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Title: Accelerating Women-Owned Businesses: Gender Matching and the Efficacy of Advisory Relationships in Entrepreneur Support Programs

An emerging school of thought among scholars in management and development stresses that “rather than viewing those in poverty as a market for goods, the solution lies in understanding how to help those living in poverty create their own businesses (Bruton et al. 2013, ).” However, it is difficult to establish new businesses in underdeveloped ecosystems, especially for female entrepreneurs. Therefore, we are seeing a proliferation of entrepreneur support programs in emerging markets around the world. These accelerators provide business development, network and financial support. TechnoServe (TNS), a global NGO, operates Impulsa Tu Empresa, the largest accelerator in Central America. This program provides mentoring, market connections and access to capital to promising entrepreneurs in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

This paper exploits a unique dataset describing Impulsa Tu Empresa ventures. These data include information about revenues earned before and after the start of each program, as well as the gender of entrepreneurs and their advisers. As such, they allow us to examine whether program-induced revenue growth is influenced by the gender of entrepreneurs and advisers. The revenue-growth patterns from the TNS data suggest that female (entrepreneur) – female (adviser) pairs do as well as their male-male counterparts. However, non-gender-matched pairs experience lower growth outcomes. To help interpret these patterns, we conducted 28 interviews with entrepreneurs and mentors, and learned that female-female pairings had greater scheduling flexibility, more empathy, and more relationships that persisted post-program.

Our findings are optimistic for female entrepreneurs and mentors. Rather than facing an amplified gender stigma, women complement one another and achieve growth outcomes that are on par with their male counterparts. The findings also provide guidance for other accelerators about maximizing impact when assigning advisers to entrepreneurs.