Six Important Characteristics of a Successful Microfranchisee

Towards a blueprint for nutrition enterprises

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Key messages

> Social entrepreneurs drive social innovation and transformation in various fields including education, health, environment and enterprise development.

> Microfranchising is a business model that applies elements and concepts of traditional franchising to small businesses or individual entrepreneurs in resource-poor contexts.

> This field report attempts to bring various social entrepreneurial activities across Asia and Africa into the spotlight to uncover which factors make for a successful nutrition microfranchisee.

> Our research has uncovered six key attributes that contribute to a microfranchisee’s success in serving base-of-the-pyramid (BoP) customers:

   > Women microfranchisees are preferred.
   > A strong supportive network is beneficial.
   > They work for their goal like their lives depend on it.
   > They have a sufficient level of education.
   > They speak the local language.
   > They are well trained.

According to the latest Global Entrepreneurship Monitor’s (GEM) Social Entrepreneurship Report, published at the end of May 2016, social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs are on the rise in both high- and low-income countries. “Social entrepreneurs drive social innovation and transformation in various fields including education, health, environment and enterprise development. They pursue poverty alleviation goals with entrepreneurial zeal, business methods and the courage to innovate and overcome traditional practices. A social entrepreneur, similarly to a business entrepreneur, builds strong and sustainable organizations, which are either set up as not-for-profits or companies.”

Although they have sparked interest among academics, policy-makers and practitioners, investigations in the field remain limited when it comes to cross-national investigations. Cross-national analyses are valuable as they enable comparison and replication, and reduce the risk of disseminating non-generalizable results.

Microfranchising is one of the most common tools social enterprises use to expand, while the microfranchisee is simply the individual recruited to run a unit of the microfranchise business. This field report is an initial attempt to bring various social entrepreneurial activities across Asia and Africa into the spotlight to uncover which factors make for a successful nutrition microfranchisee and can be attributed to the specific personal traits of the entrepreneur him- or herself and his or her environment. This report is the first of a series through which we hope our findings will serve as a primary step towards the...
A successful microfranchisee can be hard to find

But before delving into this subject, let us take a step back and further frame this topic by defining the term “microfranchising.” In fact with its increasing popularity has come less certainty about what exactly microfranchising means, which has led to all sorts of initiatives now being called microfranchises. At Sight and Life, we like to refer to the following definition of the word: “Microfranchising is defined as a business model that applies elements and concepts of traditional franchising to small businesses or individual entrepreneurs in resource-poor contexts. It refers to the systemization and replication of microentreprises and to the provision of goods and services in low-income areas where access is poor, prices are inflated and counterfeiting is rampant.”

Microentrepreneurs can now become part of a well-established franchise network with very small upfront investments. Needless to say, not everyone is an entrepreneur. While it has long been assumed that people living in poverty were natural entrepreneurs because so many of them own small enterprises, this hypothesis has widely been rejected in that most of them are entrepreneurs by necessity, not by choice. Indeed, our research has uncovered six key attributes which contribute to a microfranchisee’s success in serving base-of-the-pyramid (BoP) customers. The terms “franchisee” and “entrepreneur” are used interchangeably throughout this article.

Methodology

Seven case studies were chosen (Table 1). Each of them met the following inclusion criteria:

- Microfranchises serving BoP customers
- Microfranchises achieving a certain level of success
- Microfranchises selling health-related products
- Microfranchises located in Asia, Africa or Latin America

We compared elements at work across all case studies and teased out which key factors were most likely to contribute to a microfranchisee’s success. Four categories helped us classify the information we came across, and these are: gender, support network, socioeconomic status (SES) and skills/character traits. We then looked for characteristics related to the person him- or herself and his or her environment and excluded elements related to the way the enterprise was set up, its strategy, structure and implementation (Table 2). Since 2013, Nutri’Zaza’s entrepreneurs, the so-called animatrices, have been employed by Nutri’Zaza, and are thus officially no longer considered as entrepreneurs on the ground. Nevertheless, although their official status has changed, much can be learned from this social business’s recruitment strategy, and hence it is included and explored in this review. Sizanani Mzanzi, the South African microfranchising business founded by Sight and Life and DSM South Africa in 2014, also appears in this article. Its lessons learned were cross-checked against the results of the literature search and provide additional evidence to support our preliminary findings or shed light on outliers that require more attention. Microfranchises with differing missions (e.g., eyeglasses, nutrition, clean energy, hygiene) were deliberately included with the aim of increasing the generalizability of the outcomes and their applicability in any one situation.

