

# A POLICY MODEL FOR SUPPORTING WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP – WITH A FOCUS ON SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS



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*Support for women's entrepreneurship has been put forward as a policy measure to assist women to remain in, or migrate back to, sparsely populated areas. There is a need for taking a well thought-through perspective when formulating the goals and means for supporting women's entrepreneurship. The goals and means are not 'given' and are therefore a matter of choice. It is thus important to determine the premises for supporting women's entrepreneurship thoroughly. In order to determine appropriate goals and measures, as well as the premises for supporting women's entrepreneurship we suggest a policy model for supporting women's entrepreneurship, in sparsely populated and rural areas, that makes the choices and process of formulating goals and means explicit. Based on a policy and literature review and five Nordic case studies presented in the Nordregio working paper Supporting women's entrepreneurship in Nordic sparsely populated areas (Pettersson, 2012b) we in this brochure suggest a policy model making explicit the choice of perspective (WHAT VIEW) on supporting women's entrepreneurship, as well as making explicit and choosing the activities (WHAT TO DO) to be arranged.*

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## Introduction

Support for women’s entrepreneurship has been put forward as a policy measure to assist women to remain in, or migrate back to, sparsely populated areas. Sparsely populated areas are marked by depopulation and an ageing remaining population. In some cases young women have moved away to larger urban centres in order to enjoy more opportunities for education and employment. As employment opportunities are thus limited for women, self-employment is in some cases a solution for women who wish to stay in these areas. Thus a disproportionate migration flow of young adult women from these rural and sparsely populated areas represents the societal premise for supporting women’s entrepreneurship in these areas.

**Supporting women’s entrepreneurship** can be performed in various ways. Based on a literature review we can conclude that there are arguments for special support programmes for women’s entrepreneurship, as few regular support systems integrate a focus on women and/or a gender perspective. Furthermore, political support is said to be needed, as the issue of supporting women is subject to ‘political fragility’, and without political support there is a risk that efforts to support women entrepreneurs will not be made or that they will be postponed. The literature also underlines that women entrepreneurs do not form a homogenous group (which also applies to men) and that their entrepreneurial processes (including start-up and growth) are not always the same, which needs to be considered when formulating support policies.

**The literature also shows** that policy measures in rural areas are often devised from the top down, based on a male norm, which should not be the case if women are to benefit. There is furthermore a need to understand the specific needs of women in rural areas, in order to formulate effective support. Suggestions on a more individual

level for supporting women’s entrepreneurship are: the need to challenge the unequal childcare burden women face within families in terms of the organisation and conduct of childcare; the construction of programmes to improve self-perceptions of aspiring women entrepreneurs; mentoring by experienced women entrepreneurs; networking; and the introduction of women entrepreneurs as role models.

**In the working paper** we present five case studies on projects supporting women’s entrepreneurship: Women Can – Growth in Networks in the central region of Denmark; Futuuri: ‘Women entrepreneurs and managers in the future’, North Savo, Finland; Brautargengi in rural areas around Akureyri and Reykjavik in Iceland; Huldura in Sogn og Fjordane in Norway; and Focus on the Customer in Västerbotten county in Sweden. All of the activities studied in the case studies are courses, and all but one focus on educating women entrepreneurs. The exception is the Swedish Focus on the Customer, which is targeted at business advisors who are to be educated on gender perspectives. In the following we present the policy model, which is based on reflections made in the Nordregio working paper (Pettersson, 2012b).



WHAT VIEW?	WHAT TO DO?
Why?	What?/Activities?
	Whom?
	Where?
	When?



## The policy model – WHAT VIEW and WHAT TO DO?

The model aims at making explicit the choice of perspective (WHAT VIEW) on supporting women's entrepreneurship, as well as making explicit and choosing the activities (WHAT TO DO) to be arranged. The perspective influences the choice of activities to be performed and these considerations are thus interconnected with each other.

**WHAT VIEW**, applied when formulating the goals of supporting women's entrepreneurship and deciding on WHY women's entrepreneurship should be supported.

**WHAT TO DO**, or the activities to be performed in order to support women's entrepreneurship, deciding WHAT activities to arrange, WHOM to approach, WHERE to perform the support and WHEN to do it.

For these respective subject areas there is a set of

key questions that needs to be answered in order to ensure that the support for women's entrepreneurship is formulated in a relevant and feasible way for the specific geographical, social and economic context. In the following we present the key questions following each area of consideration. We also comment upon them based on the knowledge that we have collected in the policy and literature reviews and in the case studies. In addition, we give concrete examples of activities that can be performed, based on the case studies.

### 1. WHAT VIEW?

- Define the perspective from which you want to support women's entrepreneurship.
- Answer the question of WHY you want to support women's entrepreneurship.
- Formulate the goal for supporting women's entrepreneurship based on an informed choice of the perspective to be applied.

