

Empowering the socio-economic development of women-led businesses in Rwanda

Beneficiary: Progetto Rwanda Onlus
Location: Rwanda, Africa
Grant Cycle: 2023 - 2026
Type of Grant: three-year program support
Human Welfare & Rights
Website: progettorwanda.it

The Associazione Progetto Rwanda Onlus was founded in 1998, a few years after the end of the Rwandan Genocide. Its aim is to carry out projects to protect the rights of children and young people and to empower women, thus contributing to the social, economic and cultural development of local communities. The female unemployment rate in Africa averages around 45%, about twice as high as the male rate. The development of business-smart solutions is a key strategy to cope with an uncertain economic environment and to open up new opportunities for small entrepreneurs. Compared to the rest of the world, there are very few female-led enterprises in the region. This gap is due to many factors related to the business environment and socio-cultural barriers. However, in spite of its terrible recent history, Rwanda has experienced tremendous growth over the past nine years and has implemented key policies to counter increasing poverty. The involvement and success of women is crucial to the competitiveness of every economic sector. The Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation (NaEPF) has been committed to improving living conditions in Rwanda since 2006. In 2013, the Foundation began collaborating with Progetto Rwanda Onlus to support women's entrepreneurship and schooling projects, including the creation of a school farm in Kibaya. Supporting micro-entrepreneurship projects for the empowerment of women means enabling them to overcome a state of extreme vulnerability, become autonomous and, in many cases, find the courage to escape situations of abuse and domestic violence. As of 2018, 113 small businesses were successfully

started by Rwandan women, thanks to the support of NaEPF. The women's entrepreneurship project was successfully replicated until 2023.

The new three-year program is aimed at developing and consolidating the business activities opened by 45 women who have taken part in the entrepreneurship program in previous years and who have demonstrated outstanding entrepreneurial skills in running their businesses. Thanks to the training and financial support they have received, they have all moved from extreme poverty to running successful small businesses. The women's levels of education range from primary to high school, but they have also acquired business and entrepreneurial skills through personal experience, which have been greatly enhanced by the initial training programme. Further entrepreneurial training is provided to develop and deepen their knowledge of business, finance, social media and English, as well as to develop creative and dynamic business techniques to generate new, original and sustainable development ideas. E4Impact, the project partner, takes care of the entrepreneurial training aspect, focusing on interactions with the local business system and investors, combining skills enhancement and business acceleration with individual mentoring.