

Economic Empowerment 4 HER



2025 IMPACT REPORT

Taking **HER** Place In Kenya's Economy

The Economic Empowerment 4 HER Program

Expanding Pathways to Dignified & Fulfilling Work
through the **HER Lab Ecosystem Model**



A young woman in West Pokot wants to open a hair salon. Another hopes to become an electrician. A third dreams of returning to school. Their goals differ, but the obstacles they face are similar: schools that are hours away, fees their families cannot afford, seasonal migration that interrupts learning, and social expectations that position domestic work and marriage as their primary obligation. Even those who manage to complete their schooling often find themselves without a clear path forward; they are equipped with skills that do not match what employers need, formal jobs scarcely exist, and they have little access to the financial tools or knowledge required to start a business. The Economic Empowerment 4 HER program was designed to change this.

The Economic Empowerment 4 HER program addresses these interconnected barriers through the HER Lab ecosystem model, an integrated approach to economic opportunities for rural young women—one that builds skills, provides pathways to employment, and shifts the community mindsets that shape her choices.



HER Lab

In West Pokot, beneath the peaks of Mount Morpus, nineteen repurposed shipping containers have been transformed into a dedicated space for young women to learn, grow, and pursue the futures they have been imagining.

HER Lab is a place. Its classrooms, dormitories, dining hall, community center, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) facilities are constructed from materials that traveled the world before being remade into something purposeful and permanent. The media salon gives participants a space to find and amplify their voices. A working farm on site serves as both classroom and income source, where participants learn regenerative agricultural practices alongside the science of soil. In a space called the Risk Tank, participants sit down at a poker table. Through the Poker Power program, they learn poker as a vehicle for building the skills that economic life demands: strategic thinking, risk assessment, and the confidence to act decisively when the stakes are high. HER Lab is a space where a young woman's ambitions are taken seriously, and where she is equipped with the specific combination of skills, connections, and confidence that dignified and fulfilling work requires.



