

# 2009-2015 Report



**Ubuntu at Work**  
Expanding communities & enhancing entrepreneurship



*“The expansion of women's capabilities not only enhances women's own freedom and well-being, but also has many other effects on the lives of all.”\**

\* “Many Faces of Gender Inequality,” Amartya Sen, *The New Republic*, Sept 17, 2001





## Ubuntu at Work in 2015

Ubuntu at Work was born out of my research on women micro-entrepreneurs around the world. Given my background as a sociologist, I spent several years interviewing female micro-entrepreneurs in South Africa, Nigeria, Indonesia, Egypt, India and Nepal. What I found while I was there was that, while women micro-entrepreneurs could sometimes manage their poverty they very rarely *escaped* it.

The only exception to this was when these women micro-entrepreneurs gained access to an extra-local market - a market and network *outside* of their community. The problem was that for the women micro-entrepreneurs who had gained access to extra-local markets and networks, these encounters were serendipitous - a tourist walking by connected a woman to an international non-profit, or a researcher connected a woman micro-entrepreneur to a national craft retailer or producer.

The challenge then, was to find a way to make these serendipitous extra-local connections available systemically to women micro-entrepreneurs. Ubuntu

was created as a response to precisely this challenge.

Ubuntu began in 2009 with 25 women in one community and 125 beneficiaries. Since then, it has grown tremendously to 5,000 women and 25,000 beneficiaries in 30 communities across 4 countries and three continents.

Ubuntu's global network of volunteers and staff have reached out to women in India, South Africa, Indonesia, and Jamaica, and worked with them to enhance their capabilities, increase self-confidence, and produce sustainable and green products for global markets.

In the last five years, the Ubuntu community has women in remote villages gain confidence, skills, and increase their income. As we look back on these past five years, we are thrilled to see the achievements of our women members. Our goal is to reach 200,000 members and 1 million beneficiaries by 2020. We're on it!



## Mission Statement

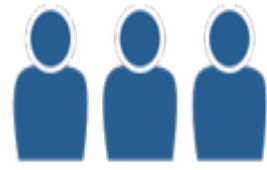
To offer women living in poverty opportunities to expand their capabilities and skills, leverage global resources, access global markets, and escape poverty.



