

Women sales force: an impactful channel for health-related products?

April 2022



Women direct sales force are often considered a panacea solution for impact

**Empowering
female sales force**

**Providing access to
health-related products
(especially to women)**



**Promoting behavior
change and raising
awareness**

To verify this assumption, we gathered data and best practices from 21 organizations relying on women direct sales forces

21

organizations studied, through primary interviews (for 14), desk research and previous Hystra analysis

Selection Criteria

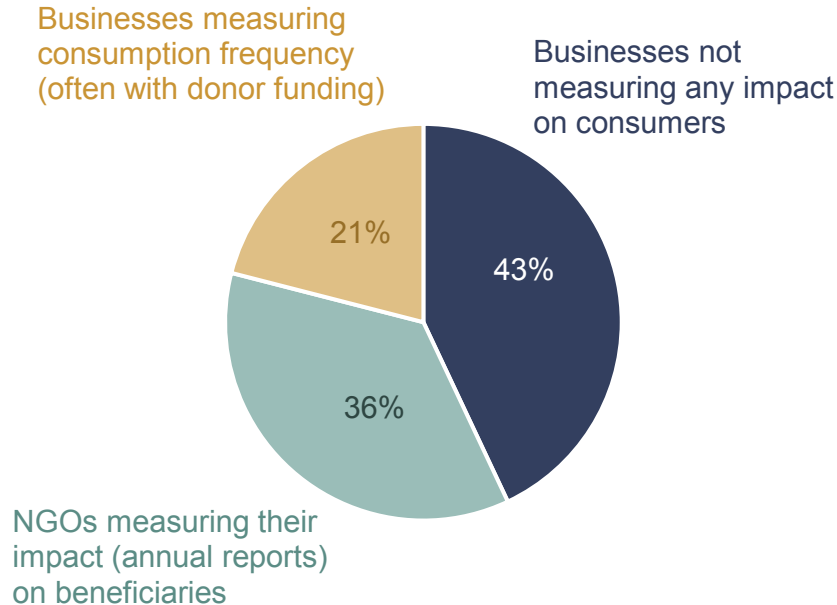
- Operating in developing countries and reaching low-income consumers
- >75% of women sales agents
- Selling health-related products
- > 100 women agents



NGOs and some companies measure impact on consumers, but very few organizations measure their impact on sales women

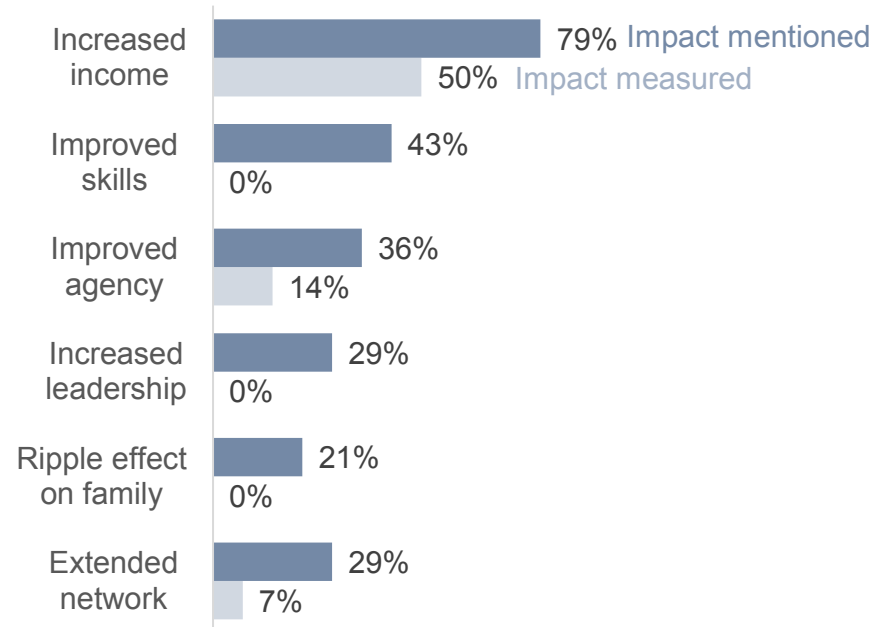
NGOs tend to measure their impact on consumers annually, a few companies measure consumption frequency as proxy

100% = 14 org interviewed for the report



Organizations assume a positive impact on women sales agents, but rarely measure it except for income

100% = 14 org interviewed for the report



When is it relevant to build
a women sales force
for health-related products?

QUESTION 1: Which of these statements is false?

