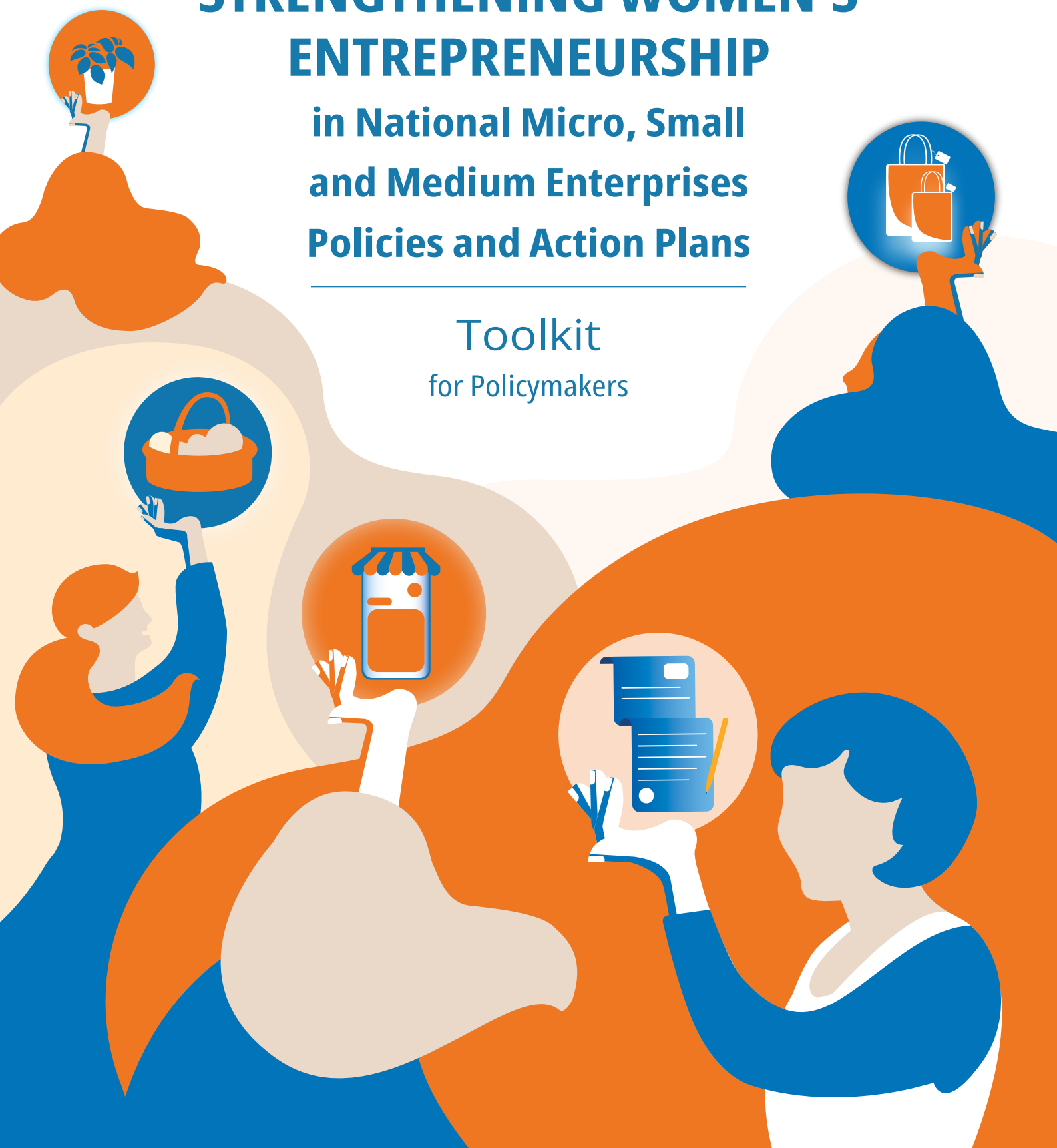


STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

in National Micro, Small
and Medium Enterprises
Policies and Action Plans

Toolkit
for Policymakers





FOREWORD

Evidence shows that women's economic empowerment is associated with positive macroeconomic outcomes, including higher economic growth, lower inequality, increased productivity, and greater financial stability. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has set us back, reversing certain progress achieved in this area. Moreover, rising inflation and supply chain disruptions exacerbate the situation, with women and vulnerable groups facing the brunt of the crises.

Despite this outlook, we are living in an age where technological advancements and social innovations have opened up new doors of opportunities for women to effectively participate and increase their contribution to the economy, one of which is through entrepreneurship.

The Policy Toolkit, spearheaded by the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (with technical support from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, presents a self-assessment toolkit for ministries responsible for MSMEs and women-owned MSMEs development to assess SME policies and support programmes through a gender-focused lens. It provides a structured methodology for the ASEAN Governments to conduct gap analysis, designing interventions, and track progress, with a view to promoting enabling environments for women's enterprises to prosper.

Feedback was sought from the public and private sectors to ensure the Policy Toolkit encompasses the critical elements in women's entrepreneurship and that the self-assessment methodology is practical and feasible. On this note, on behalf of the ASEAN secretariat, I express my appreciation to the ASEAN Committee on Women, ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, Senior Labour Officials Meeting Senior Official Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Education (SOMRDPE), ASEAN Business Advisory Council, ASEAN

Confederation of Women's Organizations), and ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network (AWEN), for their valuable contribution to the Policy Toolkit.

Moving forward, ASEAN, led by ACCMSME, will continue engaging national and regional stakeholders to roll out the Policy Toolkit and bolster our efforts to create, nurture and empower women entrepreneurs in ASEAN, towards a greater inclusive socio-economic development as we strive to build back stronger and better from the pandemic.



H.E. Satvinder Singh

Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for the
ASEAN Economic Community



FOREWORD

Empowering women – especially women entrepreneurs running micro, small and medium enterprises – is a prerequisite for Asia-Pacific countries to succeed in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its promise of “leaving no one behind”. But women’s economic empowerment is not just about delivering on global goals. It is a crucial means for lifting women and their families, reducing poverty and boosting the economy. In the Asia-Pacific region alone, closing the gender gap in employment could add as much as \$4.5 trillion – a 12 per cent increase – to the region’s collective GDP by 2025 over the business-as-usual GDP trajectory.

But the countries of the ASEAN region are still far from creating an environment where women entrepreneurs can flourish every day. The sixty million women-owned and -operated businesses in the region face complex barriers, including, among them, lack of access to finance and technology, low levels of financial and digital literacy, discriminatory laws and gender stereotypes. Women own a little more than 10 per cent of the agricultural land in South-East Asian countries while the financing gap for women entrepreneurs is as high as \$6 billion in certain countries in the region. The Covid-19 pandemic has further exposed these underlying liabilities that continue to impact women’s entrepreneurship in the region. Overcoming the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs requires targeted engagement and policies from national and regional authorities.

With the above in mind, the Policy Toolkit is designed to be a practical tool, which provides a framework and methodology for integrating women entrepreneur-centric policies and provisions into national MSME policies and action plans. The Toolkit offers a detailed blueprint, which allows policymakers to use a thorough diagnostic process to examine gender gaps in entrepreneurial and MSME policies and initiatives. It also presents a

scorecard to enable monitoring and evaluation of progress by the countries over time.

This Toolkit is a joint initiative of the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on MSMEs (ACCMSME) and the Catalyzing Women’s Entrepreneurship Programme of ESCAP. The programme, supported by the Government of Canada, has been a central mechanism of support in enabling ESCAP to foster women’s economic empowerment and efforts to reduce poverty and increase gender equality by supporting women’s entrepreneurship in the Asia-Pacific region. This Policy Toolkit will enable the scaling up of the successful reforms already seen in selected countries to the broader ASEAN region. ESCAP is thankful for the commitment and leadership of ACCMSME in the development of this Toolkit and we look forward to continued collaboration in its implementation.



Kaveh Zahedi

Deputy Executive Secretary
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific



FOREWORD

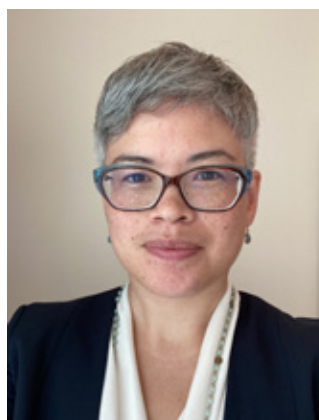
Addressing gender-based imbalances in the economy improves countries' ability to achieve broad-based economic growth that reduces poverty and contributes to the achievement of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Evidence-based national policymaking is instrumental in developing effective action plans that promote women's economic security, and creating structures that enable women to defend their economic rights. Against this background, Canada endorses the Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in National MSME Policies and Action Plans Toolkit for Policymakers, as it provides a framework for the design of effective public policies that support the growth and expansion of women-led enterprises.

We are pleased to have contributed to the production of this Toolkit through the Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship (CWE) project, implemented in the Asia-Pacific region in partnership with United Nations Social and Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Currently in its fifth year, the project is designed to deliver support for a variety of initiatives that enhance the productive capacity of women-led enterprises, including policy development and advocacy, innovative financing and ICT, and business skills training. The project also demonstrates Canada's commitment under the Feminist International Assistance Policy to placing women's economic empowerment at the centre of partnership initiatives supported under Canadian international development assistance.

Canada values the partnership with ESCAP in the CWE project to support the production of this Toolkit in collaboration with the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on MSMEs as one of Cambodia's Priority Economic Deliverables as ASEAN Chair in 2022. Well-informed and gender-responsive national policymaking means better design of policies and initiatives that provide targeted support for MSMEs to stimulate large scale economic productivity

that creates jobs, improves household income and contributes to rapid macroeconomic growth. The Toolkit can also be used to establish frameworks for advancing the inclusion of gender provisions in Free Trade Agreements in the Asia-Pacific region.

This year marks the forty-fifth anniversary of ASEAN-Canada Dialogue Partner relations. The partnership in the production of this Toolkit is an opportunity to elevate our relationship in the context of the shared priority of promoting inclusive and equitable economic growth, including support for the economic cooperation pillar of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. Canada will continue to collaborate with ESCAP, ASEAN and other regional organizations to promote shared goals of achieving peace, stability and prosperity for all.



Vicky Singmin

Chargé d'affaires, Mission of Canada to ASEAN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Policy Toolkit has been undertaken by Economic and Social Commission for the Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) jointly with the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (ACCMSME). It is supported by the Government of Canada through the Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship (CWE) Programme. The Toolkit has been conceptualized and substantively led by Sudha Gooty, CWE Programme Manager of ESCAP under the overall leadership and guidance of Srinivas Tata, Director of Social Development Division, and Cai, Head of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section of ESCAP. Editing and research support was provided by Shraddha Gautam and Sarah Copland of ESCAP. The Toolkit has benefited from extensive comments and inputs from the members of ACCMSME and the ASEAN secretariat. Consultations for development of the project were held with the ASEAN Committee on Women, the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, the Senior Labour Officials Meeting, the Senior Official Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Education, the ASEAN Business Advisory Council, the ASEAN Confederation of Women's Organizations and the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network.

Special acknowledgement is given to the following institutions for their inputs during bilateral consultations: Darussalam Enterprise, Ministry of Finance and Economy, and Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (Brunei Darussalam); SME Department, Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation (Cambodia); Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs (Indonesia); Department of SME Promotion, Ministry of Industry and Commerce (Lao People's Democratic Republic); Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives (Malaysia); Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection, Ministry of Industry (Myanmar); Department of Trade and Industry (Philippines); Enterprise Singapore (Singapore); Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion (Thailand); and Agency for Enterprise Development, Ministry of Planning and Investment (Viet Nam).

The Toolkit has been drafted by Lois Stevenson (Lead Author) and Sudha Gooty (Co-Author). Design support has been provided by Ipsita Sarkar. The document has been professionally edited by Alan Cooper.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	i
Acknowledgements	iv
Executive summary	1
1.0 Introduction and context	5
Context	6
Purpose, objectives and projected outcomes	7
How the Policy Toolkit will be used	9
Parameters of the Policy Toolkit	10
Why gender equality in micro, small and medium enterprise development is important	11
2.0 Context of women's entrepreneurship in the ASEAN region	13
2.1 Gender gaps in ASEAN countries affecting women's economic empowerment	14
2.2 The role of women in entrepreneurial activity in the ASEAN region	19
2.3 Key challenges to the development of women's entrepreneurship	26
2.4 The impact of COVID-19 on women's employment and women-owned enterprises	30
3.0 Overview of micro, small and medium enterprise policies and women's entrepreneurship in the ASEAN member States	33
3.1 Country snapshots	34
Brunei Darussalam	35
Cambodia	38
Indonesia	43
Lao People's Democratic Republic	49

Malaysia	53
Myanmar	58
Philippines	62
Singapore	68
Thailand	72
Viet Nam	76
4.0 Key elements for women entrepreneur-centric policies and initiatives	81
4.1 Fostering innovation and technology	83
4.2 Increasing access to finance	91
4.3 Creating enabling laws and initiatives	101
4.4 Increasing market access (domestic and international)	110
4.5 Enhancing human capital	127
4.6 Access to gender-responsive business development support services	128
4.7 Multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms	135
4.8 Policy leadership and coordination for women's entrepreneurship development	138
4.9 Monitoring the impact of policies for women-owned-led enterprises and the performance outcomes	145
5.0 Self-assessment tool	152
5.1 Gender-responsive legal and regulatory system that advances women's economic empowerment	156
5.2 Policy leadership, coordination and institutional support for women's entrepreneurship development	164
5.3 Monitoring the impact of policies and measures for women-owned-led enterprises	173
5.4 Gender-responsive finance	177
5.5 Gender-responsive business development support services	182
5.6 Access to domestic and international markets	188
5.7 Access to information and communications technology and production technology	201
5.8 Guidance on tabulating the scoring results across domains and subdomains	205

6.0 Concluding remarks 208

References 211

ANNEX I. Abbreviations and acronyms 225

ANNEX II. List of stakeholders consulted 226

ANNEX III. Question areas for the Women, Business and the Law Index 228

ANNEX IV. Small and medium enterprise support centres and small and medium enterprise portals in ASEAN member States. 230

ANNEX V. Compilation of scoring grids for the self-assessment tool 235

ANNEX VI. Mock scoring and assessment example 250

ENDNOTES 257

Figures

1. The framework for the self-assessment tool 9
2. Gender equality gaps in ASEAN countries, 2022 scores 15
3. Gender gap in labour force participation rates 16
4. Women comprise the majority of contributing (unpaid) workers in a family enterprise 16
5. Female and male self-employment rates by own-account self-employed and employers, ASEAN member States 20
6. Women's share of the own-account self-employed and share of employers across the ASEAN member States 21

Boxes

1. Helping women entrepreneurs to leverage technology to grow their businesses online: the Women Netpreneur Programme – Malaysia 84
2. STEM Female Entrepreneurship Programme – Ireland 86
3. Example of a public start-up accelerator programme with a targeted gender component – Start-up Chile 87
4. WE HUB – State-led incubator for women entrepreneurs in Telangana, India 88
5. Loan packages for women-owned enterprises – the VPBank, Viet Nam 95
6. The Inclusive Women Venture Capital Initiative – Government of Canada 97
7. Angel Investment Network Indonesia 99
8. The Women Entrepreneurs Bonds, Thailand 101
9. A gender lens review of the Viet Nam Law on Supporting SMEs 104

10. Changes in the Land Law in Viet Nam resulted in large gains for women's land titles	106
11. E-commerce platforms and digital solutions targeting women entrepreneurs - Philippines	111
12. The Republic of Korea Public Procurement Service favours women-owned small businesses	114
13. Public procurement for women-owned businesses in Chile	116
14. The Women Exporters Development Programme of Malaysia	120
15. Integrating gender in bilateral trade agreements – the Canada-Chile agreement	124
16. Integrated support centres for women-owned businesses in the Republic of Korea	131
17. Positive impact evaluations for the Women's Enterprise Centres in Western Canada	132
18. Small and medium enterprise support subportal for women entrepreneurs, Viet Nam	134
19. Higher-level Technical Working Group on Women's Entrepreneurship in Viet Nam	137
20. The national Women Entrepreneurship Strategy of Canada	140
21. Example of indicators specific to the inclusion of women in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation SME Strategic Plan	147
22. Reporting on gender statistics – a good practice from the Philippine Statistics Authority	148

Tables

1. Scores for Women, Business and the Law 2022 in ASEAN countries, selected indicators	18
2. Estimates of women's business ownership in the ASEAN member States	22
3. Formal definitions for women-owned enterprise in the ASEAN member States	24
4. Ministry or agency responsible for micro, small and medium enterprise policy in ASEAN member States	34



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Policy Toolkit project was initiated by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) under the Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship (CWE) Programme, in partnership with the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (ACCMSME) to advocate women entrepreneur-centric policies and initiatives in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region and to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystems that foster women's entrepreneurship.

The ultimate purpose of the Toolkit is to provide a framework and methodology for integrating women entrepreneur-centric policies and provisions in national micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) policies and action plans. It will assist policymakers, particularly from ministries and agencies responsible for MSME development in assessing the development

of women's entrepreneurship at the national level and through the completion of the self-assessment process in developing insight on actions to be taken to strengthen policy support and develop a positive ecosystem for women's entrepreneurship.

Use of the Policy Toolkit will enable policymakers to establish a baseline and monitor longitudinal progress of initiatives targeting the advancement of women-owned-led MSMEs (WMSMEs). It will also lead to more gender-responsive development of the MSME sector and a greater contribution of women entrepreneurs and women-owned-led enterprises to the economy.

The self-assessment tool is intended for primary use by ministries and agencies responsible for MSMEs to ensure the gender perspective is incorporated into MSME policies and measures; reduce the gender gaps in entrepreneurial and MSME activities; and assess gender equality

results in terms of the participation of women in business ownership and the scaling of their businesses. The self-assessment tool can also provide broader guidance and insight to regulatory bodies, and key stakeholder organizations and ecosystem members, such as financial institutions, business development service providers and business associations, including women entrepreneurs' associations, regarding the key policies and measures required to advance women's entrepreneurship in the country.

While developed with particular reference to the 10 ASEAN member States, the Policy Toolkit can be applied to countries throughout the Asia-Pacific region and beyond and serve as a reference point and useful instrument for strengthening policy support for women's entrepreneurship.

In chapter 1 the parameters of the Policy Toolkit are defined in terms of its focus on the gender equality features of women's economic empowerment most closely aligned with improved employment and entrepreneurship outcomes. According to projections of McKinsey & Company and the Boston Consulting Group, significant gains in the gross domestic product (GDP) can be achieved by reducing gender gaps in employment and entrepreneurship. Without taking actions to address these gender inequalities, the ASEAN region stands to lose economic opportunity. The enhanced role of women entrepreneurs and the strengthened capacity of their enterprises is also critical to achieving a gender-responsive ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), as well as gains in the total value of exports resulting from the contribution of women-owned-led MSMEs. Actions to further promote women's entrepreneurship can also contribute towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The framework of women entrepreneur-centric policy elements outlined in the Policy Toolkit aims to promote a gender-responsive MSME sector and a more extensive contribution of women entrepreneurs and women-owned-led enterprises to the economy. Lessons learned from the toolkit can provide guidance to ASEAN in rendering a more gender-inclusive Strategic Action Plan for SME Development.

Chapter 2 lays out the context for women's entrepreneurship in the ASEAN region, with particular emphasis on the standing of ASEAN member States on global indicators of gender equality, including gender equality in the laws. It further presents country data and comparisons on women's participation in the economy, including in self-employment and business ownership. Highlighted in the chapter are challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs across interrelated domains of finance, markets, skills and networks, as well as in coping with deeply rooted sociocultural norms



and practices, which despite equality provisions in the law, hinder the law's applicability and restrict women's economic participation in a country's economy.

It also includes a discussion of the differential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's entrepreneurship and women-owned enterprises, with a particular reference to the Asia-Pacific region, and the need for specific programme actions to ameliorate the negative impacts and strengthen women-owned enterprises in the post-COVID-19 environment, such as digital skills, transition to e-commerce and reduced care burden.

Chapter 3 presents a snapshot overview of the MSME policies and structures in each of the ASEAN member States. The snapshots include an overview of women's entrepreneurship in the country; the major challenges faced by women entrepreneurs; government policies and strategies affecting MSMEs and women's entrepreneurship; recent government initiatives and programmes to support women's entrepreneurship; and suggested actions to address the needs of women entrepreneurs.

Chapter 4 draws on various elements and examples of women entrepreneur-centric policies and initiatives that reflect global and regional policy experiences related to fostering women's entrepreneurship, including summaries of good practices and policy lessons, on the topics of innovation and technology, finance, legal and regulatory systems, domestic and international market access, enhancing human capital, business development support (BDS) services, governance mechanisms, policy leadership and coordination and monitoring the impact of policies for women-owned-led businesses.

Chapter 5 includes a presentation of the self-assessment framework and tool designed to help policymakers in the ministries dealing with MSMEs to better understand the enabling entrepreneurship ecosystem for women's

entrepreneurship in their country, identify gaps, and facilitate action planning for fostering a more enabling ecosystem. The self-assessment tool is designed to be easily understood and used; presents areas of questioning to guide the self-assessment process across the key areas of women entrepreneur-centric and MSME development policies and actions to determine the current situation; and provides a scorecard to enable the agencies involved to establish a baseline and have a mechanism to monitor progress over time. The structure of the self-assessment tool framework covers seven domains (policy areas and measures): (1) gender-responsive legal and regulatory system for women's economic empowerment; (2) policy leadership, coordination and institutional support for women's entrepreneurship development (WED); (3) monitoring the impact of policies and measures for women-owned-led enterprises; (4) gender-responsive financial access; (5) gender-responsive business development support services; (6) access to domestic and international markets; and (7) access to information and communications technologies (ICTs) and production technology. Each domain area is supported by subdomain indicators (a total of 21) to help define the specific policy or programme elements leading up to the overall assessment score for the domain. A scoring mechanism (based on a 1-5 scale, with 5 indicating strong performance) for each subdomain allows policymakers to produce the overall assessment outcome, establish a baseline and have a mechanism to monitor progress over time.

Findings from the self-assessment process can assist in identifying tangible country-specific recommendations for how to develop the potential of women's entrepreneurship that will serve as the basis for future priority actions by policymakers and other stakeholders.

Chapter 6 provides conclusions.

Gender gaps in labour force participation, employment and entrepreneurship exist in countries across the globe. Credible evidence that a lack of progress in reducing the gender gaps in is a driving force for accelerated actions to redress the imbalance. Achieving gender equality in entrepreneurship requires attention to three important elements: (1) **a legal framework that stipulates equal legal rights for women and men**, especially with respect to areas affecting employment, property ownership, the ability to enter into contracts and the rights to start a business and borrow money (and the effective enforcement of women's rights within the legal framework); (2) **a supportive policy and entrepreneurial ecosystem with a gender-responsive MSME policy framework and gender-inclusive institutions, support structures and programmes**; and (3) **concerted efforts to track and monitor the participation of women in entrepreneurial and MSME activities and the strength and growth potential of their enterprises**, as improvements in the quantity and quality of data would better inform the policy development process.

Fostering the accelerated development of women's entrepreneurship requires a holistic, whole-of-government approach, including establishment of interministerial governance mechanisms to lead policy development for WED. It also requires a public-private sector policy consultation approach involving women entrepreneurs and their representative associations. In addition to the actions of government (policies and measures), a more enabling, gender-responsive, and gender-inclusive environment requires the cooperative actions of non-governmental institutions, such as women entrepreneurs' associations, the financial sector and international cooperation partners, which all play a key role in the entrepreneurial ecosystem for women entrepreneurship. Strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem for WED, including gender-sensitization of the

ecosystem and promoting partnerships with ecosystem members, will aid in accelerating it.

Although beyond the mandate of ministries responsible for SMEs, attention must also be directed to the critical importance of addressing the deeper systemic factors underlying other inequalities constraining women's entrepreneurship, such as the unequal time burdens of women in unpaid care and the lack of accessible, affordable, and quality childcare services. Creating an enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship requires more equity in the sharing of unpaid care burden and the provision of childcare services.

The Policy Toolkit and the self-assessment tool can be a useful instruments for MSME policymakers in identifying the strengths of key women entrepreneur-centric policy domains at the national level, and the areas most in need of improvement to advance the role of women's entrepreneurship in the economy and the growth potential of their businesses.

ASEAN can provide policy leadership and guidance to its member States in strengthening policy support for women's entrepreneurship in two major ways:



1. Further gender mainstreaming of the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development by providing for the integration of target measures and indicators for the inclusion of women entrepreneurs/WMSMEs across all five strategy goals.
2. Inviting the ASEAN member States to draft and implement complementary national strategies on women's entrepreneurship as a comprehensive framework for fostering an enabling environment and entrepreneurial ecosystem to advance the role of women in entrepreneurial activities and economic growth.

1 | Introduction and context



This chapter provides an introduction to the Policy Toolkit and explanations of its purpose, objectives and projected outcomes, how the toolkit can be used, and the scope of its parameters. It also provides the case for inclusion of gender equality in micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) development and the importance for ASEAN countries to focus on the creation of an enabling ecosystem for the development of women's entrepreneurship and how promoting entrepreneurship can help address the gender gaps and contribute towards national growth.

The conceptualization of the Toolkit has relevance to the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development 2025 and the objectives related to women's entrepreneurship development (WED). The analysis of policy gaps could inform stronger consideration for emphasis on or the inclusion of WED in future editions of the Strategic Action Plan for SME Development (as per recommendations of the OECD, 2017 report). It also makes a connection between the Policy Toolkit and national strategies on women's empowerment and gender equality and a contribution towards realizing the women's empowerment indicators in the Sustainable Development Goals.

CONTEXT

This Policy Toolkit project was initiated by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), under the Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship (CWE) Programme, a five-year programme (2018–2023) supported by the Government of Canada, which aims to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystems that foster women's entrepreneurship in the Asia-Pacific region (policy and advocacy), enhance women entrepreneurs' access to capital through innovative financing mechanisms and increase women entrepreneurs' use of information and communications technology (ICT) through relevant training and tools.¹ Under the policy and advocacy stream of the programme, ESCAP partnered with the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (ACCMSME) to advocate women entrepreneur-centric policies and initiatives in the ASEAN region, the result of which is this Policy Toolkit on women's entrepreneurship.

Preparation of this Policy Toolkit started in August 2021. The inception report was endorsed by ACCMSME in February 2022, project focal points were identified in each of the ASEAN member States,² and preliminary input was collected from bilateral consultations with the respective ASEAN countries through ACCMSME members in February and March 2022. The report follows the outline agreed to by ESCAP and ACCMSME in the spring of 2021. It was informed by a review of existing statistical information, reports and documents related to the issues of gender equality, women's economic empowerment (WEE), and integration of women in MSME policies and programmes, with a particular focus on the ASEAN region, and by input and feedback from the ASEAN secretariat and ACCMSME members.

PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND PROJECTED OUTCOMES

The ultimate purpose of the Policy Toolkit is to assist policymakers, particularly those from ministries and agencies responsible for MSME development, in designing gender-responsive MSME policies and projects and to make the MSME sector more gender-inclusive. It calls attention to the need for a comprehensive approach for the development of women's entrepreneurship that encompasses an enabling policy and regulatory environment and equitable access to MSME programmes and services. It further lays out design considerations for future country-level action plans, policies, and strategic interventions targeting WMSMEs that will lead to the enhanced empowerment of women's entrepreneurship and contributions to the economy.

The **main objectives** of the Policy Toolkit are the following:

- ▶ Assess barriers and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the ASEAN countries.
- ▶ Establish an overview of available policies, strategies, reforms and responsible agencies that are currently supporting WMSMEs in ASEAN member States.
- ▶ Analyse gaps and capacity needs in the relevant agencies to implement policy reforms for WMSMEs.
- ▶ Develop a self-assessment toolkit for ministries responsible for MSMEs and women's MSME development that will enable an analysis of gaps, the design of appropriate interventions to address gender gaps and the tracking of achieved progress.
- ▶ Lead to gender-responsive development of the SME sector and a more extensive contribution of women entrepreneurs and women-led enterprises to the economy.

The **projected outcome** of the self-assessment toolkit is to result in the following:

- ▶ An increased number of women starting entrepreneurial activities.
- ▶ An improved level of women's economic empowerment and gender equality.
- ▶ An increased rate of entrepreneurial activity among women.
- ▶ An increased share of all enterprises owned by women.
- ▶ Greater sector and market diversity of women-owned enterprises.
- ▶ Growth in women-owned enterprises, such as a larger proportion of women-owned small and medium versus micro-scale enterprises and more WMSMEs trading in national, regional and international markets.

Most importantly, the Policy Toolkit provides policy agencies with a framework and methodology for assessing the development of women's entrepreneurship at the national level, and through completion of the self-assessment process, identifying actions to strengthen policy support and fostering a positive ecosystem for the advancement of women's entrepreneurship.

The Policy Toolkit will enable policymakers to establish a baseline and monitor longitudinal progress of initiatives targeting the advancement of WMSMEs. Use of the Toolkit is expected to lead to gender-responsive development of the MSME sector and a more extensive contribution of women entrepreneurs and women-owned-led enterprises to the economy. The assessment results could form the basis for an annual action plan for women's entrepreneurship and, in some cases, lead to changes in the related institutional policy and support structures to create a more enabling environment for the emergence and strengthening of women's entrepreneurship.

PROJECTED OUTCOME OF THE TOOLKIT

The main objectives behind development of the Policy Toolkit project are to

ASSESS

barriers and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the ASEAN countries.

ESTABLISH

an overview of available policies, strategies, reforms and responsible agencies that are currently supporting WMSMEs in ASEAN member States.

ANALYSE

gaps and capacity needs in the relevant agencies to implement policy reforms for WMSMEs.

DEVELOP

a self-assessment toolkit for ministries responsible for MSMEs and women's MSME development that will enable an analysis of gaps, the design of appropriate interventions to address gender gaps and the tracking of achieved progress.







LEAD

to gender-responsive development of the SME sector and a more extensive contribution of women entrepreneurs and women-led enterprises to the economy.



The projected outcome of the self-assessment toolkit is to affect



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-  An increased share of all enterprises owned by women.
-  Greater sector and market diversity of women-owned enterprises.
-  Growth in women-owned enterprises, such as a larger proportion of women-owned small and medium versus micro-scale enterprises and more WMSMEs trading in national, regional and international markets.

The Policy Toolkit may also be helpful to ASEAN in the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan for SME Development 2025 to strengthen its gender-inclusiveness, including identification of tangible key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor the inclusion of women entrepreneurs in all policy measures.

While developed with particular reference to the 10 ASEAN member States, the Policy Toolkit can be applied to countries throughout Asia and Pacific and beyond and serve as a reference point and useful instrument for strengthening policy support for women's entrepreneurship.

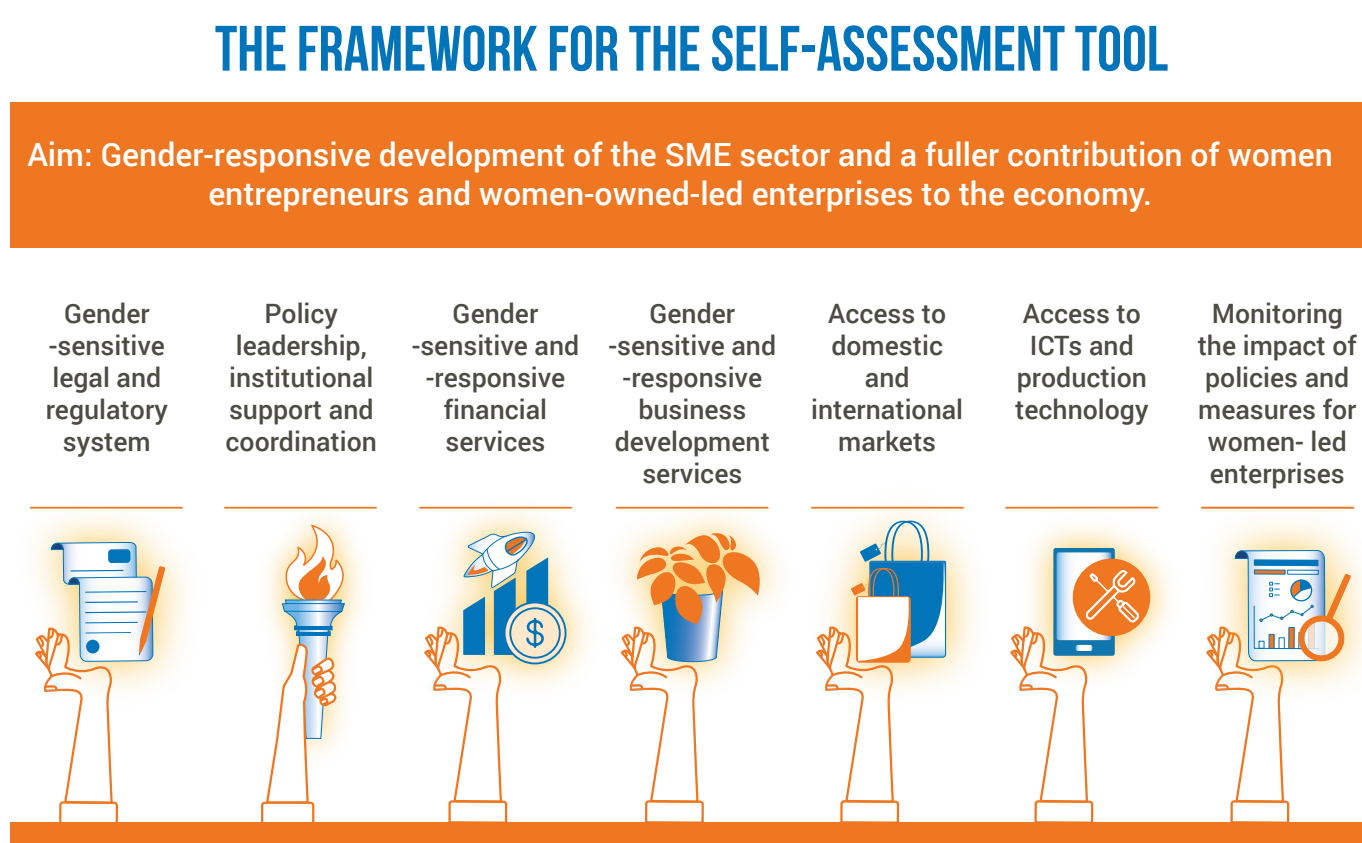
HOW THE POLICY TOOLKIT WILL BE USED

The self-assessment tool (chapter 5) comprises seven main pillars (see figure 1). Each one is supported by subdomains and accompanied by a policy checklist, which will help policymakers

to analyse their specific country and policy contexts; identify gaps, weaknesses and strengths in policies and programmes affecting the development of women's entrepreneurship; and point to a path forward for implementing more gender-responsive and inclusive laws, regulations, policies and support actions. A regular review of the self-assessment analysis will aid in monitoring progress in implementing more gender-responsive and -inclusive approaches and actions.

The practical application of the self-assessment tool is intended for primary use by ministries and agencies responsible for MSMEs to ensure the gender perspective is incorporated into MSME policies and measures; reduce the gender gaps in entrepreneurial and MSME activities; and assess gender equality results in terms of the participation of women in business ownership and the scaling of their businesses. The aim is to improve the gender-responsiveness of

Figure 1. The framework for the self-assessment tool



MSME policies and to identify measures to increase gender equality and inclusiveness of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in policy and programmes and their access to productive resources and assets, financial and business support services, markets, and the range of economic opportunities.

It will, however, also provide broader guidance and insight to regulatory bodies, governmental ministries, agencies, key stakeholder organizations and WED ecosystem members, such as financial institutions, business development service providers and business associations, including women entrepreneurs' associations, on the key policies and measures needed to advance women's entrepreneurship in the country.

PARAMETERS OF THE POLICY TOOLKIT

This section defines the parameters of the Policy Toolkit and what it attempts to cover (and not cover) in its focus.

First, the toolkit focuses on the features of WEE most directly related to improved employment and entrepreneurship outcomes for women, such as women's economic rights and access to economic resources, including, for example, credit, property ownership and markets, and business support provisions. While the overarching systemic constraints to women's empowerment³ are underscored by adverse social norms, discriminatory laws and lack of social protection, failure to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid household work and care, limitations to women's access to work,⁴ and the devaluing of their work (United Nations, 2016), the Policy Toolkit is not intended to address the totality of "women's empowerment" issues. Its main focus is on the gender equality and empowerment issues most relevant to

The Policy Toolkit is not intended to address the totality of "women's empowerment" issues. Its main focus is on the gender equality and empowerment issues most relevant to enabling increased participation of women in employment and entrepreneurship, including in MSME development.

enabling increased participation of women in employment and entrepreneurship, including in MSME development. In line with the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment,⁵ reducing gender gaps to create more economic opportunities for women will produce a multiplier effect on the economy.

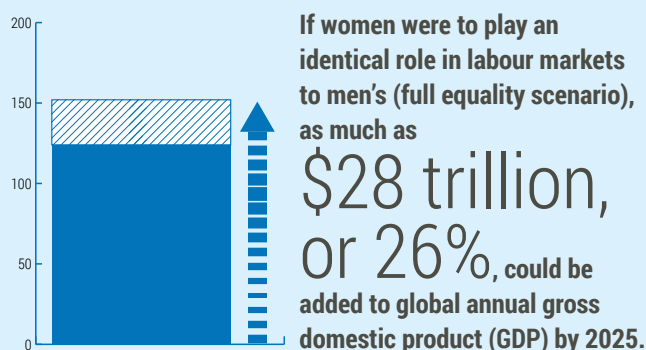
Second, **the Policy Toolkit was developed primarily for use by the ministries and agencies responsible for the design, coordination and implementation of MSME policies and laws, and action plans** and to assist in the assessment and monitoring of WED-related policies. However, as policies affecting MSMEs, including women-owned enterprises, are horizontal in nature, cutting across a number of ministries and policy areas, such as trade (trade facilitation, trade promotion, export development), education and skills (education, training), technology and innovation, government procurement,

and finance, consultation with the relevant stakeholders is required, including with the ministry responsible for women's affairs or gender equality.

WHY GENDER EQUALITY IN MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT IS IMPORTANT

First, at the macro-level, significant economic gains can be realized by closing gender gaps in employment and entrepreneurship. Countries with large gender gaps in labour force participation and entrepreneurial activity are losing economic opportunity. According to McKinsey & Company projections, if women were to play an identical role in labour markets to men's (full equality scenario), as much as \$28 trillion, or 26 per cent, could be added to

Countries with large gender gaps in labour force participation and entrepreneurial activity are losing economic opportunity.



At the current rate of progress, the World Economic Forum (WEF) estimates

it will take another 151 years to close the overall global gender gap in economic participation and opportunity.

Entrepreneurship is a key pathway for women's economic empowerment and equality



global annual gross domestic product (GDP) by 2025 (Woetzel others, 2015).⁶ At the current rate of progress, the World Economic Forum (WEF) estimates it will take another 151 years to close the overall global gender gap in economic participation and opportunity (WEF, 2022, p. 5). The imperative for action to reduce the gender gap is immediate.

Second, entrepreneurship is a key pathway for women's economic empowerment and equality. The Boston Consulting Group projects that if women and men participated equally as entrepreneurs, global GDP could rise by 3 to 6 per cent and the global economy could grow by \$2.5 trillion to \$5 trillion (Unnikrishnan and Blair, 2019).

Third, gender equality is critical to achieving a gender-responsive ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). While trade and economic integration policy may, by itself, be gender neutral, the potential of such policies for

women's empowerment cannot be realized without significant and corrective interventions. An analysis of the projected gender impact of AEC found that total exports would certainly rise following the launch of the economic community, but without adequate steps taken to promote women's participation in the economy, women's share of the total value of exports would decline over time (ASEAN secretariat, 2016⁷). Accordingly, creating a favourable environment for women to contribute to economic growth through developing their full labour market potential, by, for example, formalizing women workers, reducing the gender wage gap, skills development and increasing the share of women's employment across priority and export-oriented sectors, and addressing inequalities around women's access to resources and asset ownership is essential to maximize the impact of trade development. In the absence of counteractive measures, the report concludes that AEC will exacerbate existing gender inequalities, contributing to the inability of women to benefit from it (predominance of men in trade, investment and skilled labour sectors) and limit the overall potential gains from trade and regional integration. Unless targeted interventions are implemented to tackle gender inequality, AEC or any other economic market boost will not benefit women.

The importance of this is confirmed by the ASEAN Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the Sustainable Development Goals, which were adopted by the ASEAN Leaders in 2017, and the Action Agenda on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment in ASEAN, which encourages all ASEAN member States to mainstream WEE through innovation, trade, inclusive business, and human capital development.

Fourth, because of the strong multiplier effect of female entrepreneurship on family well-being, social development and sustainable economic growth, a strong connection can be made between support for women entrepreneurs and development of women-owned-led enterprises and the Sustainable Development Goals. Fostering women's entrepreneurship and their economic empowerment would contribute towards achieving Goal 1 on ending poverty; Goal 4 on inclusive education and lifelong learning opportunities; Goal 5 on gender equality; Goal 8 on promoting sustained, inclusive economic growth; and Goal 10 on reducing inequalities within and among countries.⁸ However, during the launch of the *2022 Asia-Pacific SDG Progress Report*, ESCAP reported that the South-East Asia subregion is not on track to achieve any of the 17 Goals by 2030, with evident lack of progress noted for Goal 4, Goal 5, and Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth) (ESCAP, 2022a).

Accordingly, fostering the development of women's entrepreneurship and higher levels of gender equality in MSME development has the potential to produce greater economic impact, such as increased job creation, export volumes, and innovation in products, services and markets, in addition to expansive socioeconomic gains stretching from households to communities and national economies. Adopting more gender-inclusive MSME policies, addressing the constraints facing women entrepreneurs and ensuring the necessary enabling policy and regulatory environment to encourage women to start businesses, scale their businesses and move up the value chain, will level the playing field for women's entrepreneurship to flourish, strengthen MSME development, and contribute towards achieving more inclusive and sustainable development under AEC (ESCAP, 2017).

2 | Context of women's entrepreneurship in the ASEAN region



This chapter lays out the context of women's entrepreneurship in the ASEAN countries. It presents country data and comparisons on women's participation in the economy, including in the labour force, self-employment and business ownership, and highlights the legal, socioeconomic and other business-related challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs. It also includes a discussion of the differential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's entrepreneurship and women-owned enterprises, with a particular reference to the Asia-Pacific region.

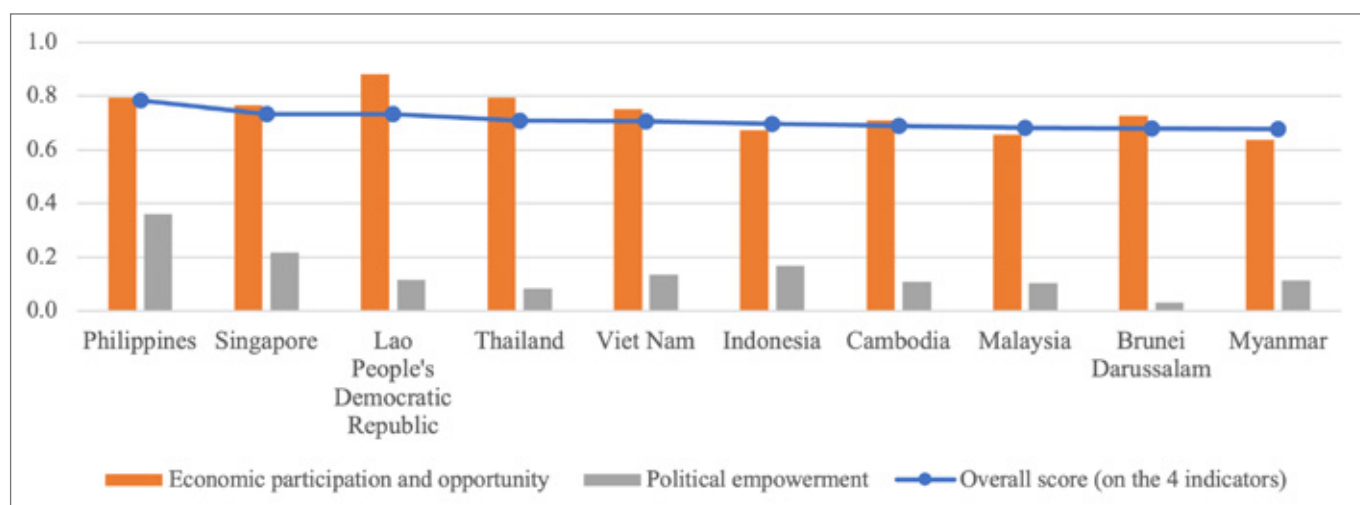
2.1 GENDER GAPS IN ASEAN COUNTRIES AFFECTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

This section examines evidence of gender gaps in the ASEAN member States, particularly those related to women's economic opportunities, as identified in global indices. It includes a review of the WEF Global Gender Gap Index and the Women, Business and the Law (WBL) assessment of gender quality in the laws.

The Global Gender Gap Index

The 2022 Global Gender Gap Index benchmarks 146 countries on four gender equality indicators: (1) economic participation and opportunity; (2) political empowerment; (3) educational attainment; and (4) health and survival. Achieving progress on these indicators is perceived as being critical to narrowing the gender gap at the global and country levels. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, WEF projected it would take 99 years to achieve gender parity at the then prevailing rates of progress, especially in reducing the large gender gaps in economic participation and opportunity and political empowerment. Due to the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis, progress towards gender parity has regressed – at the current rates of progress, the WEF projected timeline to full global gender parity is 132 years (168 years to close the overall gender gap in East Asia and the Pacific). Dramatically accelerating gender parity requires a collective, coordinated and comprehensive public and private agenda for action (WEF, 2022).

Results of the 2022 Global Gender Gap Index assessment for the ASEAN countries reveal that gender gaps in educational attainment and health and survival have almost closed (95+ per cent of the gap), but gender gaps prevail in economic participation and opportunity, and are particularly large with regard to political empowerment (figure 2). Lower scores on the “economic participation and opportunity” indicator are often reflective of discrimination and wage inequality in the labour market, a major influencing factor related to WEE. Barriers to women's labour market access may be varied, including, among them, cultural and social norms limiting women's role in the productive economy, discriminatory (or gender-segregated) hiring practices offering fewer opportunities for women to gain paid jobs, and the general lack of paid employment in rural areas. Once in the labour market, women may face a host of

Figure 2. Gender equality gaps in ASEAN countries, 2022 scores

Notes: A score of "1" indicates gender equality. The countries are ordered from left to right based on their rank in the Global Gender Gap Report 2022 (Philippines having the highest overall score and Myanmar having the lowest overall score among the 10 ASEAN member States).

Source: WEF (2022) in country profiles.

other discriminatory practices, such as wage inequality, occupational segregation and less opportunities for advancement.

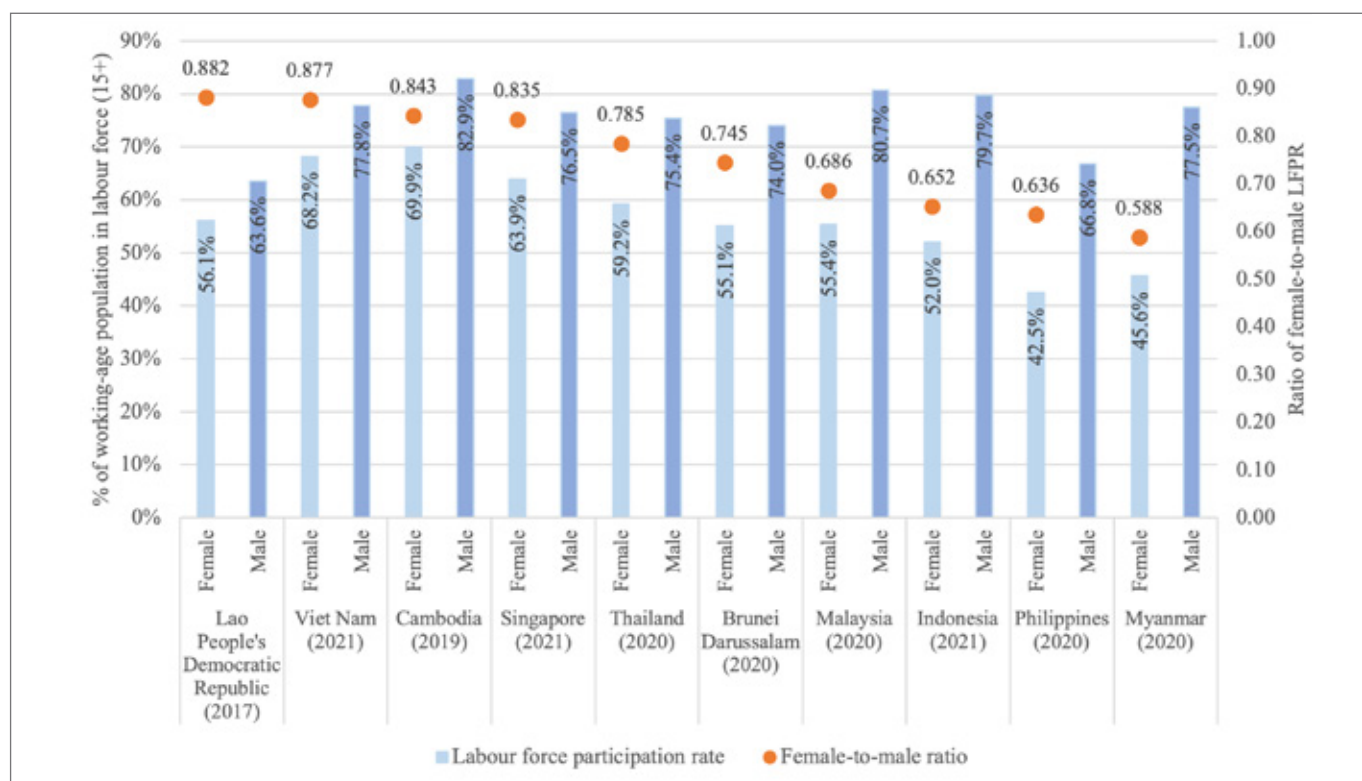
A deeper look at labour force participation rates in the ASEAN member States

The rate of participation of working-age women in the labour force, relative to men, is an important indicator of gender equality. In the Asia Pacific region, McKinsey & Company estimate that the advancement of women's equality (closing the gender gap in employment) could potentially add \$4.5 trillion to the collective GDP annually by 2025; a 12 per cent increase over the business-as-usual GDP trajectory (Woetzel and others, 2018).⁹ The projected GDP increase ranges from 12 per cent in Cambodia and Thailand, 10 per cent in Viet Nam, 9 per cent in Indonesia, 8 per cent in Malaysia and Myanmar, 7 per cent in the Philippines, to 5 per cent in Singapore.

Labour force participation rates (LFPRs) vary across the ASEAN member States, ranging from a female LFPR of 69.6 per cent in Cambodia, to a low of 42.5 per cent in the Philippines; and from a

male LFPR of 82.9 per cent in Cambodia to a low of 63.6 per cent in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (figure 3). The female LFPR across the 10 countries averages 56.8 per cent, compared to the average male rate of 75.5 per cent, a gender gap of 18.7 percentage points, but notably, it was higher by more than 25 percentage points in Myanmar, Indonesia and Malaysia. The smallest gender disparity of only a 7.5 percentage point difference between the male and female LFPRs was recorded for the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Across the ASEAN member States, the female LFPR averaged about three-quarters of the male rate; although it did exceed 80 per cent in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Viet Nam, Cambodia and Singapore, and was less than 60 per cent in Myanmar.

Another important feature of labour market data is gender disparity in the percentage of employed persons reporting employment as a contributing (unpaid) worker in a family or household enterprise. Globally, employed women are more than twice as likely as men to be contributing (unpaid) family workers (ILO, 2018, p. 9). This holds true in the ASEAN region

Figure 3. Gender gap in labour force participation rates

Notes: Countries are presented in descending order of the female-to-male ratio in the labour force participation rates.

Source: ILO, ILOSTAT. Country profiles. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/>

Figure 4. Women comprise the majority of contributing (unpaid) workers in a family enterprise

Notes: Country data are presented in order of highest percentage of unpaid family workers to lowest percentage.

Source: JPES (2020a table 1, p. 17); Cambodia, National Institute of Statistics (2020, p. 81); Statistics Indonesia (2021, pp. 84-85); Lao Statistics Bureau (2018); Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022, p. 145, table A.4); Myanmar, Department of Population (2020, p. 110); Philippines: LFS October 2020 (Philippines Statistics Authority); Singapore, Manpower Research and Statistics Department (2021); Thailand, National Statistical Office (2020); Viet Nam General Statistics Office (2021, table 8, p. 22).

as well. Although the share of “unpaid family workers” in employment statistics in the ASEAN member States varies considerably across countries, women account for an average of 61 per cent of the unpaid family workers, ranging from a high of 70.4 per cent in Indonesia to a low of less than 50 per cent in Brunei Darussalam (figure 4).

Employed women in the ASEAN member States also experience a higher rate of employment as an “informal worker” than employed men (except in Viet Nam, Brunei Darussalam, and Malaysia), which means they have less social protection and security (ASEAN secretariat, 2019¹⁰). Women's share of total informal employment tends to be higher than their share of total employment, which indicates their greater propensity to be in informal work.

Legal gender gaps – Women, Business and the Law

The Women Business and the Law report covers 35 legislative issues aggregated into eight indicators of gender equality strongly associated with WEE and pertaining to the employment outcomes for women once they enter the labour force, such as equal pay and property rights,

including opportunities for entrepreneurial activity. (See annex III for legal questions for each indicator area.) The Women, Business and the Law measures the explicit gender-based differences in the codified law, as well as good practice legislation that incentivizes women's productive employment and entrepreneurship.

Analysis of World Bank data across 104 economies finds that unequal laws not only discourage women's participation in the private sector workforce, but also their likelihood of becoming top managers and owners of firms (Islam, Muzi and Amin, 2017). Laws subjecting women to mobility and travel restrictions, for example, can negatively impact the labour supply in a country, the level of female business ownership and women's access to finance. (Hyland, Djankov and Goldberg, 2020).

The global average score in the 2022 WBL Index is 76.5 out of 100 points, indicating that women are accorded about three quarters of the legal rights as men in the eight areas measured (World Bank, 2022). The average WBL Index score of 72.0 for the 10 ASEAN member States is below the global average; however, three of the countries (Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam) have achieved full

THE EIGHT WOMEN, BUSINESS AND THE LAW INDICATORS

Mobility

Examines constraints on freedom of movement



Pay

Measures laws and regulations affecting women's pay



Parenthood

Examines laws affecting women's work after having children



Assets

Considers gender differences in property and inheritance



Workplace

Analyzes laws affecting women's decisions to work



Marriage

Assesses legal constraints related to marriage



Entrepreneurship

Analyzes constraints on women starting and running business



Pension

Assesses laws affecting the size of a woman's pension



Table 1. Scores for Women, Business and the Law 2022 in ASEAN countries, selected indicators

Country	WBL 2022 Index	Assets ¹	Entrepreneurship ²	Workplace ³	Mobility ⁴	Pay ⁵	Parent-hood ⁶
Lao People's Democratic Republic	88.1	100	100	100	100	75	80
Viet Nam	85.0	100	100	100	100	100	80
Singapore	82.5	100	75	75	100	75	60
Cambodia	81.3	100	100	100	100	75	20
Philippines	78.8	60	100	100	75	100	60
Thailand	78.1	100	75	100	100	75	20
Indonesia	64.4	60	75	50	100	75	40
Myanmar	58.8	80	75	25	75	50	60
Brunei Darussalam	53.1	60	75	25	50	75	0
Malaysia	50.0	60	75	50	50	50	0
ASEAN average	72.0	82	85	72.5	85	75	42.0

Notes: ¹ Assets examines gender differences in property and inheritance law. ² Entrepreneurship considers any legal constraints on women starting a running a business (such as accessing credit, signing contracts, registering a business and opening a bank account). ³ Workplace examines laws affecting women's decisions to enter the labour force (legal capacity and ability to work, discrimination in employment, labour market restrictions) and protection against discrimination and sexual harassment. ⁴ Mobility measures constraints on a woman's agency and freedom of movement (and travel) likely to influence her decision to enter the labour force and become an entrepreneur. ⁵ Pay measures laws and regulations affecting women's pay. ⁶ Parenthood examines laws affecting women's work during and after pregnancy, including paid maternity, paternity, parental leave. WBL uses a simple scoring approach. On legal areas with four questions, the absence of one law renders a score of 75; on legal areas with five questions, the absence of one law renders a score of 80. A score of 100 indicates that women are on an equal legal standing with men in terms of the codified laws. This table excludes indicators for marriage and pensions.

Source: World Bank (2022, appendix B: Economy Data, from Women, Business and the Law database).

legal gender equality in the formulation of relevant laws in four of the eight areas, namely those pertaining to assets, entrepreneurship, workplace equality, and freedom of movement and travel (see table 1). Further legal reforms to ensure non-discrimination on the basis of gender in the laws are particularly needed in Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Singapore, as follows:

- ▶ **Workplace:** Four of the countries do not have laws prohibiting discrimination in employment based on gender (Brunei Darussalam,¹¹ Malaysia, Myanmar and Singapore, although the Prime Minister of Singapore recently announced that the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices would be enshrined in law, which would protect against workplace discrimination, including on the basis of gender¹²).

- ▶ **Pay:** Only the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam have laws mandating equal remuneration for work of equal value.
- ▶ **Entrepreneurship:** Only Cambodia (Criminal Code), the Philippines (Women in Development and Nation Banking Act; Magna Carta on Women), and Viet Nam (Law on Gender Equality) have laws prohibiting discrimination in access to credit based on gender.
- ▶ **Assets:** Seven of the ASEAN member States have in place laws giving sons and daughters equal rights to inherit assets from their parents and giving female and male surviving spouses equal rights to inherit assets; Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and Malaysia do not have such laws in place.

Analysis of WBL results show a positive correlation between gender equality improvements in the law and higher female labour force participation and lower wage gaps between women and men, suggesting that women in countries with greater gender equality in the laws enjoy more favourable labour market outcomes (Hyland, Djankov and Goldberg, 2020). However, the “passing” of better laws does not necessarily solve the issues of gender imbalance, unless the laws are dutifully enforced. This is often not the case in countries where women's participation in the formal economy is still disadvantaged by social norms. The application of customary practices in line with gendered cultural and social norms may continue to circumvent the codified laws.

2.2 THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITY IN THE ASEAN REGION

Role of women in self-employment activity

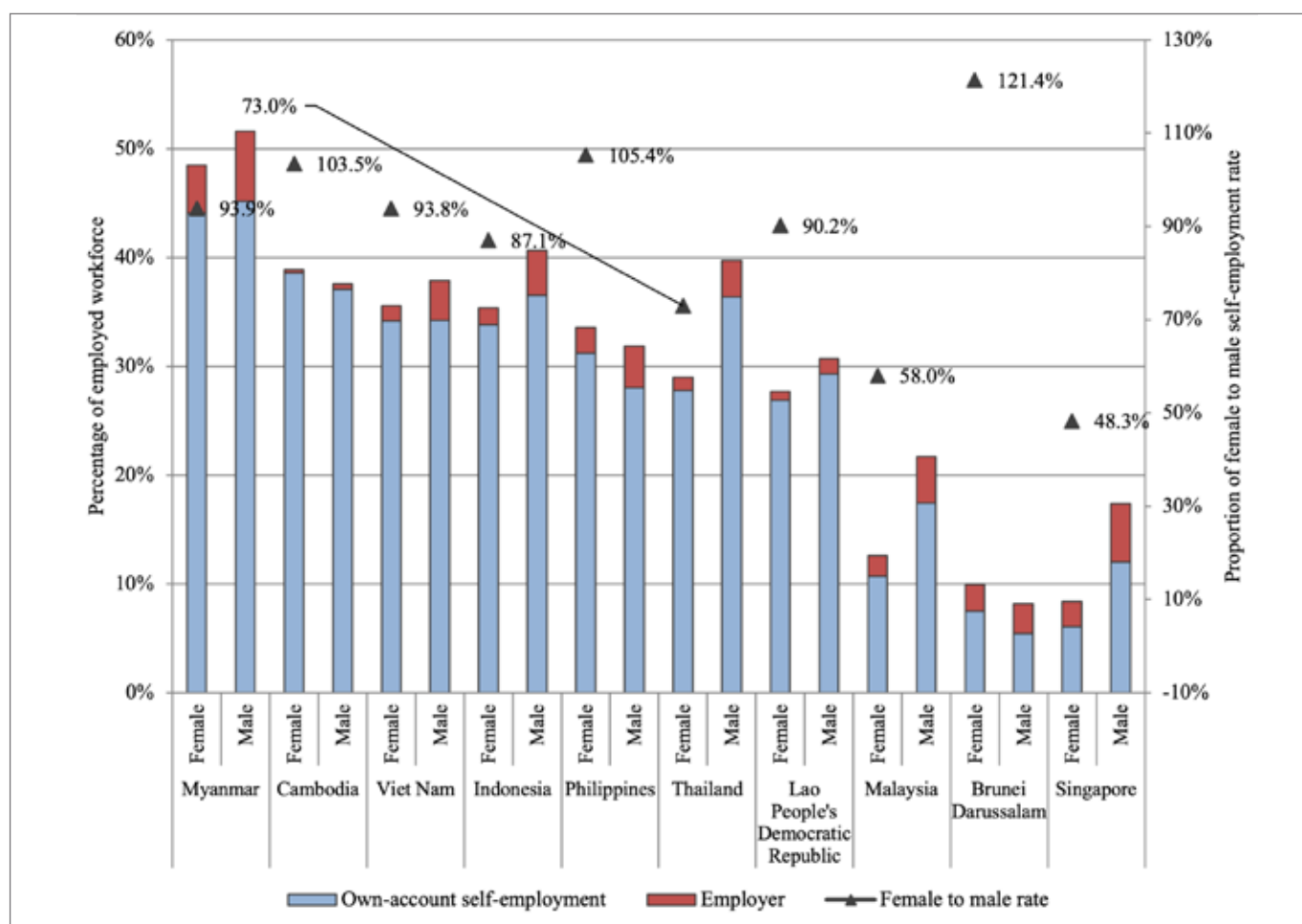
Self-employment levels are, in general, related to the level of economic development of a country; countries at a lower level of development tend to have higher self-employment rates than countries at a higher level of development. As economies develop and more paid jobs become available, the tendency is for self-employment rates to decline. In Myanmar, for example, more than 50 per cent of employed persons are self-employed, whereas in Brunei Darussalam and Singapore, the self-employment rate is lower, 8.8 per cent and 13.2 per cent of employment, respectively.

The female self-employment rates (as a percentage of all employed women) are generally lower than the male self-employment rates (ASEAN member States average of 27.9 per cent for employed women, compared to 35.6 per cent for employed men), but vary across the countries, ranging from a high of more than 48 per cent in Myanmar to a low of 8.4 per cent in Singapore (figure 5). The very high self-employment rates in Myanmar are largely due to the lack of paid private sector job opportunities in the country, especially for women. The particularly low female self-employment rate (and largest gender gap) in Singapore (the female rate is slightly less than half that of males, 8.4 per cent versus 17.4 per cent) may indicate more plentiful paid employment opportunities for working women or more encouragement for women to advance in corporate/professional management rather than to become entrepreneurs.

Exceptions are noted in Cambodia, the Philippines and Brunei Darussalam, where the female self-employment rate exceeds 100 per cent of the male rate (compared to the ASEAN member States average of 86.7 per cent of the male rate). The female-to-male rate ranges from a high of more than 121 per cent in Brunei Darussalam to a low of 48.3 per cent in Singapore. However, because the female labour force participation and employment rates are lower than the male rates in all ASEAN member States, there are fewer self-employed women than men at the country level, except in Cambodia, where the numbers are almost equal.

Figure 5 also shows the own-account self-employment rate and the employer rate. On average, working men in the ASEAN member States are two times more likely to be employers than working women (average male employer rate of 3.6 per cent; female average of only 1.8 per cent). The employer share of total self-employment averages 14.3 per cent for males and only 9.9 per cent for females. Thailand has the largest gender gap in “employer” rates among the ASEAN member States, with the female rate registering only 35.7 per cent of the male rate in 2020. Brunei Darussalam stands out in this analysis because even though the overall self-employment rate is low relative to

Figure 5. Female and male self-employment rates by own-account self-employed and employers, ASEAN member States



Source: JPES (2020a, table 1, p. 17); Cambodia, National Institute of Statistics (2020, p. 81); Statistics Indonesia (2021, pp. 84-85); Lao Statistics Bureau (2018); Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022, p. 145, table A.4). Myanmar, Department of Population (2020, p. 110); Philippines: LFS October 2020 (Philippines Statistics Authority); Singapore, Manpower Research and Statistics Department, (2021); Thailand, National Statistical Office (2020); Viet Nam, General Statistics Office (2021, table 8, p. 22).

all ASEAN member States except Singapore, the gender gap in the “employer” rate is much smaller (the female employer rate is 88.6 per cent of the male employer rate, compared to the average for ASEAN member States of 53.5 per cent). In countries with the smaller “employer” gender gaps, self-employed women are more likely to be creating jobs for others. Accordingly, supporting own-account self-employed women to become employers would bring economic benefit to the country.

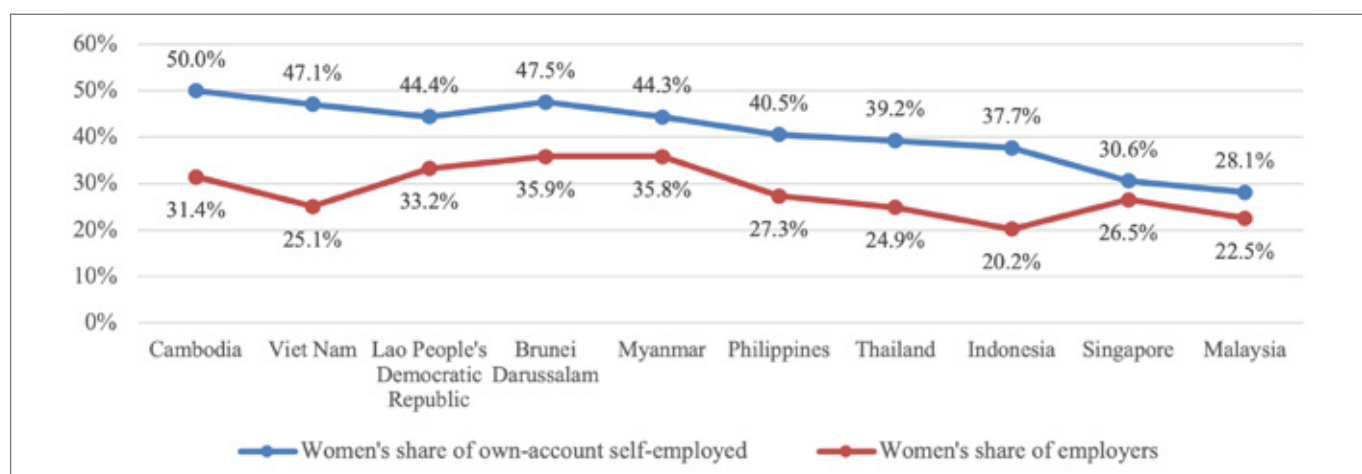
In terms of women's share of total self-employment in the ASEAN member States, on average, women account for 41.0 per cent of the own-account self-employed and 28.3 per cent of the employers, with variances across the countries. The share of own-account self-employed ranges from a high share of 50.0 per cent in Cambodia to a low of 28.1 per cent in Malaysia (figure 6). The share of women as employers ranges from a high of more than 35 per cent in Brunei Darussalam and Myanmar to a low of 20 per cent in Indonesia.