5

Women Members

2009



125

BENEFICIARIES



5,000

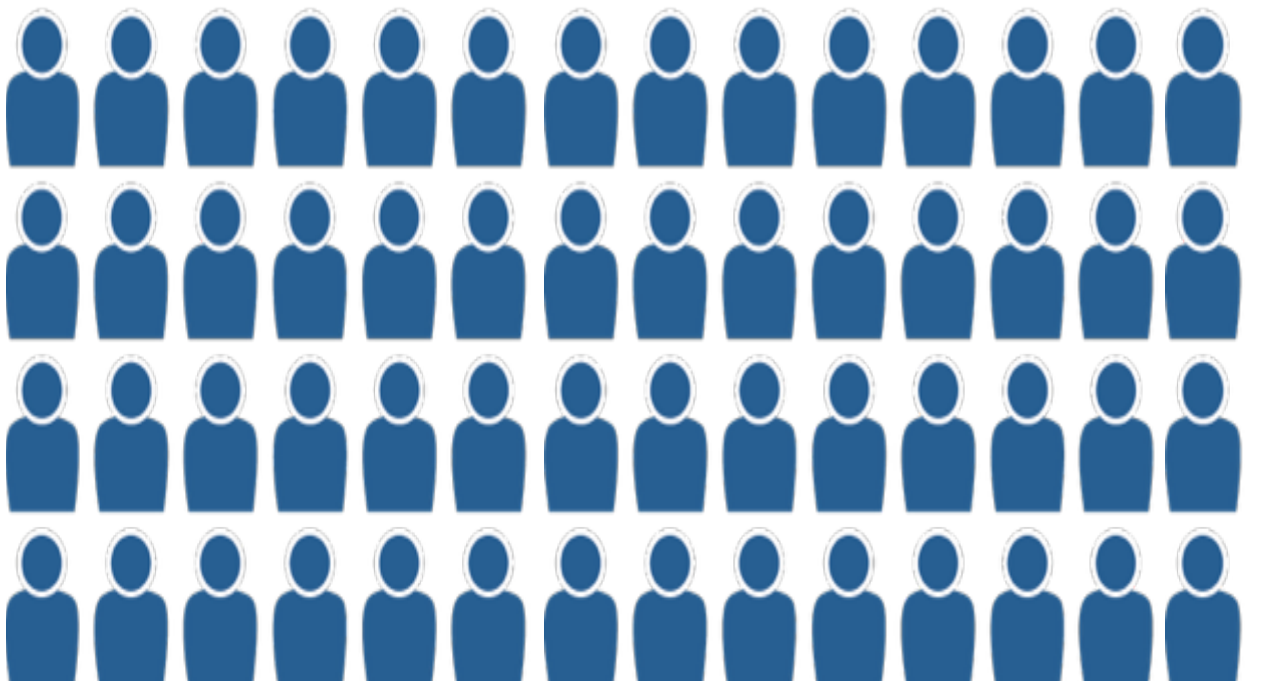
Women Members

Today



25,000

BENEFICIARIES





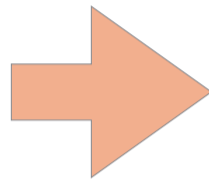
# Inputs, Outputs, Outcomes, and Impact

## Inputs

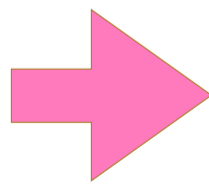
Global Community  
Ongoing Volunteer Support  
Infrastructure

## Outputs

Learning@Work Training  
Baobab Workspaces  
Production Orders



Increased Self-Confidence  
Increased Skill & Capabilities  
Increased Income & Economic Opportunities



Gender Justice for Rural Women

## Outcomes

## Impact



# Inputs

## **A Global Network**

The Ubuntu at Work network consists of rural women micro entrepreneurs who join Ubuntu as members, global retailers, volunteers, and professionals from around the world. Together, they form an ecosystem that helps Ubuntu members overcome the challenges such as weak marketable skills, a poor access to market information, and non-existent access to wider markets.

With the help of Internet connectivity Ubuntu has created a network of connecting its women members in over 25 rural locations to each other, and to its marketing, production, and training teams around the world.

Ubuntu at Work's network also includes global retailers who buy products made by Ubuntu members at our various rural locations. Finally, Ubuntu's global network includes professionals such as designers, production, IT, and logistics consultants, all of whom volunteer their time.

## **Baobab Workspaces**

Ubuntu at Work has established workspaces in the rural areas where its members live. Workspaces are

equipped with infrastructure that allow Ubuntu members to connect to the internet. Workspaces also have facilities for conducting training sessions and community meetings.

Ubuntu Workspaces also contain needed production equipment including sewing and apparel production, and printing machines. Workspaces also contain laptops for members to use. Where possible, Workspaces use solar energy for its operations.

## **Ongoing Volunteer and Staff Support**

Ubuntu at Work has also created support infrastructure composed of both staff and volunteers at the local and global levels. Local staff and volunteers offer support at Workspaces. They are supported in their efforts by Ubuntu global teams and by Ubuntu's professional volunteers as and when needed.

In addition, Ubuntu at Work recruits student interns with backgrounds in public policy and development studies. Interns support Ubuntu's global teams and/or spend time at one or more Workspaces supporting Workspace operations.



# Outputs

## **Baobab Workspaces**

Ubuntu at Work's Workspaces are called Baobab Workspaces, because like the tree, they serve multiple purposes - space for training, production, community events. Usually located in the heart of a village Baobab Workspaces are a key component of Ubuntu at Work's operating model.