To overcome the mobility barriers that women face in many developing countries, organizations working with large scale, predominantly women sales forces :

1. Visit prospective sales women's households to ensure their family are supportive of them working away from home
2. Overcome women's mobility barrier by providing support to travel, e.g., support to purchase a bike or financial compensation for travels
3. Overcome women's mobility barriers by proposing (very) local jobs

It must be possible for women to join the sales force, which is unlikely when inter-city traveling is required



At Frontier Markets:

- Local, village-level sales agents are 100% women..
- ... but on-the-ground delivery and marketing executives (traveling between villages) are all men



At Greenstar:

- Rural, local community health workers are women...
- ... but sales agents, traveling to pharmacies or healthcare providers, are all men

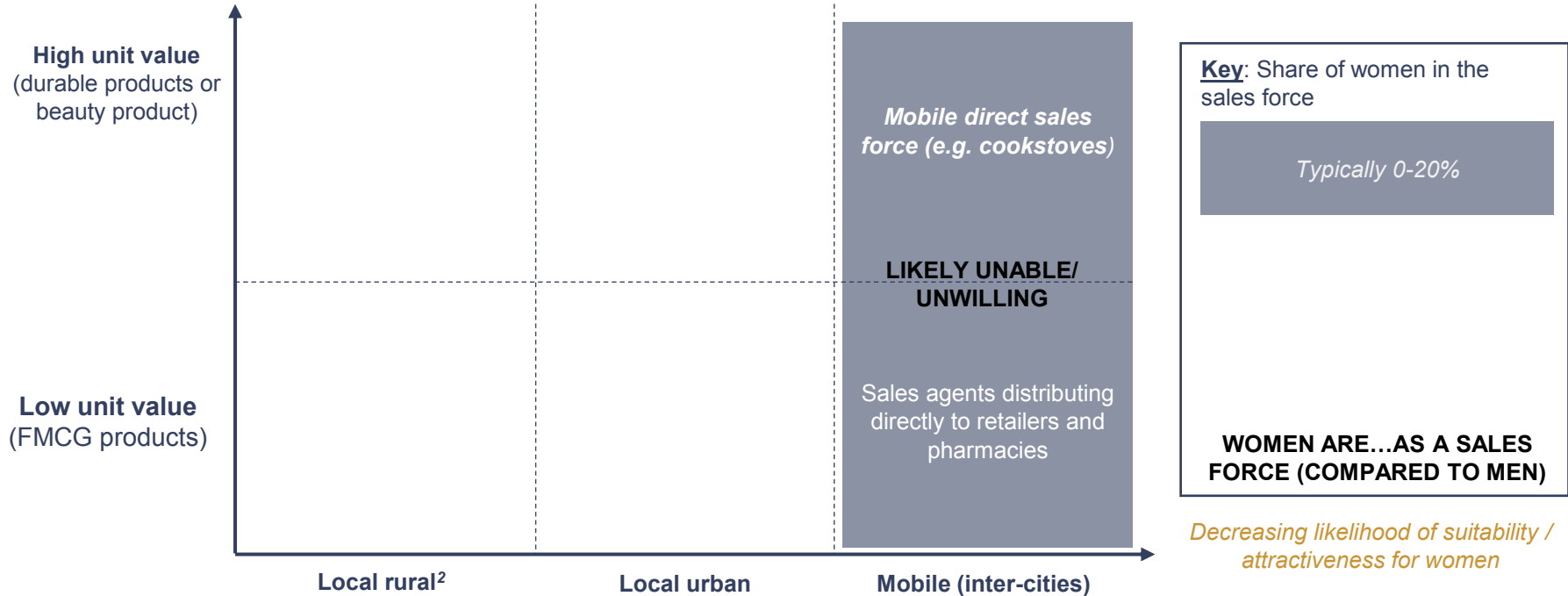


Unilever's Project Shakti:

- Hires local women to sell Unilever products in their village
- ... but provides a bicycle to men in their families to transport and sell products in neighbouring villages

Direct sales force requiring frequent and inter-cities travel count very few women agents

Income opportunity



Note: ¹ including related to taboos, ² implying limited customer base, ³ job opportunities often focusing more on awareness and education than on sales
Source: based on desk research and interviews of 14 social entrepreneurs conducted in May-June 2021 and on previous data collected in 2013 for 3 projects at scale

QUESTION 2: Which of these statements is false?

