



**WOMEN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH
ENTREPRENEURSHIP:
INSIGHTS OF POLICY REFORMS FROM INTERNATIONAL
EXPERIENCE**

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This study was commissioned by ECES as part of its project on Women Economic Empowerment in Egypt. It is authored by Nicola Ehlermann, International Development Advisor, and Serena Romano, International Gender Expert. ECES would like to thank the UK Government for financing this study.

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Abstract

This study presents the main findings of witnesses collected between June and September 2019 among about 20 women operating formal businesses in different sectors, of different size and various legal status. These experiences helped analyze how measures adopted in different countries empowered women to successfully develop their business, create employment and ultimately benefit their domestic economies.

ملخص

تستعرض هذه الدراسة النتائج الرئيسية التي تم التوصل إليها بناء على شهادات تم جمعها خلال الفترة من شهر يونيو وحتى سبتمبر 2019 من نحو 20 سيدة تدرن أعمالا تجارية بأحجام وأوضاع قانونية متنوعة في مختلف قطاعات الاقتصاد الرسمي. وقد ساعدت التجارب التي روتها هؤلاء السيدات في تحليل كيف عملت التدابير التي تبنتها الدول المختلفة على تمكين النساء من تطوير أعمالهن التجارية بنجاح، وخلق فرص عمل ومن ثم نفع اقتصادتهن المحلية.

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* <http://www.eces.org.eg/EventDetails?Lang=EN&C=2&ID=320&Economic-Empowerment-of-Women-through-Entrepreneurship:-Insights-into-Policy-Reforms-from-International-Experience>

Executive Summary

The economic impact of increased female entrepreneurial participation is significant and holds the potential of being a major driver of economic growth, job creation, increased income equality and social inclusion and cohesion. According to a recent estimate, if the entrepreneurship gender gap were abolished, global GDP could rise by approximately 3% to 6%, boosting the global economy by \$2.5 trillion to \$5 trillion (Boston Consulting Club, 2019)¹

Also, with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, countries worldwide have committed to achieving gender equality (SDG5) and to mainstreamed gender considerations throughout all other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Against these backgrounds, governments worldwide should seek to ensure that policies and institutions guarantee that men and women enjoy adequate and equal opportunities to set up and subsequently develop a business.

Building on interviews of about twenty businesswomen from different countries and operating in various sectors over concrete actions that helped them to grow their business, the authors portray key elements that the female entrepreneurs identified in operating their formal businesses. The exchanges led the interviewees to identify factors of success as well as shortcomings they faced and had to overcome.

Differently from many events such a women's entrepreneurship conferences where women will tell their stories and return to their work on the next day, here their experiences are collected, the issues that they raise are analyzed and compared.

Women's experiences captured in this study are from very diverse regions and sectors, they are about different enterprise ages and size and of various legal status with dissimilar ownership and management structures. Yet, the authors were impressed by some core similarities. All women had a good and sometimes very good education. Many had had work experience prior to creating their business. They were all interested in continuous learning. They were also attentive to their communities and their families. They showed concern to being involved and act in a positive and transformative manner on the wider environment. This allows them to be attentive to changing factors and constantly adapt their businesses. Their genuine

¹ Source: Shalini Unnikrishnan and Cherie Blair (BCG) July 2019, <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2019/boost-global-economy-5-trillion-dollar-support-women-entrepreneurs.aspx>

interest in what surrounds them has a positive impact on their business performance and their ability to identify new opportunities. They were also able to draw on skills outside the company and adapt to new managerial methods or move to new technologies. The authors not only noticed their involvement in local or international women's networks—the latter is in support of business opportunities—but also their involvement in a wider inter-personal context, being open to new generations. However, they are only rarely part of wider, mainstreaming business associations.

All female entrepreneurs expressed high satisfaction in having created and developed their business, although they had all faced severe difficulties, which they were able to manage. Interestingly, only a few received external support; and when they did it was highly acknowledged and appreciated. Yet, it is noteworthy that those support measures were of a private nature, i.e., their families, national associations or international organizations.

The information collected by way of interviews confirms international research building on data and good practices analysis. Inequalities in business persist in all countries and clearly the local legal and social differences impact women's perception and actions. This leads the authors to offer some proposals for policy action in areas that could help governments and stakeholders at large to further support the unlocking of women's economic potential.

Main recommendations:

- The public sector has a major role to play in designing and implementing public policies that lead to a socio-economic environment in which women who own and run enterprises, mostly SMEs, are able to easily register, operate and expand.
- To ensure the creation, survival and expansion of women-led businesses, it is essential that governments introduce gender sensitive elements in all enterprises development strategies and policies. In addition to closing the gender gaps in entrepreneurship and employment, a gender perspective needs to be mainstreamed into all policies, regulations, budgets and other structural reforms.
- Gender-based analyses, which help in the decision-making process *ex ante*, require reliable evidence, including gender disaggregated data and assessments of the impact of economic and social regulations and laws. It is also key to monitor policies put in place and ensure *ex post* reviews to take informed decisions and use public funds adequately.
- Improve framework conditions by establishing a business environment offering a good level of competition and the application of the rule of law for a fair and level playing field between all enterprises—including with larger ones (notably SoEs) or those operating in the informal sector.
- Strengthen measures to overcome barriers that women face in accessing targeted business development services, finance, innovation, government contracts or internationalization.
- Advocate and introduce measures ensuring women's increased visibility and involvement in positions of power and decision-making that relate to entrepreneurship. This may be supported by a pro-active media, which reports regularly on women's entrepreneurship, their businesses' performance and their contribution to the economy.
- Strengthen the diffusion of good practices through information and exchange mechanisms and increase co-operation among stakeholders, including by replicating successful women entrepreneurship support programs from other regions.

I. BACKGROUND

The economic empowerment of women is a prerequisite for sustainable development, pro-poor growth and the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Gender equality and empowered women are catalysts for multiplying development efforts. Investments in gender equality yield the highest returns on all development investments. The work on gender equality and mainstreaming at international stage rests on a host of international legal instruments, anchored by the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was instituted in September 1981 and has been ratified by 189 states. Increased attention has been placed on gender equality and women empowerment over the last decade, including by all international organizations. This work was notably triggered by the negotiation and the subsequent adoption in 2015 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Indeed, countries worldwide are now bound to achieve gender equality (SDG5); it is also noteworthy that gender is to be mainstreamed through all other 16 SDG's. Hence, while the distance to attaining the SDG is a worldwide challenge, most countries have redoubled efforts to reducing the gender gaps.

This study presents the main findings of witnesses collected between June and September 2019 among about 20 women operating formal businesses in different sectors, of different size and various legal status. These experiences helped analyze how measures adopted in different countries empowered women to successfully develop their business, create employment and ultimately benefit their domestic economies.