Policy implications of self-employment data analysis for consideration

The conclusion in countries with the highest rates of female own-account self-employment 36 per cent to 44 per cent of employed women, such as in Myanmar, Cambodia, and Viet Nam, may be that the rate is too high. Many of the self-employed in these countries are necessity-driven, having no or limited employment options for generating income. The lack of formal employment opportunities is a major factor in the decision of many women in the region to start a business. They turn to self-employment and entrepreneurial activities by starting mostly informal, marginal, low-income micro-enterprises in agriculture, food processing, beauty and tailoring services, and handicrafts production with limited potential for sustainability and growth.

The policy implication for these countries would be two-pronged: first, to ensure that women have more opportunities for productive

Figure 6. Women's share of the own-account self-employed and share of employers across the ASEAN member States



Notes: When considering the relatively high share of women among employers in Cambodia (31.4 per cent), it must be noted that only 0.5 per cent of working males and 0.3 per cent of working females are employers, so even though women's share of all employers is greater than 30 per cent, the base is tiny.

Source: JPES (2020a, table 1, p. 17); Cambodia, National Institute of Statistics (2020, p. 81); Statistics Indonesia (2021); Lao Statistics Bureau (2018); Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022, p. 145, table A.4); Myanmar, Department of Population (2020, p. 110); Philippines: LFS October 2020 (Philippines Statistics Authority); Singapore, Manpower Research and Statistics Department, (2021); Thailand, National Statistical Office (2020); Viet Nam, General Statistics Office (2021, table 8, p. 22).

employment in paid jobs by removing labour market obstacles; and second, to invest more in increasing the entrepreneurial and business management skills of women to better enable them to develop their micro-enterprises beyond the survivalist stage and become “employers”. Policy support could also be applied to bring more of the existing self-employed women and employers into the formal sector and to help in the scaling-up their activities.

Conversely, economies experiencing relatively low self-employment rates, such as Brunei Darussalam and Singapore, could be experiencing lost economic opportunities because there are too few entrepreneurs. From a policy perspective, this might warrant greater emphasis on encouraging entrepreneurial activity in general, and especially among women, where the female self-employment rates are below 10 per cent (of employed women). For example, in the case of Singapore where the

self-employment rate for women is slightly less than half the rate for men, the need for more specific efforts to promote entrepreneurship as an option for women is suggested.

Women's share of business ownership

It is difficult to compare countries on the share of WMSMEs as a percentage of all MSMEs. Apart from the absence of official sex-disaggregated business ownership data in six of the ASEAN member States (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand), the comparability of any official statistics on MSME ownership across the ASEAN member States is deterred by the use of different definitions (criteria and size-band thresholds) for micro, small, and medium enterprises. However, table 2 presents estimates of women's business ownership based on existing available information.

Table 2. Estimates of women's business ownership in the ASEAN member States

Country	Women-business ownership data	Source
Brunei Darussalam (old data)	34 per cent of registered enterprises had female owners.	2011 Economic Census of Business Enterprises (reported in APEC Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy (2018, table 3, p. 11).
Cambodia	Women comprise 61 per cent of the “representatives of the establishment”, meaning that a woman manages the business (but may or not be the owner).	Cambodia 2014 Economic Survey report. The report makes a distinction between the sex of the owner of the establishment, and the sex of “the representative” of the establishment. The “representative” of the establishment is a person who actually manages its activities; but is not always its owner.
Indonesia (mixed results)	Women own less than 25 per cent of all MSMEs.	Seno-Alday and Bourne (2017)
	Women own close to 60 per cent of enterprises.	World Bank (2016b).

Table 2. Estimates of women's business ownership in the ASEAN member States

Country	Women-business ownership data	Source
Lao People's Democratic Republic	As of 2017, females owned approximately 31 per cent of formal enterprises with more than five employees. Women make up about half the owners of newly registered enterprises .	Lao Women's Union (2019).
	Women are recorded as the primary investor in 46.4 per cent of the businesses in the Enterprise Registration system.	Myanmar National Enterprise Database, Ministry of Industry and Commerce Registration System (www.ned.moic.gov.la/index.php/en/explore-data-en/ned-charts/). Data reported on the website, accessed 13 March 2022.
Malaysia	Women-owned businesses account for 20.3 per cent of the business ownership of Malaysian enterprises, the vast majority owning microenterprises.	Department of Statistics Malaysia (2017).
Myanmar (mixed results)	Women-owned businesses comprise 25 per cent of MSMEs (28 per cent of small enterprises and 20 per cent of medium enterprises).	Survey data collected in 2015 of 2,500 enterprises as part of an SME Survey carried out by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (Amine and Stockman, 2015).
	Women have majority ownership in 33.5 per cent of businesses in the country.	Data from the 2016 World Bank Enterprise Survey in Myanmar for the indicator "percent of firms with majority female ownership" (World Bank, 2016a). www.enterprisesurveys.org/en/data/exploretopics/gender# .
Philippines	Women are reported as owners of 54 per cent of businesses.	Department of Trade and Industry Business Registry (2017).
	Women comprise 39.1 per cent of the working owners in enterprises with 20 or more employees.	2017–2018 Business Registry.
Singapore	Women-owned businesses comprised 27.2 per cent of all Singapore enterprises in 2018.	Singapore Department of Statistics.
Thailand	No data or estimates available.	
Viet Nam	Women represent 21 per cent of the total number of formally-registered enterprises in Viet Nam and 21.3 per cent of MSMEs.	Data from the 2015 Economic Census as cited in IFC (2017); ESCAP (2020b).
	By the end of 2019, women-owned enterprises accounted for about 24 per cent of the total number of businesses operating in the economy (some 285,000 women-owned enterprises).	Viet Nam General Statistics Office. Data appearing on the women entrepreneurs ecosystem subportal of the National SME Support Portal (http://we.business.gov.vn/vi-vn/Ch%C3%ADnh-s%C3%A1ch/)

Defining a “women-owned MSME”

Collecting and reporting sex-disaggregated data on MSME ownership should be a priority in ASEAN member States because of the important evidence-based policy input such data can provide to the government. However, one of the major challenges related to this is the lack of a standard set of criteria for defining a “women-owned enterprise/MSME”. In this respect, the definition must be precise enough to exclude businesses that are owned by women, but managed and controlled by men; firms that are headed by women, but owned by men (or anonymous corporations); and what appear to be women-owned firms but reliant on non-women-owned businesses to operate (Chin, 2017).

Governments in many countries have not yet developed a definition for “women-owned enterprise”. Only two countries in the ASEAN region, Indonesia and Viet Nam, have formally adopted definitions of a “woman-entrepreneur” or “women-owned enterprise” (see table 3). The Ministry of Finance and Economy of Brunei Darussalam has drafted a definition and SME agencies and Cambodia and Thailand are in the process of drafting a definition. The Philippines uses the International Finance Corporation (IFC) definition of a women-owned enterprise. The Lao People's Democratic Republic Malaysia, Myanmar, and Singapore do not have an official definition and have not indicated any plans to adopt one.

Table 3. Formal definitions for women-owned enterprise in the ASEAN member States

Formal definitions of women-owned enterprise	
Indonesia	The Presidential Regulation (Perpres No. 2/2022) on National Entrepreneurship Development for 2021-2024 (2.2.4) defines a “woman entrepreneur” as a woman who is operating a business, that is registered under the government electronic business registration system, and holds at least 51 per cent ownership of the business (initial capital of the business).
Viet Nam	Article 3 of Law 04/2017/QH14 on Supporting SMEs (referred to as the SME Law), effective 1 January 2018, defines a woman-owned small- or medium-sized enterprise as an SME having one or more than one woman holding 51 per cent or more of its charter capital, and at least one of whom is its manager.
Informal definitions	
Cambodia	The Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation is in the process of drafting a definition for “women-owned-led MSMEs” as part of the new SME development policy. However, the National Institute of Statistics uses its own definition to identify women-owned enterprises in the Inter-censal Economic Survey: Sex of Owner of Establishment (National Institute of Statistics, 2015, p. xxi): “The owner of an establishment is a person who owns it. In the case of joint ownership, the sex of the largest shareholder prevails; in case of equal shares between a male and a female, the sex is set to be male”. “The Representative of the Establishment is the person who actually manages its activities; not always its owner”.

Table 3. Formal definitions for women-owned enterprise in the ASEAN member States

Informal definitions	
Malaysia	No formally adopted definition for WSME, but the Department of Statistics Malaysia uses the following definition to categorise the ownership of business establishments by gender in the Economic Census: "Women-owned establishments" refers to establishments with "a minimum of 51 per cent of the equity held by a woman or women OR the biggest shareholders are women and the establishment is managed by a woman OR the Chief Executive Officer or Managing Director is a woman that owns at least 10 per cent of the equity" (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017, p. 52).
Philippines	For practical purposes, the IFC definition of women-owned enterprise is used: an enterprise qualifies as woman-owned if it is: ¹³ (a) at least 51 per cent owned by a woman or women; OR (b) at least 20 per cent of the ownership is held by a woman or women; AND one or more women hold top management positions, such as CEO/ COO/ President/Vice President, AND at least 30 per cent of the board of directors is composed of women, where a board exists.

A significant development in 2021 was the release of key definitions for women's entrepreneurship and "woman-owned business" by the International Standardization Organization (ISO) in the form of the International Workshop Agreement (ISO, 2021).¹⁴ The impetus for development of this standard was the lack of clear and universally agreed definitions to describe enterprises owned or led by women, which resulted in challenges across countries in the collection of internationally comparable gender-disaggregated data to support evidence-based policymaking focused on women's entrepreneurship and efforts to track and monitor the take-up of policy measures by women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs at the country level. The lack, or absence, of "standard" definitions has slowed the implementation of targeted programmes to advance women's entrepreneurship and is particularly relevant and important for the specific inclusion of women-owned enterprises in MSME incentive programmes, such as public procurement, supplier diversity initiatives, trade promotion, and grant schemes, to foster innovation or technology development.

The International Workshop Agreement Standard defines a **women-owned business** as one "that is more than 50 per cent owned by a one or more women, whose management and control lie with one or more women, where a woman is a signatory of the business's legal documents and financial accounts, and which is operated independently from businesses that are not owned by women" (ISO, 2021, p. 1).

The standard also provides a **recommended definition for a women-led business**: one in which at least 25 per cent is owned by one or more women, managed and controlled by one or more women (with demonstrated ability to make independent and unilateral decisions necessary to guide the future and destiny of the enterprise), which has at least one third of the board of directors comprised of women, where a board exists, where a woman is a signatory of the businesses' legal documents and financial accounts, and which is operated independently from businesses that are neither led nor owned by women.

Guidance from the ISO standard may be helpful to the ASEAN member States in developing their own country-level definitions and making the distinction between a “women-owned enterprise” and a “women-led enterprise” that are currently often used interchangeably.

2.3 KEY CHALLENGES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Not only are there significant gender gaps in self-employment and business ownership activity across the ASEAN countries, but women's enterprises are also clustered at the microenterprise level; concentrated in less productive sectors with lower earnings; and lag their male counterparts in other enterprise dimensions, such as size, profitability, formality, scalability and resilience to shocks (UNDP and UNICEF, 2021).

Although MSMEs, in general, share similar challenges, such as in accessing finance and markets, compared to men, women face a number of systemic and structural barriers that hamper their potential as entrepreneurs – social and cultural norms, gender stereotypes and lack of access to decision-making, which underpin their unequal access to resources and information (ESCAP, 2017). Structural barriers are largely the result of discriminatory gender norms, gender-blind policies, laws and regulations, high unpaid care burden, lower asset ownership and access to productive assets, more limited opportunities to develop relevant skills, constraints on access to finance, and less access to entrepreneurial networks and mentors (UNDP and UNICEF, 2021).

Gender equality is critical to achieving a gender-responsive ASEAN Economic Community. Creating a favourable environment for women to contribute to economic growth through developing their full labour market potential, by, for example, formalizing women workers, reducing the gender wage gap, skills development and increasing the share of women's employment across priority and export-oriented sectors, and addressing inequalities around women's access to resources and asset ownership is essential to maximize the impact of trade development.

1

Deeply-entrenched CULTURAL VALUES

regarding the primary role of women as wives and mothers in Asian society.

2

LEGAL FRAME- WORKS

or customary practices that restrict women's freedom of choice and action.

3

ACCESS TO FINANCING

complicated lending procedures, the lesser ability of women to meet the collateral requirements for bank loans (due to low property ownership and land rights), or limited knowledge of financial tools and services.

4

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

in starting, managing and growing a business.

5

LACK OF ACCESS TO BUSINESS NETWORKS AND NETWORKING ACTIVITY

In many of the countries, business-membership organizations are not highly representative of women members, and in some countries, cultural constraints may limit women's networking, especially with male-dominated networks.

KEY CHALLENGES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP



As identified in various research and studies on the issue in specific ASEAN countries and synthesised in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publication, *Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in ASEAN* (OECD, 2017), the development of women's entrepreneurship is affected by a number of common barriers and challenges that, in summary, fall into five categories.

1. Deeply entrenched cultural values regarding the primary role of women as wives and mothers in Asian society.

The social and cultural expectations for women's role in households, and traditional views of appropriate work for men and women are often a limiting factor to women's pursuit of work outside the home, influencing the type of work they do and the sectors in which they might choose to start a business. The need to manage traditional gender roles by balancing the demands of the business around the demands of family; household care is cited as a major challenge for women in all ASEAN countries. The burden of domestic responsibilities, which is significantly greater for women than men, creates a significant gender disadvantage and is a contributing factor in the predominance of women's enterprises in non-capital intensive, micro-scale activities related to their traditional roles, such as food products, handicrafts and personal services, that are often operated from their home base, and in their lesser capacity to grow the business due to time constraints. Shifting societal attitudes regarding women's role in society and work is an underlying factor in achieving progress on all aspects of gender inequality, although perhaps one of the more difficult to change in the short term.

2. Legal frameworks or customary practices that restrict women's freedom of choice and action. These may be related to unequal

property and inheritance rights or mobility restrictions that affect the freedom of women's movements and limit their access to markets, networks and information, and thus, the potential of their microenterprises. The absence of laws requiring equality in wage rates for "similar" work performed by women and men perpetuates the notion that work done by women has less value, with implications for women's entrepreneurial activity. Lower wage rates mean women have less opportunity to accumulate savings that could be invested in starting a business, or that their start-ups are smaller in scale. In some countries, married women need their husbands' consent for critical legal transactions, including bank loans, and due to industry restrictions and cultural expectations, they tend to cluster their activities in the low-earning sectors.

Traditionally, laws and regulations in the ASEAN countries have been viewed as "gender-neutral" instruments. With some exceptions, attention to the mainstreaming of gender in their respective national laws and regulations has not been a national priority, although the issue of performing gender impact assessments¹⁵ is promoted by ASEAN committees. As a general rule, OECD recommends that all draft laws and regulations be required to include a statement on gender impacts (OECD, 2018a).

Women entrepreneurs may also be disadvantaged with regard to business registration. Although the WBL 2022 indicates gender-neutrality in laws affecting the registration of a business in the ASEAN member States, namely there are no legal restrictions in the way women and men can register a business, women may experience cultural or other gendered practices in the business registration process. In some countries, the required business documents

may be recorded in the husband's name as head of the household, even though the business functionally belongs to the wife.¹⁶ Other difficulties in registering a business for women entrepreneurs may be linked to distance from a registration office, complexity of required paperwork, or general lack of know-how and knowledge about the benefits of having a registered business, any of which contributes to a higher level of informality. The lack of business registration is a major disadvantage for informal enterprises because it makes them ineligible to benefit from government incentive and MSME support schemes and to access financing and markets. The same may also be true for access to some MSME support programmes offered by international development partners and donor organizations.

3. **Access to financing** is a major and common barrier facing women entrepreneurs in South-East Asian countries. This can be related to complicated lending procedures, the lesser ability of women to meet the collateral requirements for bank loans (due to low property ownership and land rights¹⁷), or limited knowledge of financial tools and services. Women often lack confidence in negotiating a loan (associated with financial literacy needs) and lack credit histories and track records in business. In addition, a large percentage of women in developing countries do not have bank accounts and, as such, are not eligible for bank loans. Although micro-credit may be more readily available to women entrepreneurs, the low loan ceilings and high interest rates limit the scale and growth potential of their enterprises.

The financing gap for women entrepreneurs at the country-level has been estimated in many studies. In Cambodia, the unmet

demand for credit for women entrepreneurs has been estimated at \$4.2 billion (compared to a financing gap for male-owned SMEs of \$3.5 billion) (IFC, 2019). Other research indicates that only 3 per cent of Cambodian WSMEs are well served in access to formal credit (Women's World Banking, 2015), which may be related to lower levels of education, insufficient collateral and credit histories, and perceptions of financial institutions towards lending to women (IFC, 2019). The estimated financing gap for WSMEs in Viet Nam is \$1.19 billion (IFC, 2017), and the potential demand for credit from the WSME market in Indonesia is \$6 billion (IFC, 2016). In addition, because of gender biases, women are considerably less likely than men to be successful in attracting venture capital (see chapter 4).

4. **Lack of knowledge and skills in starting, managing and growing a business** is a common challenge for women's entrepreneurship, with significant gaps in formal knowledge of marketing, management and good business practices, and insufficient training and technical assistance in financial management, production, and other business-related skills. The majority of women in ASEAN countries are starting their enterprises without the benefit of prior business experience and formal training or assistance, and their weak entrepreneurial and business management skills affect the scale, sustainability and growth of their enterprises.
5. **Lack of access to business networks and networking activity.** Women entrepreneurs commonly have less opportunity than men to develop beneficial business contacts, gain market information and learn from the experiences of others through business networks. In many of the countries, business-membership organizations have

a limited number of women members, and in some countries, cultural constraints may limit women's networking, especially with male-dominated networks. Furthermore, the time constraints of women entrepreneurs limit their ability to participate in formal networking activities if the schedule of events conflicts with their home responsibilities. In each of the ASEAN member States, there are examples of women forming themselves into women entrepreneurs' associations and clubs, which provide networking and confidence-building opportunities, access to value-added services, such as information, knowledge, market linkages, and, in some cases, access to financing. However, many of these women's networks have limited reach and capacity.

In addition, women entrepreneurs in rural areas may experience limited access to markets due to poor ICT and transportation infrastructure; women's SMEs may lag male entrepreneurs in the use of technology; and lower education

and literacy levels, compared to their male counterparts, may create difficulties for women entrepreneurs in dealings with the government.

The particular challenges to women's entrepreneurship at the country level are highlighted in the country snapshots in chapter 3.

2.4 THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND WOMEN-OWNED ENTERPRISES

Female employment has been more severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic than male employment. Available data show greater job loss among women than men and higher increases in labour market inactivity for women. In the earlier stages of the pandemic, women were more likely to be laid off and also more likely to be exposed to the virus because of their overrepresentation

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND WOMEN-OWNED ENTERPRISES

In the Asia and Pacific region, female employment had declined by 4.6 per cent by the end of the second quarter of 2020

Widened gender gaps in labour force participation rates

Greater job loss among women

Increased time demands for unpaid care work

Women disproportionately impacted by the "stay-at-home" measures



- ▶ The available time for women to work on their businesses was restricted.
- ▶ Higher closure rates among businesses operated by women.
- ▶ Greater difficulties accessing the emergency liquidity measures put in place by governments to help MSMEs through the crisis.

in vulnerable sectors, such as the garments and the health-care sector (UN Women, 2020). This was also the case in the Asia and Pacific region, where the COVID-19 pandemic has widened the gender gaps in labour force participation rates (including self-employment) and is likely contributing to a further increase in gender inequalities (ILO, 2020). Women were particularly affected by the “stay-at-home” measures imposed by governments, which increased the already disproportionate demands on their time for unpaid care work,¹⁸ including care of family members taken ill from COVID-19, making it difficult for them to reconcile productive employment with the enhanced family care responsibilities and stay economically active as employees or entrepreneurs (UN Women, 2020). The lack of childcare options in the light of school closures was especially problematic. During the March to December 2020 period of the COVID-19 pandemic, about seven times more women than men cited “can’t arrange childcare” as the main reason for exiting the labour force (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

In general, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation for women-led MSMEs and self-employed women relative to all MSMEs because of their lower access to financial services and assets, ICT and business networks, which are more accessible to men (UN Women, 2020). Social distancing requirements, distorted supply chains and shifts in market demands intensified already existing structural inequalities and challenges that typically impede the performance and growth of women-owned businesses (ILO, 2021). This partly reflects the tendency for women entrepreneurs to be operating in the most disadvantaged sectors, in the lower ends of the value chains and concentrated on a limited number of activities with little opportunity for value-added growth. The increased demands on their time for caregiving responsibilities left women entrepreneurs with less available

time to work on pivoting business activities in response to the crisis. Combined with less access to external advice and lower likelihood of already using online capabilities, businesses operated by women experienced higher closure rates relative to those operated by men in some countries (OECD, 2021a).

In addition, WMSMEs often encountered greater difficulties in accessing the emergency liquidity measures put in place by governments to help MSMEs through the crisis, either because their businesses did not meet the threshold criteria (such as being too small), were involved in ineligible activities (such as some services sectors), or were not formally registered. Many self-employed women and WMSMEs in the developing economies in the Asia-Pacific region operate in the informal economy and may not have been eligible for government COVID-19 relief initiatives, such as access to low interest loans or tax exemptions that require verification of business registration (UN Women, 2020). At the same time, women entrepreneurs in many countries are less likely to use external finance than their male counterparts, so they were less able to benefit from the credit extensions and suspensions of loan payments offered to MSMEs.

To cope with the restricted access to markets, some women-owned enterprises have had to redirect their operations, seek new digitalized options for selling their products (adoption of e-commerce tools) and in some cases, make adjustments to their product lines (taking advantage of demand for personal protective equipment, such as face mask.) and seek new supply sources and markets.

The cascading effects of the COVID-19 crisis have disproportionately affected women-owned and women-led enterprises across the Asia-Pacific region, widened existing inequalities, and further entrenched income and digital inequality

(ESCAP, 2022a), and are thereby threatening to reverse progress made on gender equality over the past decade. Conversely, it is projected that acting now to advance gender equality in the recovery process would add \$13 trillion to global GDP by 2030 (Madgavkar and others, 2020). The implementation of specific programme actions may be called for to ameliorate the negative impacts and strengthen women-owned enterprises in the COVID-19 recovery environment. For example, the COVID-19 “build back better” recovery process identifies the **digitalization of women's MSMEs and their adoption of e-commerce as a key policy issue to be addressed. Developments in the area of access to finance, such as through fintech**, also have implications for women's entrepreneurship. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has re-enforced the need for governments to address **the issues of available and subsidized childcare, paid and equitable parental and family leave policies, and flexible work arrangements**, policies which will have a more positive impact on women in employment and entrepreneurial activity (UN Women, 2020).

AMELIORATING THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 AND STRENGTHENING WOMEN-OWNED ENTERPRISES

- ▶ the digitalization of women's MSMEs and their adoption of e-commerce
- ▶ developments in the area of access to finance, such as through fintech
- ▶ address the issues of available and subsidized child care
- ▶ paid and equitable parental and family leave policies
- ▶ flexible work arrangements



3 | Overview of MSME policies and women's entrepreneurship in the ASEAN Member States



This chapter contains a review of the aspects of national level policies primarily related to MSMEs and women's entrepreneurship summarized in the form of country "snapshots".

The intent of the snapshots is not to present an exhaustive review and analysis or comprehensive assessment of the MSME policy frameworks and programmes, but to outline key aspects of the institutional structures; the policy priority given to women as a target group in MSME policies, strategies, action plans and support programmes (which differs by country); and the mechanisms for ensuring more gender inclusiveness and monitoring the inclusion of women in MSME policy measures and actions. Each country snapshot also elaborates more on the status of women's entrepreneurship in the country and the suggested MSME policy priorities, based on the statistical findings presented in chapter 2, summarizes the major challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, highlights recent examples of initiatives in support of women's entrepreneurship and

concludes with suggested actions to better address the needs of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in the country and reduce the gender gaps. Some of these actions naturally flow out of the snapshot discussion, some were suggested by the country-level ACCMSME focal point, and some were noted from other recent analyses of the policy situation in the country.

The snapshots benefited from key input from representatives of the ministries and agencies responsible for MSMEs in each country (table 4). (See annex II for list of officials providing input.) This input on national level MSME policies and actions was supplemented by information from published reports and documents specific to each country, and website reviews.

It should also be noted that a SME support centre exists in each of the ASEAN member States as a one-stop shop source of information for MSMEs and a provider of other MSME support and referral services. National SME portals serve as digital platforms, providing varied combinations of online information, learning materials, training courses and linkages to MSME support programmes. The list and brief description of the SME support centres and SME portals is included in annex IV.

Table 4. Ministry or agency responsible for micro, small and medium enterprise policy in ASEAN member States

Brunei Darussalam	Ministry of Finance and Economy, Darussalam Enterprise (DARe) (National SME Agency)
Cambodia	Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation (MISTI) (SMEs Department)
Indonesia	Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs
Lao People's Democratic Republic	Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MIC) (Department of SME Promotion)
Malaysia	Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives (MEDAC)
Myanmar	Ministry of Industry, Department of Industrial Supervision and Inspection (DISI)
Philippines	Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)
Singapore	Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) (SME policy), Enterprise Singapore (SME programmes)
Thailand	Office for Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion (OSMEP)
Viet Nam	Ministry of Investment and Promotion (MPI), Agency for Enterprise Development (AED)

3.1 COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

“Wawasan Brunei 2035 (Brunei Vision 2035) explicitly aims to encourage equal opportunities for women in the workforce and development”



STATUS OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

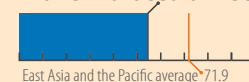
Global
Gender
Gap
Index

Brunei Darussalam 0.678



Women
Business
and the
Law Index

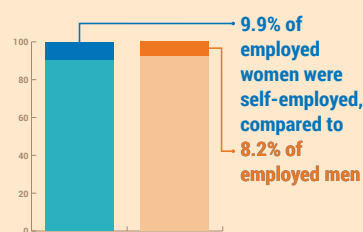
Brunei Darussalam 53.1



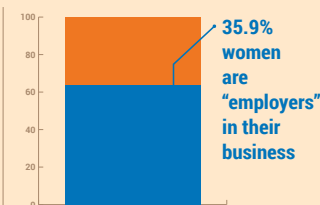
Self-employment rate



Women account for 43.4% of the total self-employed



Data on women's ownership of enterprises are not available.



Of self-employed women nearly 1/4th are employers (although the absolute numbers are relatively small)

CHALLENGES

- ▶ Gender stereotypes
- ▶ Level of business regulation
- ▶ Financing
- ▶ Market access
- ▶ Skill gap

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Darussalam Enterprise offers a range of programmes to support MSMEs

Various government agencies target women through poverty relief programmes and promote entrepreneurship and work-from-home projects to help vulnerable women out of poverty

INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMMES

Programmes for women entrepreneurs and MSMEs

Launch of the Academy of Women Entrepreneurs

The Women's Business Council which represents Brunei women entrepreneurs

Status of women's entrepreneurship

Brunei Darussalam has low self-employment rates, for women and men. The 2020 Labour Force Survey indicated that 9.9 per cent of employed women were self-employed, compared to 8.2 per cent of employed men. Women account for 43.4 per cent of the total self-employed, and 35.9 per cent of employers (although the absolute numbers are relatively small). Data on women's ownership of enterprises are not available. Data on Brunei Darussalam enterprises are collected by the Ministry of Finance and Economy through surveys and a census.¹⁹ The data collected by the Department of Statistics are used to categorize enterprises by size, sector and region, among other characteristics, but do not identify the businesses owned by women. An official definition of “women-owned business” (under way) is needed before it can be included in the data categorization.

Challenges facing women entrepreneurs

Challenges for MSMEs in Brunei Darussalam are the level of business regulation, financing, market access and skills. Information in the country on the particular, or different, challenges facing women entrepreneurs is limited.

Brunei Darussalam only received a score of 53.1 on the WBL index, meaning women in Brunei Darussalam are accorded only 53 per cent of the legal rights of men covered by WBL. In particular, Brunei Darussalam does not have laws in place that prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender, mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value, prohibit discrimination in access to credit based on gender, or give daughters and sons and female and male surviving spouses equal rights to inherit assets.

While the country has done much to promote gender equality in the workplace, a gender

perspective is still needed when considering economic policies, especially given the country's goal to diversify the economy and increase private sector activity.

Government policies and strategies

Wawasan Brunei 2035 (Brunei Vision 2035) explicitly aims to encourage equal opportunities for women in the workforce and development, including by educating women about their rights and encouraging their active involvement in entrepreneurship through equal access to incentives and entrepreneurial support. The national action plan on women's issues developed by the Special Committee on Family Institution, Women and Children promotes alignment with the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Research on Women's Development in Brunei Darussalam is being carried out, the outcome of which will be used as a basis to further develop and review the National Plan of Action on Women.

The Ministry of Finance and Economy is the ministry responsible for MSME development in the country. It focuses primarily on the industry level, with one of its priorities being the private sector development road map. The Ministry is in the process of drafting an MSME policy, with consideration being given to definitions of "micro, small, and medium enterprises" and of "women-owned-led MSMEs". It remains to be seen whether the policy document includes women and young people among the MSME and entrepreneurship targets, although such targets would be very useful in monitoring the implementation of the MSME policy.

Darussalam Enterprise conducts consultations with private sector representatives and business associations, such as the ASEAN Business Advisory Council Brunei, APEC-BAC Brunei, the Women's Business Council Brunei, and the

Brunei Womenpreneur Network, which provide input on support activities and initiatives.

Government initiatives and programmes

Darussalam Enterprise is a national SME agency, established as a statutory body in 2016 with a vision to build enterprises into dynamic and resilient drivers of economic growth. It offers a range of programmes to support MSMEs, including funding, training, business services and infrastructure assistance, and access to markets for the products and services of MSMEs. Under the operating premise that programmes and services are "open to and inclusive of all", it has no programmes specifically tailored to women entrepreneurs; male and female involvement in entrepreneurship is equally important and Darussalam Enterprise initiatives and programmes have no gender discrimination.

On occasion, Darussalam Enterprise runs programmes for women entrepreneurs and MSMEs as part of bilateral cooperation with external partners. A recent example is the launch of the Academy of Women Entrepreneurs with the United States Embassy in October 2021, an online training platform under the name "Dream Builder". The Academy is open to women entrepreneurs (between 18 to 40 years old) who are in the early stages of starting or running a business and have limited business backgrounds or training.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports plays a role in women's empowerment and entrepreneurship. The Department of Community Development is the focal agency for women affairs in Brunei Darussalam and targets women through poverty relief programmes. The General Welfare Division promotes entrepreneurship and work-from-home projects to help vulnerable women out of poverty, including women receiving monthly welfare, women with disabilities, and single mothers, by providing them with skills

While the country has done much to promote gender equality in the workplace, a gender perspective is still needed when considering economic policies, especially given the country's goal to diversify the economy and increase private sector activity.

development, mentoring support, childcare support, assistance with product development and transportation support so that they can get to the market to sell their products. The Department of Youth and Sports is the lead agency in ensuring that young people, regardless of gender, have the same opportunities for employment and decent jobs, including for entrepreneurship.

In addition to Darussalam Enterprise and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, many other government agencies provide support for MSMEs. The Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for the One Product One Village Programme; the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism has initiatives for farmers; and the Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry helps local MSMEs improve their operations and strategies with the use of digital tools. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in the adoption of e-commerce by MSMEs, which Darussalam Enterprise and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports see as an opportunity for more development of women entrepreneurs. The scale of this opportunity could be better identified with supporting sex-disaggregated data.

Although Darussalam Enterprise is the coordinating body for MSME programmes, it does not have a designated unit for WED. Given the dispersion of efforts across government agencies, there may be value in establishing a focal point to seek more collaboration and a more strategic focus on women's entrepreneurship.

Non-government initiatives and programmes

The Women's Business Council is the main non-governmental body representing Brunei women entrepreneurs and their empowerment in the economy. Established in 2000 specifically to oversee the economic activities and promote the business development of women, the Council is the country's focal point of the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network. Some of the activities coordinated by the Council are seminars and workshops, trade fairs, business matching and networking, particularly with other women entrepreneurs around the world.

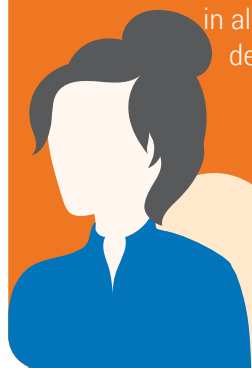
Suggested policy actions

Actions to better address the needs of women, including women entrepreneurs and MSMEs in Brunei Darussalam and reduce any gender gaps could focus on the following:

- ▶ Enriching the Government's approach to women's development by developing a coordinated approach to sex-disaggregated data collection.
- ▶ Strengthening the Plan of Action on Women under the National Council on Social Issues with results from the Research on Women's Development in Brunei Darussalam, beginning April 2022, and commissioned under the purview of the Special Committee on Family Institution, Women and Children.

CAMBODIA

“ The Government of Cambodia is committed to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres of development. ”



STATUS OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Global
Gender
Gap
Index

Cambodia 0.684

ASEAN average 0.708

Women
Business
and the
Law Index

Cambodia 81.2

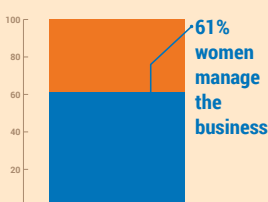
East Asia and the Pacific average 71.9

Self-employment rate

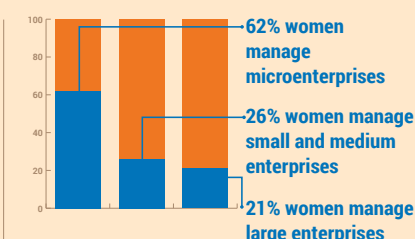


Women take 50% share of the total self-employed

Rate of women managing the business (but may or not be the owner)



In 61% of the businesses, a female is the “representative” of the establishment



The percentage of female representatives, however, declines with business size

CHALLENGES

- Gender stereotypes
- Restricted mobility
- Lack of formalization of business
- Limited educational opportunities

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Five Year Strategic Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
Gender mainstreaming action groups
SME Development Policy and strategic plan

INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMMES

Promoting financial inclusion
Schemes to access loans
Quota reservation for women-owned e-commerce businesses

Status of women's entrepreneurship

Cambodia is one of three ASEAN member States where the self-employment rate among employed women is higher than the self-employment rate among employed men (although only slightly), resulting in a 50 per cent share of the total self-employed (based on data from the Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey 2019/20). The latest data on business ownership come from the Inter-censal Economic Survey 2014, which indicates that in 61 per cent of the businesses, a female is the “representative” of the establishment, meaning that a woman manages the business (but may or not be the owner). The issue of “sex of representative” versus “sex of owner” is often misconstrued in secondary reports by reporting that women “own” 61 per cent of Cambodian businesses. The actual percentage of female owners is likely less, but given their almost equal share of self-

employment activity, it is still significant. The percentage of female representatives, however, declines with business size, from 62 per cent in microenterprises, to 26 per cent in small and medium enterprises, to 21 per cent in large enterprises (National Institute of Statistics, 2015, table 1.3.2). Overall, Cambodia is a country with many microenterprises, accounting for 97.6 per cent of all establishments, mostly informal: 99 per cent of the establishments with a female representative compared to 95.5 per cent of those with a male representative (National Institute of Statistics, 2015). Less than 1 per cent of establishments with a female representative are small and medium enterprises, compared to 4.1 per cent of the establishments with a male representative. The major challenges are to increase the level of formality and to help in scaling up more of women's enterprises from micro to small and medium.

Challenges facing women entrepreneurs

The 2022 WBL assessment for Cambodia indicates women have 81 per cent of the legal rights as men over the eight areas covered. Cambodia has perfect scores (full legal equality) on four of the relevant areas: laws affecting mobility; workplace; entrepreneurship; and assets. However, although there is legal equality, in theory, it is not necessarily enforced. The highest level of legal inequality is in the parenthood indicator, which relates primarily to the absence of mandatory maternity, paternity, or parental leave provisions, a factor affecting a woman's potential re-entry to the labour market after having children.

The Government of Cambodia is committed to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres of development. However, entrenched gender stereotypes, restricted mobility and limited educational opportunities, including limited knowledge of maintaining proper accounting records, are cited as key constraining factors to women's entrepreneurship in Cambodia.

Entrenched gender stereotypes, restricted mobility and limited educational opportunities, including limited knowledge of maintaining proper accounting records, are cited as key constraining factors to women's entrepreneurship in Cambodia (IFC, 2019). Although women are nominally guaranteed equal rights with men in the legal framework, the deeply embedded "Chbab Srey" (Code of Conduct for Women), which defines how Cambodian women should behave in society and their subordinate role to men, including husbands, poses a barrier to women's economic empowerment and their opportunities to develop growth businesses. The restricted mobility of women entrepreneurs linked primarily to their dual roles as "homemakers", results in limited access to networks, training, business registration offices, and markets.

Government policies and strategies

The Government of Cambodia is committed to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres of development through concrete actions and collaboration among all relevant government institutions, civil society and the private sector, and gender mainstreaming in government policy and programme reforms (National Institute of Statistics, 2018). Institutional strengthening and capacity development directed towards gender equality is a key focus area of the Ministry of Women Affairs Five Year Strategic Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. This includes references to WED, such as facilitating women's equal access to business services relevant for MSMEs, enhancing the networking capacity of women entrepreneurs, and ensuring women's access to financing and financial services. Technical working groups on gender established in the line ministries are responsible for promoting gender equality in their respective ministries and institutions, the implementation of policies and laws, and

reporting on the challenges and progress related to the promotion of gender equality in their sector. Gender mainstreaming action groups established in line ministries and agencies are responsible for developing their respective gender mainstreaming action plans.

The Ministry Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation is responsible for SME development in the country (SMEs Department). The SME Sub-Committee on Manufacturing Service SMEs coordinates and promotes policies to develop SMEs across ministries and is the key body to organize SME development strategies. A key output of the SME Sub-Committee is the SME Development Framework, which was officially launched by the Government in February 2006. The SME Sub-Committee is responsible for maintaining close contact with other ministries not represented on the SME Sub-Committee, the private sector and SME associations and representative groups, particularly those representing women and women entrepreneurs. The Ministry of Women Affairs is a member of the SME Sub-Committee and engages in policy dialogue. Women's associations and groups, including the Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs' Association and the Cambodian Women Entrepreneurs' Network,²⁰ are also invited to provide input in policy dialogue discussions.

The Ministry Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation has not assigned a specific focal point on women's entrepreneurship within the SME Department, however, a gender mainstreaming working group has been established, which is being coordinated by Ministry of Women Affairs. The role of this working group is to design an annual gender mainstreaming work programme and coordinate its integration into all relevant MSMEs policies, programmes, and activities. As such, the Ministry Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation is drafting a SME Development Policy and strategic plan, which will incorporate the gender dimension and include women

entrepreneurs. The new draft SME development policy is informed by suggestions of the Ministry of Women Affairs and the gender analysis and recommendations of the ESCAP Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship project, entitled "Creating a Gender-Responsive Entrepreneurial Ecosystem" in Cambodia (ESCAP, 2020a). As part of this, the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation is drafting a definition for "women-owned-led MSMEs". The new SME development policy will include a monitoring and evaluation framework to be used to track the participation of women in MSME programmes and activities. Each relevant ministry is gathering data related to the participation of WMSMEs in government-supported programmes and services. Up to this point, the National SME Policy lacks gender considerations. The revised draft now with Ministry of Economy and Finance is attempting to address this challenge.

Government initiatives and programmes

The Ministry of Women Affairs plays a greater role than the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation in offering programme support for WMSMEs. In this regard, the Ministry of Women Affairs operates a network of women development centres for training, networking, access to markets and trade fair support, including basic business training and online training on digital and financial literacy. The Ministry of Women Affairs partners with business associations, such as the Cambodian Women Entrepreneurs Association and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to offer vocational training and networking, organize trade fairs and exhibitions, and provide advocacy. It also partners with the National Bank of Cambodia to improve women's financial literacy and digital literacy and their overall inclusion in the financial system ("Promoting Financial Inclusion for Women and Women Entrepreneurs" programme). The new SME development policy, under development by the Ministry Industry,

Science, Technology and Innovation, will outline further programme actions to support women-owned-led MSMEs.

Other recent developments related to support in Cambodia for women's entrepreneurship development include the following:

- ▶ The Promoting Financial Inclusion for Women and Women Entrepreneurs project spearheaded by the National Bank of Cambodia in 2020 to improve the financial literacy of Cambodian women, and efforts by the National Bank to increase the possibilities for women to access official and quality financing.
- ▶ Launch of the State-owned commercial SME Bank of Cambodia²¹ in 2020, with initial capitalization of \$100 million, and the SME Co-financing Scheme to support SMEs during the COVID-19 crisis. In November 2020, the SME Bank introduced a new Cambodia SME scheme loan product, followed by a **special Cambodia women entrepreneurs scheme**²² to assist in addressing the unmet demand for credit from women entrepreneurs in the country. Although preference is given to registered SMEs, the scheme may consider applications from unregistered SMEs, which will make financing more accessible to the many informal women-owned enterprises.
- ▶ Official launch in April 2022 of the \$30 million **Women Entrepreneurs Guarantee Scheme** designed to close the financing gap among women entrepreneurs and formal financial institutions by guaranteeing loans of women-owned businesses that cannot meet the banks' collateral requirements. The new scheme, which increases the guaranteed coverage and lowers the guarantee fee for women borrowers, was designed to complement the Cambodia Public Credit Guarantee Scheme for SMEs made available by the Credit Guarantee Corporation of

Cambodia²³ in 2021 to help address the COVID-19 crisis, but to which only 25 per cent of all SMEs receiving the loan guarantees were women-owned (Phanet, 2022). Eligible borrowers under the Women Entrepreneurs Guarantee Scheme must meet at least two of the four definitional criteria for a "WSME": (1) a woman/women owns the majority of shares; (2) management or the decision-makers are women; (3) a woman represents the company on any legal business registration; and (4) the majority of the employees are women.²⁴

- ▶ **Quota reservation for women-owned businesses in the e-commerce acceleration project**, "Go4eCAM", an incubation, training and small grants programme to help SMEs move online, sell online and reach international customers through the business-to-business-to-consumer (B2B2C) online marketplace developed by the Ministry of Commerce (UNDP, 2020).

Non-government initiatives and programmes

Many organizations in Cambodia are supporting women entrepreneurs, including, among them are SHE Investments, Impact Hub, EnergyLab, Pact Cambodia, Grow Asia, the Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Association, the Cambodia Women Business Federation, the Young Entrepreneurs Association of Cambodia, United Nations agencies and international development partners. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has launched the "\$10 million, five-year Women Entrepreneurs Act in Cambodia" project (2019–2024) to support young women in the country's urban centres in their path towards achieving empowerment and success as entrepreneurs, and serve as leaders in their communities. Under this project, young women are provided with access to information, skills,

investment capital, and social and business connections. The initiative also offers preferential terms on business loans to young women entrepreneurs from digital financial partners and ongoing financial literacy resources to aid them in managing their businesses. Another example is the Support Her Enterprise (SHE) Investments, a resource for women entrepreneurs to easily access information, technology and markets. The SHE Investments business information and eLearning platform, "Ngeay Ngai" ("Easy Ngai" in English) is a series of online courses that teach about entrepreneurship, business models, and how to grow a business. SHE Investments also operates the only business incubator and accelerator programme for women in Cambodia that targets the scaling of female-owned microenterprises to small and medium-sized businesses and their entry into the formal economy. Different organizations deliver initiatives to train women entrepreneurs on how to use smartphones for online banking, and access information online and through social media, among other functions. Women can also attend webinars at home, which is an emerging capacity development tool.

Suggested Policy Actions

To better address the needs of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in Cambodia and reduce gender gaps, the Government could consider the following:

- ▶ Enact the definition of "women-owned-led MSME".
- ▶ Provide strategic support to MSMEs most in need from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially to those owned by women, which are mostly micro-sized.
- ▶ Create more financing support schemes and programmes specifically for women.
- ▶ Raise awareness on the formalization of business, also an issue faced by women entrepreneurs, and provide proper support and assistance where applicable and available.
- ▶ Carry out the gender study on Inclusive Business and Women's Entrepreneurship discussed by ASEAN, iBAN and ESCAP and make recommendations on how the Government (beyond women's ministries) can promote women's empowerment through inclusive business.

INDONESIA

“The President of Indonesia has directed ongoing efforts to achieve gender equality including the empowerment of women through gender-responsive entrepreneurship.”



STATUS OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Global
Gender
Gap
Index

Indonesia 0.688

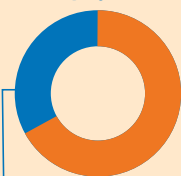
ASEAN average 0.708

Women
Business
and the
Law Index

Indonesia 64.4

East Asia and the Pacific average 71.9

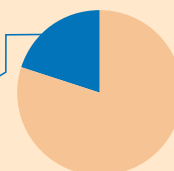
Self-employment rate



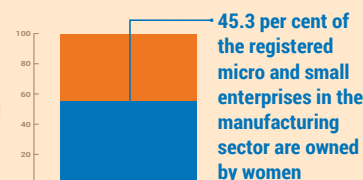
Well over 1/3 of employed females in Indonesia are self-employed.

Rate of women's entrepreneurship

Employed women account for only 20.2% of the self-employed “employers”



But employed men are 2.5 times more likely to be employers than employed women



Rate of women's entrepreneurship declines as the size of the business increases

CHALLENGES

- Restrictions on ownership of assets
- Lack of awareness of regulatory environment and benefits of business registration
- Minimal prior business experience
- High degree of dependence on husbands and family
- Limited flexibility with daily time management
- Limited access to financing

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

- Gender mainstreaming of policies and programmes
- Making gender a central issue in the National Strategy of Financial Inclusion
- Collaborating with relevant stakeholders to provide gender-responsive entrepreneurship training and business assistantship
- Supporting access to low interest-rate-credit

INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMMES

- Programmes for vocational training, technical assistance, and microloans.
- Training on digital and financial literacy.
- Educating local procurement officers on gender-responsive procurement.
- Training women entrepreneurs on bidding for government contracts.

Status of women's entrepreneurship

Well over a third of employed females in Indonesia are self-employed (87 per cent of the male rate), but employed men are 2.5 times more likely to be employers than employed women. Employed women account for only 20.2 per cent of the self-employed “employers”, the lowest share reported among the ASEAN member States (as per figure 4 in chapter 2). Accordingly, one of the policy issues for the country is to support women in becoming employers.

Sex-disaggregated data for MSME ownership are yet to be collected in Indonesia, making it difficult to present hard numbers on the share of women-owned MSMEs and their economic contribution. Although limited in scope, data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) Small and Micro Industry Survey (Industri Menengah dan Kecil, IMK) Database (for 2015) indicate that 45.3 per cent of the registered micro and small enterprises in the manufacturing sector are

owned by women.²⁵ The percentage of women owners of all MSMEs that includes the trade and services sectors would be much higher, as women are more active in these sectors, however, official statistics covering all MSMEs are not available. Estimates for the share of WMSMEs range from less than 25 per cent of all MSMEs in the country (Seno-Alday and Bourne, 2017) to close to 60 per cent of enterprises (World Bank, 2016b), while recognizing that the majority of WMSMEs are concentrated in micro or small businesses, many of them operate from home, and that the rate of women's entrepreneurship declines as the size of the business increases. In addition, data from the National Economic Census 2016 indicated a high incidence of enterprise informality; only 4.3 per cent of micro non-agricultural enterprises and 17.9 per cent of the small enterprises were registered, and more than 93 per cent of all non-agricultural enterprises did not have a legal status.

Challenges facing women entrepreneurs

Although women's entrepreneurship has been gaining momentum in Indonesia, women starting a business face challenges due to restrictions on their ability to hold ownership of assets, obtain credit and enter into contracts on their own volition (Azzopardi and Lubis, 2019). The 2022 WBL assessment for Indonesia indicates that women have less than two thirds of the legal rights as men over the eight areas of legal issues covered by the indicators. The highest level of legal inequality is in the parenthood indicator, and relates to the absence of mandatory maternity, paternity, or parental leave provisions, a factor affecting a woman's potential re-entry to the labour market after having children.

Women entrepreneurs also lack awareness of the regulatory environment and the basics and benefits of business registration (Australia Indonesia Partnership for Economic Governance, 2017). The growth and development of their enterprises is hampered by their minimal prior business experience and a high degree of dependence on husbands and family (IFC, 2016). As women assume the major responsibility for family and children, women entrepreneurs perceive they have limited flexibility with their daily time management and are more prone to start part-time, home-based or micro-scale businesses (in the informal economy) in order to maintain a balance between their business and family obligations (Azzopardi and Lubis, 2019). In this respect, entrepreneurship at least offers them a better option than the traditional labour market to manage their dual roles and still engage in income-generating activities. However, they are also hampered by the low level of education and lack of training opportunities, especially women living in rural areas; legal, traditions, customs, and cultural or religious constraints on the extent to which women can open their own businesses; and limited access to financing from banks or other financial institutions, which

is largely related to ownership rights and their ability to offer the type of collateral normally required for access to bank loans (Tambunan, 2017; Women's World Banking, 2021).

Laws relating to micro, small and medium enterprises and gender

Law No. 20/2008 on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise is gender neutral, making no reference to women entrepreneurs or WMSMEs. However, the Presidential Regulation (Perpres No. 2/2022) on National Entrepreneurship Development for 2021–2024 provides a clear definition of a woman entrepreneur as a woman who is operating a business that is registered under the government electronic business registration system and holds ownership of at least 51 per cent of the initial capital of the business. Providing clear criteria for defining a woman entrepreneur serves as a national guideline for the Government to better target women in their programmes and include their participation.

Government policies and strategies

The Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs Indonesia is the body responsible for MSMEs. Its strategic plan makes several references to women, but most generally in relation to the performance of women's cooperatives. Although the Ministry has not assigned a specific focal point for women's entrepreneurship, an entrepreneurship unit was created in 2021 under the deputy minister for entrepreneurship to carry out policymaking coordination and to synchronize policy implementation in the field of entrepreneurship, including women's entrepreneurship.

On the other hand, the gender mainstreaming of policies and programmes to promote inclusivity of gender and monitor the participation of women in government development programmes is stated as a priority in the National Medium-Term

Development Programme (RPJMN) 2020–2024 and is followed by the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs in the development of its own plans and priorities. The President of Indonesia has directed ongoing efforts to achieve gender equality in line with five priority issues, paramount of which is the empowerment of women through gender-responsive entrepreneurship.²⁶ The rationale supporting this is that women's economic resilience improves livelihoods and is one of the keys to protecting and fulfilling women's basic rights. The Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection is tasked with coordinating gender mainstreaming of all ministries and institutions and provincial, district and city governments throughout Indonesia. The Ministry is instructed by a Presidential Order issued in 2020 to "increase women's empowerment in entrepreneurship" as one of its five key goals.

A major policy development in January 2022 was the issuance of the new Presidential Regulation (Perpres No. 2/2022) on National Entrepreneurship Development for 2021–2024. The overarching goal of the presidential regulation is to increase the level of entrepreneurial activity in the country (number of new start-ups, new young entrepreneurs) and innovative MSMEs. The regulation includes women entrepreneurs in the thematic category of entrepreneurs, along with other categories, such as social entrepreneurs, tech-entrepreneurs, youth entrepreneurs and rural entrepreneurs. Specific to women's entrepreneurship, the stated goal in the regulation is to increase the contribution of women towards the growth of the economy and promote social welfare. The regulation further stipulates the establishment of a national entrepreneurship development committee to be chaired by the minister of the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs and cover 20 ministries and agencies. The role of the committee is to regulate the coordination and monitoring of entrepreneurship programmes

being conducted by all national ministries and agencies (including, but not limited to WED). Under annex 2 of the Regulation, shared responsibilities among government ministries and agencies will be achieved through the joint Action Plan on Entrepreneurship Development Programme (2022–2024).²⁷

Under the Action Plan on Entrepreneurship Development, a centralized entrepreneurship data system, called the National Entrepreneurship Information System (Sistem Informasi Kewirausahaan Nasional/SIKNAS), is under construction for use starting later in 2022. The new online system will serve as a platform for synchronizing, monitoring and evaluating the programmes and enable related ministries and agencies to regularly update their data on MSMEs. Through the National Committee on Entrepreneurship, the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs will monitor and evaluate the data, which are to be reported annually. The system will be integrated with the Single MSMEs Data Information System (SIDT KUMKM), a centralized electronic single registry system for MSMEs. For this system, the definition of woman entrepreneur (prescribed in the Presidential Regulation, Perpres No. 2/2022) is to be used and should, therefore, improve the country's capacity to report on women's participation in entrepreneurship-related programmes and support activities.

The Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs has been actively engaged with women's associations and WSMEs by involving them in policy dialogue and the design of government support programmes. Cooperating with women's associations, for example, is crucial in identifying promising and advanced women-owned and -led MSMEs, as it enables the Government to reach a wider scope of women entrepreneurs who can become involved in the supply chains of larger women-led SMEs.

Although women's entrepreneurship has been gaining momentum in Indonesia, women starting a business face challenges due to restrictions on their ability to hold ownership of assets, obtain credit and enter into contracts on their own volition.

Government initiatives and programmes

The Government of Indonesia promotes women's entrepreneurship through multiple programmes, including vocational training, technical assistance and microloans. It also promotes partnership support from State-owned enterprises in providing financial, technical, and marketing support and the provision of raw materials to MSMEs, including women's enterprises. However, these support programmes are mostly small in scale, concentrated on women's microenterprises and cooperatives, and fragmented across different technical ministries (OECD, 2018b).

The Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs cooperates with the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection to better support women entrepreneurs under the Memorandum of Understanding No. 5/2010 concerning Women Empowerment in the Gender Initiative through Cooperatives and SMEs. This agreement provides guidance to the Ministry of

Women Empowerment and Child Protection in fostering women's participation in cooperatives and entrepreneurship by improving marketing networks and expanding access to finance. Current strategic priorities for joint cooperation to advance the status of women and women's economic empowerment include the following:

- ▶ Making gender a central issue in the National Strategy of Financial Inclusion.
- ▶ Collaborating with relevant stakeholders (ministries, development sectors, private sectors and NGOs) to provide gender-responsive entrepreneurship training and business assistantship.
- ▶ Supporting WMSMEs to cope with the current global pandemic.
- ▶ Supporting access to low interest-rate-credit.
- ▶ The Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection also partners with the Ministry of Trade to organize trade expos for women and delivers enterprise development programmes to poor women in rural areas in the form of support for micro-scale, income-generating activities involving agriculture, fisheries or household enterprises.

The Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection has supported economic recovery and women's empowerment during the COVID-19 pandemic by giving importance to digital knowledge for women entrepreneurs. Digital technology enables women to penetrate a wider market and makes it easier for them to promote their products and services through collaboration with e-commerce and marketplace platform providers. In 2020, the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, together with XL Axiata, launched the **Sispreneur Incubation Class**, which was implemented in several pilot project locations as a virtual programme on digital and market-

readiness.²⁸ The Ministry also collaborates with the UK-Indonesia Tech Hub and Du Anyam to organize a virtual Digital and Business Literacy Training programme for women in the home industry ("HERfuture"), bringing 100 inspiring female entrepreneurs, selected from six regions of Indonesia, together for training on digital and financial literacy, operational skills and accessing new markets.

Bank Indonesia supports financial inclusion strategies, including financial literacy training for women entrepreneurs. It further mandates that commercial and State-owned banks must set aside 20 per cent of their total loans for MSMEs, although sex-disaggregated data on the share of women MSMEs as borrowers are not currently reported. The Indonesia Procurement Modernisation Project has sought to better integrate WSMEs into public procurement by educating local procurement officers on gender-responsive procurement, training women entrepreneurs on bidding for government contract, and hiring more female procurement officers. There are limited programmes to prepare WSMEs to tap into global supply chains, although donor-funded projects have supported pilots to address gender issues in selected clusters, such as the Embroidery and Apparel Cluster Pilot Project.

Strong cooperation from various parties is required to increase the participation of women in entrepreneurial activities. For example, cooperation with service providers is needed to improve women's access to the Internet and technology. Cooperation is needed with financial service providers to improve access to financing for financially constrained women to open their own businesses and with the marketplace players to provide greater access to market opportunities for women-owned enterprises. To this end, the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection is cooperating with many relevant and diverse partnering organizations.²⁹

The Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection and the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs maintain a close relationship with the Indonesian Association of Women Entrepreneurs on initiatives to support women entrepreneurs, with a major focus on access to markets. For example, through the Association's Go Digital project, a partnership with Telkom Indonesia and the Blanja.com marketplace, the Association promotes digital literacy among its members, and cooperates with technology companies to improve online and logistic operations, which encourages member enterprises to engage in e-commerce.

Suggested policy actions

Several actions with the objective to address the needs of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in Indonesia and reduce the gender gaps could be considered:³⁰

- ▶ Establishing a nationwide regulation on the criteria to “identify women entrepreneurs” under the new definition outlined in the Presidential Regulation on National Entrepreneurship Development (Perpres No. 2/2022) in order to enable mutual understanding among government stakeholders. To reduce gender gaps in entrepreneurship, the Government needs to mandate that an allocation to women is to be included in every programme.
- ▶ Offering incentives specifically targeting women-owned enterprises, such as financial incentives from banks, which would give women easier access to loans from banks.
- ▶ Ensuring that government policies and programmes address (and reduce) the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs.
- ▶ Expanding the availability of capital by facilitating the development of women-friendly financial products.
- ▶ Implementing a government-supported one-stop online portal to connect women entrepreneurs to relevant information and entrepreneurship ecosystem players and improve their access to business networks.
- ▶ Adopting a gender perspective in MSME-focused services provided by existing business development centres, such as by integrating gender dimensions within the design and delivery of training and materials, and tailoring business skills development programmes to meet the specific needs of WMSMEs, such as

product development, digital literacy and financial literacy.

- ▶ Enhancing access to trade information and assistance for WSMEs by establishing sector-specific, practical export-assistance services and programmes to ensure that women benefit from trade.
- ▶ Finally, the Government could promote the economic benefits of more balanced household responsibilities to reshape the sociocultural perception of men's and women's responsibilities and help ease the double burden that women carry.

In its review of SME policies and programmes in Indonesia, OECD made additional recommendations specific to developing women's entrepreneurship (OECD, 2018b):

- ▶ Give stronger attention to supporting growth-oriented women-owned enterprises through appropriate programmes providing mentoring, training and access to domestic and international markets.
- ▶ Establish goals or legal set-asides for the proportion of public procurement contracts to be awarded to women-owned businesses according to legally defined eligibility criteria.
- ▶ Implement a more targeted and comprehensive approach to meet the needs of different types of WSMEs, such as targeting microenterprises with initiatives to improve their financial literacy and managerial and workforce capacity, targeting women-owned small enterprises for improvements to access to technology, innovation and new markets, and prioritizing women-owned medium enterprises with internationalization.

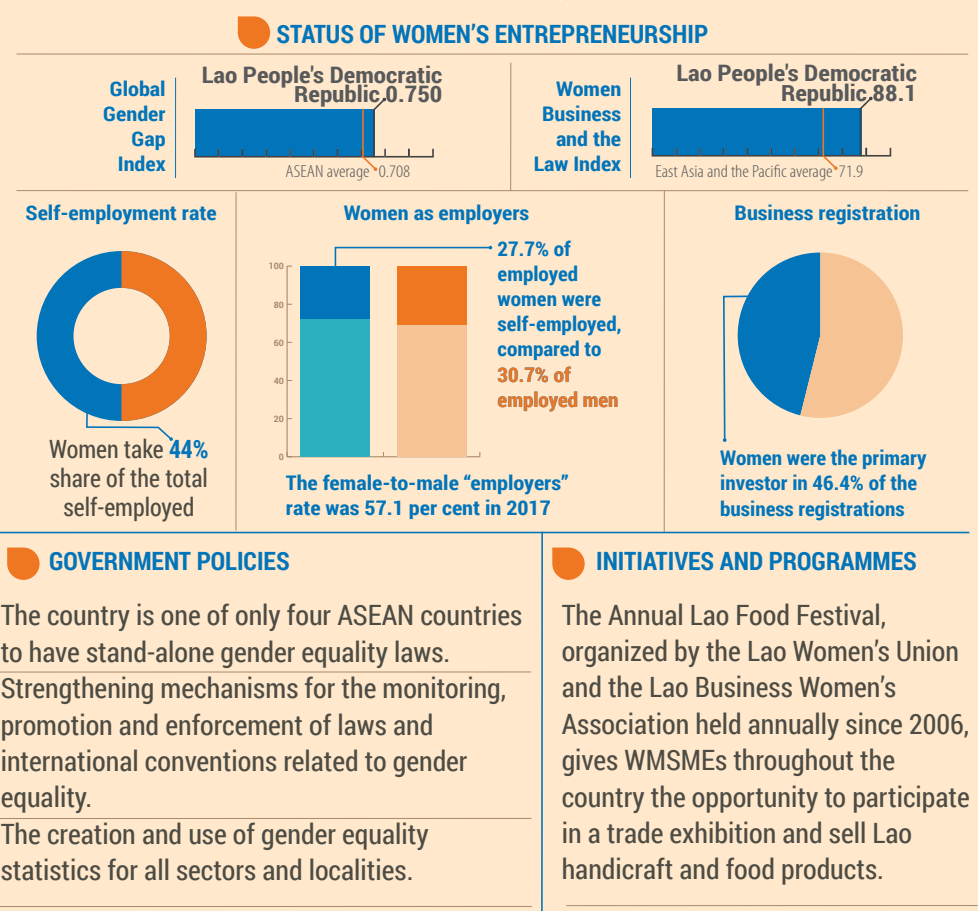
LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

“ Building women's entrepreneurship is one of the top priorities for accelerating the progress for women and girls in the country in the next five years. ”



CHALLENGES

- Gender stereotypes
- Low education levels
- Limited experience and skills in business management
- Limited access to finance, markets and infrastructure



Status of women's entrepreneurship

Labour force survey data indicate that the Lao People's Democratic Republic is approaching a level of gender equality in self-employment rates, with the female rate 90.2 per cent of the male rate: 27.7 per cent of employed women are self-employed, compared to 30.7 per cent of employed men (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2018). Among ASEAN member States, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has the third highest share of women in total self-employment (44.0 per cent). However, although the women's share of employers is also the third highest, at 33.2 per cent, the female-to-male “employers” rate was 57.1 per cent in 2017, meaning that employed men are 1.75 times more likely than employed women to be “employers”. Informality is an issue among self-employed and even more so among women. In 2017, more than 82 per cent of self-employed persons were operating on

an informal basis, of which 42.7 per cent were self-employed women and 40 per cent were self-employed men.³¹

Data on the number and share of women-owned businesses are limited. The Business Register (National Enterprise Registration Database) can be consulted to identify businesses registered under the name of a woman (gender of the primary investor of the enterprise), but few businesses in the country are actually registered. Current database statistics identify women as the primary investor in 46.4 per cent of the business registrations (of 79,368 registered enterprises).³² The level of informality in the MSME sector is a major issue affecting business registration numbers. Microenterprises make up 85 per cent of the enterprises in the country, and 70 per cent are reported as being informal. To encourage more enterprise formality, the Government is attempting to further simplify

the business registration system by reducing administrative paper burdens and discussing the implementation of an online registration system. However, training of registration officials in the registration offices across the country and the lack of Internet access present challenges.

Challenges facing women entrepreneurs

The Lao People's Democratic Republic scores highest among the ASEAN member States on legal gender equality on the 2022 WBL assessment; females are assessed as having 88 per cent of the legal rights of males (and ranking 48 out of 190 countries). At the country level, it scores lowest on issues relating to pensions. Although the legal framework for doing business in the country does not have gender discriminatory elements, according to the Lao Women's Union in practice, household responsibilities and lack of mobility due to personal duties make it more difficult to start a business (Lao Women's Union, 2019). The key challenges to the development of WMSMEs are related to sociocultural factors; low education levels; limited experience and skills in business management; limited access to finance; and inadequate access to markets and infrastructure (Keovilay, 2019). Traditional norms regarding women's role in the family limit their time and mobility, making it difficult for them to be far from home and thus to access markets. Women entrepreneurs tend to source their external financing from moneylenders, informal savings schemes or microfinance (at high interest rates), rather than banks. Dealing with banks is an issue for many Laotian women entrepreneurs because of their lack of confidence and knowledge in meeting the application requirements, lack of collateral and physical distance from banks for those living in rural areas.

Laws related to micro, small and medium enterprises

Small medium enterprise policy in the country is guided by the Law on Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Promotion of 2011. The Law makes one specific reference to female entrepreneurs, in Article 17 on creating and developing entrepreneurs, stating that the creativity and entrepreneur development of all interested sectors are to be facilitated and supported through various forms. Amendments to the 2011 SME Law are under way (the draft is expected in 2022). One of the amendments, for example, will be the provision of greater detail on SME participation in public procurement. The Lao Women's Union is a member of the drafting Committee of the SME Law. Consultations regarding the updated SME Development Plan 2016–2020 have also been underway and inclusive of the Lao Women's Union, the Lao Business Women's Association, the Lao Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and SME associations. Officials from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce Department of SME Promotion indicate that both documents will have an increased emphasis on women and young people. While previous versions made reference to the importance of women and young people in SME development, the new versions will recognize more fully the many barriers they face and the necessary actions to improve the situation. Women, young people and persons with disabilities will be designated as target groups and provided with new opportunities to engage as entrepreneurs. In addition, the Department of SME Promotion has been giving some consideration to including a formal definition of a WMSME.

Government policies and strategies

The National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2021–2025 reinforces the Government's commitment to gender equality and sets

a number of targets for the promotion and advancement of gender equality in society. It prioritizes actions to strengthen mechanisms for the monitoring, promotion and enforcement of laws and international conventions related to gender equality, and the creation and use of gender equality statistics for all sectors and localities. It further states that all parties will coordinate to integrate gender equality into their development plans, programmes, projects and activities. The Plan also aims to encourage entrepreneurs and SME units to become more involved in the formal economy and a stronger driving force for development. Regarding women's entrepreneurship, the Plan outlines the importance of actions to enhance the vocational and technical training capabilities of women, including in business management, financial literacy, banking, taxation, laws and business regulations, and the formulation of policies to improve access to finance for women entrepreneurs.

The National Commission for the Advancement of Women is the focal point for gender mainstreaming within the government and oversees the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women. Building women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprises is included in the report on the Lao People's Democratic Republic national review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as one of the top priorities for accelerating the progress for women and girls in the Lao People's Democratic Republic in the next five years (Lao Women's Union, 2019).³³ The country is also one of only four ASEAN countries to have stand-alone gender equality laws (along with the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam). It attained a low gender discrimination rating on the 2019 OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index.³⁴

The Ministry of Industry and Commerce is the country's lead ministry for SME development. The

The Lao People's Democratic Republic scores high among the ASEAN member States on legal gender equality on the 2022 WBL assessment.

Ministry hosts the Department of SME Promotion, which set up the Entrepreneur Division in 2019 to foster the creation of new entrepreneurs. The implementation of entrepreneurship policy is seen as critical to achieving the goal set by the Government in the National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2021–2025 to increase the number of new MSMEs by 2 per cent per year over the 2021–2025 period. The Ministry does not have a special focal point for women's entrepreneurship, but each ministry and department has a women's unit.

The Department of SME Promotion is required to report to the Prime Minister on a quarterly basis on the achievements under the SME Development Plan, and the performance against the objectives and KPIs of the Plan. For this purpose, a good monitoring system is critical.

Although the Ministry of Industry and Commerce is the lead ministry for SME development in the country, the Lao Women's Union is the main policy development body on women's entrepreneurship and major supporter. It promotes WMSMEs and creates opportunities for them by improving their access to financing, management knowledge, markets and training, including to women in rural areas. Many of the projects of the Lao Women's Union target income-generating activities and micro-credit/savings schemes for women.

Government initiatives and programmes

The Lao Women's Union and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce work together, along with the Ministry of Planning and Investment and the Lao Women's Business Association, to encourage women to set up small and medium businesses, and to address the challenges of women's businesses, particularly gaining access to funding and markets.