Hiring women for local sales of health-related products is often more cost-effective than hiring men because:

1. Women are more trusted than men, and hence will manage to sell more
2. Trusted women can be easier to identify than trusted men thanks to existing social infrastructures around women groups (Self Help Groups, etc), making women sales networks less expensive to build
3. Women are more likely to find local, part-time jobs attractive than men, given their (household and other) constraints, making lower salaries competitive to attract and retain them

More “cost-efficient” : When women are easier to recruit and retain

Pre-existing women networks easing recruitment

Women’s preference for part-time and local jobs, and the lack of competing suitable alternatives



Frontier Markets leverages the 7.1 millions SHGs in India to recruit Sahelis



Bel Sharing Cities adapts agents profiles to existing street vendors networks:

- 0% in India
- 66% in Madagascar
- 75% in Vietnam
- 100% in DRC



95% of **Living Goods** agents in Uganda are women - and 74% in Kenya

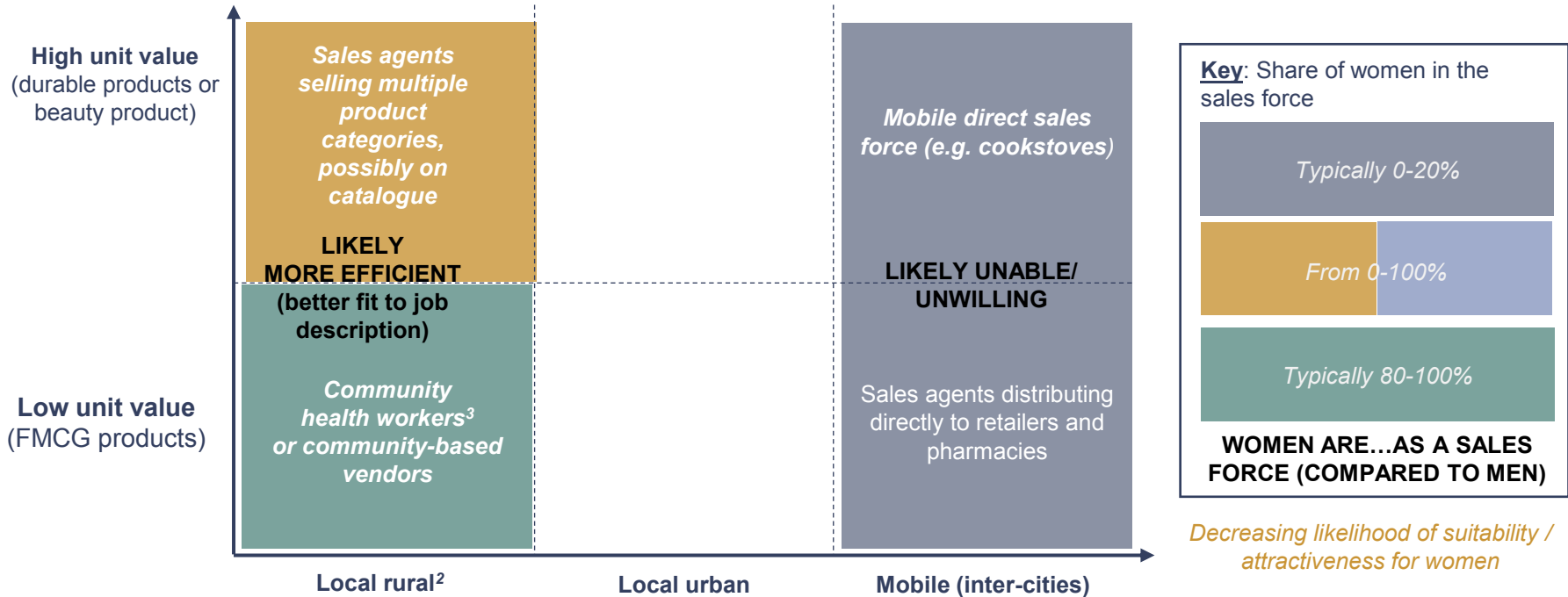


”You cannot expect these women to be full-time, they have at least five other responsibilities, including household and farm tasks”

Riad Rouf, **JITA’s** CEO

Because of these constraints, women represent most of direct sales forces in local settings