The constraints of poverty make it impossible for rural women to take the risk of learning new skills. Regular manual work in rural areas offer women with limited marketable skills avenues for surviving - even though such manual (mostly laborious agricultural) work pays a pittance. The demands of providing for their family and children further reinforce their dependence on manual agricultural work.

Even if rural women living in poverty saved enough money to venture to a nearby town to learn new skills, the time commitment involved in traveling on a usually erratic and infrequent rural bus would make be enormous. Thus further discouraging rural women from learning new skills.

Baobab Workspaces address these challenges. They provide a space for the women to learn new skills, and to make products at their convenience.

Baobab Workspaces are run collaboratively. Ubuntu women members manage the workspaces themselves, learning managerial and leadership skills along the way.

## **Learning@Work**

Learning@Work is Ubuntu at Work's unique approach to communicating production and technology (including computer) skills necessary for participating in global supply chain opportunities. As part of the training program members also learn financial skills and basic management tools for managing production processes and operating their Ubuntu Workspace.

The Learning@Work training program also helps women-members acquire skills essential for launching their independent small business after 'graduating' from Ubuntu at Work if they choose. Women-members are offered long-term mentor support after they "graduate" and are encouraged to mentor new women-members in turn.

## **Production Orders**

Ubuntu at Work's global team generates orders for products members learn to produce. Women are paid per piece for the items they produce and payments are made via bank transfer.





## 2009 - the launch



- Ubuntu at Work is launched as a 501(c)3
- Ubuntu at Work Trust is set up in India to operate as Ubuntu at Work's Indian partner organization
- 25 women at one community in Ramanagar, India become the first Ubuntu members
- Ramanagar is a small town about 2 hours by car from Bangalore

- An Ubuntu at Work workspace are set up in Bomanahalli (a slum on the outskirts of Bangalore)
- Women are given training with producing eco friendly jewelry made out of used plastic bottles
- Within a couple of months, the rapid growth of the area around Bomanahalli and the increasing economic opportunities available to the women of Bomanahalli makes it clear that Ubuntu needs to focus on developing rural workspaces and/or workspaces in socially disadvantaged communities within Bangalore
- The Bomanahalli Workspace is closed as we turn our attention to launching workspaces in more disadvantaged urban areas

- An Ubuntu at Work workspace is also set up in Anandapuram (a Dalit neighborhood in the heart of Bangalore)
- The women from Anandapuram (mostly vegetable sellers) are offered help with accessing markets that would offer higher margins
- Again, within a couple of months, increasing economic opportunities available to the women of Anandapuram made it clear that Ubuntu needs to help women even more disadvantaged and to whom such economic opportunities are not available
- The Anandapuram Workspace operations are discontinued as we turn our attention to launching workspaces in rural areas



## 2010 - fine-tuning our model

- Ubuntu continues working in Chennapatna and Ramnagar
- Ubuntu women members in Ramanagar and Chennapatna gain additional sewing, embroidery, and screen printing skills
- Ubuntu also sets up a screen printing unit in Chennapatna and the women learn how to operate the unit
- Ubuntu helps women members get bank accounts and gain financial skills
- Women members are paid for the pieces they produce via bank transfers

- Ubuntu begins recruiting and mentoring summer interns from Georgetown University





## 2011 - focus on 'Remote Women'



- Ubuntu India launches workspaces in villages around Mysore in Karnataka
- The women, who have for generations been agricultural day laborers, gain sewing and screen printing skills
- Ubuntu India gets orders from Greenpeace to produce organic cotton bags, jackets, and banners
- The items for Greenpeace are sewn and screen printed at Ubuntu's Chennapatna workspace
- The regularity of Greenpeace's orders helps Ubuntu India develop and test its production models



- Ubuntu launches a workspace in Soshanguve, South Africa
- Soshanguve members are highly skilled at sewing with many members producing elaborate garments including wedding dresses
- Since, remoteness and isolation are clearly factors impeding the Soshanguve women's entrepreneurial efforts, Ubuntu explores how the women might be connected to global markets
- Marianne Fassler joins Ubuntu as our legal representative in South Africa