Analysis

✓ Women microfranchisees are preferred

Although harder to recruit due to family and cultural influences on the role of women in low- and middle-income countries, female microfranchisees tend to perform best. Not only are they the main consumers, but there is enough evidence to support the view that they are much more focused on the greater good. In fact, research suggests that as women earn higher wages, there is a cascade of potential benefits to their social and economic wellbeing, translating into better educational, nutritional, health and productive outcomes for their families and communities.

“As women earn higher wages, this translates into better educational, nutritional, health and productive outcomes for their families and communities”
### Table 1: Description of Case Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Geography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shakti</strong></td>
<td>Microfranchise</td>
<td>Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) products that promote better health and hygiene</td>
<td>Project Shakti has over 72,000 micro-entrepreneurs supported by 48,000 Shaktimaans</td>
<td>India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VisionSpring</strong></td>
<td>Microfranchise</td>
<td>Eyeglasses</td>
<td>More than 360,000 eyeglasses sold across four continents and 11 countries since 2001</td>
<td>40 developing countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>wPOWER India</strong></td>
<td>Microfranchise</td>
<td>Clean Energy</td>
<td>1,010,000 people reached through clean energy awareness and 200,000 households reached</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Solar Sister</strong></td>
<td>Microfranchise</td>
<td>Clean energy technology</td>
<td>Since 2010, more than 700,000 people have gained access to light and energy through Solar Sister</td>
<td>Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living Goods</strong></td>
<td>Living Goods</td>
<td>Goods and lifesaving medical supplies</td>
<td>At the end of 2014, Living Goods and partners were supporting roughly 1,300 health promoters serving a population of roughly one million</td>
<td>Uganda, Kenya, Zambia and Myanmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nutri’Zaza</strong></td>
<td>Microfranchise</td>
<td>Koba Aina: fortified porridge flour mix and ready-to-eat porridge</td>
<td>About 100 jobs created; 34 Hotelin-Jazakely (‘restaurants for babies’) and more than 9 million units of Koba Aina distributed in 2015</td>
<td>Madagascar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sizanani</strong></td>
<td>Microfranchise</td>
<td>A fortified flavored instant porridge and fortified flavored powdered beverage</td>
<td>Too early to tabulate</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mzanzi</strong></td>
<td>Microfranchise</td>
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### Description of Case Studies

**Shakti**

Global corporation Hindustan Unilever established its Shakti microfranchise model in the year 2000 to reach millions of potential customers in remote parts of rural India. Project Shakti is an initiative to financially empower rural women and create livelihood opportunities for them. It provides a regular income stream for the Shakti entrepreneurs and their families.

**VisionSpring**

“Each Vision Entrepreneur receives his or her own Business in a Bag, a microfranchise sales kit containing all the products and materials needed to market and sell eyeglasses. Vision Entrepreneurs undergo a three-day training in basic eye care and business management and receive close, ongoing support from staff. Equipped with their Business in a Bag, Vision Entrepreneurs conduct educational outreach on vision care and offer screenings in their communities.”

**wPOWER India**

“The Partnership on Women’s Entrepreneurship in Clean Energy program (wPOWER India) has built and empowered a network of over 1,000 women clean energy entrepreneurs, who work in rural underserved areas. They enable market-based solutions to work for rural communities that have a concrete need for modern energy solutions.”

**Solar Sister**

Solar Sister eradicates energy poverty by empowering women with economic opportunity by combining the breakthrough potential of clean energy technology with a deliberately woman-centered direct sales network to bring light, hope and opportunity to even the most remote communities in rural Africa.

