

TITLE

Empowering Micro & Small Entrepreneurship Women

ORGANIZATION

Suma Veritas Foundation

ORGANIZATION TYPE

NGO

COUNTRY

Argentina

SECTOR

Women Entrepreneurs

DESCRIBE THE KM INITIATIVE

The **small and medium enterprises** originate in Argentina 7 out of 10 jobs, and in the country there are around 50 thousand small and medium businesses a year that generate more than half of the jobs. According to data gathered by the Sme's Institute of the Nation small and micro enterprises, **33%** generates its business from industry, and **67%** from trade, services and tourism. Considering businesses managed by women **54%** is concentrated in the sector of services, followed by the manufacturing industry (**18%**) and then the sector of trade, catering and hotel management (**10%**), the rest is distributed among the following sectors: farming, construction, financial services, communication and transport. We found that some of the women, who face the challenge of starting a business in Buenos Aires, are housewives and they develop their enterprises focused on their personal knowledge and skills, without an adequate training.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Among the specific objectives that support the project include:

- Develop tools and mechanisms that promote the generation of self-confidence and empowerment of women regardless of age, education or career.
- Train and guide participatory and accountable manner, in order to minimize the gap between the possibilities, options and employment decisions.
- Strengthen the social fabric of the region in which programs are developed, invigorating the ties between **women** involved and their **communities** to facilitate access of women to the workplace.
- Aiming to consolidate the **leading role of self and** achievement of **women** in ensuring their own welfare and comprehensive multidisciplinary follow in order to strengthen them in developing their work projects.

- Improving the **social value of knowledge, creativity and effort**, as axes of an entrepreneurial and innovative culture that values the experience of women in the community and to mobilize their creative abilities and processing.
- Negotiate with the authorities the adoption of laws or the modification of existing to ensure equal pay for men and women.

Realize these goals means to start building a community with trained women from the consolidation of local know-how. In order to achieve this, our strategy will focus on:

1.-TRAINING

It aims to design and coordinate actions tending to the creation and consolidation of women's micro businesses. It should guarantee equity in workforce.

It is closely connected to the acquisition of necessary tools to face the existing crisis, give some support to motivate them into action, as well as coordination of those effective tools that will help them implement small and micro business.

As regards training, it is focused on real market demand and their needs are met through the following courses:

Comercial Area	Management Area
Marketing and Sales Principles	Accountancy Principles
Strategic Marketing	Costs and Budget
Leadership	Tax Legislation
Business Plans	Commercial and labor Law Notions
Enterprise management	Investment Projects
Contact Networks	Stress Management
Interactive Publicity (web-blog-mail)	Conflict Resolution Tools

2.- MENTORING

It refers to professional assistance and advice so that women can have new perspectives, improve points of view and develop their whole potential both as women and as professionals. The mentor is a kind of "coach", helping the business woman to focus positively, improves their business effectiveness and their business practice.

IMPLEMENTATION

Professional Training:

The courses are prepared by professionals who develop, strengthen and enlarge leadership skills of participants.

The methodological approach is ***to learn while doing***. It is a training resource that fosters feedback among participants nourishing the experience of teaching and learning with visual media.

Training actions are carried out by training mobile units formed by a 1 to 3 people interdisciplinary team that is in charge of a focus group of 20 women to whom they will give advice and training.

Mentoring:

The mentoring program has a personalized scheme, and it aims to give help to women who are able to develop skills suitable to their potential and to adapt themselves to frequent changes of environment feeling motivated at the same time.

It establishes the main guidelines of such personalized relationship in three stages:

1.-Agreement between mentor and person under supervision: it is the crucial stage of the program. Close cooperation is essential in order to build a relationship with a synergy aiming to an active participation of the person under supervision.

2.-Development of the personalized relationship: In this stage three-hour meetings are held each fortnight during a ten-month period. At the same time, tutors, who work with no less than 3 new businesswomen at a time, should be available to help giving advice any time needed if it is possible.

3.-Final and progress assessment: between mentor and person under supervision, when they finish the process involving a personal relationship that goes beyond the contract.

DESCRIBE THE APPROACHES UTILIZED TO MEASURE/ ASSESS THIS KM INITIATIVE

In determining how many measures to use, we decided by the **SWOT Matrix** and the **Key Performance Indicators**. We didn't want to use too many measures because they will tend to dilute focus, blur alignment of strategic objectives and create unnecessary reporting.

The **SWOT Matrix** is a powerful behavioral tool that served us to determine our potential and to establish probable problems that we should face during the project. This competitive internal and external analysis encourages the right behavior and focus on the "now and the future" enabling people to understand reality that's why we chose it.