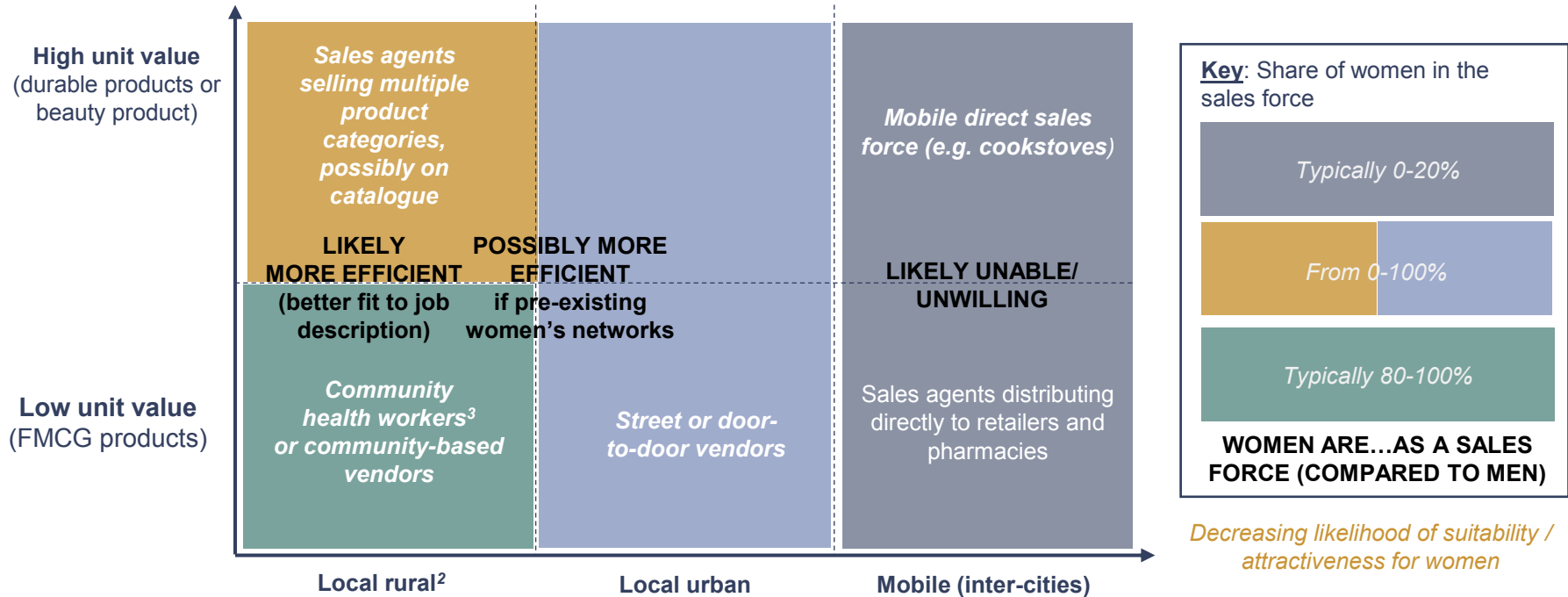
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QUESTION 3: Which of these statements is false?

It is proven that:

1. Women are better than men at selling to women
2. For products related to children, parents trust women more than men as sales agents
3. A combination of men and women sales agents can achieve higher penetration of contraceptive products than pure women sales forces

More effective: not as sales agents *in general*...

Women are not necessarily better at selling to other women...



Living Goods male CHW perform as well as women CHW in terms of performance and health impact (except for contraception)

... nor sufficient when the decision concerns the whole family



Greenstar had to recruit men healthcare workers living in the community and reaching out to other men to ensure their buy-in for family planning

More effective: when (peer) selling products under women's responsibilities

Products related to taboos



Myna Mahila Foundation sells sanitary pads door-to-door so that women don't have to buy them from male-owned shops (47% of women feel very uncomfortable talking about menstruation)

Products targeting children



It takes four times longer for a **Nutri'zaza** male door-to-door sales agent to create its target customer base than for a women