The Ministry of Industry and Commerce Monitoring and Evaluation Unit collects data on SME programme clients and the percentage share of women, although the data system could be improved. From these data, the Department of SME Promotion notes that more than half of the loan recipients from the SME Development Fund are women (accounting for 438 of the 802 loan contracts issued to SMEs). Women also comprise more than half of the beneficiaries in the basic management and accounting training programmes currently in process.

One of the most successful initiatives in support of Laotian women entrepreneurs is the Annual Lao Food Festival, organized by the Lao Women's Union and the Lao Business Women's Association and supported by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (which provides travel grants to women entrepreneurs coming to Vientiane from the villages). The five-day event, held annually since 2006, gives WMSMEs throughout the country the opportunity to participate in a trade exhibition and sell Lao handicraft and food products. During the event, women entrepreneurs can also exchange knowledge and learn how to improve their products and meet market demand, while at the same time generate revenue for themselves and their households.

Suggested policy actions

To better address the needs of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and reduce the gender gaps, the Government should consider doing the following:

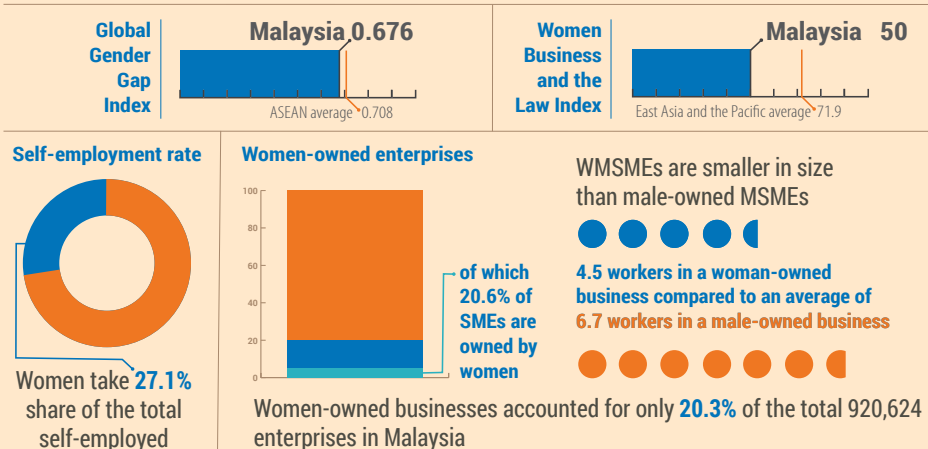
- ▶ Ensure that the action plan for the SME Development Plan 2021–2025 is responsive to the needs of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs by focusing on actions to encourage more women to become entrepreneurs and to support the scaling up and growth of their enterprises.
- ▶ Further simplify the business registration and licensing procedures and processes to enable more informal enterprises, including women-owned enterprises, to become formal. This entails overcoming some of the challenges making electronic access to the business registration system more accessible to informal enterprises in both urban and rural areas, such as limitations of the Internet connection and lack of informal technology knowledge.
- ▶ Support the digitalization of all MSMEs, with a special emphasis on WMSMEs, and their capacity to make use of e-commerce as a sales and marketing channel.
- ▶ Profile the country's successful women entrepreneurs as role models for others.

MALAYSIA

“The development and empowerment of women is a policy priority of the Government of Malaysia.”



STATUS OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP



CHALLENGES

- ▶ Balancing their business and family responsibilities
- ▶ Limited access to financial resources
- ▶ Lack of acquiring entrepreneurial knowledge and skills

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Implementation of flexible working arrangements, providing better childcare facilities, expanding the minimum maternity leave and introducing paternity leave.

INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMMES

Community-based income-generating enterprise programmes provide education, training and entrepreneurship skills to socially and economically disadvantaged rural women
Various financing schemes for women entrepreneurs
Training programmes for starting an online business
Micro-Credit Programme for Women, which seeks to increase women's accessibility to financing by accepting gold jewellery as loan collateral for women entrepreneurs

Status of women's entrepreneurship

Malaysia has the lowest share of self-employed women in total self-employment among the ASEAN member States: 27.1 per cent of all self-employed; and the second lowest share of self-employed women among “employers” (22.5 per cent of its “employers”, as per the 2021 Labour Force Survey Report). According to the special issue on women-owned statistics from the 2016 Economic Census, women-owned businesses accounted for only 20.3 per cent of the total 920,624 enterprises in Malaysia and 20.6 percent of SMEs³⁵ (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017), which indicated considerable room for improvement. The vast majority of women-owned enterprises fall into the microenterprise category. Almost three-quarters of women-owned establishments have less than five employees, and only 2.2 per cent have 20 or more employees. WMSMEs are smaller in

size than male-owned MSMEs, employing an average of 4.5 workers compared to an average of 6.7 workers. The challenge for Malaysia is to reduce the gender gap in business ownership through efforts to encourage and support more women to become entrepreneurs and to foster the scaling up and growth of their enterprises.

Challenges facing women entrepreneurs

With a score of only 50 out of 100 on the WBL Index (and ranking 173 out of 190 countries), Malaysian females have only half the legal rights as males. The largest legal gender differences are in issues relating to marriage and parenthood, but with scores of only 50 out of 100 on the laws related to mobility, the workplace and equal pay, there is potential for further legal reforms to ensure gender equality.

The main challenges for women entrepreneurs in Malaysia are balancing their business and

family responsibilities; limited access to financial resources; acquiring entrepreneurial knowledge and skills and upgrading their core skills and competencies to be successful in the business; and limited opportunities to participate in courses that offer flexibility in terms of time and place (Wahid and others, 2021). An earlier study of the barriers and enablers to women's entrepreneurship in Malaysia reported the top barriers as lack of management and entrepreneurial management skills, lack of negotiation and bargaining skills, lack of knowledge, lack of proper training on management and production skills upgrading, and lack of business ideas (Arumugam, Marthandan and Subramaniam, 2016).

Government policies and strategies

The development and empowerment of women is a policy priority of the Government of Malaysia, which is committed to stepping up its effort to ensure that the country continues to grow sustainably through fair and equal economic distribution. Measures to improve the female labour force participation rate (which lags the male rate by close to 25 percentage points) focus on employment-related incentives, such as the implementation of flexible working arrangements, providing better childcare facilities, expanding the minimum maternity leave and introducing paternity leave to further support working mothers and fathers. Otherwise, the role of women in economic development is enhanced through various awareness and capacity-building programmes, including in leadership and entrepreneurial development. For example, actions to increase the participation of women in decision-making roles between 2016 and 2020 resulted in a rise in the percentage of women in top-level management from 35.6 per cent to 38.2 per cent in the public sector and from 24.4 per cent to 25.8 per cent in the private sector.³⁶ In addition, as part of the economic

empowerment initiative, 7,542 women, primarily socially and economically disadvantaged rural women with limited access to economic resources and opportunities, were provided with education, training and entrepreneurship skills in community-based income-generating enterprise programmes. The objective of these programmes was to enhance their capacity and capability in order to raise living standards of low-income households. Malaysia has been in the process of drafting a gender equality bill since 2019, but this endeavour is progressing slowly.

The National Entrepreneur and SME Development Council, chaired by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, is the highest policymaking authority and governance body supporting MSME development with strategic functions that embody the overall development of MSMEs across all economic sectors in Malaysia. The Council is made up of 20 ministers, including the Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, and heads of key agencies, which gives it broad intergovernmental representation with respect to the formulation and coordination of MSME policies. The Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives is responsible for SME development in Malaysia, working through its agencies, namely, SME Corporation Malaysia (SME Corp), the National Entrepreneurship Institute³⁷, the SME Bank, *TEKUN Nasional*³⁸, and *Bank Rakyat* (Islamic cooperatives bank), as well as other agencies.

In response to instructions issued by the Government to increase support to women entrepreneurs, recent MSME policy, strategy and action plan documents specify the development of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs as a target group. For example, Strategic Thrust 3: *"Stimulating Holistic and Integrated Entrepreneurship Development"* of the National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030 specifies women entrepreneurs as a target group, along

with Bumiputera, disadvantaged groups, young people, senior citizens and the Orang Asli/Asal community for the promotion of entrepreneurship and assistance and intervention programmes to boost entrepreneurial capability and skills (Malaysia, Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives, 2020a). The Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives and its implementing agencies undertake regular engagements through focus group discussions, syndications or surveys to gather inputs for issues related to women entrepreneurs and WSMEs and prior to the launching of new policy or action plans by the Government for the delivery of MSME programmes and support to women entrepreneurs.

No specific definition for “women-owned-led MSME” has been established, although a criterion for access to the Women's Special Business Financing Scheme (*DanaNITA*) requires that up to at least 51 per cent of the shareholders of the business are women.³⁹ The same applies to the Women Exporters Development Programme. To be eligible for the Programme, the company must be majority owned by women, or at least 51 per cent of its equity is held by women (majority shareholding can be through a single female individual or a group of women shareholders).

The Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives has not established a specific unit to coordinate policies and programmes for women's entrepreneurship nor does it have a cross-governmental mechanism in place for coordinating the delivery of MSME programmes to women entrepreneurs. However, the Entrepreneurship Empowerment and Monitoring Division of the Ministry monitors the inclusion and participation of women entrepreneurs in all government-supported MSME programmes and services organized by the Ministry and its agencies, including the women-oriented programmes. Programmes delivered by other ministries and agencies (including women-

related programmes) are reported through the SME Integrated Plan of Action and presented to the National Entrepreneur and SME Development Council and its task force committees for monitoring and evaluation purposes. The Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives refers to the SME Integrated Plan of Action report to extract information related to women's entrepreneurship programmes, which in 2021 reported on 14 entrepreneurship programmes for women.⁴⁰ Issues or policy reviews are presented through existing governance on MSME development for strategic policy directions, namely the National Entrepreneur and SME Development Council and its task force committees. Results of the implementation performance and achievements of the MSME development programmes are

The development and empowerment of women is a policy priority of the Government of Malaysia. The challenge is to reduce the gender gap in business ownership through efforts to encourage and support more women to become entrepreneurs and to foster the scaling up and growth of their enterprises.

presented in the annual SME report published by SME Corp ("SME Insights"), which reports on the number of SME beneficiaries of each programme and the financial expenditure for each focus area, such as access to financing and market access, but it does not present sex-disaggregated data on the SME beneficiaries.

Government initiatives and programmes

Instructions issued by the Government for all government programmes to increase their support to women entrepreneurs was a driving force for new programmes, such as the *BizWanita-i* Financing Scheme for women entrepreneurs (collateral-free sharia-compliant loans) launched by the Credit Guarantee Corporation Malaysia in 2016, and the SME Bank Malaysia Women Entrepreneurs Financing Programme.

As part of the country's efforts to continuously promote female entrepreneurship, the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives and its implementing agencies offer a variety of financial support and training schemes targeting women, including, among them:

- ▶ The SME Bank "MySMELady" facility, which empowers women in business by providing funding and support to develop their businesses
- ▶ The TEKUN Nasional⁴¹ *TemanNita* financing scheme to help women entrepreneurs easily and efficiently obtain group financing for business purposes;
- ▶ The Successful Women Entrepreneurship Engagement Talent micro-franchising programme delivered by *Perbadanan Nasional Berhad (Pernas)*, a special training, business matching and financing programme for Bumiputera women venturing into entrepreneurship and interested in a franchise or pre-franchise business;
- ▶ The SME Corp Women Netpreneur Programme, a series of training programmes and workshops to assist women entrepreneurs to start an online business or to expand a business via digital and e-commerce platforms (see box 1 in chapter 4);
- ▶ The INSKEN online coaching and mentoring programmes, business training and e-BizClinics.

In the country's 2021 budget, the Government introduced a RM 50 million Malaysian ringgit (RM) (\$11.2 million) budget item for the *Ar-Rahnu BizNita* (Micro-Credit Programme for Women) initiative under the Malaysian Islamic Economic Development Foundation (YaPEIM)⁴² to support **Islamic financing activities as a specific incentive for the empowerment of women's entrepreneurship**. Officially launched in March 2022, the programme seeks to increase women's accessibility to financing by accepting gold jewellery as loan collateral for women entrepreneurs showing a business licence or another license for the operation of a business. **This helps to address women's lack of hard loan collateral, such as land or property, and is a gender-responsive action.**

The Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives also works closely with the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development on WED programmes. The Department of Women, under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, encourages women to pursue revenue-generating activities in the formal or informal sectors, as a form of social protection for themselves. As such, it works with the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives and its agencies to make entrepreneurship initiatives available to its client base of women by, for example, helping them gain access to available financing, human capital development programmes,

basic digital literacy skills, and connections to available marketplaces or platforms. Currently, the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives is collaborating with the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development to implement the Enhancement of Women Entrepreneur Programme (*Program Pernerurusan Usahawan Wanita/PUAN*), which aims to empower low-income households (B40⁴³) women business owners in the food and beverage sector (owners of stalls, eateries, cafes, restaurants and catering services).

Suggested policy actions

To better address the needs of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in Malaysia and reduce the gender gaps, the Government should consider the following:

- ▶ Continue enhancing the initiatives and support provided for women entrepreneurs in economic sectors that are traditionally dominated by women, such as the food and beverage, health and beauty services, and education sectors, and also promote increased participation of women in other sectors.
- ▶ Intensify efforts to build women's capacity with the latest entrepreneurial development trends, such as digital literacy, financial literacy and better understanding of the business ecosystem (demand-supply, product resources, supply chains and cash flow).

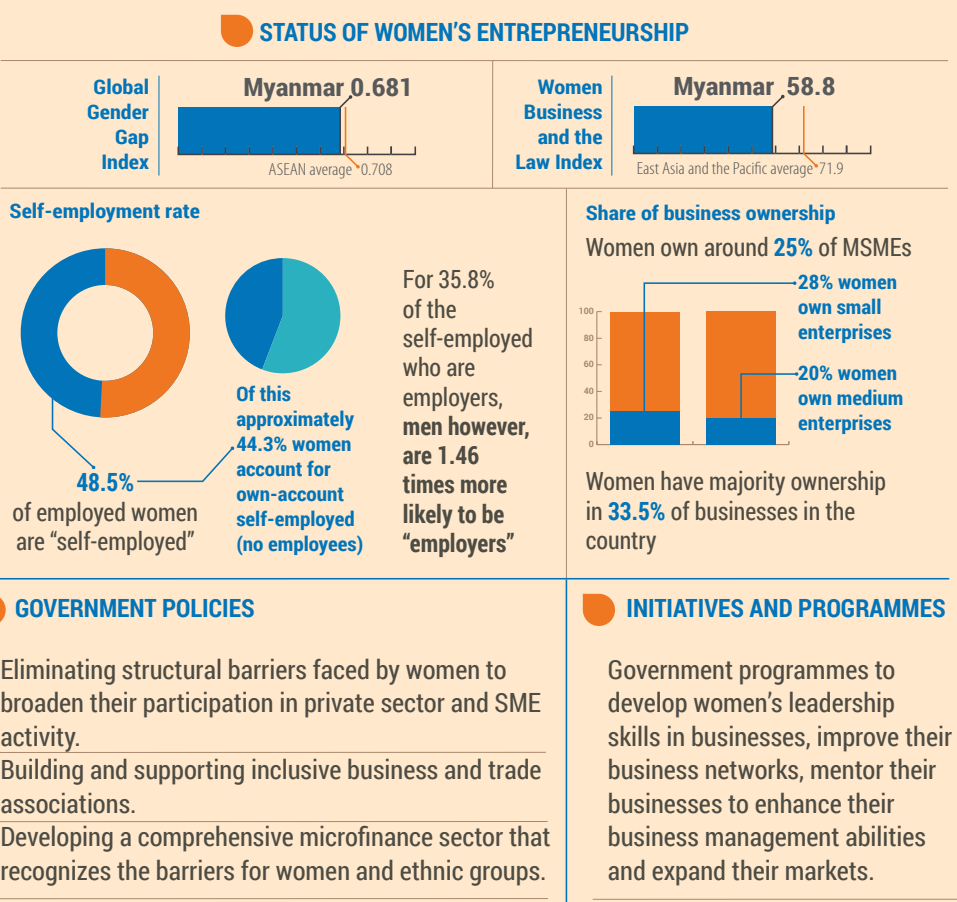
MYANMAR

“The Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan (2018-2030) states the need to put gender equality and women's empowerment at the centre of national development strategies and policies.”



CHALLENGES

- Sociocultural gender norms and attitudes
- Limited access to finance
- Restricted flexibility in time management
- Low levels of control over, and ownership of, land and productive assets



Status of women's entrepreneurship

The 2019 Inter-censal Survey reveals that 48.5 per cent of employed women are "self-employed", compared to 51.6 per cent of employed men (Myanmar, Department of Population, 2020). This signifies approximately five million self-employed women and 6.6 million self-employed men in Myanmar. Men, however, are 1.46 times more likely to be "employers": 4.4 per cent of all self-employed women are employers, compared to 6.4 per cent of all self-employed men. Overall, women in Myanmar account for approximately 44.3 per cent of the own-account self-employed (no employees) and for 35.8 per cent of the self-employed who are employers. Myanmar has the highest self-employment rates among the ASEAN member States, which is largely due to its level of economic development and the lack of paid private sector job opportunities in the country. The share of informal employment is also high

in Myanmar. According to the 2017 Labour Force Survey, 83 per cent of total employment was informal: 90.7 per cent of female employment and 77.4 per cent of male employment.⁴⁴

There are no official data sources on the percentage of businesses owned by women. The Statistical Business Register compiled by the Central Statistical Organization in the Ministry of Planning and Finance, although still in its development and refinement stages, does not report sex-disaggregated data on business ownership.⁴⁵ Other survey sources suggest that women own approximately 25 per cent of MSMEs (28 per cent of small enterprises and 20 per cent of medium enterprises)⁴⁶ and have majority ownership in 33.5 per cent⁴⁷ of businesses in the country. The vast majority of enterprises in Myanmar are not only small in scale but are informal. According to 2019 data from the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration, there were 59,300 formally

registered companies in the country; according to other estimates, there were more than 620,000 unregistered microenterprises (as reported in OECD, 2020). Important policy considerations for Myanmar are actions to improve the level of enterprise formalization and the capacity of micro and small enterprises to grow.

Challenges facing women entrepreneurs

The 2022 WBL assessment for Myanmar indicates room for improvement in all eight areas of legal issues covered by the indicators. The results show that Myanmar had closed less than 60 per cent of the gender equality gap in the related laws. One of the lowest scores is on the indicator measuring laws affecting women's decisions to work as laws are still not in place that prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender to protect women from sexual harassment in the workplace. In the 2022 Global Gender Gap Index, Myanmar ranked 106 out of 146 countries, indicating a high degree of gender inequality. Of particular note, its score on the economic participation and opportunity indicator was 0.677, well below the ASEAN average of 0.739.

The sociocultural gender norms and attitudes in Myanmar may pose the biggest challenge to the emergence of women as entrepreneurs: the time burden of household responsibilities, family members' lack of confidence in wives or daughters who wish to become entrepreneurs, a general lack of respect for women as entrepreneurs and business leaders (as men's leadership is more highly valued), and mobility restrictions that constrain women's access to markets (ILO and Sasakawa Peace Foundation, 2020). Other challenges are limited access to finance, less control over family assets than men and low levels of control over, and ownership of, land and productive assets, which puts women at a disadvantage in meeting the collateral requirements for bank loans; low financial

literacy; lack of business knowledge and skills; low awareness of business development support services and training opportunities; and inadequate access to information on business registration processes and markets.

Government policies and strategies

The Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan (2018-2030) outlines the Government's commitment to addressing the local development needs, meeting the Sustainable Development Goals,⁴⁸ and facilitating the creation of an economic system and enabling environment to achieve and maintain positive development outcomes for all citizens. To this end, issues pertaining to young people, women's empowerment, equity and inclusion were to be considered cross-cutting and mainstreamed into all aspects of the Plan. Furthermore, the need to put gender equality and women's empowerment at the centre of national development strategies and policies is stated in the Plan. This includes eliminating structural barriers faced by women to broaden their participation in private sector and SME activity; building and supporting inclusive business and trade associations; and developing a comprehensive microfinance sector with clear regulatory arrangements, including a tiered system that recognizes the barriers for women and ethnic groups (Myanmar, Ministry of Planning and Finance, 2018).

The inclusion of gender in the Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan is a progressive step forward for the country and provides a base for the different actors working towards gender equality in the country. Nevertheless, there is still much to be done to build capacities and mechanisms for the implementation of gender components at the institutional level, such as "gender units" or "gender focal points", to ensure that gender mainstreaming is effectively implemented (Myanmar National Committee on Women, 2019).⁴⁹

The Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan (2018–2030) outlines the need to put gender equality and women's empowerment at the centre of national development strategies and policies. The sociocultural gender norms and attitudes in Myanmar may pose the biggest challenge to the emergence of women as entrepreneurs.

The focal ministry for MSME development in Myanmar is the Ministry of Industry. The Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection, under the control of the Ministry, has a cross-governmental mechanism to coordinate support to MSMEs with the line ministries (such as financial support, capacity-training programmes and other MSME initiatives) under the guidance of the SME Working Committee and the SME Central Committee. For example, the Ministry of Industry cooperates with the Ministry of Planning and Finance and banks on financial support programmes for MSMEs; the Ministry of Commerce for trade related programmes; and with the Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association and the Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Network on other projects.

No specific national strategy or policy of the Ministry of Industry has support provisions or measures directed towards women-owned enterprises as a target group nor is there an assigned focal unit for women's

entrepreneurship; accordingly, concrete goals and objectives have not been set for increasing the participation and strengthening of women in entrepreneurial and MSME activities.

Myanmar has not implemented a system to analyse and monitor the impact of economic and business environment policies and reforms on WMSMEs. In addition, there is currently no specific process in place for monitoring the participation of women entrepreneurs in MSME support programmes and services, although in some cases, the Technology and Market Promotion Department and the Policy and the International Affairs Department, under the control of the Ministry of Industry, Department of Industrial Supervision and Inspection, disaggregates data showing how many women participants took advantage of MSME programmes, such as awareness and training programmes.

The Ministry of Industry, Department of Industrial Supervision and Inspection engages with private sector organizations when conducting policy dialogue sessions, and with the Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association and the Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Network to solicit their opinions and advice. For example, when developing the MSME Regional Action Plan, the Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection invited private sector organizations to propose their cooperation workplans, and actively cooperated with them in providing capacity-building training programmes and on implementation of other programmes.

Government initiatives and programmes

The SME Support Centres set up in State SME Agencies in 2018 include women entrepreneurs as part of their information, advisory, and innovation services to SMEs. In 2020, the Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection cooperated with the Myanmar Women

Entrepreneurs Network to implement the Women-Led MSMEs Strategic Advancement Programme, which was launched in three regions (Magway, Mon and Rakhine) to enhance WMSMEs. The short-and medium-term objectives of the competitive programme are to develop women's leadership skills in businesses, improve their business networks, mentor their businesses to enhance their business management abilities and expand their markets. The long-term goal is to grow their businesses and create jobs.⁵⁰ In addition, the Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection cooperates with the ASEAN secretariat and the ASEAN member States on a variety of programmes related to women's entrepreneurship, such as the following reports: "Strengthening women's entrepreneurship in agriculture in ASEAN countries"; and *Enhancing Digital Economy Participation for ASEAN Women MSMEs*.

Non-government initiatives and programmes

International cooperation partners, donor agencies, and civil society organizations play a major role in delivering women entrepreneur-focused programmes in the country.

Suggested policy actions

The Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection has made a number of suggestions on actions to better address the needs of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs and reduce the gender gaps in Myanmar, as follows:

- ▶ Conduct a gender impact review of the SME Development Law and the SME Development Policy to aid in identifying more opportunities for reinforcing WMSMEs and developing an appropriate WED strategy and action plan.

- ▶ Establish a specific system or process for data collection on the state of WMSMEs and their participation in the Ministry of Industry support programmes.
- ▶ Set aside a certain portion of the programme budgets for the participation of WMSMEs.
- ▶ In cooperation with development partners, undertake special awareness-raising efforts on programmes to support WMSMEs, such as the intellectual property and the new labour law.

The National WED Assessment for Myanmar carried out by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation in 2019/2020 made an expansive list of recommendations to improve the enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship in the country (ILO and Sasakawa Peace Foundation, 2020). Among the recommendations were to improve the system for data collection and analysis on the state of women's entrepreneurship and SME ownership in Myanmar; develop policies and awareness-raising campaigns to promote work-life balance and the equal distribution of care and domestic responsibilities between men and women, cooperate with women's groups and the Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association to disseminate information on business registration and licensing formalities to women entrepreneurs in urban and rural areas; develop and launch a transition loan fund for women entrepreneurs in order to address the lending gap between the microfinance loan ceiling and the minimum threshold for commercial bank credit and deliver a "digital literacy for business" training programme for women entrepreneurs. These recommendations should also be taken into consideration for policy action.

PHILIPPINES

“ The Philippines has in place legal frameworks to promote women's empowerment through entrepreneurship and MSME development. ”



CHALLENGES

- ▶ Gender stereotypes
- ▶ Restricted mobility
- ▶ Lack of formalization of business
- ▶ Limited educational opportunities
- ▶ Legal deficiencies in equality rights over assets

STATUS OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Global
Gender
Gap
Index

Philippines 0.784



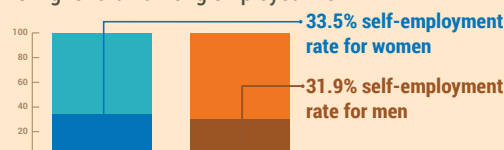
Women
Business
and the
Law Index

Philippines 78.8



Self-employment rate

Self-employment rate among employed women is higher than among employed men



Even though 54% of businesses in 2017 were women-owned, women's share of total self-employment is only 39.5%



GOVERNMENT POLICIES

The promotion of women's entrepreneurship is one of the cross-cutting issues in the MSME Development Plan 2017–2022

The gender and development agenda serves as strategic plan and framework in identifying programmes to achieve the gender and development goals.

The Department of Trade and Industry collects sex-disaggregated data

INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMMES

Launch of post-COVID-19 programmes to provide affordable and cost-efficient micro loans to micro-entrepreneurs

Programmes improving the competitiveness, sustainability and productivity of women's microenterprises

Support to access international markets
Initiatives to build the digital capacity of women entrepreneurs

Status of women's entrepreneurship

The Philippines is one of three ASEAN Member States where the self-employment rate among employed women (33.5 per cent) is higher than the self-employment rate among employed men (31.9 per cent). However, because the actual number of self-employed men is higher, the women's share of total self-employment is only 39.5 per cent. On the other hand, according to the Department of Trade Industry, 54 per cent of businesses in the 2017 Philippine Business Name Registry were women-owned.

One of the strategic targets of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Plan 2019–2025 is to increase the current percentage of businesses owned by women by 10 per cent by the end of the plan period.⁵¹ The Plan further seeks to increase the number of start-up enterprises owned by women in the science,

technology and innovation and ICT sectors (but does not indicate a baseline of a target to be reached).

The Philippines Statistics Authority produces a regular update of the “List of Establishments” in the Philippines,⁵² reporting on the distribution of “registered” establishments by employment size category, sector, industry group, region, sales and value-added, exports contribution, year of starting operation (identifies newly started enterprises), and operational status (operating, temporarily closed, permanently closed). The list, however, does not provide a sex-disaggregation of the establishment's ownership, so data on the percentage of establishments owned by women are not readily available. Efforts should be made by the Philippines Statistics Association to address this gender data gap.

Challenges facing women entrepreneurs

The major challenges facing women entrepreneurs in the Philippines are access to credit and loan facilities, lack of skills and capacity to maximize opportunities in the digital economy, lack of awareness of the available entrepreneurial programmes and services, limited capacity to comply with the requirements to avail the programmes and services, and balancing the demands of childcare and household duties with the demands of running their businesses.

According to the 2022 WBL assessment, the Philippines has closed almost 80 per cent of the legal gender gap on the covered laws. Its particular strengths are in laws affecting a woman's decision to work, women's pay, and the starting and running of a business (perfect scores). Its weakest scores are on laws affecting assets and parenthood (closed only 60 per cent of inequality in the laws). For example, with respect to "assets", women and men do not have equal ownership rights to immovable property and the law does not grant spouses equal administrative authority over assets during marriage. Both of these legal deficiencies in equality rights over assets can affect the ability of women entrepreneurs to negotiate external financing for their businesses.

Laws relating to micro, small and medium enterprises and gender

The Philippines has in place legal frameworks to promote women's empowerment through entrepreneurship and MSME development. The Magna Carta of Women, Republic Act No. 9710, mandates the State to ensure equal access to formal sources of credit and capital and equal share for women of the produce of farm and aquatic resources. It also calls on the State to enhance the social status and rights of marginalized women by promoting and

protecting their livelihood and employment. Furthermore, "an Act Providing Assistance to Women Engaging in Micro and Cottage Business Enterprises", Republic Act No. 7882, gives women entrepreneurs engaged for at least one year in any micro and cottage business (meeting certain conditions) priority in obtaining a loan exceeding the value of her business equipment at prime interest rate or at the rate of 12 per cent per annum.

The Magna Carta for MSMEs, Republic Act No. 9501, seeks to promote entrepreneurship and support entrepreneurs, including women, to generate employment and economic growth. It outlines additional functions for the MSME Development Council to conduct research and policy formulation specific to women's entrepreneurship. The Go Negosyo Act, Republic Act No. 10644, states that the Negosyo Centres must "encourage women's entrepreneurship by giving women access to information, support, training and credit facilities".

Government policies and strategies

The Department of Trade and Industry is responsible for MSME development in the Philippines. Mandated by the Magna Carta for MSMEs, the Department, along with its attached agencies, have been continuously improving the operations of WMSMEs by providing them with knowledge management, and organizational, marketing and business resiliency training or courses to strengthen their internal capabilities for innovation activities. The promotion of women's entrepreneurship is one of the cross-cutting issues in the MSME Development Plan 2017–2022 and to be integrated in the overall strategies (Philippines, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Council, 2018). The inclusion/participation of women entrepreneurs in MSME programmes and services is closely monitored under the MSME Development Plan.

The gender focus of the Department of Trade and Industry is reinforced by the requirements of the Magna Carta of Women and the Government's gender mainstreaming priority to prepare a gender and development agenda. This agenda serves as strategic plan and framework in identifying programmes, activities, and projects to be undertaken to achieve the gender and development goals and outcomes based on its core mandates of MSMEs development, trade policy, investment promotion and consumer welfare. It is the result of a thorough gender analysis of identified gaps and challenges from a series of consultations with the target beneficiaries of women and other concerned stakeholders in the MSME sector and relates to all interventions by the agency on women's economic empowerment. The agenda outlines specific interventions on WEE, including programmes related to (1) sustaining women in business, (2) capacitating women in entrepreneurship, and (3) providing women with greater and better access to business finance. It also reflects the strategic framework priorities outlined in the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Plan 2019–2025, which lays out a number of strategic outcomes for “trade, industry and services”, with the objective of enhancing the capacity of women to sustain and scale up their business. The outlined strategies, largely within the Department's area of responsibilities are the following:

- ▶ Increase support for sustainable women-led or women-managed enterprises and for capacity-building of women from marginalized groups to increase their income by engaging in sustainable entrepreneurial activities, and facilitate their access to financial and other support services, such as ICT.
- ▶ Intensify delivery of business development services that address the specific challenges of women-owned or operated

enterprises and improve programme and service delivery to increase the compliance of women MSMEs to business regulatory frameworks and standards.

- ▶ Streamline the requirements and procedures for business name registration and licensing to enable more women to engage in business.
- ▶ Enhance the access of women-owned or operated MSMEs to formal loans and other sources of financing.
- ▶ Institutionalize sex-disaggregated data collection and analysis for gender-responsive evidence-based policymaking and programme development.

The Department of Trade and Industry Gender and Development Agenda envisions cooperation with other government agencies, such as those involved in agriculture and agrarian reform on developmental and regulatory functions that affect women and children. The Department also works with various business and women's groups on advancing the Agenda, such as the Women's Business Council Philippines (WomenBizPH), Negosyo Centres, and the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

As a result of the adverse economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government updated the 2017–2022 Philippine Development Plan to focus on “building back better”. The updated Plan lays down renewed mandates for the Department of Trade and Industry in line with the pressing needs and challenges of recovering from the ravages of the pandemic. The updated Agenda utilizes this framework to help women-owned and managed businesses leverage the digital economy, develop business resilience and green enterprise, and strengthen their access to technology, efficiency, markets, finance and an enabling environment.

As a result of the adverse economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government updated the 2017–2022 Philippine Development Plan to focus on “building back better”. This could be utilized to help women-owned and managed businesses leverage the digital economy, develop business resilience and green enterprise, and strengthen their access to technology, efficiency, markets, finance and an enabling environment.

The Department of Trade and Industry does not have a specific focal point for women's entrepreneurship. However, in compliance to the implementing rules and regulations of the Magna Carta of Women, the Department has established the Gender and Development Focal Point System to catalyse and accelerate gender mainstreaming. The role of the System⁵³ is to coordinate the gender and development mainstreaming activities of the Department of Trade and Industry and lead in ensuring the gender-responsiveness of systems, structures, policies, programmes, processes and procedures.

The Department of Trade and Industry actively collects sex-disaggregated data on the users of its services by region and specific service. A consolidated report from central and regional offices and attached agencies of the department is compiled on a quarterly basis. This is also part of the agency's commitment to the Philippines Statistics Authority Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Statistics to supply agency-generated data for the information of all governing bodies and its constituents. These gender statistics are summarized and reported in the annual Women and Men in the Philippines Fact Sheets, produced by the Authority,⁵⁴ a model for other ASEAN member States (see box 22 in chapter 4). The Philippines has not yet established its own definition for “women-owned-led MSME”; it currently uses the IFC definition of a “woman-owned enterprise” (see table 3 in chapter 2).

Various Department of Trade and Industry agencies maintain a client database, which could be the source of information on women who have availed of their programmes and services. To better develop its Enhanced Client Profile and Monitoring System, the Department of Trade Gender and Development secretariat is creating a gender and development monitoring and evaluation database system that will collect, consolidate, and evaluate Department of Trade and Industry-Gender and Development-related plans, programmes, budgets and other data. The intent is to provide the Department with evidence-based information to enhance its existing programmes and services and develop new gender and development programmes and services based on its mandate and functions.

The Department of Trade and Industry engages with women entrepreneurs in policy dialogue. This is partly achieved by the representation of women on the MSME Development Council, the policymaking body that oversees interventions for MSME development (which includes one representative from the women sector

designated by the Philippine Commission on Women). This allows women's constraints and issues to be considered in the reform process and ensures that policy decisions lead to equal access and development results for women. The Department also encourages networking among women MSMEs and advocates for more women to participate in the local and international consultations and policy dialogues and in its MSME development programmes and initiatives.

Government initiatives and programmes

Building on the Department of Trade and Industry Gender and Development Agenda, the Small Business Corporation, the Department's financing arm, has developed various MSME financing programmes to mitigate the potential closure of MSMEs as an outcome of the pandemic and to also encourage MSMEs to start and expand their businesses. Of particular note are the following:

- ▶ Launch of the Enterprise Rehabilitation Financing Facility under the Pondo sa Pagbabago at Pag-asenso (P3) Programme in 2020 to support micro and small enterprises affected by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This financing initiative, delivered by microfinance institutions accredited by the Small Business Cooperation, provides affordable and cost-efficient micro loans (at a 2.5 per cent monthly interest rate) to assist micro-entrepreneurs throughout the country with business start-up or expansion activities. In 2020, **63 per cent of the beneficiaries were women's enterprises.**⁵⁵
- ▶ Launch of the *Bayanihan* COVID-19 Assistance to Restart Enterprises (CARES) Programme in March 2020, an interest-free and collateral-free financing programme to help MSMEs recover from the adverse effects of the pandemic. Under the programme,

the Department of Tourism signed the Memorandum of Agreement for the CARES for TRAVEL programme, which extended loan assistance to MSMEs from the tourism industry. As of July 2021, the CARES "Restart" Programme, delivered by the Small Business Cooperation, had approved 31,409 loan applications amounting to a total loan portfolio of 4.8 billion Philippine peso (Pts) (\$86 million); **approximately 60 per cent of the MSMEs that received loan proceeds were owned by women** (ADB, 2021, p. 16).

The Department of Trade and Industry also makes note of the Canadian-funded Gender Responsive Economic Actions for the Transformation of Women (GREAT Women) Project II (2014–2022), otherwise known as Supporting Women's Economic Empowerment in the Philippines. This 8 million Canadian dollar (Can\$) (US\$6.2 million) project, which builds on the success of the GREAT Women Project I (2006–2013), seeks to advance the economic empowerment of women micro-entrepreneurs and their workers through (1) improving the competitiveness, sustainability and productivity of women's microenterprises and (2) continuing to enhance the enabling environment for WEE. One of the recent developments under this project is the **integration of a new module for the Gender Responsive Value Chain Analysis that factors in "greening"** as a vital component in the development of women-owned and family-based MSMEs. As a holder of the National Industry Cluster Enhancement Programme, the Department of Trade and Industry oversees the Gender Responsive Value Chain Analysis project in cooperation with other departments,⁵⁶ the Philippine Commission on Women, MSMEs and private sector representatives. The focus of the Gender Responsive Value Chain Analysis is on women's microenterprises in four priority industry clusters: home style and wearables; coffee; cacao; and processed fruits and nuts

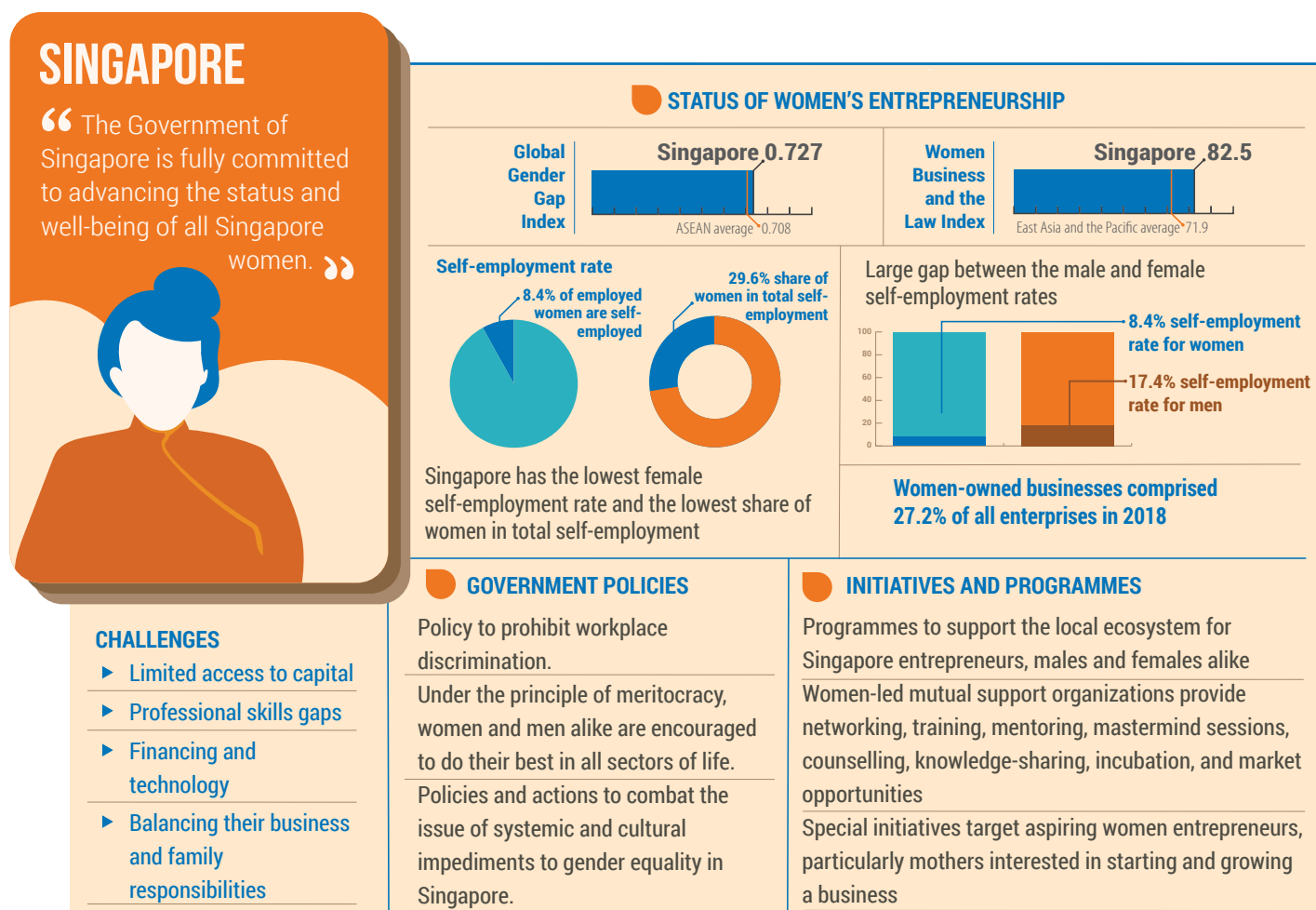
and selected high-value crops. This project is in line with one of the action items in the MSME Development Plan 2017–2022 to “promote women entrepreneurs to move up the value chain through capacity-building, market access, branding and packaging” (Philippines, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Council, 2018). From April to September 2020, the project trained 264 women micro-entrepreneurs in enterprise management and related themes, and assisted 296 women micro-entrepreneurs in market development and expansion, 125 with certification requirements, and 40 in product design and development (Philippines, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Council, 2021, p. 33).

Another recent development (in December 2020) is the partnership between the Department of Trade and Industry Export Marketing Bureau and the International Trade Centre to host the **SheTrades PH Hub**, which will support Filipino women entrepreneurs and MSMEs access international markets through the various initiatives and networks of the International Trade Centre. In addition, making use of the Integrated Digital Marketing Training Programme instructional materials developed as part of the “**Connecting Women Entrepreneurs to the Digital Economy (CWEDE)**” component of the USAID-supported E-PESO Initiative, the Department plans to continue to upscale, monitor and sustain the growth of the programme to build the digital capacity of women entrepreneurs to sell their products online through e-commerce platforms (see box 11 in chapter 4).

Suggested policy actions

To better address the needs of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in the Philippines and reduce the gender gaps, the Government could consider the following:⁵⁷

- ▶ Continue with its efforts including those of the Department of Trade and Industry to mitigate the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic by developing and amending project designs, policies, criteria, and guidelines to adjust to the current situation.
- ▶ Focus on analysis of the gender issues and concerns to identify the gaps and determine how the Department of Trade and Industry Gender and Development Agenda can be modified to help address gaps and ameliorate the situation of WMSMEs.



Status of women's entrepreneurship

Singapore has attained the second highest score for gender equality among the ASEAN member States areas covered by the 2022 Global Gender Gap Index, with an overall score of 0.734 compared to the ASEAN average of 0.709. Globally, it ranks 49 out of 146 countries, while for the economic participation and opportunity indicator, it ranks 28. Relative to the other ASEAN member States, Singapore has a lower score on this indicator than the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines and Thailand, and thus, a larger gender gap.

Singapore outperforms all other ASEAN member States except the Lao People's Democratic Republic on the 2022 WBL assessment, having closed 82.5 per cent of the gender inequality in the measured laws, and achieved perfect scores (gender equality) on laws affecting mobility, and property and inheritance. The country

recently announced that it would be enshrining its Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices, which prohibits workplace discrimination (including discrimination on the basis of gender), into law. However, the law does not mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value, and does not prohibit discrimination in access to credit based on gender. Laws, such as these, can have a direct effect on women's entrepreneurship – the types of businesses they start and scale of the start-up depending on the savings the women have accumulated and the credit financing available.

Among the ASEAN member States, Singapore has the lowest female self-employment rate (8.4 per cent of employed women), and the lowest share of women in total self-employment (29.6 per cent compared to the average of 40.4 per cent across ASEAN). Singapore also has the largest gap between the male and female self-employment rates, with the female

rate slightly less than half that of males (8.4 per cent versus 17.4 per cent), far below the ASEAN and OECD averages. Based on data from Statistics Singapore, women-owned businesses comprised 27.2 per cent of all enterprises in 2018.

Challenges facing women entrepreneurs

The barriers faced by Singaporean women-owned businesses fall into four categories: market access (due to inadequate business networking opportunities); access to capital; professional skills gaps, especially with regards to strategy, financing and technology; and balancing the demands of the business with family and other responsibilities (Accenture, 2020). Women entrepreneurs also cite significant challenges in coping with gender bias and a perceived lack of credibility in the business environment. Additionally, in Singapore, women-owned businesses are more likely to be smaller in scale than male-owned businesses; one of the main reasons behind this is that women are expected to balance family responsibilities with the demands of starting and running a business (Singapore Business Federation, 2021b).

Government policies and strategies

The Government of Singapore is fully committed to advancing the status and well-being of all Singapore women. The principle of equality of all persons before the law is enshrined in Article 12 (1) of the Singapore Constitution, which stipulates that “all persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law” and encompasses the non-discrimination of women. Under the principle of meritocracy, women and men alike are encouraged to do their best in all sectors of life. However, in a speech in 2021, the Prime Minister of Singapore⁵⁸ recognized that inequalities still exist, particularly in the pre-conceived notions and traditional mindsets

about the role of women (gender stereotypes) that are still encountered by women in the workplace and as entrepreneurs, and the heavier burden shouldered by women in domestic responsibilities.⁵⁹ The issue of systemic and cultural impediments to gender equality in Singapore was discussed in Parliament in August 2021, affirming the need for a whole of society effort to remove all barriers to the empowerment of women so they can freely realize their full potential and participation in society, including as entrepreneurs. Following a year-long consultation process with Singaporeans on how to help Singapore women make further progress, the Government released the White Paper on Singapore Women's Development in March 2022. The Office for Women's Development, under the Ministry of Social and Family Development, is the national focal point on gender policy issues related to women's development and empowerment.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry is the main body responsible for SME policy in Singapore and for formulating, leading and coordinating all enterprise development strategies, including strategies for start-ups and SMEs. The Ministry's Enterprise Strategy 2030 prioritizes support for the growth of high potential companies (enterprises with strong growth potential and global ambitions), strengthening the core industry transformation capabilities of local SMEs (digitalisation, innovation, technology upgrading), and building and sustaining a vibrant ecosystem of local enterprises that are able to compete globally.

Enterprise Singapore is the main government agency responsible for implementing enterprise development policies to support the growth and expansion of Singapore-based enterprises (both MSMEs and large enterprises). Its major focus is on delivering direct programme support to build the capabilities of committed companies to innovate and become global. In particular,

Enterprise Singapore provides the national standards and accreditation for enterprise development and serves as a one-stop agency for ecosystem development by connecting enterprises with investors, incubators and accelerators, and other stakeholders. It also provides access to information on financial and non-financial assistance and insights on market access in a cross-sector of industries within and outside of Singapore. As government agencies, such as Enterprise Singapore, do not collect sex-disaggregated data on take-up of their enterprise support programmes, data on the participation of women entrepreneurs and WSMEs do not exist. **Developing a system to track and monitor such sex-disaggregated data would provide the Government with insight on the potential gender gap.**

Government initiatives and programmes

The Government of Singapore has a full suite of programmes to support entrepreneurs and help them scale up. Among them are the Startup SG schemes⁶⁰, the Productivity Solutions, Enterprise Development and Market Readiness Assistance Grants⁶¹, Enterprise Financing Schemes⁶², and SME Go Digital Programme⁶³. Any entrepreneur/local enterprise meeting the programme eligibility requirements can apply for programme support, with no consideration of gender of the entrepreneur or the business ownership. These programmes do not carry any special provisions for women business owners.

On the other hand, Enterprise Singapore remains committed to supporting and strengthening the local ecosystem for Singapore entrepreneurs, males and females alike. To amplify its reach and engagement with local enterprises, Enterprise Singapore relies on a network of diverse ecosystem members (partners and intermediaries) in enterprise development efforts that include trade associations and chambers and women entrepreneur associations. These

ecosystem partners understand the needs and challenges of their respective sectors and members, and have the expertise and networks to assist them.

Non-government initiatives and programmes

In addition to Government support, the business community and civil society associations have initiated various programmes to further empower women entrepreneurs. Initiatives, such as the Women Entrepreneur Awards and the Women Entrepreneur Club, are also important in empowering Singaporean businesswomen through networking, mentoring and capital-raising opportunities.⁶⁴ Civil society organizations, such as the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations, have also rolled out initiatives to support women entrepreneurs, such as BoardAgender,⁶⁵ which aims to get more women into the boardroom and into senior leadership roles, and Women's Register, a networking programme for women over the age of 18 who are seeking mentorship and opportunities to get more involved in their communities.

A large number of women-led mutual support organizations provide a networking, training, mentoring, mastermind sessions, counselling, knowledge-sharing, incubation, and market opportunities (trade missions, business visits, bazaars) for their diverse memberships of women entrepreneurs that range from "mumpreneurs"⁶⁶ to women-founded technology start-ups.⁶⁷ Some of these associations also play an advocacy role, such as the Female Founders Network, which advocates gender equality in technology entrepreneurship where Singaporean women continue to be underrepresented. Mums@Work Singapore provides support for homemakers interested in becoming home-based entrepreneurs.⁶⁸ To respond to an increase in demand for

entrepreneurial know-how from homemakers during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mums@Work Mumpreneurs Network initiated the Digital Mumpreneurs Programme⁶⁹ in partnership with FinLab (an innovation accelerator programme) to target aspiring women entrepreneurs, particularly mothers interested in starting and growing a business.

A key recent development in support for women entrepreneurs is the **launch of the Singapore Women Entrepreneurs Network by the Singapore Business Federation** in September 2021 (Singapore Business Federation, 2021a). The purpose of the Network is to coordinate the existing efforts of businesswomen within the community, foster business partnerships and growth, and serve as a platform to connect with other women entrepreneurs' associations in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in ASEAN countries, through its membership in the ASEAN Women's Entrepreneurship Network. Members of the platform can tap into the platforms and initiatives of the Singapore Business Federation relating to internationalization, digitalization, and transformation, as well as jobs and skills. The platform provides additional support for women's entrepreneurship by enabling their issues to be championed through engagement with senior government officials and "data-driven advocacy"; sharing of knowledge and expertise through networking events; and recognition of the achievements of women entrepreneurs.

The Procter & Gamble (P&G) Women Entrepreneurs Development Programme was launched in Singapore in 2019 as part of the company's Supplier Diversity Programme to promote a more inclusive and diverse supply network. The Programme provides training to cohorts of women business owners to further

their capabilities and to connect them with qualified buyers and multinational companies around the world. More than 60 Singapore women-owned businesses have participated in the programme. Enterprise Singapore supports the Programme as an external partner.

Suggested policy actions

To better address the needs of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in Singapore and reduce the gender gaps, the Government could consider doing the following:

- ▶ Increase efforts to create more equal opportunities for women to participate in the workforce, given the multiple roles they play and the need to juggle both personal and professional commitments. Providing women with more flexible work arrangements, for example, would encourage more women entrepreneurs to unleash their full potential in the workplace, and at the same time allow them to fulfil their family care obligations.
- ▶ Set targets for increasing the number of women entrepreneurs and reducing the gender gap in business ownership.
- ▶ Develop a system to track sex-disaggregated data on the take-up of the Government's enterprise support programmes and monitor the level of participation of women entrepreneurs and WSMEs on a programme-by-programme basis. Such data would provide the Government with insight on the potential gender gap and actions to increase their representation.

THAILAND

“ An objective of the new national SME Promotion Strategic Plan (2023–2027), is to promote gender equality in every dimension and inclusiveness of all MSMEs.”



STATUS OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Global
Gender
Gap
Index

Thailand 0.710

ASEAN average 0.708

Women
Business
and the
Law Index

Thailand 78.1

East Asia and the Pacific average 71.9

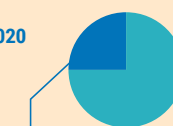
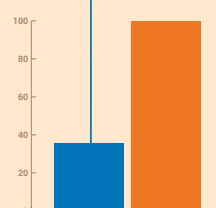
The female rate of self-employment is only 73% of the male rate.



Females account for **38.3%** of the total self-employed

Gender gap in “employer” rates is high

The female rate was only 35.7% of the male rate in 2020



Less than 25% self-employed women are employers

Employed males are 2.8 times more likely to be employers than employed females

Approximately **93%** of the self-employment activity is informal with virtually no gender differences.

CHALLENGES

- Gender stereotypes
- Laws affecting gender equality
- Gender-based discrimination for access to credit
- Laws for parental leave for working women and men

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

In the process of establishing a definition for “women-owned-MSME”

Supplier development diversity programme launched to support gender equality and social inclusivity

INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMMES

The Integrated MSME Promotion Plan supports enterprises with knowledge services, business development support, digital technology and market access. However, no data are reported on the level of participation of women entrepreneurs

Launch of the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs in 2021

Women Entrepreneurs Bonds to boost lending to WSMEs

Thailand is the first country in the Asia-Pacific region to issue a private sector “gender” bond

Status of women's entrepreneurship

The gap between the female and male self-employment rate in Thailand is the second largest among the ASEAN member States. The female rate is only 73 per cent of the male rate. The gender gap in “employer” rates is the highest among the ASEAN member States; the female rate was only 35.7 per cent of the male rate in 2020 (National Statistical Office, 2020). Overall, the data indicate that females account for 38.3 per cent of the total self-employed, but less than 25 per cent of employers (employed males are 2.8 times more likely to be employers than employed females). The challenge for Thailand is to reduce the gender gap in self-employment rates and to invest in capacity-building of women entrepreneurs to enable them to become employers and create jobs for others.

Thailand stands apart from the other ASEAN member States in presenting comprehensive

data on formal and informal employment by work status, which reports on informality levels among the self-employed and employers. This data indicate that approximately 93 per cent of the self-employment activity is informal with virtually no gender differences. This compares to an informality rate of 53.7 per cent in total employment (calculations from data of the National Statistical Office, 2020, table 3.10), as the majority of paid government and private sector employees are formal (96.6 per cent and 89.1 per cent, respectively). The challenge for the Government is to increase the formality rates of the self-employed, irrespective of gender issues.

Thailand does not report on the gender dynamics of business ownership. In its annual White Paper on MSMEs, the Office of SMEs Promotion produces extensive descriptions of the MSME sector (by size category, employment, sector, region and legal type), although it does not

provide sex-disaggregated data on the juristic or ordinary persons operating in the MSME sector. However, unofficially, women are reported as running many of the family businesses in the country and accounting for more than 40 per cent of MSMEs (Pathek, 2019).

Challenges facing women entrepreneurs

Not much has been recently studied about the barriers to women's entrepreneurship in Thailand. According to analysis by the Kenan Foundation Asia, the major challenges facing Thai women entrepreneurs are lack of collateral to meet the loan requirements of banks and the complexity of loan application processes, which hinder their access to financing; insufficient opportunities for networking with funding sources, investors, mentors and advisers and other businesses within their supply chains; and underdeveloped technical skills or competencies in digital and ICT skills, accounting and finance, business planning, and negotiation (Kenan Foundation Asia, 2021).

Thailand ranks fifth among the ASEAN member States on the 2022 WBL assessment, having achieved 78 per cent of gender equality in the laws measured and perfect scores on laws affecting freedom of movement, women's decisions to work, and gender differences in property and inheritance. However, further reforms were indicated on laws affecting gender equality in work (some restrictions on women's work in an industrial job in the same way as men), legal rights to access credit without gender-based discrimination, and laws relative to the provision of paid maternity, paternity and parental leave for working women and men.

Laws related to micro, small and medium enterprises and gender

Thailand is one of three ASEAN member States that have in place a gender equality law, the

Gender Equality Act B.E. 2558 (2015), which prohibits unfair gender-based discrimination against all persons in all aspects, including in the recruitment, retention and promotion of women in the workplace. However, irrespective of legal gender equality, traditional attitudes on the gender roles are still seen as a fundamental obstacle to the promotion of gender equality and women's advancement in the country (Thailand, Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development, 2020).

No formal process is in place to review or assess the gender impact of legislation and regulations on enterprises owned by women.

Government policies and strategies

The Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion Strategic Plan 2020–2022⁷⁰ outlines three strategic actions specific to the development of SMEs, but does not include any specific reference to women entrepreneurs or strategic actions targeting WSMEs or women entrepreneurs. However, it is in the process of establishing a definition for “women-owned-led MSME” with plans to achieve this as part of the 2022 work plan and to set up a “women-owned-led MSME” database. In addition, the Office reports that one of the objectives of the new national SME Promotion Strategic Plan (2023–2027), to be launched in 2022, is to promote gender equality in every dimension and inclusiveness of all MSMEs. Although there will be no specific provisions focused on “women-owned-led MSMEs” in the plan, the objective is to ensure that women are treated in an equal and inclusive manner. However, the plan does include an objective to connect women-owned-led SMEs and women entrepreneurs to corporate procurement opportunities, which will be partly achieved through the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion partnership with Unilever Thailand in the Inclusivity Business Partnership Programme, a supplier development diversity

programme launched in Thailand in August 2021 to support gender equality and social inclusivity in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion has not appointed a focal point for women's entrepreneurship within its organizational structure and deals with MSMEs on a generic basis. According to reporting from the Office,⁷¹ there is no cross-governmental mechanism for coordinating the delivery of MSME programmes to women entrepreneurs.

The Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion has a system for monitoring achievements of the Strategic Plan against 17 performance indicators related to the three strategic actions, but it does not report sex-disaggregated data on any of the indicators associated with the strategic actions. **Having sex-disaggregated data on programme recipients and performance outcomes would provide important evidence for policymaking.**

Thailand is one of three ASEAN member States that have in place a gender equality law. However, irrespective of legal gender equality, traditional attitudes on the gender roles are still seen as a fundamental obstacle to the promotion of gender equality and women's advancement in the country.

Government initiatives and programmes

In its annual report on SMEs, the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion reports on the performance of the Integrated MSME Promotion Plan, which incorporates results from the evaluation of all projects implemented under the SME budget allocation. The 2021 report indicates that 460,325 SMEs benefited from the project support of 25 agencies in 2020, and provides details on the allocation to various SME segment targets: early-stage enterprises; microenterprises, small enterprises; and medium and high-potential enterprises, plus the efficiency of the ecosystem in realizing specific targets for supporting SMEs, such as the SME One-Stop Service Centres, business incubators, and cluster networks (Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion, 2021). However, no data are reported on the level of participation of women entrepreneurs/WMSMEs in the government-supported MSME programmes and services and there is currently no process in place for tracking and monitoring these data. This is a missed opportunity, as the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion is able to report collective data on the number of MSMEs that received knowledge services, engaged in international business and adopted innovation or digital technology in business development, and the number of entrepreneurs who developed the capacity to start a business (as evidenced in Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion, 2021, Annual Report 2020). Given the Office's capacity for collecting such data on all participating or affected MSMEs, efforts could be made to provide further sex-disaggregation data. This could be achieved by integrating a male-female dimension to the SME database, including, for example, on the number of SMEs and employment size, exporting SMEs, SMEs accessing financing from the SME Development Fund, the SME D Bank and Credit Guarantee Corporation, training, and

coaching and consultation services, and SMEs participating in cluster networks.

Non-government initiatives and programmes

A recent development to support women entrepreneurs in Thailand was the launch of the **Academy for Women Entrepreneurs in 2021**. Delivery of the Academy's online courses, called "DreamBuilder", are facilitated by local Thailand partners, namely, the CU Innovation Hub at Chulalongkorn University, and successful women-owned businesses from various fields.

Although the Government of Thailand is not involved per se, another innovation in Thailand is the **introduction of Women Entrepreneurs Bonds**, issued by Bank of Ayudhya, one of the country's largest universal banks (known as *Krungsri*), to boost lending to WSMEs in Thailand and help grow their businesses (IFC, 2019). Women Entrepreneurs Bonds of *Krungsri* is the first private-sector "gender" bond issuance in the Asia Pacific region and the first social bond issuance in Asian emerging markets (see box 8 in chapter 4). This offshore bond issuance introduces WSME loans as an attractive asset class for investors and positions *Krungsri* as a pioneer of women finance in Thailand.

Suggested policy actions

To better address the needs of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in Thailand and reduce the gender gaps, the Government could consider the following:

- ▶ Extend more support to women's entrepreneurship by specifically mentioning this target group in policy documents, creating specific instruments and allocating the necessary budgets (OECD and Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, 2018).
- ▶ Establish a workable definition for "women-owned-led MSME".
- ▶ Develop a mechanism for collecting sex-disaggregated data on recipients of SME support programmes and their performance outcomes as evidence for more gender-responsive SME policymaking.
- ▶ Establish KPIs for women's entrepreneurship in the new national SME Promotion Strategic Plan (2023–2027) to monitor levels of improved performance in the number and quality of WMSME, and progress in achieving the "inclusiveness" objectives in the implementation of the Plan.

VIET NAM

“ Changing the social norms towards advancing gender equality constitutes the primary goal of the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030. ”



CHALLENGES

- Gender stereotypes
- Burden of domestic and unpaid care responsibilities
- Limited access to financing
- Lacking knowledge of ICTs
- Lack of social networks and capacity building

STATUS OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Global Gender Gap Index

Viet Nam, 0.701

ASEAN average 0.708

Women Business and the Law Index

Viet Nam, 85

East Asia and the Pacific average 71.9

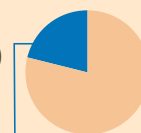
Self-employment and women as employers



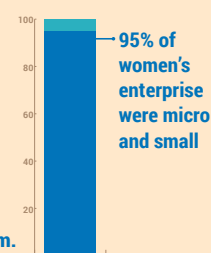
Majority of the self-employed women do not have employees: the female employer rate is only 37.8% of the male employer rate.

Women in Viet Nam comprise 45.5% of the total self-employed, but they are only 25.1% of the employers

The gender gap in (formal) business ownership is even greater



Women represented 21% of the total number of formal or registered enterprises in Viet Nam.



GOVERNMENT POLICIES

- A formal definition for a “women-owned-led MSME”
- Goal to increase share of women-owned businesses
- Regular consultations with stakeholder organizations to discuss priorities and actions
- Revised SME Law/Decree 80 with targeted provisions for women entrepreneurs

INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMMES

- Programmes supporting women to start a business and to strengthen competitiveness
- Creation of a subportal for women entrepreneurs on the National SME Support Portal
- Private initiatives addressing gender-specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and providing training, mentoring, financial-matching and business-matching.

Status of women's entrepreneurship

Women in Viet Nam comprise 45.5 per cent of the total self-employed, but they are only 25.1 per cent of the employers (self-employed with employees) (Viet Nam, General Statistics Office, 2021). Self-employed men are more than twice as likely to be an employer than self-employed women (employer rate of only 1.4 per cent of total employed females versus 3.7 per cent of total employed males). Employers account for only 3.9 per cent of the self-employed women, but 9.8 per cent of the self-employed are men. Accordingly, the gender gap among “employers” is much larger than the gender gap in own-account self-employment. Female own-account self-employment is 99.9 per cent of the male rate, but the female employer rate is only 37.8 per cent of the male employer rate.

The gender gap in (formal) business ownership is even greater. Up-to-date information on business

ownership by sex of the owner is not readily available, but data from the 2015 Economic Census indicate that women represented 21 per cent of the total number of formal or registered enterprises in Viet Nam (and 21.3 per cent of MSMEs) (as cited in IFC, 2017; ESCAP, 2020b). Although men-owned enterprises outnumber women-owned enterprises by a ratio of 4.7:1, the distribution of businesses by size does not vary much between women and men. The reported data indicate that 95 per cent of women's enterprise were micro and small, compared to 94.5 per cent of male-owned businesses. Viet Nam also recognizes the very significant number of informal and household enterprises in the country, which exceeds five million, close to 10 times the number of registered enterprises. Efforts are being made to incentivize informal and household enterprises to become “SMEs” within the context of the Law on Supporting SMEs (SME Law) and these should continue.

Challenges facing women entrepreneurs

Studies identify the following as major challenges faced by female entrepreneurs in being able to realize their entrepreneurial ambitions: discriminatory social and cultural norms; limited access to financing and financial resources; inadequate knowledge of ICTs; lack of social networks and capacity-building opportunities; insufficient support for trade promotion activities; and gender-blind legislation (IFC, 2017; Viet Nam Women Entrepreneurs Council, 2018; WeEmpowerAsia, 2020; ESCAP, 2022b). Women in Viet Nam also face the additional burden of domestic and unpaid care responsibilities, which can be a deterrent for many women to start a business (ESCAP, 2022b).

On the legal front, the 2022 WBL assessment found that in 85 per cent of the laws measured, there is gender equality. However, gaps still remain in the laws related to parenthood (no parental leave) and pensions.

Laws relating to micro, small and medium enterprises

The Law on Supporting SMEs in Viet Nam was passed in 2018. It calls attention to the domestic SME sector as a source of future growth and lays out the provisions of policy support and incentives to improve the environment for SME development. This law is distinctive in that it includes a formal definition for a “women-owned-led MSME”, namely a MSME in which one or more women own 51 per cent or more of the charter capital, including at least one woman who manages the operation of the business. The SME Law and Decree No 80/2021/ND-CP on Elaboration of Some Articles of the Law on Provision of Assistance for Small and Medium Enterprises outline preferential measures for WSMEs and SMEs with high female employment. Decree No 80/2021 specifies that SMEs in these two categories, as well as social enterprises,

shall be given priority for State support in cases in which they meet the “SME eligibility” criteria and resources are available. Women-owned micro, small, and medium enterprises also benefit from special reimbursement concessions on counselling and advisory contracts and a higher percentage of support than general MSMEs for participation in various training activities to develop their human resource levels, such as entrepreneurship, business management, and production and processing.

In accordance with Law No. 80/2015/QH13 on Promulgating Legal Documents, a gender impact assessment must be performed when formulating policies and decrees (where applicable). Business-related laws, such as the Enterprise Law, the Investment Law and the Science and Technology Law, could benefit from an ex-post gender lens review to assess any differential impacts on women-owned enterprises. Of late, a gender lens review of the Law on Supporting SMEs, carried out by the ESCAP Catalysing Women Entrepreneurship Programme (ESCAP, 2022b), identified areas where the gender responsiveness of the Law and its policy provisions could be improved, especially in relation to the implementation of the Law (see box 9 in chapter 4).

Government policies and strategies

In 2016, the Prime Minister-issued Resolution on Enterprise Development Policy to 2020 (No. 35/NQ-CP dated 16 May 2016) set a target to have at least one million registered enterprises by 2020, indicating that specific policies will support SMEs, start-ups, innovative enterprises and businesses with high growth potential. The Prime Minister's Plan for Sustainable Development of Private Sector Enterprises (2019) set a further target of at least 1.5 million registered enterprises by 2025 and two million by 2030 to be supported by an ambitious set of policy actions related to improving the business

While many initiatives to support Vietnamese women entrepreneurs are spearheaded by international partners, organizations, and the Government, proper mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that WSMEs are adequately represented in all incentives and programmes within the scope of the SME Law.

environment to attract investment, promote innovative start-ups, upgrade the workforce and management skills to enhance the productivity of SMEs, encourage SMEs to adopt advanced technologies and cleaner production, and support business associations in their role in assisting SMEs.⁷² **It would be challenging for these targets to be met without taking into consideration the contribution of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs.**

Changing the social norms towards advancing gender equality constitutes the primary goal of the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030,⁷³ which continues to include targets specific to women's entrepreneurship. The National Strategy on Gender Equality 2011–2020 had set the target of WMSMEs accounting for 30 per cent of all MSMEs by 2015 (It reached only 22.4 per cent.) and upwards of 35 per cent by 2020. However, by 2020, the proportion of WMSMEs had reached only 24 per cent of formal, registered businesses (Viet Nam, Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social

Affairs and UN Women, 2021). The targets were adjusted downward in the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030, setting the **goal to increase the share of women-owned businesses to 27 percent of all enterprises by 2025 and to 30 percent by 2030.**

The Gender Equality Department in the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs is responsible for women's affairs and gender equality and developing the National Strategy on Gender Equality. The objectives of the strategy are to be mainstreamed into national target programmes as well as in sector and local plans and applied by all ministries and agencies of the Government, and presidents of the provincial and city people's committees. The Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Strategy and reporting results to the Government and the Prime Minister, including proposals for necessary measures to ensure its full implementation. The review of the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2010–2020 revealed that only 14 of the 22 targets set for this first national strategy had been achieved or were expected to be achieved as set out, and seven targets were not met, including the target for the share of women business owners (Viet Nam Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and UN Women, 2021). As part of the most recent strategy, the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs has developed a guide to aid key ministries, sectors and localities in the collection and reporting of consistent data on the annual results of the National Strategy on Gender Equality implementation. This is intended to ensure the monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the strategy is more effective and timelier.