Making explicit and choosing the perspective (VIEW) on supporting women's entrepreneur-

ship can be done through answering the question WHY support for women's entrepreneurship is to be formulated and performed. Answering the question of WHY can be done through considering and clarifying the premises for supporting women's entrepreneurship and in what perspective you want to support women's entrepreneurship. Inspired by previous research (Braidford et al., 2008; Mayoux, 2001; Pettersson, 2012a; Rees, 2005; Wilson et al., 2004) we follow a categorisation of three perspectives in support for women's entrepreneurship. When formulating support for women's entrepreneurship a choice can thus be made between three perspectives:

- An economic perspective
- A women-centred perspective
- A gender perspective

**An economic perspective implies** that the goal for supporting women's entrepreneurship is economic growth. In that way it promotes women for their contribution to economic growth and views women as an underused resource. This perspective downplays constraints on women's entrepreneurship, like a gender segregated labour market or that the concept of entrepreneur is gendered. It is based on presumptions of economic individualism and basically only provides cosmetic changes in terminology. An example of the goal formulated in an economic perspective, to increase the economic growth in a region (or nation), can be found in the current Danish national action plan for women's entrepreneurship (see Erhvervs- og byggestyrelsen, [the Danish Enterprise and Construction Authority] 2009).

**A woman-centred perspective** combines the two perspectives of market-led growth and a feminist development critique of the gender perspective, in what has been seen as an 'uneasy marriage'. It has as its goal to support women entrepreneurs through special projects. This perspective treats support for women's entrepreneurship and gender issues as special cases, requiring extra costs and attention – and does not integrate support into mainstream support systems. An example of a goal formulated in a woman-centred perspective is to better equip individual women entrepreneurs, as they are portrayed as lacking knowledge and abilities. This kind of perspective can to some extent be

found in the Brautargengi project in Iceland and the Futuuri project in North Savo, Finland.

**A gender perspective** implies a critique of mainstream support systems and seeks to challenge and transform them and also the gendering of entrepreneurship. The aim is to contribute to gender equality through supporting women's entrepreneurship, and/or to change the gendering of mainstream support systems. This view implies long-term support also integrated into regular support systems. The perspective also emphasises women's equal representation in economic decision making – otherwise the degree to which entrepreneurship development really benefits women are called into question. The perspective also allows for problematising that entrepreneurship is gendered, and that there is a male norm, e.g. intrinsic in the view of who is an entrepreneur. The perspective takes gendered inequalities seriously, like a gender-segregated education, labour market and work-life balance, and demands a change of the inequalities. An example of a goal formulated in a gender perspective can be: to promote entrepreneurship among women through creating a more gender-equal and diverse industry, which is a goal presented in the Norwegian action plan for more entrepreneurship among women (see Departementa [Ministries], 2008).

Another goal following this perspective can be to educate and train actors within the 'mainstream' ordinary support system for entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship on the concept of gender and a gender perspective. An example of this goal formulation can be found in the project Focus on the Customer in northern Sweden. Furthermore, another example is the goal to get more fathers to take parental leave in order to support women's entrepreneurship, which is the case in the Norwegian action plan for women's entrepreneurship (Departementa [Ministries], 2008). In line with applying the gender perspective one can also ask if it is feasible and/or interesting to include also a discussion of other power structures intersecting with gender, like ability, age, sexuality and/or ethnicity – and if there should be goals seeking to problematise norms regarding these identity categorisations. We note that the threefold categorisation and the choices to be made in line with it can be indistinct in practice and that three perspectives can sometimes be

built into the same policy supporting women's entrepreneurship (cf. Pettersson, 2012a).

## 2. WHAT TO DO?

*Answer the questions of:*

- WHAT activities to arrange?
- WHOM to approach?
- WHERE to perform the support?
- WHEN to do the activities in order to support women's entrepreneurship?

Making explicit and choosing the activities (WHAT TO DO) to be arranged when aiming at supporting women's entrepreneurship can be done through planning the activities to be performed in order to support women's entrepreneurship and deciding on: WHAT activities to arrange, WHOM to approach, WHERE to perform the support and WHEN to do it.

*What* activities to be arranged is of course related to the perspective (VIEW) decided upon and applied in support for women's entrepreneurship, and the considerations of WHAT TO DO and WHAT VIEW are thus interconnected with each other. Depending on the perspectives on supporting women's entrepreneurship the activities can range e.g. from instruments on micro-financing (applying an economic perspective) to seeking to change male norms in entrepreneurship support through extensive training and education and gender mainstreaming support projects (applying a gender perspective).

**Other examples of activities** following an economic perspective can be; training in finance, business training and increasing women's access to financial capital. Activities following a woman-centred perspective can include: courses on marketing and internationalisation, networking of various kinds (women-only; persons [women] within the same support project; related to the same economic sector etc.), role models and ambassadors for women's entrepreneurship, mentors (successful women; same-sector persons; influential men etc.) and study visits. In following a gender perspective activities arranged could be: discussions on the concept of gender, extensive training and education and gender mainstreaming support projects, and activities seeking to change the gender-segregated labour market.