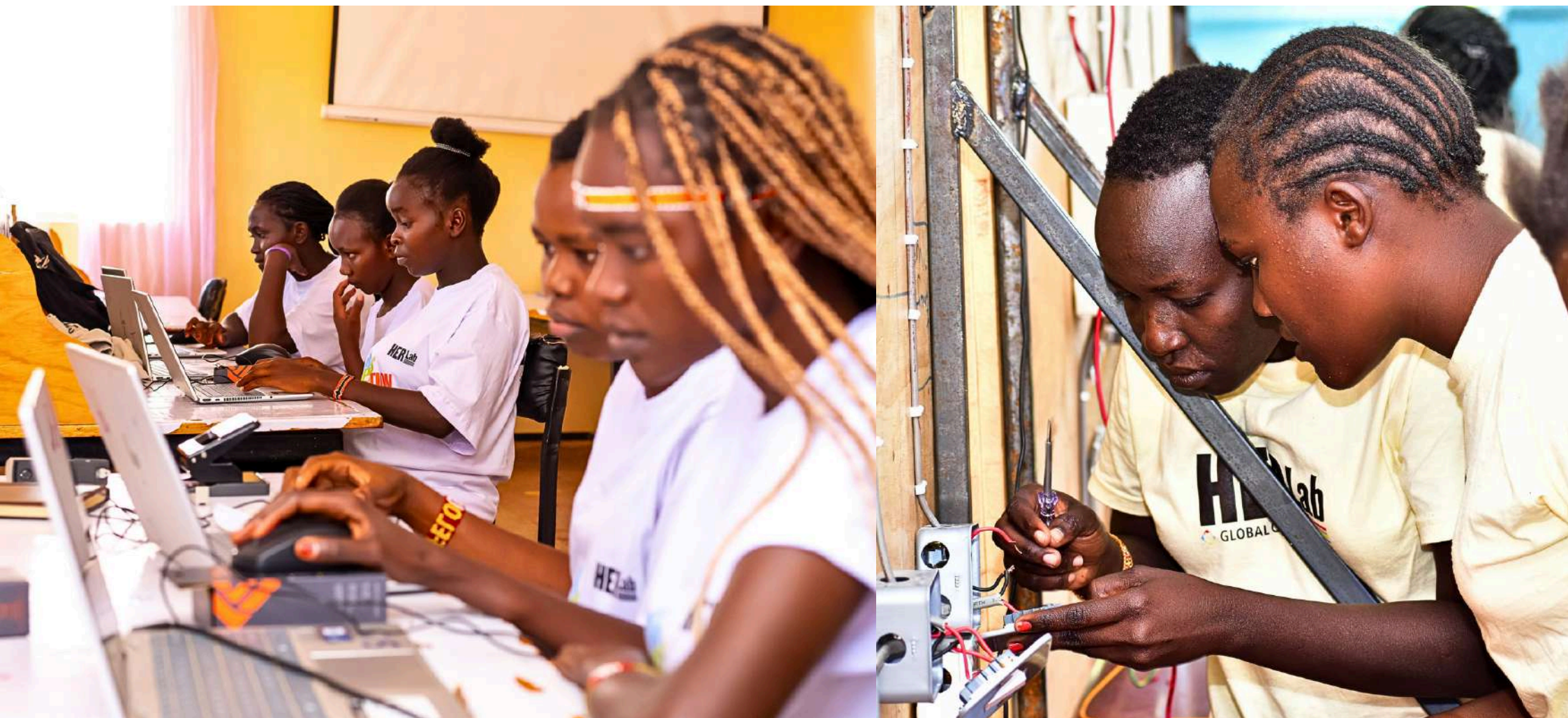
A Model Built for Scale

In December 2024, Global Give Back Circle entered into a multi-year partnership with Mastercard Foundation to bring the HER Lab model to sustainable, community-rooted scale.

Extending through June 2028, the partnership moves HER Lab from proven pilot to sustained presence in rural, hard-to-reach, and marginalized communities, beginning in West Pokot and Kajiado, reaching 3,000 young women directly alongside their families and communities.

This partnership is organized under **the Economic Empowerment 4 HER program**, Mastercard Foundation's commitment to expanding the pathways available to rural young women in Kenya to pursue dignified and fulfilling work. HER Lab is the model through which that commitment is realized: a physical place where participants build skills, access economic opportunities, and where the community conditions that determine whether she attends, stays, and advances begin to change.

Young women in West Pokot and Kajiado are the center of this work. Their goals, their constraints, and their knowledge of what their communities need have served as the program's foundation from the beginning. **The HER Lab ecosystem** serves as a community learning hub where participants build workforce readiness, develop hands-on skills, access mentorship, and find real economic pathways forward. But the model has always understood something that workforce programs often miss: a young woman's ability to show up and learn is shaped by what happens at home, not just what happens in the classroom. **Domestic responsibilities, spousal expectations, and community norms** determine whether she attends, stays, and thrives. HER Lab works at both levels, building her skills and shifting the conditions around her.



Implementation is locally led by Perur Rays of Hope in West Pokot and Humanitarian Efforts for the Learning of the Girl-Child in Africa (HELGA) in Kajiado, with technical support from Circle Group Limited. Local leadership is central to this model. Global Give Back Circle serves as resource partner and program lead, ensuring strong governance, strategic direction, and fidelity to the model's vision.

Together, these programs reflect a model that works at every level: young women gain skills and a path forward, real economic opportunities are created, and the families and communities around them adapt to make that possible. **Empowerment becomes a communal effort, championed by families instead of carried alone.**

An Ecosystem Approach to Economic Opportunities for Rural Young Women

HER Lab is an ecosystem — integrating three essential components:

Skills-Building. Participants engage in market-aligned vocational training alongside soft skills and personal growth curricula. Structured journalizing—a facilitated, guided writing practice where participants reflect on their experiences, define goals, and work through challenges—encourages reflection, goal-setting, and problem-solving, while one-to-one mentorship expands social capital and offers guidance as participants clarify their trajectories. The aim is to cultivate technical abilities alongside the self-awareness and confidence that allow young women to navigate improbable journeys.

Connection to Work. As participants build competence, the HER Lab curriculum guides them towards achievable employment pathways: scholarships for further education, internships with local employers, hands-on learning placements, and resources for launching small enterprises within viable local value chains. These linkages are designed to translate skill acquisition into income generation, closing the gap between what participants learn and what they can earn.