## 2012 - growing orders



- Ubuntu India gets orders from the Nuance Group to produce cotton and paper bags for its duty free stores in India
- Ubuntu's rural workspaces around Mysore in India begin producing cotton cloth and recycled paper bags for the Nuance Group
- The Nuance order, along with the orders from Greenpeace help Ubuntu India women members earn a regular income
- Ubuntu India welcomes summer interns from Georgetown University again
- Interns play a key role in helping Ubuntu's rural members produce quality products and more importantly gaining confidence
- Summer interns also launch Ubuntu's computer skill and English language training programs in rural India
- Ubuntu India sets up additional workspaces around Mysore
- Workspaces are also set up in remote villages in Chamarajnagar district (Karnataka's poorest district)
- The training periods are extended and the training programs are expanded to help women with no sewing skills gain the confidence and the technical abilities to sew quality products



## 2013 - pilots in South Africa, consolidation in India, outreach in Bali

- Ubuntu's third annual batch of summer interns arrive in India
- This is the largest group of interns Ubuntu has had thus far, they live in Kodagahalli and eat meals provided by Ubuntu women members in the area
- Outreach in Bali is launched



- Ubuntu India's production operations are consolidated
- Staff training programs are enhanced
- Efficient logistical plans launched for delivering cut fabric to Ubuntu women members in remote rural areas and collecting sewn bags



- Ubuntu South Africa launches its pilot production operation
- Marianne Fassler designs childrens' frocks and skirts
- Soshanguve women learn to sew hi-end apparel
- The frocks and skirts are available for sale at Ubuntu's head office in the US
- This pilot helps Ubuntu Global understand how its ground operations in South Africa would differ from its ground operations in India



## 2014 - search for global orders, pilot in Bali

- Ubuntu India's Paper bag production expands
- Ubuntu India's members start cutting and printing paper bags in addition to folding, sticking and finishing them
- Ubuntu India receives additional orders for bags

- Ubuntu explores market for paper beads made by rural women in Uganda
- Ubuntu offers training and support to a group of rural women in Uganda

- Developing Core Group of Ubuntu members in Bali
- Volunteers in Bali coordinate with the Core Group of Ubuntu members in Bali
- Core Group gain initial training in sewing and paper bag production



- Pilot orders are produced by Ubuntu Bali
- Pilot orders help tweak Ubuntu Global's production model for Bali
- Ubuntu Bali members begin preparing for possible large paper bag orders
- Ubuntu India members begin computer training
- Ubuntu India members who have 'graduated' get support with managing and completing independent orders





## 2015 - orders, outreach, and online operations



- Bali operations develop as legal formalities are completed
- Bali women receive preliminary computer training and internet-use training

- Marketing efforts ramp up as the skills of Ubuntu members increase
- Ubuntu Global seeks large orders for uniform, apparel, and shopping bags as Ubuntu members gain training and acquire necessary skills
- Ubuntu India partners with India's largest apparel manufacturer to provide high end training to its members



- Rural women in Jamaica reach out to Ubuntu Inc. seeking to participate in Ubuntu's global network, gain training and support
- Volunteers in Jamaica provide laptops and wifi in the village
- Ubuntu puts together a computer training and data entry and data management training modules for Ubuntu Jamaica



# Outcomes

Three primary questions frame how Ubuntu at Work evaluates its Outcomes: Have the women micro entrepreneurs gained the confidence to expand their aspirations? Have the women micro entrepreneurs gained the skills and capabilities to think entrepreneurially? Have the women micro entrepreneurs increased their income and their assets? Together, these three questions help us understand whether Ubuntu women have moved further along on the path toward Gender Justice.