The use of **KPIs** was perfect for focusing on core processes and critical variables this tool is wonderful for greater alignment and linkage to strategic objectives and outcomes, monitoring at the same time progresses towards achieving goals.

TIME FRAME

We started with 20 businesses led by women considered dynamic and with an important future perspective arising from this new tool during 2008-2010 and we plan to continue with a second phase during 2011.

ACTION PLAN

The **project** was based on **four types of specific actions** aimed at: skills training, career guidance, motivation and communication, and the compartment of experience and support. With the goal of achieving effective implementation of this project we decided to:

- 1.-Make a **situation analysis of the community** which seeks to establish **training** needs knowledge and skills of the same
- 2.-To conduct a **survey of common challenges** in order to provide advice and appropriate support for each target group of women.
- 3.-To carry out a **program evaluation through monitoring and reporting** to estimate the actions implemented.
- 4.-To organize **complementary activities** to the target audience giving the chance to put into action the knowledge and leadership skills incorporated.

Organization of an Entrepreneurial Fair: aiming to foster confidence within women who start their business projects, so that they can exhibit their products or services and try direct contact with customers.

Elaboration of a data bank: by collecting data from human resources attending different courses and, at the same time, increasing the contact network

Furthermore, and along this personalized process, we did some training meetings about essential topics for management, such as:

- Conflict resolution.
- Business Integration.
- Interpersonal Development.
- Empowerment & Professional Improvement.
- Support and contact network.
- Suggestions about financial sources.

ASSESSMENT:

1.-SWOT Analysis: helped us to better understand the reality providing us more rapid and easy access to our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in this way:



STRENGTHS:

* In times of economic adjustment, women have greater easiness to enter the workforce.

*This critical context, with high male unemployment rates, accelerates the feminine recruitment.

WEAKNESSES:

- Lack of areas that encourage creativity and innovation which acts as motivators for generating new business.
- Lack of coordination and dialogue between different social actors that support equal employment.

OPPORTUNITIES:

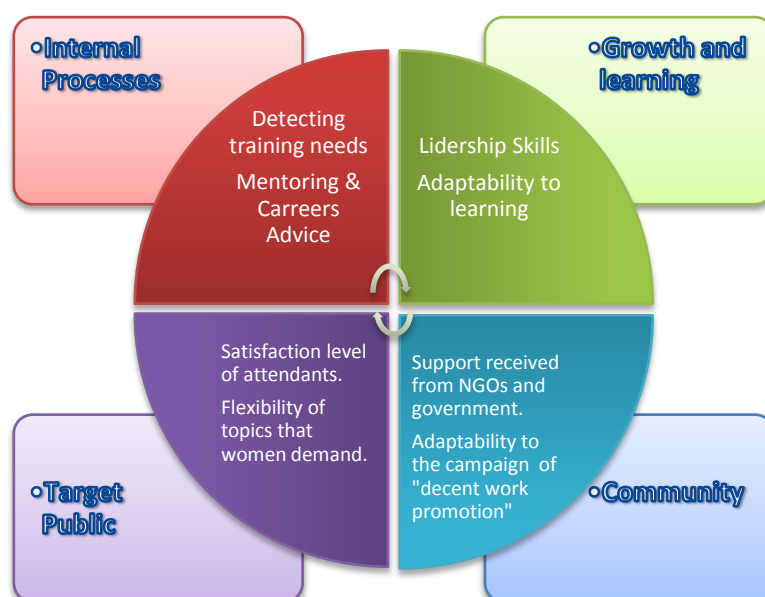
- By empowering women and encourage them to enter the labor market is encouraged creativity and autonomy
- Higher income in the labor market implies greater social inclusion.

THREATS:

- The critical context can increase the wage gap and the precarious conditions of employment.
- It also generates a deceleration of equality measures and the progress achieved so far.

2.-Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The key performance indicators (KPIs) measured the progress of women entrepreneurs involved in this project taking into account the following graph:



Monitoring of these indicators, together with the reports filled by members of the project enabled us to realize the strategic goals of practical and effective way.

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OR MOTIVATION FOR ASSESING THIS KM INITIATIVE?

The global economic crisis is still unfolding, raising questions about whether the rights acquired by women in the labor market may be maintained. Furthermore, analyzing the impact of economic adjustments and past recessions has occurred we can better understand how millions of women and girls around the world will suffer as the crisis forward. Our motivation was to response to the growing need to develop female talent through improving their skills and enhance their **leadership skills**, supported by training that provided a practical approach to boost the action.

