

SWEEP CONFERENCE

Staying Power

*The Personal Traits Behind Women
Who Build Businesses That Last*

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YEARS OF IMPACT



**Our Future
Reimagined**

We keep asking why women start businesses. The harder question is why they stay.

Most research

focuses on entrepreneurial entry — motivations, barriers, and start-up rates.

Far less research

asks what keeps a woman committed once the business exists and the novelty wears off.

My doctoral study

reframed the question around persistence: intention to remain, not just intention to start.

**Women start almost as often as men.
They don't stay in business at the same rate.**

9.7%

**Female Total Early-Stage
Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA)**

vs. 12.7% for men

4.1%

**Women owning
established businesses**

vs. 7.9% for men — nearly double

66.2%

**Women who perceive themselves
as having the capabilities to run a
business**

vs. 72.4% for men

BACKGROUND AND INDIVIDUAL ATTRIBUTES



Perceived Opportunity (%)

	Women	Men
 GDP PER CAPITA	A: 53.1 B: 50.5 C: 63.1	A: 59.6 B: 52.3 C: 63.0
 GEM AVERAGE	55	57
 SOUTH AFRICA	61.7	66.7

Fear of Failure (%)

	Women	Men
 GDP PER CAPITA	A: 49.9 B: 50.9 C: 48.1	A: 45.0 B: 45.0 C: 44.0
 GEM AVERAGE	49.8	44.7
 SOUTH AFRICA	52.5	51.6

Networking (%)

	Women	Men
 GDP PER CAPITA	A: 48.7 B: 54.1 C: 52.1	A: 55.9 B: 58.7 C: 59.9
 GEM AVERAGE	51.7	58.2
 SOUTH AFRICA	36.7	41.5

Perceived Capabilities (%)

	Women	Men
 GDP PER CAPITA	A: 46.9 B: 53.9 C: 67.1	A: 61.9 B: 62.6 C: 78.0
 GEM AVERAGE	55.4	66.3
 SOUTH AFRICA	66.2	72.4

Level A: Economies with a GDP per capita exceeding \$50,000
 Level B: Economies with a GDP per capita ranging from \$25,000 to \$50,000
 Level C: Economies with a GDP per capita below \$25,000

ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITY TRENDS



TEA (Early stage of Entrepreneurship (%))



GDP PER
CAPITA

Women

A: 10.2
B: 11.8
C: 16.6

Men

A: 13.7
B: 15.4
C: 19.1



GEM
AVERAGE

Women

12.6

Men

15.9



SOUTH
AFRICA

Women

9.7

Men

12.7

Entrepreneurial pipeline (%)



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Not all motivation is created equal

In my study of South African women entrepreneurs, motivation split into two distinct categories:

IN

INTERNAL MOTIVATION

- Independence & being one's own boss
- Work-life balance and flexibility
- Using one's own talent, skill & innovation
- Self-fulfilment and pursuing a challenge
- Contributing to society and family security

EX

EXTERNAL MOTIVATION

- Desire for wealth & economic stability
- Filling a gap in the market
- Improving family status
- Higher, more recognised social position
- Direct benefits of a high-status business

ENTREPRENEURIAL MOTIVES AND OUTCOMES



Make a difference motive (%)

	GDP PER CAPITA	Women A: 5.2 B: 5.9 C: 9.2	Men A: 6.7 B: 7.1 C: 10.6
	GEM AVERAGE	Women 6.6	Men 8.0
	SOUTH AFRICA	Women 6.0	Men 7.5

Make wealth motive (%)

	GDP PER CAPITA	Women A: 6.0 B: 6.0 C: 10.3	Men A: 9.0 B: 9.0 C: 12.2
	GEM AVERAGE	Women 7.2	Men 9.9
	SOUTH AFRICA	Women 6.2	Men 8.2

Family tradition motive (%)

	GDP PER CAPITA	Women A: 3.2 B: 3.4 C: 7.4	Men A: 4.7 B: 5.0 C: 8.8
	GEM AVERAGE	Women 4.5	Men 6.0
	SOUTH AFRICA	Women 4.3	Men 6.0

Earning living motive (%)

	GDP PER CAPITA	Women A: 5.8 B: 8.5 C: 14.2	Men A: 7.3 B: 10.2 C: 15.6
	GEM AVERAGE	Women 9.2	Men 10.8
	SOUTH AFRICA	Women 6.5	Men 8.6

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THE HEADLINE FINDING

Internal motivation is the strongest predictor of a woman's intention to remain in — and grow — her business.

Independence, self-fulfilment, using one's own talents, pursuing a challenge, and family security outweighed money, status, and market opportunity as drivers of staying power — across race, age, and years in business.

NWU Doctoral Study: South African female entrepreneurs' intention to remain in business



WHO LEANS ON INTERNAL MOTIVATION MOST

Persistence is a skill that deepens with time

40+

Entrepreneurs 40 years and older

reported significantly higher internal motivation than younger entrepreneurs — content with intrinsic reward, less swayed by external validation.

yrs

Longer-tenured business owners

showed the same pattern: more years self-employed tracked with stronger internal motivation and attitude toward growth.



Exposure to a role model

in youth or early career (family business, mentor) correlated with higher internal motivation and a more positive outlook on entrepreneurship overall.

SUSTAINABILITY AND ADOPTION OF TECHNOLOGY



WOMEN (%)

Sustainability

64.6	Strategy of Environmental Sustainability
63.3	Practice of Social Sustainability
33.3	Awareness of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Digitalisation

45.0	Yes – adopted digital technologies in response to the coronavirus pandemic
62.1	Intention to digitalisation in future
28.9	No intention to digitalisation in future



MEN (%)

Sustainability

59.7	Practice of environmental Sustainability
72.2	Strategy of Social Sustainability
64.3	Prioritize the social and/or environmental impact of business above profitability or growth

Digitalisation

15.3	Yes –enhanced the initial plans you had with new or improved digital technologies
15.0	No –already planned a range of digital technologies before the coronavirus
34.5	No –business can function without digital technologies
15.8	No –business can function without digital technologies

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If internal motivation predicts persistence, cultivate it deliberately

01

Peer & role-model networks

Small, local, female-led circles build the confidence and identity that fuel internal motivation faster than large formal networks.

02

Reframe support around growth, not just survival

Programmes should assume women want to grow, not just stay small — and back that ambition with tailored finance and mentorship.

03

Early exposure matters

Role-modelling and business exposure from a young age builds the same internal drive we see in older, more resilient entrepreneurs.

04

Name the confidence gap directly

Training that explicitly targets self-belief and fear of failure addresses the real gap — not a gap in skill or opportunity.



"Ngiyabonga"
"Baie dankie"
"Ke a leboga"
"Thank you"