The Agency for Enterprise Development under the Ministry of Planning and Investment is the government body responsible for MSME development in the country. Although there is

no specific division in the Agency in charge of women's entrepreneurship, it assumes the duties of monitoring the operational status of women-owned enterprises, as well as policies and programmes to support women entrepreneurs. Under provisions of the SME Law and other relevant guiding Decrees, the Agency makes use of a cross-governmental mechanism for coordinating the delivery of MSME programmes to women entrepreneurs. This is more formalized by the creation of an interministerial technical working group on women's entrepreneurship (see box 20 in chapter 4). The Agency holds regular consultations and policy dialogue sessions with stakeholder organizations, including women entrepreneur associations and women's groups to discuss priorities and actions.

The Agency for Enterprise Development has not yet implemented a system to monitor the participation of women entrepreneurs in MSME support programmes and services, but it has drafted a circular guiding the implementation of MSME support programmes, which is expected to stipulate that 20 per cent of the annual budget be allocated to support WMSMEs⁷⁴. When the circular is passed, data collection will be implemented as instructed. In addition, the General Statistics Office is conducting business surveys to also explore the level of participation in programmes to support women-owned businesses.

Government initiatives and programmes

While many initiatives to support Vietnamese women entrepreneurs are spearheaded by international cooperation partners and donor organizations, the Government has implemented two projects of note. The first is **Project No 939 Supporting women to start a business in the period of 2017–2025** (Prime Minister Decision No. 939/QĐ-TTg of 30 June 2017), initiated by the Viet Nam Women's Union. This project is a sizeable initiative with ambitious targets for

increasing the number of start-ups owned by women. The project proposed to support 20,000 women's start-ups and the establishment of 1,200 women-led or women-managed cooperatives through entrepreneurship training, peer-learning opportunities, incentives for women to develop business ideas, and extending support for completing business plans and accessing the necessary resources to realize the plans. In the first year of project implementation, more than 8,600 women started businesses. The Viet Nam Women's Union reports that over three years, more than 46,000 ideas and projects were presented in the start-up contests, 38,415 women entrepreneurs were supported in starting a business, more than 13,000 women were provided with loans totalling 237 billion Vietnamese dong (₫) (\$10 million), and more than 25,000 women-owned businesses received consultancy, training, and connections to loans amounting to ₫148 billion (Viet Nam Women's Union, 2020).

The second initiative is inclusion of the "Programme to strengthen competitiveness for women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises for the period of 2021–2025" in Resolution No. 99/NQ-CP on the Government's Action Plan for 2021–2025 to implement the five-year Social Development Plan 2021–2025 (dated 31 August 2021), to be implemented by the Ministry of Planning and Investment.

Also of note is the creation of a subportal for women entrepreneurs on the Agency for Enterprise Development National SME Support Portal (see box 18 in chapter 4), which was designed to improve women's access to SME-related information and supports. Supported by ESCAP's Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship Programme, the subportal also signposts details on the policies and programmes in support of women entrepreneurs in several of Viet Nam's provinces.

Non-government initiatives

On the non-governmental side, a key player in the start-up ecosystem for Vietnamese women is the Women's Initiative for Startups and Entrepreneurship, a not-for-profit social enterprise established in 2017. The Initiative addresses gender-specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and helps them to start and grow their businesses through training, mentoring, financial-matching and business-matching, and connecting women with the resources and opportunities required for them to innovate and grow. One of the innovative programme features is the incubation/accelerator programme targeting start-ups founded or co-founded by women, which helps improve their business models and raise capital. The Initiative also has implemented the Women Entrepreneurs Amplifying Ventures and Economics project in Viet Nam, which used digital technology to empower, support and bring entrepreneurial skills to women.

Suggested policy actions

To better address the needs of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in Viet Nam and reduce the gender gaps, the Government should consider the following actions:

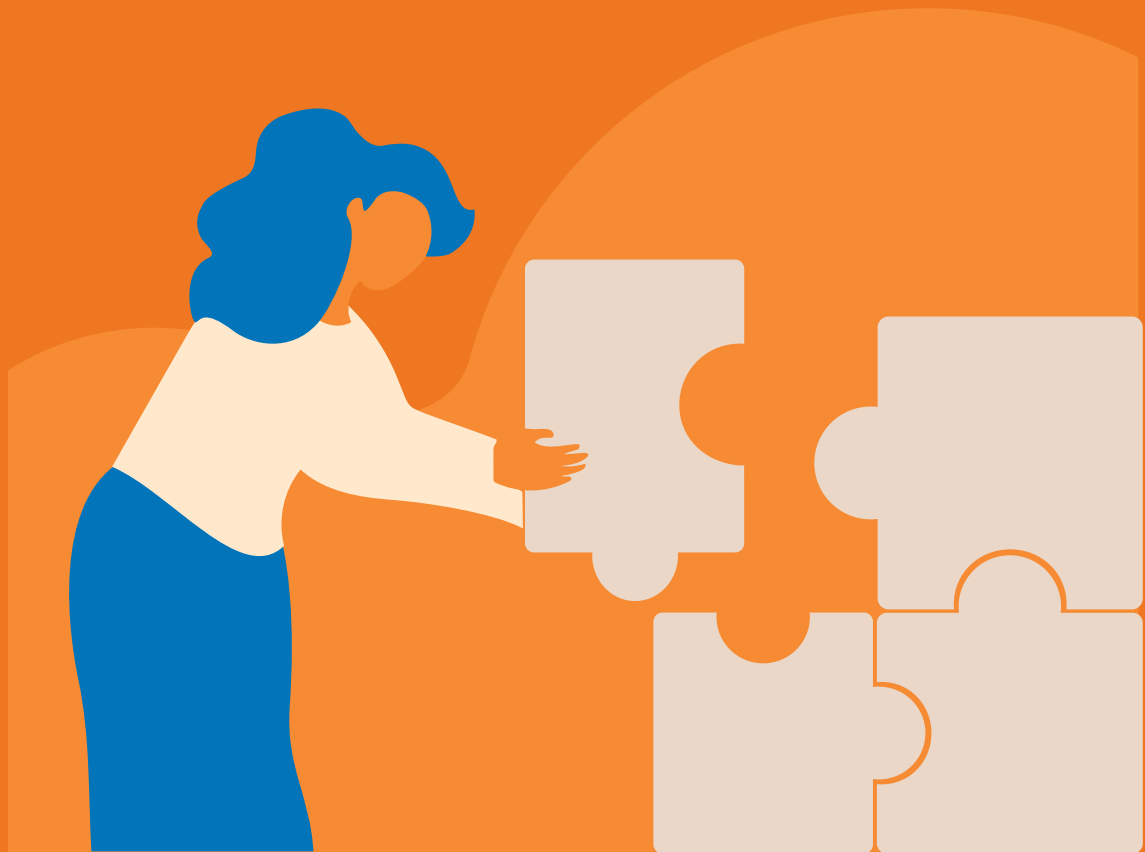
- ▶ Put in place the proper mechanisms to ensure that WSMEs are adequately represented in all incentives and programmes within the scope of the SME Law.
- ▶ Organize policy dialogues and develop information channels to exchange information on the implementation of SME-related policies to gain a better understanding of the situation affecting women entrepreneurs' access to the available support programmes and assistance.

- ▶ Further develop an ecosystem to support women-owned enterprises, with special emphasis on the agencies that support women-owned enterprises.
- ▶ Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of policy support to women-owned enterprises.
- ▶ Collect data on the operational situation of women-owned enterprises and the contribution of women-owned enterprises to the country's socioeconomic situation.

The *OECD SME and Entrepreneurship Policy in Viet Nam* offered additional recommendations to the Government of Viet Nam to shore up policy and programme support to women's entrepreneurship (OECD, 2021b). These included the following:

- ▶ Establish a government focal point for WED in the Agency for Enterprise Development to coordinate SME policies targeting WSMEs across ministries and agencies.
- ▶ Establish an expert panel comprised of experts from the private sector and civil society to identify gaps in support measures for women entrepreneurs and propose solutions.
- ▶ Develop new loan products in national development banks to address the constraints faced by WSMEs in access to credit.
- ▶ Design a dedicated exporter development programme for WSMEs to enhance their export-readiness through training, business matchmaking, participation in international trade missions, and access to export finance solutions.

4 | Key elements for women entrepreneur- centric policies and initiatives



KEY ELEMENTS FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEUR- CENTRIC POLICIES AND INITIATIVES

1

Foster
innovation
and
technology

2

Increase
access
to gender-
responsive
finance and
financial
services

3

Create enabling
laws and initiatives
to foster a gender-
responsive legal
and regulatory
system that
advances women's
economic
empowerment

4

Increase
(domestic
and
international)
market
access

5

Enhance
human
capital

6

Ensure access
to gender-
responsive
business
development
support (BDS)
services

7

Establish
multi-
stakeholder
governance
mechanisms

8

Effective policy
leadership and
coordination of the
promotion of
women's
entrepreneurship
development

9

Monitor the
impact of policies
and programmes
for women-
owned-led
enterprises



This chapter presents the key elements of women entrepreneur-centric policies, programmes, and initiatives in fostering women's entrepreneurship, as reflected in global good practices and experiences, including in the ASEAN region.

In this regard, a comprehensive framework of women entrepreneur-centric policies should seek to address the following areas:

1. Foster innovation and technology;
2. Increase access to gender-responsive finance and financial services;
3. Create enabling laws and initiatives to foster a gender-responsive legal and regulatory system that advances women's economic empowerment;
4. Increase (domestic and international) market access;
5. Enhance human capital;
6. Ensure access to gender-responsive business development support (BDS) services;
7. Establish multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms;
8. Effective policy leadership and coordination of the promotion of women's entrepreneurship development;
9. Monitor the impact of policies and programmes for women-owned-led enterprises.

The discussion provides the rationale for each of the women entrepreneur-centric policy/programme elements, relevant issues, implementation options to be considered for addressing the framework elements and examples of good practice initiatives.

4.1 FOSTERING INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Entrepreneurial innovation is an important factor in an enabling policy environment for MSMEs. This consists of encouragement of start-ups around priority high value-added, growth-potential sectors, promotion of higher value-added digital services, including e-commerce and fintech, incubation support and funding for innovation-related activities. This section includes a discussion of policy needs and action for supporting the digitalization and ICT capacity of women entrepreneurs, improving the role of women in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, and gender-responsive innovation-focused business incubators and accelerators.

Why is it important for women's entrepreneurship development?

Women-owned enterprises are less likely to be engaged in innovation sectors driven by technology, to adopt innovation, to be accessing government grant schemes that support innovation, research and development (R&D) or science and technology development, and to be participating in innovation-focused business incubator programmes. They may also have less capacity to employ digital solutions in their businesses.

- ▶ Women are generally not well-represented in STEM education programmes and careers, so the pipeline for women entrepreneurs in STEM fields is limited; globally, women entrepreneurs are underrepresented as technology entrepreneurs (OECD, 2019; Ewens and Townsend, 2020; PitchBook, Beyond the Billion and J. P. Morgan, 2021).
- ▶ Due to the "masculinization" of business incubators, women entrepreneurs are underrepresented across business

incubators and accelerators and accordingly are less likely than male founders to be beneficiaries of the education, mentoring, networking and capital resources offered in incubation and acceleration environments, even though these challenges are more acute for women entrepreneurs.

- ▶ Increasing the innovation-related activity and capacity of women entrepreneurs could make an important contribution to the economy and towards the creation of higher wage jobs.
- ▶ Governments have a key role to play in advancing technology entrepreneurship among women and ensuring that they have access to the related programmes and support offered to MSMEs.

Supporting the digitalization and information and communications technology capacity of women entrepreneurs

The acquisition of digital skills and adoption of digitization tools by women entrepreneurs is key to unleashing the potential of their businesses, and even more importantly so in the post-COVID world. Women entrepreneurs can leverage

ICTs and the digitalization of key aspects of a business to overcome barriers in gaining access to information, financing and payment platforms, conducting business transactions, gaining knowledge and skills, accessing new markets and participating in networks. Consequently, the adoption and greater use of ICTs can promote productivity growth, innovation and new economic activities for WMSMEs.

Traditionally, MSMEs are mostly low-tech, but as digital penetration increases and e-commerce markets expand nationally, they are becoming more technology literate. This, in turn, has led to the emergence of more technology-based MSMEs and start-ups. Women entrepreneurs have potential to lead in the digital transformation, including with technology-based enterprises, but they require inclusive development support. There are a number of examples of government-supported programmes in the ASEAN member States that aim to bring women entrepreneurs into the ICT field with a major focus on preparing them for Industry 4.0 and helping to bring their businesses online. The Women Netpreneur Programme in Malaysia is an example of an initiative to bring WMSMEs into the digital world of selling (see box 1).

Box 1. Helping women entrepreneurs to leverage technology to grow their businesses online: the Women Netpreneur Programme – Malaysia

The Women Netpreneur programme is organized by SME Corp Malaysia in collaboration with Gorgeous Geeks Malaysia, to help women entrepreneurs leverage technology to start and grow their businesses online. The programme also seeks to ensure that women entrepreneurs are continuously kept in the loop regarding the changing business landscapes and key megatrends that will permanently transform businesses, such as Industry 4.0, digitalization and technological convergence, big data analytics, e-commerce and financial technology (fintech).

The programme partners with the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation and private sector online and e-commerce platform providers, such as Google, Shopee, Lazada, Lelong, Facebook, Buy Malaysia (MPay) and Global Halal Data Pool, to help

Box 1. continued

women move their businesses online. First piloted in 2013 and revived in 2017, the programme targets women entrepreneurs who wish to start their own online business and learn the best practices via e-commerce platforms or who wish to expand and grow their existing business online and explore digital marketing tactics as part of their strategy. The programme consists of 10 sessions covering digital transformation, website set-up, packing and delivery, e-payment, digital branding and marketing, and using digital platforms. An average of 150 women participate in each of the 10-session programmes.

From 2017 to May 2022, the Women Netpreneur Programme trained more than 2,700 women entrepreneurs: 80 per cent successfully subscribed to online shopping platforms, such as Facebook, Shopee and Lazada, to market their businesses. The 2022 programme series is open to women-owned enterprises with a registration certificate (formal businesses) and will include e-commerce adoption sessions and workshops. Funding for the programme is provided by SME Corp under its Micro Connector Programme.

Sources: www.smecorp.gov.my/index.php/en/programmes1/2015-12-21-09-57-03/women-netpreneur-programme/; <https://gorgeousgeeks.net>

Increasing the role of women entrepreneurs in technology-driven fields

Increasing the role of women entrepreneurs in technology-driven fields, including STEM, which continue to be very male-dominated, is an emerging policy focus of governments. Part of the challenge is that women are not well-represented in STEM education programmes and careers and there is often a lack of female STEM role models, resulting in a limited pipeline for women entrepreneurs in STEM fields.

An option for encouraging more young women to pursue STEM studies and to explore entrepreneurship in these fields is to showcase successful women in science and technology and in high-growth innovative firms to serve as useful role models for young women on career possibilities in fields that they otherwise may not consider. In addition, these role models are important in inspiring potential women

entrepreneurs to explore technology-based business ideas.

Governments have a key role to play in advancing technology entrepreneurship among women and ensuring they have access to the programmes and support offered to MSMEs. In some instances, this may require adjustments to bring technology-oriented women into the entrepreneurship programmes. For example, in Government of Ireland had determined that in order to increase the number of women STEM entrepreneurs, it was not necessary to encourage more females to pursue STEM studies, but instead to provide an entry path for them into entrepreneurship. One way they are seeking to accomplish this is through the STEM Female Entrepreneurship Programme, implemented through a technology start-up acceleration model (see box 2).

Box 2. STEM Female Entrepreneurship Programme – Ireland

In 2013, women in Ireland made up approximately 25 per cent of the STEM workforce, but lagged considerably behind men in starting STEM-related businesses. The challenge was twofold – encourage more females to enter STEM fields of study and incentivize more of them to become STEM entrepreneurs with businesses that have high potential for growth and exports.

The solution was to launch the Exxcel STEM Programme, a platform for females with STEM-related business ideas to complete a pre-launch preparation. The programme was co-funded by Enterprise Ireland and the Cork Institute of Technology CIT with the ultimate goal of increasing activity in female STEM entrepreneurship. Delivered by the Rubicon Centre, an innovation centre and incubator at the Cork Institute of Technology, the programme was structured to develop the women's leadership skills, expose them to support from the technology ecosystem, build networking opportunities, and help them access national and international opportunities. This was done through trainings and one-on-one intensive mentoring to the start-ups one day per month over a six-month period to help with the business model and plan, marketing and sales, financing, and scaling. The part-time nature of the programme allowed women to keep their jobs prior to launching their venture.

The programme graduated the first nine ready-to-market women entrepreneurs in March 2015 and the second group in May 2016. The success stories and role models from the programme were used to inspire more women with STEM backgrounds to develop their own ventures in science and technology-related sectors.

Gender-responsive innovation-focused business incubators and accelerators

Business incubators are an instrument used by governments to foster technology-based or innovative start-ups. Women entrepreneurs are underrepresented across business incubators and accelerators and are, therefore, less likely than male founders to be beneficiaries of the education, mentoring, networking and capital resources offered in incubation and acceleration environments, even though these challenges are more acute for women entrepreneurs. Due to factors associated with the “masculinization” of business incubators, the male-centric networks of mostly male incubator managers, male-dominant selection panels and the lack

of outreach to women's networks, biases in recruitment and selection processes⁷⁵ act as barriers to entry for women into the incubator and accelerator programmes. Gender-insensitive programme design⁷⁶ and “macho culture” issues, especially in high-technology accelerators, create an environment in which women do not comfortably fit and a reason for women not wanting to join such programmes (Amezcuca and McKelvie, 2016; European Network of Business and Innovation Centres, 2016).

To bridge the gender gap, a lot needs to be done to promote gender diversity and inclusiveness in innovation business incubation and acceleration facilities and programmes. At the incubator level, some options for achieving more gender

inclusiveness are performing gender lens assessments of selection criteria, developing pre-accelerator programmes to build the capacity of women-founded teams to meet incubator criteria, being gender-responsive regarding time requirements, offering a babysitting service in the incubator, and providing online access to learning materials and participation in mentor sessions (Sasakawa Peace Foundation and Frontier Incubators, 2020; Sasakawa Peace Foundation and YGAP, 2021; WeEmpowerAsia and Bopinc, 2021). At the government level, governments could tie its funding for innovation

incubators and accelerators to their gender diversity approaches and outcomes. They could also encourage business incubators to become more gender-responsive by adapting some of their requirements and programmes to attract more women into the pipeline of incubator-ready clients. The Start-up Chile accelerator, a government-led initiative, demonstrates a positive outcome from just such of an approach to address the underrepresentation of women-led ventures in its accelerator programme components (box 3).

Box 3. Example of a public start-up accelerator programme with a targeted gender component – Start-up Chile

Start-up Chile is a government-led start-up accelerator programme launched by the Government in 2010 under the Chilean Economic Development Agency. The programme invests in start-ups in the e-commerce, software, social media, education, clean technology, advertising, apps and information technology sectors. It is open to applications from innovative, scalable start-ups in other countries, so it is global in nature. The programme has supported more than 5,000 entrepreneurs and invested in more than 2,300 start-ups. Start-up Chile is recognized as one of the best acceleration programmes globally, with a high survival rate of incubated start-ups and a propensity of more than 50 per cent of them to remain in Chile.

In 2015, Start-up Chile noted that only 15 per cent of the start-ups were founded by women. The lack of representation of women-led ventures in the accelerator programme was linked to their underrepresentation in other programme components to build a pipeline of accelerator-ready applicants. Keen to make their acceleration programmes accessible to both men and women, Start-up Chile decided to design a special boot camp for less experienced female entrepreneurs rather than to establish a gender quota for the accelerator. In line with this decision, Start-up Chile launched the “S-Factory”, a pre-acceleration diversity programme for start-ups led by female founders with less experience, determining that this would have a stronger impact on changing the low-female-founded start-up ratio in the accelerator programmes. The target is to attract female-led start-ups in the early stage of development that are technology-related with a potential global impact and willing to relocate to Santiago for the entire four months of the programme.

The S Factory is a 12-week programme designed to improve the capacity of first-time women entrepreneurs to join the pipeline of successful start-ups ready to apply

Box 3. continued

for the IGNITE acceleration and funding programme for start-ups with a functional product (validated idea/prototype development). This is done through an intense course load of pitch training, investor preparation, mentoring and connections. The online application requires information on the founders and team, the product and its attributes, the innovation aspects of the project and its potential to solve local, national or global problems. To qualify for the S Factory programme, at least one of the founders must be female, the venture is an early-stage project within the first 12 months of development, and the female founder is 100 per cent dedicated to the project. Successful applicants receive an equity-free investment of up to \$20,000, a one-year resident visa for the founder and team members, and access to the Santiago coworking space for the four months.

By 2019, the share of women-led ventures in Start-up Chile programmes (IGNITE and GROWTH) had increased to 26 per cent, indicating the success of special efforts to attract women through the S Factory pre-acceleration programme and to help them create scalable start-ups that can attract further funding investments from Start-up Chile and venture capital partners.

Sources: Start-up Chile brochure (<https://startupchile.org/content/uploads/brochure-start-up-chile-2022-eng-big-4.pdf>); <https://startupchile.org/en/femalefounderfactor>).

At the same time, **governments could also pay more homage to the creation of incubators and accelerators that specifically target women entrepreneurs/women-led enterprises**, which is becoming a more common practice in many countries and a promising approach to address a programme gap in supporting the start-up and

growth needs of innovative women-founded start-ups. Many women business incubators are initiated by successful women entrepreneurs and executives, but there are a growing number of government-initiated and supported women business incubators, such as the WE HUB in Telangana, India (see box 4).

Box 4. WE HUB – State-led incubator for women entrepreneurs in Telangana, India

The Women Entrepreneurs Hub (WE HUB), operational since 2018, is the first and only State-led business incubator exclusively for women entrepreneurs in India. Located in Hyderabad, the state capital, under the Information Technology, Electronics and Communication Department of the government of Telangana, the key objective of WE HUB is to provide a one-stop shop service to support women-led start-ups and women entrepreneurs with innovative ideas and solutions focusing on emerging

Box 4. continued

areas of technology. The mission of WE HUB is to ensure that women entrepreneurs have access to the technical, mentoring, financial, governmental and policy support required to start up, scale up and sustain accelerated growth. It does this mainly by offering an incubation programme specifically designed for girls and women to pursue entrepreneurship that builds a strong foundation for being innovative and is linked to government schemes and multi-stakeholder ecosystem supporters, including government entities, international aid agencies, private sector companies, academia, and financial institutions.

The scope of the work of WE HUB covers high potential urban and rural women and female students who it encourages to pursue opportunities in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics. With enhanced support, the Government aims to increase the number of women entrepreneurs, the quality of their start-ups, and their percentage share of all entrepreneurs from a base of less than 14 per cent (as per the 2015 Economic Census). The WE HUB incubation services include access to infrastructure, such as space, technological resources, mentors, venture capital pitch events, advisory and consulting services, network connections and linkages structured around three stages of the incubation journey:

- ▶ Pre-incubation: Facilitating innovators to build their start-ups by helping them move from ideation to prototype creation and synergizing their business plan with global best practices.
- ▶ Incubation: Seven-month incubation programme enabling women to transition from their prototype to a start-up business by extending support in mentoring, business strategy, market- and investment-readiness, investor-pitching, and interventions based on industry needs and current market trends.
- ▶ Acceleration: four-to-six-month programme assisting women-led enterprises to scale up into self-sustaining businesses and capacitating them to achieve tangible outcomes.

The WE HUB incubators are illustrative of a state-level, but decentralized model with strong digital presence and offerings and physical nodes in various locations, geared to overcome digital and literacy barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in rural and remote pockets. These physical nodes are often the result of partnerships with other organizations, such as the Association of Lady Entrepreneurs of India Industrial Estate, the Western Digital Corporation, and iHub (government IT incubator in Gujarat), which deliver WE HUB incubation and launch pad programmes to support start-ups in electronics, food processing, robotics, textiles, solar power, information technology, fintech, edtech and medtech. The co-incubation collaboration between WE HUB and iHub also involves discussions around policy frameworks and case studies on how to enable greater gender inclusion in incubation programmes based on WE Hub experience and expertise.

Box 4. continued

Being a government/state entity, WE HUB is able to coordinate mechanisms across government departments to deliver better support and services to women entrepreneurs, support women entrepreneurs with information and hand-holding on how to access a range of government services, and check on policy effectiveness. It can also help women entrepreneurs overcome complexities with business registration, prepare for access finance, and build their skills to manage and grow their enterprise.

One of the greatest strengths of WEHUB is its ability to leverage a range of partnerships across government agencies, corporates, universities, and development actors to amplify support for strengthening women's entrepreneurship. The WE HUB model is also being used in other states in India that can benefit from learning and replicating programmes, such as exchange initiatives for preincubation with the governments of Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir.

Source: ESCAP (2021b).

Relevance to the ASEAN member States

In the ASEAN member States, there are a number of government-run business incubators and/or government-funded business incubation programmes (such as university-based incubators). Depending on the level of participation of women-led start-ups in these incubator programmes, the Governments could promote the adoption of gender-responsive approaches to increase their representation, including special initiatives to build the capacity of women-led ventures to meet the incubator admission criteria, such as the actions taken by Start-up Chile example, as explained in box 3.

Different models are also used to establish women business incubators, some initiated and operated by the Government, but most are operated by donor or social enterprise organizations, women entrepreneurs' associations or private sector entities. The target groups of women for these incubators vary greatly, from single mother, low-income women, to scalable women micro-entrepreneurs, and in rare cases to technology entrepreneurs. For example, the Women's

Initiative for Start-ups and Entrepreneurship Women Innovation Accelerator, launched in Viet Nam in 2018, targets development of technology-based female-led start-ups through a competitive application process with the objective of fostering innovative start-ups with higher growth potential.⁷⁷ As one of the only female-targeted accelerator programmes in the ASEAN region focused on development of "innovative" start-ups and bringing women's ideas into the innovation milieu, it could be a model for other ASEAN member States.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns and social distancing restrictions, physical incubators had to close their facilities and move quickly to revert to online mechanisms to continue delivering incubation services to their clients, such as online training sessions and workshops, mentoring and coaching services, including online "pitching competitions", so that incubating enterprises could present their projects to investors and funders. This has been a viable option for delivering incubation services and enabling physical incubators to attract

promising start-ups from outside the immediate area into virtual programmes. For example, the government-supported “Sispreneur Incubation Class”, initiated by the Indonesian Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection in partnership with WL Axiata (an Indonesia-based mobile telecommunications services operator) in 2020, operates on a virtual basis to provide online incubation classes, training and mentoring to women micro-entrepreneurs help them become product-ready, market-ready, and digital and marketplace-ready by using digital technology to sell more of their products via social media platforms and e-commerce platforms.

In developing women business incubators, consideration could be given to placing more emphasis on targeting women entrepreneurs with innovative and higher potential business ideas (such as the Women Innovation Accelerator in Viet Nam), as well as developing an incubation model with potential for expanded geographic reach, such as by scaling the number of incubator locations, adopting more virtual delivery of incubator services and securing stable sources of annual funding for operating costs of the incubator programmes.

Summary of key policy options for fostering innovation and technology for women entrepreneurs

- ▶ Develop programmes to support women entrepreneurs in the adoption and greater use of ICTs to promote productivity growth, innovation and new economic activities.
- ▶ Promote successful females in the STEM field as role models for young women and aspiring women entrepreneurs and make special efforts to develop the pipeline of women entrepreneurs in STEM fields.
- ▶ Promote gender diversity in incubators and accelerators to bridge the gender gap in

access to the supports available in these facilities to help innovative businesses start, grow and create jobs. Tie government funding of incubators and accelerators to gender diversity approaches and outcomes.

- ▶ Support the creation of innovation incubators and accelerators that specifically target women entrepreneurs and women-founded start-ups.

4.2 INCREASING ACCESS TO FINANCE

The principle of “gender-responsive finance” takes into account the specific needs of women entrepreneurs while delivering services in an environment where gender bias is non-existent. If all credit and financial services were gender-responsive, the outcome would be equitable participation of women-owned enterprises. Delivery of gender-responsive financial services requires the acknowledgement of financial institutions of the gender-based differences between women and men clients (and prospective clients) and takes these differences into consideration in the design and delivery of products and services. It also requires recognition of their own gender biases and not ignoring gender-based constraints that perpetuate inequalities between women and men.

This section discusses access issues related to debt financing and equity financing.

Why is it important for women's entrepreneurship development?

- ▶ Access to credit and capital markets is a persistently reported obstacle to women's entrepreneurship in developed and developing countries.
- ▶ Women entrepreneurs are less likely than male entrepreneurs to be borrowing from

banks to finance the business; often perceived by banks as “riskier”. The inability to provide adequate collateral, lack of capacity to develop a strong financing proposal, and cultural barriers, such as mobility restrictions and higher demands on their time due to their domestic and family responsibilities, further limit their ability to access finance.

- ▶ The difficulties women entrepreneurs face in accessing finance can lead to smaller start-ups, undercapitalization of their enterprises and lower growth rates, and one of the factors in explaining the dominance of women's businesses in the microenterprise sector and the greater challenges they face in expanding into the small and medium-size enterprise classes.
- ▶ Women-founded enterprises are dramatically underrepresented in venture capital and business angel funding. The lack of women partners and investors in the venture capital industry and business angel networks, and the low share of women-led companies in their investment portfolios signal serious systemic gender gaps. This is largely due to gender biases in the traditionally male venture capital and business angel industries.
- ▶ Without addressing the gender-based constraints in accessing credit and equity finance, countries are losing out on the full economic potential of WMSMEs.
- ▶ Women's financial inclusion is critical to delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals target 8.3 on the role of access to finance for MSMEs, and target 8.10 on expanding access to financial services for all.
- ▶ The United Nations estimates that, through innovative financing instruments, such as women's bonds and impact investment

funds and specially developed fintech funds, \$100 million of public and private sector funding could be leveraged for investment in women entrepreneurs and women-owned-led enterprises in the Asia-Pacific region.

Accessing credit financing

Although all MSMEs face challenges in accessing capital, women entrepreneurs, especially in developing, emerging and transition economies, face additional and greater challenges. Generally, women entrepreneurs finance the start-up and early stages of their enterprises with their own savings and money from family and friends and less so from banks. Although women entrepreneurs may tend to be more cautious when it comes to borrowing money, the gender-based difficulties they encounter in doing so may be a critical factor in explaining the dominance of women's businesses in the microenterprise sector and the greater challenges they face in growing into the small and medium-size enterprise classes.

Microfinance has partly compensated for women's low access to formal finance, however, although microfinance institutions (MFIs) often have a large percentage of women among their microenterprise loan clients, the average loan size to women-owned enterprises is frequently much lower than to male-owned microenterprises and the investment portfolio favours men. As women entrepreneurs develop their enterprises, they need financial products and services that go beyond micro-credit ceilings. To date, the overwhelming majority of women entrepreneurs in developing economies are trapped in the “missing middle”, unable to access the finance needed to move beyond the microenterprise scale.

Policymakers would benefit from two critical inputs in assessing the gender gap in financing of WMSMEs and the appropriate remedial

actions to address these gaps: (1) research to better understand the particular constraints of women entrepreneurs in accessing financing in the country; and (2) evidence on the size of the gender gap in access to finance. To better understand the particular constraints of women entrepreneurs in accessing financing, research should be conducted to seek answers to questions, such as the following. Is it gender differences in property rights and other forms of assets that can be used as collateral for bank loans? Is it a lack of credit histories? Is it gender biases of financial institutions, such as perceptions of higher risk in lending to women or not being taken seriously as credible entrepreneurs? Is it inadequate financial literacy of women? Is it other constraints based on location, complexity of loan application processes, education level, or other factors? Estimating the size of the gender gap in access to finance requires the answer to two questions.

What is the supply of credit to women entrepreneurs and WMSME clients versus their male counterparts (share of loan clients, share of the business loan portfolio)? What is the gender difference in the scale of unmet demand for credit from MSMEs? The gap between the two is the gender gap to be addressed.

Evidence from these two input sources, if accessible, would assist in determining policy actions and measures to address gender-based issues. These could include the following:

- ▶ Issuance of laws prohibiting discrimination in access to credit based on gender (a very early regulatory action in the United States of America and Canada⁷⁸);
- ▶ Laws providing equal property and inheritance rights for women and men;
- ▶ Gender-sensitivity training of banks and loans officers (an early action taken in Canada⁷⁹);
- ▶ Simplified loan application processes, more flexible collateral requirements or special loan products tailored to the requirements of women entrepreneurs;
- ▶ Financial literacy programmes for women;
- ▶ Offer e-lending services through the application of fintech approaches.

More priority on gender inclusion in the National Financial Inclusion Strategy framework,⁸⁰ being implemented by all 10 ASEAN member States, can be a vehicle for tackling gender-specific barriers and improving access to financing for WMSMEs (Alliance for Financial Inclusion, 2017, 2021). The inclusion of gender can provide a policy foundation for action by the ministries and agencies responsible for MSMEs to close the financial inclusion gender gap, and should be an objective of the National Financial Inclusion Strategy in all of the ASEAN member



States, supported by the collection of sex-disaggregated data on financial inclusion of MSMEs.

Specifically targeting women entrepreneurs in credit and financial programmes and services

To address the challenges and more severe constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing credit, governments, financial institutions, NGOs or other bodies often establish special financing programmes for women entrepreneurs. These programmes have two objectives. The first is to improve women entrepreneurs' access to financing by addressing access constraints in the commercial financial system, such as gender-based risk perception, collateral issues and lack of experience in lending to WMSMEs. The second objective, through the presence of credit and financial services adapted to the needs of women-owned enterprises, is to build the financial access capacity of women entrepreneurs by improving their financial literacy and negotiating skills, and in developing credit histories and track records. Programmes that provide incentives for commercial banks to lend to WMSMEs, such as credit guarantee schemes or special credit lines for relending to WMSMEs, help the banks gain experience in lending to this market segment and better understand its potential, challenge any gender biases they may have, and ultimately lead to changes in the lending practices of commercial banks, while also releasing more credit financing to WMSMEs.

Over time, across countries, there have been many developments to address gender barriers in access to external financing. Examples from the ASEAN member States (and referred to in the country snapshots in chapter 3) highlight a number of recent innovations. These include the following:

- ▶ The new Cambodia SME Bank Women Entrepreneur Scheme;
- ▶ The new Cambodia Women Entrepreneur Guarantee Scheme.
- ▶ The VPBank loan packages for women-owned enterprises (Viet Nam) (see box 5).
- ▶ The agreement between the associations of banks and MFIs in Cambodia with the Cambodian Women Entrepreneurs Association to help informal women entrepreneurs access financing (Cambodia Investment Review, 2021).
- ▶ The *Ar-Rahmu BizNita* programme in Malaysia, which accepts gold jewellery from women entrepreneurs as collateral for loans, which addresses women's lesser ownership of immovable collateral for loans.

The Development Bank of the Philippines has also implemented gender-responsive programmes to support inclusive lending to women entrepreneurs, including a lending window to provide financial support to women entrepreneurs and help them grow beyond micro-credit, and the Inclusive Lending for Aspiring Women Entrepreneurs Business Loan Programme, which offers simplified lending procedures, flexible collateral policies, customized repayment schedules, and mentoring and advice from WomenBizPH.⁸¹

These examples demonstrate the range of options available to governments and banks to tailor loan products for women entrepreneurs and help address market and systemic failures affecting women's access to credit.

Box 5. Loan packages for women-owned enterprises – the VPBank, Viet Nam

In 2018, the Viet Nam Prosperity Joint Stock Commercial Bank (VPBank), the largest private bank in Viet Nam, was the first Vietnamese bank to adopt a strategy specifically designed for WMSMEs. The specifically designed loan package also included free access to non-financial services enabling women to share experiences and identify new networking opportunities for their businesses. By 2021, the VPBank lent \$600 million to 2,000 women entrepreneurs and women made up 25 per cent of the bank's MSME-client portfolio.

Through a partnership with the CARE Ignite Programme in 2019, VPBank was able to extend further extend its outreach to WMSMEs by facilitating their access to tailored financial products, alternative digital lending channels and a range of non-financial services (training, mentoring, digital capabilities, networks) to improve the health of their businesses. In 2021, the VPBank also benefited from a \$75 million loan agreement with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to promote financial access among WMSMEs, which will aid in efforts to close the gender financing gap in Viet Nam.

Source: FinEquity (2021).

Another recent development is the implementation of the World Bank Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative, Women Accelerating Vibrant Enterprises in Southeast Asia and the Pacific (WAVES) project in Viet Nam.⁸² The objective of the project is to strengthen the entrepreneurial skills and business management capacity of WMSMEs and to foster long-term behavioural change across the entrepreneurial ecosystem of public and private sector stakeholders to support the development and growth of women's enterprises. The WAVES programme works with financial institutions to develop and offer blended finance products to WMSMEs, explores how digital tools can support gender-responsive financing, and supports assessments and capacity-building for financial institutions⁸³ and WMSMEs. For WMSMEs, this is directed to financial literacy and business acceleration programmes, mentorship, and networking opportunities. Working both on the supply and demand sides of women's access

to financing, the WAVES model has potential for being delivered in other ASEAN countries.

Fintech offers innovative solutions to address access to financing for women-owned-led micro, small and medium enterprises

Innovations, such as fintech, are being employed to make financial services more accessible and available. This includes mobile money and mobile banking, which is being introduced by many banks, including in the ASEAN region. Some of the fintech solutions are specifically targeted to women entrepreneurs. For example, the UNCDF and ESCAP **Women MSME FinTech Innovation Fund**, launched in 2019, supported the piloting of innovative digital solutions to improve access to financing and the operational efficiency of WMSMEs in Cambodia, Myanmar and Viet Nam. The UNCDF and ESCAP **Women Enterprise Recovery Fund**, launched in 2021, also supported the development and expansion

of digital technology and digital finance solutions to alleviate the financial and other business constraints of women's enterprises disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Seven of the 10 projects funded by the Women Enterprise Recovery Fund that targeted WMSMEs were to organizations in Cambodia, Indonesia and Viet Nam.⁸⁴ In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the **United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) Shaping Inclusive Finance Transformation (SHIFT) Challenge Fund** worked with the leading State-owned bank, Banque Pour Le Commerce Extérieur Lao Public, to develop a new mobile money platform **designed for women-owned businesses that resell products supplied by fast-moving goods companies** to support their supplier transactions (UNCTAD, 2018, p. 35). This platform addresses the much harder time WMSMEs have in providing the collateral required for loans from formal financial institutions (fewer than half of Laotian women are in possession of a home or a title deed in their name), while acknowledging that more than 80 per cent of women use mobile phones, which offers new ways for financial service providers to deliver affordable financial services to them. Through the mobile money platform, WMSMEs can begin building a formal financial history, are able to use their relationship with the supplier as partial collateral for business loans, and later use their credit scores to take out business loans.

Ministries and agencies responsible for MSMEs can build on projects such as these to increase the potential of more WMSMEs to digitalize their businesses and participate in digital access to financing options. The delivery of fintech solutions is particularly relevant to the banking and microfinancing sectors, which should be further encouraged to make the shift from traditional banking methods to new delivery channels. However, making greater use of fintech solutions to reach women entrepreneurs

requires policy support to increase women's capacity in the use of digital skills.

Women entrepreneurs and access to equity financing

Women entrepreneurs are only beginning to tap into formal seed and venture capital programmes as sources of financing. As more women move into high-growth sectors, access to equity financing becomes increasingly important, particularly for those in high-tech, innovative firms. The current policy trend in developed countries to improve women's access to growth funds, particularly equity capital, is also gaining traction in developing and emerging economies.

Although the demand-side issues are a factor in the venture capital-backed funding of women-owned enterprises, namely venture capital companies receive considerably fewer requests for funding from women-owned firms, studies reveal gender biases in the evaluation of investment opportunities by male-dominated venture capital companies, which place women at a disadvantage in accessing traditional venture capital. In 2020, start-ups led by all-women founder-teams received only 2.3 per cent of all venture capital investments in the United States (Bittner and Lau, 2021). In 2021, only 15.4 per cent of the general partners (and cheque-writers) in United States venture capital firms were women (PitchBook, *Beyond the Billion* and J. P. Morgan, 2021). The small representation of women partners in venture capital firms results in considerable gender bias in the industry and in the selection of venture capital-backed enterprises.⁸⁵ Studies also find evidence of gender bias in the allocation of angel investment funds.⁸⁶ As investors tend to invest in people like themselves ("homophily" effect), the paucity of women among venture capital and angel investors leaves women entrepreneurs without adequate access to investment funds (Kaplan and VanderBrug, 2014). These

findings have two important implications. First, women entrepreneurs pitching to a venture capitalist can expect to have lower chances of success based on gender. Second, even though venture capitalists and investors stress meritocracy in their investment decisions, in reality, the investment process subtly discounts women by not recognizing the implicit biases in the investment selection process that disproportionately favour ventures with male founders. Options for gender rebalancing in the equity financing sector include attracting more women investors and advisors as part of traditional venture capital firms and forming women's venture capital funds that specifically direct investments in women-owned enterprises.

To address the venture capital gap in backing female-led businesses, over the past decade, the number of women-focused venture capital funds and angel networks and the amount of capital they are investing in women-led businesses have increased.⁸⁷ This bodes well for women-founded businesses looking for equity capital, who often seek out female investors, and whose chances of success in securing venture financing can rise with a female investor in the room (PitchBook, *Beyond the Billion* and J. P.

Morgan, 2021). Even so, women continue to be vastly underrepresented among the investment teams of venture capital-backed firms.

In terms of relevant policy options to address gender gaps in equity financing, governments could take actions to adjust for gender bias in government-backed venture capital funds by setting gender quotas for their top staff or for the targeting of women-led start-ups, and foster linkages for women entrepreneurs with the investment community (OECD, 2019). Governments could also encourage an increase in the presence of women business angels by supporting business angel networks and associations to develop training and orientation programmes to attract and inform more women angel investors, or by providing online platforms for potential women investors to learn about angel investing. These policy actions would help address the supply side of the gender disparity in the angel industry and stimulate demand from women entrepreneurs to seek angel investments.

An excellent example of a government action to build capacity for a more gender-inclusive venture capital industry is the Inclusive Women Venture Capital Initiative from Canada (see box 6).

Box 6. The Inclusive Women Venture Capital Initiative – Government of Canada

A recent initiative of the Government of Canada is the 2022 launch of the Inclusive Women Venture Capital Initiative. The aim of the three-year, 15 million Canadian dollars (Can\$) (US\$11.8 million) programme is to respond to gender barriers in the venture capital environment by building a more inclusive venture capital environment for Canadian women. It funds projects to strengthen the capacity of women entrepreneurs to access venture capital funding to increase the representation of women in the venture capital industry and other initiatives to reduce biases in the venture capital industry. The initiative is calling for proposals from Canadian not-for-profit organizations with a focus on supporting women in the venture capital environment, such as business or investor associations; business accelerators and

Box 6. continued

incubators; business and entrepreneur support organizations and associations; research and innovation hubs; and post-secondary academic institutions or research institutes.

The project budget from individual proposals can range from Can\$600,000 to 5 million. The services provided through each project proposal must be at a national or multiregional scale, covering at least five provinces or territories. The funding available under the initiative cannot be used to provide direct capital investment to women-owned or-led businesses, or to create investment funds, but must focus on capacity-building. Focus areas of proposals can include one or more of the following:

- ▶ Assist women entrepreneurs to better understand available financing options and enable them to pursue and access such options;
- ▶ Support efforts to advance and increase the representation of women in roles, such as investors and fund managers in various venture capital industry contexts;
- ▶ Provide education and training to support equitable access to funding and/or promotion of related practices to the venture capital industry;
- ▶ Engage investors to better understand, adapt to and work with women entrepreneurs or their enterprises;
- ▶ Foster networking or mentoring models to facilitate access to capital for women entrepreneurs and their businesses;
- ▶ Strengthen the network of women and diverse entrepreneurship organizations in Canada, aligned with the objectives of the Inclusive Women Venture Capital Initiative.

Source for more information: See Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (2022a).

Relevance to the ASEAN member States

Development of the venture capital industry in the ASEAN region varies considerably by country (much more developed in Singapore than in the Lao People's Democratic Republic), however, there is limited evidence of venture capital and angel investment targeting women-owned firms. The Angel Investment Network Indonesia, launched in 2012 as an angel funding "seed" platform targeting early-stage investments in

women-led start-ups, was the first such network in the ASEAN region and often referenced as a good practice (box 7). There is no evidence in the ASEAN member States of government venture capital funds giving consideration for women-owned ventures, such as in the Republic of Korea, where the Ministry of SMEs and Startups is mandated to support programmes specially designed to encourage and give preference to start-ups and venture businesses led by

women entrepreneurs. The 2019 Masterplan for Promoting Women's Entrepreneurship Activities allocated a budget of 30 billion Republic of Korea won (₩) (\$23 million) to the state-linked Korea Venture Investment Corporation for the Women Venture Fund, which will reach a total

of ₩ 100 billion by 2022 (Republic of Korea, Ministry of SMEs and Start-ups, 2019). The Korea Venture Investment Corporation allocates this government funding to venture capital firms to invest in start-ups founded by women.

Box 7. Angel Investment Network Indonesia

The original core of Angel Investment Network Indonesia angel investors was initially comprised of 15 high-profile business leaders and successful women entrepreneurs who wanted to help other Indonesian women grow their businesses through mentoring, networking and seed funding (open to co-investment with other angels or venture capital firms). The Network has developed significantly over the past decade, broadening the scope and scale of its investment partners, investments and investment targets, but applies impact investing and gender-lens principles in the screening of investment proposals. In 2021, of the Network enterprises showcased to investors, 55 per cent either had female ownership, women in the executive suite, or included women as the venture's primary target market.

In 2021, it partnered with Teja Ventures, a female-founded Singapore venture capital firm, to organize the global "She Loves Tech" start-up competition for women and technology in Indonesia. "She Loves Tech" competition seeks out the best entrepreneurs and technology for transformative impact, and offers the finalists opportunities for venture acceleration (mentoring and workshops) to make them investment- and market-ready and able to compete on the "She Loves Tech" global stage.

Source: ANGIN (2021).

Rise of crowdfunding as an option for women-led firms seeking investment and for women investors

Crowdfunding, a fintech innovation, is a rapidly emerging and increasingly popular mechanism for raising funds and attracting investments for a project. The valuation of the global crowdfunding market reached \$13.5 billion in 2021 and is expected to increase to \$28.2 billion by 2028.⁸⁸ Partly due to the relative gender anonymity of the Internet, which diffuses the unconscious and unintentional gender bias in the venture capital sector, crowdfunding has disproportionate effects in favour of women entrepreneurs. This

results in increased participation of women as investors and an increased flow of capital to women-led projects.⁸⁹ While crowdfunding does not totally eliminate gender barriers in raising money, the presence of more women investors increases the level of sensitivity to women-led projects targeting women's markets, such as the fashion and food sectors, and leads to greater success of women entrepreneurs in raising funds for their projects than from banks and traditional venture capital funding.

As part of the crowdfunding phenomenon, successful women entrepreneurs and

executives are stepping up to improve women entrepreneurs' access to crowdfunding through mentoring and coaching on how to improve their crowdfunding campaigns.

Gender bonds, an innovation in the financing of women-led enterprises

A very recent development in the funding of women entrepreneurs is the use of “**gender bonds**” as an instrument to attract investments in women-owned enterprises. The first such bond programme was the IFC Banking on Women bonds, launched in 2013 (IFC, 2013)⁹⁰, which essentially created a new asset class for retail and institutional investors who want to support projects with positive social impact.

Gender bonds are still a nascent market, but with increasing global interest in “impact investing”, the general success of gender bonds indicates the potential of this funding instrument for advancing gender equality, addressing the financing gap for women-owned businesses and improving the institutional capacity of lending organizations to better understand the needs and opportunities of the women's market. In accordance with the ASEAN Social Bond Standards⁹¹ and the core principles of the International Capital Market Association, a bond must provide documentation of its success in achieving “impact”, which requires the ability to collect and track sex-disaggregated data on the number of MSME clients and the total monetary value of these loans.⁹²

The first private sector Women Entrepreneurs Bonds in the ASEAN countries was the Bank of Ayudhya (Krungsri) bond issue in Thailand in 2019 (referred to in the Thailand snapshot in chapter 3) (see box 8). Later, in 2020, Hana Bank of Indonesia issued a gender bond, the first-ever sustainable bond issue in the country. Supported by an investment of \$200 million from IFC through the Women Entrepreneurs Finance

Initiative programme, the bond is intended to unlock financing for WSMEs in Indonesia and contribute towards achieving the country's goal of reducing the gender gap.

Although the two gender bond issues in ASEAN are driven by private banks, national development banks can also be issuers of gender bonds targeting WMSMEs. This is exemplified by the gender bond issued in 2020 by the Mexican Trust Funds for Rural Development (*Los Fideicomisos Instituidos en Relación con la Agricultura/FIRA*), a second-tier development bank (public trust under the trusteeship of the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit and the Bank of Mexico).⁹³ In alignment with its commitment to enhance gender equality and strengthen its portfolio of projects aimed at supporting women, FIRA seeks to expand the resources available to finance women-led projects in rural areas. The 3 billion Mexican pesos (Mex\$) (\$150 million) bond offering, oversubscribed by almost four times,



Box 8. The Women Entrepreneurs Bonds, Thailand

The Bank of Ayudhya (*Krungsri*) issued the Women Entrepreneurs Bonds in 2019, in compliance with the International Capital Markets Association Social Bond Principles and the ASEAN Social Bond Standards. The bond investment of up to \$220 million was supported by the Women Entrepreneurs Opportunity Facility, a joint initiative of the IFC and the global 10,000 Women initiative of Goldman Sachs to expand access to capital for women entrepreneurs globally. IFC invested \$150 million and *Deutsche Investitions und Entwicklungsgesellschaft* (DEG) invested \$70 million in the bonds. The intent of the bonds is to boost lending to women-owned-led MSMEs in Thailand and reduce the estimated financing gap of \$25 billion, which accounts for 61 per cent of the overall SME finance gap in the country. This certified and insured bond issue is intended to expand credit lines to WSMEs and thereby support Thai women entrepreneurs in taking their businesses to the next level and contributing further to the growth of the economy. At the end of December 2021, women accounted for 48 per cent of the bank's SME Business Bank borrowers.

Krungsri considers the Women Entrepreneurs Bond as an opportunity to contribute to the broader goal of financial inclusion for the underserved WSME market segment in Thailand. The bond issue is also consistent with the bank's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Sources: Krungsri (2021); DEG Press Office (2019).

will help tackle the barriers Mexican women face in access to land, capital and technology that limits their economic participation and empowerment (IDB, 2020). Thus, the issuance of gender or women entrepreneurs bonds can be considered a feature of government policy.

Summary of key policy options for increasing access to financing for women-owned-led micro, small and medium enterprises

To increase access to credit financing and help address market and systemic failures affecting women's access to credit, governments could take the following actions:

- ▶ Undertake studies to fully understand the gender-based constraints for WMSMEs in accessing financing.
- ▶ Implement credit guarantee schemes for WMSMEs to compensate for their lack of collateral, either through special provisions in a SME credit guarantee scheme or a separate women entrepreneur credit guarantee scheme.
- ▶ Encourage banks to implement gender-responsive financial services to WMSMEs, such as lending windows and special business loan programmes.
- ▶ Develop women entrepreneur loan funds that can be accessed directly by WMSMEs or accessed by banks for relending to WMSMEs.
- ▶ Implement programmes to create a pathway for women micro-entrepreneurs to transition from microfinance to commercial bank lending.

- ▶ Promote the adoption of gender inclusive practices in the commercial banking sector.
- ▶ Commit to the collection of sex-disaggregated data on MSME loan clients.
- ▶ Offer large-scale financial literacy training programmes for women.
- ▶ Support fintech solutions to make financial services more accessible to WMSMEs, such as mobile money, mobile banking and financial transaction platforms.
- ▶ Engage in negotiations with international financial institutions to partner with global women entrepreneur finance initiatives at the country level, such as the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative Women Accelerating Vibrant Enterprises in Southeast Asia and the Pacific (WAVES) project, and Women Entrepreneur Bond issues.

To address gender gaps in equity financing, Governments could take the following actions:

- ▶ Adjust for gender bias in government-backed venture capital funds by setting gender quotas for their top staff and for the targeting of women-led start-ups.
- ▶ Support the development of women-targeted venture capital funds and the integration of more female investors in traditional venture capital industry space.
- ▶ Encourage an increase in the presence of women business angels by supporting business angel networks and associations to develop training and orientation programmes to attract more women angel investors, or by providing online platforms for potential women investors to learn about angel investing.
- ▶ Ensure that the regulatory system is in place to support equity-based crowd-funding platforms.

4.3 CREATING ENABLING LAWS AND INITIATIVES

A “gender-responsive business environment” is one in which the policy, legal, institutional, and regulatory conditions that govern business activities take into account the dynamics of socially constructed behaviours, norms and relationships between men and women and gives women the same economic rights and opportunities as men (Miles, 2017). It considers evidence of the business environment factors that affect women's enterprises and employment differentially to that of men's (such as sociocultural binding constraints on women) and how this can undermine or accelerate WEE, particularly women's ownership of and access to assets, agency to make decisions, and decent employment (Donor Committee for Enterprise Development, 2016a; Miles, 2017). Furthermore, it ensures that specific laws and regulations are clearly enforced so that women are not denied their legal rights and access to a fair distribution of economic resources and opportunities based on the application of customary laws and practices, which may take precedence over constitutional and other codified laws.

Why it is important for women's entrepreneur development?

- ▶ In many countries, women do not have the same legal rights and opportunities as men and are, therefore, less economically empowered. If this situation is not addressed at various levels of the institutional ecosystem, the development of women-owned enterprises will generally continue to lag.
- ▶ Many laws affecting business have not been subjected to a gender impact assessment and do not consider the gendered impact.

- ▶ Improving national legal and administrative frameworks related to employment, property rights, land and inheritance, and ensuring that women have equal access to the full range of credit and financial services to fully develop their productive assets, land and businesses, are all enabling factors for the development of women's entrepreneurship.
- ▶ Gender inequalities in labour laws affect women's potential for wage employment, mobility to better jobs, and transition to higher value-added enterprises as entrepreneurs. Unequal access to labour markets puts women at a disadvantage in terms of being able to gain know-how and experience and build networks that will be of benefit should they become entrepreneurs.
- ▶ Gender inequalities in laws (and customary practices) affecting property and inheritance rights prejudice against women in amassing capital that could be used to start a business and providing collateral to support credit financing.
- ▶ Appearing to be gender-neutral, the burden of business registration processes is often larger for women entrepreneurs because they have less time (due to their dual work and domestic responsibilities) and resources to overcome time-consuming and expensive requirements, are often less knowledgeable about registration procedures, are less likely to be the targets of government-disseminated relevant information, and face greater difficulty in travelling to the business registration office or one-stop shops to file the necessary documents. The inaccessibility of online registration systems also weighs more heavily on women.
- ▶ Despite efforts of donor organizations to advocate consideration of the gender context in business environment reforms in developing economies, as well as

implementing programmes to gender-sensitize the policy and legal framework, institutional arrangements, and regulatory and administrative frameworks, much work remains to be done to build the capacity of governments in the implementation of gender-equal business environment reforms (Donor Committee for Enterprise Development, 2016a⁹⁴).

The key role of gender impact assessments

The WBL assessment covers the laws considered most relevant to levelling the playing field for women's economic opportunity and entrepreneurship (see section 2.1 and annex III). A number of other laws affecting business, particularly entrepreneurship, such as tax law, investment law, enterprise law, procurement law, and SME Law (and their regulations), are also important. More often, these laws are "gender-neutral" in design, but may have significant implications for equality in the participation of male and female-owned businesses and their economic performance. A gender assessment review of these laws would likely prove beneficial to more equal opportunity for women entrepreneurs.

Gender impact assessments answer the central question of whether a law, policy, or measure reduces, maintains, or increases inequalities between women and men (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017). They are a useful mechanism for determining the gender-sensitivity of laws, regulations and policies and taking into account the differences between women and men that are relevant to the given policy field. These assessments may be conducted during the draft phase of a new law or policy (ex-ante) to identify potential adverse gender impacts, the policies or measures to be avoided or the complementary measures to mitigate the adverse effects of the planned

reform or to produce more positive outcomes. They may also be conducted to measure the impact of the law, policy or measure following its implementation (ex post).

Many developed countries require a gender analysis of new legislative and regulatory proposals. For example, the Government of Canada commits “to supporting the full implementation of gender-based analysis across federal departments and agencies”. Most recently, the Action Plan on Gender-based Analysis (2016–2020) mandated the Minister of Status of Women Canada to identify barriers to implementation of a gender-based analysis at the departmental and agency level, work to overcome these barriers, and monitor progress towards a more consistent application of gender-based analyses across the government to ensure incorporation of gender considerations in submissions to the Treasury Board and on

to Parliament.⁹⁵ In many developing countries, any number of laws and regulations may be adversely affecting the emergence and growth of women entrepreneurs with no consideration of their gender impacts.

The adoption of using a gender impact assessment as a practice is not well advanced in the ASEAN countries. However, as the commitment to gender equality under the law and gender mainstreaming gain momentum, a range of laws, regulations and policies affecting WEE and women's entrepreneurship should be subjected to such assessments. The gender assessment review of the Viet Nam Law on Supporting SMEs, which identified a number of areas for improving the gender-responsiveness of the law and its policy provisions, is an example of the outcome of a gender impact assessment process (see box 9).

Box 9. A gender lens review of the Viet Nam Law on Supporting SMEs

The gender lens review of the Viet Nam Law on Supporting SMEs, carried out in 2021, found that many of the eight key dimensions of the Law did not have specific provisions or regulations for the targeting of WSMEs. Recommendations from the review stressed the importance of collecting sex-disaggregated data on the different aspects of SME development reflected in the legislation in order to better assess the impact of interventions on WSMEs. This applied to provisions ranging from the initial step of registration to dimensions of access to credit loans, information, technology, human resource development and transition from household businesses to enterprises, as well as on the type of SME support provided and its impact in order to adequately assess the benefits of support interventions and policies for WSMEs. The review also recommended the following:

- ▶ Strengthen the institutional coordination of the various stakeholders (including provincial authorities) to produce a whole-of-government approach;
- ▶ Leverage the private sector and women's business associations to build a favourable support ecosystem;
- ▶ Ensure that information about the support provisions and measures of the SME Law is well communicated to women entrepreneurs;

Box 9. continued

- ▶ Develop a robust gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation framework to track the progress of the provisions of the SME Law and to continue to improve upon and address gaps for inclusion of WSME.

This review provided the necessary insights to inform further legal reform and actions in the implementation decrees and circulars where the greatest gaps between male and female owned businesses remain. All of these recommendations were successfully included in the revised law in the form of Decree 80 and a clear action plan for its implementation has been chalked out by the Ministry of Planning and Investment.

Source: ESCAP (2022b).

Relevance of labour laws, property and inheritance rights, and business registration formalities to women's entrepreneurship

Three sets of legal and regulatory areas are particularly relevant for the advancement of women's entrepreneurship: labour laws and regulations; laws affecting property and inheritance rights; and business registration formalities.

Equal labour and employment rights and women's entrepreneurship

Equal access to labour markets and rights to gainful equal employment and employment opportunities are fundamental to WEE, however, gender inequalities in labour and employment laws can create barriers to women's access to the labour market and lead to poor working conditions. Once in the labour market, women in developing countries are more likely than men to be classified as "unpaid family workers" and often disproportionately concentrated in informal work and a small number of sectors of activity (occupational segregation), and experience lower returns to employment. Unemployment rates are much higher for women than men in many countries, indicating that women face

more severe barriers to labour market entry and have more difficulty in securing a job even when in the labour market. These phenomena exist largely due to the absence of equality provisions in labour laws and regulations (and their application), although other laws, such as family law and marriage laws may also affect women's opportunity to participate in employment and enterprise activities.

Equality of women's labour market access and participation is relevant to WED because the majority of entrepreneurs actually start their businesses after having spent some time in paid employment. Consequently, countries with a low female labour force participation rate have a smaller pool of potential entrepreneurs from which to draw. Unequal access to labour markets puts women at a disadvantage in terms of being able to gain know-how and experience and build networks that benefit them should they become entrepreneurs. Labour market segregation is also a factor for entrepreneurial activity. Because entrepreneurs generally start enterprises based on their skills, knowledge and experience, the types of enterprises they set up are largely a reflection of this. Limiting women's labour market experience to traditionally female

spheres of activity, dictated by social norms as acceptable for a woman, produces gender-related inequalities in women's capacity for making occupational preferences and less diversification in the types of businesses they start compared to the choices men can make. Expanding the scope of occupational and employment choices for women bodes well for entrepreneurship, as it leads to more women starting businesses in higher value-added sectors and results in overall gains for the economy.

Women's property and inheritance rights and women's entrepreneurship

The issue of property rights is linked to entrepreneurship and MSME development in a number of key ways. Strong property rights can allow women to leverage these assets for economic gain, increasing their financial security and providing them with the collateral needed to start a business. Weak property rights disadvantage women entrepreneurs in credit markets, as it affects their ability to pledge property and assets as collateral for loans.

The issue of property rights can be complex. Legal marital regimes, family laws, divorce laws, inheritance laws, and customs and social norms also define property rights between spouses, as well as other key laws underpinning social institutions. Regardless of their legal property rights, women can be disadvantaged in statutory and customary land tenure systems, giving them weak property and contractual rights to land and other natural resources. This creates an uneven playing field for women farmers and is particularly important in countries where many women are running agricultural enterprises, such as in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam. Many women farmers in the ASEAN region do not hold land titles to their farms, typically farming on land that belongs to the families or clans or their partners or spouses (OECD, 2021c). Viet Nam presents a good example of the impact on the economic empowerment of women as a result of revisions to the Land Law (box 10).

Box 10. Changes in the Land Law in Viet Nam resulted in large gains for women's land titles

In accordance with the Land Law of 1993, the first land tenure certificates were issued in the name of the "head of household", usually, in the name of men only. Revisions to the Land Law in 2003 clearly stated that land use right certificates should be issued as a joint title, with both the wife's and the husband's names on the certificate. Since the Land Law 2004, all new land use right certificates must include the names of both spouses. The joint land tenure certificates reduce gender inequality in legal access to land. In addition to empowering women, women's legal access to land title increases their ability to use property for economic investments. The land use right certificates with both spouse's names allows the woman (or man) to directly borrow bank loans without authorization from the spouse whose name is on the certificates and enables women, those who are not household heads, to directly take bank loans using certificates without complicated paper procedures.

Box 10. continued

An analysis of the impact of the new land use right certificates revealed that the benefits for women of joint titles were more than just symbolic (World Bank, 2008). Approximately 42 per cent of people surveyed used their newly issued land use right certificate for investment, either as a collateral to borrow from banks or share for investment. Having their name on the land title gives women a greater say in important decisions pertaining to the household's land, avoids male monopoly over jointly owned assets, ensures equal rights in the event of a conflict, and along with the joint-title land tenure certificates ensures greater equality between husband and wife compared to single-title land tenure certificates.

Clause 4, Article 98 of the 2013 Land Law states that land use rights and the ownership of houses and other land-attached assets would be the joint property of husband and wife, so the full names of both must be recorded on the certificate of land use rights and ownership of houses and other land-attached assets, unless husband and wife agreed to record the full name of only one. A new certificate that records the full names of both husband and wife may be granted upon request of either.

Viet Nam is not the only country that has given women the right to include their name in property titles; in fact, most national legislation provides for joint titles. What is unique about Viet Nam is the Government's concerted effort to implement the measure as widely as possible, as well as an understanding within society that joint titles can play a major role in improving women's economic status. In that respect, the success story of joint titles in Viet Nam can serve as an inspiring example for other countries that are serious about promoting women's rights, and are looking for ways to move from equality on paper to equality in practice.

Source: World Bank (2008).

Inheritance laws are also very relevant to women's entrepreneurship. If women do not have equal inheritance rights, they are less able than men to amass property and wealth that could be used to help finance a start-up business. The 2022 WBL report states that women in more than 20 per cent of economies do not have equal property and inheritance rights and that the pace of reforms in these areas is very slow (World Bank, 2022).

In the South Asia subregion, there has been only limited reform in the issue of women's

property rights; the engrained social norms dictating inheritance rules may be a strong influencing factor in the slow pace of change in reforming laws governing property ownership and inheritance (World Bank, 2022). In addition, implementation of formal legislation is often hindered by social norms and women's lack of awareness of their rights, both of which play a role in whether women can claim their legal rights to land and property.

Recognizing that these gender "asset" gaps are a critical indicator of women's empowerment

and their capacity to function as entrepreneurs, it is not surprising that women entrepreneurs experience challenges in accessing financing due to collateral constraints. Strengthening their property and inheritance rights (as equal title holders and beneficiaries) would make a significant difference to their financial and credit capacity. Until full equality rights are ensured, it is incumbent on governments to consider policies to ease their collateral constraints, such as by special credit guarantee provisions or other incentives to encourage financial institutions to extend loans to otherwise bankable women entrepreneurs for their projects (issues discussed in section 4.2).

Business registration formalities and women's entrepreneurship

One of the most important areas of regulation applying to private enterprises relates to the requirements for formally registering a business and for obtaining the various necessary licences or permits to begin operations. Business registration processes may appear to apply equally to businesses owned by women and men, but, in fact, the burden of registration is often even larger for women entrepreneurs because they have less time (due to their dual work and domestic responsibilities) and resources to overcome time-consuming and expensive requirements (Simavi, Manuel and Blackden, 2010). Other factors, such as less knowledge about registration procedures (combined with inadequate efforts on the part of government to disseminate relevant information to them), greater difficulty in travelling to the business registration office or one-stop shop to file the necessary documents, and the inaccessibility of online registration systems weigh more heavily on women. In many countries, a large percentage of women entrepreneurs operate their businesses in the informal economy and women's share of informal businesses is much higher than their share of formal enterprises.

This suggests that registration procedures may have differential impacts on enterprises owned by women, placing women entrepreneurs at a disadvantage in accessing resources and opportunities.

The issue of formalization of MSMEs is on the radar screen of ACCMSME and policy options are being explored (OECD, 2020). The objectives of government reforms in this area should be to ensure that measures to ease the process of business formalization do not inadvertently discriminate against women and enable them to benefit from regulatory reforms on the same basis as men (Simavi, Manuel and Blackden, 2010). In addition to reducing the number of steps and time required to complete the business registration process (simplification), which is critical for women entrepreneurs, efforts may be needed to create greater awareness among women of the procedures and benefits of registering their enterprise; make business registration facilities more accessible; and enable online business

The provision of online and other forms of easily accessible regulatory information and services can increase the rates of formalization of women MSMEs



registration. It may also require extending guidance to women on how to comply with the requirements. Offering counselling advice and assistance with the business registration process may be particularly helpful in supporting the formalization of women's micro and small enterprises. This could be provided by women entrepreneurs' associations, women's unions, or chambers of commerce and industry in partnership with and on behalf of the business registration authorities.

