

Women entrepreneurs drive their communities forward - with support from the Givaudan Foundation

How women picking ylang-ylang flowers learn the skills to succeed as entrepreneurs in Moheli, Comoros Islands.

When traveling on the island of Moheli, the chances of encountering a female entrepreneur have grown. Arriving in Hamba in the northwest of the island, people will tell you to visit the new clothing store, where a shipment of first-class goods has just arrived.

The owners of the store will be pleased, as they depend on a growing customer base. The three women have invested a lot of time and energy to get this store off the ground and are aiming for sales to grow over the coming years.



The founders of the Vao Layi Mwana clothing store in Hamba are assessing the first delivery of merchandise. They realized that it pays off to invest in higher-quality goods and to build relationships with trusted suppliers. This is what they have been doing since.

It all started in late 2019, when the three entrepreneurs enrolled in a challenging course program with 99 other women from four villages of the region. Over the following six months, the

women met three times a week to work on their language and calculation skills.

This was made possible by a project of the Givaudan Foundation, which is implemented with the help of the local NGO Maecha. The project aims to help women who pick ylang-ylang flowers as a seasonal activity to build an additional economic livelihood.



The courses and the preparation of the business plans required great concentration.

Already during the courses, the women were supported in developing their own business ideas. Those who arrived at a promising business plan were able to secure start-up funding for it, as well as support in planning and implementation.

Several of the women run their projects single-handedly. For example, one of the women has ventured into the production of bananas and ginger, while two others are taking their goat farms to a new commercial level. Another woman has established herself in the fuel business by expanding her gas sales point. In this way, she is contributing to the security of supply on the island, which is still weak with regular shortages.

Many of the projects have also been set up by groups of women. For example, two bakeries run by six women now supply fresh bread to the residents of the villages of Barakani and Hamavuna. The demand for their bread is high, but there have also been shortages of flour recently. The difficult supply situation is one of the obstacles to building a new business on the islands.



One of the founders of the Baraka Four bakery in Barakani is inspecting the production of a fine batch of bread.

However, entrepreneurship against all odds is essential for improving people's lives, in the Comoros as elsewhere. That is why it is so encouraging to see how the women of the bakery in Hamavuna have used the time when flour was no longer available. They hired an expert at their own expense who helped them to refine their dough mix. Production is now running at full speed again.

The women's drive for success is coming from within. We, as the Givaudan Foundation, cannot create this driving force of progress from the outside. What we are trying to do is to help create a better environment for people to achieve their goals - for the benefit of their communities.

Why is the Givaudan Foundation supporting ylang-ylang pickers?

Ylang-ylang is one of the most coveted flowers in perfumery. In the Comoros Islands, it is an important economic factor. The women collecting the flowers play a key role in producing the precious ylang-ylang oil. But this activity is restricted to a few months per year and other employment options are limited.

In contrast, there are many business opportunities in the agricultural and village context. However, most of the women never had the chance to develop the reading, writing and calculation skills required to become successful entrepreneurs. This is why the Givaudan Foundation is giving them an opportunity to learn and apply these skills.