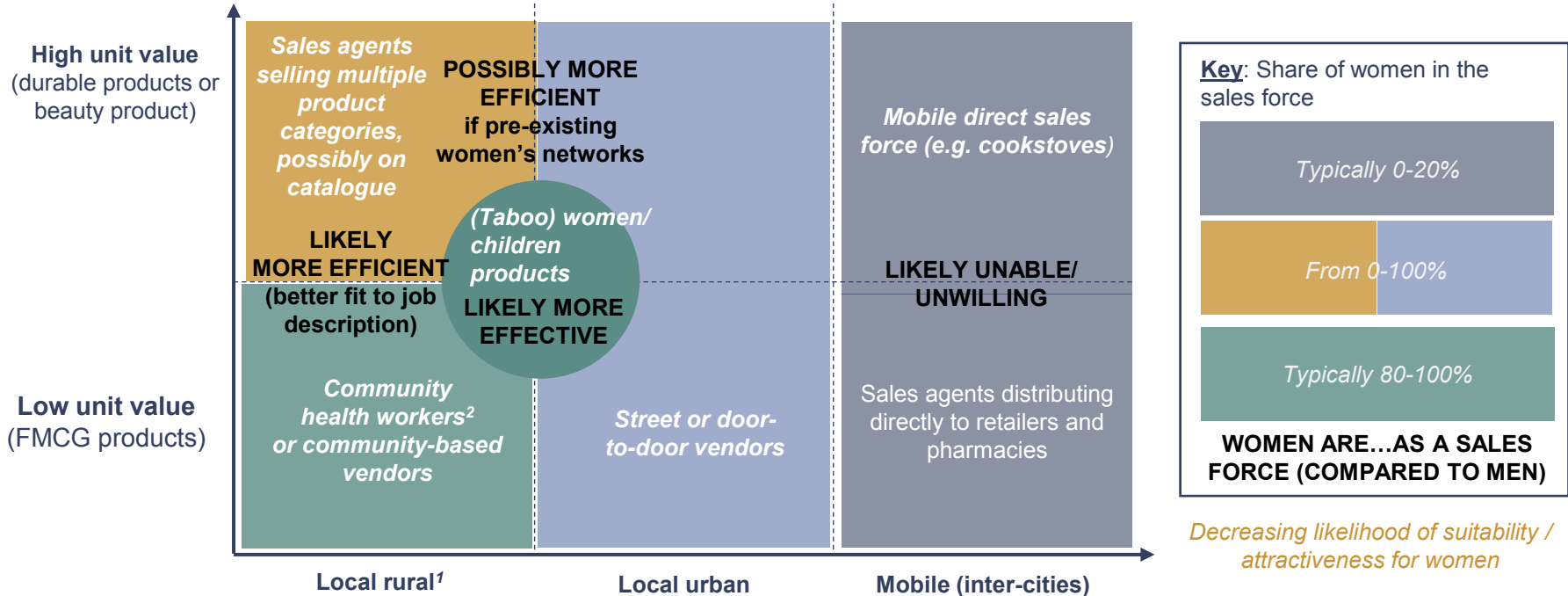
Generic products targeting women



Natura's 2 million direct sales agents count 90% of women, known to create deep links with their customers as they pitch products they have tried

For products considered under women’s responsibility, women agents usually represent most of the sales force

Income opportunity



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What can these women expect to earn from
these opportunities?

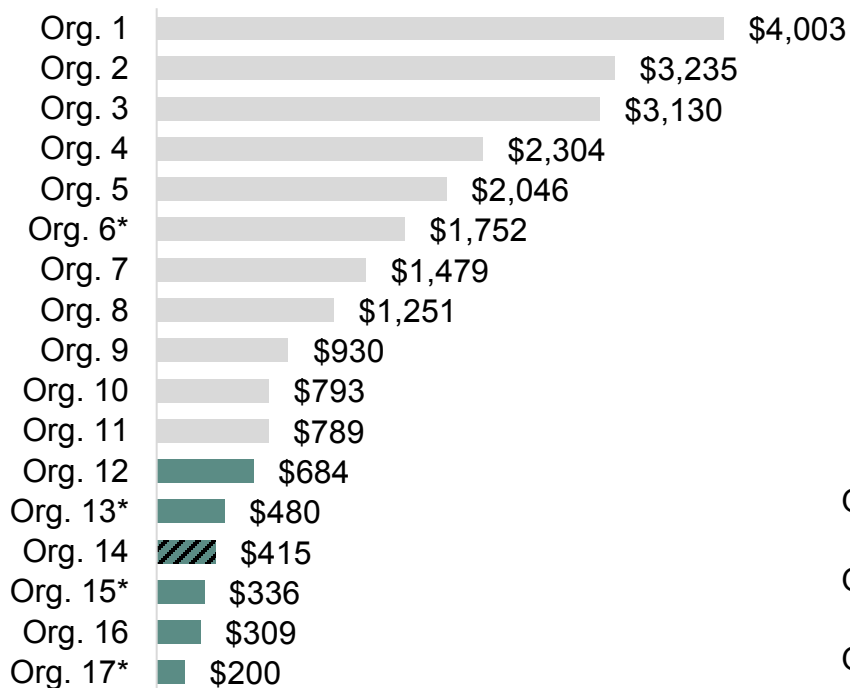
QUESTION 4: Which of these statements is false?