**Living Goods**

Living Goods employs and trains local people – the majority of whom are women who sell goods and lifesaving medical supplies at competitive prices. Living Goods provides businesswomen and saleswomen with employment and entrepreneurial skills while improving health outcomes in their communities.

**Nutri’Zaza**

A social business, the goal of which is to sustainably combat chronic child malnutrition in Madagascar. It was formerly a project called Nutrimad, supported by GRET, a French NGO. Nutri’Zaza distributes a food supplement called Koba Aina to disadvantaged populations through a network of restaurants for babies (Hotelin-Jazakely) and a home sale network, using Nutri’Zaza field employees, so-called Animatrices Nutri’Zaza. Since 2013, Koba Aina has also been selling single-serving sachets through retail.
A qualitative assessment conducted by Solar Sister reports that women’s contribution to the household income has led them to play a larger role in deciding what proportion of the household budget is spent on themselves and their children. This trend is more noticeable for women than if men were the recipient. Sizanani Mzanzi’s initial recruitment mandate in 2014 was women only; however, this was later revised to include male entrepreneurs. Nearly all case studies specifically target women, except for VisionSpring and Nutri’Zaza. Despite this difference, 90% of VisionSpring’s current entrepreneurs are women and Nutri’Zaza has rarely had to recruit men, as very few of them apply for this type of work. In fact, most of Nutri’Zaza’s entrepreneurs are mothers. Likewise, the typical Living Goods entrepreneur, called a Community Health Promoter, is also a mother. For some so-

