



**ESCAP**  
Economic and Social Commission  
for Asia and the Pacific

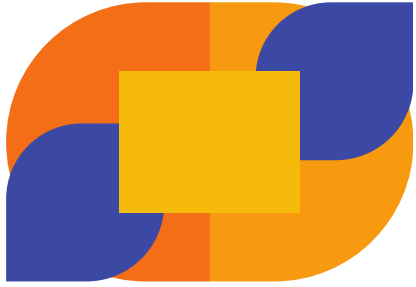
# CATALYZING WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

**Women's Economic  
Empowerment Session**

**Apia, Samoa**

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UN ESCAP





## Context



World Bank's Women Business and Law Report 2024 - Globally, only 44 percent of the legal provisions that support the entrepreneurship of women are in place, only about two-fifths of the supportive frameworks needed to promote the implementation of gender-equal laws have been established



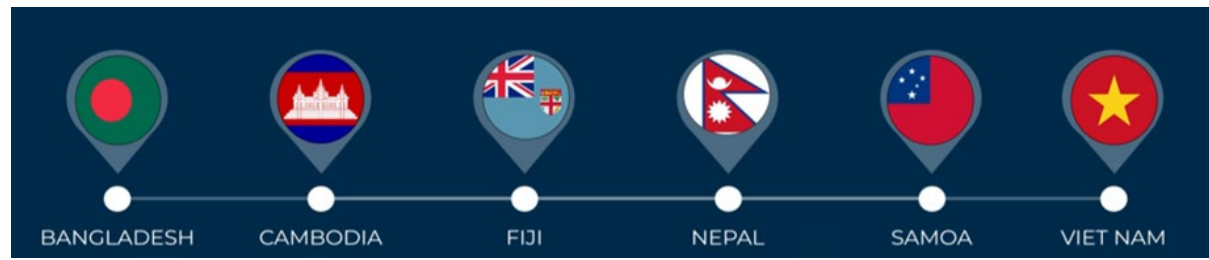
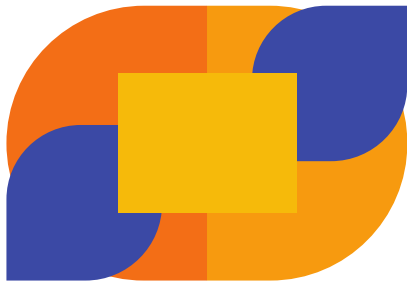
Closing the gender gap in employment and entrepreneurship could raise the global GDP by more than 20 percent. Eliminating the gender gap over the next decade would essentially double the current global growth rate.



Women led enterprises in the Asia Pacific Region were more adversely impacted during the pandemic compared to those owned by men –threatens to reverse progress made on gender equality in the past decade



Distorted supply chains and shifts in market demands have exacerbated the already existing structural inequalities that impede the performance and growth of women-owned businesses



# The Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship Programme

regional programme (2018-2024) that aims to advance women's entrepreneurship in the Asia-Pacific region through three interconnected pillars of influence:



## POLICY & GOVERNANCE ENVIRONMENT

Creating an enabling ecosystem for women



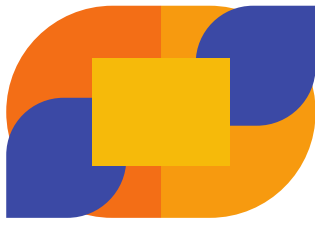
## INNOVATIVE FINANCING

Enhancing access & use of financial services



## ICT & BUSINESS SKILLS

Strengthening use of ICT & digital solutions



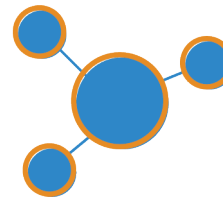
## KEY ELEMENTS & APPROACH OF THE POLICY PILLAR



**POLICIES, LAWS  
& PROCESSES**



**RESEARCH, EVIDENCE  
& MEASURING  
IMPACT**



**KNOWLEDGE &  
NETWORKING  
HUBS**



**GOVERNANCE /  
COORDINATION  
MECHANISMS**



**REGIONAL  
IMPACT &  
INFLUENCE**

### PRINCIPLES

Participation of  
women  
entrepreneurs in  
decision making

Solutions  
designed at the  
country level

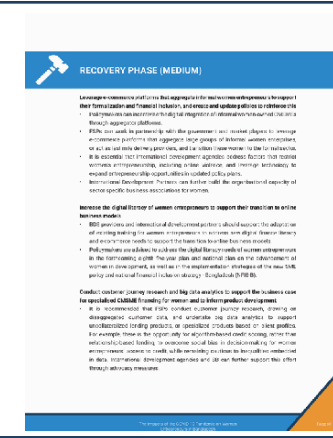
Ownership and  
sustainability –  
beyond the project

Disadvantaged  
and vulnerable  
groups

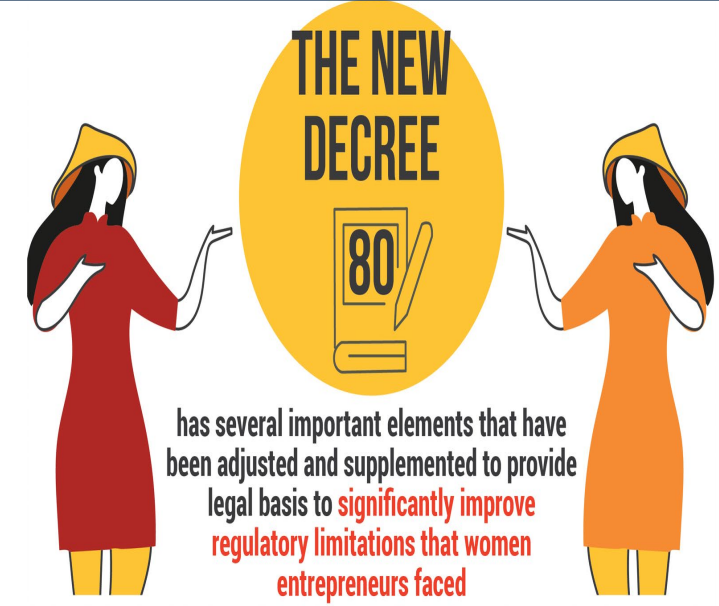
Partnerships

# Country examples

## Gender-sensitive legal and regulatory advance women's economic empower



- **Viet Nam:** Assessment of SME Law; New Decree 80 for enhanced support for WEs
- **Cambodia:** Revised SME Policy, Policy guidelines for increasing business registration and access to one-roof service for WEs
- **Bangladesh:** Addressing business registration constraints of WEs, 5-year women entrepreneurship strategy
- **Fiji:** Review of MSME Fiji Policy and Young Entrepreneur Scheme
- **Nepal:** Provisions for women entrepreneurs submitted to Cabinet for inclusion in Nepal's Micro Cottage and Small-Scale Industries Promotion Policy



**1 CREDIT LOANS AND CREDIT GUARANTEE FUNDS (CGF)**

- Women-owned SMEs find it challenging to get information, lack appropriate skills for accessing bank capital

**Recommendations**

- Build a comprehensive framework for the CGF
- Strengthen human resource capacity
- Improve coordination with commercial banks
- Diversify financial resources
- Simplify process for claims with consistent payment rules
- Strengthen financial knowledge of women-owned SMEs

**4 TECHNOLOGY, START-UP INCUBATION, TECHNICAL FACILITIES, AND CO-WORKING SPACE**

- Overall funding is limited
- Lack of access to support network of experts and services
- Challenges in finding large co-working spaces
- Centrally located co-working spaces have high rental costs

**Recommendations**

- Incentivize incubators, technical facilities and co-working spaces to support women-owned SMEs
- Improve coordination between the CGF and the SMEDF and improve financing options women-owned SMEs
- Equip service providers with information on support policies for SMEs
- Reduce production costs for women-led SMEs