When it comes to women's agent income:

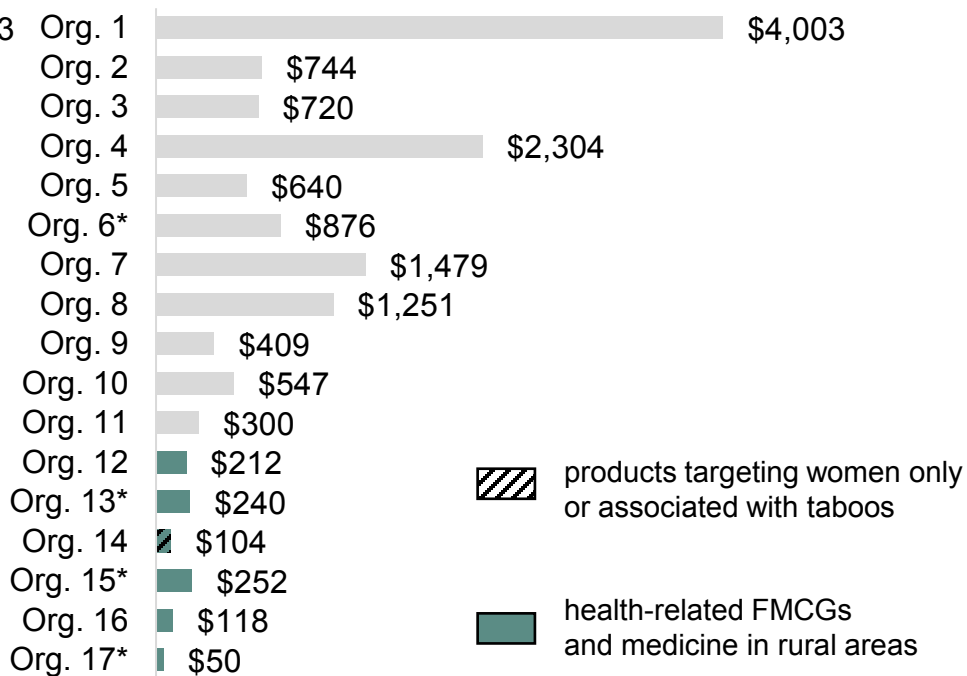
1. Women agents usually earn less in rural areas than in urban areas
2. Successful women sales forces manage to pay their agents up to \$4,000 per year in full-time equivalent
3. Selling a diversified basket of health-related FMCGs enables even rural agents to earn up to \$2,000 a year in full-time equivalent

Women agents selling FMCGs and medicine in rural areas only access a marginal income

