



SWEEP
STUDENT WOMEN ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME



TRANSFORM**HER**

Building Businesses That Matter: Women, Entrepreneurship & Sustainability

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THE STARTING POINT

A Nation of Founders — With a Leaky Pipeline

50%+

of South African women identify as 'entrepreneurs', one of the highest rates measured across 17 countries.

Source: Veuve Clicquot Barometer, 2020

7.9% vs 4.1%

men vs. women who own established businesses (3.5+ years). The gap between men and women widens as businesses mature indicating that women exit at a higher rate than they start.

Source: GEM South Africa Report 2023/24, Stellenbosch Business School

So, the question isn't whether women will start businesses. It's why some don't just survive but matter, and last.

Sustainability is a strategy, not a side project



What research shows

Women entrepreneurs tend to prioritise social, health, educational and environmental impact alongside, not instead of profit.

Source: GEM SA Report 2023/24



Why it's an advantage, not a trade-off

Differentiation

Purpose-built products stand out in crowded markets.

Resilience

Local-resource models absorb supply shocks better.

Access to capital

Impact investors & grants increasingly seek this profile.

Bottom line: this isn't charity bolted onto a business model. Done well, it is the business model.



CASE STUDY

Wonderbag

Sarah Collins · South Africa

Innovation From Lived Experience

- A non-electric heat-retention cooker, designed for rural African communities, born when an electricity shortage prompted Collins to recall her grandmother using cushions to retain heat in food.
- Now recognised as the fastest-growing carbon offset project in Africa.
- Named to Time's 50 Most Genius Companies in 2018, alongside a Climate Change Leadership Award.

Takeaway

The problem she solved came from her own life experience — not a market report. Your lived experience is data.

Source: The CEO Magazine, "Most Successful Women in Business in South Africa"

Product Integrity Over Hype

- After surviving heavy metal poisoning, Sherwin channelled her recovery into building science-backed skincare that works.
- Three generations of family knowledge behind her: her grandfather co-founded Adcock Ingram, the company behind Ingram's Camphor Cream.
- Her approach stands in deliberate contrast to the 'build fast, scale faster, exit faster' playbook.

Takeaway

A great story sells once. A product that works keeps customers, and that's what lasts.

Source: Ventureburn, "South African Women Entrepreneurs Get It Right", Aug 2025



CASE STUDY

Eco Diva Natural

Nicole Sherwin · South Africa

CASE STUDIES

Sustainability Spans Every Sector



Marine Waste → Bicycles & Eyewear

Mozambican entrepreneurs Marta Uetela and Claudia Machaieie respectively turned ocean plastic waste into bicycles and reading glasses, creating green jobs locally.



Climate-Smart Agriculture

Dr Phindi Cebekhulu-Msomi, an agripreneur building climate-smart solutions in South African farming.



Sustainable Homeware

Morongwe and Michelle Mokone built a high-growth, premium sustainable homeware business from a social-impact lens.



Sustainable Architecture

Gillian Holl runs a sustainability-focused architecture practice responding to both client and environmental needs.

LET'S BE HONEST

The Barriers are Real



Case studies can feel out of reach if we skip this part.

Less access to networks & capital

Women business owners often have less access to wealth, economic networks, and social standing in a frequently patriarchal business culture.

Support gaps as businesses mature

Funding, mentoring, and technology access remain key barriers to sustaining growth, and not just starting out.

Digital adoption lag

Many women entrepreneurs recognise digital tools as essential to sustainability and growth, but face training and access gaps in adopting them.

YOUR TURN

Pair Up — 4 Minutes

Talk through these three with a partner. We'll hear from a couple of pairs after.

1

What's one sustainability angle already built into my business that I'm underselling?

2

Who is one person or network I could tap for mentorship or funding this month?

3

What's one small, low-cost change I could pilot in the next 30 days?

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**Sustainability isn't a side project.
It's your competitive edge.**

Before you leave:

Write down the one action from today's pair exercise you'll do this week, and who will hold you to it.



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**NOW CLAP FOR YOURSELF: YOU DID A GREAT JOB, GO
AND IMPLEMENT.**



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Thank you



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