- **Bangladesh:** Impact of COVID-19 on women owned MSMEs
- **Cambodia:** Impact of unpaid care work on WEs
- **Nepal:** Bridging gender divide in digital ecosystem for WEs
- **Fiji:** Assessment of impact of COVID-19 on WEs; Action research with Suva women market vendors
- **Vietnam:** Climate Change and Women Entrepreneurs



## GOVERNANCE COORDINATION MECHANISMS

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- **Extensive relationship and partnership building** with 7 Government Ministries (5 SME and 2 Women Ministries)
- **Country-level project advisory committees (PAC)** transformed into national platforms led by Governments, institutionalizing national inclusive policy dialogue platforms.

*“The PAC has been a great platform to initiate dialogue on various dimensions that impact women’s entrepreneurship. We would like to see it strengthened further in Samoa to enhance our coordination with the women’s machinery to translate and decentralize the policy work”*

*- Representative of Ministry of Commerce Industry and Labor in Samoa*

## KNOWLEDGE AND NETWORKING HUBS

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**Digital one-stop hubs** or service centers established in Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Viet Nam



# CWE in Samoa



## National Coordination

**Working Group on Women's Economic Empowerment** (i.e., PAC) chaired by MWCPA  
- under National Task Force on Women's Economic Empowerment

## Evidence Generation

Review of **business license registration**

**Baseline assessment** on status of women entrepreneurs

**COVID-19 assessment** on women entrepreneurs

## Technical Assistance & Capacity Development

Analysis of provisions pertaining to WE in **MSME Development Policy and Strategy 2020**

Development of **M&E indicator framework** and training of Ministry staff

**E-commerce and digital marketing training** for WE

# CWE in Fiji



## National Coordination

### Ecosystem of stakeholders

- PAC transitioned into the Project Advisory Group
- Established under the Trade, Commerce and Industries Board
- Strong partnerships forged with diverse ministries