Shifting Community Mindsets. The HER Lab ecosystem engages the participants' families, spouses, and community leaders through dialogue and shared learning, working to reshape the norms that limit the career choices of rural young women. As participants demonstrate the value of their abilities and contributions, families and neighbors come to see them as capable economic actors. This recognition, in turn, creates the kind of household environment which enables participants to pursue training and employment with minimal disruption.





The Impact

In the sections that follow, we share what we are learning and observing through the Economic Empowerment 4 HER program. We begin with our pilot cohort—participants who completed HER Lab and are now navigating employment and entrepreneurship. We then shift to our current (2025-26) cohort of participants, now midway through their HER Lab experience, and the early shifts we are seeing in their confidence, skills, and sense of possibility. Finally, we examine what may be the most essential condition for sustained progress: the changing attitudes of families and communities who are beginning to see their young women through a different lens.

She Moved Mountains: Pilot Participants Breaking Barriers, Building Futures

Young Women Prepared to Work, Poised to Lead: The 2025-26 Cohort

When the Community Backs HER: Local Mindsets Are Shifting





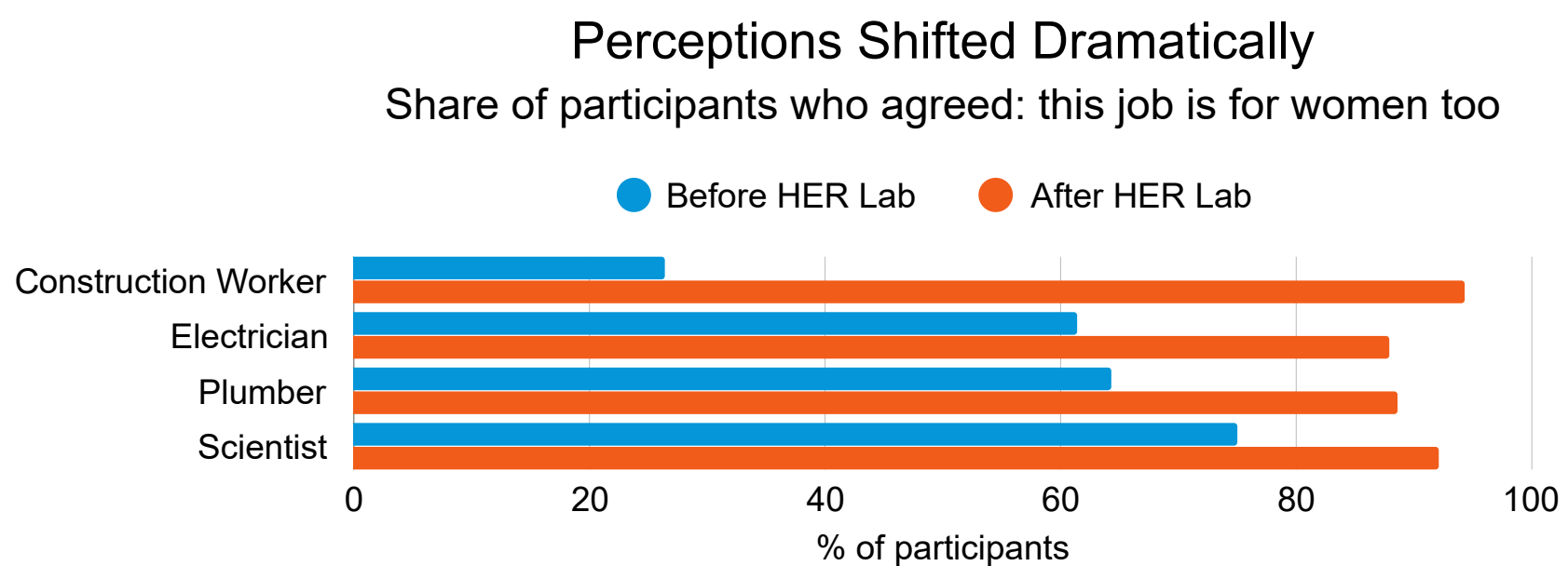
She Moved Mountains:

Pilot Participants Breaking Barriers, Building Futures

The pilot cohort completed HER Lab in **May 2023**. Two years later, they offer the clearest picture we have of impact after HER Lab. *HER Lab serves two types of participants: **day scholars**, who live at home and attend training three days per week while managing household responsibilities; and **boarders**, who reside at the HER Lab site full-time for the duration of their training.*

Redefining What's Possible: Women in Gender-Atypical Trades

Among pilot participants who have completed HER Lab, one of the most striking findings is how dramatically perceptions shifted around trades historically reserved for men. These numbers come from the pilot cohort, but the trend is already visible among current participants, who describe electrical installation, plumbing, and ICT as new sources of pride and possibility. The data below captures what that shift looks like when measured.



For pilot graduates, changed perceptions have translated into action, with women offering plumbing services, pursuing agricultural endeavors, and running businesses in fields their communities once considered off limits. For the current cohort, now midway through their HER Lab experience, that translation is still underway. What they are already reporting is that the question is no longer whether these fields are for women, but which one they will enter.



HER Lab's Full-time Boarders (94)

We met with 65 of the 94 boarding participants from the pilot cohort, and the picture is encouraging: **87% are currently working, running businesses, or pursuing further education.**

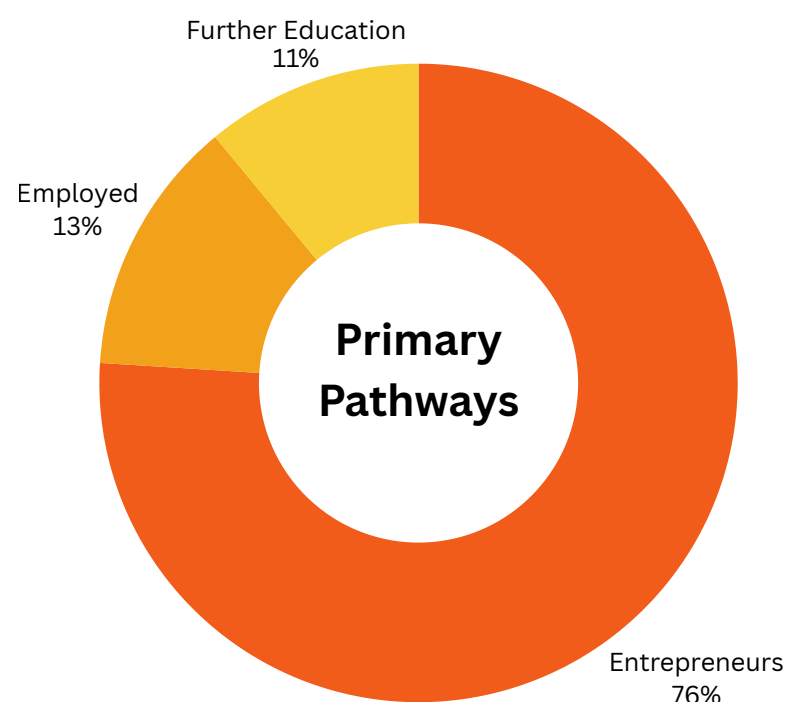
When we asked participants whether their work feels dignified, fulfilling, and satisfying, **nearly 69% said yes.** Behind the statistics are women engaged in poultry, grains and produce small businesses, setting up small beauty/hair salons, offering plumbing services, and furthering their education through diplomas in nursing, education, and engineering.

“ *I will always commit myself to my job and save the money because when my business expands, I will be more successful and fulfilled.* ”

– Pilot participant, age 32

Pilot Cohort Outcomes (Boarders)

87% of HER Lab Graduates Are Working, Running Businesses, or Continuing Their Education



Next Steps

Most pilot graduates are working, running businesses, or continuing their education—a strong foundation to build on. For the small group still seeking opportunities, limited market access and earnings remain the primary barrier, not lack of skills. Strengthening these connections is an ongoing program priority.

HER Lab's Part-time Day Scholars (44)

Boarders immersed themselves full-time in the HER Lab environment, but the program was also designed for women who could not step away from home. Day scholars, attending three days a week while managing household responsibilities, show what the model makes possible even under those constraints. Among the 44 day scholar participants, 38 remain active in income-generating work.