### TABLE 2: Six characteristics of a successful microfranchisee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Support Network</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shakti</td>
<td>HUL taps into the growing number of women’s self-help groups (SHGs) and identifies and invites women to become Shakti entrepreneurs.¹⁴ The women who are trained can then choose to set up their own business or to become Project Shakti distributors – or Shakti Ammas (‘mothers’).¹⁴</td>
<td>Furthermore, the Shakti program was extended to include Shaktimoms, who are typically the husbands or other male family members of the Shakti Ammas.¹⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VisionSpring</td>
<td>Although the model does not purposely target female candidates, about 90% of current entrepreneurs are women.¹⁷</td>
<td>VisionSpring looks for entrepreneurs with a good reputation and connections within the community to provide them with a solid customer base.¹⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wPOWER India</td>
<td>wPOWER India solely recruits women entrepreneurs, and has built and empowered a network of over 1,000 female clean energy entrepreneurs.⁸</td>
<td>The network of wPOWER India entrepreneurs, known as Sakhis, forms the core of wPOWER India, aided by multisector partnerships that enhance access to technology, finance and markets.¹⁸ Evidence has shown that a Sakhi’s success potential increases significantly if her business activities are approved and supported by her husband and family.⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solar Sister</td>
<td>Solar Sister recruits women only.⁹ Management staff train and recruit Business Development Associates (BDAs), who are locally hired field staff and Solar Sister’s direct link to entrepreneurs. In turn, each BDA recruits, trains and supports a group of 1–25 self-employed women entrepreneurs (Solar Sister entrepreneurs or SSEs).¹⁹</td>
<td>Men are also encouraged to join and engage in their wife’s work, to avoid family conflict when she earns money.²⁰ The business model is based on the Avon model (which benefits from the powerful connections of women’s social networks and highly personalized sales).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Goods</td>
<td>Living Goods rigorously trains Community Health Promoters (CHPs). Although Living Goods does not specifically target women, the typical CHP is a mother.²²</td>
<td>Living Goods looks for a savvy and connected entrepreneur with rich social networks that he or she leverages to spread health education and build his or her business.²² These businesses are based on the Avon model.²²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutri’Zaza</td>
<td>Nutri’Zaza’s recruits are mostly women entrepreneurs, known as animatrices. Each Hôtelin-Jazakely (baby restaurant) is entirely managed by one or two animatrices, who prepare the ready-to-eat porridge and sell it. Most of them are mothers.</td>
<td>Women are part of Sozazas – associations that regroup animatrices and serve as an internal network whereby the interests of the animatrices are put forward and/or defended.²⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sizanani Mzanzi</td>
<td>Sizanani Mzanzi targets women specifically.²⁶</td>
<td>A nonrestrictive invitation is sent to all potentially interested women. However, for the future franchisors, it was decided it would be preferable for the women to belong to an existing network (church, stokvel, community, school, political).²⁶</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### SIX IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL MICROFRANCHISEE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SES*</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>character traits</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantaged women living below the poverty line are identified and invited to become <em>Shakti</em> entrepreneurs. For Unilever, these had to be individuals for whom earning US$16 a month fundamentally changed their life, rather than just making life a little easier.</td>
<td>“Soft” skills, like confidence-building, as well as “hard” skills, such as selling and bookkeeping, are looked for. Confident and independent distributors who are motivated and committed to the cause are recruited.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most candidates are unemployed prior to joining VisionSpring. Additionally, VisionSpring looks for an adequate education level that will allow the candidate to run a business as well as someone who seeks a higher income to promote entrepreneurialism.</td>
<td>VisionSpring looks for entrepreneurs with potential leadership ability, self-motivation and the ability to work under pressure to meet sales targets.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Goods looks for entrepreneurs with between six and 10 years of schooling. They should be able to pass a basic math/reading test in English. Unlike many microfinance organizations, Living Goods does not aim to help the neediest people start businesses.</td>
<td>Solar Sister gives attention to training women, supporting them and giving recognition. It acknowledges that women entrepreneurs gain important skills from trainings and ongoing mentorship support, and that they consequently become increasingly confident.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The <em>animatrices</em> originate from the poorest areas and have very little income or no income at all prior to joining the business. In terms of their level of education, they should be able to read and write.</td>
<td>Microentrepreneurs must be literate in both the local language and English, and previous work experience or training in health or business skills is desired (but not mandatory).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among the recruits, some are unemployed, others are employed part-time and/or are pensioners. None of them completed secondary school. <em>Sizanani Mzanzi</em> recruits community-based entrepreneurs from low-income areas.</td>
<td><em>Animatrices</em> must be able to speak Malagasy (the local language), whereas neither French nor English is required. Women with a flair for business and who have some experience in social work are preferred. Experienced and no longer active <em>animatrices</em> will coach four to five <em>animatrices</em> and play the role of quality assurer.</td>
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*Socioeconomic status (SES): education, income; ** *i-shaktis*: these are information “kiosks” that are operated and hosted by the *Shakti* Entrepreneur. *i-shaktis* give access to information on education, employment, agriculture, health, personal care, legal procedures, e-governance and entertainment.

Microbusinesses in India such as *Shakti* and wPOWER India, self-help groups (SHGs) have proven to be an ideal instrument to recruit women entrepreneurs by providing them with a safe and supportive environment (financial and social support) through which they are encouraged to take on entrepreneurial initiatives. Interestingly, the entire family is often involved when the woman is the primary entrepreneur, while men are much more likely to do it alone. This additional support may be one of the factors that positively influence women’s entrepreneurial success.

- **A strong supportive network is beneficial**

Why are women the best microfranchisees? Much of their success is attributed to their powerful social network. “We look for women who are uber-connected in their communities. That’s the
currency," says Chuck Slaughter, the founder of Living Goods. By tapping into their relationships, social networks and social influence, women lay the foundation for a solid and personalized customer base, making it easier to build and extend a supply chain. Solar Sister, Living Goods and Nutri’Zaza resort to the Avon distribution channel, where social networks are crucial as sales depend on direct distribution such as door-to-door sales, bypassing wholesalers and retailers. Three of the case studies highlight the importance of families’ involvement, particularly the husbands. It seems that women whose husbands and/or other male family members are included and involved in their wife’s/female family member’s work are more successful in their business activities.