Annual income per agent FTE



Annual income per agent

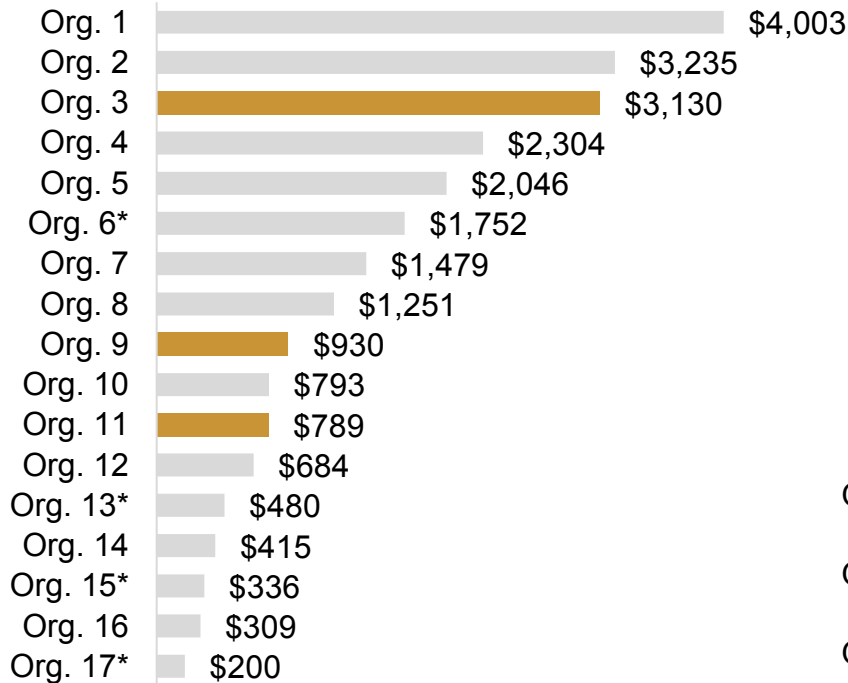


* models focusing more on awareness and education than on sales

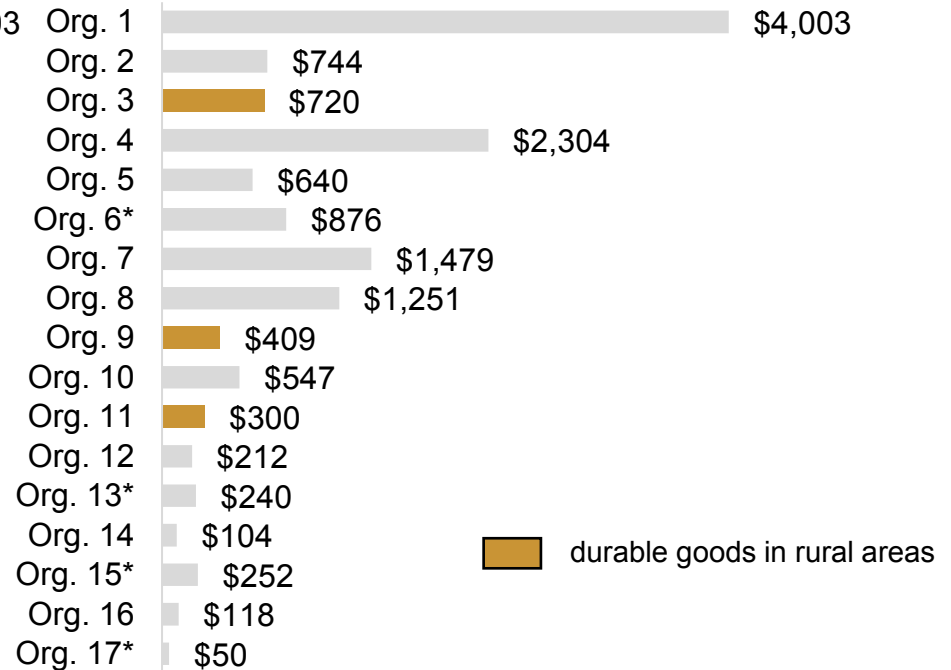
Source: based on desk research and interviews of 14 social entrepreneurs conducted in May-June 2021 and on previous data collected in 2013 for 3 projects at scale

Rural women agents (also) selling durable goods earn a more significant income, that can increase over time