Administrative options for facilitating business registration and licensing may include implementing a "one window scheme" for business registration and licensing renewal tailored for WMSMEs that takes their key constraints into consideration – a key recommendation coming out of Cambodia (ESCAP, 2020a). Other suggestions to support women entrepreneurs are setting up a one-roof system to facilitate business registration processes, establishing one-stop business registration shops and implementing online registration systems (ESCAP, 2021b). The provision of online and other forms of easily accessible regulatory information and services can increase the rates of formalization of women MSMEs and improve public service delivery to such enterprises. For example, the Cambodia One-Roof System not only enables online business registration via a single-entry digital platform, but it also offers a non-digital option for entrepreneurs with limited digital access and skills (which may include many women's enterprises). The Negosyo (business) workstream of the Philippines Department of Trade and Industry portal enables online registering of a business name through the Business Name Registration System, and includes YouTube seminars and trainings to support the registration and acquiring a business name. In 2021, women registrants comprised almost 60 per cent of the new business name registration submissions.

Summary of key policy options for a gender-responsive legal and regulatory system

Gender impact assessments

- ▶ Adopt the practice of conducting formal gender impact assessments on new laws, regulations and policies affecting business.
- ▶ Perform a gender impact assessment or gender-lens review of existing enterprise-related laws, such as the Enterprise Law, the Investment Law and the SME Law.

Labour, property rights, and inheritance laws

- ▶ Undertake reforms to achieve legal gender equality.
- ▶ Inform women of their legal rights and implement the enforcement to protect their legal rights.

Business registration formalities

- ▶ Reduce the number of steps and time required to complete the business registration process (simplification), which is critical for women entrepreneurs.
- ▶ Create greater awareness among women of the procedures and benefits of registering their enterprise; make business registration facilities more accessible (including establishing a "women's desk"); and enable online business registration.
- ▶ Make guidance available to women on how to comply with the business registration requirements. Facilitate the offer of counselling advice and assistance to women entrepreneurs with the business registration process to support the formalization of women's micro and small enterprises (business registration authorities working in partnership with women entrepreneurs' associations, women's unions or chambers of commerce and industry).

4.4 INCREASING MARKET ACCESS (DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL)

This section contains a discussion on the needs and options for ensuring that WMSMEs overcome market access barriers and have greater access to domestic and international markets, both of which require targeted initiatives and measures. On the domestic market side, the focus is on WMSMEs' access to markets through e-commerce and digital solutions, gender-responsive public procurement and supply chain integration. To improve access to international markets, the focus of the discussion is on export promotion support for WMSMEs, particularly capacity-building, gender-responsive trade facilitation, and the importance of gender-sensitivity and inclusiveness considerations in free trade agreements to ensure that women-owned-led enterprises are not left behind in trade-related opportunities.

Why is it important to women's entrepreneurship development?

- ▶ WMSMEs are often challenged by accessing markets. This may be related to a variety of factors, including, among them, lack of entrepreneurial and business experience prior to starting a business, lack of marketing skills and know-how, lack of connection to business networks (where information can be shared), insufficient production capacity to serve larger markets, and digital, mobility, time, and financial constraints.
- ▶ Targeted policies and measures are required to respond to the constraints faced by WMSMEs in accessing domestic and international markets.
- ▶ Digital solutions and e-commerce platforms can enhance WMSMEs' access to domestic

and international markets by reducing time and mobility constraints and overcoming information asymmetries.

- ▶ WMSMEs are vastly underrepresented as awardees in public procurement contracts, reflecting systemic gender disparities in public procurement systems. Lack of access to public procurement markets precludes women from major domestic growth markets for their businesses.
- ▶ Supply chain opportunities can open the door to domestic markets for WMSMEs, an area that is not well exploited for them.
- ▶ Women-owned firms are underrepresented in all export statistics. Addressing gender-based constraints to international trade and leveraging women's access to international markets would benefit the growth of their businesses and produce economic gains for the country.

Improving women-owned-led micro small and medium enterprises access to markets through e-commerce and digital solutions

Digital solutions and e-commerce platforms can enhance WMSMEs' access to domestic and international markets by reducing time and mobility constraints and overcoming information asymmetries. By reducing the need for face-to-face interaction, digital solutions may also improve the participation of women entrepreneurs in traditionally male-dominant trade networks. Digital payment technologies also have the potential to provide a greater array of financial services for women entrepreneurs.

The COVID-19 crisis has re-emphasized the importance of online selling as a vehicle for WMSMEs to reach domestic and international markets and is now considered essential for doing business. In 2020 and 2021, many initiatives were spearheaded to support the

pivoting of WMSMEs to online marketing and sales. Since then, Governments across countries have escalated their support to help MSMEs “go digital”, including targeted initiatives to build the e-commerce capacity and capabilities of WMSMEs.

To ensure the participation of women entrepreneurs in government-supported and sponsored e-commerce development programmes, special efforts can be made to attract women entrepreneurs into the MSME-targeted programmes, or to offer women-targeted programmes. Illustrative approaches are evident in many of the ASEAN member States. For example, the Go4eCAM e-commerce acceleration project of Cambodia, which helps

SMEs move online and reach customers through the B2B2C online marketplace of the Ministry of Commerce, uses a quota reservation to ensure the inclusion of women-owned businesses. The Viet Nam E-Commerce Development Centre, under the Ministry of Information Technology, has trained organizations to deliver e-commerce training to WMSMEs through the E-Commerce Training of Trainers Programme for women entrepreneurs. Other programmes are directed to women entrepreneurs. The OneStore.ph platform, an initiative of the Department of Science and Technology in the Philippines, is achieving great success in bringing WSMEs into the digital world of selling (box 11).

Box 11. E-commerce platforms and digital solutions targeting women entrepreneurs - Philippines

In the Philippines, the Department of Science and Technology launched the OneStore.ph platform in 2018 to help MSMEs widen the scope of their target markets, expand their market reach, locally and internationally, increase brand awareness, and overcome geographical limitations. This e-commerce platform, which promotes electronic and mobile commerce, is part of the Department's efforts to encourage and assist MSMEs in adopting progressive technological practices to further operations (Small Enterprise Technology Upgrading Programme/SET-UP). As of December 2019, **65 per cent of the MSMEs enrolled in the OneStore.ph were women-owned**, of which almost three quarters of them were involved the food sector (<http://gad.dost2.ph/page/2/>). In early 2020, the Department of Science and Technology Regional Office No. 2, in cooperation with the **Philippine Council for Women onboarded women micro entrepreneurs in the online platform**, with the objective of further supporting women's economic empowerment.

Women entrepreneurs in the Philippines were also assisted by the USAID-funded E-PESO Initiative (2015–2021), whose objective was to help transition the economy to an electronics payments system for broader-based financial inclusion and economic growth. The **Connecting Women Entrepreneurs to the Digital Economy (CWEDE)** component of the E-PESO Initiative, launched in July 2020, was delivered under a public-private partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry, the National Confederation of Cooperatives, Facebook Philippines, Shopee and Lazada.

Box 11. continued

This project provided training to women entrepreneurs on becoming effective online sellers of their products (such as in digital marketing, digital payments and establishing online storefronts on popular e-commerce sites). The pilot programme assisted 436 women entrepreneurs who had “online-ready” products (and at least 15,000 Philippine peso (Pts) (\$270) in monthly gross sales) to undergo a tailored, intensive and integrated capacity-building programme that enables them to expand their market reach and increase revenues within six months. The integrated training programme also included a 90-day mentoring component, which covered topics on digital entrepreneurial mindset and principles, concepts and trends, digital marketing, online selling case studies and e-commerce walk-throughs (onboarding, learning creative content, tools and techniques, troubleshooting).

By the beginning of 2021, the 436 trained women entrepreneurs had opened a total of 349 online stores that reported Pts 36 million in sales (Chemonics International, 2021). A capacity-building project, such as Connecting Women Entrepreneurs to the Digital Economy, demonstrates the impact of helping women entrepreneurs and their enterprises bounce back quickly and adapt to the “new normal” of doing business in a post-COVID-19 environment.

Source: Chemonics International (2021).

Government procurement and women-owned firms

An important avenue to increase the economic contribution of WMSMEs is to improve their access to the public procurement market. The value of government procurement of goods and services ranges from 10 to 15 per cent of GDP in developed economies and from 30 to 40 per cent of GDP in developing countries, totalling an estimated global value of up to \$10 trillion per year (ITC and Swedish Institute of Standards, 2020). However, only approximately 1 per cent is awarded to women-owned businesses (ITC, 2014), suggesting systemic gender disparities within public procurement systems and the exclusion of women from major domestic growth

Governments in many countries notably make special provisions in their public procurement policy to enable MSMEs to compete for and be awarded contracts, such as preference

programmes, set asides, small tender packages and dedicated financial instruments. These actions can be further supported by training procurement officers in contracting to MSMEs, and through offering awareness, capacity-building and enablement initiatives for potential MSME suppliers. Opening up the public procurement market to more women-owned businesses, which are mostly MSMEs, by adopting gender-responsive public procurement policies would contribute to a more gender equal distribution of economic resources and support the development, growth and competitiveness of their businesses. Introducing qualified women-owned businesses into the public procurement supply chain can also benefit governments by increasing competition in tendering calls and improving value (potential cost savings).

The United States Small Business Administration has the longest experience in targeting women-

owned small businesses in federal government contracting. Although many policies and programmes were implemented to raise the level of their participation in the federal procurement system, the regulatory goal of not less than 5 per cent of the annual value of all federal prime contracts and subcontracts to be awarded to women-owned small businesses established in 1994 was not reached until 2015. The United States experience indicates it can take considerable time and effort to reach targeted public procurement goals and reveals an array of actions needed in order to increase women's participation in the tendering process and their success in securing awards:

- ▶ Setting definitional-criteria for a women-owned business;
- ▶ Establishing a process for certifying that the enterprise meets the definitional requirement;
- ▶ Establishing mandatory goals and targets for procurement awards to women-owned small businesses;
- ▶ Establishing procurement set-asides for which only women-owned small businesses can compete;
- ▶ Training contracting officers in the delivery of the procurement rules;
- ▶ Training women entrepreneurs on how to participate in public procurement;
- ▶ Promoting the programme widely among women entrepreneurs' networks;
- ▶ Organizing opportunities for women entrepreneurs to meet with government buyers;
- ▶ Reporting on progress made towards achieving the prescribed quota and continual efforts to examine barriers and obstacles and take remedial actions.

The experience to the United States also shows the strong role of women's business associations and other lobby groups in advocating government action to increase opportunities for women-owned small businesses access the public procurement system.

These lessons are supported by guidance and the experience of the ITC Global Platform for Action on Sourcing from Women Vendors,⁹⁶ which also emphasized the options of preferential treatment (such as a points system); restricting contract-bundling practices to reduce the size of tenders to increase the possibilities for women-owned businesses to bid for contracts, given that most women-owned businesses are smaller than the national average; reducing the requirements for performance bonds and bid guarantees; building the capacity of women-owned businesses so they are able to compete for contracts; implementing streamlined processes for the prequalification of women-owned firms; and monitoring the number and value of contracts being awarded to women entrepreneurs.

Relevance to the ASEAN member States

The size of the government procurement market for ASEAN countries is estimated at 5 to 8 per cent of GDP, with a value of approximately \$140 billion (Gourdon and Bastien, 2019). National Governments in six of the ASEAN countries target procurement policies towards SMEs (Malaysia, the Philippines⁹⁷, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam, and most recently Indonesia),⁹⁸ although they make no reference to the specific inclusion of WSMEs. The Governments of ASEAN member States had only sparingly addressed the gender-responsiveness of their national procurement policies and practices.

Example of actions taken are discussed below. In response to a 2014 study on procurement issues affecting women entrepreneurs in Indonesia,⁹⁹ the Government Goods and

Services Procurement Policy Agency hired more female procurement officers, and held gender-related workshops across the country to educate and inform procurement officers on gender-responsive procurement practices and to encourage women entrepreneurs to seek government procurement opportunities (MCA-Indonesia, LKPP and Bappenas, 2014). In March 2022, the “WE RISE Together” programme was launched in Thailand and Viet Nam to encourage the adoption of gender-responsive procurement in the public and private sectors and boost the procurement spent towards women-owned businesses and gender-responsive enterprises.¹⁰⁰ Just getting started, this project could benefit from the earlier experience of Indonesia in conducting a study on procurement issues affecting women entrepreneurs to help guide subsequent policy directions and actions.

ASEAN member States also learn from good practice examples of non-ASEAN countries in implementing gender responsive procurement policies, such as by establishing sub-goals for a certain percentage of the value of awards to be allocated to women-owned enterprises. A prime example is the practice of the Government of the Republic of Korea, which regulates that women-owned enterprises are to be awarded a minimum of 5 per cent of the annual value of federal contracting (see box 12). Also of note is the practice in Chile. Although without a specific rule for the value of procurement awards to

women-owned businesses, the Government of Chile has implemented a number of actions to increase their participation in public procurement transactions (box 13).

Lessons learned from the experiences in countries with gender-responsive public procurement policies indicate that the awarding of procurement contracts under special provisions requires a system for verifying the business is actually “women-owned”. This necessitates the adoption of a formal definition for “women-owned enterprise” and a system for certifying them as such. For example, in the case of the Republic of Korea, the Public Procurement Service partnered with the Korean Women Entrepreneurs Association to manage a certification system and provide public agencies with a list of suppliers verified as meeting the definition of a female-owned small businesses. In the Chilean case, ChileCompra launched the Women Supplier Certification scheme to help procurement entities identify women-owned-led firms and firms employing a workforce with more than 50 per cent female employees. Implementation of a mechanism for the e-certification of women-led enterprises linked to the Chilean Civil Registry (where company information is stored) enabled ChileCompra to remedy the challenge of identifying companies that are truly women-owned and the expense associated with becoming “certified”.

Box 12. The Republic of Korea Public Procurement Service favours women-owned small businesses

The Republic of Korea Public Procurement Service is implementing a procurement policy to support SMEs in entering the government procurement market. It also bridges socially vulnerable businesses to the government procurement market by giving preferential points in the bid qualification evaluation to female-owned small businesses, companies owned by or employing persons with disabilities and other

Box 12. continued

social enterprises. A female-owned business is defined as one that is primarily managed by a woman, either a registered sole proprietorship or a limited company whose largest investor is a woman and a woman is registered as an executive officer with the authority to represent the company (including companies in which at least two women registered as chief executive officers hold the largest aggregate equity stake).

The Republic of Korea Act on Support for Female-Owned Businesses of February 1999 instructs that the head of public entities shall promote the purchase of goods manufactured and supplied by female-owned businesses. The revised Enforcement Decree for the Act in 2014 set a goal of 5 per cent or more of the total procurement value of goods and services contracts to be awarded to female-owned business, and 3 per cent or more of the value of construction contracts. To implement the government procurement policy for female-owned business, the Public Procurement Service has issued special regulations and rules. These include simplifying procedures for contracts of up to \$50,000, making it easier for women-owned supplier companies to compete; reserving procurement to female-owned small businesses when the contract price is under 50 million Republic of Korea won (₩) (\$38,000); and giving extra points to the bidding company for goods tenders in cases in which a female-owned small business or a business with high employment of women or gender parity is involved. Female-owned small business are also awarded additional extra points in certain categories of procurement contracts, such as those for innovative products.

In addition to managing a certification system for female-owned business, which facilitates public agencies in applying the preferential purchases of their products and services to qualified applicants, the Korean Women Entrepreneurs Association promotes procurement opportunities among women entrepreneurs and provides information on bidding procedures. This demonstrates the value of government entities networking with women entrepreneur associations as they seek to reach their procurement targets for contracting to women-owned firms.

The special procurement rules in Republic of Korea has led to an increase in the number and share of female-owned businesses registered with the Public Procurement Service and their access to public procurement contracts continues to increase. In 2015, female-owned businesses accounted for 6 per cent of the total value of public procurement from SMEs, a 30 per cent increase over 2014. **In 2020, female-owned businesses were allocated 10.2 per cent of the total domestic procurement contracts for goods, services, and construction works.**

Sources: Public Procurement Service (2021, p. 21); http://swbiz.or.kr/woman/womanbiz/womanbiz_certificate.do/.

Box 13. Public procurement for women-owned businesses in Chile

Chile has one of the most accessible public procurement systems for MSMEs in the world. MSMEs comprise more than 96 per cent of companies selling their products and services on the *Mercado Público*, an e-marketplace managed by ChileCompra, the public agency supervised by the Department of Public Procurement and Contracting in the Ministry Finance. These MSMEs represent more than 57 per cent of public procurement transactions. However, a 2015 analysis of procurement activity over the 2007–2013 period revealed a low number of women-owned business suppliers, which accounted for only 26 per cent of procurement transactions. The women-owned supplier firms also tended to have lower transaction amounts than men. Based on these data, ChileCompra aimed to significantly narrow the gender gap in public procurement participation.

In 2015, ChileCompra implemented an action plan to enable women-owned businesses to have greater visibility on the public procurement platform. This included regulatory reform, enacted in 2016 and issuance of a guideline document advising the inclusion of gender criteria in all public purchases; the launch of the Women Supplier Certification ("*Sello Empresa Mujer*") scheme to help procurement entities identify qualified firms; and the development of a complementary business management training programme for women participating in the certification scheme. These actions immediately led to a 25 per cent increase in participation of women-owned-led supplier firms on the e-procurement platform.

By 2019, more than 20,000 women-owned-led firms were listed as suppliers with ChileCompra (up from less than 6,000 in 2013) and represented more than 36 per cent of total participants in the public procurement system. ChileCompra constantly monitors the performance of smaller companies in the public market, especially those led by women.

Sources: USAID (2020); ITC and SheTrades (n.d.b).

Supply chain linkages, integration and women-owned enterprises

Linking WMSMEs to supply chains is another policy option for building their access to domestic markets. Acting as downstream suppliers to large foreign and domestic enterprises can present an abundance of opportunities for women-owned enterprises. Governments in many countries have initiated supply chain and linkages programmes focused on SMEs, so this is a relatively common practice, but even where

these exist, often little or no consideration is given to the specific role of women producers in value and supply chain analysis, or to specifically target their participation in supply chain programmes. Accordingly, WMSMEs can be inadvertently or otherwise largely excluded from upgrading strategies that would open them up to these market possibilities.

Tools, such as the gender-responsive value chain analysis, are useful for SME development practitioners working on value chain analysis

to determine the extent and role of women (as workers or producers) in value chains at the sectoral or industry levels and to identify opportunities for the more effective empowerment and integration of WMSMEs or other positive gender effects, such as targeting value chain development in sectors with high female employment. Application of the gender-responsive value chain analysis can also assist in improving the capacity of value chain practitioners to see the value of a gender equality analysis. The Philippines and others have experienced some success in the application of the gender-responsive value chain analysis to enhance women's economic empowerment at the local level.

At a higher level, the rapid adoption of Supplier Diversity and Inclusion Programmes by large multinational corporations provides a compelling market opportunity for women entrepreneurs, as these programmes seek to bring women-owned enterprises into their supply chains. WEConnect International is a significant intermediary in matching "certified" women-owned businesses with the supplier diversity programmes of major multinational corporations.¹⁰¹ In carrying out the certification process (to confirm their status as a "women-owned and -managed business"), WEConnect performs an assessment of the business readiness "good practices" of the business, its capacity to sell to large corporations and/or its ability to scale accordingly. By providing training to the women entrepreneurs in the skills and knowledge to grow their businesses, WEConnect is breaking down the barriers that prevent them from connecting to new market opportunities, including connections to local and multinational corporate buyers.

In South-East Asia, WEConnect International has three affiliates – in Indonesia (2019), Malaysia (2020) and Singapore (2019). In these markets, WEConnect International identifies, educates,

registers and certifies women's business enterprises that are at least 51 per cent owned, managed and controlled by one or more women, registers them in its database, and connects them with multinational corporations also registered in the searchable database. WEConnect has certified 148 women-owned businesses in Indonesia, 13 in Malaysia, and 221 in Singapore and facilitated hundreds of connections with corporate buyers and thousands of connections between the women business owners.¹⁰²

Although corporate supplier diversity programmes can work independently of government support in a country, there are opportunities for ministries and agencies responsible for SMEs to play a more direct role. For example, in Canada, the regional development agency for Western Canada funded the three-year Access to Supply Chains Programme to improve access of local women entrepreneurs to supply chain opportunities. The policy rationale for the project was that less than 2 per cent of women-owned businesses in Canada were involved in contracting to corporations and government; thus, increasing the number of women entrepreneurs with the capacity to bid successfully on contracts in regional, national and international markets can be a significant driver of growth for women's businesses and also for the economy. The project was delivered by an agency-supported women's enterprise centre in partnership with WEConnect, which held information sessions, webinars, training sessions and conferences to inform women business owners about the value of certifying their businesses as "woman-owned" and developing their capacity to participate in supply chains. Certifying women-owned businesses through the WEConnect Canada Certification Assessment Support facilitated pathways into national and global supply chains that otherwise would be very difficult to enter. As a result of the project, 71 women-owned businesses became

certified and secured 127 supply chain contracts valued at Can\$12 million. The project, which generated significant value to the economy, would not have happened without government funding support.

Another route to bringing women-owned enterprises into the supply chain is to strengthen linkages between geographic markets through gender-responsive trade and supply chains. This is an approach taken by the WeEmpowerAsia (2019–2022) project¹⁰³, being implemented in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam, as well as in China and India, to advance inclusive growth by strengthening supply chain linkages between Asian and European markets. The project seeks to inculcate gender-inclusive business cultures according to the Women's Empowerment Principles put forward by UN Women and the United Nations Global Compact.¹⁰⁴ Principle 5 of the Women's Empowerment Principles commits private sector companies to implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women, which includes adopting "equitable procurement practices" and establishing supplier diversity programmes to expand business relationships with women-owned enterprises. The Women's Empowerment Principles KPIs for "equitable procurement practices" are the percentage of procurement spent with women-owned businesses; the percentage of procurement spent from companies with gender equality commitments; and the percentage of workers in the supply chain receiving a living wage, disaggregated by sex (UN Women, 2021, p. 71).

Whatever approach is taken to integrate WMSMEs into value and supply chains, three essential types of support are likely required: (1) capacity development (business management skills, know-how, connections); (2) new or upgraded production equipment to improve efficiency, improve quality, and meet standards

Acting as downstream suppliers to large foreign and domestic enterprises can present an abundance of opportunities for women-owned enterprises.

requirements of the buyer); and (3) supply chain finance (FAO, 2016). As any new or upgraded equipment or technology requires capital expenditures, and processing of the buyer's order (and possible cost of quality standards certification) creates working capital demands, supportive initiatives need to be in place for women entrepreneurs to improve their access to finance.

Export promotion activities for women entrepreneurs

Women-owned enterprises are underrepresented in international markets as exporters. Their overall representation in export statistics is low on all counts: percentage of all exporters; percentage of all women-owned firms; and percentage of total export value, among other statistics. There are various reasons for the underrepresentation of female-owned businesses in international trade. The different characteristics of women-owned businesses versus male-owned businesses (such as smaller average size, lower capital intensity, fewer and shallower business networks and limited capacity to export) and the additional gender barriers faced by women entrepreneurs (such as the gender gap in financing, relative inexperience, time demands of their unpaid domestic and care responsibilities) may be magnified when entering

competitive international markets and affect their ability to expand internationally and how their businesses would fare in the international market space (Korinek, Moïsé and Tange, 2021). Although the adoption of e-commerce and participation in e-commerce platforms has to some extent facilitated women's access to international markets, it has generally been more a vehicle for enabling domestic (local) market reach. Even the potential to export through e-commerce platforms brings with it additional challenges for women entrepreneurs. Among them are a lack of export marketing skills and know-how, information on markets and exporting procedures, and knowledge of how to identify and access export markets (for example, make contact with potential buyers in international markets and navigate the trade facilitation system). They may also be challenged by production capacity and scale issues; lack of quality standards and certification to meet requirements of international buyers; and lack of finance, among other factors. If countries are to experience increased export activity from women-owned enterprises, measures must be put into place to address these challenges.

Because an increase in export activity by women-owned businesses would contribute to jobs and economic growth, the underrepresentation of women-owned enterprises in export activity is gaining more attention as a policy issue. The prevalence of "Women in Trade" strategies targeting an increase in the number of women exporters and their share of export volume has been somewhat uncommon, although it is gradually improving. However, many export promotion support programmes and activities are not tailored to WMSMEs; consequently, opportunities to make them export-ready and succeed in international markets are limited.

Building a pipeline of export-ready WMSMEs through targeted and tailored export development programmes should be a policy

priority of ministries and agencies responsible for MSMEs. In addition, there is a need to help export-ready WMSMEs connect with international markets. This can be done by ensuring that women entrepreneurs have access to information on international market opportunities and are included in international trade missions, which is a common export promotion approach of governments. Seeking gender balance in the selection of SMEs to participate in the government-sponsored missions or exhibitions should be an objective, but being gender-inclusive is not normally a priority criterion. Producing sex-disaggregated data on trade mission participants and other export promotion activities would highlight any gender gaps and serve as a basis for informing policy or programme adaptations to be more conducive to women's participation. In North America and Europe, women entrepreneur-only trade missions were popular during the past decade, including the occasional negotiated mission with Asian countries. This path could also be considered by SME or trade ministries.

Among the ASEAN countries, Malaysia stands out for its export promotion support for women entrepreneurs. A flagship of the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation is its Women Exporters Development Programme, an initiative to build the export-ready capacity of WMSMEs (see box 14). Although the Programme is small in scale (working with 24 enterprises per year), it serves as a model with potential for scaling-up and replication in other ASEAN countries, particularly because of the emphasis on building the export-readiness capacity of the women's enterprises, which is not a common programme focus in the ASEAN countries. In addition, the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation is implementing the Women Trade Outreach Programme to encourage WMSMEs to export their products.

Box 14. The Women Exporters Development Programme of Malaysia

The Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation initiated the Women Exporters Development Programme in 2005 to encourage women-owned companies to expand their exports of products and services. The initial aim of the Programme was to increase the export potential and sales for women-owned companies and the number of women exporters by 30 per cent.

The Women Exporters Development Programme is specifically targeted for women exporters. Participating companies must be majority-owned by a woman or women who hold at least 51 per cent of the equity, managed by a woman, comply with the national definition of a small or medium enterprise and in operation for a minimum of three years, have a designated premise or manufacturing locale and attained some level of domestic market visibility. The selection process for participation in the Programme involves an onsite audit, interviews with a selection committee and an assessment of scores attained from the Exporter's Readiness and Capability Assessment Tool.

The Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation issues an annual invitation for participation in the programme and selects 12 women entrepreneurs for each intake to complete the three-year cycle of customized skills enhancement, entrepreneurial development and leadership training, seminars, assistance in selecting an export market(s), international business exposure, visitations and export promotional activities, all of which are geared to enhance their knowledge, capability and connections to become sustainable exporters. The women are entitled to participate in three Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation export promotional activities each year from a menu of international trade exhibitions, trade and investment missions, and individual business missions. In addition, they are connected with financial institutions and linked to trade finance, and market and commercial intelligence. Women selected into the programme may apply for a grant of up to 200,000 Malaysian ringgit (RM) (\$45,000) to undertake export promotion activities and participate in trade fairs or other international trade promotion events.

The programme has graduated 1,700 women exporters, who mostly represented non-traditional sectors, such as electronics, medical equipment and chemicals, generating more than RM 640 million in revenue (ITC and SheTrades, n.d.a).

Sources: The official portal of the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation. (www.matrade.gov.my/en/malaysia-exporters-section/224-ettrade-programme--supporting-document) [accessed 2 February 2022]; ITC and SheTrades (n.d.a.).

Countries may gain leverage in women's access to international markets by partnering with the ITC to implement the SheTrades Initiative. SheTrades is a global project with the goal to enable women entrepreneurs to share information about their companies, increase their visibility, expand their networks and make connections to internationalize their market reach. The Initiative has a presence in 38 countries and a global network of 350 partner organizations from 65 countries, is directly supported by 30,000 women-led businesses and has generated \$140 million in trade opportunities for women. Three ASEAN member States are implementing the ITC SheTrades Initiative – Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. It is definitely a programme worthy of further exploration by other ASEAN member States.

Gender and trade facilitation

Trade facilitation refers to the simplification, standardization and harmonization of procedures and information related to the movement of goods from the seller to international buyers and related payments. In gender-responsive trade facilitation, women and men benefit equally from trade facilitation-related reforms. However, there is growing acknowledgement that trade reform is not gender neutral and that actions are needed to ensure that women are not negatively affected by trade facilitation mechanisms and programmes due to the different roles they play in society as producers, business owners and entrepreneurs and their differing access to resources (Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation, 2020). Acknowledgements, such as this, has led to the Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Empowerment and the commitment of countries to make trade more gender-responsive.¹⁰⁵ However, despite multilateral calls to address gender-responsive trade reforms, including the design and implementation of

gender-targeted activities, limited progress has been made regarding gender equality and trade, including in trade facilitation (UNCTAD, 2022).

As women-owned firms tend to be smaller, they are likely to benefit even more than larger firms from greater transparency in regulation and trade facilitation reforms and, in particular, from the automation of border processes. However, all trade facilitation indicators should be assessed to inform inclusive trade policy design (Korinek, Moïsé and Tange, 2021). General steps and measures to ease trade facilitation for MSMEs by decreasing the time and costs of cross-border trade, especially the digitalization of processes, would be especially beneficial to WMSMEs, not only by accommodating their smaller size and time restrictions, but also by reducing opportunities for corruption and bribery to which women traders are more vulnerable (UNCTAD, 2022). While simplifying and harmonizing trade procedures and documentation, establishing single window systems and enabling electronic filing of import and export documents would help to level the playing field for women, efforts are also needed to actively target women entrepreneurs and traders in information campaigns and training on trade regulations and procedures. It is also critical for trade policy and facilitation bodies to understand the difficulties women face in meeting export and import requirements, so appropriate responses can be built in the reform agenda.

Relevance to the ASEAN member States

All ASEAN countries participate in the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, which obligates them to report biannually on their implementation progress against the Trade Facilitation Agreement measures via the biannual Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation. The general Trade Facilitation score covers five

measures: (1) transparency; (2) formalities (streamlining trade procedures); (3) institutional arrangements and cooperation (coordination and cooperation among government agencies involved in trade facilitation, border agencies control); (4) paperless trade; and (5) cross-border paperless trade.¹⁰⁶ The Global Survey also includes the measurement of “indicators for SME trade facilitation” covering (1) trade-related information for SMEs; (2) SMEs in authorized economic operator schemes; (3) SMEs access to single window; (4) SMEs in national trade facilitation committees; and (5) other special measures for SMEs. It also includes the measurement of “indicators for women in trade facilitation” covering (1) trade facilitation policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade; (2) trade facilitation measures to benefit women involved in trade; and (3) women membership in the national trade facilitation committees or similar bodies.

The 2021 Global Survey results indicate that very few ASEAN countries have customized their trade facilitation efforts to support SMEs and women, as their implementation rates of the designated trade facilitation indicators are relatively low, pointing to significant room for improvement in these areas (ESCAP, 2021a). Three of the ASEAN member States have reported no actions to implement “women in trade facilitation” measures – Brunei Darussalam, Myanmar and Singapore. Seven of them have made some efforts to introduce “trade facilitation measures to benefit women involved in trade”, although implementation is on a partial and pilot basis. The measures taken include, among others, appointing a gender focal point in the relevant border agencies, promoting balanced participation of men and women in trade facilitation training, and offering specific training for women involved in trade (ESCAP, 2021a). Only five of the countries are engaged in the process of developing a

trade facilitation policy or strategy to increase women's participation in trade, and none of the countries have fully implemented the inclusion of women members in the national trade facilitation committee.

As a mechanism to obtain consensus on reforms and implementation priorities, the lack of gender-balance in the membership of national trade facilitation committees is problematic. UNCTAD (2022) recommends that national trade facilitation committees become gender-responsive institutions and play a more active role in encouraging the representation of women in meetings and monitoring the participation of women traders in activities. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) further suggests that the committees address the trade barriers faced by small and informal traders, many of whom are women, by proposing appropriate trade facilitation responses, such as reducing fees and formalities overwhelmingly affecting women traders. Technical working groups or regional committees on gender equality could also be formed under the national trade facilitation committees to help mainstream gender into trade facilitation reforms by raising awareness of gender issues, surveying women traders, conducting gender gap analyses and developing position papers on gender-responsive trade facilitation initiatives, in addition to acting as focal points for women traders experiencing issues at the border (UNCTAD, 2022).

Going forward, the Governments of ASEAN member States should seek to make progress in addressing the WTO trade facilitation measures for “women in trade facilitation”.

Gender inclusive trade agreements

The underrepresentation of women in trade is a worldwide issue. Globally, women lead only 15 per cent of the exporting firms. Although

policy initiatives may seek to address the barriers and obstacles faced by women-owned businesses in international trade, such as by facilitating access to finance, market information, networks, capacity-building and training, it is also necessary to establish a more enabling environment for inclusive trade in the international trade arena. Introducing gender impact assessments in the context of international trade agreement negotiations offers an opportunity for deeper analysis of how the international trade arena affects both women and men in terms of job losses and gains and the inclusion of women-owned businesses in trade activity between countries.

Although there is a long tradition of including “non-trade concerns” in trade agreements, such as labour rights, human rights and environmental protection, recognition that trade policy can be used as a tool to empower women is a relatively recent development. This is evident in the recent trend of including a separate trade and gender chapter in free trade agreements, rather than dealing with gender equality issues in a preamble that lacks commitment on actions. The Government of Canada is one of the first to set out standard provisions for inclusion of gender considerations as guidance for its free trade agreement negotiations with other countries on a trade and gender chapter.¹⁰⁷ The action plans and cooperative activities to meet the terms of the trade and gender chapter could then be agreed to by the countries during the implementation of the agreement. These may cover the following:

- ▶ Financial inclusion, access to financing, including export financing and venture capital;
- ▶ Participation in government procurement markets;
- ▶ Enhancing competitiveness and participation of women entrepreneurs in local, regional, and global supply chains;

- ▶ Undertaking trade missions for businesswomen and women entrepreneurs;
- ▶ Advancing care policies and programmes with a gender and shared social responsibility perspective;
- ▶ Participation in standards and conformity assessment development and implementation;
- ▶ Closing the gender wage gap and gender digital divide;
- ▶ Advancing the use of e-commerce;
- ▶ Facilitating women-owned cooperatives and their access to international networks, markets, and supply chains;
- ▶ Conducting Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) and sharing best practices and procedures for sex-disaggregated data collection, and use of indicators.

Canada negotiated its first inclusion of a trade and gender chapter in a trade agreement with another country in the updated Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement in 2017 (see box 15 for a summary description). Since the signing of the Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement, Canada has negotiated a dedicated trade and gender chapter in the updated Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement and the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement. Canada uses the GBA+ to assess both ex-ante and ex-post¹⁰⁸ impacts of trade agreements on labour and gender in Canada. This gender analysis contributes greatly to understanding the potential impact of the agreements on women, identifying trade reforms to particularly benefit women (such as market access in certain sectors, trade facilitation or measures to support SMEs or digital trade), and identifying areas for mainstreaming of gender-responsive and -inclusive provisions in the free trade agreement negotiations and for providing assistance to help women take advantage of the new opportunities in the agreement.

Canada has also co-signed the Global Trade and Gender Arrangement, a stand-alone initiative open to other countries to join.¹⁰⁹ The experience of Canada may provide useful guidance to

ASEAN member States and the ASEAN region in strengthening support for the inclusion of gender considerations in bilateral and regional trade agreements.

Box 15. Integrating gender in bilateral trade agreements – the Canada-Chile agreement

In the 2017 updated Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement, Canada negotiated the inclusion of a trade and gender chapter. The chapter outlines the areas of cooperation between the two countries in promoting women's entrepreneurship, leadership, and full participation in society, and provides a framework for Canada and Chile to work together on issues related to trade and gender.

The joint Trade and Gender Committee was established to lead the implementation of the chapter, which came into force in February 2019. The first Committee meeting, held in April 2019, agreed on the work plan of activities to implement the chapter, better understand the gender-related effects of trade, and share information on ways to reduce barriers to the participation of women in international trade. Related activities to accomplish these objectives, included workshops, internships, study visits, collaborative research and development, and exchange of technical knowledge and assistance.

Priorities of the agreement include the following:

1. Sharing policies and good practices – the chapter highlights workshops, seminars, dialogues and other forums for exchanging knowledge, experiences and best practices to identify innovative policies and approaches to address barriers to women's participation in international trade and enhance their access to global markets and areas for cooperation. The Minister for Status of Women Canada and the Chilean Minister of Women and Gender Equality also participate in meetings to discuss joint cooperation in activities to complement the Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement.
2. Collecting gender-focused statistics related to trade and women-owned businesses. Officials of Statistics Canada held meetings with the Chilean national statistical agency to share methods and procedures for the collection of gender-disaggregated data and how the data are used to influence policymaking across the Government. Canada undertook a project to identify and assess gender-disaggregated data to determine if Canadian women were benefiting from the trade and investment opportunities flowing from the Canada-Chile relationship. The numbers are encouraging, but more room exists for women-owned businesses to take advantage of trade and investment opportunities with Chile.

Box 14. continued

3. Exchanging experience and best practices for conducting gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) of trade agreements or policies. GBA+ is an analytical tool used by the Government of Canada to assess the impact of international policies, programmes, initiatives, organizations and activities on different groups in the society, including women. It was used as a tool to better understand the impact of Canada-Chile trade on women's participation in the economy and gender equality and how to make the trade agreement more gender-responsive. Later, Canada also hosted a series of training workshops with Chile to share its experience with GBA+, including with staff at the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Official data for Chile indicate that in 2018, only 5.3 per cent of export companies were led by women. The figures reported for Canada are better – in 2017, WSMEs accounted for 11.1 per cent of exporters, but these numbers also indicate that there is more room for women-owned businesses to take advantage of trade opportunities. Chile has tackled the production of sex-disaggregated statistics on exporters to measure the participation of women in trade (making use of data from the Export Promotion Bureau/ProChile and the National Customs Service database) and as of 2017, it is able to report on these data by industry, sector, market destination and total export values. Concrete actions of the Trade and Gender Committee will seek to further promote the role of women-owned firms in their countries to become exporters. To inform the process, both countries have conducted research to better understand the obstacles hindering women entrepreneurs from participating in trade and internationalization activities.

Sources: Global Affairs Canada (2022a; 2022b).

ITC and SheTrades, "Data Initiative for Report on Women's Participation in Chilean Exports, Good Practices Chile".

Summary of key policy options for increasing market access

Access of women-owned-led micro, small and medium enterprises' to markets through e-commerce and digital solutions

- ▶ Undertake special efforts to ensure the participation of women entrepreneurs in government-supported and sponsored e-commerce development programmes targeting MSMEs, including the offering of women-only programmes.

Government procurement and women-owned firms

- ▶ Address the structural inequalities faced by WMSMEs in accessing procurement markets by promoting gender diversity in their public procurement policies.
- ▶ Undertake a consultation process to identify barriers to government purchasing from WMSMEs and establish steps to overcome these as part of a gender-responsive procurement approach. Enable these

efforts by providing capacity-building to contracting authorities and guidance on the implementation of gender-responsive procurement rules and procedures and providing information and trainings to WMSMEs to increase their capacity to participate in the public procurement system.

- ▶ Disseminate information on procurement opportunities to WMSMEs through their networks, provide knowledge on how government procurement tendering and bidding processes work, and offer any assistance programmes to help them meet the specific eligibility criteria, prepare bidding documents and benefit from procurement opportunities.
- ▶ Apply a quota or share of public procurement contracts to be awarded to WMSMEs. Establish the supporting procurement policies, rules and special provisions.
- ▶ Establish criteria for defining a women-owned-led MSME and a mechanism for certifying them as such. Include the certified WMSMEs in the list of prequalified supplier firms. Track the participation of WMSMEs in procurement awards.
- ▶ Engage women entrepreneur associations as a partner with government procurement offices in efforts to reach procurement targets for contracting to women-owned firms.

Supply chain linkages, integration, and women-owned enterprises

- ▶ Employ tools, such as the gender-responsive value chain analysis, to analyse the gender effects of supply chain development and identify opportunities for the more effective integration of WMSMEs into supplier development initiatives.
- ▶ Promote opportunities for women-owned enterprises to become suppliers as part of corporate supplier diversity programmes.

- ▶ Promote the adoption of Principle 5 of the Women's Empowerment Principles (equitable procurement practices) by large domestic firms to increase their procurement spent with women-owned businesses.
- ▶ Develop support programmes tailored to addressing the supplier capacity needs of WMSMEs to participate in supply and value chains, such as management skills, know-how, upgraded equipment/technology, meeting quality standards, and supply chain finance.

Export promotion activities for women entrepreneurs

- ▶ Produce sex-disaggregated data on beneficiaries and participants in all export promotion activities.
- ▶ Implement targeted and tailored export development programmes to build a pipeline of export-ready WMSMEs and connect them with international market opportunities.
- ▶ Ensure that information on international market opportunities is disseminated to WMSMEs.
- ▶ Adopt a gender-inclusive approach in the selection of MSMEs participating in government-sponsored international trade missions.
- ▶ Profile women exporters in the government's trade directory to increase their visibility in international markets.
- ▶ Explore opportunities for implementing the ITC-SheTrades Initiative at the country level.

Gender and trade facilitation

- ▶ Make progress in addressing measures for "women in trade facilitation" under the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement.

4.5 ENHANCING HUMAN CAPITAL

Enhancing human capital is a common pillar of national development plans and MSME development strategies. The main MSME-related objectives are to increase the supply of skilled labour for MSMEs (technical and workforce skills) and build the capacity of labour force participants to become future entrepreneurs. The scope of human capital support can range from strengthening the education system to developing the talent pool, such as through entrepreneurship education schemes and training programmes, to produce highly skilled human capital (to meet the demand for current job skills and future jobs). The scope may also include vocational education and training schemes to upskill and reskill industrial and technical workers, and programmes to improve the production and product quality of MSMEs and their business management skills.

Why is it important to women's entrepreneurship development?

- ▶ Because the labour force participation rate of women in many countries, including in the ASEAN member States, is considerably lower than for men, enhancing the employability and entrepreneurial skills of women has untapped potential for increasing the pipeline of qualified labour and entrepreneurial talent and contributing to household income and economic growth.
- ▶ Addressing deficiencies in the technical, entrepreneurial, financial literacy, digital literacy skills of girls and women would increase their employability potential, including as workers in MSMEs, as well as their potential to become competent entrepreneurs and employers.

Several skill sets are required to strengthen the capacity of women to enter the labour force.

Among them are technical and vocational skills, financial literacy skills, digital literacy skills, entrepreneurial skills and management skills. As noted in section 4.1, the pipeline for women in STEM fields is limited. Their technical skills training in non-traditional fields is also limited. Ultimately, these training deficiencies will weaken the occupational, employment, and business opportunities for women and need to be addressed by ensuring their representation in vocational and technical training programmes and offering women-dedicated training and skills development programming.

Collection of sex-disaggregated data on training programme participants would aid in identifying gender gaps and efforts to carry out more concerted gender mainstreaming to attract women into the programmes or for women-designated and tailored programmes.

Vehicles for delivering these skills-sets to women in the ASEAN member States vary by country. In the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic and Viet Nam, the large and well-established women's unions play a key role in providing financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills, technical skills and job trainings. In Cambodia, the women's development centres of the Ministry of Women Affairs provide training support for women (financial literacy, entrepreneurial skills) and assistance in improving the quality of their products and supply arrangements. In the Philippines, the Philippines Trade Training Centre targets women for technical and entrepreneurial skills training, accounting for almost three quarters of their students in 2021. The Viet Nam SME Law and its supporting decrees prioritize training for women, as entrepreneurs, or as employees in SMEs with high female employment, offering free tuition for women in these categories.

The SME authorities in the ASEAN member States also make use of SME online training portals for

individuals and SMEs (owners and workers) to access online training courses, which broadens the reach to a larger population. However, women with lower education levels and digital capabilities or lack access to Internet networks are at a disadvantage in accessing online tools. Making learning materials available through apps that can be accessed on smartphones is a more viable alternative in these cases. Many NGOs and donor-funded projects deliver business training to women through apps, such as the free and downloadable HerVenture business skills learning app made accessible by the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women.¹¹⁰ Since the introduction of HerVenture in 2018, the learning app has been downloaded by more than 5,000 women in Indonesia and more than 20,000 women in Viet Nam. The users of the app have reported that it helped them implement new methods for their business, increase their client base, business revenue and profits, and develop confidence in running a business.¹¹¹

While distinct initiatives exist across the ASEAN member States to address specific human capital development issues, such as entrepreneurial, financial literacy and digital literacy skills, there are significant advantages to working with women on their integrated application. For example, the Women Entrepreneurs Amplifying Venture and Economics (WEAVE) project, which is being implemented in Indonesia and Viet Nam, delivers an integrated 17-month programme to help women build more sustainable enterprises through various stages. The programme combines the business skills mobile learning app (HerVenture), a blended learning programme of in-class and online training to develop the business management and investment readiness skills of women entrepreneurs, supplemented with weekly chat sessions with trainers, networking events, regular meetups and exposure to business development services

(“Road to Growth component”); and online coaching and advice by a women in business mentor for a period of six months.¹¹²

Summary of key policy options for enhancing human capital

- ▶ Collect sex-disaggregated data on training programme participants to aid in identifying gender gaps and the need for accelerated gender mainstreaming efforts or for women-designated programmes.
- ▶ Strive to increase the representation of girls and women in vocational and technical skills training in non-traditional fields.
- ▶ Use online training portals to improve access to courses and broaden reach.
- ▶ Deliver entrepreneurship and business management training to women through downloadable learning apps accessible from a smartphone.
- ▶ Adopt tailored and blended training approaches to women that integrate entrepreneurial, financial literacy and digital skills.

4.6 ACCESS TO GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Business development support encompasses a range of services used by an enterprise to assist in business start-up, functional operations and growth. These may include basic information, advice and counselling, seminars and workshops on business topics (such as financial literacy, start-up regulations and procedures, developing export markets, improving product quality and packaging and use of ICT) to more technical (such as skills training) or strategic assistance

(such as consultancy services, technical assistance with preparation of feasibility and market studies and linkages to supply chains). It may also include signposting or referral services to direct entrepreneurs and SMEs to the most appropriate provider of the services they need. As stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, BDS-providing organizations can include mainstream business support entities, such as government offices and programmes, SME support centres, business incubators, business and industry sector associations, non-governmental and civil society organizations, private sector consultants and mentors, as well as women entrepreneur-focused organizations and programmes, including women entrepreneurs' associations.

"Gender-responsive BDS services" take the specific needs of women entrepreneurs into account and deliver services in an environment free of gender bias.



This section covers approaches to developing gender-responsive BDS services, meeting the needs of women entrepreneurs through women's enterprise centres, the value of mentoring to women entrepreneurs and addressing the information access needs of women through SME portals.

Why is it important to women's entrepreneurship development?

- ▶ BDS services can have a substantial and positive impact on the performance of women's enterprises at all stages of the business lifecycle by enhancing the knowledge, skills, abilities, and networks of the women entrepreneurs.
- ▶ BDS organizations may demonstrate limited awareness of, or sensitivity to, the specific gender-related barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in starting and growing their businesses and may not be sufficiently gender-focused in their content and approach. Combined with a host of access barriers to formal BDS services experienced by women, such as low awareness of the availability of these services, location and transportation issues, inconvenient scheduling options, and limited time due to family responsibilities, BDS organizations may experience a low take-up of their services by women.
- ▶ Improved gender-sensitivity and -responsiveness of mainstream BDS providers and programme offerings would benefit the development of women entrepreneurs and their businesses.

Gender-responsive business development support services

In many cases, BDS organizations may profess to operate on a gender-neutral basis, but make

limited efforts to reach out to the women entrepreneurs as a target group and do not make any adjustments in their service offerings, programme content or scheduling options to address the specific gender-related barriers faced by women in starting and operating their own businesses.

An indication of the level of “gender-sensitivity of BDS service provision” may be ascertained by collecting data on the representation of women entrepreneurs among BDS clients, particularly in the government-supported SME support centres, and their participation in the various programme and service offerings (such as advisory services, upgrading programmes and incubators). This may provide indicative information on the extent to which the mainstream BDS providers are reaching out to women entrepreneurs and adapting programmes and services to better respond to their needs. Tracking the gender composition of their BDS users and clients, although not universal, is becoming more prevalent as national governments seek to implement gender mainstreaming across all ministries and agencies and require all entities to report gender statistics on their programme take-up. For example, BDS and training entities within the scope of the Department of Trade and Industry of the Philippines collect sex-disaggregated data on the share of women beneficiaries, which is reported on an annual basis in the Women and Men in the Philippines Fact Sheet. This includes beneficiaries of the Negosyo Centres, which by the Act that created them, commits the centres to encouraging women's entrepreneurship by giving them access to information, support, training and credit facilities, and to ensure representation of women entrepreneurs in the delivery of counselling and advisory services. In 2021, almost two thirds of the MSMEs receiving services from the Negosyo Centres were women.

The gender-responsiveness of BDS providers and programmes can be enhanced by research on the specific BDS needs and challenges of women entrepreneurs at their various stages of development. Adjustments in support programme content, for example, may be appropriate given the different backgrounds, labour market experiences and levels of social capital of women entrepreneurs compared to men. The delivery of gender-sensitivity awareness and orientation sessions to BDS staff – managers, counsellors, advisers and trainers is often a critical step, as well as seeking a gender balance in the staffing complement.

Information communications technologies could help increase women entrepreneurs' participation by enabling flexible BDS that are better tailored to their time demands and mobility (such as online business information and courses). However, this is not the only solution to the myriad of issues that may be preventing women from having greater access to BDS that could have a significant impact on the start-up, development and growth of women-owned enterprises.

In response to gender-related issues, an option for governments is to pursue a hybrid approach for delivering BDS: working to improve women's access to mainstream BDS programmes and services by addressing identified gender gaps and offering complementary, parallel structures dedicated to services and programmes for women entrepreneurs (OECD, 2021a). The hybrid approach may be particularly relevant in contexts where strong sociocultural barriers to women's economic participation are prevalent, gender-biased practices exist (inadvertent or otherwise), and women do not have equal access to labour markets, information, leadership roles, services and the resources needed to support the development of sustainable enterprises (ILO, 2009). In such environments,

a gender mainstreaming approach does not necessarily remove the need for gender-specific interventions through targeted policies and programmes. Other evidence suggests that women-only programmes can be more effective because women are more likely to be aware of them and more comfortable participating when they are women-only (OECD and European Union, 2018).

Given their contexts, Governments in the ASEAN region are encouraged to support women's entrepreneurship by gender-responsive MSME policies and strategies (gender mainstreaming of BDS services), while, at the same time, complementing this with targeted programmes to address gender-specific barriers and needs (OECD, 2017). Until issues pertaining to gender and women have been fully mainstreamed,

programmes focusing exclusively on women remain important (ESCAP, 2018b).

Meeting the business development support needs of women entrepreneurs through the establishment of women's enterprise centres

The creation of women's enterprise/entrepreneurship centres is a long-established model in many OECD countries for better serving the advisory and counselling needs of women entrepreneurs and helping them to overcome the challenges of starting a new business and the obstacles to sustainability and growth. More governments in developed economies are adopting this practice (see the example of the Republic of Korea in box 16), and it continues to be promoted as a good practice in developing, transition and emerging economies.

Box 16. Integrated support centres for women-owned businesses in the Republic of Korea

The Republic of Korea Act on Support for Female-Owned Businesses of February 1999 has provided the legal basis for support programmes to promote start-ups by women, improve their business management capabilities and business performance, and ensure that national and local governments give preference to women entrepreneurs in their general SME support programmes. The Act stipulated that a comprehensive support system would be put into place.

Further enforcement decrees of the Act have provided more specific guidelines regarding the functions to be performed by the support centres for women-owned businesses, which include providing various kinds of information and services to assist women in starting a business and to improve the performance and market development of their existing businesses, such as promotion, education and training, advice and counselling management development, and marketing support.

The Enforcement Decree requires that the support centres for female-owned businesses file an annual report to the Ministry of SMEs and Startups on their annual performance and their plans and budgets for the current year. Based on the projected budget, the Ministry earmarks funding for the centres' activities.

The Korea Women Entrepreneurs Association is the key deliverer of the support centres for women entrepreneurs, and has established regional centres in locations across the country.

The experiences in countries with dedicated women's enterprise centres demonstrate the effectiveness of tailored entrepreneurship/SME support delivered in female-friendly environments (see box 17). Many women,

particularly those just starting a business with limited background experience, value targeted female-only initiatives, such as women's enterprise centres and business incubators that focus on their specific needs.

Box 17. Positive impact evaluations for the Women's Enterprise Centres in Western Canada

The Government of Canada has a long history of funding networks of women's enterprise centres throughout the country in order to better address the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. The network of women's enterprise centres across Western Canada was launched in 1994 to encourage the establishment of women-owned businesses and help them expand, and promote economic equality between men and women. As one-stop shops for potential and existing women entrepreneurs, the women's enterprise centres offer advice, business planning assistance, mentoring and matchmaking, networking opportunities, information, and referrals to accountants and lawyers. They also deliver loan funds targeted to new or existing businesses owned by women. The centres are also an important instrument to ensure that women have better access to and increased take-up of government support services.

Impact assessments reveal that the advisory services and training received by clients leads to new start-ups and jobs, job retention in existing client firms, increased revenue and higher survival rates than for the average Canadian SMEs. The most significant impacts on the women entrepreneurs have been the following: improved development of their business and their management skills; increased access to other programmes and services; networking with other women entrepreneurs; and receiving encouragement to start or further develop their own businesses. For a large number of its new clients, a women's enterprise centre was the first and only SME support organization they had ever approached. This indicates that women's enterprise centres create new demand for BDS from women entrepreneurs.

Impact studies also report high levels of client satisfaction and many positive advantages. Women clients value the safe, warm and nurturing environment of the centres. They particularly appreciate that the counsellors take their ideas and concerns seriously, are sensitive and knowledgeable about the gender-related challenges of business ownership, provide advice from a "woman's perspective", and demonstrate understanding and respect for the challenges that women entrepreneurs face, including the needs of women to juggle family and business (Orser, 2011). The emotional and motivational support offered by the centres gives women self-confidence and encouragement, and contributes to a strong and trusting relationship.

Source: Orser (2011).

Women's enterprise centres are less common among the ASEAN member States. In the Philippines, a number of local government units have established one-stop women's enterprise development desks to deliver comprehensive services to women micro-entrepreneurs, including information support, entrepreneurship training, business counselling, mentoring, product development and promotion, access to market services and help with business planning. In Cambodia, the Ministry of Women's Affairs operates a network of women development centres, which deliver entrepreneurship training and BDS services, such as business counselling, financial literacy training, product improvement, and supplier arrangements. To some degree, businesswomen's associations and some NGOs (often led by women) are filling the gap for meeting the business support needs of women entrepreneurs, often with donor funding.

The value of mentoring to women entrepreneurs

To address the capacity-building needs of women entrepreneurs and to help them deal with issues that are pertinent to women, the government or other bodies also establish special women-only BDS programmes, such as mentoring and coaching, making use of successful women entrepreneurs and professionals to provide the mentoring. Mentorship is particularly important for women entrepreneurs. As a form of social capital contribution, mentoring helps compensate for the lesser capacity of women to accumulate human and social capital prior to becoming entrepreneurs, particularly due to limitations in their access to business networks. The mentoring relationship enhances personal and business growth and by increasing women's self-efficacy and confidence produces positive effects on a firm's performance.

Mentoring initiatives for women entrepreneurs may be supported by the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs, but are often implemented

in partnership with associations of women entrepreneurs or businesswomen associations. For example, the National Entrepreneur Institute in Mexico (government agency) signed an agreement with the Mexican Association of Women Entrepreneurs to join the national Network of Mentor Entrepreneurs, thereby enabling the association to offer free mentoring consultations to women entrepreneurs with funding support from the Institute's budget (OECD, 2017).

The opportunity in ASEAN is to ensure that the ASEAN Mentorship for Entrepreneurs Network attracts a large number of women mentors, is linked into the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network, and actively promoted to women entrepreneurs in the region.

Addressing the information access needs of women through small medium enterprises portals

Access to information is also a BDS service. With the increasing role of Internet-provided sources of information and support, such as SME portals, the opportunity to reach out to women entrepreneurs also increases. Important in this regard is tailoring some of the information specifically directed towards women. The new subportal for women entrepreneurs in a SME support portal in Viet Nam is an example of this (box 18).

Box 18. Small and medium enterprise support subportal for women entrepreneurs, Viet Nam

A major milestone for Viet Nam is the development of the National SME Support Portal by the Agency for Enterprise Development to provide access to information about SME support policies, regulations and related business activities. The National SME Support Portal includes a new subportal on the women's enterprise ecosystem to serve as a platform for women entrepreneurs to easily access useable resources, information and knowledge that speak to the specific business development and needs and priorities of women entrepreneurs (balanced with a focus on self-care and psychosocial support), and to connect to a broader entrepreneurship ecosystem (<http://we.business.gov.vn/vi-vn/>).

In particular, the subportal covers the following:

- ▶ Information related to the policies and regulations for SMEs in Viet Nam and supportive policies and programmes for women's entrepreneurship and WMSMEs by region; **links to the National Registration System, which enables women to register their businesses online**; and links to the National Procurement System for information on tender calls for the purchase of goods and services.
- ▶ Information related to comprehensive financial services, features of loan products offered by various banks, fintech and alternative innovative financing sources for women entrepreneurs, digital banking services tailored to women and financial literacy training.
- ▶ Information on how women entrepreneurs can develop their skills to use digital tools and technology to scale up and grow their business, including tips on how to engage in cross-border e-commerce.
- ▶ Access to online training opportunities to foster women's entrepreneurship (E-Learning Centre), with a section showcasing success stories of women entrepreneurs who can serve as role models and inspire other women into becoming entrepreneurs (CEOx Stories).
- ▶ An online survey feature that allows women entrepreneurs to share their business plans and request technical support and that creates a space for women entrepreneurs to provide feedback and voice their specific challenges and needs. The survey findings can be used by the Agency for Enterprise Development to inform policies and programmes to further foster women's entrepreneurship in Viet Nam.

One of the distinctive features of the subportal is the Mental Healthcare Corner, which creates awareness about psychological health and the mental health-related issues that women entrepreneurs may encounter as they deal with juggling the demands of starting, managing and growing their business with their gendered

Box 18. continued

roles of performing unpaid care and domestic work, and with other crises, such as coping with the effects of COVID-19. The subportal provides a unique support service for women entrepreneurs to identify, recognize and cope with mental health-related issues. This includes an online psychological self-assessment test to enable women entrepreneurs to understand how these pressures may be affecting them, and to receive guidance on access to resources and psychosocial support and advice.

The platform also provides a mechanism for national and local ecosystem partners who are working to support women's entrepreneurship to connect and share materials and information; and for the engagement of women entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs' associations in designing services and informing policy.

Source: Adaptation and updating of the profile originally published in ESCAP (2021b, pp. 12–13).

Summary of key policy options for access to gender-responsive business development support services

- ▶ Encourage the collection of sex-disaggregated data on the clients and beneficiaries of BDS services, by type of service.
- ▶ Conduct a study to better understand the BDS needs of women entrepreneurs (and subgroups of “would-be” entrepreneurs, start-ups, micro-entrepreneurs and SMEs), their constraints in accessing mainstream BDS services, and their suggestions for approaches that would address their needs and limitations.
- ▶ Promote gender-inclusion practices in all BDS organizations.
- ▶ Examine the potential of establishing a parallel BDS structure of women's enterprise centres.
- ▶ Broaden the offer of mentoring services to women entrepreneur as part of BDS offerings.
- ▶ Make use of ICTs to offer more flexibility to women in accessing BDS services, such as online training courses, virtual mentoring and online “chats” with business advisors.
- ▶ Improve women's access to business-related information by adding a subportal for women entrepreneurs on the Government's main SME support portal.

4.7 MULTI-STAKEHOLDER GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS

Why is it important to women's entrepreneurship development?

- ▶ Establishment of a high-level, interministerial governance structure for WED would facilitate a “whole-of-government” approach to policy development and actions, improve the level of policy attention given to women's entrepreneurship, and provide for effective coordination of policy formulation, action planning, monitoring, and reporting.

- ▶ Such a governance structure is necessary because of the horizontal nature of policies and programmes affecting women's entrepreneurship, implicating the engagement of several ministries and departments on policy formulation, action planning and programme development.

The policies and programmes of several ministries and departments are likely to affect the development of women's MSME and entrepreneurship. The ministries and departments may include those responsible for MSMEs, industry, innovation and technology, international trade, procurement, employment and labour, digital economy, justice and finance, as well as for women's empowerment and gender equality. The establishment of a higher-level, interministerial committee to develop and oversee policy development and implementation provides a mechanism for coordination across ministries and assurance of a more holistic and integrated approach to addressing the gender inequalities and creating an enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship.

Governments in many countries establish interministerial committees or councils as institutional policy and governance structures for MSME development, including among the ASEAN member States,¹¹³ so the concept is not unfamiliar. Similar interministerial governance mechanisms for WED would improve the level of the policy attention given to women's entrepreneurship and the coordination of action planning, monitoring, and reporting. For example, in preparation for creating a national Women's Entrepreneurship Strategy, the Government of Canada established the federal Interdepartmental Committee on Women's Entrepreneurship to engage with more than 20 federal departments. European countries with national WED strategies also often establish an interministerial or cross-sectoral body (committee or working group), chaired by the

ministry responsible for SMEs, to develop and coordinate the implementation of a strategy and monitor its progress towards achieving its targeted outcomes.

Within the ASEAN member States context, the issue of women's entrepreneurship may be partially covered by the higher level MSME development councils or by the intergovernmental mechanisms established to implement gender equality law or women's empowerment and gender equality action plan. However, in both instances, insufficient attention is often given to the issue of women's entrepreneurship and the integration of it into the MSME development or gender equality action plans. Options for improving this may be to create subcommittees for women's entrepreneurship within these existing governance structures. Another option is to establish a separate interministerial governance structure for WED with the mandate for policy formulation and integrated action planning. This option was recently implemented in Viet Nam with the creation of Technical Working Group on Women's Entrepreneurship (see box 19). While set up within the context of the ESCAP Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship programme, this working group is instrumental in the planning and implementation of an integrated WED action plan.

Box 19. Higher-level Technical Working Group on Women's Entrepreneurship in Viet Nam

With support from the ESCAP Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship programme, the Government of Viet Nam is developing a National Programme for Women Entrepreneurs (2021–2025) to enhance the competitiveness of WMSMEs and improve their access to policy support measures at national and international levels. The lead implementation partner is the Agency for Enterprise Development under the Ministry of Planning and Investment.

To facilitate policy formulation and coordination of central government action on women's entrepreneurship, Viet Nam has established an interministerial technical working group, the Technical Working Group on Women's Entrepreneurship, which is represented by the following bodies:

- ▶ Ministry of Planning and Investment – Chair
- ▶ Agency for Enterprise Development – Secretariat
- ▶ Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
- ▶ State Bank of Viet Nam
- ▶ Ministry of Finance
- ▶ Ministry of Justice
- ▶ Ministry of Science and Technology
- ▶ Ministry of Industry and Trade
- ▶ Viet Nam Women's Union

The Technical Working Group on Women's Entrepreneurship holds consultation sessions with national stakeholder groups to provide input to the policy development work and identify key interventions, including the SME associations, the chamber of commerce and industry, women entrepreneur associations, financial institutions and business support organizations. The mechanism for stakeholder consultations provides a platform for taking stock of progress in implementing the action plan for women's entrepreneurship, and for identifying new partnerships and priorities in different components to promote a more enabling regulatory and ecosystem environment for women entrepreneurs in Viet Nam.

The Technical Working Group on Women's Entrepreneurship meets twice a year to advance the agenda for women's entrepreneurship in the country.

Source: Information from the ESCAP Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship programme Manager.

Summary of policy options for governance mechanism for women's entrepreneurship development

- ▶ Establish an interministerial governance mechanism for WED policy formulation, action planning and coordination across the government.
- ▶ This could be a new committee structure or created as a subcommittee of an already existing MSME development council.
- ▶ Designate the ministerial members of the WED governance body,
- ▶ Define the terms of reference and the roles and responsibilities of the body.
- ▶ Perform a mapping of the existing policy, programme and support environment for WED.
- ▶ Consult with relevant stakeholders on policy and programme gaps and opportunities.
- ▶ Develop a WED policy agenda and action plan.

Why is it important to women's entrepreneurship development?

- ▶ The identification of women's entrepreneurship as a national policy priority focuses on its importance and creates a signal for all stakeholders to engage in actions to realize the policy objectives.
- ▶ Designation of a body with clear policy leadership for WED is needed to drive the policy agenda and to provide effective policy coordination across relevant ministries, agencies and departments. The ministry responsible for SMEs may be in a good position to assume the leadership role.
- ▶ The responsibilities associated with WED policy leadership and coordination are best fulfilled by the establishment of a WED unit (focal point), such as in the ministry responsible for SMEs.
- ▶ Effective integration of gender-inclusiveness in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and of the women-focused stakeholder organizations and programmes creates the collective momentum to foster support for the development of women entrepreneurs.

4.8 POLICY LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION FOR WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT

This section provides a discussion on issues related to the positioning of women's entrepreneurship as a national policy priority and its integration in the SME development strategy, the role of designated policy leadership and coordination, and the importance of a building a gender-inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Women's entrepreneurship development as a national policy priority

The inclusion of gender equality and women's economic empowerment in a country's economic policy framework can take many forms. General statements regarding the importance of women's development as a national policy priority, and particularly their role as entrepreneurs, may be integrated into the government's national development plan. These may be further re-enforced in the national gender equality and women's empowerment strategies and ideally in the national SME development strategies.

Women's entrepreneurship development as a policy priority in national MSME development strategies

Governments in most countries have a policy framework or strategy for the development of MSMEs. While this policy or strategy document often includes reference to women entrepreneurs as a target group, in many cases, it does not define the gender constraints and barriers to be addressed, lay out the specific policy measures to address these constraints, include specific and quantitative objectives for increasing or strengthening WED, or outline the processes to evaluate the MSME and entrepreneurship policies from a gender perspective and any differential impacts on women and men. In instances in which there is a particular policy emphasis on the development of WMSMEs as a target group, the policy framework may include statements outlining objectives to increase the participation of women in business

ownership, enhance the capacity of women to be able to start businesses, improve women entrepreneurs' access to essential financing, business development services and markets, or similar such references. The presumption in the implementation of many MSME policy or strategy documents is that the gender mainstreaming of policy actions ensures the inclusion of women beneficiaries in any MSME incentive and support measures and programmes. However, gender mainstreaming of policy actions is only successful if specific targets are set for the inclusion of women as beneficiaries across pillars of the MSME strategy and the outcome tracked through a monitoring system. Otherwise, it would be difficult to verify the impact on women's entrepreneurship and MSME development of national MSME strategies.

Although there is often a reference to the inclusion of women in national MSME strategies in the ASEAN member States, they mostly lack clear, explicit strategies for advancing women's entrepreneurship. In many countries, the ministry responsible for women's affairs plays a leadership role in policies to promote entrepreneurship as an option for women, which are integrated as part of the national gender equality or women's empowerment strategies and plans. The ministry responsible for SMEs may then seek to apply a gender mainstreaming approach in the delivery of its own programmes and services, the effectiveness of which depends on how well this is done and monitored. This is carried out particularly well in the Philippines where, in line with the objectives of the Women's Development and Gender Equality Plan¹¹⁴ for the strengthening women's entrepreneurship, gender was integrated into the MSME Development Plan as a thematic and provisions were made for gender mainstreaming across its programmes on business environment, access to finance,



access to markets and MSME productivity, including gender-responsive outcomes for each of these pillars and indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of these outcomes. All ministries involved in implementing initiatives with the Plan integrated gender-responsiveness as a component of all projects and programmes.¹¹⁵

For the most part, gender mainstreaming of a national MSME strategy is helpful, but insufficient attention is often paid to ensuring the representation of women in the various pillars of these strategies and, as a result, WMSMEs are not accessing or benefiting from the incentives and programme supports on an equal plane. The effective treatment of women's entrepreneurship in national SME strategies requires clear identification of women as a target group, clear quantitative objectives for increasing their role in MSME development, and specific objectives and actions for the integration of women across policy pillars.