The authors note a large cross-country diversity in the opportunities and challenges for these businesses to access markets and resources, including finance, skills, energy, technology, innovation and knowledge as well as in the institutional and regulatory framework. Yet, there are also a number of striking commonalities between the women interviewed.

The study illustrates the main common features and considerations that the interviewed women have and identifies what is guiding them in their development. It is intended to inspire and offer ideas to the development practitioners and policymakers to design policy tools and well-tailored interventions, identify and address the gaps hindering women's entrepreneurial take-off and fulfill the UN 2030 Agenda's aspirations.

II. THE STUDY'S OBJECTIVE

This study builds on the analysis of 20 cases of women entrepreneurs and seeks to identify the key elements supportive of their success. The analysis illustrates how women's economic empowerment is enhanced through entrepreneurship in different countries and ascertains the circumstances that allowed success to take place.

The study combines desk research on women's entrepreneurship and SME studies from the major institutions (OECD², UN, ILO, the World Bank and EIGE) and literature to identify the key issues that entrepreneurs in general and women in particular face to develop their companies. An important part of the work was also dedicated to identifying the institutions that provide support to women.³ Finally, a qualitative analysis was made from women entrepreneurs via interviews through the administration of a standard questionnaire.

Indeed, SMEs are critical for the economic development of societies. Worldwide, they represent about 90 percent of all businesses. They generate about 50 percent of employment and total between 60 percent and 70 percent of added value (for both formal and informal enterprises). They help economies to adapt to change such as globalization, innovation and digitalization. They are the main drivers of productivity in many regions; and SMEs with high turnover and adaptability play a major role in removing regional and sectoral imbalances in the economy. They can have a major impact on inclusiveness and sustainable growth.

Yet, SMEs are very heterogenous when it comes to size, productivity, international competitiveness and their integration into the global economy. The contribution of the informal enterprise segment, mostly micro-enterprises, is particularly important in developing countries. In developing countries, micro-enterprises generally co-exist with some large enterprises, a singularity often referred to as the "missing middle". This missing middle is seen as the root problem of sluggish productivity increases and low growth rates in developing countries. Informality decreases significantly at higher revenue levels; in countries with higher revenue

² The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an [intergovernmental economic organization](#), which currently comprises 36 member countries ([list](#)). These countries are regarded as developed, mostly high income economies committed to democracy and the market economy. The OECD provides a platform to compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify good practices and coordinate domestic and international policies of its members. It also engages with non-members worldwide.

³ There are many national, regional or global institutions in support of women economic empowerment and entrepreneurship; they can be public, semi-public, private or run by civil society, which sometimes benefit from international donors. An effort to collect and present such institutions was made by N. Ehlermann when at the OECD; see [MENA-OECD Directory of Initiatives Supporting Women's Economic Empowerment](#). Creating an equivalent registry for selected countries would be a task of its own.

levels one can observe a marked shift to a larger number of formal SMEs that make a crucial contribution to national income.

Starting and growing a business is one of the most powerful tools for women to build a better future for themselves and their communities. Yet, in most countries, women face legal, financial, and market barriers that stifle their entrepreneurial success. IFC estimates there is a \$1.5 trillion annual credit deficit for women-owned small and medium enterprises.⁴ It is thus important to identify ways that ensure women's access to entrepreneurship, and their success as businesswoman.

The relevance of SMEs and their role in the global economy is due to grow. According to the World Bank, 600 million jobs will be needed by 2030 to absorb the growing global work force. SMEs' capacity to grow quickly, and therefore hire, to promote innovation and foster change is raising the attention of policymakers around the world. Governments are supporting them through targeted measures. This is essential as SMEs have more difficulties in addressing, for instance, the global consequences of a deteriorating business climate and in accessing resources than larger firms.

The study presents 15 thematic sections, which are all structured in the same manner. Firstly, the reason why the issue under discussion is important for entrepreneurship is explained. Secondly, measures which the authors have identified mostly in the examples are analyzed and thirdly recommendations that the authors could build on are identified in the testimonies.

Further details on the methodology are provided in Annex 1. Annex 2 provides an overview of the entrepreneurs met. Annex 3 is the outline of the questionnaire, which served for information collection.

III. THE STUDY'S FINDINGS

Entrepreneurs, whether women or men, have their own personal key competencies that qualify them as entrepreneurs irrespective of the surroundings in which they work. Their competencies may be supported by a favorable environment or through different types of measures. It is generally admitted that enterprises, and in particular small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), are dependent for their development on the business environment and may be

⁴ <https://live.worldbank.org/unleashing-potential-women-entrepreneurs-finance-markets>

vulnerable to deficient framework conditions, market failures—including access to funding, skills and assets, or can suffer from inefficient infrastructures.

The reverse is obviously also true: Governments may adopt or amend laws and regulations and government institutions can introduce measures, actions and programs encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship, employment and innovation. As an example, the Italian Government adopted Law 662/96 (art. 2, 100, a) in 1996 to set up in the year 2000 a special State-guaranteed revolving fund for Small and Medium Enterprises in Italy. In case of a request for a loan, it provides female-owned or controlled companies guarantees that can cover as much as 80 percent of the loan and up to an amount of € 2.5 million. The fund specifically addresses the many cases of women entrepreneurs who need credit to launch or develop their business but do not benefit from assets to use as collateral. During the 2000-2014 period, 13 percent of the guarantees were granted to women entrepreneurs and guarantees to women have grown exponentially from 37 granted in 2000 to 9.791 in 2013.⁵

In addition to national government institutions, non-governmental organizations, including cooperatives and academia, as well as international organizations and donors can play a critical role in supporting innovation and entrepreneurship. Education and training facilities as well as various modes of financial support improve women's ability to innovate and engage as entrepreneurs.

The authors have identified the following 14 factors that in their view can most influence the launch and development of a company or business:

- 1) Business Development Services (BDS)
- 2) Infrastructure
- 3) Access to finance, e.g., low interest loan, guarantee
- 4) Human capital and skills development
- 5) The importance of the national business enabling environment
- 6) Competition and public governance
- 7) The impact of taxation on businesses

⁵ Serena Romano, *a State-guaranteed fund for SMES in Italy*, In *Genere*, 10.05.2016, <http://www.ingenero.it/en/articles/state-guaranteed-fund-smes-italy>

- 8) National or international sector-specific actions
- 9) Third-party investment
- 10) Access to knowledge, technology and innovation
- 11) Public procurement
- 12) Involvement into a supply chain
- 13) Network engagement
- 14) Involvement into public-private dialogue
- 15) Other factors (as identified by the entrepreneurs)

The most influential factors relate to the direct or indirect support that women can obtain and which can determine the success of a company: such as the direct support of BDS services that can provide the orientation, the training and the business knowledge to manage the company adequately. A smooth, understandable and equitable access to finance is another major building block for a company to grow and succeed. And the third element of support is made by human capital. Entrepreneurs need to have professional, knowledgeable and well-trained staff that they can rely on to ensure that the company continues to operate. The infrastructure and the business climate are determining factors for companies and their absence can lead entrepreneurs to take drastic decisions such as precluding investments or even closing down their company.

