

Institution: Harper Adams University
Unit of Assessment: 6 – Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Science
Title of case study: Women in Rural Enterprise (WiRE) – a business support organisation for UK female rural entrepreneurs
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

This research initially discovered that, in response to reduced farm incomes from reform of the Common Agricultural Policy in the 1990's, a significant number of farm diversifications were being established by women, but these women were coming up against a number of barriers. A direct consequence of this research was the establishment of WiRE to promote, support and develop rural business women. A survey in 2010 of 334 of the 1,300 subscribing WiRE business members indicated that they generated in direct income nearly £35.3 million annually. Also during 2010 WiRE trained 117 business start-ups with a cumulative projected turnover, within two years, of £1m.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)
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- The key insight from the underpinning research was to show that agricultural business policy support from the UK Government was incorrectly focused and targeted. Although a large number of farm diversifications were led by women, an appropriate support infrastructure was not available to them.
- The initial research involved analysis of the role of women in the rural economy, together with an appraisal of a group of rural female entrepreneurs. This has continued through action research which has developed the business model of WiRE and explored through an iterative process how it delivers benefits to female rural entrepreneurs. This has involved working on rural enterprise in deprived areas in collaboration with the Countryside Agency. Further collaborations have involved work in South Africa.
- 1994-ongoing
- The initial research component at Harper Adams University was led by Izzy Warren-Smith, Senior Lecturer in Agricultural Economics (now Dr and Principal Lecturer). The initial research also involved Mr S.T. Parsons, Director of the Countryside Development Unit (retired). Subsequent action research has involved WiRE Director Polly Gibb.
- The context for the research was the need to understand the role of women in farm diversification into on-farm, but non-farm enterprises in response to the declining farm incomes in the 1990's. The fall in income was a general pattern in agriculture resulting from reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Warren-Smith, I. (1999). Female entrepreneurs in rural development. *Journal of the Agricultural Manpower Society* 2:7-20.

Warren-Smith, I. (2001). Women and Rural Enterprise. *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England* 162:47-57.

Warren-Smith, I. and C. Jackson (2004). Women Creating Wealth through Rural Enterprise. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research* 10:369-383.

Warren-Smith, I. (2012). Rural female entrepreneurs: rational choices and socio-economic development. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business* 17:338-354.

Indicators of quality of the research

- i. Grant awarded to I. Warren-Smith (now Dr)
 Grant title: Development of outreach capabilities to service small-scale farming systems in the Southern Cape region of South Africa through provision of Agri-business education and -technology transfer programmes.
 Sponsor: British Council
 Period of Grant: 2001 – 2004
 Value of Grant: £20,000

 Grant awarded to HAUC/WiRE/I. Warren-Smith (now Dr)
 Grant title: Women in Rural Enterprise
 Sponsor: HEIF
 Period of Grant: 2001 - 2004
 Value of Grant: £171,000

 Grant awarded to HAUC/WiRE/I. Warren-Smith (now Dr)
 Grant title: Women in Rural Enterprise
 Sponsor: European Social Fund
 Period of Grant: 2001 - 2003
 Value of Grant: £21,000

 Grant awarded to HAUC/WiRE/I. Warren-Smith (now Dr)
 Grant title: Women in Rural Enterprise
 Sponsor: European Social Fund
 Period of Grant: 2002 – 2005
 Value of Grant: £901,500

 Grant awarded to HAUC/WiRE/I. Warren-Smith (now Dr)
 Grant title: Women in Rural Enterprise
 Sponsor: HEIF
 Period of Grant: 2004 - 2006
 Value of Grant: £398,000

 Grant awarded to HAUC/WiRE/I. Warren-Smith (now Dr)
 Grant title: Women in Rural Enterprise
 Sponsor: European Social Fund
 Period of Grant: 2006 – 2008
 Value of Grant: £ 50,000
- ii. I. Warren-Smith was an invited speaker at “Women Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation”, a seminar in Ljubljana, Slovenia 9/10 December 2003 (organised by the LEED programme of the OECD).
- iii. The above 2004 paper has received 28 citations in Google Scholar (at 28 November 2013).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)
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This research clearly identified two key features of farm diversification for the first time: that women were important contributors to diversification of enterprises on farms and to the survival of farm businesses; that these diversified enterprises were being held back by significant barriers. The research showed that key barriers were inadequate access to finance and lack of business support and mentoring. As a direct outcome of this research, the WiRE programme was established by the lead researcher, Dr Izzy Warren-Smith with a variety of funding sources between 2001 and 2011. The funding was used to develop a range of services, including

Impact case study (REF3b)

training, workshops and conferences, to help rural women start, develop and grow their businesses and aimed to directly assist innovation and growth through enabling these microbusinesses to associate with each other. The funding enabled the research to continue through an iterative process using the WiRE members as subjects (action research).

WiRE membership currently (November 2012) stands at c. 6,000, including 700 who pay for additional services. There are 60 volunteer network leaders across the country organising local meetings for some 1,800 business women each month. The following examples from 2010 data give a measure of the scale of the economic impact of WiRE over the last 10 years: 2010 turnover data from 334 of the 1,300 subscribing WiRE business members indicates that they generate in direct income for the rural economy and farming nearly £35.3m annually. During 2010 WiRE trained 117 start-ups within the West Midlands with a cumulative projected turnover, within two years, of £1m.

Recognition of the impact of this research is shown by the following:

- WiRE has been cited as an exemplar in the UK Government's Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise
- A Case-study of WiRE was included in the Stairways to Growth report on women in business by the National Association for the Promotion of Women's Enterprise (Prowess).
- Dr Izzy Warren-Smith was awarded the OBE in 2005 for services to female entrepreneurship.
- Harper Adams was awarded the Queen's Anniversary Prize in 2005, in recognition of the contribution that WiRE has made to supporting women-owned rural businesses.
- In January 2013 Polly Gibb, the current WiRE Director, was awarded the OBE for services to rural enterprise.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- a. Gibb, P. (2011). WiRE Internal report 2010 Member Survey (Available upon request)
- b. Dti (2003). *A Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise*. <http://www.prowess.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Strategic-Framework.pdf>
- c. Prowess (2006). *Stairways to Growth*. http://www.prowess.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/GEMProwessReportFinal_000.pdf
- d. Queen's Birthday Honours List 2005 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/birthhons_main_11_06_05.pdf
- e. The Royal Anniversary Trust (2005). *The Queen's Anniversary Prizes for Higher and Further Education 2005*. <http://www.royalanniversarytrust.org.uk/the-prizes/previous-prize-winners>
- f. New Year Honours List 2013 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-year-honours-list-2013>