Formulation of national women's entrepreneurship development strategies

Complementary to MSME strategies, governments of many countries are seeking to boost strategic support for women's entrepreneurship and women-led enterprises by developing specific strategic frameworks and action plans. For example, in line with the assessed need to improve the level of women's entrepreneurship across the European Union, the European Commission has invited member States to draft and implement national strategies on women's entrepreneurship. Among the countries that have already complied with this request are Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, North Macedonia and Sweden.¹¹⁶ This trend is also occurring in other countries, such as Canada, which, in 2018, launched the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy. This national strategy provides a government- and stakeholder-wide strategic framework that implicates cooperative actions by federal departments and agencies along with entrepreneurship and MSME support organizations, such as enterprise centres, financial institutions and business incubators (see box 20).

Box 20. The national Women Entrepreneurship Strategy of Canada

In 2016, the Government of Canada created the Interdepartmental Committee on Women Entrepreneurship to facilitate dialogue among government bodies, the private sector and academia about women's entrepreneurship policy and strategy development. In 2018, under the leadership and coordination of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (federal department), the national Women Entrepreneurship Strategy was launched with an initial budget allocation of 2 billion Canadian dollars (Can\$) (US\$1.6 billion) (and increased to CAD 5 billion in subsequent budget years). **The goal of the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy is to double the number of women-owned businesses by 2025¹** and, through the adoption of a whole-of-government approach to increase women's access to capital, supply chains, export opportunities, training and mentorship, to **position women's entrepreneurship as an integral part of the country's growth strategy**. One of the major strengths of the Strategy is that it combines **government resources under**

Box 20. continued

a single federal framework to further the economic empowerment of Canadian women, and sets out a flexible approach to the delivery of nationally coordinated and regionally tailored programming. This includes programme funding and support actions by the regional development agencies, the Business Development Bank of Canada (Women in Technology Venture Fund), Global Affairs Canada (Business Women in International Trade programme), Export Development Canada (Women in Trade Strategy), Public Services and Procurement Canada, Farm Credit Canada (Women Entrepreneur Programme) and others. The Strategy is also intended to contribute towards the country's progress in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

The Strategy includes four pillars addressing the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs: (1) helping women-owned businesses grow; (2) increasing access to capital; (3) improving access to federal business innovation programming (supporting women entrepreneurs entering productive sectors, such as clean technology); and (4) enhancing data and knowledge. It includes funding to support programmes targeting women-owned or women-led businesses and the organizations that support them; capital targeted at women-owned-led businesses; improved access to federal government contracting; and the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub.

- ▶ **Women Entrepreneurship Fund**, a Can\$30 million fund providing loans of up to Can\$50,000 to women-owned-led businesses (business owners and entrepreneurs) to enable them to start up, scale up and access new markets. This covers activities related to pursuing international market opportunities (including development of an online presence), and expansion and growth (including, among other activities, development and improvement of products and services, upgrading, process and technology improvements, value stream mapping and inventory management). The 2021 Federal Budget allocated an additional Can\$55 million for the establishment of a new national microloan to provide smaller amounts of affordable financing to women entrepreneurs, particularly for start-ups, underrepresented groups or sole proprietorships that may experience more difficulty in accessing financing.
- ▶ **Inclusive Women Venture Capital Initiative**, a Can\$15 million fund for projects to strengthen and build a more inclusive venture capital environment for Canadian women.
- ▶ **WES Ecosystem Fund**, a Can\$100 million fund to strengthen the capacity of existing (non-profit) ecosystem organizations across Canada to respond to systemic barriers and gaps and ensure support is available to meet the needs of diverse and/or underserved women entrepreneurs, including mentorship and networking resources. Eligible organizations are business and entrepreneur

Box 20. continued

support organizations; research and innovation hubs; business accelerators and incubators; organizations that certify diverse suppliers in Canada; and indigenous organizations. The projects supported by the Fund are closing service gaps in the entrepreneurial ecosystem for women and helping thousands of women start a business and grow an existing business.

- ▶ **Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub**, a Can\$13.6 million project to establish and support the operation of a one-stop source of knowledge, data and best practices for women entrepreneurs. The Hub brings together a network of more than 300 researchers, business support organizations and key stakeholders to create a more inclusive and supportive environment to grow women's entrepreneurship. Ten regional hubs work together to coordinate activities in different regions. The Hub also conducts a review of the Canadian entrepreneurship ecosystem's support for women, and produces an annual report on the state of women's entrepreneurship in Canada.

Source: Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (2020).

1 In 2017, 15.6 per cent of SMEs with at least one employee (employer businesses) were majority owned by women (114,000 SMEs), and women accounted for 36.9 per cent of all self-employed individuals (1,021,900).

The need for policy leadership and coordination

As many ministries and agencies are implicated in the implementation of policy initiatives to realize MSME development objectives, including those for WED, a clear system of policy leadership and operational coordination is needed. Without such mechanisms, support to women is likely to consist of disjointed and disparate initiatives without a coordinated and strategic plan of action outlining the connectivity of the various support and their ultimate culmination in increasing the number of sustainable WMSMEs with capacity for growth. Examples might be the provision of BDS services without financial assistance, the delivery of entrepreneurship training courses without any follow-through support when the training ends, or a primary focus on vulnerable women with insufficient focus on helping women entrepreneurs grow their existing businesses, diversify into growth sectors and pursue more innovative activities.

In many countries, the policy leadership for WED is delegated to the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs, and tasked with the responsibility to champion reforms and programme initiatives to address the barriers faced by women in starting, managing and growing their own businesses. Within that body, the focal point for women's entrepreneurship could take the form of a WED office or unit. For example, the United States Small Business Administration established the Office for Women's Business Ownership in 1979. The mission of the Office of Women's Business Ownership is to enable and empower women entrepreneurs through advocacy, outreach, education and support. The Office supports a number of programmes for women that are coordinated through every Small Business Administration district office, such as business training and counselling, access to credit and capital, and marketing opportunities, including through federal procurement contracts. The

Office also manages the coordination of the Small Business Administration Women's Business Centre Programme, which is comprised of a network of Women's Business Centres that serve the programme and support the needs of women entrepreneurs at state and local levels.

The WED focal point would generally have the responsibility to coordinate actions to promote WED and to ensure that information, programmes and services are being provided to respond to the capacity and other developmental needs of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs either through government bodies or in partnership with business associations, civil society organizations and the private sector. Advocacy across ministries and agencies to promote particular issues relevant to women's entrepreneurship in policy and programme formulation is also an important role of the focal point. This could include advocating the assessment of any gender-related impacts of legislation and regulations affecting the start-up and operation of an enterprise or championing the gender-mainstreaming of initiatives in ministries, agencies, financial institutions and business support organisations to improve the level of sensitivity in responding to the specificities of women's entrepreneurship.

Building a gender-inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem

The entrepreneurial ecosystem is the set of interdependent actors and factors coordinated in such a way to enable productive entrepreneurship within a particular local area or region. It comprises the formal public and private institutions and informal institutions that create and support entrepreneurial environments, including governments, development agencies, financial institutions and intermediaries, angel investors, venture

capital firms, business support organizations, business incubators and accelerators, mentors, business associations, cluster initiatives, higher educational institutions and even corporations seeking to develop relationships with future supplier firms. The intended output of an entrepreneurial ecosystem is "higher quality entrepreneurial activity". The focus on building entrepreneurial ecosystems is a relatively recent phenomenon as governments in many countries have begun to adopt an ecosystem approach with specific objectives in mind, including in the ASEAN region, such as stimulating innovative start-ups, supporting SME cluster networks and fostering an entrepreneurial culture.¹¹⁷

A "gender-inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem", more recent as a concept, fosters an inclusive environment that creates equal access for all genders to the organizations and programmes playing a key role in supporting the success of entrepreneurs and that is able to respond appropriately to unlock the skills, experience and the potential of all entrepreneurs (Sasakawa Peace Foundation and Frontier Incubators, 2020). An enabling entrepreneurial ecosystem for WED is a necessary component in allowing women to freely participate in entrepreneurial activities to their full capacity and access targeted and more effective policy and support measures to address the constraints and barriers hampering their capacity and ability to start and grow their own businesses.

The organization of an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem requires identification and assessment of strong private sector champions for women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship development and their role at the country level. In this regard, governments need to be able to identify and bring together the relevant driving forces, players and stakeholders into a common platform to share knowledge and engage in dialogues in order to more effectively

harness the combination of public and private sector support for women's entrepreneurship.

A key step in organizing an entrepreneurial ecosystem is to map all of the stakeholders and programme supports, categorized by their main target group (such as start-ups, young entrepreneurs, innovative entrepreneurs, high-growth entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs and cluster SMEs) and their support services, such as entrepreneurship training, incubation, business advice and counselling, strategic planning, mentoring, microfinancing, venture capital, digital support, technology development and SME upgrading. To assess the gender-inclusiveness of the ecosystem and the gender diversity of entrepreneurs being served, a gender lens review can be applied to all programmes and supports.

Analysis of the gender inclusiveness of the entrepreneurial ecosystem helps in identifying gender gaps, such as the level of awareness among women of existing mainstream support offers and their willingness to take advantage of them; any gender bias in the selection and in-take mechanisms used by mainstream programmes that may not appropriately account for the different characteristics of businesses operated by women (sectors, size) or the specific needs of women entrepreneurs; and the need for different content in support programmes to respond more effectively to the barriers and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and women-owned-led enterprises, given their personal characteristics, backgrounds, different labour market experiences and levels of social capital. Depending on the outcomes of this analysis, MSME policymakers can determine the actions to be taken to promote more gender-inclusiveness.

While promoting a gender-inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem should be a MSME policy priority, it takes time to infuse gender-

inclusive approaches throughout the ecosystem. In the meantime, the entrepreneurial ecosystem approach often pays inadequate attention to the targeting of women entrepreneurs and may not be inclusive of women entrepreneurs' associations and business support organizations targeting women entrepreneurs in their programmes and initiatives. To address these potential deficiencies, governments in some countries incentivize an entrepreneurial ecosystem focused on meeting the needs of women entrepreneurs. The investment of the Government of Canada to set up the Women Entrepreneurs Ecosystem Fund is an example of this (see reference in box 20).¹¹⁸ Making funding available to ecosystem actors for programmes in support of women entrepreneurs and women-owned businesses ensures their greater access to programmes and services to help them start, maintain and grow their businesses. It also builds capacity in the entrepreneurial ecosystem for the adoption of more gender-inclusive approaches.

The ministry responsible for SMEs could also promote the use of tools, such as the United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles, to encourage ecosystem actors to adopt gender-inclusive practices, as simply the responsible thing to do.

The ESCAP publication *Fostering Women's Entrepreneurship in ASEAN* makes a strong case for creating a gender-responsive ecosystem for fostering women's entrepreneurship in the region. It includes a series of recommendations for building such an ecosystem for enterprise development (ESCAP, 2017). The ESCAP Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship Project has been building on these recommendations to foster entrepreneurial ecosystems for WED in Cambodia and Viet Nam. Apart from this initiative, which could be a model for other ASEAN member States, there is little evidence in

the ASEAN region of efforts to gender-sensitize entrepreneurial or innovation ecosystems.¹¹⁹

Summary of key policy options for policy leadership and coordination for women's entrepreneurship development

- ▶ Strengthen the integration of WMSMEs across pillars of national SME development strategies.
- ▶ Develop a complementary WED strategy and action plan.
- ▶ Designate a government body to provide policy leadership and coordination for WED (preferably, the ministry responsible for SMEs).
- ▶ Establish a WED unit (focal point) in the responsible ministry.
- ▶ Promote a gender-inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

4.9 MONITORING THE IMPACT OF POLICIES FOR WOMEN-OWNED-LED ENTERPRISES AND THE PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

The application of a monitoring, evaluation and learning framework to measure success in achieving gender-inclusive outcomes in MSME support programmes begins with establishing the higher-level outcomes (or goals) for the programmes and supporting these outcomes with measurable, quantitative targets, a list of performance indicators to achieve these targets, and identification of the data collection method and frequency, and the responsible entities.

This section includes discussions on the need to collect sex-disaggregated data relative to

the role of women entrepreneurs and WSMEs in the economy and their level of participation in MSME support programmes, the KPIs for inclusion of women in MSME policy measures and programmes, the integrated reporting of the collective outcomes of MSME programmes by strategic pillars, and a monitoring and evaluation system.

Why is it important to women's entrepreneurship development?

- ▶ Evidence-based research and sex-disaggregated data are essential to effective policymaking, appropriately targeting policy supports to reduce gender inequalities and enabling a favourable environment for women's entrepreneurship.
- ▶ Sex-disaggregated data are needed to capture the state of women's entrepreneurship and develop baselines against which progress can be monitored.
- ▶ The establishment of KPIs relative to women's entrepreneurship and MSME development is essential for measuring their inclusion in policy measures and programmes and monitoring progress in achieving an increase in the number and quality of WMSMEs.

The collection of sex-disaggregated data

The importance of sex-disaggregated data has been emphasized throughout the Policy Toolkit with examples of how the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data has led to policy reforms and programme development.

Two levels of sex-disaggregated data collection are important. The first is data to capture the state of women's entrepreneurship and develop baselines against which progress can be monitored. This includes sex-disaggregated data on, for example, self-employment,

employers, business ownership by size of enterprise, new business creation rates, MSME rates of employment creation, MSME exporters and export value. Such data could be used by policymakers and advocates to monitor progress in reducing the gender gap on these indicators over time. It can also be used to measure the increased contributions of WMSMEs to the economy and to evaluate the impact of policies and measures for WMSMEs. Baselines establish the foundation for setting forward targets in MSME development action plans and/or action plans for women's entrepreneurship and gauging the quantitative improvements in women's entrepreneurship and MSME activity.

The second level of sex-disaggregated data tracks the level of participation of WMSMEs in MSME support, financing and incentive programmes (share of users, clients, beneficiaries) and is useful in signalling any gender gaps requiring specific remedial actions.

Challenges may have to be overcome in collecting some of the data. Sex-disaggregated data on self-employment activity (the own-account self-employed and self-employed "employers") are generally available from labour force surveys and easy to track. Determining the percentage of all enterprises (and MSMEs) owned by women is more difficult unless the government has adopted a formal definition of a "women-owned-led" enterprise and developed workable criteria and a statistical approach to identify businesses by the gender of their ownership in the Business Registry or a similar database. In chapter 2, some of the definitional challenges of determining that a business is actually "woman/women-owned and managed" are outlined. Notably, these challenges may have to be dealt with at the country level.

A coordinated system may have to be developed to track the level of participation of WMSMEs in MSME support and financing programmes and

capture the collective sex-disaggregated data into a central platform.

Establishment of key performance indicators for inclusion of women in micro, small and medium enterprise policy measures and programmes

Key performance indicators are useful to ensure the inclusion of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in MSME support programmes. These KPIs should be determined and reflected in the MSME policy frameworks and action plans. The example of such KPIs from the APEC-level SME Strategic Plan given in box 21 may be useful for consideration. Although the indicators are largely output-oriented (such as number of programmes or activities and number of women reached), rather than outcome-oriented (such as change in behaviour), the positive aspect of the APEC example is that performance indicators for the targeting and inclusion of women and WMSMEs were established for each of the strategy's pillars.

In general, SME development strategies, including those across the ASEAN member States, are often deficient in establishing KPIs relative to the inclusion of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs across pillars. The same would apply to the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development, which lacks specific targets and indicators for the inclusion of women in the implementation of policy pillars, making it difficult to assess performance outcomes.¹²⁰ The 2020 Mid-Term Review of the Strategic Action Plan for SME Development 2016–2025 emphasized the importance of integrating gender as a key focus in each of the five strategic goals of the action plan (ASEAN secretariat, 2021b).¹²¹ Developments to strengthen the gender-inclusiveness of the Strategic Action Plan for SME Development are underway, which as a guidance document, will greatly assist the ASEAN member States in developing more

Box 21. Example of indicators specific to the inclusion of women in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation SME Strategic Plan

The APEC SME Working Group Strategic Plan 2021–2024, agreed to by the 21 APEC economies in 2020, which include seven ASEAN member States, sets objectives and indicators specific to the inclusion of women for each of the five priority areas. Examples of the indicators for monitoring the inclusion of women entrepreneurs and WSMEs in the implementation performance of the SME Working Group Strategic Plan:

Policy priority 1: Entrepreneurship, innovation and start-ups

- ▶ Number of outreach programmes, capacity- and skill-building activities, mentoring and networking to women.
- ▶ Number of female entrepreneurs reached with entrepreneurship promotion and business development opportunities.

Policy priority 2: SME access to international markets and global value chains

- ▶ Share of SME exporters who are women.

Policy priority 3: Inclusive capability development towards digitalization

- ▶ Adoption rate of digital technology by SMEs, especially for women, youth-led businesses and rural communities.
- ▶ Number of digital skills-building activities for women to improve digital literacy to support business development in digital trade.

Policy priority 4: Access to finance and alternative financial solutions

- ▶ Number of women-led or women-owned businesses with access to new capital and export credit.

Sources: APEC Small and Medium Enterprises Working Group, Strategic Action Plan 2021–2024 (2021).

KPI-driven gender-responsive national SME development strategies and action plans and an enhanced national-level focus on WED.

Integrated monitoring and reporting

Ideally, there would be a mechanism for integrated and collective reporting of sex-disaggregated data and KPI outcomes for all entrepreneurship and MSME-related

programmes and services, under the auspices of the ministry responsible for SMEs. This can be a challenging task given the horizontal nature of MSME support programmes and services and delivery of these by a number of ministries, agencies and institutions beyond the ministry responsible for SMEs. These can include the science and technology ministry (innovation, R&D support), the trade ministry (export promotion), the employment agency

(entrepreneurship and skills training), the digital economy ministry (ICT sector), the agricultural ministry (agricultural and food processing support), government-funded incubators, development banks, and perhaps others depending on the government structure in an economy.

However, it can be achieved. The Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion in Thailand is an excellent example of an agency that provides integrated reporting on all the project support extended to SMEs from 25 agencies. The reporting gives details on the allocation of the SME budget to various SME segments: early-stage enterprises; microenterprises; small enterprises; medium enterprises; and high-potential enterprises, by type of support (such as training, financing, consulting services, coaching, cluster network support and exporting support) (see the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion Annual Report, Office

of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion, 2021). It also includes reporting on the number of SMEs making use of the SME One-Stop Service Centres, government-supported business incubators and cluster networks. This may be done more easily in Thailand because agencies that participate in the Integrated MSME Promotion Plan must report to the Office of SMEs Promotion on how their SME budget was allocated and present evaluation results.¹²² Although an excellent example of integrated reporting, the Office's annual reporting does not provide any sex-disaggregated data on the SMEs participating in the many SME support programmes.

On the other hand, in the Philippines, data on the sex distribution of participants across the Department of Trade and Industry SME support programmes are collected on a regular basis and published as part of the annual factsheet on gender statistics (see box 22).

Box 22. Reporting on gender statistics – a good practice from the Philippine Statistics Authority

The Philippines is the model ASEAN example with respect to reporting on gender statistics covering a broad range of indicators. The Philippine Statistics Authority publishes an annual fact sheet on women and men in the Philippines, starting from 2012. The fact sheets present the latest available statistical information on various spheres, such as labour, work and economic participation, overseas employment, agriculture, population, families and households, health, education, decision-making, participation in public life, violence against women and others. A current limitation in the fact sheets is the absence of gender data on indicators related to the share of women in self-employment of MSME ownership activity. However, the fact sheets include data on the inclusion of women in MSME programmes and services offered by the Department of Trade and Industry (and other departments), which is made possible by the monitoring of the Department's Gender and Development Action Plan. For example, the 2022 Women and Men in the Philippines Fact Sheet reports the following data on the share of women beneficiaries in Department of Trade and Industry programme-related services in 2021.

Box 22. continued

Trade and Industry - Services to micro, small and medium enterprises: share of women beneficiaries (%)			
Activity	% women	Programmes/services	% women/ women's enterprises
Training activities (total)	71	Industry Cluster Enhancement Programme	57
Product design-related training	72	Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme (to promote and develop MSMEs in the countryside)	49
Export-related training	67.1	Farmer-beneficiaries	49
Training provided by the Philippines Trade Training Centre and Foreign Trade Service Corp.	73.21	Shared Service Facility (aimed at improving MSME productivity and efficiency through better access to technology)	50.3
Share of women in business name registration		Kapatid Mentor ME Programme (for micro-entrepreneurs)	84.5
New business name	59.6	Negosyo Centers	64.6
Business Name renewal	48.8	One Town One Product (OTOP) Next Gen Project	69.6
		Regional Interactive Platform for Philippine Exporters (RIPPLES)	60.7
		Overall participation in programmes/services	59.8

The scale of the Department of Trade and Industry programmes and services to MSMEs vary considerably. For example, women account for 64.6 per cent of the 629,361 individuals and MSMEs served by the Negosyo Centers; 73 per cent of the 25,518 participants in training programmes; 84.5 per cent of a smaller number of 5,985 micro-entrepreneurs in the Kapatid Mentor Me Programme; and 60.7 per cent of the 79 MSMEs supported through the RIPPLES programme.

Sources: The Women and Men FactSheets of the Philippines Statistical Authority, which are available at <https://psa.gov.ph/gender-stat/wmf>.

Achieving gender equality in entrepreneurship requires concerted efforts to track and monitor the participation of women in entrepreneurial and MSME activities and the strength and growth potential of their enterprises, as improvements in the quantity and quality of data would better inform the policy development process.

The optimal approach would be to combine the comprehensive cross-government/agency monitoring approach of the Office of SMEs Promotion (Thailand) with the approach of the Department of Trade and Industry (in the Philippines) to collecting and reporting data on the share of women and WMSMEs among the beneficiaries of MSME support programmes and activities.

Establishing a monitoring and evaluation system

Establishing a tracking and monitoring system is critical for two major reasons. Progress monitoring enables the tracking of progress in implementing components of the MSME development or WED strategy. Is the intervention

being implemented according to timelines, is it delivering on the expected outputs, or is it experiencing delays or difficulties and in need of remedial actions? Impact (or achievement) monitoring tracks and assesses the outcomes of the intervention and whether it is achieving its objectives. When considering the gender-inclusiveness of the implementation of a MSME development strategy, the monitoring process would track progress relative to the baseline data and the established KPIs.

At the individual pillar or programme level, monitoring would track progress against the targets and KPIs set for the programme activity. If, for example, KPIs for the participation of women entrepreneurs or WMSMEs are not being met, further investigation would be necessary to determine the reasons by asking the following questions: Is the programme not being adequately promoted to women? Is the design or content of the programme not appropriate? Do the criteria for admission to the programme actually disadvantage the selection of women applicants? With this information, adjustments could be made to features of the programme to be more inclusive of women.

To supplement the monitoring results, follow-up surveys could be conducted with participants regarding their experience and level of satisfaction with the initiative. An additional monitoring step may be to collect views from a sample of the participants on whether they felt the assistance made a difference, and in what way. In the case of a gender-mainstreamed initiative, did the women and men feel the same or differently regarding their experience?

At the strategic level, key monitoring questions might appropriately be the following:

- ▶ Is the gender gap in self-employment rates narrowing (for both own-account self-employment and employer categories)?

- ▶ Is the number of women engaged in entrepreneurial activity increasing?
- ▶ Is there an increased rate of entrepreneurial activity among women?
- ▶ Is the share of all enterprises owned by women increasing?
- ▶ Is the sector and market diversity of women-owned enterprises changing in positive directions?
- ▶ Is the distribution of women-owned enterprises across MSME size bands changing, for instance, is the proportion of women-owned small versus microenterprises increasing? Is the proportion of women-owned medium enterprises versus small enterprises increasing?
- ▶ Is there an increasing number of WMSMEs exporting their products and services?
- ▶ Is the contribution of WMSMEs to trade statistics increasing, such as the share of exporters or the share of export volume?
- ▶ Is there an increasing number of WMSMEs participating in supply chains and public procurement?
- ▶ Is the percentage of business loans from banks to WMSMEs (and share of total loans to MSMEs) increasing?

If there is a national women's entrepreneurship strategy or action plan, such as the one being developed in Viet Nam under the ESCAP Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship Programme, baseline data would also be collected, KPIs would be established, and progress data would be monitored and reported.

A more advanced evaluation method is needed to assess the impact of the policies and programmes on WMSMEs.

Summary of key policy options for establishing a monitoring system for women's entrepreneurship development

- ▶ Implement a system for collecting sex-disaggregated data related to MSME statistics.
- ▶ Develop a coordinated mechanism for the integrated and collective reporting of sex-disaggregated statistics on users of all entrepreneurship and MSME-related programmes and services, including capacity-building of MSME agencies, other ministries, programme providers and financial institutions, to enable the consistent collection and reporting of data on the participation of women entrepreneurs in programmes and services.
- ▶ Develop KPIs for the inclusion of women entrepreneurs across pillars of the national MSME strategy and action plan.
- ▶ Develop a mechanism for monitoring gender-based outcomes at the individual programme or policy pillar level and the strategic level.

5 | Self-assessment tool



The main goal of the self-assessment tool is to help policymakers in the MSME ministries understand the enabling ecosystem for women's entrepreneurship in their country, identify gaps and facilitate action planning for fostering a more enabling ecosystem.

The self-assessment tool provides policy formulation agencies with a framework and methodology of WED assessment that is easy to understand and facilitate. It presents areas of questioning to guide the assessment process across the key areas of women-centric entrepreneurship (and MSME development) policies and actions and provides a mechanism for scoring the assessment results, which will enable the agencies involved in establishing a baseline and monitoring progress in developments over time.

Seven domains (policy areas and measures) are covered in the assessment framework. Each one is supported by subdomain indicators to help define the specific policy or programme elements leading up to the overall assessment score for the domain. Each section of the self-assessment tool includes four aids:

1. A set of questions to guide the areas for consideration in determining the current situation regarding the subdomain theme and the possible gaps.
2. A list of aspirational goals for optimal policy and programme actions.
3. A scoring grid for each subdomain, built on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 = not much is being done, and 5 = strong performance. To arrive at the scoring for a subdomain, the team conducting the self-assessment selects one

statement from the list of five statements in the scoring grid that most closely describes the overall situation regarding the subdomain in the country. Averaging the total scores for each of the subdomains in a domain category produces its overall assessment outcome.

4. Place markers at the end of each section for recording observations and insights from the assessment analysis as well as for presenting potential actions to improve performance.

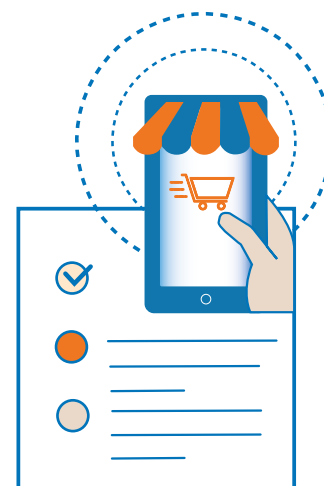
Analysis of findings from the self-assessment can lead to the identification of concrete country-specific recommendations on how to develop the potential of women's entrepreneurship to serve as the basis for an action plan of short- and medium-term priority measures by policymakers and other stakeholders. Policymakers may refer to some of the examples presented in chapter 4 for guidance in identifying possible options for policies, measures and initiatives to address gender gaps and improving self-assessment scores over time.

In summary, the outcome of policies and programmes aimed at supporting women's entrepreneurship are to generate the following:

- ▶ An improved level of women's economic empowerment and gender equity;
- ▶ An increased rate of entrepreneurial activity among women;
- ▶ An increase in the share of enterprises owned by women;
- ▶ Greater sector and market diversity of women-owned enterprises;
- ▶ Growth in women-owned enterprises (such as a larger proportion of women-owned small and medium versus micro-scale enterprises, with more of them trading in national, regional and international markets).

FRAMEWORK OF SELF-ASSESSMENT POLICY DOMAINS AND SUBDOMAINS

Aim: Gender-responsive development of the MSME sector and greater contribution of women entrepreneurs and women-owned-led enterprises to the economy



1. Gender-responsive legal and regulatory system for women's economic empowerment

- ☐ Gender impact assessments
- ☐ Gender equality in labour market participation
- ☐ Women's property and inheritance rights
- ☐ Business registration regulations and procedures

2. Policy leadership, coordination and institutional support for women's entrepreneurship development

- ☐ Women's entrepreneurship as a national development and MSME policy priority
- ☐ WED focal points and the MSME ministry or agency
- ☐ Formal mechanisms for the engagement of women entrepreneurs and representative bodies in public-private sector policy dialogue
- ☐ Inclusive response to WED in the entrepreneurial ecosystem

3. Monitoring the impact of policies and measures for women-owned-led enterprises

- ☐ Collecting and reporting on sex-disaggregated statistics relative to women's entrepreneurship
- ☐ Monitoring and evaluation

4. Gender responsive financial access

- ☐ Inclusiveness of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in generic financing programmes
- ☐ Financing programmes specifically targeted to women-owned enterprises

5. Gender responsive business development support services

- ☐ Gender responsiveness of BDS organizations and services to needs of women entrepreneurs
- ☐ Women-targeted BDS services and programmes

6. Access to domestic and international market

- ☐ E-commerce adoption and use of online trading platforms
- ☐ Government procurement targeting women-owned-led MSMEs
- ☐ Supply chain linkages and integration for WMSMEs
- ☐ Export promotion for women entrepreneurs
- ☐ Gender-responsive trade facilitation mechanisms

7. Access to information communications technologies and production technologies

- ☐ Digitalization and technology upgrading of WMSMEs
- ☐ Supportive ecosystem for women-led start-ups in ICT and technology-based sectors

Instruction guidance for completing the self-assessment

The self-assessment tool is designed for completion by the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs, which coordinates and leads the process. However, the ministry or agency will likely need to consult with other ministries and agencies to conduct the analysis underpinning the final scoring. The following steps are prescribed for undertaking the self-assessment process:

- ▶ Step 1: Establish an assessment task group with representatives knowledgeable on the different policy domains (such as a policy development domain, access to finance domain, business support domain, ICT domain and market access/trade domains). This is an important first step, as no one official in the ministry responsible for SMEs is likely to have the required knowledge to complete the assessment for all policy areas.
- ▶ Step 2: Convene an initial meeting of the task group to review the self-assessment tool and discuss a plan for conducting the assessment.
- ▶ Step 3: Assign individual task group members with the leadership responsibility to one of the policy assessment domains and the task of reviewing the current state of affairs, and collecting enough evidence to justify a preliminary scoring of 1 to 5 on the assessment grid for that policy domain (and subdomains). A composite list of scoring grids for all subdomains is attached as annex V for easy reference.
- ▶ Step 4: When each task group member has completed their work, convene a full task group meeting to share, discuss and agree on the preliminary assessment scoring results and supporting rationale/

justification and finalize the collective scoring results (scorecard). This will likely lead to some questioning of the individual scorings, further discussion and debate, and an ultimate group decision to accept or revise the score. In other words, it is a collaborative process. When the scoring is agreed, the collective scorecard can be finalized.

- ▶ Step 5: Enter the final scoring results into an Excel sheet (see the template in section 5.8), total it, and produce a spider diagram to graphically display the strongest and weakest policy area domains and subdomains (see the mock scoring example in annex VI).
- ▶ Step 6: With this visualization, reconvene the task group to discuss what and how improvements could be made in policy and programme measures to address weaker areas and achieve a higher assessment score. This should result in an action plan for strengthening support for the development of women's entrepreneurship.

The self-assessment scoring mechanism enables the involved agencies to establish a baseline and, through periodic assessment reviews, to monitor progress.

The next section provides the self-assessment tool for completion.

5.1 GENDER-RESPONSIVE LEGAL AND REGULATORY SYSTEM THAT ADVANCES WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



The level of women's entrepreneurship in an economy is strongly influenced by the legal and regulatory environment. This includes laws and regulations concerning market entry and exit (costs and feasibility of creating, growing or closing a business) and those related to the social welfare system, labour market, taxation and other policies that directly affect the costs and rewards of entrepreneurship and self-employment relative to other labour market activities (OECD, 2021a). On the labour market and social welfare side, for example, maternity and paternity leave provisions have an impact on the general rate of women's entrepreneurship, as parental leave systems typically favour those working as employees. In the OECD report "Entrepreneurship policies through a gender lens", two primary questions for ensuring that regulatory policy is sufficiently supportive of women's entrepreneurship are proposed: (1) Does the regulatory environment directly and indirectly influence labour market decisions appropriately (namely, working as an entrepreneur versus working as an employee)?; and (2) Does the regulatory environment directly or indirectly impact women entrepreneurs differently than male entrepreneurs (OECD, 2021a, p. 152)?.

This policy domain assesses four subdomain areas:

- E. Gender impact assessment
- F. Gender equality in labour market access and participation
- G. Women's property and inheritance rights
- H. Business registration regulations and procedures

A. Gender impact assessments

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Does the Government require a gender impact assessment on all legislation and regulations before they are passed into effect?		
Does the ministry responsible for SMEs advocate with the regulatory bodies for gender impact assessments of laws pertaining to SMEs, such as the enterprise law, the investment law and the labour law?		
Does the ministry responsible for SMEs conduct a gender lens review of its SME strategies and action plans?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ The national government has introduced the development of a gender impact assessment to integrate gender issues and perspectives into existing and new legislation, regulatory actions, and policy plans, programmes, and budgets.
- ▶ A gender lens analysis is performed on laws and regulations that affect the enterprise sector, including MSMEs.
- ▶ The national SME policy or strategy undergoes a gender lens review, inclusive of consultations with relevant stakeholders.

Self-assessment scoring grid: A. Gender impact assessments	Points	Score
The government has approved the principle of gender impact assessments, but it has not yet been put into effect.	1	
Gender impact assessments on new laws and regulations is a regulatory requirement of the government, but is not always performed.	2	
A gender impact assessment framework has been adopted; legal and regulatory bodies have been trained on the gender impact assessment methodology and in gender equality competencies.	3	
Gender impact assessments are routinely performed and appropriate adjustments made based on recommendations of the gender impact assessment report; the SME law (if one exists) undergoes a gender impact assessment; the national SME strategy receives, at minimum, a gender lens review before being finalized.	4	
Gender impact assessments have been conducted on all laws and regulations affecting business/SMEs (such as the enterprise law, investment law and labour law) and appropriate adjustments have been made based on recommendations of the gender impact assessments report.	5	

B. Gender equality in labour market access and participation

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Do women have equal access to the labour market under the law, evident as per the national labour law, presence of law prohibiting discrimination in employment based on gender, compliance with international conventions, such as the ILO Core Labour Standards? Are women's employment rights provided for and protected under the law?		

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Do labour laws and regulations restrict women from working in certain sectors, during certain hours, or in certain types of jobs? (For example, if women are banned from working in certain sectors or certain hours of the day, such as at night, it can influence the types of businesses they set up given that entrepreneurs often start businesses in industries or sectors in which they have previous work experience.)		
Do labour laws and employment regulations, inadvertently or otherwise, adversely affect the incentives for private employers to hire women and thus, create barriers to women's employment (such as requirements for employer-paid maternity leave and maternal care provisions; requirements to provide day-care facilities if the private sector employer employs a specified number of women; limiting their working hours, such as banning women from night work; or having to provide transportation for female employees from the workplace to home after dark). Although the intent of these laws and regulations may be to "protect" women in the workplace, they actually prejudice their hiring by private sector employers.)		
Are there laws geared to ensuring equal pay for work of equal value? (Equal pay for equal work legislation improves the parity of women's income levels and equalizes their opportunity to amass savings that could be used as start-up capital for an entrepreneurial venture.)		
Do women have equal opportunity to participate in the government's workforce training programmes that help develop employability skills in areas of highest labour market demand or in self-employment or entrepreneurship skills?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ Provisions of the labour law promote gender equality.
- ▶ Legislation on equal pay for work of similar value is in place, and efforts are being carried out to reduce the gender wage gap.
- ▶ Women have equal opportunity to participate in the labour force in occupations of their choice.
- ▶ Women have equal opportunity to become entrepreneurs as an employment status.

Self-assessment scoring grid: B. Gender equality in labour market access and participation	Points	Score
There are still a number of restrictions in the labour law preventing women from having the same work choices as men; the law does not prohibit discrimination in hiring based on gender; equal pay for work of equal value legislation is not in force; married women need to have their husband's permission to work outside the home or to operate a business.	1	

Self-assessment scoring grid: B. Gender equality in labour market access and participation	Points	Score
The labour law enables women to have some of the same opportunities as men to participate in the labour market (with some restrictions, such as in "hazardous" jobs); the law does not prohibit discrimination in hiring based on gender; equal pay for work of equal value legislation is not in force; married women need their husband's permission to work outside the home or to operate a business.	2	
Labour laws give women the same employment rights as men without restrictions; discrimination in hiring based on gender is not legally prohibited; married women are free to work outside the home or to operate a business without their husband's permission.	3	
Labour laws give women the same employment rights as men without restrictions; discrimination in hiring based on gender is prohibited; equal pay for work of similar work laws are in place; women are legally free to make the decision to work outside the home or start a business without their husband's permission; but these legal rights are not always enforced.	4	
Labour laws give women the same employment rights as men without restrictions; discrimination in hiring based on gender is prohibited; equal pay for work of similar work laws are in place; women are free to make the decision to work outside the home or start a business without their husband's permission; women are informed of their legal rights and legal recourse mechanisms are in place.	5	

C. Women's property and inheritance rights

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Do laws in the country provide women with equal rights to own land and non-land assets?		
Do laws in the country provide women with equal rights to inheritance?		
Are the legal requirements under the laws enforced or do customary or traditional practices deny women their legal rights to property ownership and inheritance?		
Are women made aware of their legal property and inheritance rights and are efforts taken to educate and inform them of their legal rights?		
Do women have access to mechanisms of legal recourse to gain their established rights through the legal system?		

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
As inequality in property and inheritance rights adversely affects the ability of women entrepreneurs to provide collateral for credit (creating gender inequalities in accessing loans for their business), does the government, including the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs and government-backed financial institutions, offer concessions for women entrepreneurs to level the playing field, such as credit guarantees with additional coverage for women borrowers)?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ Women and men have the same legal rights to property ownership and land assets.
- ▶ Widows and daughters enjoy the same rights as widowers and sons to inherit land and non-land assets.
- ▶ The government offers special financing programmes for women entrepreneurs to compensate for any gender inequalities in meeting the collateral requirements to obtain credit for their businesses, due to inequalities in property and inheritance rights.

Self-assessment scoring grid: C-1. Women's property rights	Points	Score
Women do not have the same legal rights as men to own land and non-land assets.	1	
Women and men have the same legal rights to own land and non-land assets, but not to use, make decisions and/or use land or non-land assets as collateral.	2	
Women and men have the same legal rights and secure access to land and non-land assets; however, this does not apply to all groups of women.	3	
Women and men have the same legal rights and secure access to land and non-land assets, without legal exceptions regarding some groups of women. However, some customary, religious or traditional practices or laws discriminate against women's legal right.	4	
Women and men have the same legal rights and secure access to land and non-land assets without legal exceptions; customary, religious and traditional laws or practices do not discriminate against women's legal rights.	5	

Self-assessment scoring: C-2. Women's inheritance rights	Points	Score
Widows and daughters do not have the same rights as widowers and sons to inherit land and/or non-land assets.	1	
Widows or daughters do not have the same rights as widowers and sons to inherit land and/or non-land assets.	2	
Widows and daughters have the same rights as widowers and sons to inherit land and non-land assets; however, this does not apply to all groups of women.	3	
Widows and daughters have the same rights as widowers and sons to inherit land and non-land assets without exceptions (applies to all groups of women); however, some customary, religious or traditional practices or laws discriminate against women's equal inheritance rights.	4	
Widows and daughters have the same rights as widowers and sons to inherit land and non-land assets and this applies to all women; customary, religious and traditional laws or practices do not discriminate against women's inheritance rights.	5	

Note: The scoring statements for women's property and inheritance rights are drawn from the OECD Gender, Institutions and Development Database. These statements are also used by the World Economic Forum in assigning values to countries in the Global Gender Gap Report. The scoring for women's property rights and women's inheritance rights are assessed separately because in some countries, women may have equal legal rights to own land and non-land assets, but may not have equal inheritance rights.

D. Business registration regulations and procedures

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Has analysis been conducted on the major barriers to business registration from a women's perspective?		
Are there urban-rural differences in the business registration rates of women entrepreneurs?		
Are there any legal restrictions or procedures for women to register a business (that are not there for men)?		
Are WMSMEs involved in public consultations dealing with business registration processes or reforms?		
Is there a one-stop shop or a business registration executive agency?		

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Have business registration procedures been simplified to make the process easier, more rapid and less costly? Is it possible for businesses to register with the authorities through online mechanisms (making it easier for women to register their businesses without having to travel to a business registration office)?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs, either independently or in partnership with other entities, implement initiatives to increase awareness among women entrepreneurs on the benefits of business registration and explain the business registration processes?		
Are efforts being made by the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs to reach out to women entrepreneurs with information about the business registration process, such as through SME support centres, women entrepreneurs' associations, women's groups, and civil society organizations?		
Do government-supported SME support centres, or women entrepreneurs' associations or women's support groups (on their behalf) offer assistance to women in completing the business registration process and in complying with tax and reporting requirements?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ Business registration processes have been digitalized, which will save time and cost for women entrepreneurs.
- ▶ Business registration processes can be completed online through a one-stop shop approach (reducing the need for women to visit business registration offices and making business registration more accessible to women entrepreneurs in non-urban areas).
- ▶ Women entrepreneurs and their representative bodies are included in any public consultations or policy dialogue concerning business registration reforms or processes.
- ▶ A support system exists to help informal women entrepreneurs better understand the benefits of business registration, gain knowledge about the business registration formalities and receive aid in completing the process (if needed).
- ▶ Simplification of the business registration system and access to a one-step e-business registration is leading to an increase in the number of formal women-owned MSMEs.
- ▶ Sex-disaggregated data are available on business registration.

Self-assessment scoring grid: D. Business registration regulations and procedures	Points	Score
High level of informality of women's businesses; no efforts made to make women aware of the business registration formalities.	1	
High level of informality of women's businesses; information on the benefits of business registration have been made available to informal women entrepreneurs, such as through their networks; this promotion has not resulted in reduced informality rates.	2	
Research analysis has been conducted to reveal the major challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in pursuing business registration and determine the gender-based challenges, but no specific actions have been taken.	3	
Findings from the research analysis on gender-based challenges to business registration are complemented by a gender lens assessment of the business registration regime (regulations, procedures); this information is shared in consultations processes and used to inform gender-responsive adaptations to the process.	4	
The business registration is fully digitalized through a one-stop shop e-business registration platform; WMSMEs have been informed and oriented to the digital process; the necessary support is provided to enable WMSMEs to complete the digital process; data are collected on the business registration rates of WMSMEs to monitor the level of formality.	5	

Conclusions and recommendations for considered actions – Gender-responsive legal and regulatory system that advances women's economic empowerment

When the self-assessment process is completed, observations from the analysis should be noted in a summary description (as per below), followed by the itemization of potential policy measures to address identified gaps.

Insert summary description of analysis

What is the current status? Where is there room for improvement?

Propose potential actions to be taken

Based on the analysis of the current situation, and the scoring, what are the opportunities for further action? What should be considered? Who should be responsible? What steps could be taken?

5.2 POLICY LEADERSHIP, COORDINATION AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT



This policy domain assesses four subdomain indicators:

- A. Women's entrepreneurship as a national development and MSME policy priority.
- B. WED focal points and the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs.
- C. Inclusive response to WED in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.
- D. Formal mechanisms for the engagement of women entrepreneurs and their representative bodies in public-private sector policy dialogue.

A. Women's entrepreneurship as a national development and micro, small and medium enterprise policy priority

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Is the development of women's entrepreneurship stated as a clear priority in the government's national development or socioeconomic plans?		
Does the national government provide instructions to all ministries, departments and agencies to mainstream gender in all of their policies and programmes?		
Are women integrated as a target group into the MSME policy framework? Is gender mainstreamed throughout the MSME policy or strategy document?		
Does the MSME policy framework address the specific needs and interests of women entrepreneurs and policy gaps affecting the full participation of women in each of the strategic pillars of the policy framework?		
Does the policy framework set quantitative targets for women's entrepreneurship and associated KPIs?		
Did the MSME policy framework or strategy undergo a gender lens assessment prior to being released?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs actively seek consultation input from women entrepreneurs and their representative associations in the development of policy and programme platforms?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ Women's entrepreneurship development is a national policy priority as evidenced in statements in national development plans and gender equality policies.
- ▶ The SME policy aims for gender equality and mainstreams gender throughout the SME policy framework document.
- ▶ Women are integrated as a target group into the SME policy framework, including in KPIs.
- ▶ The MSME policy framework sets targets for increases in business start-ups by women.
- ▶ The SME policy framework sets targets for increasing the percentage of women-owned enterprises in the "small" and "medium" enterprise categories (namely targets for the scaling of women-owned micro and small enterprises).
- ▶ The MSME policy framework addresses the specific needs and interests of women entrepreneurs and any policy gaps affecting the full participation of women across all strategic objectives and pillars of the policy framework. Each of the pillars includes a target for the participation of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs.
- ▶ The MSME policy framework and action plan is developed with consultation input from women entrepreneurs' associations and women's groups.
- ▶ Data are collected on the percentage of WSMEs among all SMEs by firm size in order to monitor the performance of the SME policy or strategy to strengthen women's entrepreneurship.

Self-assessment scoring grid: A: Women's entrepreneurship development as a national development and micro, small and medium enterprise policy priority	Points	Score
High-level national development and socioeconomic plans to prioritize gender equality and gender mainstreaming, but no specific reference is given to the importance of women's enterprise development.	1	
The development of women's entrepreneurship is identified as a national policy priority in high-level documents, such as the government's national development plan and the national gender strategy, but targets have not been set and concrete actions have not been articulated; the national MSME strategy only references women's entrepreneurship as a cross-cutting issue.	2	
Women entrepreneurs have been identified as a target group in the government's SME policy framework, but the policy or strategy document does not outline specific objectives, targets, and concrete actions for the inclusion of women entrepreneurs across the policy pillars.	3	

Self-assessment scoring grid: A: Women's entrepreneurship development as a national development and micro, small and medium enterprise policy priority	Points	Score
The national MSME policy framework or strategy identifies women entrepreneurs as a specific target group, addresses policy gaps affecting the full participation of women in pillars of the policy framework, and includes specific measures to foster women's entrepreneurship and MSME development across each of the strategy's pillars.	4	
The MSME policy framework goes further by articulating a national strategic framework for women's entrepreneurship development, including provisions for the start-up and growth of their enterprises.	5	

B. Women's entrepreneurship development focal points and the small and medium enterprise ministry or agency

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Is there a body within the government tasked with the responsibility for coordinating WED and providing policy leadership to other ministries, public agencies and regulatory bodies?		
Has the ministry responsible for SMEs and affiliated agencies assigned a focal point (such as a person, desk, unit, department or division) for women's entrepreneurship?		
If so, does the focal point have clear roles and responsibilities, scope, resources and influence for ensuring that other ministries and agencies with which it collaborates integrate WED concerns into their policies and programmes?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs demonstrate policy leadership by providing guidance to provincial or local government counterparts on action planning for women's entrepreneurship?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ There is a focal point in the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs for the promotion and coordination of WED and support actions.
- ▶ The WED focal point provides policy inputs on the inclusion of women entrepreneurs in MSME policies and programmes.
- ▶ The WED focal point plays a coordinating role with other relevant departments, ministries, agencies regarding the integration of a women's entrepreneurship focus in their policies, plans and programmes.

- ▶ The ministry or agency responsible for SME policy development provides leadership and guidance to provincial or local government counterparts on action planning for women's entrepreneurship.

Self-assessment scoring grid: B. Women's entrepreneurship development focal point in the small and medium enterprise ministry	Points	Score
At the national level, attention is paid to issues affecting women's entrepreneurship in certain ministries and agencies, but there are no specific WED focal points in the government.	1	
There are focal points in some ministries and departments for the gender mainstreaming of policies and programmes, but collaboration across ministries the agencies, if there is any, is limited; the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs has a gender mainstreaming focal point, but the role is limited to gendered aspects of policies and programmes within the ministry.	2	
The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs undertakes some promotional activity for women's entrepreneurship, but has not yet taken any steps to address the issue of WED policy leadership and coordination.	3	
A WED focal point has been established in the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs, but it is still not functioning properly, is underresourced, and has limited liaison across ministries and agencies.	4	
The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs has an established a WED unit that provides policy leadership and coordination across the ministry and its departments and affiliated agencies, supported by a budget, resources, and interministerial collaboration and cooperation necessary to carry out its purpose; actively consults on the policy and programme needs of women entrepreneurs with external stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.	5	

C. Formal mechanisms for the engagement of women entrepreneurs and their representative bodies in public-private sector dialogue

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Are issues affecting women in business regularly raised in dialogues between the business community and government, and do these dialogues influence the policy agenda?		
Are the issues, concerns and views of women entrepreneurs and WSMEs raised by the business and advocacy organizations routinely consulted by the government (such as the chambers of industry and commerce and national SME associations)?		

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Does the government make use of ICT-enabled mechanisms (such as online consultations and social media) to gather feedback on policy issues, and are women entrepreneurs made aware of these options for providing input?		
Are businesswomen's and women entrepreneurs' associations invited as regular members of policy dialogue meetings between the government and the business community on the broad range of issues affecting economic and social development, including on issues feeding into the preparation of national development plans, poverty reduction strategies, employment strategies and national gender policies?		
Do women entrepreneurs' associations have sufficient representation (in terms of membership) and capacity to speak on behalf of the needs of women entrepreneurs to local, regional and national policymakers on issues related to access to financing and business support, creating a favourable legislative and regulatory environment, and those that affect the development of women-owned enterprises?		
Does the government gather information on the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs' associations in terms of expanding their reach to more members and enhancing their membership services and advocacy capacities?		
Are initiatives or actions in place to build and/or strengthen the advocacy capacity of women entrepreneurs' associations?		
Does the ministry responsible for SMEs consult regularly with the representatives of women entrepreneurs' associations on policy and programme actions?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs actively seek consultation input from women entrepreneurs and their representative associations in the development of policy and programme platforms?		
Does the ministry responsible for SMEs have an organized system for soliciting the input of women's organisations and businesswomen's associations in policy dialogue?		
Are women entrepreneurs or their association representatives invited as members of any government MSME advisory committees or task forces examining business environment reforms?		
Is there documented evidence of whether the participation of businesswomen in dialogue processes has led to concrete outcomes in terms of improving the environment for women's entrepreneurship?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ The ministry responsible for SMEs consults regularly with women entrepreneurs' associations on policy and programme issues.
- ▶ Women entrepreneurs or their association representatives are invited to be members of government MSME advisory committees or task forces examining business environment reforms.
- ▶ Businesswomen and women entrepreneurs' associations are invited to be regular members of policy dialogue meetings between the government and the business community on the broad range of issues affecting economic and social development, including on issues feeding into the preparation of national development plans, poverty reduction strategies, employment strategies and national gender policies.
- ▶ Business and advocacy associations are encouraged to adopt gender-inclusive memberships and approaches to enable adequate representation of the policy views of women in business.

Self-assessment scoring grid: C: Formal mechanisms for the engagement of women entrepreneurs and their representative bodies in public-private sector policy dialogue	Points	Score
Women entrepreneur associations and groups are rarely included in formal policy dialogue mechanisms between the public and private sectors.	1	
The mainstream business associations rarely present the views of women members in their policy advocacy priorities; women entrepreneurs' associations are developing their advocacy skills and capacity, but these efforts have not yet led to much progress in influencing the government's policy agenda.	2	
The major business associations routinely raise issues of concern to their women members in policy dialogue with the government; women entrepreneurs' associations have the capacity to play a strong advocacy role on behalf of the interests and concerns of their members, and women's entrepreneurship more generally, and are consulted by the government for policy input on a regular basis.	3	
Women entrepreneurs, or their representative associations, are included as members of government task forces and advisory committees on business environment reforms and SME development issues.	4	
There are a number of concrete examples in which the participation of businesswomen and women entrepreneurs in public-private dialogue processes have led to concrete outcomes in terms of improving the environment for WED.	5	

D. Inclusive response to women's entrepreneurship development in the entrepreneurial ecosystem

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Has the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the country been mapped?		
Is the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs spearheading the "entrepreneurial ecosystem" approach in the country? Does this embrace the inclusion of women and organizations providing support to women and an analysis of gaps in terms of support to WMSMEs?		
Is there a WED focal point in the ministry to provide support in developing and coordinating the "entrepreneurial ecosystem" (including mapping of women-focused stakeholders)?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs actively engage in partnerships with other organizations and private sector companies to foster support for WED?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs advocate gender inclusive delivery of programmes and services by entrepreneurial ecosystem members?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs promote adoption of inclusive business principles by entrepreneurial ecosystem members to encourage gender-inclusive practices, such as the UN Women Empowerment Principles?		
Are women entrepreneurs' associations or women's groups (such as women's unions) present in many parts of the country and integrated into the entrepreneurship ecosystem?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs partner with and support women entrepreneurs' associations or women's union to coordinate or deliver entrepreneurship and SME support programmes to women on behalf of the government (such as digital literacy programmes, business management development, coaching or mentoring and participation in trade fairs)?		
Are entrepreneurial ecosystem members receiving government support for programme or service delivery targeting WMSMEs?		
Are entrepreneurial ecosystem members encouraged to collect sex-disaggregated data on the beneficiaries of their programmes and services?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ The entrepreneurial ecosystem has been mapped and is inclusive of organizations and service providers targeting women entrepreneurs.
- ▶ Ecosystem organizations providing services to entrepreneurs and MSMEs are encouraged to have more explicit commitments to gender equality and diversity.
- ▶ Efforts are made to raise awareness of ecosystem organizations about gender inequities and practices and to promote a gender-lens approach to their activities.
- ▶ Members of the ecosystem are provided with gender-sensitivity and -inclusiveness training and orientation and/or guidelines on gender mainstreaming or inclusive business practices and approaches.
- ▶ Ecosystem organizations are encouraged to set targets for the inclusion of women in their programmes and to collect and report sex-disaggregated data.
- ▶ Ecosystem organizations providing services to entrepreneurs and MSMEs are encouraged to offer women-friendly environments and support, such as female facilitators, mentors and advisers, women-centred design, content, and delivery of services (such as flexible hours and access to childcare.).
- ▶ Strong connections between ecosystem members and their programmes and services are facilitated to ensure that women entrepreneurs have support at each stage of their development and access to a collaborative pathfinding mechanism within the ecosystem for referrals to other programmes to meet their needs.
- ▶ Forums are provided for ecosystem members to share their experiences and challenges in becoming more gender-inclusive.

Self-assessment scoring grid: D: Inclusive response to women's entrepreneurship development in the entrepreneurial ecosystem	Points	Score
The entrepreneurial ecosystem has been mapped but is not inclusive of WED stakeholder organizations; and has not become active.	1	
The entrepreneurial ecosystem has been mapped, is inclusive of WED stakeholder organizations, and coordination of the ecosystem is in the beginning stages.	2	
The entrepreneurial ecosystem is inclusive of WED stakeholder organizations; is engaged as a collaborative group and a gender mainstreaming approach is promoted to stakeholders.	3	

Self-assessment scoring grid: D: Inclusive response to women's entrepreneurship development in the entrepreneurial ecosystem	Points	Score
Forums are hosted for entrepreneurial ecosystem members to foster exchanges and sharing of experience in becoming more gender-inclusive in their programme and service offerings.	4	
The entrepreneurial ecosystem members are becoming more collaborative with each other in providing programmes and services to women entrepreneurs, are doing cross-referrals to help women entrepreneurs navigate the system of supports, and are collecting sex-disaggregated data on the participants of their programmes and initiatives.	5	

Conclusions and recommendations for considered actions – Policy leadership, coordination and institutional support for women's entrepreneurship development

When the self-assessment process is completed, observations from the analysis should be noted in a summary description (as per below), followed by itemization of potential policy measures to address identified gaps.

Insert summary description of analysis

What is the current status? Where is there room for improvement?

Propose potential actions to be taken

Based on the analysis of the current situation, and the scoring, what are the opportunities for further action? What should be considered? Who should be responsible? What steps could be taken?

5.3 MONITORING THE IMPACT OF POLICIES AND MEASURES FOR WOMEN-OWNED-LED ENTERPRISES



This domain covers two subdomain indicators:

- A. Collecting and reporting on gender statistics relative to women's entrepreneurship
- B. Monitoring and evaluation

A. Collecting and reporting on gender statistics relative to women's entrepreneurship

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Does the country have a formal definition of a "women-owned enterprise" to aid in the quantification of the number and share of women-owned-led MSMEs in the MSME sector and provide data on the differences between WMSMEs and male-MSMEs in terms of size distribution, employment, turnover and other characteristics covered in economic or establishment censuses?		
Does the national statistical agency produce gender statistics and include sex-disaggregated data on "employment by status" (self-employed, employers, unpaid family worker) in the gender statistics report?		
Are ministries and agencies required to collect sex-disaggregated data on the users, recipients, clients, beneficiaries of all of their SME-directed programmes and services?		
Is the sex-disaggregated data compiled in a centralized database and available to the ministry responsible for SMEs for integrated analysis and reporting?		
Does the annual report on the state of SMEs, SME performance or similar report include a presentation of the sex-disaggregated data to highlight the participation of women in SME development generally and in government-supported programmes?		
Has the government set policy objectives and measurable targets for WED?		
Does the national SME development strategy include policy objectives and quantitative and measurable targets for development of women's entrepreneurship (such as a specific increase in the number or rate of women's start-ups or increase in the share of all MSMEs)?		
Are KPIs related to the inclusion of women entrepreneurs or WMSMEs established for each of the strategic objectives and actions plan pillars in the national SME development strategy?		
Does the ministry responsible for SMEs require other ministries and agencies delivering SME support programmes to collect report sex-disaggregated data?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ A formal definition of a women-owned-led MSME is in place.
- ▶ The ministry responsible for SMEs and its affiliated agencies use the definition of women-owned-led MSME when setting the eligibility criteria for access to incentives for women-owned enterprises.
- ▶ Objectives and concrete quantitative targets are set for the inclusiveness of WMSMEs in the national SME development strategy, across all strategic objectives and pillars.
- ▶ Sex-disaggregated data are collected and reported on users of all MSME support programmes.
- ▶ There is a mechanism for the integration of the collection of gender statistics on the users of government-supported entrepreneurship and MSME-related programmes and services through a single point of contact, such as the ministry responsible for SMEs.
- ▶ The annual report on MSMEs provides sex-disaggregated data for all programmes.

Self-assessment scoring grid: A. Collecting and reporting on gender statistics relative to women's entrepreneurship	Points	Score
Sex-disaggregated data on MSMEs or participation in MSME programmes are not collected; KPIs relative to women's entrepreneurship are not defined.	1	
Sex-disaggregated data on MSMEs may be collected, but are not analysed and reported; the ministry responsible for SMEs does not produce an annual report on MSMEs.	2	
The ministry responsible for SMEs produces an annual report on MSMEs; it provides comprehensive and integrated data on the take-up of all MSME programmes across relevant ministries and agencies, but it does not report any sex-disaggregated data.	3	
The ministry responsible for SMEs produces an annual report on MSMEs reporting sex-disaggregated data on all MSME-related programmes within its domain, but it does not provide integrated sex-disaggregated data on the participants/beneficiaries of the SME-related programmes of other ministries.	4	
The annual report on MSMEs includes sex-disaggregated data across programme areas and ministries and agencies, highlights whether KPI targets were met and what, if any, adjustments to programme delivery are needed to meet these targets over the life of the national SME development strategy.	5	

B. Monitoring and evaluation

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Does the government publish guidelines concerning its M&E practices that can be used by managers of M&E units as a reference document in planning, preparing and managing the M&E process for the national SME development strategy?		
Has the ministry responsible for SMEs developed a monitoring framework for tracking progress on implementation of the national SME development strategy, according to the stated activities, outputs, and outcomes for each programme area?		
Is there a process for the coordination of all actors in the implementation of MSME policies and programmes to contribute to the preparation of monitoring and assessment reports related to their areas of responsibility, including the performance indicators for gender-inclusiveness (such as an interdepartmental working group)?		
Is there a regular reporting requirement on implementation progress for all SME programme deliverers across ministries and agencies? Are these reports used to identify areas of concern and possible remedial actions?		
Are mechanisms in place to monitor the impact of policies and measures for WMSMEs?		
Does the ministry responsible for SMEs conduct surveys with WMSMEs to collect evidence of their experience and level of satisfaction with the SME support programmes?		
Is information collected from surveyed WMSMEs used to modify programme delivery to improve the experience and level of satisfaction?		
Are studies carried out on the differentiated outcome for women versus men of participation in MSME support programmes?		
Does the government make active use of the M&E results to inform policy and programme decisions?		
Is analysis performed on the impact of MSME support programmes on the growth of WMSMEs (such as number of start-ups, job creation, growth into larger size categories, integration into supply chains and export activity) and which programmes (or combinations of programmes) have the largest impact, as well as on reductions in the labour force participation gender gap, and improvements in women's economic empowerment?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ The ministry responsible for SMEs has developed a monitoring framework for implementation of the national SME development strategy and a mechanism for collaborating with other programme deliverers in other ministries and agencies to collect monitoring data on implementation progress.
- ▶ There is a requirement for regular reporting on the implementation progress for all SME programme deliverers across ministries and agencies. These reports are used to identify areas of concern and possible remedial actions.

- ▶ The ministry responsible for SMEs has a process for monitoring the impact of policies and measures for WMSMEs.
- ▶ The government makes active use of the M&E results, including on WMSME measures, to inform policy and programme decisions.

Self-assessment scoring grid: A. Collecting and reporting on gender statistics relative to women's entrepreneurship	Points	Score
No monitoring of progress in implementing the national SME development strategy is undertaken; accordingly, no monitoring of activities directed to WMSMEs is being carried out.	1	
The ministry responsible for SMEs has developed a monitoring framework, but this applies mostly to monitoring the implementation progress of programmes within its domain.	2	
The ministry responsible for SMEs has established a working group of all MSME-related implementing bodies across ministries and agencies that cooperate in preparing progress monitoring reports on a regular basis.	3	
The ministry responsible for SMEs produces the monitoring reports and tracks regular progress on implementation of programmes and actions against activities, outputs and outcomes as per the strategy action plan; particular attention is paid to achievement of KPIs and targeted outcomes for WMSMEs and identifying remedial approaches, if necessary.	4	
The ministry responsible for SMEs conducts surveys of WMSMEs to gain information on their experiences and level of satisfaction with the programme supports, makes adjustments to programme delivery or approach as per this feedback and conducts analysis of the collective impact of the MSME support programmes on the development of women's entrepreneurship and WMSMEs relative to the baseline.	5	

Conclusions and recommendations for considered actions – Monitoring the impact of policies and measures for women-owned-led enterprises

When the self-assessment process is completed, observations from the analysis should be noted in a summary description (as per below), followed by the itemization of potential policy measures to address identified gaps.

Insert summary description of analysis

What is the current status? Where is there room for improvement?

Propose potential actions to be taken

Based on the analysis of the current situation, and the scoring, what are the opportunities for further action? What should be considered? Who should be responsible? What steps could be taken?



5.4 GENDER-RESPONSIVE FINANCE

This policy domain considers two subdomain indicators:

- A.** Inclusiveness of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in accessing financing for their businesses from lending institutions, government loan or grant programmes, or from informal and formal equity investors, such as business angels and venture capital funds.
- B.** Financial programmes specifically targeting women-owned enterprises, particularly WMSMEs.

In assessing this domain, a good understanding of the major impediments to women's access to financing and the inequities and gaps in access to credit and financial service provision would be helpful so that appropriate policy actions can be identified.

A. Inclusiveness of women entrepreneurs and women-owned-led micro small and medium enterprises in generic financing programmes

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Does the government have access to research on the particular constraints of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in accessing financing in the country and on the size of the gender finance gap?		
Is there any evidence that the loan terms and conditions for WMSMEs are different than those for male-SMEs in general (such as higher interest rates, higher loan rejection rates, lower average loan size and default rates.)?		
Does the national bank issue instructions to banking institutions to allocate a certain percentage of their loan portfolio to women-owned businesses, or otherwise offer incentives to the banks to increase their lending to WMSMEs?		
Does the national bank encourage financial institutions to report sex-disaggregated data on their loan clients and portfolio?		
Does the government collect sex-disaggregated data on the MSME loan recipients participating in government-backed financial institutions (such as development banks) or SME loan funds?		
Do government-backed financial institutions set targets for reaching and serving women clients?		
Do government-backed financial institutions offer special loan schemes or products to WMSMEs that take into consideration their lower capacity to provide collateral and access traditional loan funds? Do they combine financial literacy and management development support with the loan support?		

Have gender-sensitivity programmes been implemented by government-backed financial institutions, including SME loan funds, to provide orientation and training to front-line credit officers?		
Are there proactive government policies to help women entrepreneurs overcome obstacles in accessing credit and finance by providing tools and incentives to non-governmental financial institutions, such as credit guarantee schemes and low-interest lines of credit for relending to WMSMEs?		
Has the government taken any actions to improve the accessibility of financing to WMSMEs in rural areas of the country?		
Is financial literacy an issue regarding women's access to financing?		
Is the government implementing financial literacy programmes for women to improve their capacity to access credit?		
Is the government exploring the use of innovative financial tools (such as fintech, crowd-funding platforms and gender bonds) to expand and improve access to financing for WMSMEs?		
Has the government, alone or in partnership with the private sector, taken any actions to help women entrepreneurs access equity capital for their businesses?		
Do government grant schemes targeting MSMEs, such as to support R&D and innovation activity, upgrade their technology, digitalize their operations, explore international markets, collect and report sex-disaggregated data on grant recipients? Are any actions being taken to increase the participation of WMSMEs in government grant schemes?		
Has the ministry responsible for SMEs set targets for improving WMSMEs access to financing under the finance pillar of the SME strategy?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ Programmes are available to meet the financing needs of WMSMEs at various phases of their development and growth.
- ▶ The national government encourages commercial banks to increase their lending to WMSMEs.
- ▶ The national development banks recognize the limitations of WMSMEs in accessing traditional credit and offer special loan products to meet those needs.
- ▶ The public credit guarantee agency (or equivalent), where they exist, offers guarantee products with special provisions to WMSMEs to address their lower capacity to meet the collateral requirements of commercial bank loans.
- ▶ Government grant schemes for entrepreneurs, start-ups and existing MSMEs are equally accessible to women- and male-owned businesses.

- ▶ Sex-disaggregated monitoring data confirm equitable participation in government grant schemes and MSME Funds.
- ▶ Sex-disaggregated data collected from financial institutions indicate that the gender finance gap for WMSMEs is narrowing.