In the following sections, we are analyzing the 14 factors of success that were identified in the desk-top research and providing examples of measures that were adopted for each of these factors. We are also suggesting recommendations to governments on which measures to adopt. In Section 15, we also gave the opportunity to the women entrepreneurs to express their personal positions towards additional factors that can have an impact on their company.

1. Business Development Services (BDS)

The ultimate objective of Business Development Services' (BDS), is to improve small enterprise performance, as a means to achieve higher economic growth and employment, reduce poverty, and meet social objectives.⁶ Various studies have also shown that business

⁶ Business Development Services for Small Enterprises: Guiding Principles for Donor Intervention 2001, prepared by the Committee of Donor Agencies for Small Enterprise Development, World Bank 2001.

development services policy encourages better businesses, in the sense of businesses better growth, innovation and export record and the absorptive capacity to utilize advice effectively.⁷

BDS cover a wide array of services ranging from strategic, i.e., those needed for medium or longer-term affairs, and operational, i.e., needed for the day to day affairs of enterprises.

There are many varieties of BDS providers: private for-profit firms, private not-for-profit firms, NGOs, parastatals, national or subnational government agencies, industry associations, or even individuals, possibly facilitated by donors.

Business incubators are a sub-set of BDS, offering space for new enterprises in their facilities. Ideally, the beneficiaries of the incubators should be accompanied with a package of business support services such as coaching, advice, networking with other entrepreneurs and linkages with possible investors. Other examples include: value chain development, cluster development, which strengthens the interactions between businesses in order to achieve more collective efficiency and better performances.

BDS may not always be sufficiently known to SMEs and their benefit not well explained; this is probably also why only a few interlocutors referred to having used them.

Measure:

As noted in a recent OECD publication,⁸ to help women start quality businesses with growth potential, a growing number of countries are setting up women-dedicated business incubators. Although they amount to fewer than 3 percent of incubators globally, international evidence shows that women-only incubators are more effective than mainstream incubators that rely on male-centric networks and have male-dominated selection panels.

Recommendations:

1. To increase the visibility of BDS by promoting them through government and non-government institutions;
2. To ensure a coherent system of business development services. Experiences in several countries, including Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands but also MENA, emphasizes the need to reduce fragmentation of business advice offers and a better alignment of support;

⁷ OECD (2018), Leveraging Business Development Services for SME Productivity Growth.

⁸ OECD/EU (2017).

3. To reach out to SMEs and in particular women entrepreneurs and explain the advantages that they can gain from BDS;
4. To ensure that BDS' services are gender-sensitive and that bureaus have staff that are familiar with women entrepreneurs' needs;
5. To improve the performance of BDS, it would be advisable to define with a focus group of women and men entrepreneurs and other stakeholders the services that are needed by women that are launching and developing companies and businesses need. The focus group can then tailor them to their requirements. When the needs are defined, to launch a public tender for the BDS services. The winner of the tender will offer the defined BDS services throughout the country, or in a specific region.
6. To strengthen networks, mentoring and peer-to-peer learning will allow closer exchanges with peers. Companies' contact points, such as accountants and banks, should be included in these networks.
7. To favor the creation and promotion of incubators operating in the national or regional context and particularly women-only incubators that can cater for their specific needs. Alternatively, if the services are provided to both women and men it is important to ensure that they are gender sensitive.
8. To organize a high-level award for a woman entrepreneur on a yearly basis. The award can be offered personally by the relevant ministry or industry, in a highly publicized event. The winner could be selected by a panel of famous local and international women and men entrepreneurs.

Findings:

Several women interviewed mentioned having benefitted from BDSs. In particular, entrepreneurs in France, India, Lebanon, Philippines, Tunisia, Morocco and Zambia underlined the high value of being able to benefit from a set of **business services**. These same women noted that the services had been critical for creating and developing their companies. Interlocutors mentioned that BDS services provided the necessary support to reach a professional standard in business through improved marketing, design or product quality. In addition, BDS offered key economic regulatory and market information necessary to take appropriate and informed decisions, which had helped scale up their business. They were guided to develop the right strategy, fine-tune or occasionally redirect their business concept.

Overall, the better understanding of what others expected of them as entrepreneurs helped them to develop adequate business plans, which in turn made it easier to obtain **financial support**. This was the case of an entrepreneur in France, selected by a business incubator, who received extremely valuable support that allowed her to launch and develop her business. **Incubators** often have the additional advantage of offering services to several entrepreneurs in the same location. This vicinity can create bonds between new entrepreneurs with similar experiences giving them the opportunity to interact. The French entrepreneur valued positively the fruitful and stimulating business exchanges she had with the other businesswomen. These exchanges granted her, through a regular confrontation of common challenges and concerns, the opportunity to find adequate solutions.

Special attention must be given to women who receive an **award** as woman entrepreneurs (this is the case in Tunisia, Lebanon and France⁹). These women subsequently feel that they have greater ease and access to financial and non-financial development services. In addition to the inherent need that all business people have for public recognition, the authors feel that the award added to the women's self-confidence and assertiveness. When women are publicly honored, they often realize the leap forward that they have made in society. They often gain a broader sense of their involvement in society, wishing that other women are granted the same opportunities that they have had. They will become even more involved in networks that support entrepreneurship or in similar BDS structures, they will work with schools and intervene in conferences mainly to help other women. Many businesswomen who have not necessarily won an award often have this trait as they want somehow "to give back".

⁹ One of the French entrepreneurs was "labellisée," i.e., she received a recognition by Les Premières, a label acknowledging the standard of the business.

Box 1. Example of a Successful BDS in France: Les Premières

Les « Premières », which was initiated in 2005, is a network of incubators in metropolitan France and the overseas territories dedicated to supporting women, and mixed creative teams of innovative and impactful companies. Since its inception, the initiative benefits from a wide number of public and private sector institutional partnerships, which allow to develop the women's entrepreneurs access to finance and competencies.

The Initiative defines itself as a growth promoter through the development of the economy, businesses, skills and sustainable jobs. It provides individualized benevolent accompaniment, personal coaching, and collective training workshops. Since its launch in 2005, the Initiative had 13,633 first contacts with project carriers of which 883 were created. The Initiative accompanied 3,484 entrepreneurs and created 23,58 direct jobs after a period of 2 years of which 85 percent were sustainable after a 3-year existence of the projects.