Poultry farming has become a cornerstone for profitable work. Eight groups involving 28 women raise chicks, sell eggs, and periodically sell mature birds.

Small retail businesses—grocery shops, cereals, second-hand footwear—generate daily profit.

Beadwork offers another revenue stream. Participants craft belts, neckpieces, dresses, and more, with sales peaking during festive seasons.

Through a partnership with the International Tree Foundation and Perur Rays of Hope, participants also **raise and sell seedlings** to the county government. Group contributions from this initiative have enabled members to purchase one cow per month for a participant, building assets that generate milk, income, and long-term security.

Financial Discipline: Registering their own Sacco (Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization)

38 day scholar participants are now members of the newly registered 'HER Financial Freedom SACCO'—taking their participation in table banking and SILCs (Savings and Internal Lending Communities) to an even higher level of financial prowess. Operating their own Sacco reinforces sound saving and lending behaviors and purposeful financial discipline—critical skills that underpin everything else.



Local women from the cohort now supply HER Lab with onions, tomatoes, firewood, and fruits, turning training into a direct economic relationship with the institution that supported them.

A Few of Their Stories

Priscah Samuel has become a well-known local plumber, completing multiple successful projects. She was recently contracted by HER Lab itself for a toilet construction project.

Valentine Shakira graduated as a soil microbiologist and has been admitted to the University of Eldoret for Environmental Project Management.

Esleen Chepyego is attending Kenya Forestry College on a Global Give Back Circle scholarship.



Young Women Prepared to Work, Poised to Lead:

HER Lab's 2025-26 Cohort

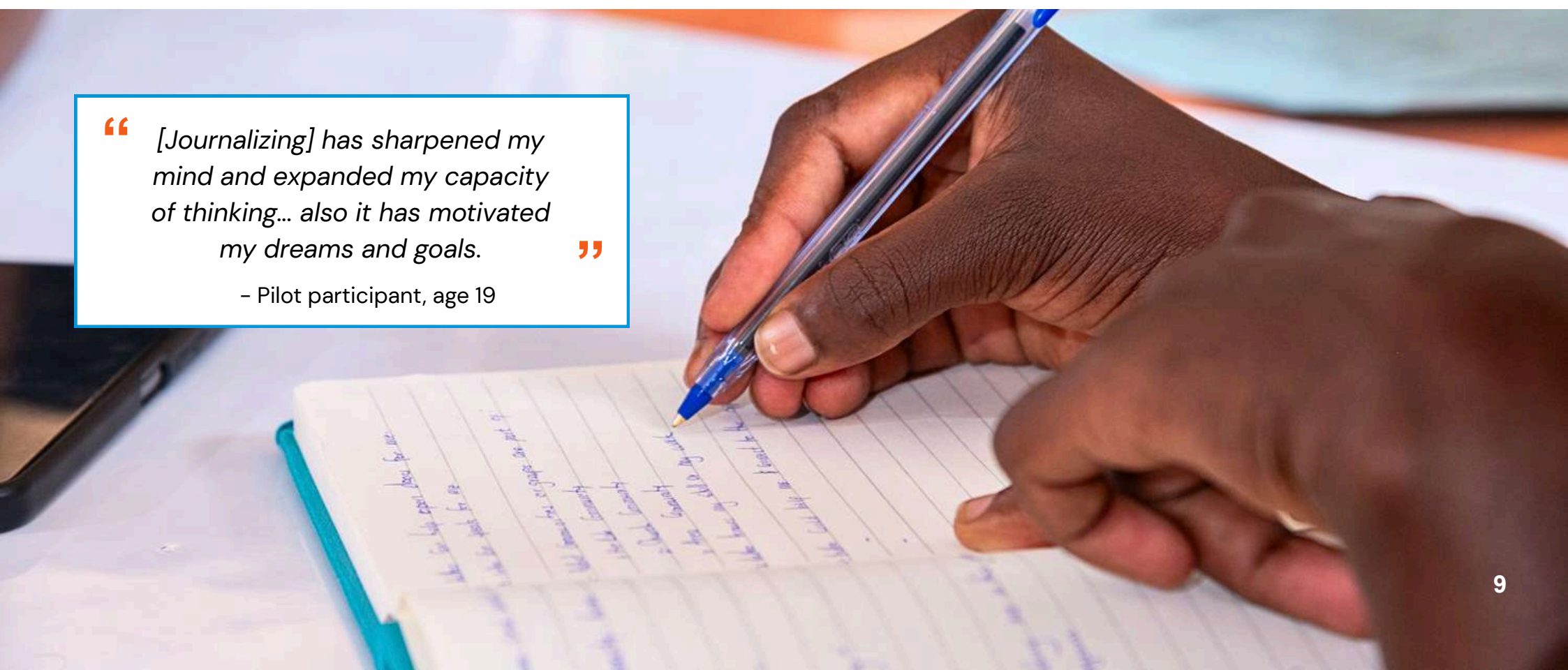
The **2025–26 cohort** is midway through the **12-month HER Lab program**, and early findings translate to results. In October 2025, participants were surveyed to assess how their confidence, skills, and outlooks were shifting. They were asked to rate their agreement with statements across areas like workforce readiness, financial resilience, and public service/political inclusion, and then we tracked whether their responses had moved in a positive direction since the program's start. Participants are reporting stronger confidence in their ability to start businesses, find employment, and manage financial uncertainty. They are also stepping into leadership roles and building professional networks. What follows is a closer look at the story the midline data tells.