Self-assessment scoring grid: A. Inclusiveness of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in generic financing programmes	Points	Score
The commercial banking system takes a passive approach to lending to women entrepreneurs; is not yet actively reaching out to the market of WMSMEs with promotional efforts.	1	
On the supply side, the government provides incentives to stimulate the commercial banks to lend to WMSMEs to address the financing gap (such as credit guarantee schemes); banks are required to provide sex-disaggregated data on their loan clients.	2	
In addition to stimulating the supply side of lending to WMSMEs, the government assists the demand side by providing accessible financial literacy programmes to WMSMEs.	3	
In addition to working the supply and demand sides of access of WMSMEs to commercial lending, the government sets performance targets for the share and volume of financing to WMSMEs through government SME funds, MSME-targeted grant programmes and national development banks.	4	
The banking and government sector is well developed in terms of financing WMSMEs; loan products and services have been modified to meet the needs of WMSMEs; performance targets are set for the number and share of loans and grants extended to women entrepreneurs; sex-disaggregated data are reported on loan and SME grant scheme clients.	5	

B. Financing programmes specifically targeted to women-owned enterprises

This subdomain focuses on examining financing initiatives designed specifically for women-owned enterprises. To tackle gender inequalities in access to financing and the more severe constraints that women entrepreneurs face (such as the inability to provide adequate collateral and lack of capacity to develop strong financing proposal), the government or other bodies may have established special financing programmes for women entrepreneurs. These may include loan guarantee schemes and seed or venture capital funds that specifically target women-owned enterprises.

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Does the government help address the collateral constraints of women entrepreneurs by offering a credit guarantee scheme tailored to their needs?		
Are special loan products or financial services targeted to WMSMEs in the country?		
Does the government offer financial literacy programmes specifically targeting WMSMEs?		
Have international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, IFC, ADB or similar entities partnered with banks in the country to deliver women in business financing programmes (such as the IFC Women Entrepreneur Finance Initiative)?		
Do government agencies, including the SME agency, make provisions for targeting women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in their various business grant programme schemes or SME loan funds (such as funds specially designed to meet the needs of WMSMEs)?		
Does the government support financial innovations, such as fintech, crowd-funding platforms and mobile money products to make financing more accessible to WMSMEs?		
Does the government provide support to women-targeted seed or venture capital programmes or funds in the country?		
Does the government collect data on the total number of WMSMEs accessing women-targeted financing programmes and the impact of these financial programmes?		
Do WMSME-targeted financing programmes offer complementary services to improve the management capacity of these clients (such as business and financial management advice and mentoring).		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ The government offers a special credit guarantee scheme for women entrepreneurs to help address their collateral constraints in securing loans from the commercial banking sector.
- ▶ The government provides for the provision of financial literacy programmes specifically targeting WMSMEs.
- ▶ The government collaborates with international financial institutions in bank-partnered initiatives to deliver women in business financing programmes.
- ▶ Government agencies, including the SME agency, make provisions for targeting women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in their various business grant programme schemes or SME loan funds (such as funds specially designed to meet the needs of WMSMEs).
- ▶ The government takes advantage of the women entrepreneur financing initiatives available from international financial institutions.
- ▶ The government provides support for women-targeted seed funds or venture capital programmes in the country.
- ▶ Fintech options provide more accessible financing for WMSMEs in the country.

Self-assessment scoring grid: B. Financing programmes targeted to women-owned enterprises	Points	Score
The government and financial stakeholders have documented evidence of the gender gap in financing for WMSMEs, but no action is taken; there are no specifically targeted financial programmes or services for women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs.	1	
The majority of women-focused loan programmes target women with micro-enterprises (such as microcredit programmes); few loan options target women with growth enterprises.	2	
WMSME-targeted credit programmes are providing access to financing for WMSMEs of different sizes and at different stages of development (from start-up to expansion), but they are not widely available in non-urban parts of the country; there is no evidence of women-focused equity (seed and venture capital) programmes.	3	
WMSME-targeted government credit guarantee schemes complement credit programmes targeting women entrepreneurs at different stages of their development, but they are primarily accessible to women entrepreneurs in urban areas; the ministry responsible for SMEs is cooperating with the ministry of finance to explore fintech options to improve access to financing for WMSMEs across urban-rural dimensions; initial efforts are in place to encourage the development of women-targeted angel and venture capital funds.	4	
Both women-targeted credit (microfinancing and commercial bank financing) and equity (seed and venture capital) programmes exist and are accessible to women entrepreneurs in urban and rural areas, including through ICT-enabled and fintech solutions, such as mobile money and digital platforms.	5	

Conclusions and recommendations for considered actions – Gender-responsive financial access

When the self-assessment process is completed, observations from the analysis should be noted in a summary description (as per below), followed by itemization of potential policy measures to address identified gaps.

Insert summary description of analysis

What is the current status? Where is there room for improvement?

Propose potential actions to be taken

Based on the analysis of the current situation, and the scoring, what are the opportunities for further action? What should be considered? Who should be responsible? What steps could be taken?

5.5 GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SERVICES



This policy domain considers two subdomain indicators:

- A. Gender responsiveness of BDS organizations and services to the needs of women entrepreneurs.
- B. Women-targeted BDS services and programmes.

A. Gender responsiveness of business development support organizations and services to the needs of women entrepreneurs

The assessment of this subdomain examines aspects of the delivery, relevance and responsiveness of mainstream BDS services to the needs of women entrepreneurs, such as government SME support centres.

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs conduct surveys on the population of women entrepreneurs and WSMEs regarding their SME support needs?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs make government-supported BDS service providers aware of the barriers and constraints faced by women entrepreneurs?		
Have government-supported SME support centres committed to gender mainstreaming of their programmes and services?		
Do government-supported BDS providers adjust their services and the nature of their service delivery to accommodate the needs of women entrepreneurs (such as by adjusting eligibility criteria to be more inclusive of women-owned enterprises, making use of online service delivery, offering flexibility in the scheduling the delivery of training, and seeking gender balance in the composition of business advisors and mentors)?		
Do the government-supported SME support centres make concerted efforts to disseminate information on BDS programmes and services to women entrepreneurs (such as through businesswomen's networks or through the use of ICTs.)?		
Do government-supported SME support centres maintain a gender balance of advisers and mentors?		
Has any gender-sensitivity or gender-mainstreaming training been delivered to staff of government-supported BDS organizations?		
Are government-supported SME support centres required to collect sex-disaggregated data on users of their services (such as the share of women among clients) by type of service (such as information, advice, counselling and referral, services)?		

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Are efforts being made to increase the number of women-owned and -led start-ups participating in government-supported business incubators?		
Are government-supported incubators required to collect data on the percentage of female-founded start-ups participating in their programmes?		
Are assessments carried out on the differences in the impact of BDS services on the performance of WMSMEs (or on satisfaction with the services) versus male MSMEs?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs include a menu option for “women entrepreneurs” (subportal) on the government’s national SME web portal that provides relevant information and knowledge and linkages to support programmes and services offered by the government and other stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem?		
Does the ministry or the agency responsible for SMEs actively mobilize an entrepreneurial ecosystem approach to supporting MSMEs in general and specifically women entrepreneurs?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ Women entrepreneurs have equal access to services offered in government-supported enterprise or SME support centres.
- ▶ Government-supported enterprises or SME support centres make special efforts to inform women entrepreneurs about SME support centres and services available to them.
- ▶ Government-supported enterprise or SME support centres provide services specifically for female clients (such as a women’s desk and play centres for women with children).
- ▶ Government-supported enterprises or SME support centres demonstrate gender-sensitivity and responsiveness by making use of female staff as advisers, including, for example, specifying women mentors in the mentor database.
- ▶ Sex-disaggregated monitoring data confirm the level of participation of women in services and programmes offered in government-supported enterprise and SME support centres, business incubation programmes, entrepreneurship and business management training programmes and mentoring programmes.
- ▶ Government-supported BDS programmes offered by other organizations carry the condition of gender mainstreaming and the collection and reporting of sex-disaggregated data on clients and types of BDS services.

Self-assessment scoring grid: A. Gender responsiveness of business development support organizations and services to the needs of women entrepreneurs	Points	Score
Most BDS providing organizations, including government-supported SME support centres, have few women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs participating in their programmes and services (based on, for example, a low percentage of all clients); limited efforts are made to promote these services to WMSMEs; no special efforts are made to attract women entrepreneurs.	1	
Government-supported SME support centres and other BDS providing organizations are cognizant of the low take-up of services by women and are beginning to examine why that is the case through surveys and consultations with WMSMEs.	2	
The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs offers or arranges for gender-sensitivity training or orientation to staff in the government-supported SME support centres, government-supported business incubators, and other government-supported BDS providers; efforts are taken to create broader awareness among women entrepreneurs of the BDS services, including through women's networks and social media; however, most BDS programmes and services have not been specifically adapted to meet the needs of women clients.	3	
The government-supported SME support centres and BDS providers have modified existing BDS services and offerings to respond to the needs of women entrepreneurs (such as flexible scheduling, use of women advisers, counsellors and trainers, gender-responsive content, or using ICTs to expand their delivery reach), and are actively promoting their services to potential women entrepreneurs and existing WMSMEs, including through the national SME portal.	4	
Government-supported SME support centres and BDS services are perceived as women-friendly; women entrepreneurs are equally as likely as male entrepreneurs to be making use of all types of BDS programmes and services; this is confirmed by sex-disaggregated data on clients and services.	5	

B. Women-targeted business development support services and programmes

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Is there an evidence-based policy rationale in the country for developing and offering dedicated BDS services for women entrepreneurs (such as an analysis carried out by the government to support women-targeted BDS programmes and services)?		
Has the government introduced or supported special BDS services for women entrepreneurs to address gaps in the provision of mainstream BDS services to women entrepreneurs?		
In the women-targeted market for BDS, is the BDS provider responding in a more gender-responsive way to the needs of women entrepreneurs than mainstream BDS providers (such as modifying content, programme and service offerings, use of women advisers, counsellor, trainers and gender-responsive staff)?		
Does the delivery of the programmes and services differ from methodologies or approaches used by mainstream services providers (addressing women's time, scheduling, travel constraints)?		
Have women's enterprise centres or women business incubators been established to provide women-friendly environments for accessing BDS and business start-up programmes or services?		
Are data collected on the number of women participating in the various service offerings and the geographical outreach of the women-focused programmes in urban and rural areas?		
Are data reported on the impact of the programmes and services in terms of women's start-ups, skills enhancement, increased productivity and expanded markets, among other factors?		
Are women-targeted BDS programmes and services being funded through the government budget?		
Or are women-targeted BDS programmes and services being primarily funded through donor-funded projects or initiatives? (may not be sustainable when a donor project comes to an end.)		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ Evidence has been gathered on the need for developing and offering dedicated BDS services for women entrepreneurs, supporting the provision of women-targeted BDS programmes and services.
- ▶ The ministry responsible for SMEs supports the development of dedicated BDS services for women entrepreneurs to address gaps in the provision of mainstream BDS services to women entrepreneurs.

- ▶ The dedicated BDS services for WMSMEs respond in a more gender-responsive way to the needs of women entrepreneurs than mainstream BDS providers (such as modified content, use of women advisers, counsellors or trainers, flexible scheduling and on-site play areas for clients with small children).
- ▶ Dedicated women's enterprise centres and/or women business incubators have been established to provide women-friendly environments for women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs.
- ▶ Data are collected on the number of women participating in the various women-focused programmes and service offerings in urban and rural areas to assess geographical reach and impact.
- ▶ Data are reported on the impact of the programmes and services in terms of women's start-ups, skills enhancement, increased productivity and expanded markets, among other factors.
- ▶ The provision of women-targeted BDS programmes and services receives funding through the government budget to ensure sustainability.

Self-assessment scoring grid: B. Women-targeted business development support services and programmes	Points	Score
No BDS services or programmes specifically target women at the moment; there is growing recognition of the need to reach out to women with more responsive BDS.	1	
There are isolated women-targeted BDS services or programmes, but with limited breadth in service offerings and very local in their reach; most are initiated and delivered by NGOs dedicated to enhancing the capacity of women-owned micro and small enterprises.	2	
A number of women-targeted BDS programmes are being offered, but they focus on a limited range of offerings (such as self-employment training for women and BDS for women-owned microenterprises); are fragmented and not accessible in all parts of the country.	3	
A number of women-focused BDS programmes are being offered; in addition to meeting the training and development needs of microenterprises, they also target women in growth enterprises and the upgrading and capacity-building of WMSMEs; are accessible to women in most regions of the country; often supported by international development partners.	4	

Self-assessment scoring grid: B. Women-targeted business development support services and programmes	Points	Score
There is an organized national system of business support for women entrepreneurs, such as a women's desk in government MSME agencies and SME support centres, women's enterprise or business resource centres, entrepreneurial training programmes for women, women's page on the national SME portal, and use of online tools for disseminating information to women entrepreneurs and accessing mentors and accessing entrepreneurship courses, including with online access to training, advice and mentoring through, for example, ICTs or learning apps.	5	

Conclusions and recommendations for considered actions – Gender-responsive business development support services

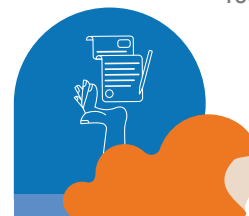
When the self-assessment process is completed, observations from the analysis should be noted in a summary description (as per below), followed by the itemization of potential policy measures to address identified gaps.

Insert summary description of analysis

What is the current status? Where is there room for improvement?

Propose potential actions to be taken

Based on the analysis of the current situation, and the scoring, what are the opportunities for further action? What should be considered? Who should be responsible? What steps could be taken?



5.6 ACCESS TO DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

This policy domain assesses five subdomain indicators:

- A. E-commerce adoption and use of online trading platforms
- B. Government procurement programmes targeting WMSMEs
- C. Supply chain linkages for WMSMEs
- D. Export promotion for women entrepreneurs
- E. Gender-responsive trade facilitation mechanisms

A. E-commerce adoption and use of online trading platforms

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Is the adoption of e-commerce by WMSMEs a stated priority of the government?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs collect and analyse sex-disaggregated data on participants in the government-supported e-commerce training programmes for MSMEs to identify gender gaps in take-ups?		
Has the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs entered into partnerships with the ministry responsible for ICT/digital economy (or other related areas) to develop e-commerce training for women entrepreneurs?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs and/or the ministry responsible for ICT/digital economy partner with private sector ICT and e-commerce companies to deliver capacity-building training to WMSMEs?		
In addition to e-commerce training, is assistance provided to WMSMEs to facilitate their onboarding to e-commerce platforms?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs provide financial support to WMSMEs to increase their production capacity and meet the fulfilment requirements for onboarding to popular e-commerce platforms to sell their products?		
Are mentors made available to WMSMEs to guide them through the process for establishing their businesses on e-commerce platforms?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs collects and analyses sex-disaggregated data on participants in the government-supported e-commerce training programmes for MSMEs and identifies gender gaps in take-up.

- ▶ The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs enters into partnerships with the ministry responsible for ICT/digital economy (or other related areas) to implement e-commerce training for women entrepreneurs.
- ▶ The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs and/or the ministry responsible for ICT/digital economy partner with private sector ICT and e-commerce companies to deliver capacity- building training to WMSMEs.
- ▶ Assistance is provided to WMSMEs to facilitate their onboarding to e-commerce platforms.
- ▶ The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs provides financial support to WMSMEs to increase their production capacity and meet the fulfilment requirements for onboarding to popular e-commerce platforms to sell their products.
- ▶ Mentors are made available to WMSMEs to guide them through the process to establish their businesses on e-commerce platforms.
- ▶ An increasing number of WMSMEs are selling their products on e-commerce platforms.

Self-assessment scoring grid: A. E-commerce adoption and use of online trading platforms	Points	Score
Few WMSMEs have the capability to adopt e-commerce, but may be using social media platforms, such as Facebook Marketplace, to sell their products.	1	
A number of support organizations are offering digital literacy training to WMSMEs to enhance their skills; generally need more than digital literacy training to move to e-commerce.	2	
The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs and/or the ministry responsible for ICT/digital economy are partnering with private sector ICT and e-commerce companies to deliver capacity-building training to WMSMEs; WMSMEs have difficulty accessing support to build their production capacity and manage the digital aspects of online selling.	3	
The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs and/or the ministry responsible for ICT/digital economy are collaborating to provide the necessary programme support to e-commerce-ready WMSMEs to build their production capacity and manage the digital aspects of online selling.	4	
There are dedicated programmes to support WMSMEs in onboarding to e-commerce platforms, both government-developed e-commerce platforms and international e-commerce platforms; many WMSMEs have the capacity to meet the demand from online orders; WMSMEs are substantially increasing their sales on the e-commerce platforms.	5	

B. Government procurement programmes targeting women-owned-led micro, small and medium enterprises

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Has an analysis been conducted on public procurement contracts awarded by gender?		
Has the government assessed the access barriers faced by women-owned enterprises in competing for government contracts and identified how they could be addressed?		
Does the government make special provisions in the public procurement law or policy for the awarding of procurement contracts to MSMEs?		
Does the public procurement law or policy specify special provisions for the awarding of procurement contracts to WMSMEs (such as a quota system or setting aside a certain percentage of the value of procurement contracts)?		
Has the public procurement office made adjustments to tender packaging and calls to be more conducive to the engagement and successful bidding of WMSMEs (such as offering smaller lot sizes, reducing the requirements for performance bonds and bid guarantees, and offering advance payments) to reduce the key obstacles to the participation of WMSMEs in the procurement process?		
Are specific efforts being made by the public procurement office to inform WMSMEs about procurement opportunities?		
Are public procurement opportunities publicly available through online mechanisms, including through online tendering and bidding processes?		
Have initiatives been designed to facilitate access to government procurement opportunities, including using innovative technology solutions, and are women-owned enterprises being targeted and participating?		
Are efforts being made by the government to provide training to procurement officers on gender-inclusive procurement?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs, in concert with the public procurement office, partner with women entrepreneurs' associations and women's business groups to disseminate information on public procurement and create awareness of opportunities and processes?		
Are efforts being made to provide training to WMSMEs on how to access procurement opportunities?		
Is there a process in place for pre-qualifying and "certifying" WMSMEs as potential suppliers to the government?		
Are efforts made to input "pre-qualified" WMSMEs in the procurement supplier database?		

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Does the ministry responsible for SMEs include “access to government procurement” as a policy objective for SME development, and including for WSMEs?		
Does the ministry responsible for SMEs provide support to build the capacity of WSMEs to compete for public procurement contracts?		
Are efforts being made by the government to foster linkages between WSMEs and public procurement offices (such as organizing business matching fairs)?		
Are sex-disaggregated data collected and reported on the number and share of procurement awards given to WSMEs?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ The government recognizes the public procurement market as a tool for increasing the domestic market for WSMEs and this is reflected in the national SME development strategy and action plan.
- ▶ The government has established public procurement targets and/or goals for the amount and percentage awarded to women-owned businesses; these are followed by the public procurement office.
- ▶ The procurement office has made adjustments to the tendering and bid evaluation processes to be more conducive to the participation of WSMEs and developed a set of guidelines on procurement to WSMEs, which are followed by procurement officers.
- ▶ Public procurement officers receive gender-sensitivity and gender mainstreaming training on how to process procurement rules for WSMEs.
- ▶ The government has implemented a mechanism for “certifying/verifying” that an SME meets the criteria as being “women-owned”.
- ▶ The procurement office maintains a database of “verified” women-owned supplier firms.
- ▶ The procurement office makes use of e-procurement systems to ease participation of SMEs and WSMEs in the procurement process.
- ▶ The government cooperates with women entrepreneurs’ associations in promoting public procurement opportunities to WSMEs.
- ▶ The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs supports the delivery of capacity-building workshops to WSMEs on how to compete for public procurement contracts.
- ▶ The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs facilitates linkages between WSMEs and government procurement opportunities.
- ▶ The government procurement office monitors the allocation of procurement contracts to WSMEs and reports on the share of contracts awarded to WSMEs and the share of total procurement value.

Self-assessment scoring grid: B. Government procurement programmes targeting WMSMEs	Points	Score
Information on public procurement opportunities is made available to businesses; no specific efforts are made to inform WMSMEs or reach out to them; no sex-disaggregated data on procurement contract awards.	1	
Special efforts are made to disseminate information on public procurement opportunities to potential women suppliers, such as through businesswomen's networks and online mechanisms, but no targets have been set for contracting WMSMEs and no adjustments have been made to the procurement rules and processes.	2	
Analysis conducted on the constraints affecting women-owned businesses in accessing the procurement system; in addition to general promotional efforts, capacity-building sessions are offered to procurement officers on gender-inclusive procurement, and to women entrepreneurs on how to access public procurement opportunities; more attention being paid to the adoption of gender-responsive procurement practices.	3	
WMSMEs are targeted with orientation workshops on public procurement and offered programmes to build their capacity to meet the requirements to compete for public procurement contracts; supplier-ready WMSMEs are "pre-qualified" as competent suppliers (according to product categories) and included in the list of pre-qualified suppliers used by the public procurement office.	4	
Gender-responsive procurement practices are being adopted; government procurement programmes are targeting WMSMEs, such as by allocating a certain percentage of the value of procurement contracts to WMSMEs and applying preference provisions; the share of WMSMEs in procurement awards is monitored and reported.	5	

C. Supply chain linkages for women-owned-led micro, small and medium enterprises

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Are efforts being made to integrate gender analysis into value chain analyses?		
Are specific actions being taken by the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs to further integrate women-owned enterprises into supply and value chains and other linkages activities?		
Are initiatives being implemented to link women-owned enterprises in the supply chains of large businesses?		
Are efforts being implemented to help women-owned enterprises build their capacity to become credible suppliers in supply or value chains (such as targeting sectors in which women-owned enterprises are dominant, targeted supplier development programmes)?		
Are data collected on the degree of integration and participation of women-owned enterprises in supply chain development programmes and initiatives and the impact on their business development?		
Does the ministry responsible for SMEs facilitate linkages between WMSMEs and large domestic businesses and country-based multinationals with existing supplier diversity programmes?		
Does the ministry responsible for SMEs encourage large domestic businesses and country-based multinationals to implement gender-inclusive practices and adoption of supplier diversity programmes (such as by promoting the Women Empowerment Principles, which would lead to working with WMSMEs as suppliers)?		
Is there a process and programme in place to certify WMSMEs as "women-owned and -led" and verify them as credible suppliers for companies with supplier diversity programmes?		
Do government-supported SME support centres, or women entrepreneurs' associations or women's support groups (on their behalf) offer assistance to women in completing the business registration process and in complying with tax and reporting requirements?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs implements specific actions to further integrate WMSMEs into supply and value chains, including capacity-building of WMSMEs to become credible suppliers in these chains.
- ▶ The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs fosters supply chain linkages between WMSMEs and medium and large domestic businesses in the country through supplier development programmes.

- ▶ The ministry responsible for SMEs provides support to WMSMEs in accessing the procurement opportunities of private sector companies with supplier diversity programmes, including capacity-building, programmes to “certify” the WMSMEs as “women-owned”, and efforts to link the WMSMEs to the companies (such as through a partnership with WEConnect International).
- ▶ The ministry responsible for SMEs encourages larger domestic businesses and country-based multinationals to implement gender-inclusive practices and adopt supplier diversity programmes.
- ▶ Data are collected on the degree of integration and participation of women-owned enterprises in supply chain development programmes and initiatives and the impact on their business development.

Self-assessment scoring grid: C. Supply chain linkages for women-owned-led micro, small and medium enterprises	Points	Score
There are a few value chain initiatives to integrate SMEs in sectors with a high share of female workers, but none of them specifically seek to integrate WMSMEs.	1	
There are a few initiatives to integrate WMSMEs into value and supply chains, but women lack awareness about them and are not generally informed about or targeted for capacity-building activities.	2	
There are a number of good supply chain or linkages programmes targeting women-owned enterprises, but they are limited to one or two sectors and/or one or two regions.	3	
Promotional efforts to create awareness of supply chain opportunities for WMSMEs are being made, particularly in relation to corporate supplier diversity programmes; efforts are being made to build their capacity to become supply chain suppliers.	4	
Supply chain initiatives for WMSMEs are being implemented across many sectors in which women are dominant, and in different parts of the country; supply chain linkages have been fostered with large enterprises; a number of WMSMEs are certified as “women-owned-led businesses” and have engaged in supplier arrangements with large domestic firms and country-based multinational corporations.	5	

D. Export promotion for women entrepreneurs

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Is country-level research available on the barriers and challenges facing WSMEs wishing to engage in international trade activities (exporting and importing), such as being at a disadvantage to men in competing in international markets due to their lower access to finance, professional networks, and other resources, smaller average size or lower levels of capitalization?		
Are sex-disaggregated data available on the share of WSMEs in the country's exports (share of exporting SMEs, share of export value) by sector, industry, and market destination?		
Are efforts being made to disseminate information on market opportunities to women entrepreneurs, including through the use of ICT tools?		
Are support programmes or initiatives in place to help women entrepreneurs identify new export markets and expand existing ones?		
Do export development support programmes include targets and objectives for the participation of WMSMEs? Are data collected on the extent to which women entrepreneurs are being targeted and participating in these activities? Is the impact of these programmes on the women-owned enterprises versus the male-owned businesses being assessed?		
Are ICT tools being used in innovative ways to enable women to access export markets, including, for example, marketing and selling their products and services to overseas markets over Internet platforms tailored to e-commerce and business process outsourcing?		
Are efforts being made to include WMSMEs in national exhibitions and international trade missions and fairs in order to increase their level of participation? (Note by which agency and what results have been achieved to date.)		
Does the export promotion agency provide support to women entrepreneurs in accessing international markets?		
Do government-sponsored international trade missions seek gender balance by ensuring that women-owned businesses are well represented?		
Has the export promotion agency led (or considered leading) women-only trade missions, which is becoming a more common practice between countries?		
Are efforts being made to ensure the participation of WMSMEs in the mainstream export promotion and development offerings to help SMEs export?		

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Are there targeted programmes to help WMSMEs export (such as export-readiness programmes, technology and production upgrading, acquiring international quality standards, grants and low interest loans)?		
Does the export promotion agency support women entrepreneurs in accessing international markets by making exporting information readily available to them, providing export-readiness training, and facilitating contacts with international buyers?		
Does the government make provisions for SME exporters to access export financing programmes? Do WMSME exporters have access to these export financing programmes?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ Sex-disaggregated data are collected on exporters and export volume, by sector.
- ▶ The export promotion agency collects sex-disaggregated data on the participation of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in government-supported trade missions.
- ▶ The export promotion agency negotiates and organizes “women-only” trade missions for women entrepreneurs to selected markets.
- ▶ The ministry or agency responsible for SME and/or the export promotion agency offer export-readiness and capacity-building programmes to women with exporting potential.
- ▶ Export-potential and exporting WMSMEs have equitable access to government grant and financing schemes available to MSMEs to build their production capacity, upgrade their quality processes, acquire international standards and meet the fulfilment requirements for listing on international e-commerce platforms, such as Amazon and Alibaba.
- ▶ Export-ready and already exporting WMSMEs are included in the country's directory of exporting firms.

Self-assessment scoring grid: D. Export promotion for women entrepreneurs	Points	Score
No government-supported programmes are specifically targeting WMSMEs with export promotion or development programmes; participation of WMSMEs in mainstream programmes is low.	1	
Some limited efforts are being made to promote export opportunities to WMSMEs through dissemination of information, but they are generally not represented in government-sponsored trade missions or in export training programmes.	2	

Self-assessment scoring grid: D. Export promotion for women entrepreneurs	Points	Score
Government agencies are making active efforts to include women entrepreneurs in export orientation seminars and workshops; women are participating to a minimal degree in government-sponsored trade missions and fairs; sex-disaggregated data on participants are being collected.	3	
Government agencies are making concerted efforts to promote export opportunities to WMSMEs; early efforts are being made to ensure that women entrepreneurs are included in export-readiness and capacity-building programmes to improve their product quality and marketing skills; the participation of WMSMEs in government-sponsored trade missions or fairs is actively sought; sex-disaggregated data are collected.	4	
There is a national "export promotion for women entrepreneurs" strategy or programme that is comprehensive in nature, taking into account all of the above; targets are included for increases in the export activity and the contribution of women exporters; key performance measures are monitored.	5	

E. Gender-responsive trade facilitation mechanisms

Matters related to trade policy and trade facilitation mechanisms may not fall directly within the purview of the ministry responsible for SMEs in a country; this depends on the scope of that ministry's overall mandate. The ministry may, in some cases, also be responsible for trade policy and activities; in other cases, trade policy may be the responsibility of a separate ministry. Because the internationalization of SMEs is commonly a pillar of the national SME strategy, the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs is in the position to advocate consideration of WMSMEs in trade facilitation mechanisms.

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Do trade policy reforms focus on measures that support the internationalization of women-owned-led businesses?		
Are gender-related provisions in trade policies monitored and are the results used to inform subsequent adjustments in the implementation framework?		
Have trade facilitation formalities been subjected to a gender lens assessment to identify areas for improvement?		
Has analysis been conducted on the border experience of WMSMEs (trade facilitation mechanisms)?		

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Has research on the experience and challenges of WMSMEs in accessing the trade facilitation mechanisms informed adjustments to the procedures and processes (analysis of challenges, steps taken to ease their access, increase their usage)?		
Does the trade facilitation policy or strategy include an objective to increase women's participation in trade (an indicator measured as part of a country's progress report on trade facilitation measures under the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement)?		
Are trade facilitation measures designed to benefit women involved in trade (such as establishing a gender focal point in the relevant border agencies, promoting balanced participation of men and women in trade training or offering specific trade facilitation training for women involved in trade)?		
Have staff and officers in trade facilitation offices (such as customs, border agencies) been offered gender-sensitivity awareness or training sessions?		
Are efforts being made to achieve a gender balance in customs and border control officers?		
Are special efforts being made by the ministry or agency responsible for MSMEs, either solely or in cooperation with women entrepreneurs' associations, to provide women entrepreneurs with information sessions, workshops and training on import and export processes and trade facilitation procedures (documentation, e-submissions, how to find the necessary information, how to submit documents, pay fees and access cross-border procurement procedures)?		
Are women represented in the national trade facilitation committee (in compliance with the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement)?		
If not, are steps being taken to ensure women's membership in the national trade facilitation committee?		
Has the national trade facilitation committee established technical working groups or regional committees on gender equality to help mainstream gender into trade facilitation reforms?		
Is there a formal process of consultation on trade facilitation mechanisms or reforms that includes the views of women exporters?		
Are women's business associations and WMSMEs engaged in inclusive public-private sector dialogue to identify trade facilitation challenges and inform project design and possible implementation solutions?		
Are sex-disaggregated data collected on traders (importers, exporters) interacting with the trade facilitation mechanisms?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ Trade policy and strategy, and trade reforms are analysed to determine the impact on women and men respectively.
- ▶ A gender lens assessment of trade facilitation reforms informs areas for improvement.
- ▶ Trade facilitation information is strategically disseminated to women entrepreneurs.
- ▶ Women entrepreneurs are offered capacity-building workshops on navigating the trade facilitation system.
- ▶ Gender-sensitivity orientation and training is provided to trade facilitation officials and border control officers.
- ▶ Women are included in the hiring of customs and border control officers.
- ▶ The single window approach integrates a specific service for women cross-border traders.
- ▶ Women entrepreneurs and their representative bodies are included in public consultations and awareness programmes on trade facilitation matters.
- ▶ The national trade facilitation committee has women in its membership.
- ▶ Sex-disaggregated trade facilitation data are collected, analysed, reported and used to inform policy and procedural improvements.

Self-assessment scoring grid: E. Gender-responsive trade facilitation mechanisms	Points	Score
Actions are being taken to improve trade facilitation mechanisms under a trade facilitation agreement with WTO, but specific trade facilitation measures for MSMEs or WMSMEs in the country have not yet been implemented.	1	
Special trade facilitation measures for SMEs have been designed and are in place (such as targeting SMEs with trade-related information, single-window access or other simplification or special incentives geared to easing SMEs' access to international trade activities), but with no particular focus on addressing the gender gap in the take-up of the SME trade facilitation measures.	2	
The context of women entrepreneurs is taken into consideration to ensure their participation in trade facilitation measures, such as electronic filing of export and import documents, computerized customs services for cross-border trade, efforts to include women in the provision of information and training in trade regulations and procedures	3	

Self-assessment scoring grid: E. Gender-responsive trade facilitation mechanisms	Points	Score
The trade facilitation policy or strategy seeks to increase women's participation in trade; trade facilitation measures are in place to benefit women traders; women are included in the membership of the national trade facilitation committee, and customs and cross-border officials have received gender-sensitization training.	4	
The trade facilitation policy or strategy and trade facilitation measures are intended to increase women's participation in trade through specific support; women have representation on the national trade facilitation committee; procedures are in place to collect sex-disaggregated data to monitor progress in women's participation in international trade activities (exporting, importing); the data are used to inform further actions to improve women's participation in trade activities.	5	

Conclusions and recommendations for considered actions – Access to domestic and international markets

When the self-assessment process is completed, observations from the analysis should be noted in a summary description (as per below), followed by itemization of potential policy measures to address identified gaps.

Insert summary description of analysis

What is the current status? Where is there room for improvement?

Propose potential actions to be taken

Based on the analysis of the current situation, and the scoring, what are the opportunities for further action? What should be considered? Who should be responsible? What steps could be taken?

5.7 ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY AND PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGY



Access to production inputs and ICTs is crucial for supporting the development of women's micro and small enterprises. It helps to improve their competitiveness and opportunities to engage in trade-related work, expand their capacity and market reach, and enable the growth of their businesses. This domain covers the assessment of two subdomains:

- A. Digitalization and technology upgrading of WMSMEs
- B. Supportive ecosystem for women-led start-ups in ICT and technology-based sectors

A. Digitalization and technology upgrading of women-owned-led micro, small and medium enterprises

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Are digital literacy training programmes widely available for women, and specifically for WMSMEs (supported by the government and delivered in partnership with women entrepreneurs' associations and women's groups at the community level)?		
Are initiatives being implemented to promote digital solutions in support of women's entrepreneurship?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs engage in partnerships with the ministry responsible for ICT and the digital economy and private sector ICT firms to target programme support to help WMSMEs develop their digital capacity and integrate ICT solutions throughout their business operations (such as to prepare them for Industry 4.0)?		
Does the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs offer programme support to WMSMEs to update their production equipment and bring new technology into their business operations?		
Are active steps being taken to provide assistance to WMSMEs in upgrading their production equipment to improve its quality and efficiency and expand capacity?		
Is assistance provided to help women entrepreneurs integrate newer forms of technology in their businesses (such as consultancy programmes, training, upgrading, capacity-building and financing)?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ Digital literacy training programmes are widely available for women, and specifically for WMSMEs, at the community level.
- ▶ Initiatives are in place to promote digital solutions in support of WMSMEs.
- ▶ The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs engages in partnerships with the ministry responsible for ICT and the digital economy and private sector ICT firms to target programme support to help WMSMEs develop their digital capacity and integrate ICT solutions throughout their business operations.
- ▶ The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs targets WMSMEs with programme support to update their production equipment and bring new technology into their business operations to improve its quality, efficiency and production capacity.
- ▶ The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs provides assistance to help women entrepreneurs integrate newer forms of technology into their businesses (such as consultancy programmes, training, upgrading, capacity-building and financing).

Self-assessment scoring grid: A. Digitalization and technology upgrading of WMSMEs	Points	Score
WMSMEs are generally operating with rudimentary technology, limited in their use of ICTs for business development and no efforts are being made to improve their related digital and technical know-how and skills nor to help them acquire more modern production technologies.	1	
Efforts are being made to provide WMSMEs with training on digital literacy skills and with advice and counselling on updating their use of technology; participation in formal government-supported MSME upgrading programmes is limited.	2	
WMSMEs are targeted for inclusion in technology upgrading and modernization programmes and programmes focused on the integration of ICT-enabled and digital solutions; financing for implementation is generally not accessible.	3	
The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs supports the upgrading of WMSMEs and makes grant or other financing programmes available to WMSMEs to defray the cost of investing in updated and new technologies, including digitalization capacity.	4	
WMSMEs are able to upgrade their production equipment; are making use of ICTs in many of their business operations; are increasing their productivity and market access.	5	

B. Supportive ecosystem for women-led start-ups in information and communications technology and technology-based sectors

Guidance questions for the assessment	Yes	No
Are efforts being made to encourage and support women to start and develop businesses in innovative technology sectors?		
Do ICT incubation programmes make way for the participation of women-founded-led venture teams? Are provisions being offered to attract a higher number of applications from women-founded-led teams?		
Are flexible programmes being implemented to build the pipeline of women-owned-led technology start-ups (such as designing them to be sensitive to women's time demands; mentoring by successful women entrepreneurs in technology sectors; linkages with R&D institutes; validation of business ideas, business models)?		

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ Women are encouraged and supported in efforts to start and develop businesses in innovative technology sectors.
- ▶ ICT and technology-based incubation programmes actively seek the participation of women-founded-led venture teams and make provisions to attract a higher number of applications from women-founded-led teams.
- ▶ The participation of women-founded-led teams in ICT and technology-based incubation and accelerator programmes is increasing.

Self-assessment scoring grid: B. Supportive ecosystem for women-led start-ups in information and communications technology and technology-based sectors	Points	Score
Women entrepreneurs are underrepresented in ICT and technology-based sectors; limited efforts are being made to reduce the gender gap.	1	
Businesswomen associations and related groups are making efforts to promote STEM-related opportunities to potential women entrepreneurs; governments and other technology ecosystem stakeholders are only moderately engaged in such efforts.	2	

Self-assessment scoring grid: B. Supportive ecosystem for women-led start-ups in information and communications technology and technology-based sectors	Points	Score
The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs is supporting efforts to build the pipeline of ICT and technology women entrepreneurs through support extended to initiatives of third-party organizations to hold business idea or business plan competitions targeting potential and existing women entrepreneurs with innovative projects in ICT and technology-based sectors; other support is limited.	3	
The participation of women-founded-led start-ups in government-supported ICT and technology incubator programmes is small; the ministry responsible for SMEs advocates gender mainstreaming of the incubators; efforts are under way to gender-sensitize incubator programmes and approaches; special initiatives are being employed to attract women-led start-up teams.	4	
Initiatives are in place to introduce women entrepreneurs to technological innovations and the opportunities for developing businesses in ICT-enabled and technology-driven sectors; women entrepreneurs are actively encouraged and supported to start businesses in higher-technology and innovative sectors of the economy, including the ICT sector, through business incubation, acceleration, linkages with R&D institutes and investors, mentoring, and other targeted programmes; the gender gap in ICT and technology-based start-ups is narrowing.	5	

Conclusions and recommendations for considered actions –

Access to information and communications technology and production technology

When the self-assessment process is completed, observations from the analysis should be noted in a summary description (as per below), followed by the itemization of potential policy measures to address identified gaps.

Insert summary description of analysis

What is the current status? Where is there room for improvement?

Propose potential actions to be taken

Based on the analysis of the current situation, and the scoring, what are the opportunities for further action? What should be considered? Who should be responsible? What steps could be taken?

5.8 GUIDANCE ON TABULATING THE SCORING RESULTS ACROSS DOMAINS AND SUBDOMAINS

To tabulate the final scoring, the scoring results are entered in an Excel sheet (see below). The subdomain scores are totalled and then averaged (out of five) to produce the final score for each domain. Producing a spider chart of the seven (7) domain scores indicate where the WED policy is strongest and not so strong. Producing a spider chart of the subdomain scores provides a more granular picture of areas requiring the most attention. It may be useful to cluster the subdomain into two categories: the first covering the policy, governance, and monitoring (domains 1, 2, and 3); and the second covering the programmatic areas (domains 4, 5, 6 and 7) (as per below). The mock country scoring example in annex V illustrates how this might be done.

		Subdomain score	Domain score (average)
1.	Gender-responsive legal and regulatory system to advance women's economic empowerment		
	Gender impact assessments		
	Gender equality in labour market access and participation		
	Women's property and inheritance rights		
	Business registration regulations and procedures		
	Total score on the domain (average score of subdomains)		
2.	Policy leadership, coordination and institutional support for women's entrepreneurship development (WED)		
	Women's entrepreneurship as a national development and SME policy priority		
	WED focal points and the SME ministry or agency		
	Formal mechanisms for the engagement of women entrepreneurs and their representative bodies in public-private sector policy dialogue		
	Inclusive response to WED in the entrepreneurial ecosystem		
	Total score on the domain (average score of sub-domains)		

		Subdomain score	Domain score (average)
3.	Monitoring impact of policies and measures for women-owned-led enterprises		
	Collecting and reporting on sex-disaggregated statistics relative to women's entrepreneurship		
	Monitoring and evaluation		
	<i>Total score on the domain (average score of sub-domains)</i>		
4.	Gender- responsive financial access		
	Inclusiveness of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in generic financing programmes		
	Financing programmes specifically targeted to women-owned enterprises		
	<i>Total score on the domain (average score of subdomains)</i>		
5.	Gender-responsive business development support services		
	Gender responsiveness of BDS organizations and services to the needs of women entrepreneurs		
	Women-targeted BDS services and programmes		
	<i>Total score on the domain (average score of sub-domains)</i>		
6.	Access to domestic and international markets		
	E-commerce adoption and use of online trading platforms		
	Government procurement programmes targeting women-owned-led MSMEs		
	Supply chain linkages for WMSMEs		
	Export promotion for women entrepreneurs		
	Gender-responsive trade facilitation mechanisms		
	<i>Total score on the domain (average score of sub domains)</i>		

		Subdomain score	Domain score (average)
7.	Access to ICTs and production technology		
	Digitalization and technology upgrading of WMSMEs		
	Supportive ecosystem for women-led start-ups in ICT and technology-based sectors		
	<i>Total score on the domain (average score of the subdomains)</i>		

6 | Concluding remarks



Gender gaps in labour force participation, employment and entrepreneurship exist in countries across the globe, including in developing, emerging and developed economies. The lagging performance of women in these domains of economic activity is due to a number of factors, largely related to cultural and social norms regarding women's role in society and the economy. Credible evidence that lack of progress in reducing the gender gaps in economic participation and entrepreneurship is costing countries and regions economic growth is a driving force for accelerated actions to redress the imbalance. The conclusion: the inclusion of women in the economy as entrepreneurs is a boon to economic development and growth. Entrepreneurship is also a clear pathway for women's development and accordingly, policies and actions to improve the enabling environment for women to start and grow businesses will foster economic growth and women's economic empowerment and social development.

Achieving gender equality in entrepreneurship requires attention to important elements: (1) a legal framework that stipulates equal legal rights for women and men, especially with respect to areas affecting employment, property ownership, the ability to enter into contracts, the rights to start a business and borrow money (and the effective enforcement of women's rights within the legal framework); (2) a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem with a gender-responsive MSME policy framework and gender-inclusive institutions, support structures and programmes; and (3) concerted efforts to track and monitor the participation of women in entrepreneurial and MSME activity and the strength and growth potential of their enterprises.

To increase the participation of women as entrepreneurs and strengthen their enterprises, policymakers must challenge and change a

number of formal regulations and informal norms to create a more enabling, gender-responsive and gender-inclusive environment. Fostering the accelerated development of women's entrepreneurship requires a holistic, whole-of-government approach, including the establishment of an interministerial governance mechanism to lead policy development for WED. However, while government policy and measures are essential for creating a favourable environment for women's entrepreneurship, they are not sufficient on their own. Non-governmental institutions, such as women entrepreneurs' associations, the financial sector and international cooperation partners, play a key role in the entrepreneurial ecosystem for women entrepreneurship. In this context, the entrepreneurial ecosystem requires strengthening, including gender-sensitization of the ecosystem and promoting partnerships with ecosystem members to accelerate WED. It also requires a policy consultation approach involving women entrepreneur and their representative associations.

Although beyond the mandate of ministries responsible for SMEs, attention must focus on the critical importance of addressing the deeper systemic factors underlying other inequalities constraining women's entrepreneurship, such as the unequal time burdens of women in unpaid care, and the lack of accessible, affordable and quality childcare services. Creating an enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship requires more equity in the sharing of unpaid care burden and the provision of childcare services.

Governments of ASEAN member States offer varying levels of policy and programme support for women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs, and for ensuring the gender-inclusiveness of their SME policy frameworks, strategies and action plans. Prevailing cultural and norms are still the most

significant barriers to women's entrepreneurship in the ASEAN region. These affect most aspects of entrepreneurship, including the decision to start a business, the ability to grow a business, and access to finance, business networks and markets. While top-level governments are directing ministries and departments to increase the level of participation of women in their business support programmes, women entrepreneurs are not adequately targeted in MSME policies and strategies; WED strategies and action plans are not the norm. There are many deficiencies in the collection and reporting of sex-disaggregated data on MSMEs as well as on the level of participation of WMSMEs in MSME support programmes. As the case in many other countries, the MSME policy frameworks do not sufficiently integrate gender considerations into the design and delivery of SME support programmes. This report highlights a number of often neglected policy areas conducive to women's entrepreneurship, such as gender-responsive public procurement, linkages with the supplier diversity programmes of large corporations, gender-responsive trade facilitation and building the pipeline of women-led start-ups in ICT and technology-based sectors, which could be taken into consideration, while not ignoring the need to build the capacity of women micro-entrepreneurs in the informal sector.

The self-assessment tool can be a useful instrument for MSME policymakers in identifying the strengths of key women entrepreneur-centric policy domains at the national level and in the areas most in need of improvement to advance the role of women's entrepreneurship in the economy and the growth potential of their businesses. The Policy Toolkit can be useful to the ASEAN member States as well as other countries, as they seek to improve the gender-inclusiveness of their own national MSME policies. It can also play an important role in

the process to update the gender dimensions of the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations can provide policy leadership and guidance to its member countries in strengthening policy support for women's entrepreneurship in two major ways:

1. Further gender mainstreaming of the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development by including target measures and indicators for the inclusion of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs across all five strategy goals.
2. Inviting ASEAN member States to draft and implement complementary national strategies on women's entrepreneurship as a comprehensive framework for fostering an enabling environment and entrepreneurial ecosystem to advance the role of women in entrepreneurial activities and economic growth.

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| Annexes

ANNEX I. Abbreviations and acronyms

ABC	Association of Banks in Cambodia
ACCMSME	ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
ANGIN	Angel Investment Network Indonesia
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AWE	Academy for Women Entrepreneurs
BDS	business development support
B2B2C	business to business to consumer
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
GBA+	Gender-based Analysis Plus (Canada)
GDP	gross domestic product
ICT	Information and communications technology
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
ITC	International Trade Centre
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KPI	key performance indicator
LFPR	labour force participation rate
MFI	microfinance institution
MSME	micro, small and medium enterprise
NGO	non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
P&G	Proctor & Gamble
R&D	research and development
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WAVES	Women Accelerating Vibrant Enterprises in Southeast Asia and the Pacific
WED	women's entrepreneurship development
WEE	women's economic empowerment
WEF	World Economic Forum
WMSME	women-owned-led micro, small and medium enterprise
WSME	women-led small and medium enterprises
WTO	World Trade Organization

ANNEX II. List of stakeholders consulted

ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises representatives from ASEAN member States

Country	Stakeholders/Agencies	Representatives
Brunei Darussalam	Darussalam Enterprise	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ms. Norlela Suhailee, Head of Department, Business Development and Support Head of Delegation for ACCMSME Brunei Darussalam 2. Ms. Siti Maszuraimah Haji Mahmud, Manager, International Relations and Cooperation 3. Ms. Azrina Hidup, Executive Officer, International Relations and Cooperation Focal point for ACCMSME Brunei Darussalam
	Ministry of Finance and Economy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hajah Siti Maslina Binti Hj Md Said, Acting Assistant Director, Industry and Business Ecosystem Division 2. Nur Shuhaidah binti Arifin, Industry and Business Ecosystem Division
	Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports Department of Community Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hajah Noridah binti Abdul Hamid, Director, Social Services section 2. Dayang Zainab binti Haji Morshidi, Director, Development of Youth and Sports 3. Dk Siti Saihalina Binti Pg Hj Md Daud, Assistant Director, Community Development Department
Cambodia	Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation	Mr. Layhy CHHEA, Director of SME Department
Indonesia	Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs	Ms. Yuthika
Lao People's Democratic Republic	Department of SME Promotion Ministry of Industry and Commerce	Mr. Litthideth Khamhoung, Director, Entrepreneur Development Division

Country	Stakeholders/Agencies	Representatives
Malaysia	Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives	M. Zainal bin Bahaudin, Senior Assistant Secretary, Policy and International Relations Division
Myanmar	Ministry of Industry	Thein Swe, Director-General, and Kyi Lin Khine, Deputy Director, Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection
Philippines	Department of Trade and Industry	Ms. Teresita A. Go
Singapore	Enterprise Singapore	Ke En CHAI, Assistant Business Partner, Corporate Planning
Thailand	Office of SMEs Promotion	Ms. Nipawis Ritthironk (Nancy), Chief of ASEAN Cooperation Division, International Cooperation Department; with input from: Attanisa Changchaitum; Wittawat Lamsam, Lalana Takerngrasmee; and Supree Terapat (from the Office of SMEs Promotion).
Viet Nam	Agency for Enterprise Development, Ministry of Planning and Investment	Ms. Huong Trinh Thi, Director, Policy and General Affairs Division; Ms. Thuy Bui Thu; Mr. Le Duc Anh

Notes: The input from Brunei Darussalam and the Lao People's Democratic Republic was obtained from virtual interviews with government officials in February 2022; officials from the remaining countries provided their input by way of written responses to a set of questions, received in February and March 2022.

ANNEXIII. Question areas for the Women, Business and the Law Index

ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises representatives from ASEAN member States

Indicator	Question	Answer (Yes/No)
Mobility	1. Can a woman choose where to live in the same way as a man?	
	2. Can a woman travel outside her home in the same way as a man?	
	3. Can a woman apply for a passport in the same way as a man?	
	4. Can a woman travel outside the country in the same way as a man?	
Workplace	1. Can a woman get a job in the same way as a man?	
	2. Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	
	3. Is there legislation covering sexual harassment in employment?	
	4. Are there criminal penalties or civil remedies for sexual harassment in employment?	
Pay	1. Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?	
	2. Can a woman work at night in the same way as a man?	
	3. Can a woman work in a job deemed dangerous in the same way as a man?	
	4. Can a woman work in an industrial job in the same way as a man?	
Marriage	1. Is there no legal provision that requires a married woman to obey her husband?	
	2. Can a woman be the head of household in the same way as a man?	
	3. Is there legislation that specifically addresses domestic violence?	
	4. Can a woman obtain a divorce judgment in the same way as a man?	

Indicator	Question	Answer (Yes/No)
Marriage	5. Does a woman have the same rights to remarry as a man?	
Parenthood	1. Is paid leave of at least 14 weeks available to mothers?	
	2. Does the government administer 100 per cent of the maternity leave benefits?	
	3. Is paid leave available to fathers?	
	4. Is there paid parental leave?	
	5. Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?	
Entrepreneurship	1. Does the law prohibit discrimination in access to credit based on gender?	
	2. Can a woman sign a contract in the same way as a man?	
	3. Can a woman register a business in the same way as a man?	
	4. Can a woman open a bank account in the same way as a man?	
Assets	1. Do men and women have equal ownership rights to immovable property?	
	2. Do sons and daughters have equal rights to inherit assets from their parents?	
	3. Do male and female surviving spouses have equal rights to inherit assets?	
	4. Does the law grant spouses equal administrative authority over assets during marriage?	
	5. Does the law provide for the valuation of non-monetary contributions?	
Pension	1. Is the age at which men and women can retire with full pension benefits the same?	
	2. Is the age at which men and women can retire with partial pension benefits the same?	
	3. Is the mandatory retirement age for men and women the same?	
	4. Are periods of absence due to childcare accounted for in pension benefits?	

Source: Women, Business and the Law report. Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/home>.

ANNEX IV. Small and medium enterprise support centres and small and medium enterprise portals in ASEAN member States. SME portals in the ASEAN member States

Country	SME support centres	SME portals
Brunei Darussalam	Darussalam Enterprise Business Support Centre offers general advice to SMEs.	BusinessBN portal (https://business.mofe.gov.bn/) is used for business-related information (how to start, run and grow a business), including information on government services and reforms. The portal includes a business reporting portal for companies to submit their business data (business, employment and financial data) and performance report. It has links to the "OneBiz" portal for online applications and payment of services (Ministry of Finance and Economy site) and the DARE Business Help Desk for general advice, and information on programmes and services, events and activities.
Cambodia	<p>Khmer Enterprise (National SME Promotion and Development Centre, established in 2021). provides financial and non-financial support through programmes linked to priority sectors: tech start-ups; tourism; agro-processing; and manufacturing (import substitution); and industrial clusters.</p> <p>TECHNO Start-up Centre, which is under the innovation arm of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, targets viable early-stage emerging tech start-ups by igniting innovation and technology. It works with young talents to co-create start-ups.</p>	The Khmer SME digital platform (https://khmersme.gov.kh), launched in June 2020, uses a "single portal" approach. It has an online business registration platform and provides information on business registration, and business operations and lists of State-run institutions, support programmes and service providers, training opportunities and access to finance.

Country	SME support centres	SME portals
Indonesia	Integrated Business Services Centres for Co-operatives and SMEs (PLUT-KUMKM Centres), launched in 2013, is comprised of a national network of local one-stop shops that provide comprehensive, integrated and free BDS to SMEs and cooperatives. The centres aim to cover seven key business competencies: management advice; product quality and intellectual property; legal affairs; access to finance; marketing and promotion; ICT adoption; and business networks.	The SME National Portal lists SME support organization; there is no special icon for women entrepreneurs.
Lao People's Democratic Republic	The Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry operates three SME service centres, under agreement with the Ministry of Finance. The centres offer BDS, consultancy, enterprise coaching, training workshops, networking, business matching, upgrading, and co-working space opportunities to entrepreneurs and SMEs.	
Malaysia	<p>SME Corp. is the central point of reference for information and business advisory services for entrepreneurs and SMEs nationwide. It is delivered through the SME Corp. SME Hub, located in Kuala Lumpur, and 12 State Offices throughout the country.</p> <p>The Entrepreneurship One-Stop Centre provides advisory services and facilitation to SMEs and entrepreneurs (The One-Stop Centre represents access to information and services</p>	SMEinfo One Stop SME Resource portal (www.smeinfo.com.my/) is a centralized online information gateway for SMEs that was initially launched in 2006 and has been upgraded several times since then. Managed by SME Corp, it provides an extensive range of information on financing, training, government initiatives and support programmes for entrepreneurs and SMEs, and other tools, such as business guides, site-maps that detail stages in the creation, growth and expansion of a business. The portal also includes published material on policies and regulations, the SME

Country	SME support centres	SME portals
Malaysia	provided by various agencies of the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives, including, among them, SME Bank, TEKUN Nasional, Bank Rakyat, National Institute of Entrepreneurship (INSKEN), UDA Holdings Berhad, Co-operative Institute of Malaysia, Malaysia Co-operative Societies Commission, and Perbadanan Nasional, and other agencies, such as the Intellectual Property Corporation of Malaysia and Royal Malaysian Customs Department.	Masterplan and various annual reports. The site contains a list of 18 programmes targeting women entrepreneurs by various government ministries and agencies, some of which also target young people and Bumiputera entrepreneurs, but the site does not have an icon for women entrepreneurs that would facilitate specifically support programmes for women.
Myanmar	The MSME Support Centre was established in Yangon in 2014 under the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration. Since then, 53 SME branches have been set up in all states and regions in partnership with the state SME agencies (14 branches and 38 subbranches).	The Myanmar SME Portal (https://msmemm.org/) is well structured for the presentation of information on SME support organizations offering various services, but the site is still in infancy stages and in need of further development.
Philippines	Negosyo Centers, launched in 2014 with five centres, expanded to 1,330 centres by 2021. Located in strategic areas convenient to potential and existing entrepreneurs, such as in the Department of Trade and Industry offices, local government units, universities, NGOs and malls. It offers advisory services to MSMEs tailored to their needs via individual consultations, focus groups discussions and coaching and mentoring. It also links MSMEs to seminars, trainings and programmes related to setting-up a business, marketing, financial literacy, digital literacy, and	Negosyo Center Online Portal, launched in 2021 (https://dtinegosyocenter.online/), is a one-stop-shop portal for MSMEs providing business ideas, a step-by-step guide to registering a business, assistance to growing and expanding operations and free consultations from various industry experts. The portal extends the reach of the Department of Trade and Industry in helping MSMEs navigate through the various entrepreneurial programmes and projects offered by the government. It includes access to online business registration, links to the network of business mentors and consultants, access to the learning centre, and an online chat function to ask questions and solicit information.

Country	SME support centres	SME portals
Philippines	other capacity-building and information needs. In addition, it assists MSMEs in the processing and documentation of necessary paper requirements and facilitates the business name registration process. Based on data from the gender-mainstreaming mandate, close to two thirds of Negosyo Center clients are women.	
Singapore	Network of 11 SME Centres was set up by five trade associations and chambers, with support from Enterprise Singapore. It offers individual business advisory services (delivered by business advisers within the centres), capability workshops, and group-based upgrading projects and assists more than 25,000 enterprises annually to help them grow through areas, such as overseas expansion, financing, productivity and human resources.	Jointly developed by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Smart Nation and Digital Government Office and GovTech, GoBusiness (https://www.gobusiness.gov.sg/) is the go-to platform for businesses in Singapore to access Government e-services and resources
Thailand	To access the services offered by the One-Stop Services Centres operated under the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion, MSMEs must register with the Ministry of Commerce to become a one-stop shop member. The one-stop shop acts as a referral centre for MSMEs, answers questions, provides basic advice, and introduces them to the appropriate agencies to address their specific needs. It has more than 700,000 MSME members and uses information gathered on them to monitor their business development.	The Thai SMEOne Portal (www.smeone.info) has no links to any information specific to women entrepreneurs.

Country	SME support centres	SME portals
Thailand	Approximately 180,000 MSMEs use one-stop shop support services yearly.	
Viet Nam	3 regional assistance centres for SMEs.	<p>The Agency for Enterprise Development National Business Portal, (https://business.gov.vn), was launched in December 2001. It provides a one-stop shop for SMEs; user-friendly platform and access point for relevant information and business support services, such as the SME consultant network, business matching, market research, and industry reports. It also has an easy-to-navigate database on national SME support programmes.</p> <p>The platform has the Women Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Sub Portal, which signposts details on the policies and programmes in support of women entrepreneurs, including in several of the country's provinces (http://we.business.gov.vn/vi-vn/).</p>

ANNEX V. Compilation of scoring grids for the self-assessment tool

1. A gender-responsive legal and regulatory system that advances women's economic empowerment

1A: Gender impact assessments	Points	Score
The government has approved the principle of gender impact assessments, but it has not yet been put into effect.	1	
Gender impact assessments on new laws and regulations is a regulatory requirement of the government, but is not always performed.	2	
A gender impact assessment framework has been adopted; legal and regulatory bodies have been trained on the gender impact assessments methodology and in gender equality competencies.	3	
Gender impact assessments are routinely performed and appropriate adjustments are made based on recommendations of the gender impact assessment report; the SME Law (if one exists) has gone through a gender impact assessment; the national SME strategy receives, at minimum, a gender lens review before being finalized.	4	
Gender impact assessments have been conducted on all laws and regulations affecting business/SMEs (such as enterprise law, investment law and labour law) and appropriate adjustments have made based on recommendations of the gender impact assessment report.	5	

1B. Gender equality in labour market access and participation	Points	Score
There are still a number of restrictions in the labour law preventing women from having the same work choices as men; the law does not prohibit discrimination in hiring based on gender; equal pay for work of equal value legislation is not in force; married women require their husband's permission to work outside the home or to operate a business.	1	
The labour law enables women to have some of the same opportunities as men to participate in the labour market (with some restrictions, such as in "hazardous" jobs); the law does not prohibit discrimination in hiring based on gender; equal pay for work of equal value legislation is not in force; married women need their husband's permission to work outside the home or to operate a business.	2	

1B. Gender equality in labour market access and participation	Points	Score
Labour laws give women the same employment rights as men without restrictions; discrimination in hiring based on gender is not legally prohibited; married women are free to work outside the home or to operate a business without their husband's permission.	3	
Labour laws give women the same employment rights as men without restrictions; discrimination in hiring based on gender is prohibited; equal pay for work of similar work laws are in place; women are legally free to make the decision to work outside the home or start a business without their husband's permission, but these legal rights are not always enforced.	4	
Labour laws give women the same employment rights as men without restrictions; discrimination in hiring based on gender is prohibited; equal pay for work of similar work laws are in place; women are free to make the decision to work outside the home or start a business without their husband's permission; women are informed of their legal rights and legal recourse mechanisms are in place.	5	

1C-1. Women's property rights	Points	Score
Women do not have the same legal rights as men to own land and non-land assets.	1	
Women and men have the same legal rights to own land and non-land assets, but not to make decisions and/or use land or non-land assets as collateral.	2	
Women and men have the same legal rights and secure access to land and non-land assets, however, this does not apply to all groups of women.	3	
Women and men have the same legal rights and secure access to land and non-land assets, without legal exceptions regarding some groups of women, but some customary, religious or traditional practices or laws discriminate against women's legal rights.	4	
Women and men have the same legal rights and secure access to land and non-land assets without legal exceptions; customary, religious and traditional laws or practices do not discriminate against women's legal rights.	5	

1C-2. Women's inheritance rights	Points	Score
Widows and daughters do not have the same rights as widowers and sons to inherit land and/or non-land assets.	1	
Widows or daughters do not have the same rights as widowers and sons to inherit land and/or non-land assets.	2	
Widows and daughters have the same rights as widowers and sons to inherit land and non-land assets, however, this does not apply to all groups of women.	3	
Widows and daughters have the same rights as widowers and sons to inherit land and non-land assets without exceptions (applies to all groups of women), however, some customary, religious or traditional practices or laws discriminate against women's equal inheritance rights.	4	
Widows and daughters have the same rights as widowers and sons to inherit land and non-land assets and this applies to all women; customary, religious and traditional laws or practices do not discriminate against women's inheritance rights.	5	

1D. Business registration regulations and procedures	Points	Score
High level of informality of women's businesses; no efforts made to make women aware of the business registration formalities.	1	
High level of informality of women's businesses; information on the benefits of business registration have been made available to informal women entrepreneurs, such as through their networks; this promotion has not resulted in reduced informality rates.	2	
Research analysis has been conducted to reveal the major challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in pursuing business registration and determine the gender-based challenges, but no specific actions have been taken.	3	
Findings from the research analysis on gender-based challenges to business registration are complemented by a gender lens assessment of the business registration regime (regulations, procedures); this information is shared in consultations processes and used to inform gender-responsive adaptations to the process.	4	
The business registration is fully digitalized through a one-stop shop e-business registration platform; WMSMEs have been informed and oriented to the digital process; the necessary support is provided to enable WMSMEs to complete the digital process; data are collected on the business registration rates of WMSMEs to monitor the level of formality.	5	

2. Policy leadership, coordination and institutional support for women's entrepreneurship development

2A: Women's entrepreneurship development as a national development and SME policy priority	Points	Score
High-level national development and socioeconomic plans prioritize gender equality and gender mainstreaming, but make no specific reference to the importance of women's enterprise development.	1	
The development of women's entrepreneurship is identified as a national policy priority in high-level documents, such as the government's national development plan and the national gender strategy, but targets have not been set and concrete actions have not been articulated; the national MSME strategy only references women's entrepreneurship as a cross-cutting issue.	2	
Women entrepreneurs have been identified as a target group in the government's SME policy framework, but the policy or strategy document does not outline specific objectives, targets, and concrete actions for the inclusion of women entrepreneurs across the policy pillars.	3	
The national MSME policy framework or strategy identifies women entrepreneurs as a specific target group, addresses policy gaps affecting the full participation of women in pillars of the policy framework and includes specific measures to foster women's entrepreneurship/MSME development across each of the strategy's pillars.	4	
The MSME policy framework goes further by articulating a national strategic framework for women's entrepreneurship development, including provisions for the start up and growth of their enterprises.	5	

2B. WED focal point in the SME ministry	Points	Score
At the national level, attention is paid to issues affecting women's entrepreneurship in certain ministries and agencies, but there are no specific WED focal points in the government.	1	
There are focal points in some ministries and departments for the gender mainstreaming of policies and programmes, but collaboration across ministries the agencies, if there is any, is limited; the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs has a gender mainstreaming focal point, but the role is limited to gendered aspects of policies and programmes within the ministry.	2	

2B. WED focal point in the SME ministry	Points	Score
The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs undertakes some promotional activity for women's entrepreneurship, but has not yet taken any steps to address the issue of WED policy leadership and coordination.	3	
A WED focal point has been established in the ministry or agency responsible for SMEs, but it is still not functioning properly, is underresourced, and has limited liaison across ministries and agencies.	4	
The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs has established a WED unit that provides policy leadership and coordination across the ministry and its departments and affiliated agencies, supported by the budget, resources and interministerial collaboration and cooperation necessary to carry out its purpose; actively consults on the policy and programme needs of women entrepreneurs with external stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.	5	

2C: Formal mechanisms for the engagement of women entrepreneurs and their representative bodies in public-private sector policy dialogue	Points	Score
Women entrepreneur associations and groups are rarely included in formal policy dialogue mechanisms between the public and private sectors.	1	
The mainstream business associations rarely present the views of women members in their policy advocacy priorities; women entrepreneurs' associations are developing their advocacy skills and capacity, but these efforts have not yet led to much progress in influencing the government's policy agenda.	2	
The major business associations routinely raise issues of concern to their women members in policy dialogue with the government; women entrepreneurs' associations have the capacity to play a strong advocacy role on behalf of the interests and concerns of their members, and women's entrepreneurship more generally, and are consulted by the government for policy input on a regular basis.	3	
Women entrepreneurs, or their representative associations, are included as members of government task forces and advisory committees on business environment reforms and SME development issues.	4	
There are a number of concrete examples in which the participation of businesswomen/women entrepreneurs in public-private dialogue processes have led to concrete outcomes in terms of improving the environment for WED.	5	

2D: Inclusive response to WED in entrepreneurial ecosystem	Points	Score
The entrepreneurial ecosystem has been mapped, but it is not inclusive of WED stakeholder organizations, and has not become active.	1	
The entrepreneurial ecosystem has been mapped; is inclusive of WED stakeholder organizations; and coordination of the ecosystem is in the beginning stages.	2	
The entrepreneurial ecosystem is inclusive of WED stakeholder organizations; is engaged as a collaborative group; a gender mainstreaming approach is promoted to stakeholders.	3	
Forums are hosted for entrepreneurial ecosystem members to foster exchanges and sharing of experience in becoming more gender-inclusive in their programme and service offerings.	4	
The entrepreneurial ecosystem members are becoming more collaborative with each other in providing programmes and services to women entrepreneurs; are doing cross-referrals to help women entrepreneurs navigate the system of supports; are collecting sex-disaggregated data on the participants of their programmes and initiatives.	5	

3. Monitoring the impact of policies and measures for women-owned-led enterprises

3A. Collecting and reporting on gender statistics relative to women's entrepreneurship	Points	Score
Sex-disaggregated data on MSMEs or participation in MSME programmes are not collected; KPIs related to women's entrepreneurship are not defined.	1	
Sex-disaggregated data on MSMEs may be collected, but they are not analysed and reported; the ministry responsible for SMEs does not produce an annual report on MSMEs.	2	
The ministry responsible for SMEs produces an annual report on MSMEs; it provides comprehensive and integrated data on the take-up of all SME programmes across relevant ministries and agencies, but it does not report on any sex-disaggregated data.	3	
The ministry responsible for SMEs produces an annual report on MSMEs reporting sex-disaggregated data on all MSME-related programmes within its domain, but it does not provide integrated sex-disaggregated data on the participants or beneficiaries of the SME-related programmes of other ministries.	4	
The annual report on MSMEs includes sex-disaggregated data across programme areas and ministries and agencies, highlights whether KPI targets were met and what, if any, adjustments to programme delivery are needed to meet these targets over the life of the national SME development strategy.	5	

3B. Monitoring and evaluation	Points	Score
No monitoring of progress in implementing the national SME development strategy is undertaken; accordingly, no monitoring of activities directed to WMSMEs is being carried out.	1	
The ministry responsible for SMEs has developed a monitoring framework, but this applies mostly to monitoring the implementation progress of programmes within its domain.	2	
The ministry responsible for SMEs has established a working group of all MSME-related implementing bodies across ministries and agencies that cooperate in preparing progress monitoring reports on a regular basis.	3	
The ministry responsible for SMEs produces the monitoring reports and tracks regular progress on implementation of programmes and actions against activities, outputs and outcomes as per the strategy action plan; particular attention is paid to achievement of KPIs and targeted outcomes for WMSMEs and identifying remedial approaches, if necessary.	4	
The ministry responsible for SMEs conducts surveys with WMSMEs to gain information on their experiences and level of satisfaction with the programme supports; makes adjustments to programme delivery or approach as per this feedback; conducts analysis of the collective impact of the MSME support programmes on the development of women's entrepreneurship and WMSMEs relative to the baseline.	5	

