritize in-person over virtual classes and events. This will support the networking component mentioned above.
  - b) Keep cohort sizes as is (between 18-36) to allow for meaningful interactions among cohort peers and between participants and implementors (IP, facilitators, mentors, speakers, etc.).
  - c) To respect the many roles women play in their household, workplace, and community that demand their time, survey participants ahead of program start to identify a schedule that will work for the maximum number of participants, including best meeting days, times, and session frequency.

## POST-PROGRAM COMPONENTS

- 10) Seed Funding/Capital: Prioritize identifying concrete sources or mechanisms for seed funding/capital for alumnae to start or expand their businesses. This may include offering or identifying loan sources, leveraging or developing new relationships with funding institutions to create avenues for easier access to funding, or connecting alumnae with investors at the

international and domestic levels.

- 11) Allocate resources to maintain and support the AWE alumnae network post-graduation. For example, make sure the alumnae network is recognized and integrated into embassy communications in the same way as other ECA/DOS programs.
- 12) Consider formally using WhatsApp as the primary vehicle for network outreach, given that it is by far the most widely used.
- 13) Identify mechanisms for better capturing alumnae contact information to ensure that it is possible to maintain contact. Implement follow-up activities with AWE alumnae, from regular engagement to know their progress to offering additional opportunities for learning and connection with AWE alumnae and the broader ECA/DOS alumni network.
- 14) Continue to connect alumnae with new markets, both domestic and international, for their products and services. This might be done via embassy-sponsored events, providing alumnae with business contacts, and promoting their products and services via digital catalogues, events, and embassy purchases (e.g., using alumnae catering services for embassy events).