In 2018 alone, the Initiative accompanied over 550 projects that benefitted of a total of almost 6000 hours of individual support. Les Premières offer three distinct support programs: During 2 days program entrepreneurs can test the concept of a business project through professional support by experts in startups. This allows to formalize business projects and action plans. The 6-month program allows women to build and develop their entrepreneurial project and launch and test the project on the market. Coaching and training ensure that she can establish a business plan and understand its constitutive elements (e.g., financial, legal, commercial), acquires project management skills and can elaborate adequate service or product proposals. The 8 to 10 month program is to perpetuate the business, develop the commercial positioning and formalize the development strategy at national or international level.

One businesswoman in France who provided a testimony for the study benefitted from the “Premières” support and thought that it had been instrumental to her success.

Source /internet site : <https://www.wikilespremieres.com/fr>

The authors are of the opinion that targeted services, where women are personally coached, often over a period of time, have a greater impact than ready-made solutions dispensed to large classrooms. These services are particularly beneficial when they describe and help implement the steps that a woman entrepreneur needs to undertake to expand her business. Tailormade services were offered in Lebanon, where a woman entrepreneur identified her direct needs and received a consulting support financed by an international donor, the EBRD.

2. The infrastructure

A well-functioning and reliable infrastructure is essential to the creation and development of businesses and companies. It ensures secure and cost-efficient access to strategic resources as well as to entering distant markets. Infrastructure includes the availability of adequate roads and transportation services, maritime ports, airports, railways, ICT, energy delivery and real estate at affordable prices to ensure that the business can be run not too far from home. Good quality

roads have a positive impact and ease business contacts, work conditions within the company and with partners as well as the transportation from and to all kind of business-related activities.

As firms have to compete in just-in-time production systems in which response time between business and clients are reduced, infrastructure is critical for firms to compete. Also, the competitiveness of economies is increasingly influenced by digitalization, research and development and innovative capacity at national and subnational levels.

Deficient infrastructure has a much more negative effect on women and women entrepreneurship than on men as it creates anxiety and instability, which may deter them from working and engaging in business, especially in patriarchal societies that do not always view positively women's involvement in the economy. This is even more the case in insecure and possibly violent environments.

Governments play a key role as facilitators in building adequate infrastructure, including through public-private partnerships, installing system enabling instruments or setting standards. Yet, it would seem that women's needs are not taken into account through explicit processes, which associate them to project developments and decisions.

Measures:

Women do not automatically benefit from existing or new infrastructure developments as their needs may be different from that of men. A gender lens is necessary to improve women's economic access through quality infrastructure.

As demonstrated by a study of eight European and Asian cities by Wei-Shiuen and Acker (2018),¹⁰ women travel shorter trips on average than men, use public transport more and travel more during off-peak hours. They tend to prefer more flexible travel patterns and public transport modes are more appealing to women than to men. But cities generally do not have transport programs or policies focusing on improving the user experience of women. Yet, examples provided in ITF Compendium on Women's Safety and Security: "A Public Transport Priority" (2018) show that a large majority of women worldwide feel unsafe in public transport and have been victims of some type of physical or verbal harassment and other forms of violence in public spaces.

In countries where women suffer from discriminatory legislations and social norms, the gender-specific effects of infrastructure may need to be strengthened as inadequate access to

¹⁰ Wei-Shiuen Ng and Ashley Acker (2018).

basic services affects girls' school attendance and later their employment and entrepreneurship perspectives.

At a minimum, infrastructure should ensure public lighting, safe public spaces, and safe public transport (public or private). Several governments, including notably Brazil, Bangladesh, Egypt, Japan, India, Iran, Indonesia, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, Taiwan, and the Philippines have put in place sex-segregated transport services: ladies' coaches, special trains, segregated buses, "pink" taxis, during peak hours or full time. Yet as noted in a recent study, it is unclear to what extent these transports are effectively used and gender-equitable public transportation requires an integrated approach.¹¹ Thus going further it will be important, to involve women in the design of infrastructure strategies and plans as well as in their implementation and monitoring.

Improving women's access to communication networks and services such as the Internet, digital platforms, mobile phones and digital financial services, will most probably help women earn additional income, increase employment opportunities, and access knowledge and digital government services. The use of the "SafetiPin" application improves women's security in India by helping them navigate the city with less risk. Users can rate streets and areas for safety criteria, such as lighting, visibility, people density, gender diversity, security and transportation. They can also use an SOS button. Interestingly, building on the application's use, local government and planners take account of the application's data to improve services and make cities safer for women (SafetiPin 2019¹²).

Recommendations:

For policy makers:

1. To play a strategic role by reinforcing public-private dialogue and public-private partnerships in support of infrastructure development.
2. To engage in a Whole-of-Government approach involving ministries, departments and agencies, with experts supporting gender equality from central authorities involved in women's equal rights and economic development and policy areas as gender sensitive budgeting or gender units in relevant ministries and administrations.

¹¹ Sonal Shah (2019).

¹² SafetiPin (2019).

3. To engage businesswomen to express their key needs and constraints. This would help to gender mainstream infrastructure projects.

4. To develop gender budgeting practices to ensure that women's and girls' concerns are mainstreamed in policies and public administrations.

Findings:

All women entrepreneurs confirmed that businesses are impacted by the quality of the infrastructure. For women entrepreneurs, who often also have families to cater to, time is of the essence. In France, long commutes between home and the company are detrimental and stressful for women entrepreneurs. Hence, infrastructure should be fast and efficient.

Many interlocutors were concerned by poor transport infrastructure, bad maintenance and services impacting on their productivity. This concern extends to their employees who may not always be on time or present, creating additional stress for the business owner and her team, even in countries where teleworking is permitted and a common practice. In countries where transportation services are deficient or irregular, the recruitment of women employees may be affected. Either because women fear for their security and do not apply for employment or that employers, anticipating women's fears, do not consider them as potential workers.

Equally important is the quality of ports (maritime, air); this is a critical enabler for firms to access and compete in domestic and foreign markets. Most businesswomen were satisfied with the accessibility to those facilities. However, a clear distinction can be drawn between women working in smaller companies operating in developing countries. They reported that getting to the ports was a hassle as they live in remote areas; this in turn impacts the distribution of their goods. Another issue is the relation to the port authorities and the rapidity with which goods are getting out of the ports. Lengthy procedures and undue payments impact their business performance. The Lebanese entrepreneur was concerned that domestic customs and port regulations are not necessarily adapted to international online commerce. She noted that goods sent abroad but which the customer returns to the business are kept in the port customs and submitted to taxation as if they were imports from abroad. The Tunisian entrepreneur has to struggle with the infrastructure as the roads are considered to be in a catastrophic state, negatively affecting her business. Public transport penalizes her staff and internet bandwidth is irregular. She added that ICT equipment is expensive in Tunisia.