4. Gender-responsive finance

4A. Inclusiveness of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in generic financing programmes	Points	Score
The commercial banking system takes a passive approach to lending to women entrepreneurs; is not yet actively reaching out to the market of WMSMEs with promotional efforts.	1	
On the supply side, the government provides incentives to stimulate the commercial banks to lend to WMSMEs to address the financing gap (such as credit guarantee schemes); banks are required to provide sex-disaggregated data on their loan clients.	2	
In addition to stimulating the supply side of lending to WMSMEs, the government assists the demand side by providing accessible financial literacy programmes to WMSMEs.	3	

4A. Inclusiveness of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in generic financing programmes	Points	Score
In addition to working the supply and demand sides of access of WMSMEs to commercial lending, the government sets performance targets for the share and volume of financing to WMSMEs through government SME funds, MSME-targeted grant programmes and national development banks.	4	
The banking and government sector is well developed in terms of financing WMSMEs; loan products and services have been modified to meet the needs of WMSMEs; performance targets are set for the number and share of loans and grants extended to women entrepreneurs; sex-disaggregated data are reported on loan/SME grant clients.	5	

4B. Financing programmes targeted to women-owned enterprises	Points	Score
The government and financial stakeholders have documented evidence of the gender gap in financing for WMSMEs, but no action is taken; there are no specifically targeted financial programmes or services for women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs.	1	
The majority of women-focused loan programmes target women with micro-enterprises (such as microcredit programmes); few loan options target women with growth enterprises.	2	
WMSME-targeted credit programmes are providing access to financing for WMSMEs of different sizes and at different stages of development (from start-up to expansion), but they are not widely available in non-urban parts of the country; there is no evidence of women-focused equity (seed and venture capital) programmes. There are WMSME-targeted credit programmes providing access to financing for WMSMEs of different sizes and at different stages of development (from start-up to expansion), but they are not widely available in the non-urban parts of the country; no evidence of women-focused equity (seed and venture capital) programmes.	3	
WMSME-targeted government credit guarantee schemes complement credit programmes targeting women entrepreneurs at different stages of their development, but they are primarily accessible to women entrepreneurs in urban areas; the ministry responsible for SMEs cooperates with the ministry of finance to explore fintech options to improve access to financing for WMSMEs across urban-rural dimensions; initial efforts are in place to encourage the development of women-targeted angel and venture capital funds.	4	

4B. Financing programmes targeted to women-owned enterprises	Points	Score
Women-targeted credit (microfinancing and commercial bank financing) and equity (seed and venture capital) programmes exist and are accessible to women entrepreneurs in urban and rural areas, including through ICT-enabled and fintech solutions, such as mobile money and digital platforms.	5	

5. Gender-responsive business development support services

5A. Gender responsiveness of BDS organizations and services to the needs of women entrepreneurs	Points	Score
Most BDS providing organizations, including government-supported SME support centres, have few women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs participating in their programmes and services (based on, for example, a low percentage of all clients); limited efforts are made to promote these services to WMSMEs; no special efforts are made to attract women entrepreneurs.	1	
Government-supported SME support centres and other BDS providing organizations have become cognizant of a low take-up of services by women and are beginning to examine why that is the case through surveys and consultations with WMSMEs.	2	
The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs offers or arranges for gender-sensitivity training and orientation to staff in the government-supported SME support centres and government-supported business incubators, and other government-supported BDS providers; efforts are taken to create broader awareness among women entrepreneurs of the BDS services, including through women's networks and social media, however, most BDS programmes and services have not been specifically adapted to meet the needs of women clients.	3	
The government-supported SME support centres and BDS providers have modified existing BDS services and offerings to respond to the needs of women entrepreneurs (such as in their approach, scheduling, use of women advisers, counsellors and trainers, and use of ICTs to expand their delivery reach), and are actively promoting their services to potential women entrepreneurs and existing WMSMEs, including through the national SME portal.	4	
Government-supported SME support centres and BDS services are perceived as women-friendly; women entrepreneurs are equally as likely as male entrepreneurs to make use of all types of BDS programmes and services; this is confirmed by sex-disaggregated data on clients and services.	5	

5B. Women-targeted BDS services and programmes	Points	Score
No BDS services or programmes specifically target women at the moment; there is growing recognition of the need to reach out to women with more responsive BDS.	1	
There are isolated women-targeted BDS services and programmes, but they have limited breadth in service offerings and are very local in their reach; most are initiated and delivered by NGOs dedicated to enhancing the capacity of women with micro and small enterprises.	2	
A number of women-targeted BDS programmes are being offered, but they focus on a limited range of offerings (such as self-employment training for women and BDS for women-owned micro-enterprises); are fragmented and not accessible in all parts of the country.	3	
A number of women-focused BDS programmes are being offered; in addition to meeting the training and development needs of micro-enterprises, they also target women in growth enterprises and the upgrading and capacity-building of WMSMEs; are accessible to women in most regions of the country; often supported by international development partners.	4	
There is an organized national system of business support for women entrepreneurs (such as a women's desk in government MSME agencies and SME support centres, women's enterprise or business resource centres, entrepreneurial training programmes for women, women's page on the national SME portal, use of online tools for disseminating information to women entrepreneurs and accessing mentors and accessing entrepreneurship courses, including with online access to training, advice and mentoring through, for example, ICTs or learning apps.	5	

6. Access to domestic and international markets

6A. E-commerce adoption and use of online trading platforms	Points	Score
Few WMSMEs have the capability to adopt e-commerce, but those that do may be using social media platforms, such as Facebook Marketplace, to sell their products.	1	
A number of support organizations are offering digital literacy training to WMSMEs to enhance their skills; generally need more than digital literacy training to move to e-commerce.	2	

6A. E-commerce adoption and use of online trading platforms	Points	Score
The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs and/or the ministry responsible for ICT/digital economy partners are partnering with private sector ICT and e-commerce companies to deliver capacity-building training to WMSMEs; WMSMEs have difficulty accessing support to build their production capacity and manage the digital aspects of online selling.	3	
The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs and/or the ministry responsible for ICT and the digital economy are collaborating to provide the necessary programme support to e-commerce-ready WMSMEs to build their production capacity and manage the digital aspects of online selling.	4	
There are dedicated programmes to support WMSMEs in onboarding to e-commerce platforms, government-developed e-commerce platforms and international e-commerce platforms; many WMSMEs have the capacity to meet demand from online orders; WMSMEs are substantially increasing their sales on the e-commerce platforms.	5	

6B. Government procurement programmes targeting WMSMEs	Points	Score
Information on public procurement opportunities is made available to businesses; no specific efforts are made to inform WMSMEs or reach out to them; no sex-disaggregated data on procurement contract awards.	1	
Special efforts are made to disseminate information on public procurement opportunities to potential women suppliers, such as through businesswomen's networks and online mechanisms, but no targets have been set for contracting to WMSMEs and no adjustments have been made to the procurement rules and processes.	2	
Analysis conducted on the constraints affecting women-owned businesses in accessing the procurement system; in addition to general promotional efforts, capacity-building sessions are offered to procurement officers on gender-inclusive procurement, and to women entrepreneurs on how to access public procurement opportunities; more attention is being paid to the adoption of gender-responsive procurement practices.	3	

6B. Government procurement programmes targeting WMSMEs	Points	Score
WMSMEs are targeted with orientation workshops on public procurement and offered programmes to build their capacity to meet the requirements to compete for public procurement contracts; supplier-ready WMSMEs are “pre-qualified” as competent suppliers (according to product categories) and included in the list of pre-qualified suppliers used by the public procurement office.	4	
Gender-responsive procurement practices are being adopted. Government procurement programmes are targeting WMSMEs, such as by allocating a certain percentage of the value of procurement contracts to WMSMEs and applying preference provisions; the share of WMSMEs in procurement awards is monitored and reported.	5	

6C. Supply chain linkages for WMSMEs	Points	Score
There are a few value chain initiatives to integrate SMEs in sectors with a high share of female workers, but none of them specifically seek to integrate WMSMEs.	1	
There are a few initiatives to integrate WMSMEs into value and supply chains, but women lack awareness about them and are not generally informed about or targeted for capacity-building activities.	2	
There are a number of good supply chain or linkages programmes targeting women-owned enterprises, but they are limited to one or two sectors and/or one or two regions.	3	
Promotional efforts to create awareness of supply chain opportunities for WMSMEs are being made, particularly in relation to corporate supplier diversity programmes; efforts are being made to build their capacity to become supply chain suppliers.	4	
Supply chain initiatives for WMSMEs are being implemented across many sectors in which women are dominant, and in different parts of the country; supply chain linkages have been fostered with large enterprises; a number of WMSMEs are certified as “women-owned-led businesses” and have engaged in supplier arrangements with large domestic firms and country-based multinational corporations.	5	

6D. Export promotion for women entrepreneurs	Points	Score
No government-supported programmes are specifically targeting WMSMEs with export promotion or development programmes; the participation of WMSMEs in mainstream programmes is low.	1	
Some limited efforts are being made to promote export opportunities to WMSMEs through dissemination of information, but they are generally not represented in government-sponsored trade missions or in export training programmes.	2	
Government agencies are making active efforts to include women entrepreneurs in export orientation seminars and workshops; women are participating to a minimal degree in government-sponsored trade missions; sex-disaggregated data on participants are collected.	3	
Government agencies are making concerted efforts to promote export opportunities to WMSMEs; early efforts are being made to ensure that women entrepreneurs are included in export-readiness and capacity-building programmes to improve their product quality and marketing skills; the participation of WMSMEs in government-sponsored trade missions or fairs is actively sought; sex-disaggregated data are collected.	4	
There is a national "export promotion for women entrepreneurs" strategy or programme that is comprehensive in nature, taking into account all of the above; targets are included for increases in the export activity and the contribution of women exporters; key performance measures are monitored.	5	

6E. Gender-responsive trade facilitation mechanisms	Points	Score
Actions are being taken to improve trade facilitation mechanisms under a trade facilitation agreement with WTO, but specific trade facilitation measures for MSMEs or WMSMEs in the country have not yet been implemented.	1	
Special trade facilitation measures for SMEs have been designed and are in place (such as targeting SMEs with trade-related information, single-window access, other simplification or special incentives geared to easing SMEs' access to international trade activities), but there is no particular focus on addressing the gender gap in take-up of the SME trade facilitation measures.	2	
The context of women entrepreneurs is taken into consideration to ensure their participation in trade facilitation measures, such as electronic filing of export and import documents, computerized customs services for cross-border trade, efforts to include women in the provision of information and training in trade regulations and procedures.	3	

6E. Gender-responsive trade facilitation mechanisms	Points	Score
The trade facilitation policy or strategy seeks to increase women's participation in trade; trade facilitation measures are in place to benefit women traders; women are included in the membership of the national trade facilitation committee, and customs and cross-border officials have received gender-sensitization training.	4	
The trade facilitation policy or strategy and trade facilitation measures seek to increase women's participation in trade through specific supports; women have representation on the national trade facilitation committee; procedures are in place to collect sex-disaggregated data to monitor progress in women's participation in international trade activities (exporting and importing); the data are used to inform further actions to improve women's participation in trade activities.	5	

7. Access to information communications technologies and production technology

7A. Digitalization and technology upgrading for WMSMEs	Points	Score
WMSMEs are generally operating with rudimentary technology, limited in their use of ICTs for business development and no efforts are being made to improve their related digital and technical know-how and skills nor to help them acquire more modern production technologies.	1	
Efforts are being made to provide WMSMEs with training on digital literacy skills and with advice and counselling on updating their use of technology; participation in formal government-supported MSME upgrading programmes is limited.	2	
WMSMEs are targeted for inclusion in technology upgrading and modernization programmes and programmes that focus on the integration of ICT-enabled and digital solutions; financing for implementation is generally not accessible.	3	
The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs supports the upgrading of WMSMEs and makes grant or other financing programmes available to WMSMEs to defray the cost of investing in updated and new technologies, including digitalization capacity.	4	
WMSMEs are able to upgrade their production equipment; are making use of ICTs in many of their business operations; are increasing their productivity and market access.	5	

7B. Supportive ecosystem for women-led start-ups in ICT and technology-based sectors	Points	Score
Women entrepreneurs are underrepresented in ICT and technology-based sectors; limited efforts are being made to reduce the gender gap.	1	
Businesswomen associations and related groups are making efforts to promote STEM-related opportunities to potential women entrepreneurs; governments and other technology ecosystem stakeholders are only moderately engaged in such efforts.	2	
The ministry or agency responsible for SMEs is supporting efforts to build the pipeline of ICT and technology women entrepreneurs by supporting initiatives of third-party organizations to hold business idea and business plan competitions targeting potential and existing women entrepreneurs with innovative projects in ICT and technology-based sectors; other support is limited.	3	
The participation of women-founded-led start-ups in government-supported ICT and technology incubator programmes is small; the ministry responsible for SMEs advocates the gender mainstreaming of the incubators; efforts are under way to gender-sensitize incubator programmes and approaches; special initiatives are being employed to attract women-led start-up teams.	4	
Initiatives are in place to introduce women entrepreneurs to technological innovations and the opportunities for developing businesses in ICT-enabled and technology-driven sectors; women entrepreneurs are actively encouraged and supported to start businesses in higher-technology and innovative sectors of the economy, including the ICT sector, through business incubation, acceleration, linkages with R&D institutes and investors, mentoring, and other targeted programmes; the gender gap in ICT and technology-based start-ups is narrowing.	5	

ANNEX VI. Mock scoring and assessment example

The ministry responsible for SMEs in fictitious country A completed the Policy Toolkit self-assessment tool and tabulated the following scoring results for the 21 subdomains and seven policy domains (average scores for the subdomains under each one).

		Subdomain score	Domain score (average)
1.	Gender-responsive legal and regulatory system to advance women's economic empowerment		2.75
	Gender impact assessments	1	
	Gender equality in labour market access and participation	3	
	Women's property and inheritance rights	4	
	Business registration regulations and procedures	3	
	Total score on the domain (average score of subdomains)	11	
2.	Policy leadership, coordination and institutional support for women's entrepreneurship development (WED)		2.25
	Women's entrepreneurship as a national development and SME policy priority	3	
	WED focal points and the SME ministry or agency	3	
	Formal mechanisms for the engagement of women entrepreneurs and their representative bodies in public-private sector policy dialogue	2	
	Inclusive response to WED in the entrepreneurial ecosystem	1	
	Total score on the domain (average score of subdomains)	9	

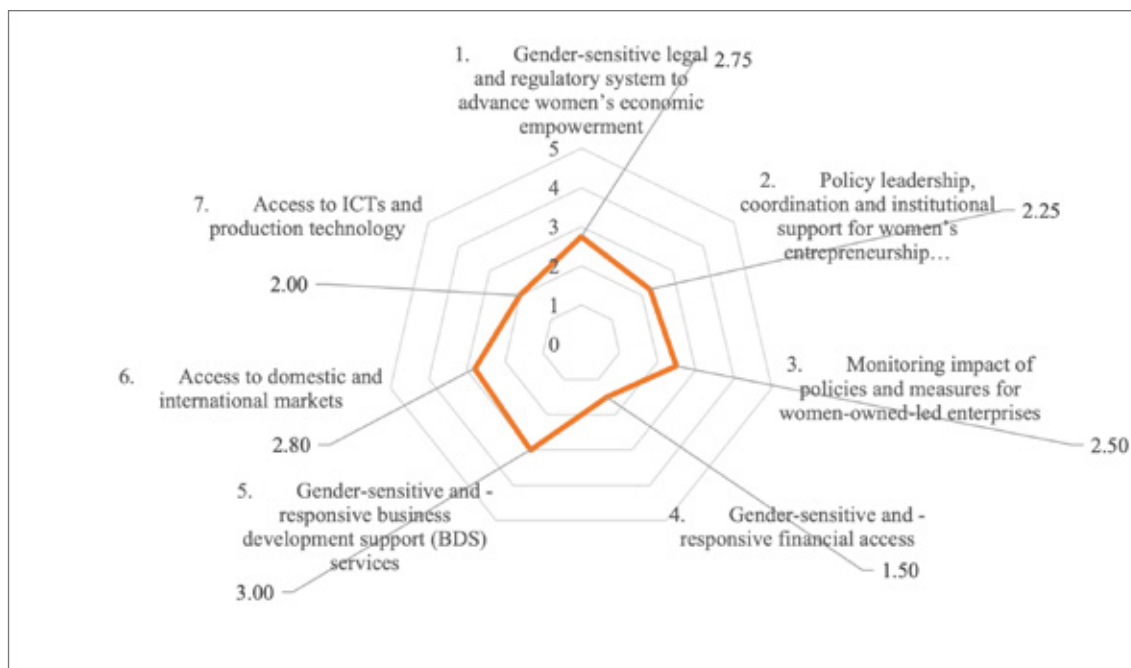
		Subdomain score	Domain score (average)
3.	Monitoring impact of policies and measures for women-owned-led enterprises		2.5
	Collecting and reporting on sex-disaggregated statistics relative to women's entrepreneurship	3	
	Monitoring and evaluation	2	
	<i>Total score on the domain (average score of subdomains)</i>	5	
4.	Gender- responsive financial access		1.5
	Inclusiveness of women entrepreneurs and WMSMEs in generic financing programmes	1	
	Financing programmes specifically targeted to women-owned enterprises	2	
	<i>Total score on the domain (average score of subdomains)</i>	3	
5.	Gender-responsive business development support services		3.0
	Gender responsiveness of BDS organizations and services to the needs of women entrepreneurs	3	
	Women-targeted BDS services and programmes	3	
	<i>Total score on the domain (average score of subdomains)</i>	6	

		Subdomain score	Domain score (average)
6.	Access to domestic and international markets		2.8
	E-commerce adoption and use of online trading platforms	4	
	Government procurement programmes targeting women-owned-led MSMEs	1	
	Supply chain linkages for WMSMEs	3	
	Export promotion for women entrepreneurs	3	
	Gender-responsive trade facilitation mechanisms	3	
	<i>Total score on the domain (average score of subdomains)</i>	<i>14</i>	
7.	Access to ICTs and production technology		2.0
	Digitalization and technology upgrading of WMSMEs	2	
	Supportive ecosystem for women-led start-ups in ICT and technology-based sectors	2	
	<i>Total score on the domain (average score of subdomains)</i>	<i>4</i>	

Analysis at domain level:

Domain scores (average of subdomain score)	Score
1. Gender-responsive legal and regulatory system to advance women's economic empowerment	2.75
2. Policy leadership, coordination and institutional support for women's entrepreneurship development (WED)	2.25
3. Monitoring impact of policies and measures for women-owned-led enterprises	2.50
4. Gender -responsive financial access	1.50
5. Gender-responsive business development support (BDS) services	3.00
6. Access to domestic and international markets	2.80
7. Access to ICTs and production technology	2.00

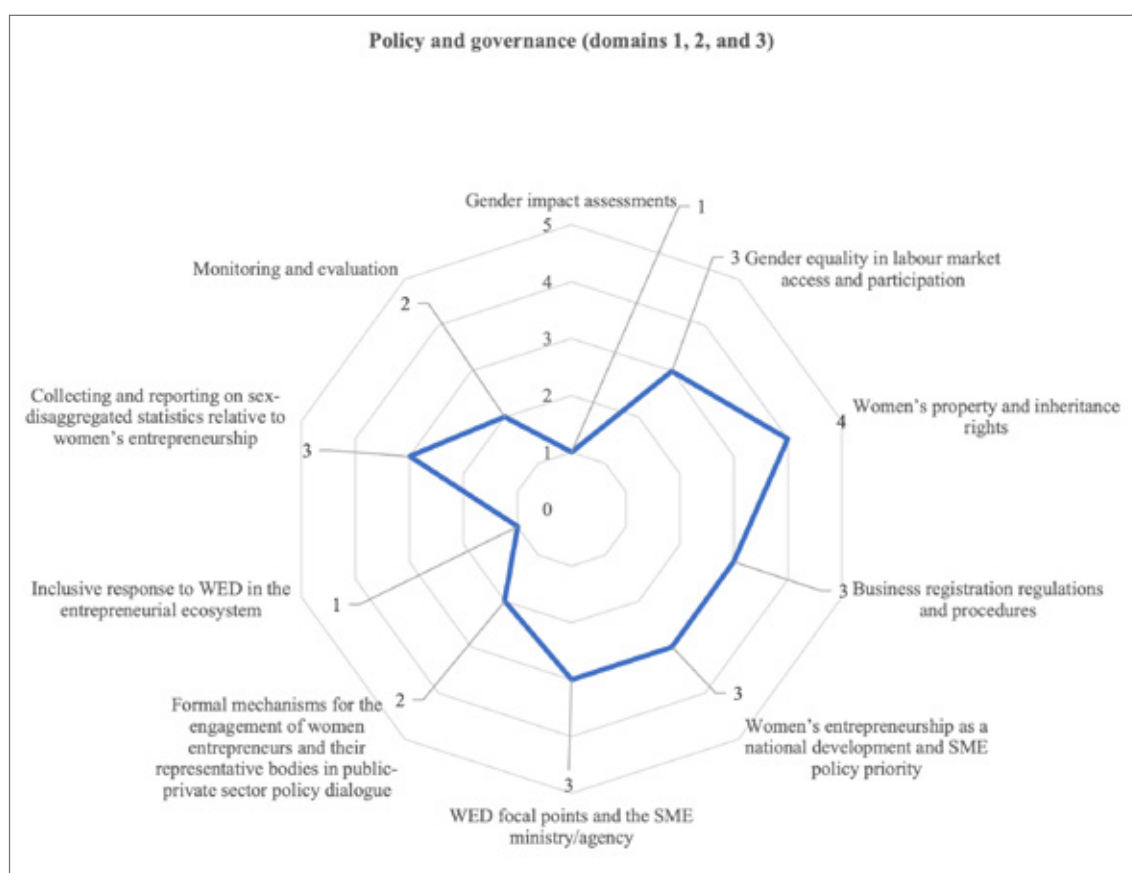
Producing a radar diagram of the seven domain scores from the Excel data reveals considerable room for improvement in both policy and governance and programme measures to support WED. The strongest domain is “gender-responsive legal and regulatory system”, although the score is only 2.75 out of 5.0. The weakest domain is “gender-responsive financial access” with a score of 1.5 out of 5.0.



A more granular view of the subdomain areas in the form of a radar diagram indicates where specific actions could be taken to strengthen WED in the country. For this purpose, the domains are clustered into two categories: the first covering the policy, governance, and monitoring (domains 1, 2, and 3); and the second covering the programmatic areas (domains 4, 5, 6 and 7).

Policy and governance (domains 1, 2, and 3)

Under the policy, governance, and monitoring domains, the strongest subdomain is legal equality in property and inheritance rights; however, women are not always able to exercise their legal rights because of the continuing application of customary or traditional practices, which favour men. Efforts are needed to inform women of their legal rights, improve enforcement of the legal provisions under the law and ensure women have legal recourse to secure their property rights.



The weakest subdomains relate to (1) the absence of a system of conducting gender impact assessments of laws and regulations and (2) the lack of inclusiveness of WED stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. A rudimentary stakeholder mapping has been constructed, but it is not inclusive of WED stakeholder organizations, and has not yet been operationalized. The mapping requires further development to include the WED stakeholder organizations and support programmes and operationalization.

Examples of possible actions arising from the self-assessment results on this domain: (1) complete the stakeholder mapping by including the WED stakeholder organizations and programmes; (2) actions to address the general lack of engagement of women entrepreneurs and their representative bodies in formal public-private sector policy dialogue; (3) implement a monitoring and evaluation mechanism that captures progress of programmes targeting women entrepreneurs being delivered by government entities beyond the scope of the ministry/agency responsible for SMEs; and (4) advocating a gender lens review of the SME law to identify opportunities for strengthened gender inclusiveness (meet with the ministry of justice to discuss).

Possible actions to improve the overall strength in policy and governance: (1) propose revisions to the current SME Policy framework to strengthen its inclusiveness of WMSMEs (specific women-focused objectives, targets, concrete actions across policy pillars); (2) establish a unit responsible for WED policy leadership and

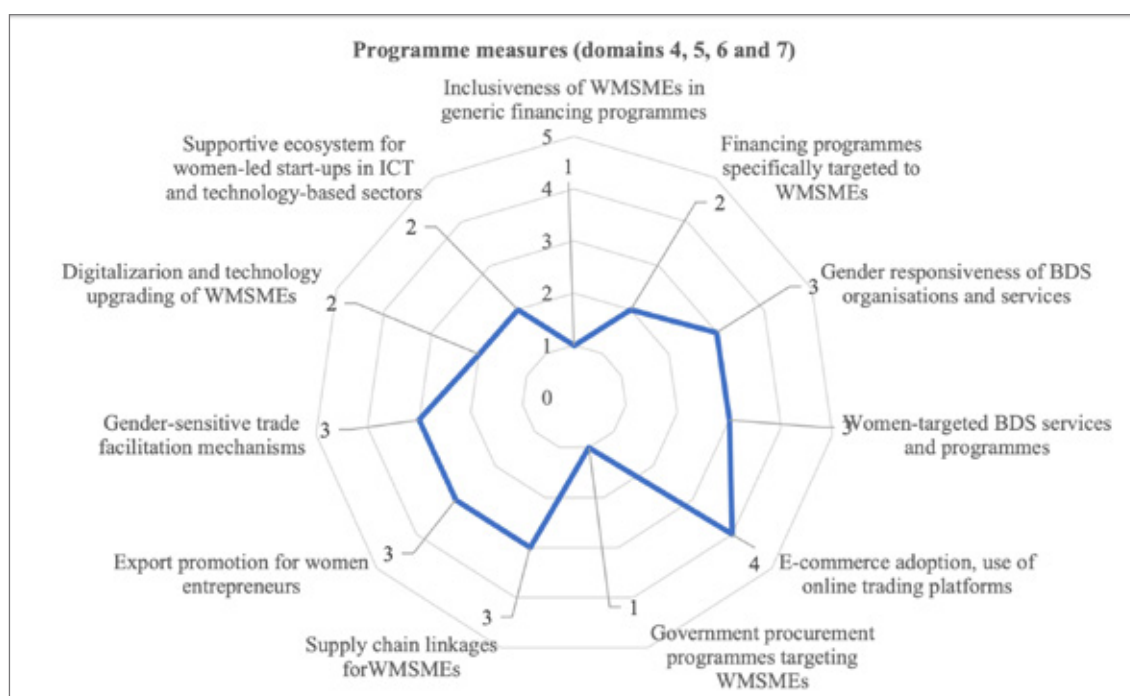
coordination within the ministry responsible for SMEs; and (3) make improvements to the system of collecting and reporting relevant sex-disaggregated statistics and data and monitoring programme implementation.

Each of the actions could be elaborated with specific tasks, timelines, persons or agencies responsible, and together with weaknesses identified in the other subdomain areas form the basis for a government-wide WED action plan.

Programme measures (domains 4, 5, 6 and 7)

In the programmatic subdomains, the weakest areas are in the “inclusiveness of WMSMEs in generic financing programmes” and “government procurement programmes targeting WMSMEs” (scores of 1.0 out of 5.0). Actions are needed to improve women entrepreneurs’ access to financing by developing instruments to address specific issues, such as collateral constraints, and providing incentives to the commercial banking sector to be more responsive to the borrowing needs of WMSMEs. In addition, financing programmes specifically targeting WMSMEs and addressing their needs would lead to an improvement in their access. Modifications to the public procurement system with particular attention to making it more favourable to the participation of WMSMEs is needed to open up more domestic market opportunities for women entrepreneurs. Significant improvements are also needed to enhance WMSMEs’ access to digitalization and technology upgrading as well as to encourage more women-led start-ups in ICT and technology-based sector (scores of 2.0 out of 5.0).

The strongest programme intervention relates to supporting WMSMEs to adopt e-commerce and make use of online trading platforms (score of 4.0 out of 5.0). Much attention has occurred in this subdomain in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Collaborations are under way between the ministry responsible for SMEs and the digital economy ministry to support the e-commerce readiness of WMSMEs and build their capacity to fulfil online orders and manage the digital aspects of online selling. Scaling up of these programme efforts to reach more WMSMEs and to monitor the impact is needed.



Based on the scoring results, the ministry responsible for SMEs is able to identify specific areas for improvement for policy and programme support for women's entrepreneurship. By reviewing answers to the assessment guidance questions for each subdomain area (yes and no answers), the outlined aspirational goals, and the self-assessment scoring statements, the ministry can determine necessary actions for improving the country's performance in supporting WED. These actions could be organized in the short-term, medium-term and longer-term, essentially laying out an action plan for moving forward, the progress of which could be monitored over time.

ENDNOTES

¹ The Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship project is being implemented in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Fiji, Nepal Samoa and Viet Nam with the objective to directly support 20,000 women entrepreneurs to start up and expand their businesses by 2023.

² They are Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; Indonesia; Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia; Myanmar; Philippines; Singapore; Thailand; and Viet Nam.

³ Women's empowerment is broadly defined as "a process whereby the lives of women and girls are transformed from a situation where they have limited power to one where their power is enhanced" (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2007). It covers a wide range of cultural, social, health, political and educational dimensions, such as equality in education, women's role in decision-making (at the household, community and political levels) and violence against women, which although they have an impact on the strength of women's economic empowerment, go beyond the scope of specific policy issues covered in this Policy Toolkit.

⁴ For example, sexual harassment can be a direct or indirect deterrent to women's economic empowerment, as families may discourage women from working due to the perceived dangers.

⁵ The United Nations framework identifies seven drivers of change to create an enabling environment for WEE and reduce the gender gaps in economic opportunities in employment and entrepreneurship: (1) tackling adverse norms and promoting positive role models; (2) ensuring legal protection and reforming discriminatory laws and regulations; (3) recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid work and care; (4) building assets – digital, financial and property; (5) changing business practices and culture; (6) improving public sector practices in employment and procurement; and (7) strengthening visibility, collective voice and representation (<https://hlp-wee.unwomen.org/en/about/seven-drivers/>).

⁶ Two scenarios were considered. If women participated in the economy identically to men, \$28 trillion could be added to annual GDP in 2025, or a 26 per cent increase compared with a business-as-usual scenario. If all countries matched the rate of improvement of the best performing country in their region ("best-in-region" scenario), annual GDP in 2025 could increase by as much as \$12 trillion, or double the likely growth in global GDP contributed by female workers in the business-as-usual scenario, using 2014-2015 as the baseline (Woetzel and others, 2015).

⁷ The analysis uses metrics to calculate the "female intensity of exports" and measure "women's share of total export value" in a country based on the assumption that female labour force participation is the same across sectors and can be directly applied to attain the monetary equivalent of the female labour involved in export industries (comparison of wages rates) (ASEAN secretariat, 2016, p. 19). From 2000 to 2010, the female shares of employment participation and labour force participation remained relatively unchanged as did the female share of export, while the value of total exports expanded significantly. This reveals that women's share in exports mirrors their overall work force participation; the conclusion being that in order to bridge the gender gap in export-intensive sectors, their overall work force participation needs to increase (ASEAN secretariat, 2016, p. 67).

⁸ For example, target 1.4 advocates that by 2030, "all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance".

Target 5.a advocates for stepped up action to “undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.” Goal 5 target b states the importance to “enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.”

⁹ Raising the female-to-male labour force participation ratio, in line with the global average contribution, would contribute 58 per cent of the total \$4.5 trillion GDP opportunity, increasing the number of paid hours women work would contribute a further 17 per cent, and increasing the employment of women in higher-productivity sectors would contribute the remaining 25 per cent (Woetzel and others, 2018, p. 4).

¹⁰ Based on data presented in table A.2, p.80 and table B.5, p. 89 of the Regional Study on Informal Employment Statistics to Support Decent Work Promotion in ASEAN report (ASEAN secretariat, 2019).

¹¹ There is no law to prohibit discrimination in employment because the Brunei Darussalam Employment Order 2009 gives equal rights to men and women. For example, women may be employed as employees or may work at night the same as men by prescribing the circumstances and conditions. Additional benefits are given to women in terms of maternity benefits.

¹² “PM Lee Hsien Loong’s speech at the Closing Session of the Conversations on Women’s Development”, Newsroom, Prime Minister’s Office Singapore, 18 September 2021. Available at www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/pm-lee-conversations-on-singapore-womens-development.

¹³ The IFC definitions of targeted sectors can be found at www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/industry_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/financial+institutions/priorities/ifcs+definitions+of+targeted+sectors.

¹⁴ The International Organization for Standardization facilitated two rounds of virtual workshops to arrive at the International Workshop Agreement with input from 368 experts in 77 countries. The workshops covered definitions for “women-owned businesses”, “women-led businesses”, “women-led cooperatives” and “women-led informal enterprises”. The background note on the technical discussions provides commentary on input from various stakeholders (ITC and Swedish Institute of Standards 2020).

¹⁵ The European Institute for Gender Equality defines “gender impact assessment” as “an ex-ante evaluation, analysis or assessment of a law, policy or programme that makes it possible to identify, in a preventative way, the likelihood of a given decision having negative consequences for the state of equality between women and men”, namely reducing, maintaining, or increasing the gender inequalities between women and men (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017, p. 8).

¹⁶ For example, out of respect for gender norms or to leverage their rights as a business owner, women in Indonesia often go through their husbands to register their businesses (Women’s World Banking, 2021).

¹⁷ For example, in countries, such as Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Myanmar, property is traditionally registered in the name of the husband or a male relative, even if the law provides for women’s equal property rights, rendering their rights to property and land highly vulnerable.

¹⁸ Women and girls in Asia are reported to spend up to 11 times more of their day than men and boys on unpaid and domestic care (ADB and UN Women, 2018).

¹⁹ The Census of Enterprises covers all active companies and businesses registered in Brunei Darussalam: proprietorships; partnerships; public limited companies; private limited companies; branch of a foreign company; or co-operatives (Brunei Darussalam, Department of Economic Planning and Statistics, 2020b).

²⁰ The Ministry of Women's Affairs encouraged the formation of CamWEN as a federation of all associations (with at least 25 female members) and communities of women entrepreneur-driven MSMEs (with at least 50 female members) in Cambodia to represent the collective female voice of Cambodia in the business sector and on the international stage.

²¹ The SME Bank enables better access to affordable financing to the SME sector, providing technical assistance to enhance their productivity, improving business advisory support, and easing access to regional markets.

²² The Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Scheme brochure, <https://smebankcambodia.com.kh/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/CWES.pdf/>.

²³ The Credit Guarantee Corporation of Cambodia is a State-owned enterprise, established under the Ministry of Economy and Finance of Cambodia in September 2021, to provide credit guarantees on loans disbursed to businesses in order to improve financial inclusion and support the development of SMEs.

²⁴ Women Entrepreneurs Guarantee Scheme Guidelines, www.cgcc.com.kh/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/WEGS_Guideline_Stamp.pdf. The Guidelines are in line with the "Strategic Framework and Programmes for Economic Recovery in the Context of Living with COVID-19 in a New Normal 2021–2023", which encourages financial institutions to increase additional lending to SMEs. The guarantee can apply to loans of up to \$500,000 per single borrower in priority and non-priority sectors.

²⁵ As cited in the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada analysis of the role of gender in MSE Business Development in Indonesia (Istiandari and Anandhika, 2019, p. 15). The IMK database includes registered businesses with 1-4 employees (micro-enterprises) and 5-9 employees (small enterprises). In Indonesia, enterprises with less than 10 employees account for more than 99 per cent of all firms.

²⁶ The other four priorities are improving the roles of mother and family education and care, decreasing violence against women, decreasing child labour and preventing child marriage. Further reasoning for the priority on WEE through entrepreneurship by Indonesian officials: if vulnerable women achieve more economic independence, it is hoped that violence against women and children, child labour and child marriage will also decrease. If the gender perspective in entrepreneurship is improved, vulnerable women will have a more equal opportunity to participate in economic activities. "Vulnerable women" include women survivors of violence, women survivors of disasters, and female heads of families, especially in rural areas. Fostering an interest in entrepreneurship among these groups of vulnerable women boosts their potential to be entrepreneurs, who can then advance to become beginning entrepreneurs and eventually established entrepreneurs. The ultimate goal is to make these vulnerable women economically independent so that they can contribute to improving the welfare of their families.

²⁷ The Action Plan on Entrepreneurship Development Programme (2022–2024) targets four main groups of entrepreneurs: (1) the general public and citizenry; (2) aspiring and nascent

entrepreneurs; (3) early-stage entrepreneurs, and (4) advanced-stage entrepreneurs, and includes the integration of programmes, targets, and indicators from 24 ministries and agencies that target different groups, depending on their respective scope of responsibilities, policies and programmes.

²⁸ In 2020, the “Sispreneur Incubation Class” programme, implemented in West Sumatera, West Kalimantan, Bali, and West Nusa Tenggara, supported 280 female “micropreneurs”, largely in the food and handicrafts sectors. Incubation classes were held online, including training and mentoring. The training focused on becoming product-ready (building a business development mindset from product selection to financial management); market-readiness (ensuring product quality in accordance with the targeted market); and digital and marketplace-readiness (how to use promotional channels to sell more via social media platforms and marketplaces). In 2021, the “Sispreneur 2” Business Management Incubation Class targeted 1,000 women entrepreneurs from more than 20 provinces with online training to enhance their knowledge of product development, business planning, digital marketing and financial matters, and to upgrade their “go digital” potential. XL Axiata provided the incubator participants with a SisterBiz starter/sim card, free 5GB access to the Sisternet, Zoom and e-learn.id applications, as well as Whatsapp lecture assistance and e-certificates. Bank Rakyat Indonesia provided the financial literacy training materials and resource persons, and organizations, such as the Association of Women Small Business Assistance, the Women's Resource Development Centre and the Women Heads of Family Empowerment Foundation offered support. (See www.xlaxiata.co.id/en/news/support-women-in-micro-business; www.kemenpppa.go.id/index.php/page/read/29/4002/program-w20-sispreneur-wujudkan-perempuan-wirausaha-yang-tangguh.)

²⁹ Among the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection partners are the Association of Women Small Business Assistance, the Women Heads of Family Empowerment Foundation, the Institute of Women Alternative Education Circle (Kapal Perempuan), Migrant Care, the Indonesian Association of Women Entrepreneurs, PT. Madani National Capital, Go-Jek Indonesia, Grab Indonesia, Danone Indonesia, Frisian Flag Indonesia, XL Axiata (Sispreneur), the British Embassy (HERfuture) and Tokopedia (online buying and selling site).

³⁰ Some of the suggested actions reflected input from officials of the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs.

³¹ Data from the Lao Statistics Bureau database of Sustainable Development Goals indicators, Goal target 8.5.4. www.lsb.gov.la/sdg/en/.

³² www.ned.moic.gov.la/index.php/en/explore-data-en/ned-charts/. Data reported on the website, accessed 13 March 2022.

³³ Other priorities are to further strengthen the establishment of political participants and representation of women, the implementation of the approved laws, ensure quality education including, short-term and vocational training programmes, improve unpaid care and domestic work and increase access to health care for mothers and child.

³⁴ The OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index metrics measure gender-based discrimination in social institutions, including formal and informal laws, social norms and practices.

³⁵ In the 2016 Economic Census, the Department of Statistics reported that women owned 186,930 of the total 907,065 SMEs in the country.

³⁶ Information provided to ESCAP from officials in the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives in February 2022.

³⁷ The Malaysia National Entrepreneurship Development Institute offers entrepreneurial capacity-building initiatives through training and mentoring and coaching programmes.

³⁸ TEKUN Nasional has set a policy to allocate at least 50 per cent of its funding for women entrepreneurs.

³⁹ The DanaNITA programme, a specific financing programme for women entrepreneurs established under the Ministry of Rural Development in 2017 to encourage women's participation in entrepreneurship and to increase the competitiveness of women's enterprises, was allocated 230 million Malaysian ringgit (RM) (\$51.6 million) in the 2022 budget to target women entrepreneurs affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and women-owned enterprises seeking to increase their business capacity. For more details see www.mara.gov.my/bm/menu_keusahawanan/kemudahan-sokongan/pembiayaan-perniagaan/dananita/#tab-id-2.

⁴⁰ "Summary SMEIPA 2021", www.smeinfo.com.my/sme-development-programmes/summary-smeipa-2021.

⁴¹ TEKUN Nasional is a financing facility targeting Bumiputera women entrepreneurs who require financing to start or develop a business. From 2013-2020, TEKUN Nasional disbursed 1.62 billion Malaysian ringgit (RM) (\$360 million) to 161,522 women entrepreneurs (Malaysia, Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives, 2020b).

⁴² The Ar-Rahru Biznita initiative aims to increase women's accessibility to financing for business purposes under the Ar-Rahru Micro Credit Programme, especially those who do not have access to loans in financial institutions. The initiative encourages women to make gold an asset and savings to be used for various productive purposes, encourage entrepreneurship among women to increase family income and improve the socioeconomic status of the family, and to increase the contribution of women to socioeconomic development and support the entrepreneurial development ecosystem.

⁴³ B40 refers to households in the bottom 40 per cent of the income pyramid.

⁴⁴ Results from the first quarter labour force survey, January–March 2017, produced by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population.

⁴⁵ In 2017, the Central Statistical Organization had made significant improvements to the Statistical Business Register, assisted by ESCAP and ADB. The 2019–20 version of the Register covered 477,148 businesses, including businesses with licences and market businesses, which do not generally require licences. However, the Register still suffers from undercoverage of businesses in rural Myanmar; not all businesses have been given a common identification code to allow matching of the two databases between years in order to classify the business registration status (continuing business or new business), and the challenge of collecting information that would allow it to produce data on the size of businesses in the Register, such as employment data, persists (Thein, Aung and Biddington, 2021). The Statistical Business Register also does not make a provision for collecting data on the ownership of a business that would enable producing gender statistics, which would be most valuable in the future.

⁴⁶ Based on survey data collected in 2015 of 2,500 enterprises as part of a SME survey carried out by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (For more details see Amine and Stockman, 2015).

⁴⁷ Data from the World Bank Enterprise Survey in Myanmar, 2016 for the indicator “percent of firms with majority female ownership” (Word Bank, 2016a).

⁴⁸ The Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan includes 46 gender indicators, 30 of which relate to the Sustainable Development Goal indicators (five are directly related to Goal 5).

⁴⁹ The Myanmar Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement is responsible for women's empowerment and coordinating and operationalizing the National Strategic Action Plan for the Advancement of Women 2013–2022. The Department of Social Welfare is the Government's nodal point to oversee gender mainstreaming across the sectors, however, it is not funded sufficiently to carry out national-level activities for system-wide integration, mainstreaming and monitoring of gender equality and women's empowerment. With strengthened internal capacity, mechanisms and resources, gender mainstreaming efforts could increase.

⁵⁰ The Myanmar Women-Led MSMEs Strategic Advancement Programme holds regional competitions in each region to select the potential women-led MSMEs for the programme. The selected WMSMEs participated in capacity-building trainings, knowledge-sharing workshops with successful women entrepreneurs, and mentoring meetings to address their particular needs. A national competition is later held to identify the winners from the three regions. The KPI for the programme is the post-programme assessment of “change/improvement of the level of knowledge, skills and attitudes of women-led MSMEs” relative to the baseline pre-programme assessment.

⁵¹ The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Plan results-matrices indicate that the baseline is the “number of registered business establishments by sex of owner” as the proxy indicator, and the women's share of registered businesses (of 54 per cent) in 2017. For more details see <https://pcw.gov.ph/assets/files/2020/05/GEWE-Plan-2019-2025-Results-Matrices.pdf?x12374#:~:text=The%20GEWE%20Plan%202019%2D2025,resilient%20society%2C%20and%20a%20globally/>.

⁵² An establishment may be covered in the list of establishments if it is under a single ownership focusing on a specific economic activity and has a single fixed physical location.

⁵³ The Department of Trade and Industry GAD Focal Point System consists of the top management of the Department's functional groups, which include regional operations, competitiveness and innovation, trade policy, industry development and trade policy, consumer protection, and management services and the technical working group. They are comprised of representatives in-charge in the planning and implementation of activities institutionalizing gender and development in their respective focal groups. The focal groups provide directions towards gender mainstreaming in their respective policies and plans, activities and programmes. The technical working group members lead and provide guidance to their respective offices and bureaus under their respective focal groups in the formulation of its gender and development plans, programmes and budget in response to the gender gaps and issues faced by their women and men clients and employees, following the conduct of a gender audit, gender analysis and/or review of sex disaggregated data, among others.

⁵⁴ See <https://psa.gov.ph/gender-stat/wmf>.

⁵⁵ Blesila Lantayona, Closing remarks at the launch of the Rebuilding Better: Fostering Business Resilience Post-COVID-19 in the Philippines, 27 May 2021, Manila. Available at www.ilo.org/manila/public/sp/WCMS_797092/lang-en/index.htm.

⁵⁶ The Department of Science and Technology, the Department of Agriculture, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and the Department of Labour and Employment are cooperative partners in this gender responsive value chain analysis project.

⁵⁷ Suggestions made by Department of Trade and Industry officials as input to ESCAP in February 2022.

⁵⁸ In a speech in 2021, the Singapore Prime Minister stated that “while women’s standing in Singapore has improved greatly, societal attitudes towards women have not fully modernized” and that inequalities still exist in the traditional mindsets about the role of women in the workplace and the heavier burden they shoulder in domestic responsibilities. See: “PM Lee Hsien Loong’s speech at the Closing Session of the Conversations on Singapore Women’s Development held virtually on 18 September 2021”, Prime Minister’s Office News, 18 September 2021. www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/pm-lee-conversations-on-singapore-womens-development/.

⁵⁹ The issue of systemic and cultural impediments to gender equality in Singapore was discussed in Parliament in August 2021, affirming the need for a whole of society effort to remove all barriers to the empowerment of women so they can freely realize their full potential and participation in society, including as entrepreneurs (<https://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/fullreport?sittingdate=03-08-2021/>).

⁶⁰ See www.startupsg.gov.sg/programmes.

⁶¹ See www.enterprisesg.gov.sg/financial-assistance/grants#for-local-companies-.

⁶² See www.enterprisesg.gov.sg/financial-assistance/loans-and-insurance/loans-and-insurance/enterprise-financing-scheme/overview.

⁶³ See www.imda.gov.sg/programme-listing/smes-go-digital/

⁶⁴ The Women Entrepreneur Awards is a community-led initiative to celebrate the achievements of female entrepreneurs (<https://wea-sg.com>). The award winners go on to support their fellow businesswomen through the Women Entrepreneur Club by offering practical assistance, cultivating a close network of support and encouraging collaboration through networking events and mentoring programmes. The Women Entrepreneur Award and WE Club help build a sustainable ecosystem to support women entrepreneurs in Singapore.

⁶⁵ See <https://boardagender.org/about>.

⁶⁶ A Mumpreneur is defined as a multi-tasking mother who can balance both the stresses of running a home-based business as an entrepreneur, and the time-consuming duties of motherhood at the same time (www.mumsatwork.net/mumpreneurs/).

⁶⁷ The members are the Business and Professional Women’s Association chapter of the International Women’s Federation of Commerce and Industry; ATHENA Network Singapore, chapter of Secret (W) Business; Mums@Work Mumpreneurs Network; Female Founders Network; LadyBoss Singapore; the Southeast Asia Female Entrepreneurs Club, and the Women Entrepreneur Club.

⁶⁸ The phenomenon of “mumpreneurs” in Singapore has been growing. Mums@Work Singapore has noted that more “mums” have turned to entrepreneurship during the COVID-19 pandemic, largely attributed to the fact that the pandemic has been an opportunity for them to explore alternative ways to work or supplement their income. Having their own business allows them to work flexibly, often through the use of digital platforms, virtual

meeting providers and e-commerce enabling platforms. However, “mumpreneurs” still face challenges. Apart from having to juggle work and family responsibilities, they tend to lack an effective support network, including relevant financial, social and technological resources. Those who are interested in starting their own business also tend to have limited knowledge on sourcing initial capital, deciding on a starting point or formulating an overall business strategy. Mitigating financial risks and coming up with an effective digital marketing strategy are two other key concerns for mumpreneurs-to-be.

⁶⁹ The five-week Digital Mumpreneurs Programme guides women entrepreneurs on different aspects of starting and running a business, exposes them to tech solution providers and builds connections with business support networks and women's groups.

⁷⁰ See www.sme.go.th/en/page.php?modulekey=435/.

⁷¹ Information provided to ESCAP in February 2022.

⁷² Decision 1362/QĐ-TTg dated 11 October 2019.

⁷³ Decree No 28/NQ-CP “Promulgating the National Strategy on Gender Equality for the 2021-2030 period” (dated March 2021). <https://english.luatvietnam.vn/resolution-no-28-nq-cp-dated-march-03-2021-of-the-government-on-promulgation-of-the-national-strategy-on-gender-equality-in-the-period-of-2021-203-199301-Doc1.html>.

⁷⁴ Information provided to ESCAP by Agency for Enterprise Development officials in February 2022.

⁷⁵ For example, male-dominant selection panels were found to exercise an unconscious bias against women in “pitch processes” (often a component of the selection process for acceptance into the incubator programme).

⁷⁶ In a gender-insensitive programme design, women's needs are not taken into consideration (such as inflexibility in the requirement for residency in the incubator facility, scheduling networking or mentoring meetings in the evening, which may deter women with children, and the lack of female counsellors and mentors on programme delivery teams).

⁷⁷ The Women's Initiative for Startups and Entrepreneurship Women Innovation Accelerator programme provides finalists with business model review, workshops on building new e-commerce platforms, intensive bootcamp training on business model development, marketing and communication, finance and investment, pitch and presentation skills, and business evaluation (<http://wisevietnam.org/uom-tao-tang-toc-ho-tro-startup-nu/?lang=en/>).

⁷⁸ Laws prohibiting discrimination in access to credit based on gender are critically important to removing structural barriers to the full participation of women in economic activity. This was one of the first actions taken by the Governments of Canada and the United States to level the playing field for women generally and for women business owners specifically, dating back to the late 1970s. The Government of the United States passed the Equal Credit Opportunities Act in 1975. This was followed by the Affirmative Action Act of 1978, another critical step in removing structural barriers to the growth of women-owned enterprises.

⁷⁹ Another early action taken by Governments in developed countries was to offer gender-sensitivity training to commercial banks and their loans officers. In the early 1990s, the Government of Canada launched an advocacy effort with the commercial banking sector to examine its gender-sensitivity in lending. This involved the hosting of government-initiated

policy forums with senior officials from the country's leading banks to discuss improving the level of financing to women-owned businesses. Several of the banks launched gender-sensitivity orientation and training sessions to their loans officers to call attention to gender biases in lending decisions.

⁸⁰ The National Financial Inclusion Strategy framework, itself, is gender neutral in seeking to improve the supply-side access and demand-side access of all working-age adults to the financial system, and especially the unbanked population, including to credit, savings, payments systems, and insurance. However, the Policy Framework for Women-led MSME Access to Finance states that in addition to monitoring financial inclusion data for the population as a whole, at the country level, the National Financial Inclusion Strategy can place particular emphasis on improving the financial inclusion of women (Alliance for Financial Inclusion, 2021).

⁸¹ Development Bank of the Philippines Inclusive Lending for Aspiring Women (ILAW) Entrepreneurs Program Business Loan brochure, which is available at www.dbp.ph/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Ilaw-brochure.pdf.

⁸² Beginning in June 2020, the WAVES project committed to undertaking gender gap assessments of financial institutions, working with the State Bank of Viet Nam to collect sex-disaggregated data from financial institutions, and engaging financial institutions in dialogue on different blended finance models to increase on-lending to women entrepreneurs. The ADB WAVES 2020 Implementation Progress Report (<https://we-fi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/4.ADB-WAVES-2020-Annual-Progress-Report-public.pdf>).

⁸³ From 2020 to 2022, the WAVES project was set to conduct gender-gap assessments of the Viet Nam State Bank and four financial institutions. In the meantime, partnering banks have conducted a gender audit of their portfolio in order to establish their baselines and targets.

⁸⁴ "Announcing the 10 winners of the Women Enterprise Recovery Fund", the UNCDF blog (www.uncdf.org/article/7019/announcing-the-10-winners-of-the-women-enterprise-recovery-fund). In Cambodia, the Women Entrepreneur Capacity Upgrade toward Digital Economy project is training and onboarding women entrepreneurs onto their own e-commerce platforms and building a dashboard on their business health to facilitate lending from financial institutions. In Indonesia, funded projects are rolling out a digital mobile platform for coffee farmers, providing digital solutions, equipment financing, digitalized supply chain financing, and training support to WMSMEs in the garment and fashion, and agricultural sectors, creating a fintech lending platform for agri-entrepreneurs and supporting women farmers to digitize their agricultural processes and financial management systems. In Viet Nam, the project is implementing a business management platform and mobile application for WMSMEs, which will provide them with the digital tools for recordkeeping to facilitate the provision of the transaction history of MSME's to financial institutions in support of lending applications.

⁸⁵ For example, research on the investment behaviour of predominantly male United States venture capital firms finds evidence of strong bias towards investing in male-founded firms; investors are 60 per cent more likely to invest in venture opportunities pitched by male entrepreneurs than female entrepreneurs even when the content of the pitch is the same. The male investor bias towards male-led start-ups could be due to a number of factors: lack of expertise in industries in which some women-led start-ups are operating (such as female-centric industries geared primarily to meeting the needs of female customers); the perception that women-led ventures are generally less ambitious in spite of evidence to the

contrary; or greater comfort in investing in male-led ventures due to inexperience in dealing with female founders and the possibility of higher communications costs.

⁸⁶ An analysis of the investment behaviour of angel investors in AngelList, an online platform that connects investors with seed stage start-ups, found that female-led start-ups experienced significantly greater difficulty in attracting interest and raising capital from male investors compared to similar male-led start-ups (Ewens and Townsend, 2020). Conversely, the same female-led start-ups were more successful with female investors than the same observably similar male-led start-ups; however, because the vast majority of early-stage investors are male, female-led start-ups seeking early-stage investments for their projects are at a disadvantage.

⁸⁷ These are generally women-led private sector initiatives to address the gap in women's access to investment capital to start and grow their businesses. The models are somewhat varied. In some cases, the entities have all-female founders and investors targeting investments in promising enterprises, regardless of the gender of the founder(s); others have all-female founders and investors targeting only women-led projects; and some are women-led, but include male and female investors, and invest in women-led projects or projects not necessarily female-led but have a positive impact on women.

⁸⁸ See www.fnfresearch.com/crowdfunding-market.

⁸⁹ Evidence confirms that women are much more active in investing on crowdfunding platforms than they are as venture capital or angel investors. From 2009 to 2012, a total of 44 per cent of investors on the Kickstarter platform were women, and they had invested more in female-led projects (more than 40 per cent of the investments by female investors), as compared to the male investors, who had chosen more often to invest in male-led projects (only 23 per cent of their investments supported female-led projects) (Gafni and others, 2021).

⁹⁰ This first bond, with a five-year maturity and a designated coupon rate paid on a semi-annual basis, raised more than \$160 million for investments to support access to finance for women-owned or women-controlled enterprises. Proceeds from the bond issue were allocated to IFC investments in financial intermediaries to expand their services to women-owned or -controlled enterprises.

⁹¹ ASEAN Social Bonds Standards, www.theacmf.org/initiatives/sustainable-finance/asean-social-bond-standards. Annual reporting is required to bond investors of the list of projects to which the ASEAN Social Bonds proceeds have been allocated, a brief description of the projects and the amounts allocated, and their expected impact.

⁹² Core principles for reporting on the impact of bond issues include reporting on the output, outcome, and/or impact of projects financed by the social bond proceeds, as well as clearly identifying the target populations of the project (such as WMSMEs).

⁹³ FIRA does not lend directly to the final borrower, but, instead, through bank and non-bank financial intermediaries to facilitate access to credit of the agriculture, livestock, fishing, forestry and agribusiness sectors in Mexico.

⁹⁴ Reform areas profiled by the Donor Committee on Enterprise Development covers business registration and licensing; tax policies and administration; access to finance; labour laws and regulations; land titles, registers and administration; and broadening public-private dialogue.

⁹⁵ See <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/gender-based-analysis-plus/resources/action-plan-2016-2020.html>.

⁹⁶ The Global Platform for Action on Sourcing from Women Vendors was a 10-year initiative launched in 2010 to gain a commitment and subsequent actions of governments (and corporations) to bring economic benefit to women by increasing the amount of procurement secured by women vendors. The Global Action Platform helped connect a network of more than 50,000 women vendors to partners who collectively purchased more than \$1 trillion in goods and services.

⁹⁷ The Magna Carta for MSMEs stipulates the requirement for the Government to procure at least 10 per cent of its total annual purchases of goods and services from eligible MSMEs.

⁹⁸ It is noted that the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development does not deal with the potential of public procurement as a market opportunity for SMEs. Procurement regulations in the six ASEAN member States vary, but generally they make use of preferential selection and treatment that could include setting a quota for the value of procurement budgets awarded to SMEs (such as the case for Thailand), price handicaps for SMEs (such as the case for Thailand), preferential set-asides for SMEs (such as the case for Viet Nam) and giving priority to the products of SME suppliers (such as the case for Indonesia).

⁹⁹ The main recommendations of the report to implement a more gender-responsive procurement system, which was one of the goals of a major initiative to modernize the Indonesian procurement system and improve its integration, accountability, efficiency and transparency under the Millennium Challenge Account – Indonesia Procurement Modernization Project, included (1) adopting a formal definition of a male enterprise and a female enterprise to be further incorporated in the data and monitoring system of the National Public Procurement Agency; (2) providing support to strengthen the capacity of women-owned enterprises; (3) improving linkages between public procurement units and women's business associations for information sharing; and (4) increasing transparency of public procurement coupled with improvements in the e-procurement system (MCA-Indonesia, LKPP and Bappenas, 2014, pp. 49–50). However, there is no evidence that the Government Goods and Services Procurement Policy Agency completed the process of implementing specific rules and procedures for awarding contracts to women-owned businesses or that data are being collected on the level of their participation in the procurement system.

¹⁰⁰ Funded by the Government of Australia, in collaboration with UN Women, the three-year, \$2.14 million programme aims to tackle structural inequalities faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing procurement markets and improve their market access (UN Women Asia and the Pacific, 2022).

¹⁰¹ WEConnect, a United States-based non-profit organization, has been a major driver of accelerated attention on the issue of participation of women-owned firms in the supply and value chain activity of multinational corporations globally. It has established affiliates in more than 30 countries and developed partnerships with more than 70 large corporations, such as Home Depot, Walmart, IBM, Dell, ExxonMobil, Amazon, Cartier and Verizon. It has a global database of more than 10,000 female suppliers that have been certified by the WEConnect programme entitled "Women's business enterprises". Women entrepreneurs pay for the certification and business readiness assessment and an annual fee for maintaining their registration on the global database. The SUPPLIER diversity programme corporations pay an annual fee for access to the WEConnect global database of certified women-owned businesses.

¹⁰² Information posted on the WEConnect International website (<https://weconnectinternational.org/asia-pacific>), accessed May 2022.

¹⁰³ The WeEmpowerAsia project is funded by the European Union (8 million euro (\$8.12

million) in partnership with UN Women.

¹⁰⁴ UN Women's Empowerment Principles, www.weps.org.

¹⁰⁵ Endorsed in December 2017, proponents of the Buenos Aires Declaration agreed to collaborate on making trade and development policies more gender-responsive, implementing policies and programmes to encourage greater participation of women in trade and sharing best practices for conducting gender-based analysis of trade policies, for monitoring their effects, sharing ways of collecting gender data and analysing gender-focused statistics related to trade, and ensuring that Aid for Trade support efforts to analyse, design and implement more gender-responsive trade policies (www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/womenandtrade_e/buenos_aires_declaration_e.htm). Seven of the 10 ASEAN member States have signed onto the Declaration (Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Viet Nam).

¹⁰⁶ UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation (www.untfsurvey.org/economy).

¹⁰⁷ The free trade agreement list of gender provisions set out by the Government of Canada includes assurances that (1) all gender equality laws are effectively enforced; (2) women have access to, ownership of, and control over economic resources required for economic empowerment; (3) gender equality laws and standards are not lowered to attract trade and investment; (4) parties will work together multilaterally to advance gender equality and women's economic empowerment; (5) all gender-responsive provisions across the free trade agreements are listed for transparency and communication purposes; and (6) an illustrative list of cooperation activities is included in the free trade agreement, such as developing programmes, sharing best practices, and exchanging information on issues to advance women's economic empowerment and full participation in the economy. Referenced in the presentation of Global Affairs Canada at the WTO Trade Agreements secretariat Workshop, 28 March 2019 in Geneva (www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/womenandtrade_e/session_2_d_global_affairs_canada_wto_women_and_trade_workshop_presentation_march_28_2019.pdf).

¹⁰⁸ For example, ex-post gender-based analysis can quantify changes (and gender gaps) in the share of females in exports-supported jobs (by sector) and any gender-related wage premiums for females in exports-supported jobs.

¹⁰⁹ Global Trade and Gender Arrangement (www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/inclusive_trade-commerce_inclusif/itag-gaci/arrangement.aspx?lang=eng/).

¹¹⁰ See <https://herventure.org/>.

¹¹¹ In Indonesia, 69 per cent of the HerVenture app users reported that it helped them implement new methods for their business, 62 per cent reported an increase in their business revenue, and 82 per cent reported an increase in their confidence in running a business (<https://cherieblairfoundation.org/what-we-do/programmes/herventure-indonesia/>). Similar results were achieved in Viet Nam: 76 per cent of users increased their client base, 64 per cent saw an increase in their profit levels, and 64 per cent felt more confident in running a business (<https://cherieblairfoundation.org/what-we-do/programmes/herventure-vietnam/>).

¹¹² See the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women websites: <https://cherieblairfoundation.org/what-we-do/programmes/weave/>; <https://cherieblairfoundation.org/what-we-do/programmes/herventure-indonesia/>; <https://cherieblairfoundation.org/what-we-do/programmes/herventure-vietnam/>.

¹¹³ For example, the Government of Malaysia established the National Entrepreneurship and SME Development Council in 2004. Membership of the Council is comprised of 20 ministers and heads of agencies, giving it broad intergovernmental representation in the formulation and coordination of MSME policies. As per stipulations of the Magna Carta for MSMEs (Republic Act No. 9501), the Government of the Philippines established the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Council as the primary agency responsible for the promotion, growth and development of MSMEs and for facilitating and coordinating national efforts. The Council has an interministerial membership consisting of the secretaries of the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Science and Technology, and departments related to agriculture, tourism and the interior and local government, the head of the Small Business Corporation, and representatives from labour and MSME sectors. Women's representation on the Council is mandatory. The Council produces periodic reports on the gender-responsiveness of MSME policies and programmes, based on the reports and data provided by the different implementing agencies and in line with their gender and development plans.

¹¹⁴ The Women's Development and Gender Equality Plan (2013–2016) included a full chapter on women in MSMEs, presenting the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in starting and growing a business, a list of policy and programme actions to address those challenges and an action plan matrix with indicators, delivery targets and accountable entities for implementation of each action, including the Department of Trade and Industry.

¹¹⁵ The Philippines is advantaged in this respect by requirements in the 2009 Magna Carta on Women for all government entities to allocate a minimum of 5 per cent of their annual budgets for gender programmes, projects or activities and to prepare an annual gender and development plan and agenda as the basis for the formulation of programmes, projects and activities to be included in the gender and development plan and budget. Government entities are further required to submit annual gender and development accomplishment plans, which include an analysis of the number of men and women who availed of the interventions and any gender issues relevant to the programmes or projects (Philippine Commission on Women, 2019).

¹¹⁶ The European Commission stated that the invited national strategies on women's entrepreneurship should seek to raise the percentage of women entrepreneurs in the active labour force; enlarge the percentage of women in management posts within the enterprises; include gender criterion in the statistic monitoring of economic activities in the country; prepare annual reports on the status of women entrepreneurship at the national level; expand existing networks of women mentors; and implement policies that would enable work-family life balance in women (such as commencing appropriate day-care programmes for children and elderly family members). The Commission's rationale for country-level strategies on women's entrepreneurship is threefold: (1) female entrepreneurs and self-employed are an underutilized source of economic growth and job creation and with targeted support can strengthen the competitiveness of the European Union; (2) the relative scarcity of women entrepreneurs is an untapped source for innovation and development, especially in the context of green and digital transformations in Europe and their economic recovery following the COVID-19 crisis; and (3) women face more difficulties in pursuing entrepreneurship than men in a number of areas that require strategic attention and support (see the Motion for a European Parliament Resolution on reaching women's economic independence through entrepreneurship and self-employment (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/FEMM-PR-699289_EN.pdf)).

¹¹⁷ For example, Singapore is building a vibrant ecosystem for local enterprises that provides

connections with investors, incubators and accelerators, entrepreneurs' associations, chambers of commerce, trade associations and other stakeholders with the aim of creating an environment for these local enterprises to compete globally. The Government of Viet Nam has committed support for a national project to build an innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem that embraces the education community, particularly higher educational institutions, to infuse students with entrepreneurial skills and develop business incubator programmes. In Thailand, the Government is focusing on developing ecosystem support for cluster networks, including SME clusters, by bringing together SMEs, large companies, research institutes, business support providers and investors to foster innovation and higher value-added activities at the sectoral level. Indonesia is strengthening ecosystem support for new innovative start-ups and new young entrepreneurs under the new National Entrepreneurship Development Policy. In the Philippines, the Government considers it important to support the development of the start-up ecosystem to foster an innovative and entrepreneurial culture in the country. Consequently, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Science and Technology and the Department of Information and Communications Technology have been working together with other government agencies to further develop the Philippine Start-up Ecosystem as prescribed in the Innovative Start-up Act of 2019.

¹¹⁸ Details on the WES Ecosystem Fund can be found at Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (2022b).

¹¹⁹ An exception is the effort of ANGIN, which in 2021 published a mapping of the Indonesia Entrepreneurs Ecosystem. This mapping also included profiles of organizations and programmes supporting women's entrepreneurship across a number of thematic areas (ANGIN and Blue Impacts, 2021). The ANGIN mapping has not yet identified gender gaps in the gender diversity of entrepreneurs being served, but ANGIN plans to conduct a survey with each organization to understand how it was contributing to the "impact technology start-up ecosystem" and publish the findings. This is a starting point to generating information on the gender dynamics in the Indonesian entrepreneurship ecosystem.

¹²⁰ The Strategic Action Plan for SME Development (2016–2025) specifically referenced women in only one of the five strategic goals of the Plan, under "human capital development for MSMEs" (focused on the provision of entrepreneurial and business skills, such as through vocational training and counselling centres, and capacity-building platforms to promote and facilitate branding and packaging activities and market access for women entrepreneurs and move them up the value chain (ASEAN secretariat, 2015). The 2020 KPI monitoring report on the Strategic Action Plan for SME Development reported on only one women-related KPI outcome – for women's labour force participation rate, indicating that, compared to the baseline figures, the female labour force participation rates had declined in all of the ASEAN member States, except for Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, where rates had increased slightly (ASEAN secretariat, 2021a).

¹²¹ This work is informed by the guidelines developed by the ASEAN Committee on Women for ASEAN sectoral bodies to incorporate gender issues into their workplans (ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025, ASEAN Committee on Women, 2021). To this end, ACCMSME will establish a working mechanism with the Committee to apply a gender lens to Strategic Action Plan for SME Development initiatives.

¹²² The SME budget allocation of the Government of Thailand (based on an Integrated MSME promotion plan) is channelled through the Office of SMEs Promotion, which then reallocates the budget to the various agencies delivering SME support programmes according to their submitted programme plans.

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