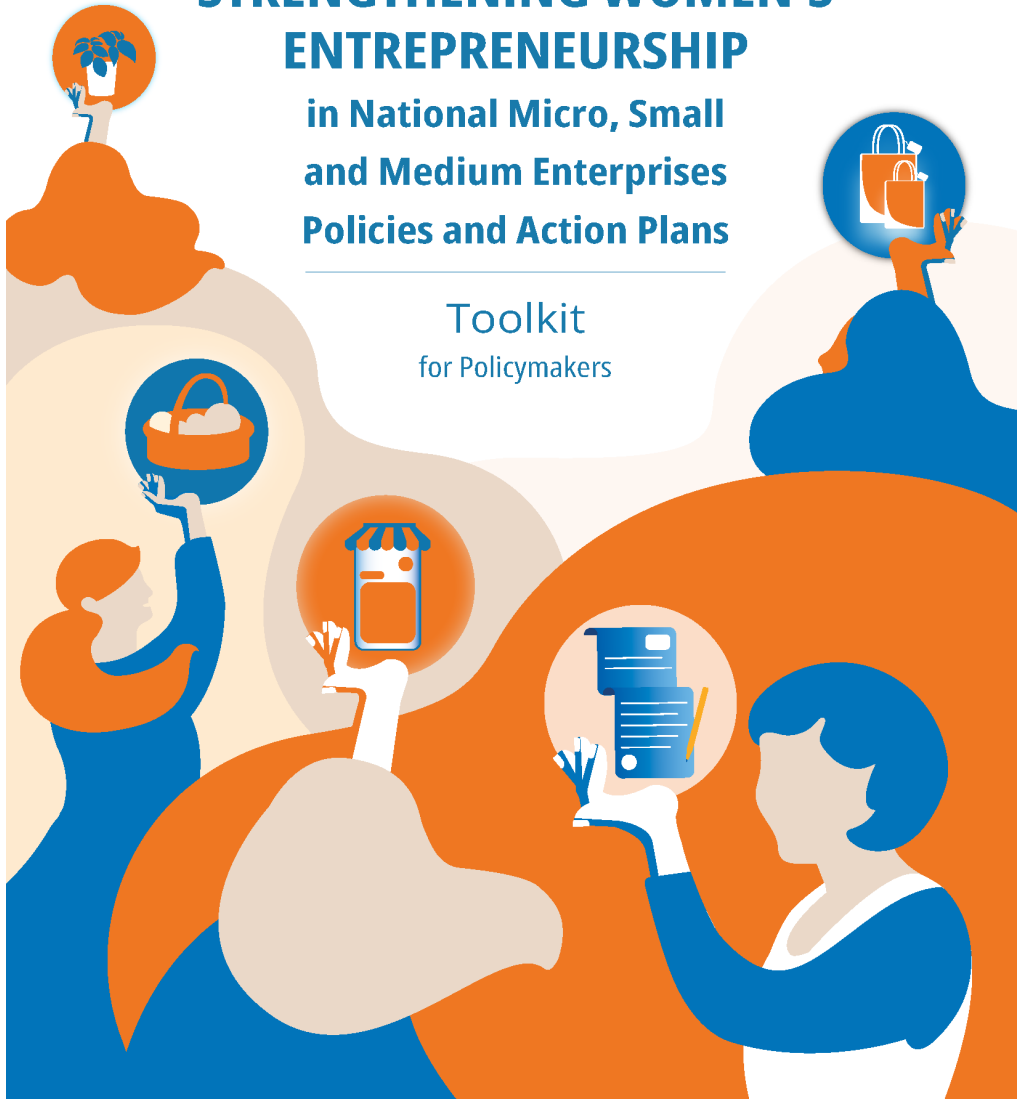


# REGIONAL IMPACT AND INFLUENCE

## STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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

Toolkit  
for Policymakers



## PARTNERSHIP WITH ASEAN AND POLICYMAKERS' TOOLKIT



Collaboration with the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on MSMEs (ACCMSME) on the scale up of the Policymakers Toolkit on “Strengthening Women’s Entrepreneurship in National MSME Policies and Action Plans” approach to the sub-regional level



Endorsed by the ASEAN Economic Ministers Group and being piloted in the Philippines



The Toolkit assists policymakers to self-assess the development of women’s entrepreneurship at the national level, identify gaps and opportunities for improvements and develop action plans



This is the first time that an initiative on gender has received such a significant uptake by the economic community in the ASEAN region.



Implementation of the toolkit has been included as a priority economic deliverable in ASEAN’s workplan.



## THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

**Aim: Gender-responsive development of the SME sector and a fuller contribution of women entrepreneurs and women-owned-led enterprises to the economy.**

Gender  
-sensitive  
legal and  
regulatory  
system



Policy  
leadership,  
institutional  
support and  
coordination



Gender  
-sensitive and  
-responsive  
financial  
services



Gender  
-sensitive and  
-responsive  
business  
development  
services



Access to  
domestic  
and  
international  
markets



Access to  
ICTs and  
production  
technology



Monitoring  
the impact of  
policies and  
measures for  
women- led  
enterprises



# REFLECTIONS & LESSONS LEARNT.



Being able to position the programme with the right anchor at the country level has been instrumental for creating influence and change in the policy space for women's entrepreneurship (SME Ministries)



The CWE programme has been able to establish a sustained multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism to discuss the multiplicity of issues to promote policy coherence on women's entrepreneurship. Each country has leveraged the platform model based on its own needs and context to provide a solid foundation for systemic reforms.



Importance of strong diagnostics that have been instrumental in legal reforms (example - SME Law in Viet Nam)

# REFLECTIONS & LESSONS LEARNT.



Collaboration with the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on MSMEs has been fundamental in shaping a sub-regional policy agenda for WMSMEs and increasing the footprint of CWE approach



COVID-19 dominated the timeline of the project period, despite the difficult period, the programme was able to pivot and create opportunities to ensure women's entrepreneurship agenda remained visible and became part of the recovery planning and COVID response



Impact of policy interventions takes several years. Ongoing M&E efforts and multiplier studies have been helpful to measure preliminary results.

**THANK YOU**