All interlocutors stressed the need of a good ICT infrastructure as well as regular electricity. When effective, these are public utilities, which have a direct and positive impact

on market access. All businesswomen mentioned their need to interact with clients and suppliers and the importance of having access to low-cost technologies (e.g., internet, mobile phones) and logistics services, which rely on ITC to offer facilities to participate in e-commerce platforms.

Conversely, when public goods are of poor quality, for instance if the local phone operator does not establish land lines in offices due to red tape and possibly corruption and the technologies are of high cost, then business development is negatively affected. In Lebanon, for instance, productivity gains, which would result in additional funds for research and innovation development, had to be invested into alternative communication tools.

The case of India is exemplary. Through the “Digital India Initiative” of Prime Minister Modi all regions, including remote rural areas, have established facilities in which the population has access to computers and phones to facilitate the use of these technologies. The easy access to smartphones allows women working in remote rural areas to engage in nationwide trade through Mahila E-Haat (see Box 2). This initiative has helped business development which in turn leads eventually to some formalization of the business activity. Furthermore, electronic support mechanisms such as the Indian online marketing platform built on phone payments facilitate data collection. The advantages of a cashless economy are debated in India, as they would enhance transparency in the tax and data collection system and limit illegal payment. More data facilitates policy analysis and helps identify the right policy proposals for regional and national development (see also recommendation above on data collection).

Box 2. India, Mahila E-Haat

Mahila E-Haat is an online marketing platform, which was conceived in 2015 and launched in March 2016 for women working from home or via women NGOs across India. It allows to display and directly sell manufactured products nationwide. Women can also showcase services, e.g., tailoring. It allows women to sell their goods and services to individual purchasers or to wholesale vendors who can take sales forward. The transactions are transparent, ensuring women the visibility and benefits of their work without having to travel physically to large markets.

The multilingual platform (Hindi and English) has been set up by the Ministry of Women and Child Development with the support of Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), an autonomous body for socio-economic empowerment of women under the Ministry, and the Government of India. It is part of the ‘Digital India’ and ‘Stand Up India’ initiatives. Initially started in the North East India, the platform expanded rapidly to cover Southern India, West, Central and Panjab.

This virtual market place is aimed at facilitating women’s business transactions. Women producers need a mobile number to ensure that they can handle all business transactions with a mobile phone. The products are pictured, described and the price displayed with the mobile number on Mahila E-Haat. The buyer will have the option of approaching the seller over the phone or in any other convenient means. Every village has a post office and products are delivered by the postal service.

Also, in line with the concern of digitalizing and engaging in a less cash-dominated economy, all buyers and sellers have to have a bank account. This also ensures that all working women, no matter how small their business, develop their financial ability and their empowerment. This small step towards less economic and financial dependence eventually will lead to their participation in their families’ decision-making process and help question the role models in their communities.

The platform has a verification process to control the quality of the products sold. The women artisans submit pictures of their products and it is only when their products are approved by the monitoring team, affiliated to the RMK, that they can upload them for sale. When the platform was launched, the women from the different regions enjoyed trainings on design, quality, packaging and finance.

The platform generated important sales in its first year (up to 4 Mio \$ USD in 2017). With products sold at low prices, this is a remarkable achievement, which benefitted several hundreds of thousands of women who were able to take advantage of this new opportunity to reach customers.

One woman interviewed in the course of this study was identified by her use and the development of her business through the platform. She provided an extraordinary testimony of how the business she created was supportive of the empowerment of women in her community thanks to their work as micro-entrepreneurs and how their engagement was helping their communities more generally.

3. Access to finance e.g., low interest loan, guarantee

Accessing appropriate sources of finance is critical for businesses to fulfil their potential to innovate, grow and create jobs. Access to finance is important at all stages of the business life

cycle, i.e., for the company to start, develop and innovate as well as grow. Research suggests that conversely, constraints on access to finance impact their investments, business and innovation capacity and negatively affect their employment, their productivity and income.

Depending on the size of the firm, different forms of funding are available. Usually, small firms will move towards using family capital¹³ and credit from a bank or a credit organization when they have guarantees. Yet, as SMEs are frequently undercapitalized, they are often reliant on straight debts.

It has been documented that women have higher barriers to accessing finance than men. In particular, their businesses may suffer from a lack of collateral to provide guarantees. Additional difficulties can also be due to their lack of financial literacy and awareness. It has also been shown that women entrepreneurs confront higher market barriers due to information asymmetries between them and financial institutions. This may include their insufficient financial literacy. They are also often charged higher transaction and borrowing costs.

Lack of access, or uneven access, to funding may become a factor of inequality, which negatively affects women-led companies. The financial gender gap will be even more critical for women working in remote or rural areas.

Larger companies will also be able to have recourse to public offerings in capital markets by issuing stocks or bonds. The entrepreneur may also have to choose whether to retain independent control over the decision-making process by opting for a bank credit or to welcome other partners into the management of the business, which would imply opening its equity portfolio to investors. Finally, very small companies can select micro-financing deals, which are generally the only options when they have no collateral to offer.

These difficulties are compounded by the fact that recent evidence suggests that financial institutions have become more risk-averse since the last financial crises, including due to the new provisions that regulate the banking sector such as Basel III.

In emerging markets where access to finance for private sector companies is a particularly important issue, alternative funding is increasingly developing.¹⁴ “Fintech”

¹³ In a survey of 350 women who were founding CEOs, presidents, chief technology officers, or leading technologists of tech start-ups founded between 2002 and 2012, nearly 80 used personal savings as their main funding source: *Sources of Economic Hope: Women’s Entrepreneurship*, by Alicia Robb et al. Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, November 2014.

¹⁴ SME Finance Forum, 2019, assesses that financing needs of SMEs in emerging and developing countries amount to about US\$ 5,2 trillions.

(technology enabled innovation in financial services) developments are likely to become more central in the financial landscape in the coming years and may offer new opportunities for SME financing. Digital platforms and blockchain technology may indeed profoundly modify the financial industry. In the development of new financial avenues, gender issues should be addressed to ensure that women are involved, and their needs considered.

Measure:

The Moroccan entrepreneur benefited from a guarantee resulting from a partnership between AFEM¹⁵ with the Ministry of Finance and CGC¹⁶ to offer women a 75 percent guarantee on loans requested by companies managed by women instead of the standard 60 percent guarantee offered to men.

Box 3. Morocco’s Financing Mechanisms in Support of Women Entrepreneurship

To support the financing of enterprises run by women, Morocco’s Central Guarantee Fund (*Caisse centrale de garantie*, CCG) teamed up with the Ministry of Economy and Finance in March 2013 to launch a guarantee tool called “*Ilayki*” (“towards you”). The guarantee covers 80 percent of bank loans of up to MAD 1 million (Moroccan dirham, about EUR 100 000) that are granted to women, and was able to help around 50 businesses within the first year.