Journalizing

Journalizing emerged as an especially influential practice. Participants described it as a safe, reflective space that supports self-awareness, emotional expression, and goal clarity. Mentorship reinforced these gains, offering guidance, role-modeling, and encouragement as participants clarified their next steps. This signals that participants are building internal capacities like self-awareness, planning, motivation, and communication, skills that underpin sustained progress. These new proficiencies extend beyond the technical; *they are learning to see themselves differently.*

“ [Journalizing] has sharpened my mind and expanded my capacity of thinking... also it has motivated my dreams and goals. ”

– Pilot participant, age 19





Workforce Readiness & Entrepreneurship

48% of participants reported significantly stronger belief in their ability to start a business. Participants consistently linked skills training directly to income-generating pathways, describing what they learned as immediately applicable to small business development. Another **43%** reported stronger confidence in their employability.

Financial Resilience

47% report stronger confidence in their ability to support themselves for at least one month if their income suddenly stopped. **40%** feel better equipped to access money in a financial emergency.

Professional Networks

Participants increasingly feel that they have someone they can turn to for professional advice or guidance (**42%**) and that they see people like themselves in leadership or mentorship roles (**42%**).

Leadership & Public Service / Political Inclusion

Over **40%** of participants reported increased comfort taking on leadership roles, sharing political opinions, and feeling included in local and national political activities. As participants gain confidence in their skills and voice, they are stepping into spaces like community gatherings, professional discussions, household decisions, where they previously held back.

Social Resilience

Participants increasingly feel they have people they can turn to for help when they have a problem (**37%**) and report lower levels of loneliness (**28%**). These gains are modest compared to other areas, but the ability to ask for help, and to feel less alone, provides a foundation for everything else.

Belief in ability to start a business



48%



Financial emergency preparedness



47%



Access to professional networks



42%



Comfort in leadership roles



40%+



Feeling support is available



43%





When the Community Backs HER:

Local Mindsets Are Shifting

In 2025, we held **three convenings** designed to **open dialogue, surface concerns, and build shared ownership**: a community convening in August, a spousal convening the following day, and a second community convening in December.

At the August 2025 convening, a husband was asked to stand as his wife, a pilot phase participant who had completed plumbing training, was recognized by the crowd. He rose proudly. The room responded with applause. Then more applause, this time for him. The moment captured something essential about HER Lab's theory of change: what happens at home and in the community is central to whether participants can learn, persevere, and apply the skills and knowledge they gain.



The Spousal Convening: Addressing Resistance Directly

Day scholars—participants who attend training three days per week while living at home—were showing inconsistent attendance. Through follow-up conversations, we were able to identify the reason: limited support from partners. Some spouses felt the program took women away from domestic responsibilities for too long. Others had heard misinformation, including a rumor that participation would restrict women from having more children.