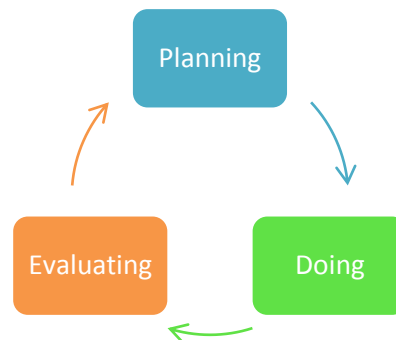
In order to raise awareness about the benefits of training women our purposes were:

- **To Contribute** to developing leadership skills of women so that they can start their enterprises successfully.
- **To foster** women participation in professional training, non standard training, in order to enter or re-enter workforce.
- **To encourage** business initiatives through actions tending to the **creation, strengthening and support small and micro businesses**.
- **To trigger** optimization of labor methods through training and technical assistance and create new employment sources.

- **To strengthen** the concept of financial woman's independence through a suitable resources management and the rational use of productive factors.
- **To be aware** of communitarian needs launching business projects for sustainable development in the future.

WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON LEARNED FROM THE ASSESTMENT PROCESS?

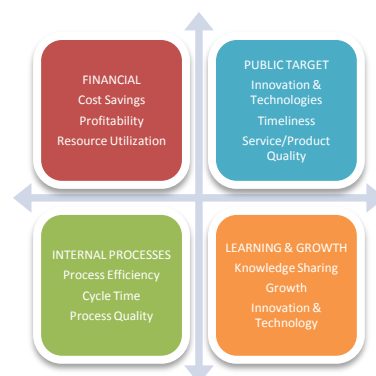
We knew that we had to evaluate the project continuously, so we divided it in three stages:



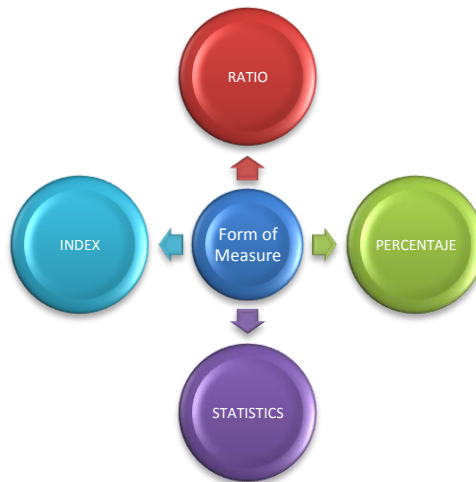
PLANNING STAGE

At the **planning stage** we had all the data about women entrepreneur's situation and our dreamed proposal. We had to establish priorities which should allow us to coordinate the tasks and activities with the effects and impacts we wanted to produce. Here appeared the "**pre evaluation**" which was done comparing the reality to transform with our dream project. We didn't use a particular method, we just analyzed the data against the proposal just to verify its feasibility and tried to choose the best **key performance indicators (KPIs)** that reflected better our goals through three steps:

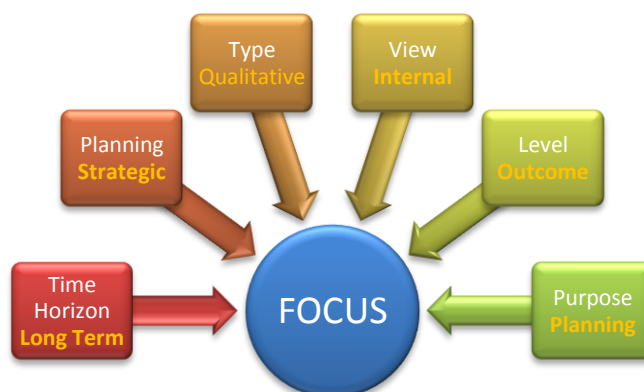
1.-**Identifying the Perspective** of the KPI, which implies the construction of the *categories* or key issues, and the variables for each of the categories; the above mentioned variables are understood as the essential characteristics of every category.



2.-**Formulation of the indicators** which means the form of measure we should take (percent, statistics, and ratio.) and we preferred to use the percentage (%). Then we had to standardize the measure so that comparisons across groups were consistent.



3.-**Establishing the Focus** that will reflect the selection of KPIs and that covered things like: *time horizon* (long term-short term), *planning* (strategic-tactical), *type* (quantitative-qualitative), *view* (internal-external), *level* (process-outcome) and *purpose* (planning-control). In our case our time horizon was *long term*, the planning was *strategic*, the type was *qualitative*, and the view *internal*, the level was *outcome* and the purpose *planning*.