Ilayki was launched through an awareness campaign involving caravans in communities around the country to inform women entrepreneurs about the availability of financing through the CCG (carried out in partnership with the Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Morocco). The CCG also developed agreements with banks to promote the guarantees. Along with the guarantee, the CCG helps women identify their business needs and develop their financing file, and it accompanies them through the process with the banks.

In addition, the National Agency for Promotion of SMEs (Maroc PME) implemented a Women Business Financing project that included efforts to sensitize financial institutions to the needs of women clients, for example recommending that banks engage in gender-sensitivity training for their front office staff. Access to commercial bank credit is still difficult, but some banks have initiated targeted marketing campaigns to reach out to the women’s market.

Source: OECD (2017) Women’s Economic Empowerment in Selected MENA Countries, OECD, PARIS.

¹⁵ *L’Association des Femmes chefs d’entreprises du Maroc*

¹⁶ *Caisse de Garantie et de Crédit*

Recommendations:

A. For policy makers:

1. To increase credit lines through commercial banks and support the establishment of programs that specifically support women entrepreneurs, provide training and gender mainstreaming;
2. To accompany credit provisions by advisory and networking services, such as advisory bureaus established at chambers of commerce as well as online point of contacts.
3. To identify the most promising businesses and sectors, including the small ones, monitor them and ensure that they receive the services that they need.
4. To regulate and monitor, if necessary, the activities of the micro-credit agencies, so that excessive rates may not be imposed on women entrepreneurs that will be more vulnerable to their lending policies.
5. As new financial avenues develop, gender issues should be addressed from the beginning to ensure that women's needs are identified and considered, including by involving women entrepreneurs into the discussions on new tools.

B. For lenders:

1. To understand better the new forms of businesses that are being created and adapt their offers thereto.
2. To undergo a gender mainstreaming exercise to address gender bias in lending and consider hiring women employees that can, amongst other tasks, be the front-end for women entrepreneurs.
3. To train women on how to address lenders, how to present a business plan, their business, their accounts and their needs. Specific programs should be dedicated to learning how to address venture capitalists.

Findings:

Almost all women noted that they had experienced difficulties in accessing finance. According to literature, some governments in developed and developing countries are now aware of the issue and have started launching initiatives to ease access to various sources of finance, including by way of credit guarantees or alternative financing instruments.

During the desk research, references to support mechanisms were identified, including on the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) website.¹⁷ Yet, women entrepreneurs in developed market economies reported difficulties in having access to funds. It is noteworthy that the funds for which they had applied were not extremely high. Eventually, they mostly used their personal funds or were supported by their families at different moments of the life of their business. For some it was when they started their business; others had to bridge periods of particular difficulties for which additional resources were required.

Box 4. The Netherlands: Future Women X (FWX)

Women X is a private company that offers executive coaching, board membership training and leadership programs for women worldwide.

One of the interventions to develop financial inclusion took place in Zambia in 2018. This first-of-its-kind financial effort towards “female leadership” was initiated by Dr. Tukiya Mabula, Deputy Governor, Bank of Zambia. It was modelled on a prior experience in Ghana.

In partnership with the Bank of Zambia and FMO, the Dutch Development Bank, 25 selected women participated in a one-week exchange. The 17 Zambian CEO level women bankers from 6 banks and the Bank of Zambia and the representatives of 3 development banks (FMO, Arise, and Norfund), and 6 local women entrepreneurs as well as policy makers from the Zambian Ministry of Finance engaged thanks to the interventions and mediation of FWX. The exchanges were aimed at better knowing each other and subsequently at a knowledge exchange which would eventually result in a better system for women’s economic involvement.

The entrepreneurs left with a powerful network of allies, and the bankers obtained invaluable insights on how to create real solutions for systemic change.

Concrete consequences a year later were:

- women entrepreneurs from Zambia had become more aware and assertive which led them to raise financial funds, including with the World Bank, which provided additional business development services, which proved very helpful;

- the experience was to be extended with the support of the Bank of Zambia across the entire banking sector nationwide, and

- further capacity building was provided in 2019 to enhance the capacity of the 2018 participants in the training.

Furthermore, to more systematically support women entrepreneurship in Zambia:

¹⁷ <https://eige.europa.eu/>: An autonomous body, EIGE operates within the framework of European Union policies and initiatives, collects, analyses, processes and disseminates data and information on gender equality issues, whilst at the same time making them comparable, reliable and relevant for the users. A number of financial support mechanisms are referenced on the website. Yet, when seeking to obtain information, the authors noted that many of those initiatives had been terminated to mainstream women into wider SME access to finance support mechanisms.

- FMO and the Bank of Zambia aligned their effort to explore dedicated credit risk guarantee structures, which should significantly improve access for women entrepreneurs.

- The Bank of Zambia is pursuing the collection of sex-disaggregated data from the financial sector, a huge step toward understanding the scope of the problem and eventually being able to develop adequate concrete policy responses.

- Women entrepreneurs now have a direct pathway of financial and non-financial support from local banks.

Zambian women entrepreneurs who had participated in the 2018 week of exchanges as well as the women owners of Future Women X provided extremely valuable witnesses that are reflected in the report.

Source/web site: <https://www.futurewomenx.com/>.

Some women entrepreneurs, one in France who had been included in the business development project and others in developing countries, benefitted from financial support, including through donor programs, which compensated for their lack of resources and under-collateralization. In Zambia, our entrepreneur was invited by the Zambian Federation of Women in Business, to take part in the *Women in Financial Inclusion* training. She was asked to pitch her business in front of representatives from the Ministry of Finance, Bank of Zambia and CEOs from banks. She obtained a grant that allowed her to move from her living room to a small factory, buy machines and massively produce clothes. Through the Future Women X seminar (see Box 3), she learnt how to pitch from women bankers who encouraged her and asked her to be an inspiration to others. She reckons that that the grant incited her to scale up her business.

“There are many tailors in Zambia, they have a shop and they make clothes for their neighborhood. I am not a tailor, I am a business woman!”

Our entrepreneur from Ireland, who has twenty-three years of executive experience in ICT, injected the first seed investment to develop the prototype for her mobile application and then obtained debt capital from angel investors from the USA, Europe and Asia to launch commercially. She reckons that the process is complicated with its own rule and procedures and that she needed very specific business skills and a web of contacts acquired in her career to succeed. She strongly advises that Chambers of Commerce and local incubators should coach aspiring women candidates to go through a step-by-step process to learn the tricks of the trade in order to pitch successfully. A view also shared by our Mexican entrepreneur involved in real estate. Once the process is learned, women will most likely succeed, she said, if they are bold and impose their own style to venture capitalists who appreciate strong personalities.

