

SPRING Cohort 3 Summary

Coffey is the independent evaluator of SPRING, a business accelerator programme funded by DFID, USAID and DFAT. It works with businesses to impact girls' lives in 9 countries in East Africa and South Asia by helping them learn, earn, stay safe and stay healthy.



What is SPRING?

SPRING offers assistance to businesses in a range of areas including financial support, business support in strategy and marketing, and support in how to more effectively understand and meet girl-focused needs. SPRING uses Human Centred Design (HCD) as its core methodology to help businesses to understand the needs of their girl market and to develop products and services to meet these needs.

In the third cohort of the programme, SPRING worked with 20 businesses. We conducted in-depth case studies with six of the businesses, **Ubongo, AcceleratED, Cherehani, Safeboda, Micro Health Initiative (MHI)**, and **Resonate**, all of which are based in East Africa. Our findings are summarised in this document¹.

What did the businesses do?

Three of the businesses aimed to help girls learn, with one business each focusing on staying healthy, earning and staying safe. Prior to SPRING, one business had some experience of applying HCD and three had some level of knowledge but limited or no experience. HCD was an entirely new process to the remaining two businesses.

Did HCD have an impact?

Of the six businesses, four are still using HCD as a methodology for decision making and operations internal to their business, and five are using it to better develop or refine their products.

Did the businesses change?

As a result of SPRING, **three of the six businesses changed their business model**, developing a strategy focussing on scale. In each of these cases, the businesses moved from a business to customer (B2C) model to a business to business (B2B) model. This meant that they moved further away from working directly with girls, entrusting that process to another organisation.

“ *SPRING helps you realise your potential. They make you realise opportunities.* ”
— Business 2

In two cases, the businesses realised their current geographic footprint limited their ability to achieve scale. **One business responded by planning to expand to another country, and the other decided to widen its geographic reach to other areas.** The final business recognised that management issues were a key to achieving scale, and is working on increasing internal efficiencies.

Common limitations to achieving scale were:

- Client perceptions of the value of the product or service (4 businesses)
- Technical challenges in internet coverage and market penetration, especially smartphone access (3 businesses)
- External bureaucratic challenges (2 businesses)

Did the businesses reach girls?

Girls became a specific subset of a wider market focus for two businesses, which recognised that girls have unique needs. Of these businesses, one moved away from the pre-SPRING idea of targeting girls specifically, widening its market reach to include girls as well as other groups. Another business narrowed its focus to more effectively serve its existing girl clients.

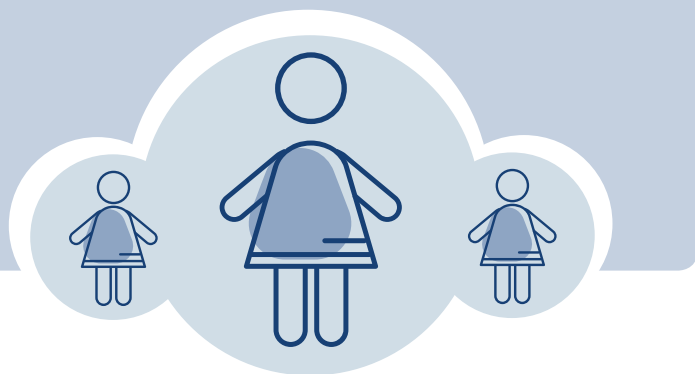
For half of the case study businesses, the SPRING experience did little to change or deepen their focus on adolescent girls. Two were already engaging with girls and women before SPRING, and did not change their approach in a substantial way. Another had no specific focus on girls, and recognised that adolescent girls were largely not part of its target market.

Common problems that businesses faced in reaching girls included younger girls' limited financial decision making and control, and the legal barriers in reaching them.

“ *The major issue is IDs, as IDs can only be given to people who are eighteen or above. Without IDs you cannot register customers.* ”

— Business 6

Technological challenges such as limited internet access in rural areas also prevented businesses from reaching girls living there.



What about the funding?

In a competitive process, businesses bid for funding to help them develop their SPRING prototypes. Grants ranged from £25,000 to £65,000, with an average of £47,000.

Four businesses used some of the funding for building internal capacity to develop the prototype. Four also used funding to design and test the prototype. Another three used some funding for a broad marketing of their prototype, including improving and testing their messaging and branding or increasing their geographic reach.

Were external investors interested?

Some businesses in the cohort were also offered support to seek outside investment. Among the six businesses we spoke to, three were not actively seeking investment, and one business was an NGO that was in the process of becoming a for-profit company. Another of these businesses said that the investment advice, although not appropriate for them at that time, was useful and may be applied later.

Two businesses recognised that they were not ready for external investment but at the same time said that they now better understand that environment. The final business was introduced to another international company in the same field to receive mentoring.

“ *Girls are energetic, future influencers in their households and communities and working in highly untapped rural areas.... If girls grow [we] will also grow.* ”

— Business 6

¹ Each of these businesses has a standalone infographic and case study, for more specific information.