Other important issues to consider when it comes to the activities planned also include whether



the activities should be project-based or more continuous and integrated into the mainstream, existing support system. This issue includes considerations on the financing of the activity, and particularly if it is project-based (and part of a national action plan, or the like, which might be finished or continued) or a continuously financed budget item. Another issue concerns whether an activity is to be planned and/or performed from the top-down or bottom-up. An example of a bottom-up approach and development of a project is the Finnish Futuuri project where the idea came from the women themselves, and the education process was developed throughout the three years that the project was carried out. Another issue to deal with is whether the participants are to pay a fee for their participation, as they did in the Finnish Futuuri project, the Norwegian Huldra project, the Danish Women Can project, and in the Icelandic Brautargengi. The experience in Iceland is that if the participants pay a fee they dedicate themselves a lot more to the project, seeing it as their own investment in their future.

**Whom to approach or engage** in the activity is also subject to choice, in terms of e.g. the target group for an activity and who is to be the one performing the activity. Issues to consider in that respect are, for example, if it should be woman-only or if it should include women and men. Many of the projects in the case studies have been arranged as women-only activities, and the rea-

son for that, according to the interviews, has been the thought that women tend to talk more freely when they are in women-only groups. In the Danish course Women Can – Growth in Networks the view is that a group of all women will present the problems they are facing in their business almost immediately, which entails that they will be able to deal with these issues and discuss them in the group more quickly, whereas in mixed-gender groups men generally present their firms as problem-free and women will be less likely to be as open about the problematic issues they might be facing. A reason for being open only to women stated in the Norwegian Huldra project is that it is beneficial in terms of building a network with others who have similar ideas, and men are considered to have different business ideas.

Another issue to deal with is whether the target group consists of potential entrepreneurs (start-ups) or established entrepreneurs. In the case studies we can see that some projects are focused on spurring women to start businesses, like in the Norwegian project Huldra and in the Icelandic Brautargengi project, while the focus in the Danish Women Can project and in the Finnish project Futuuri is on existing entrepreneurs. Furthermore, one issue to decide upon is who will arrange the activities and, for instance, who will be the project leader. Furthermore, the who-question can concern who are taken on as mentors in a course or education. In the Norwegian Huldra project the participating women are offered mentoring at the end of the course. The mentors are, intentionally, more often men than women due to the fact that in the business community, e.g. at the bank or when dealing with suppliers, most often the women will be confronted with men.

**The who-question can also concern** who should be networking in a programme or project, and aspects to consider in this respect include if ‘networkers’ are to be part of the specific project and also in the same line of business. It should also be decided who the networkers are in terms of gender: should there be women and/or men in the network? In the Norwegian Huldra project a majority of the participating women who were interviewed stressed that the network was the most important thing that they gained from participating in the project, and in this case the net-

workers were other self-employed women, with similar business ideas, with whom they could discuss their ideas. Other examples of ‘who-considerations’ is that the Brautargengi project in Iceland includes women role models and that it also emphasises the hiring of women teachers. In the Norwegian Huldra project, in contrast, the organisers have put no particular focus on women teachers, but instead on teachers who understand and give examples from small businesses in seminars. Another important question regarding the WHAT TO DO in supporting women’s entrepreneurship is information on the specific needs of the women to be approached and what they want in terms of support. Regarding the question of whom, it is also feasible to consider if women of a particular age, or in a particular sector of the economy, are to be approached or engaged.

**Where to perform the support** is of course a highly interesting question, especially when focusing on rural and sparsely populated areas. Sub-questions that need to be answered in this respect are e.g.: does the arranging actor have knowledge on the local and regional context of the women to be supported, and if not: how is that knowledge going to be gained? In the Finnish case study on the Futuuri project, for example, it is interesting to note that the premises of the project were a regional lack of advice services for women only, an ageing population and the potential in the growing service-oriented economy. Also in the Norwegian case study of Huldra, the course is very much linked to the particular situation of the region being sparsely populated and that women especially are moving away. Another interesting question that needs to be answered is where the meetings (if meetings are arranged) should be held in order to reach the women: Can a meeting be arranged in more than one place or should there be a particular place chosen as the ‘home’ for the support and/or meetings? Where should the management of the support be located? Should virtual meeting places be arranged (e.g. through using social media)? Should there be long-distance education arranged through e.g. video-links and/or Skype? One example of the use of long-distance education tools is the Icelandic Brautargengi project where initially lectures held in Akureyri were broadcast through video link to a group in a rural area (where a represen-

tative was also present to assist the women).

**When to perform the support** for women's entrepreneurship is also an important question to be answered when planning the activities. The when-question includes considering how extensive an activity should be and also when it is best to arrange e.g. meetings, since it could be feasible to arrange meetings when it suits the women entrepreneurs best. The case studies reveal differences in the scope of the projects studied and some of them are more extensive, like the Icelandic course Brautargengi which is a course of one-day meetings that goes on for 15 weeks (and that has been arranged for 15 years). And others are more short-term, like

the Swedish Focus on the Customer project which was arranged as a one-day or half-day meeting.

**In this brochure we have argued** that there is a need for taking a well thought-through perspective when formulating the goals and means for supporting women's entrepreneurship. In order to determine appropriate goals and measures, as well as the premises for supporting women's entrepreneurship we have suggested a policy model for supporting women's entrepreneurship that makes the choices and process of formulating goals and means explicit. □

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