It is our only example of an entrepreneur having called on alternative ways of equity finance such as business angel investments or venture capital or asset-based finance as an alternative. It would seem that alternative funds of finance are not always as universally accessible, sufficiently diffused or known to SMEs to be able to create a viable alternative to more traditional forms of finance. One entrepreneur in France noted that she had reached out to venture investors but that she had eventually decided to keep full control over her business also because she thought that the different types of venture capital companies had very diverse and complex approaches which she could not fully grasp.

What the interviews confirmed is that women have indeed great difficulties accessing finance. The authors' impression is that the women interviewed did not lack entrepreneurial experience; nor are they operating in marginal sectors. It is more likely that they suffered from a combination of different factors: for those that operate in small businesses and cannot offer a guarantee, they are locked in a vicious circle related to their size and can only hope that a donor will provide support. As for the larger businesses, they were the victims of a gender stereotyped lending process that imposes harsher financial conditions on women than men.

As many other studies highlight, the sample of interviewed women confirm that typically women entrepreneurs start their business with less money and are more reliant on self-financing. Furthermore, although the businesswomen who provided their experience have a high-level education, an excellent work experience and record performing companies, they are more likely to be "discouraged borrowers" as a consequence of the difficulty in accessing finance (see the chart below). Consequently, they may avoid applying for loans because they believe that they will not be successful in obtaining credits.

One woman mentioned clearly that she had been too shy to ask for a bank loan when she created her company. She noted some key elements:

- She had been too timid. She should have been more assertive and request a loan when she created her company.
- She noticed that when the bank saw the cash flow of her company, the bankers came forward offering loans, which she took to bridge payments. So, she mostly uses it for her cash flow (more than for investments).
- She sees her son who pitched and received a loan at the age of 24. She feels this is inspiring and she should have done the same.

“It would have been beneficial if I had had a network to learn from. I lacked being more assertive”

It may be noted that there seems to be a misunderstanding on the side of the entrepreneur and on the side of the lender, fueled by stereotypes and cultural norms. Whilst some women suffer from the shyness and lack of experience factors mentioned above, the lenders, who are often represented by bank employees that have strict procedures to adhere to, have little knowledge of the types of companies that the women own. Women are innovating: creating in Zambia a food processing company launched on the basis of an oatmeal recipe, in the Philippines a farm, which has a café and restaurant that sells fashionable handbags and works of art. The revenues are small and little guarantees can be offered. Women do not fit the bank standards and the risks appear too high for a bank loan. As suggested in the recommendations, these difficulties should be addressed from all sides. One example is the case of the bank in Lebanon (see Box 5).

Box 5. Lebanon: The “We Initiative” Access to Finance

The “*We Initiative*” was launched in 2012 by BLC Bank. It is a holistic program dedicated to the economic empowerment of women in Lebanon and aimed at making BLC Bank the Bank and employer of choice for Lebanese women.

It provides women with equal banking rights and opportunities in order to get financed and grow their expertise at personal or business projects; in addition to giving women access to tools and services—including business power sessions, workshops, articles, studies and inspirational success stories. Through the “*We Initiative*,” women can connect with other businesswomen, consult experts and mentors to help organize their work, balance their professional and personal life, and promote their business. Networking events and conferences are also organized.

The “*Brilliant Lebanese Awards*,” created in 2012, rewards the “woman entrepreneur of the year” by recognizing Lebanese women entrepreneurs, honoring their achievements and turning them into role models for other women.

With the “*We initiative*,” the BLC Bank revised its internal culture and created a fairer and more inclusive work environment. In 2019, women represented 51 percent of the Bank’s workforce and 45 percent of its upper management. With national campaigns, the “*We Initiative*” offers a cultural shift and fights gender stereotypes.

The *We Initiative* story was shared globally and the BLC Bank is the first bank in the MENA region to join and contribute to the Financial Alliance for Women as well as to commit to the UN Women Empowerment Principles and SDG#5 that promote gender equality. The BLC Bank is now a member of the UN Leadership Board.

The “*WE Initiative*” supported the business development of a woman interviewed in the course of this study. She provided an outstanding testimony of her own development and the growth and consolidation of her business thanks to this support.

BLC Bank’s engagement towards women empowerment was honored in various ways. BLC Bank won the “Best Bank Supporting Women Owned and Women Led Businesses” in 2015, and the prestigious “Best Female Empowerment” award by CPI and the “Women’s Market Champions Data Award” in 2018. In 2019, BLC Bank won the "Outstanding Engagement Award” from the Financial Alliance for Women in June and more recently the gold level “Women-Owned SME Bank of the Year” from IFC at the SME Finance Forum held in Amsterdam in October.

The WE Initiative: <https://we-initiative.com/>

Internal engagement: <https://we-initiative.com/WeEngage/InternalEngagement>

Social engagement: <https://we-initiative.com/WeEngage/SocialEngagement>

International engagement: <https://we-initiative.com/WeEngage/InternationalEngagement>

Micro-credit, which would have seemed an ideal solution for many small businesses, was on the contrary rejected in many instances, the interest rates being considered too high or the terms too difficult to meet. This was the case of our Filipino entrepreneur who after several years in business wished to expand it. She reverted to selling a part of her property, after being discouraged to borrow with the micro-loans from the government agencies, as they requested a three years credit-history signed by Certified Public Accountants (CPAs).

References to alternative equity funding was only limited; the authors learned about it in Malaysia where some women obtained support through Peer to Peer funding (see Box 6).

Box 6. Malaysia: Peer-to-peer (P2P) Financing

Malaysia has been eager developing peer-to-peer (P2P) lending to enable MSMEs as well as individuals to obtain loans through P2P financing platforms.

As the first Asian country to regulate P2P financing, Malaysia has ensured that the industry is structured and provides improved protection for investors. The government and the Malaysian Securities Commission, which is the industry’s regulator, ensure that adequate safeguards are in place but also support this type of financing. The Government has engaged in continuous advocacy on P2P financing to strengthen public’s and investor’s perception about the legitimacy of this newer type of financing. With underserved-markets facing difficulties to obtain financing from the traditional channel, this alternative financing channel has grown and is hailed as a route to create financial inclusion.

Although Malaysia is not progressing at a rate as swift as other more advanced Asian nations like China, Japan and Korea in the development of ICT, Malaysia’s P2P providers are well equipped with technology and tools that allow to elevate business processing, including by leveraging alternative data, which ensure the offering of tailor-made financing products to prospective clients. This significantly reduces the stringent documentation and collateral requirement otherwise needed by traditional financing institutions. Technology also enables to quickly and directly reach a wider target audience. Constant new innovations keep the industry and financial landscape moving forward.