Rather than work around this resistance, we invited spouses and guardians to the table. When it was announced that men would lead the breakout discussions, the room broke into applause. Spouses shared what they had observed at home. Their partners had become better timekeepers and were more confident, cleaner, more organized, and more independent. Several noted that their wives were now contributing to or fully supporting household expenses. Participants, in turn, reported increased support from their spouses and more involvement in household decisions. One participant, age 28 from Pokot South, put it simply: community engagement sessions *"help communicate things that cannot be communicated at home."*



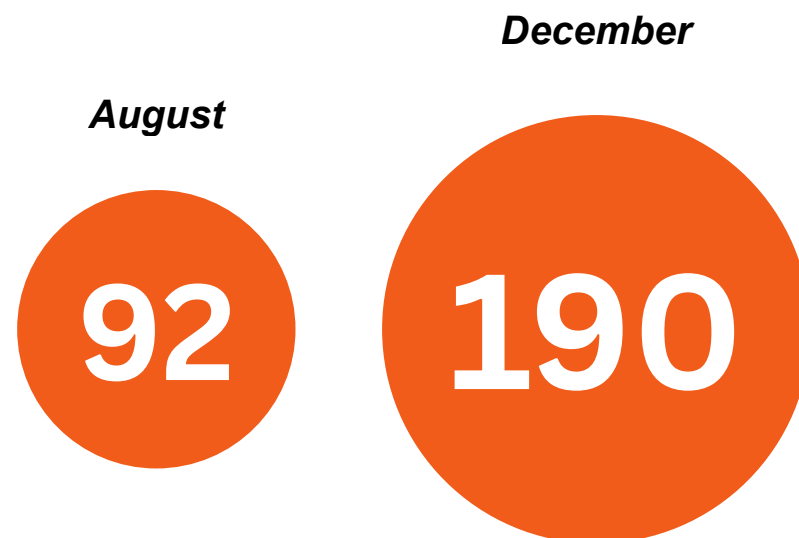
“ *Baada ya hii program kuja hapa Morpus, tumepata kusaidika sana. Watoto wetu wanasoma, na hapa mbele tunaona kazi watapata. //*
After this program came to Morpus, we have been helped a lot. Our children are learning, and we can see that they will get work. ”

The convening also surfaced tensions: some spouses expressed discomfort with changes like increased social media use or new demands that strained household budgets. These concerns underscore why ongoing dialogue matters. Still, it produced concrete outcomes. Spouses expressed willingness to support their partners in pursuing the more demanding CDACC-accredited courses, which require five days of attendance per week. A revised training schedule was co-created. Four day scholars who had previously dropped back to internal courses re-enrolled in accredited programs following the engagement.

For participants, the difference was felt at home. *"Now I feel respected in the home,"* said one participant, age 25 from Pokot South. Another, age 23, said it in Swahili: *"Ninahisi nina heshima kwa familia yangu na kusikizwa kwa nyumbani / I feel respected by my family and listened to at home."*

From 92 to 190: A Community Claims Ownership

The August community convening drew 92 attendees. By December, attendance had more than doubled to 190.



A pilot phase participant described how her cohort had used their training and seed capital to launch businesses: *"We are now suppliers of onions, tomatoes, and chicken at the site."* A day scholar in fashion design spoke about what it meant to wake up every morning with somewhere to go: *"No one can even tell I have five children. And I know once I finish, my children will not sleep hungry because I will get work."*

Among pilot cohort participants (borders and day-scholars), **44%** reported increased earnings in the year immediately following graduation. Notably, **22%** of women from the local area who were not enrolled in the program also reported increased earnings. The pattern suggests that shifting community attitudes toward women's work may be opening doors beyond those the program directly serves.

The attitude data tells the same story. Among women in the surrounding community who have not participated in the HER Lab curriculum, perceptions of women's suitability for trades shifted significantly alongside those of participants. Before the program arrived in West Pokot, only **19%** of community women considered construction work equally suitable for men and women. After, that figure reached **94%**, nearly identical to the shift among participants themselves. Similar patterns emerged across electrical work, plumbing, and public service roles.

This finding suggests that HER Lab's impact, on how women's work is perceived, is not contained within the program. As participants move through their communities — visibly learning, earning, and leading — the boundaries of what feels possible for women appear to shift around them.