Annual income per agent FTE



Annual income per agent

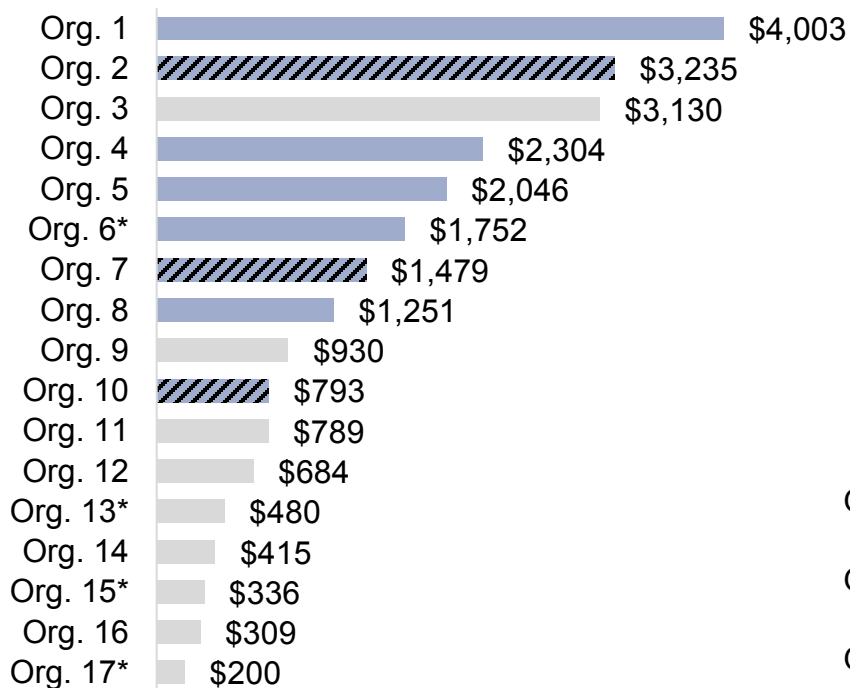


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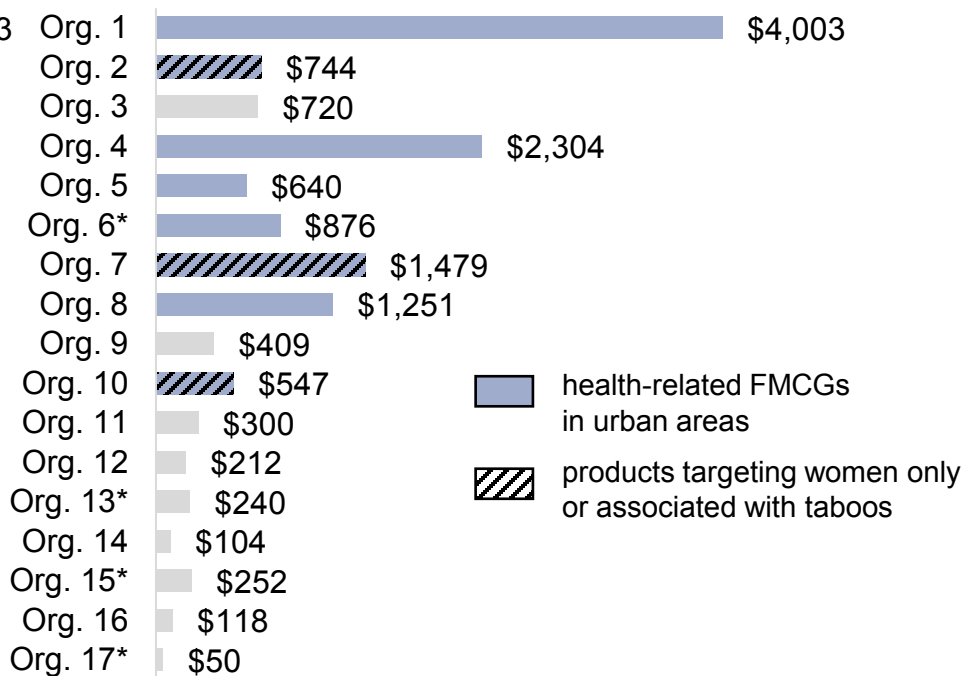
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Longer hours and higher population density can lead to significant income for women selling FMCGs in urban areas

Annual income per agent FTE



Annual income per agent



health-related FMCGs in urban areas
 products targeting women only or associated with taboos

* models focusing more on awareness and education than on sales

Source: based on desk research and interviews of 14 social entrepreneurs conducted in May-June 2021 and on previous data collected in 2013 for 3 projects at scale

Who are these agents, and how to recruit and retain more of them?

QUESTION 5: Which of these statements is false?

The observed characteristics of most women sale agents include:

1. Established and recognized in her community
2. Young and unmarried with lesser household responsibilities
3. Received support from her family
4. Confident speaker, with previous working experience

A clear persona emerges in women networks

Recognized in her community



Nutri'zaza

Married with children old enough for her to be away



FanPrime (FanMilk Nigeria)

Owner of a smartphone and confident to use it



Frontier Markets

Confident speaker, preferably with previous community experience



Dharma Life

Best practices to attract, retain and improve productivity of female agents



Flexible schedule, often part-time
Living Goods' CHWs organize their schedules as they wish
Greenstar agents only work in the morning

Adapted incentives targeting the family
FanMilk Nigeria combines a semi-fixed salary with longer-term incentives (e.g medical insurance, children school fees)



Specific trainings and targeted support around confidence
Pollinate's training focuses on improving agents' confidence
JITA launched a "Confidence building campaign"



Adaptation to physical capabilities and mobility constraints
Danone Kiteiras provides agents with a catalogue



Does this mean that these women are
on track to economic empowerment?

From income to economic empowerment: more needs to be done

Additional income does not consistently translate into economic empowerment for women

- % of agents more active in family decisions thanks to their job



- % of agents who felt their ability to afford a decent standard of living very much improved thanks to their job's salary and benefit



*Among 1,193 sales agents from off-grid solar companies

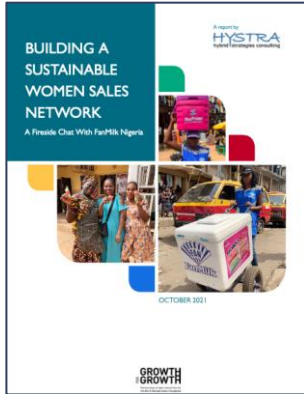
Source: 60 Decibels, 2021

Some companies are looking to encourage women's agency over their income



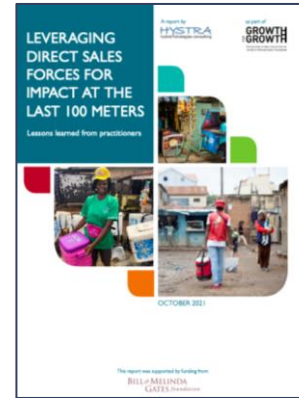
Pollinate only pays agents through transfers on their own bank account

Learn more on best practices for selling impactful products



Building a sustainable women sales network: a fireside chat with Fanmilk Nigeria

Hystra.com/insights



Leveraging untraditional distribution channels for impact at the last 100 meters

Hystra.com/insights



Overall Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Growth for Growth team learnings... coming soon!

Thank you !

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