Shakti has gone as far as extending the program to women’s spouses and naming them Shaktimaans, who are none other than the male versions of their female counterparts, Shakti Ammas. Likewise, Solar Sister encourages men to join and engage in their wife’s work to avoid family conflict as soon as they start earning money. The network of wPOWER India entrepreneurs known as Sakhis closely engage with an enabling partnership ecosystem comprised of financing institutions, private sector, government and other stakeholders providing them with access to technology, finance and markets. Nutri’Zaza’s Soazazas are associations that regroup animatrices and serve as an internal network whereby the interests of the animatrices are put forward and/or defended, while Sizanani Mzanzi decided it would be preferable for the women to belong to an existing network(s) (church, stokvel, community, school, political) for future franchisors to improve the selection of more successful entrepreneurs. In South Africa, mothers are the pillar of the house, as they take care of the family needs (while the man is at work) including diet and within available household funds. Consequently, they may be more inclined to know about the value of vitamins and minerals and influence the state of nutrition in the community.

✔ They work for their goal like their lives depend on it
According to John Alexis Guerra Gomez, “The true social entrepreneurs are ghosts that never claim the glory for themselves, that work for their goal like their lives depend on it, because actually their lives do depend on it.” A good predictor for successful entrepreneurship is one’s socioeconomic status prior to becoming an entrepreneur. Evidence points to a positive correlation between low income and successful business. Nearly all case studies targeted unemployed women living below the poverty line and/or living in low-income areas. Part-time workers and even pensioners were targeted in some cases (e.g., Sizanani Mzanzi). Among the candidates recruited by Sizanani Mzanzi, a few suffered from life-changing events with drastic consequences for their quality of life (see Box 1). It seems that those who are already financially successful are some of the least motivated. Hindustan Unilever explains that they would look for someone for whom higher income would fundamentally impact their daily life rather than slightly improve it. Sizanani Mzanzi seconds this approach and indicates that this method encourages prospective candidates to value the opportunity once given and further promotes entrepreneurialism. Nonetheless, for others, low income is not enough and needs to be complemented with a will-
Solar Sister Fatma uses her networks (here a village savings and loan group) to sell products in Tanzania.

ingness to invest to ensure that profits are not the sole motivator to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Nutri’Zaza reflects this, too, and demonstrates a preference for women with a flair for business and with some experience in social work. Interestingly, Living Goods does not aim to help the neediest people to start a business: similarly to Hindustan Unilever and Sizanani Mzanzi, it seeks someone who is willing to invest, reflecting their stake and interest in engaging with the social business.

“The best entrepreneur displays the right mix between not being needy and yet being someone for whom entrepreneurial activities would significantly and positively change their quality of life”

Sizanani Mzanzi requires future entrepreneurs to pay a sign-up fee of R100.00 (US$7.30) for the training, which would determine acceptance on the premise that only a committed prospect would pay the price to take advantage of the opportunity. Sizanani Mzanzi’s experience has revealed that entrepreneurs with less cash are unable to recover from shocks (death of a family member, credit sales, etc.). Moreover, the needy have developed a short-term view to most things. They want to gauge quickly what is in it for them, how quick the gain might be and how much effort might be required. Consequently, commitment levels are very low or else quickly evaporate. Regarding the Shakti project, each Shakti entrepreneur invests US$220 in stock at the outset – usually borrowing from SHGs or microfinance banks. All in all, it seems that the best entrepreneur displays the right mix between not being needy and yet being someone for whom entrepreneurial activities would significantly and positively change their quality of life.

✓ They have a sufficient level of education

Our case studies seem to reflect a preference for recruiting women with a level of education that will allow them to run a business, influence it and enable them to communicate with and convince consumers. Nutri’Zaza recruits literate women; Living Goods recruits entrepreneurs with between six and 10 years of schooling, as they tend not to stick around if they have more, and the candidates should be able to pass a basic math and reading test in English. According to Sizanani Mzanzi, women who start off with low levels of education require upskilling that starts with very basic concepts, with slow increments of complexity in training, resulting in high costs. Equally, they must be assisted for a long time until they have mastered new skills.