At the December convening, we shared midline findings with the community and asked whether they reflected what people were seeing at home. Community members reported improved household income, stronger savings behavior, reduced reliance on borrowing, and better family relationships.

“ *Hatuwezi sahau kitu HER Lab imetufanyia //*
We cannot forget what HER Lab has done for us. ”

The momentum is unmistakable. Attendance has doubled. Husbands are standing proudly. Communities are showing up, asking questions, and imagining what more is possible. Tensions remain—some families still struggle to support participants' time away from home, and some spouses remain uneasy about the changes they observe—but the direction is clear. When the village backs HER, she is freer to learn, to persist, and to succeed. Her success shows her community what becomes possible.

What's Next

The progress documented in this report represents the foundation of something larger. The evidence is clear, the model is proven, and the direction is forward.

1 Scaling the HER Lab Model

HER Lab is expanding. With West Pokot established as the Center of Excellence and Kajiado now actively underway, the next phase of growth extends the model to Garissa and additional arid and semi-arid (ASAL) communities across Kenya, with plans reaching further into Rwanda and Uganda. Each new site will be locally led, community-rooted, and built on the same integrated ecosystem that has demonstrated measurable impact on skills, confidence, and economic participation. The objective is to ensure that a young woman in Kajiado and Garissa, for example, have access to the same dedicated space, the same quality of training, and the same pathway to dignified and fulfilling work as the young women of West Pokot.

2 Scaling the HER Financial Freedom Program

The HER Financial Freedom Program was built on the premise that the economic momentum young women develop inside HER Lab requires a financial infrastructure to sustain it. Suze Orman, a woman whose voice around money, fear, and courage has shaped generations of women, is our partner in this much-needed intervention, and in West Pokot, the infrastructure is now established—and it is supporting the broader community of over 700 rural women. Previously unbanked women are saving regularly, accessing credit, and participating in household financial decisions with newfound confidence. The next phase brings this model to Kajiado, where it will serve 269 women in the Second Chance Education cohort alongside 500+ additional women from the surrounding community.

3 A Women's Cooperative Business Model

For women in arid and semi-arid communities, limited market access, isolated decision-making, and the vulnerabilities of working alone require solutions that go beyond individual training. Women-led cooperatives provide a mechanism for sharing risk, building collective bargaining power, and strengthening economic agency—and GGBC is incorporating this model into the HER Lab ecosystem. This work is progressing on two fronts.

The West Pokot Women Farmers' Cooperative is being established with chamomile production as its flagship enterprise, targeting supply to Melvins Tea (committed buyer of all the tea the cooperative can produce), a Nairobi-based tea blending company. Chamomile was selected through a value chain analysis designed to identify enterprises that are both commercially viable and grounded in what women in the region already know and grow. In Kajiado, a parallel value chain analysis is underway, with a goat dairy cooperative identified as a strong entry point, an enterprise rooted in Maasai women's existing knowledge and positioned to generate income, build collective assets, and facilitate financial independence for women across the community. The approach is phased and evidence-based, moving from trust-building and governance formation through to market integration and long-term institutional sustainability, guided at every stage by the perspectives and needs of participants. The goal is cooperatives that are resilient, well-governed, and built to endure beyond program support.

4 Digital Transformation

Over the next three years, GGBC will develop and implement a comprehensive Digital & AI Transformation Strategic Plan. This plan will guide the responsible, ethical, and inclusive integration of AI across its ecosystem—which includes HER Lab, Mentorship and Alumnae Networks, women's cooperative, strategic partners, and private sector—positioning the organization to effectively respond to a global economy that is rapidly shifting toward digital-first, AI-powered systems. The goal is to support GGBC in strengthening and aligning its internal systems while enhancing economic resilience, digital inclusion, and income-generation opportunities for women and youth. Through a structured, participatory, and collaborative approach, this initiative aims to ensure that GGBC's programs remain scalable, competitive, and aligned with its mission.

What connects these next steps is the same vision we have been working toward from the beginning: rural young women in Kenya who have the skills to work, the financial tools to save and grow, the business knowledge to build something of their own, and a community prepared to support them. West Pokot demonstrated that this is achievable. The work ahead is to make it replicable.