

### THE SERIE'S FOUR COMPONENTS:

Background papers  
Quick guides to what and how  
Tools  
**Inspiring Initiatives**

**The association has been attracting more women entrepreneurs as members each year. Now AWEA has over 3,000 members, with nearly 2,000 active/paying members.**

**AWEA created the National Women Business Network, NWBN and approximately 11,000 Ethiopian women entrepreneurs are now represented by NWBN.**

**AWEA's support to its members consists of:**

- **Business Development Services** by introducing innovative business ideas and helping members develop their own ideas;
- **Consultancy services** in marketing, taxation, financing, etc;
- **Skill training** on customer handling, bookkeeping, business planning, etc; and,
- **Mentoring**, more experienced members are mentors to their less experienced colleagues.

### Why this initiative is inspiring

The Amhara Women Entrepreneurs Association (AWEA) is a private regional non-profit organisation established for female entrepreneurs. Since AWEA became active in 2003 it has grown into the second-largest private business organisation in Ethiopia, in number of members. AWEA operates in four different cities: Bahir Dar, Gondar, Debre Markos and Dessie. The head office is located in Bahir Dar.

AWEA has become a national role model for supporting female business entrepreneurs. The role of the private sector, and women entrepreneurs in particular, for economic growth and development of Ethiopian society cannot be emphasised enough. AWEA offers a number of Business Development Services, which are instrumental in improving the livelihood of its members. Advocacy and lobbying, trade fairs, saving and credit, secretarial are among the core services on offer.

The project was run with financial assistance from Sida and technical assistance from the Swedish Chamber of Commerce (see the column to the left for more details).

### Programme objective

The long-term objective of the project was to facilitate sustainable development of the Ethiopian business community and thus contribute to poverty reduction through economic growth and increased trade.

The purpose of the cooperation between AWEA and the Swedish Chamber was to strengthen the capacity of AWEA. The goal for AWEA was, and still is, to provide necessary support to members and therefore contribute to a well functioning, more equal business community in the Amhara Region.

### Results

AWEA achieved remarkable results in creating socio-economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs. The overall result of the project is increased operational efficiency of the association and social and economic empowerment of women. AWEA has received recognition from governmental and non-governmental organisations. As a result of advocacy efforts, members in the four zones managed to get access to working premises, land for a business centre, office and tourist village, and space for street fairs.

## The AWEA project consisted of four areas:

### 1. Leadership and governance

The organisational structure was reformed and thanks to this the capacity of the executive committee increased. Training was focused on long-term visions, strategic planning, identifying goals, opportunities, challenges and how to meet them – both on a theoretical and practical level.

### 2. Development of member services

The variety and quality of services offered to AWEA members was developed. AWEA now offers training to all its members (the association is still dependent on donor contributions to carry out training). Trade Fairs are organised and business development services are offered. AWEA aspires to establish a credit and savings fund.

### 3. New project proposal to Sida

The Swedish Chamber assisted AWEA in drafting new project documents in line with our priorities and needs. A new cooperation agreement was signed 2008 between Sida and AWEA for the period 2008-2011.

### 4. Building a national women's business network

It was a necessity for AWEA members to find suppliers and buyers from other regions in the country; therefore a national network, NWBN, for Ethiopian women entrepreneurs was established. Through the network AWEA has been able to provide business opportunities and contacts to members seeking partners and clients outside the Amhara region.

To read more about AWEA, visit:  
<http://www.aweamhara.org/>

Below are some of the results that members of the AWEA have achieved:

- Diversified and expanded business;
- Improved income, ways of working, business management, knowledge in negotiations and improved self-confidence among the women;
- Broader business network;
- The families of the women became supportive; today one can observe close assistance from husbands. For example the husbands and the families of the members visit AWEA to pay monthly membership fees and the husbands help with exhibits during trade fairs.
- The National Women Business Network (NWBN) was established 2007 by AWEA with assistance from the Swedish Chamber. The network has now members representing 10 regions in Ethiopia.

### What made a difference?

One crucial part of this project was the presence of the Swedish Chamber. Within the AWEA project, the Swedish Chamber has played the role of mentor and strengthened the capacity of AWEA through experience sharing between established business organisations and AWEA. For four months a chamber employee was placed at AWEA headquarter in Bahir Dar. This was important in order to intensify the cooperation.

The project with AWEA covered four areas (see more information to the left):

- Leadership and governance;
- Development of member services;
- New project proposal to Sida (a new proposal); and,
- Networking – building a national women business network.

Through workshops, interactions with the Swedish Chamber, external consultants with knowledge of gender and networking, together with study tours, gave the women an international exposure that is needed to challenge current perspectives. Learning from women's associations and business women in other countries is crucial.

### Conclusions

- AWEA is a genuine grassroots organisation run by and representing women in a country where men traditionally rule.
- The association now has a solid base, and has taken on the role of mentor and role model to other Ethiopian women's entrepreneurial associations.
- AWEA has developed its management practice, enhanced its service delivery and created valuable networks. Local, regional, national and international trade has been promoted through the networks.
- The association generates more than 50% of its budget from sources outside donor support.