This labor-intensive approach requires a significant amount of human capital to work. In this light, Sizanani Mzanzi decided to focus more on recruiting savvy entrepreneurs who require less support to launch and operate. However, it recruited women who had not completed secondary school yet had many years of working experience – hence their comprehension and spoken English was good. This is important to be aware of, especially in countries in which education was not available to everyone (e.g., in South Africa, due to apartheid). In such cases, adapting to the context is necessary. Sizanani Mzanzi therefore adjusted the criteria of education level to grade 10 (two levels lower than secondary completion).
**Box 1: Perseverance – When business seems to be in your DNA**

As an experienced seller with over 15 years of informal and formal sales expertise, you would expect Adelaide to be flamboyant, expressive and a convincing negotiator. That is not the case – her calm and quiet (introverted) nature may be part of her learned strategy that has made her a successful microfranchisee.

Her narrative of her youthful days reveals a driven individual who traveled and sold various personal care and household products in several southern African countries including Botswana, South Africa, Swaziland and Lesotho. A tragic car accident while en route to sell brought this adventurous entrepreneur’s activity to a halt, leaving her with a back injury that causes discomfort every now and then.

With a reduced appetite for travel but an increased need to care for her family, she was forced to be flexible and to work with the constraints and opportunities within her immediate residential area. One such opportunity was Sizanani Mzanzi. Adelaide was one of the 20 participants of the successful 2014 micro-franchising pilot in Ivory Park, which led to the establishment of Sizanani Mzanzi Non-Proft Company (NPC).

Adelaide’s sales results since the pilot show consistency and demonstrate that she has mastered her model and way of interacting with consumers. Listening to her talk about strategy reveals a plotter who has become proficient at her trade. From lowering her own margins to push volumes through other sellers when she doesn’t have time or capital, to identifying underserved markets and roping in friends and family to be the feet on the ground, she is a tactician. The wealth of experience that she has gained over time has given her both the insight and the maturity to make trade-offs when constraints exist, but also to remain nimble in her approach and reactions.

Every entrepreneur has his or her fair share of challenges to overcome, and certainly Adelaide is no exception. For example, some of her most reliable clients and even close family members have become bad debtors, resulting in losses or the injury that limited her mobility; the list is endless. Despite these hardships, Adelaide doesn’t give up and remains focused on her goals, and she has the results to show that. As the most consistent and highest seller of all current microfranchises, one could say it’s in Adelaide’s DNA to pursue entrepreneurial activities and persevere in this sector.

*Taurai Nyakunu*

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✔ **They speak the local language**

Often, the ability to speak the local language reduces the suspicion and increases the trust between the microentrepreneurs and the end users. This higher level of trust allows the consumers to simply evaluate the products and services that are offered rather than be preoccupied with the ulterior motives of an outsider. For Sizanani Mzanzi, women are not required to speak English. Instead, women who spoke Zulu and/or several other languages were preferred for appropriately reaching out to the local community. The same applies to Nutri’Zaza, where women are only required to speak Malagasy. With regard to Living Goods, microentrepreneurs must be literate in both the local language and English. An IT component of the Shakti project, i-shaktis, are IT-enabled community portals run by the Shakti entrepreneurs and designed to give rural people access to information on a wide range of topics, including Unilever products, employment, education, personal care, agriculture, health, legal procedures, entertainment and e-governance. Users can post queries on these subjects to local experts in their local language and access free content developed in their local language as well.

✔ **They are well trained**

The best entrepreneurs are not necessarily the ones with the highest risk tolerance and ability to develop new business ideas. Of course, entrepreneurs need to have hard skills, be able to sell and be able to keep the books, but soft skills – the ability and willingness to follow processes and procedures and a desire to learn – are often more important than having a high-risk tolerance or the ability to generate a new business idea. Trainings therefore make up an important part of the process, as they foster these much-needed soft skills among women.
Following the training, many women will feel more confident and independent as distributors. Additionally, other skills that relate more to one’s personality traits are extremely beneficial, such as the ability to work under pressure to meet sales targets, being committed to the social objectives of the business, having the ability to lead, self-motivation and feeling comfortable interacting with people. Recruiting women from below the poverty line in India brings its own challenges: It is difficult for them to visit the homes of those who are better off, while the caste system adds an extra layer of complexity. For the Shakti project, this meant teaching a lot of confidence-building, but also investing considerably in training and coaching women to become highly competent and confident business operators. Additionally, the daily reality of Shakti staff often requires arduous work in remote areas of the country. To do this, motivation and commitment to the cause are required.