## Gaining Confidence

From our conversations with Ubuntu members it is clear that Ubuntu has had significant impact in raising the confidence of its members. Ubuntu women from South Africa to Indonesia commented on they felt so much more confident after engaging and working with Ubuntu at Work.

Manjula, an Ubuntu member in India, observed that she has become “independent and bold when it comes to dealing with matters outside the home and especially when dealing with banks.” Where earlier, she hesitated entering banks or talking to bank tellers for fear that they would mock her ignorance, she now walks into the bank confidently and feels comfortable asking bank tellers for help.

Elizabeth in Soshanguve noted that working with Ubuntu “allowed us to do positive things for ourselves and our community.” Elizabeth’s friend Mavis observed that Ubuntu women felt better about themselves

after their engagement with Ubuntu. They felt good that they were using their time productively. Elizabeth added that “we were ... women who were sitting at home doing nothing. In the morning we would take our kids to school and after a cold drink and sandwich, we would while away our time. Then in the evening we would get our children from school.” Mavis continued that through Ubuntu we were still able to take care of our kids and also get some money and experience. Bilkis Banu echoed Elizabeth and Mavis’s comments that they were able to earn this respect instead of idling their time at home.

Latha and Sudha, Ubuntu members in India, observed that people in the village respect them so much more now. Ashwini, an Ubuntu member in India also noted that she and the other members had gained confidence, respect in the village and financial confidence after working with Ubuntu. Rajini added that because of their involvement with Ubuntu, “we don’t waste time; we learn new things.” And because the workspace is conveniently located, they are able to work easily, combining household chores and Ubuntu work. Consequently, they now lead freer, more secure lives, with the opportunity to learn new skills and develop expertise.

What clearly appears to have helped them gain confidence is Ubuntu’s collaborative model. Members from Ubuntu India noted that they became more confident as they had the support of other women in their village





and area. The “sense of bonding” helped us enormously. The “feeling of oneness and friendliness” helped them. As they put it, with others’ support they were able to address their concerns and overcome their anxieties: “together, we could make it happen, we could support each other and become confident.”

Ubuntu women in all locations further observed that they “share ideas with each other and help each other.” This helps them learn new skills faster and complete larger and larger orders. As one Ubuntu Indonesia woman remarked that the “best thing about Ubuntu was how they worked collaboratively (“kolaboratif”) with other women.”

The clearest evidence of the women’s growing self-confidence is the election to a local village council (‘panchayat’) in India where Ubuntu has a workspace of two Ubuntu women, Shalini and Jyoti. Three women fought in the elections; unfortunately, one member filed her application a few minutes after the deadline. Of the two women who won, Shalini, was from the lower caste.

The rise in Shalini’s self-confidence has been truly remarkable. It took Shalini two weeks to feel comfortable with sitting on a stool at a sewing machine when she first joined Ubuntu in 2010. As Shalini saw it, only rich people and powerful people sat on a chair or stool. Poor women, farm labor, sat on the floor. Today, Shalini feels entirely comfortable interacting with

senior politicians at both the village and district level.

As Ubuntu members have grown confident, they have become much more comfortable sitting straight in chairs (rather than on the ground) and making eye contact. They are comfortable carrying themselves as ‘professional’ women and express their desire to wear Ubuntu uniforms and IDs.

Ubuntu members in Indonesia, India and South Africa have clearly offered evidence of a very significant growth in their self-confidence. In the initial years, Ubuntu women members in all three countries would barely speak to Ubuntu volunteers and staff. They answered questions in monosyllables. Today, they feel comfortable discussing their concerns and their achievements both in their local language and increasingly in English.

### **Gaining Skills and Capabilities**

In South Africa, Mavis observed that Ubuntu at Work helped her and others in her community learn new skills and get experience. “I liked [Ubuntu at Work] because I can’t sit at home now and say I learned nothing. I learned to do something with my own hands, so now I have something to show for myself. ...I have my skills.” Mahadevi in India echoed Mavis’s sentiments.



