Activity Spotlight and Lessons Learned

Alliance Partner: eCommerce Institute
Dates: 2020-2021

Program: Ecommerce capacity-building for women-led MSMEs
Alliance Series: MSME capacity-building, inclusive trade

What was done?
- The eCommerce Institute selected women-led MSMEs to receive scholarships to take one of four types of courses on ecommerce topics as part of their eWomen program.

How was the program designed?
- Women-led firms applied to receive scholarship for a course suitable for their digital maturity level:
  - "Internet Sales Operator" Course + Digital Acceleration Program (Beginner)
  - "Intensive Digital Commerce Program" (Intermediate)
  - "Senior Program in Digital Commerce" (Advanced)
  - "Advanced Program in Digital Commerce" including cross-border ecommerce (Advanced)
- Target firms selected to receive scholarships, based on the following selection criteria:
  - <250 employees
  - USAID presence country or Argentina
  - Woman CEO or 50%+ female executive team
  - Focus on rural and artisan sectors
  - Motivated and desire to learn
  - Viable product/service and proven demand
  - Dedicated time and investment in company to build ecommerce business

Project: Scholarships for ecommerce training for women-led businesses
Country: Various, Latin America
Target segments: Women-led MSMEs
Outcomes: 288 MSMEs selected in two rounds of applications, 139 completed the program
Impacts: Gains in ecommerce use, online sales, new customers
Top Lesson: Essential to ensure participant participation during and after the course

Keys for impact:
- Rigorous selection criteria
- Courses tailored to firms’ ecommerce readiness
- High-quality course content and teachers
I. Participants

The eCommerce Institute’s scholarship program for women-led MSMEs provided training on ecommerce topics, with varying course levels based on the participant’s ecommerce readiness.

There were two rounds of applications and scholarships given out. In the first round, 160 women from 12 countries were selected to participate, 131 accepted the scholarship, and 70 completed the program.

In the second round, 128 women from 8 countries were selected to participate, all 128 accepted the scholarship, and 69 completed the program.

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of selected participants by country for each training.

**Figure 1 – Number of participants by country in each training**
II. **Reported Impacts**

In a post-course survey, a majority reported “significant improvement” in use of ecommerce (figure 2), specifically in:

- 70 percent in use of online marketplaces
- 65 percent in optimizing packaging, shipping and delivery
- 64 percent in digital marketing and after-sales service
- 59 percent in understanding online domestic online customers, and 52 percent in understanding international online customers.

**Figure 2 – Reported improvements in skills**

Respondents saw improvements in several business KPIs and revenue (Figures 3 and 4):

- 97 percent reported coming up with new ideas on how to generate revenue online
- 68 percent reported “improvements” or “significant improvements” in KPIs of making first online sales and 67 percent in gaining new domestic customers
- 37 percent reported improvements in KPIs in gaining international customers
- 70 percent reported growth of online sales since taking the course
Figure 3 - Reported improvement in Business KPIs

- Get new ideas on how to generate revenue online
- Be better positioned to overcome Covid's impact on our business
- Make more ecommerce sales to existing customers
- Overcome a specific barrier or restriction to do ecommerce
- Create own online store
- Reduce our logistics costs
- Make our first online sale
- Increase our ecommerce sales in the domestic market
- Get new ecommerce customers in the domestic market
- Reduce our operating costs
- Establish a store on a regional marketplace such as Mercado Libre
- Overcome a specific barrier to export
- Identify business synergies with other vendors in the course
- Get new international ecommerce customers
- Hire new employees
- Make at least one sale to a new export market
- Increase existing online sales to export market
- Start exporting using ecommerce: sell to at least one new overseas...
- Establish a store on a global marketplace such as eBay or Amazon
- Start importing products or services from foreign markets

Figure 4 - Reported revenue growth

- >50% sales growth
- 31-50% sales growth
- 1-10% sales growth
- 11-30% sales growth
- 0% sales growth
II. Implementation analysis

What worked well in implementation:

- Rigorous selections and slotting of firms to the right course
- Course content and teachers were effective

Challenges in implementation:

- Almost half of the original selected participants did not complete the course. A survey was done for these drop-out participants after the first cohort which indicated that most of those who dropped out did so because of challenges due to time constraints, and Covid-related burdens.
- Did not receive post-course survey from all participants- 20/70 responses from first cohort, 49/69 responses from second cohort
- Participants often require further support after the course ends
- Some participants’ low leadership skills and confidence

Recommendations to overcome challenges:

- Discuss time commitment in selection process
- Provide greater flexibility/options for taking the course
- Consider alternative methods of measuring impact, include hosting a focus group with past students to gather real time data, or offering incentives such as partner discounts or additional content for participating in the impact survey.
- Provide ongoing mentorship and support
- Training in general leadership skills

Testimonial

THANK YOU to eCommerce Institute for teaching me and believing in my potential. Please pass on my thanks to USAID for this opportunity they gave me. It is an excellent tool for my professional career and I encourage you to continue supporting women. The impact attained is incredible. –

Tete de Cid, Guatemala

This summary was prepared by Erica Vambell and Kati Suominen of Nextrade Group.
About Alliance partner eCommerce Institute

The eCommerce Institute, based in Argentina, is a nonprofit regional organization that supports the development of the Digital Economy in Latin America through initiatives that strengthen and promote ecommerce. The Institute works with its network of 18 Latin American eCommerce and business associations to develop, promote, and accelerate the training and professionalization of human capital in the industry, as well as share knowledge, success stories, and best practices. The Institute distributes ecommerce training and capacity courses, and hosts regional eCommerce Days. As a partner of the eTrade Alliance, the Institute contributes to capacity building projects and policy dialogues.