

Connecting women in urban informal settlements with stable and decent cleaning jobs

In our Insights series, TRANSFORM shares successes and learnings from our projects to:

- Help the SME and entrepreneur community gain knowledge and learn from our projects
- Showcase to funders what can be achieved through impact-led initiatives

PROJECT AT A GLANCE:

CONNECTING WOMEN TO SAFE AND DECENT WORK IN KENYA

Gwiji for Women is a tech-based social enterprise that economically supports marginalised women from Kenya's urban informal settlements by connecting them to safe and decent work. Through its mobile app, Gwiji links trained cleaners directly with clients seeking domestic help, providing a reliable source of income and financial independence. Beyond work placement, Gwiji offers digital literacy education and domestic work skills training to equip women with the confidence and tools to thrive in a growing digital economy.



Collaboration is key to scaling impact enterprises. Learn more about the successful programmes that other enterprises and funders have delivered together. Read more stories here.

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THE CHALLENGE

In Kenya, the World Bank estimates that 74% of women are in vulnerable employment, meaning they are least likely to have formal work arrangements, social protection and safety nets to guard against economic shocks. The situation is even worse for single mothers, who may struggle to find childcare, and those with limited education or training, who face additional barriers to accessing stable employment.

Domestic cleaning offers a practical and immediate income opportunity for many women because it can be done flexibly around childcare and draws on skills that may be familiar or at least quick to learn. However, the biggest challenge lies in finding reliable and consistent work. Without formal channels, many need to wait near residential areas to inquire about potential cleaning work from passing residents. This unpredictable approach leaves women vulnerable to abuse and trapped in poverty, unable to afford food, healthcare or education for their children.

THE INNOVATION

Gwiji transforms access to domestic work through a mobile app that lets trained women cleaners receive bookings directly on their phones. The platform pairs job access with practical training in digital literacy, professional cleaning and customer service, so women can manage bookings, build trust with clients and grow repeat work. This end-to-end model reduces the uncertainty of informal day-labour and replaces it with predictable, dignified income pathways.



THE IMPACT

With support from TRANSFORM, Gwiji has expanded across Nairobi and Mombasa, providing upskilling and employment opportunities to over 3,350 women. Cleaners on the app typically complete 1–2 gigs per day, lifting average earnings from under \$2 to around \$8 daily. This steady income enables women to provide for their families, pay school fees and plan for the future, supporting them in building more stable livelihoods.

Through TRANSFORM, Gwiji has also successfully expanded from serving individual households (B2C) to securing business contracts (B2B) with Airbnb properties, offices and residential complexes, enabling 215 cleaners to secure permanent, formal positions.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Gwiji will continue to expand its services across both B2C and B2B workstreams. The enterprise is actively extending its outreach to offices, serviced apartments, and institutional clients, securing an even more stable pipeline of work for both the business and cleaners.

It also aims to further promote its diversified service offerings, such as team cleaning and Gwiji Prime, a premium tier designed for customers willing to pay more for enhanced service quality like scheduled cleaning services with preferred, highly-rated cleaners.



INSIGHTS:

SUCCESSFULLY BREAKING BARRIERS TO FORMAL EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN

1. DECENTRALISE TRAINING TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY

Despite enthusiasm for skills development, inadequate logistical support such as inaccessible training venues, can undermine participation.

When training was held only at Gwiji's offices, many women from distant informal settlements were unable to attend because of transport costs and time constraints. As a result, attendance remained low despite strong initial interest. Recognising this barrier, Gwiji identified decentralised training as essential for inclusion.

By shifting sessions to more accessible central locations such as Nairobi's central business district and community venues, the team saw participation rise significantly, enabling more women to complete training and join the platform.

Gwiji also introduced a modest training fee (KES 500) which covered the cost of essential personal protective equipment like gloves and aprons. It instilled a stronger sense of commitment and value in the opportunity, resulting in greater dedication among participants.



2. DIVERSIFY SERVICES IN BOTH B2C AND B2B

Expanding to a broader audience can unlock new avenues for growth and resilience.

Gwiji expanded and diversified its offerings in both B2C and B2B markets, which not only increased women's earning potential but also boosted the enterprise's revenue and competitiveness. Within the B2C segment, it introduced complementary cleaning services such as carpet cleaning, fumigation and Gwiji Prime. They also launched Go Weekly, a subscription-style service giving clients regular support and women predictable income. On the B2B side, partnerships with Airbnb properties opened larger, recurring contracts that increased revenue and improved income stability for cleaners.



3. INTEGRATE COMPLEMENTARY PRODUCTS INTO THE SERVICE PLATFORM

Finding opportunities to address customer needs that go beyond the core service can be mutually beneficial for both the enterprise and its clients.

Many clients booking cleaning services did not have the necessary cleaning products at home, creating delays and inconvenience for both clients and cleaners. To address this, Gwiji incorporated Unilever cleaning products like soap and washing powder into its mobile app, enabling clients to pre-order supplies alongside their cleaning service. Cleaners could then arrive equipped with the required products, ensuring a seamless experience while earning a small additional income.

Since launch, more than 1,000 products have been sold each month, demonstrating clear demand for integrated services and an additional revenue stream for the enterprise.

4. BE ATTENTIVE AND ADAPTIVE

Complex social challenges rarely have a single, clear-cut solution, that's why continuous refinements matter.

Gwiji strengthens its model by observing, experimenting and iterating based on what works and what doesn't. The enterprise continually seeks feedback and actively pursues opportunities for improvement.

When centralised training proved inaccessible for many, the team tested new venues and formats. When the shift to B2B contracts revealed that monthly payments did not suit cleaners' financial realities, the enterprise introduced weekly payments to boost satisfaction and retention. When exploring outdoor advertising, Gwiji took the time to identify the most effective strategies, which contributed to the success of its billboard campaign. This responsive approach ensures the business thrives as well as remains relevant, reliable and trusted by all stakeholders.



TRANSFORM is an impact accelerator that unites corporates, donors, investors and academics to support visionary enterprises across Africa and Asia. Together, we test and scale new market-based solutions that build inclusive, sustainable economies, empower marginalised communities, and drive climate-resilient growth.

Combining grant funding, business insight and research, TRANSFORM is advancing the development of innovative business models to help solve global challenges. It was established in 2015 and is led by Unilever, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and EY.