Women involved in Ubuntu projects in India, she added, had gained skills such as sewing, operating cutting machines, and screen printing. Famida in India added that her group of women had gained embroidery, cutting, and basket making skills. Mahadevi, Famida and others in India continued that their involvement with Ubuntu has led them to continually gain new skills.

Along with specific production skills, women involved in Ubuntu at Work's operations in India, Indonesia, and South Africa have gained operational management skills. They have learnt how to manage their production units, to oversee their quality control processes, and to maintain records of their expenses and production. In Indonesia, India and South Africa, Ubuntu members have also gained skills necessary to interact with government officials, and with buyers and suppliers.

Ubuntu women in Indonesia, India discussed their computer skills they had gained as a result of their involvement in Ubuntu. They have been getting comfortable with typing on the computer and with using email. Marta and Budi from Indonesia are delighted to be able to communicate with other Ubuntu members and staff using their Ubuntu email accounts. They have also learned how to use 'Google Translate' so they could translate their emails between Bahasa Indonesia and English.

As members' confidence and computer skills have increased, they have become increasingly eager to learn more 'advanced' skills such as data entry and management. A review of the learning curve among women members suggests that women members who had greater levels of self-confidence to begin with (though not necessarily greater familiarity with technology), are eager and faster learners.

Women in both rural south India and rural Bali live in poverty, both have only have middle or high school education, both speak little or no English, and without Ubuntu's support, both women have minimal opportunities for gaining new skills and escaping poverty. Yet, the level of confidence among rural Balinese women members is considerably higher than that of women in India even at the start of their engagement with Ubuntu at Work.

Confidence development is clearly critical for speeding up the learning process. Consequently, Ubuntu's training programs have focused on enhancing the confidence levels of the trainees. This has been done in primarily two ways: 1) developing training materials that are deeply integrated with local cultural practices and traditional women's activities; 2) encouraging collaborative learning and working.

Our conversations with Ubuntu members in all three countries revealed that both these approaches have been significant



in helping women members enhance their self-confidence.

Members in South Africa commented on how collaborating with other Ubuntu members has helped them feel comfortable with taking on more risk and venture into new pathways.

Members discussed how they gained these skills, and gained them faster, by working collaboratively with other Ubuntu members; and skills they gained after becoming confident and comfortable with speaking in public and to people they considered ‘important’. Attending training sessions with other members, likewise, was more effective at enhancing their skills than attending a training session by themselves. Moreover, they commented on how collaborating with others during the production process, also helped them take on new production opportunities. Where earlier, they might have shied away from such production opportunities, they now eagerly sought them, given the support they knew they would get from other Ubuntu members at their workspace, and from the Ubuntu network in general.

### **Opportunities for Increased Income**

In all three countries, Ubuntu women-members remarked that what they valued about their engagement with Ubuntu is the opportunity to increase their income. Women engaging with Ubuntu India have

clearly had the most opportunity to increase their income (given that Ubuntu India members have been received support from Ubuntu longer than other Ubuntu South Africa or Ubuntu Bali members.

Mahadevi mentioned how the money she earns from Ubuntu has been very helpful to her and her family. It helped with her children’s school fees, with her granddaughter’s doctor’s bills and hospital costs. Lata mentioned how her increased income has helped her buy land and build a house — something she could never have imagined before.

Bhagya talked about how she used her increased income to ask her bank for a loan to build her house. When her husband and his friends tried to frighten her about the risk of taking on a loan and falling into debt, she remarked that she informed them that her income from Ubuntu would help her cover her monthly loan payments, and that they need not worry.

Neela discussed how her husband does not support their household financially and it is only through her income from Ubuntu that she has been able to raise her children somewhat comfortably. Without the Ubuntu income she remarked, she’d have been dependent on menial farm work which was back-



breaking, monotonous and paid a pittance by comparison. Kumari observed that she has been able to not just support her family and raise her children, but also plan for her/their future by taking out life insurance policies.