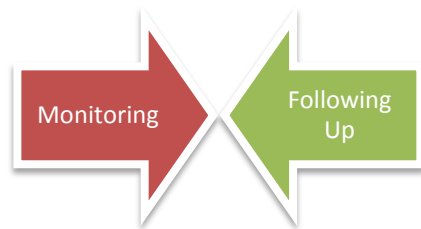


We learned that the use of these **KPIs** as a **performance management tool** gave everyone a clear picture of what was important and what we needed to make happen. It also, worked as a “**carrot**” because everyone had to focus on meeting or even exceeding them.

DOING STAGE

Achieving consistency across the metrics being gathered became problematic when we had several sources from which the data was collected and too much data became confusing. We discovered that the use of **an information system** was useful to analyze and organize the information gathered so that specific information could be easily traced and compared in order to coordinate actions and resources so that our idea of empowering women entrepreneurs to the creation of their businesses could come true.

We did an **“ongoing assessment”** which consisted of comparing what was said we should do with what was being done by:



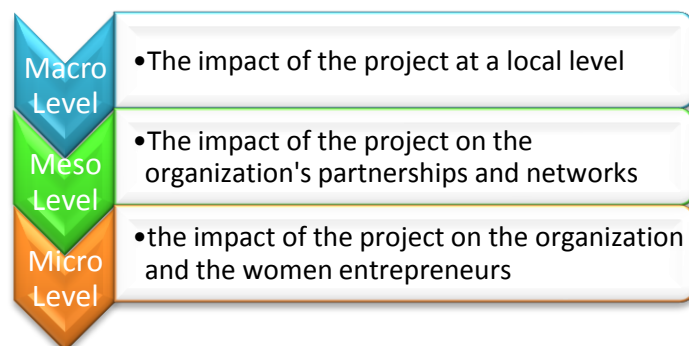
1.-**Monitoring:** the way we used our resources, the time we spent on that and the activities and goals reached.

2.-**Following Up:** the effectiveness of the strategy, the progresses, setbacks and changes we had to do to meet the project milestones.

We encountered some unexpected roadblocks at the moment of measuring the effectiveness of our strategy; we realized that we needed more participative processes to be more proactive in doing changes.

EVALUATING STAGE

In the **evaluating stage**, we did a **“post assessment”** by comparing the objectives planned with the results obtained on three levels:



In the evaluation of the effects and impacts the scale to describe the results was: ideal, acceptable, deficient. They reflect both the initial situation and the situations wished in each of the established categories.

So far the overall impact the project at the **“macro level”** was limited since we have not yet identified stronger organizations to extend our scope. At the **“meso level”** the project was an excellent instrument to get different people on board and at a **“micro level”** the involvement of women entrepreneurs created certain ownership and pride, motivating the members of the group to carry on with their initiatives.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENT NEXT TIME?

In order to improve the assessment, we found that social environment affected the project a lot, so in the future we are going to use other key indicators to measure the public goal, the community, besides the internal process and the growth and learning achieved as shown in the following graphic:



We want to continue with the initiative during 2011 and create a second level of training focusing on more marketing and management areas rather than the starting up business.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHERS BASED ON YOUR EXPERIENCE?

Usually, knowledge and experience gained during projects or programs is buried within numerous reports, and valuable information dispersed among lengthy documents or stays inside the group that works on a specific topic. Because of this, I will advice others to implement a **Knowledge Profiling (KP)** to identify, document and enable access to knowledge for future use.

Respect our project : If you are going to use **KPIs** as a tool is very important that they must be realistic, direct to factors than matter and make a difference, focused more on managing resources than costs, supportive to organizational learning and committed to provide action oriented feedback.

If you decide to use it as a carrot you have to be careful that the KPI doesn't encourage competition because it will destroy team work.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MAIN UNANSWERED QUESTIONS OR CHALLENGES RELATED TO THIS FIELD OF WORK?

The global economic crisis is still unfolding, raising questions about whether the rights acquired by women in the labor market may be maintained. Furthermore, analyzing the impact of economic adjustments and past recessions has occurred we can better understand how millions of women and girls around the world will suffer as the crisis forward. Our response to the growing need to develop female talent through improving their capacities and enhance their **leadership skills** will provide a practical approach to boost the action. The challenge is to generate a "vision socially constructed" which mobilizes and directs operations towards the creation of **equal opportunities for all** in the workplace.