Hindustan Unilever has a team of rural sales promoters (RSPs) who coach and help Shakti Ammas in managing their businesses. At wPOWER, Shaktis are provided training on clean energy technology, products, technical aspects of doing business, and knowing their customers on a regular basis. Clémence Boule Martinaud, Nutrition Project Manager and social marketing expert at GRET, tells us that the most successful Nutri’Zaza entrepreneurs are the flexible ones who are keen to adapt to the demand (e.g., ensuring that the porridge is delivered at the same time on a daily basis for the baby in the baby restaurants). They also need to be motivated – carrying heavy thermos flasks containing ten liters of porridge requires some level of motivation! The animatrices benefit from continuous coaching: Experienced and no longer active animatrices will coach four to five animatrices and play the role of quality assurer. Lastly, a flair for business and good relationships with the health authorities and agents are beneficial, as these give them increasing credibility and legitimacy among their networks.

To retain motivation, Sizanani Mzanzi scheduled bi-weekly meetings that served for both discussion and product stocking. Pre-set themed discussions ranging from successful sales tactics to bad experiences, challenges, prospecting plans, etc., were organized. Worth mentioning is the key role that social recognition seems to play: “When my husband left, I had nothing. Today everyone knows me. I am someone,” says Rojamma, a Shakti entrepreneur.28 Nutri’Zazo explains that this increase in social recognition stems from the social nature of the business and its charitable objective for the most vulnerable – namely, the children. The women are proud and feel privileged to play such an important and valued role in society.

“The women are proud and feel privileged to play such an important and valued role in society”

Conclusion and recommendations
Recruiting the right entrepreneurs is critical, and a tough call. The sustainability and overall success of an entrepreneurial activity depends a lot on finding the right person. Not just anyone can and will become a successful entrepreneur. While several organizations have tried to identify the exact combination of variables that would make a successful one, cross-national investigations in this area are rare, and this report is a modest attempt to put a spotlight on the key characteristics related to the person him- or herself and his or her environment and which make for a successful nutrition entrepreneur. Our investigation has revealed six common characteristics observed across different contexts (geographical setting, mission of the business), namely the following:

1. Women microfranchisees are preferred
2. A strong supportive network is beneficial
3. They work for their goal like their lives depend on it
4. They have a sufficient level of education
5. They speak the local language
6. They are well trained
Solar Sister Julieth Mollel serves dinner to her four grandchildren who live with her in her home near Arusha, Tanzania. Julieth has had a lot of success selling Solar Sister products to her community. She is now able to have a little savings put aside from her Solar Sister sales and to care for her family.

Our analysis has also revealed other elements which may have been overlooked and are worth considering, such as whether mothers are even more successful than women in general and whether age plays a role at all, and if so, in which direction (older, younger or mid-generation) and why? Some businesses (e.g., Nutri’Zozo) go as far as requiring the candidates to have some health/nutrition knowledge prior to recruitment. It would be interesting to know to what extent this adds value to the business and leads to more success. Furthermore, although some level of education is beneficial, too much education may lead to high turnover rates – the right balance must be struck, but what is that balance? Some case studies highlight the fundamental role that context plays – overcoming the caste system in India, and historical aftermaths and their implications in South Africa.

Sizanani Mzanzi, the South African microfranchising business founded by Sight and Life and DSM South Africa, is a fascinating example in which many (if not all) of these elements are encountered. It is hoped that this case study will be the source of many other investigations, and that as it matures and improves, its lessons learned will serve as a reference point for many other nutrition start-ups in Africa.

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