Famida remarked that working with Ubuntu at Work has helped her and her friends in her neighborhood pay for their children's education. Her friend Sakena added that they no longer have to depend on their husbands for financial support. This is a very significant change for women like Sakena and Famida living in a socially conservative community that discourages women from working outside their homes. The Ubuntu production model has helped them overcome these social pressures and work on making their futures better.

Elizabeth and her friends in Soshanguve in South Africa expressed similar sentiments. Income from Ubuntu had helped them buy food for their households and pay for their children's education. Sizo commented that Ubuntu's orders helped her family as well and she hopes the orders keep coming so she can continue to support her family.

Budi and Megawati in Batuan, Bali Indonesia are also eager for large continuous orders from Ubuntu so they can continue paying for their children's education and saving for their future.

Mariani welcomed the opportunity to earn while producing. Feeling comfortable with larger orders, however, took time. And the comfort level increased as the women's self-confidence grew.

The greater self-confidence among Ubuntu members has also helped them seek out access to wider and wider markets. The initial reaction among Ubuntu members when they see samples of products from potential global buyers is to express awe at the quality of production and anxiety about their ability to ever produce such products. However, as their confidence and skills have increased, Ubuntu members become not willing to produce global quality products for global buyers, but also eager for such orders.



# Impact - Gender Justice

Gender justice is a basic right. Its also a means of addressing poverty. Policies and practices that benefit women will also have positive outcomes for the economy and society as a whole.

Women form the majority of those living in poverty, and have fewer resources, less power and less influence in decision making when compared to men. They are exposed to various forms of violence and exploitation and, in addition, experience inequality because of their ethnicity, age, (dis)ability, nationality, caste, religion, or sexual orientation.

Moreover, a number of factors - all with gendered roots and implications - are creating additional challenges for women living in poverty:

- Global food, financial and climate crises
- Global competition for natural resources
- Inadequate healthcare and frequent pandemics
- Manipulation of cultural/religious ideologies for political purposes

Increasing gender justice requires empowering women. To meaningfully promote empowerment, programs must contribute toward all aspects of empowerment. They must help women increase:

- 1. Their critical awareness of their capabilities and social situation and**

**they must help women gain the self-confidence to make desired changes.**

- 2. Their economic power within their household, community, and markets in areas traditionally regarded as women's realm and also in areas regarded as men's areas.**
- 3. Their ability to join others to challenge and transform their rights, capabilities, and social situation.**

Have Ubuntu at Work's activities contributed in these three areas and thus increased women's empowerment and improved the possibilities for gender justice?

Our conversations with Ubuntu members strongly suggests that women's self-confidence increases as they engage with Ubuntu at Work. Women's participation in Ubuntu's production activities is helping them accumulate, access, and control financial and knowledge-based assets. It offers them employment and opportunities to launch their independent income-generating ventures.

Ubuntu's collaborative model helps the women develop mutually-beneficial relations with both familiar and previously unknown women in their community and elsewhere. This appears to encourage the women to share ideas, partner with others, and to organize locally and beyond.



Such social interaction contributes toward the reduction of domestic violence against women, strengthening women's leadership and participation in their community, while it encourages and supports the ability of women to become aware of and responsive to their needs and their rights.

Ubuntu activities are clearly helping women gain self-confidence. They also appear to be helping the women acquire economic power at home and in their communities, and most importantly in areas traditionally viewed as "men's concerns." And Ubuntu at Work's collaborative training and production is playing a critical role in helping women organize themselves, formally and informally, to challenge their families and their communities.

Ubuntu at Work adopts a bottom-up approach toward gender justice insofar as its focus is on helping women gain the capabilities they need to fight for greater gender justice. Such an approach allows women to engage with their culture as they negotiate pathways out of poverty and disempowerment. It allows them to define empowerment and prioritize its dimensions.

This approach can, however, lead to undermining women's rights to the extent that it might encourage local cultural traditions that weaken a rights-based view of women's empowerment. And this approach steps right in the

middle of debates between advocates of multiculturalism and women's rights; A debate with entrenched positions discussed in Susan Okin's landmark book: *'Is Multiculturalism bad for Women?'*

So how does Ubuntu at Work negotiate this debate between multiculturalism and women's rights? Given that Ubuntu at Work works with women in a variety of cultural contexts, does this lead Ubuntu to strengthen the hand of patriarchal local cultures at the expense of its stated mission to 'empower women'? or does it 'impose' a top-down women's rights framework implicitly?

Ubuntu at Work does neither. It encourages dialogue and debate among its various members. Conversations among rural women working hard to escape poverty in Bali, India, and South Africa help women. These conversations encourage the women to place their positions and understanding of the negotiation between culture and women's rights in a global context. It encourages them to negotiate positions that work best for each of them, in light of this broader conversation and debate.



As Sarah Song observes in her book *Justice, Gender, and the Politics of Multiculturalism*, the “best way to achieve rights-respecting results is through a deliberative process that includes the voices of all those affected by the rules or traditions in question.” (p.171) The collaborative operating processes at Ubuntu at Work encourage women members to engage in precisely such a deliberative process, not just among members at any one workspace, but with members at other workspaces as well. It has helped women members learn how other women deal with domestic violence, with patriarchal demands, with constraints on their choice and freedoms, and negotiate responses and strategies for themselves. And it does this not by leaving every woman to herself, but by creating support groups that help the women create alternative communities for themselves.

Ubuntu at Work members are aided in this deliberative process not just by the presence of women from other cultures and with other experiences. They are also encouraged to negotiate an optimal pathway for themselves by the demands of producing for global markets. Global markets make few accommodations for its workers.

When women negotiate with the global marketplace as individuals, they face onerous challenges. The challenges faced by uneducated poor women are

significantly worse than the challenges faced by professional women in the West.

However, the fact that Ubuntu at Work is the entity negotiating the terms of their engagement with the global marketplace, and the fact that Ubuntu at Work is a collaborative group of women makes this negotiation work that much better for Ubuntu’s members.

Ubuntu women do of course face many of the challenges that working women everywhere face - childcare dilemmas, family dramas. However, the support Ubuntu members get from other members appears to make the challenges more manageable. And the possibilities for workplace harassment are greatly reduced, given that the women manage their workspaces themselves.

A deliberative process without the transformative power of a production operation and income generating process is unlikely to lead to the kind of empowerment that their combination can. Moreover, when the deliberation accompanies the collaborative support, and the income generating production opportunities, the results appear to be striking.

Ubuntu members are moving further along the path towards gender justice. Their daughters are growing up in households where mothers are respected within the family and outside.



They are growing up in homes where mothers are conscious of their rights and speak up for them. They are being raised in families where learning and education is encouraged and valued. And in families where they can receive greater gender justice than do girls in families where mothers are repressed and compelled to follow traditional patriarchal and misogynistic familial patterns of behavior.

The change is slow, but it is taking place. Women are getting empowered and they are moving themselves and others in their communities along the path toward greater gender justice. And the change is not ignoring local cultures, and nor it is accepting all local practices are supreme. The change is a process of accommodation between tradition, global production demands, as viewed through a lens of women's needs and rights.

Ubuntu at Work's impact in the area of gender justice suggests a number of comparative research questions. Answering these research questions would

not just contribute to debates about gender justice, but will help Ubuntu fine-tune its model and inputs and possibly deepen their impact.

### **Questions Raised:**

1. Do these conclusions hold up when compared to similar women's empowerment inputs elsewhere?
2. What contextual features might alter these gender justice outcomes?
3. At what point will this impact taper off or plateau?
4. How would involvement in this model affect buyers (global corporations) and their employees? Would gender justice percolate upwards?
5. What broader lessons might be drawn from this experience to improve gender justice programs in general?