We learned from one of the key P2P FinTech companies that this emerging segment is revolutionizing the financial landscape, and opening up more opportunities to the often-neglected small players and businesses, through leveraging alternative data and machine learning to better assess these small players in need of financing aid. SMEs in Malaysia represent 98.5 percent of all establishments, contributing to 37.1 percent of Malaysia's (GDP) and 66 percent of employment in 2017.

Witnesses from four Malaysian female entrepreneurs who had each created their company between 2005 and 2018 reported successful borrowings. They reported great satisfaction in obtaining their respective loans as this had allowed them to 1) strengthen their business, 2) expand their business, 3) had allowed them to access short term lending and 4) to access it fast. Some women had had a good prior experience with a traditional lending facility but others had been rejected. Two women entrepreneurs reported having received, in addition to the P2P loan, training or business development services. All four women advocated that P2P financing be developed, including in other countries, in support of women led businesses in light of the strong needs of obtaining support and grow their businesses. They also thought that it was an effective and helpful financial facility, particularly for start-ups.

To avoid that any gender discrimination exists in any form, for instance that they have to pay higher interest rates than the male borrowers, and to avoid that they may miss out on investment and business opportunities, some P2P platforms offer loans for women only. This is not the case in Malaysia who does not consider this a strong risk but exist in Indonesia.

It would certainly be very interesting exploring the P2P impact on women accessing funds more easily further, building on a wider comparative study of the industry's development and practice in Asia.

A question which might also need further investigation is whether there is a link between the fact that bankers are mostly men. A hypothesis which might deserve to be examined is whether women entrepreneurs have a similar ability to access male-dominated financial networks or whether this is a difficulty, which could explain gender differences in lending policies? Indeed, all interviewed entrepreneurs mentioned being part of a network, but not necessarily those of men entrepreneurs (see also the section on networks below).

An interesting experience carried out in France by a non-for-profit organization with the support of a financial institution is to assess women-led SMEs and to ensure their adequate evaluation and access to finance. These women-owned and run companies are highly performing and their outstanding contribution to the economy is not generally and sufficiently recognized (see Box 10).

4. Human capital and skills development

It is generally admitted that investment in people and development of skills are essential for enterprise developments. Yet, SMEs face greater difficulties than larger companies to identify, attract and retain skilled employees. This is usually attributed to the fact that they lack the

adequate networks to identify talents. The working conditions and the wages that they offer may also be less attractive than those of larger corporations.

In recent years, a number of initiatives were developed to enhance the entrepreneurial culture. Efforts to develop entrepreneurship skills have significantly increased. Yet, people do not necessarily feel more confident in their capacity to starting and developing a business. In addition, women are under-represented among entrepreneurs. In OECD countries, it is argued that this is due to a skills gap, such as in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) or management, communication and entrepreneurship. This is often due to gender-related unconscious biases, which pigeonhole women in care-related activities and in humanities rather than scientific, technological and managerial fields.¹⁸

Skilled workers have an essential role in firms. Empirical studies have confirmed economic research, which links the performance of complex tasks that help drive competitiveness and productivity growth to higher skilled employees. This is because the latter have usually strong mental skills (i.e., literacy, numerical, and problem-solving capacity), a readiness to learning new skills as well as management capacities. Increasingly, strong social and emotional skills are also identified as key. Women's more limited access to the different stages of professions, in particular managerial and executive positions, limits their exposure to adequate education and subsequent levels of follow-up training. This may eventually impact their readiness and capacity to engage as entrepreneurs. So, supporting initial training and skill development can also support the development of women

Companies need to upscale their employee skills. But although there are more vocational and education training programs available, smaller companies offer less opportunities for employee development and skill acquisition. This is often due to the relatively high financial cost associated with training.

Public policies can play an important role in helping smaller companies address these needs. Companies and non-government organizations can also improve womens skills in the areas most needed for their economic development.

Measures:

Our entrepreneur in real estate in Mexico decided to engage in training women entrepreneurs as a new initiative. The school, which is currently being created, will provide soft skills for

¹⁸ Women's Forum: Daring Circles: Women & Stem, Il manque un morceau de la citation?

women in areas where they are not trained at university such as training for leadership positions and in finance, in setting up a company, how to obtain government support. In business she insists that building a cohesive team is the most difficult challenge. She believes that companies, to retain staff, especially millennials, should share the purpose of their work with them.

In Tunisia, our entrepreneur working in plastic extrusion and processing, considers that human capital provides the highest added value to the company and represents its enduring wealth. The company benefitted from the Japanese development agency (JICA) KAIZEN program¹⁹ under the aegis of the United Nations, which fosters quality improvements within the national Tunisian program. This program has supported the entrepreneur in working on her staff's skills by transforming their approach to work. The staff is encouraged to use their intellectual capacities to make proposals that will positively enhance the results of the company.

Recommendations:

Some policy actions may be envisaged for human resources and their training that may apply to both women and men-owned companies:

A. The cost of hiring and retaining staff

1. To guarantee a minimum period for newly incorporated SMEs that some/all of the social cost of hiring young professionals are covered by the State for a defined period of time (such as two years).²⁰ This would give SMEs the necessary boost to hire adequate skills to develop the company. It could also be beneficial for employees who thereby acquire an experience.

B. Their training

A distinction should be made between women who aspire to become entrepreneurs and the staff of women entrepreneurs:

1. to ensure that training programs should always include women;
2. to target women specifically in programs so that they may acquire and develop the skills needed to successfully launch and run a business to reduce the gender gap among entrepreneurs;

¹⁹ The Kaizen concept was created by Toyota. It allows companies to humanise the productivity process by involving all their human resources, including the CEO, into proposing improvements, even if small, to eliminate waste.

²⁰ This practice was adopted in some countries such as France and Italy.

3. to further act against the under-representation of women among entrepreneurs and businesswomen, help women harness economic opportunities, including those created by the digital economy and ensure that they acquire ICT skills, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) skills as well as management and communication skills;

4. to ensure that the training of employees should be assigned to the State or to other stakeholders (such as trade unions; in Italy trade unions have funds available for training), in order to alleviate the burden of running a company;

5. to give women the opportunity to be trained on self-assertiveness and confidence.

Findings:

The interviewed businesswomen are all well-educated., most had some professional experience prior to launching their business or were pursuing a very successful career.

Also, the largest number of the business women that we have interviewed tend to be closely involved with their staff. This may be due to the small size of their companies or to the fact that their initiative is a lifelong project to which they are profoundly committed.

The women interviewed in developed countries did not refer to missing skills for themselves. But women in developed countries who have not benefitted from a good education and who aspire to become businesswomen even though they did not have adequate training expressed some concern. Several women in emerging economies referred to the great benefits of having acquired some entrepreneurial skills and tailored business advice through women's enterprises and entrepreneurship centers. To respond to the concerns of women wanting to engage as entrepreneurs, it would be important that they benefit from access to training on starting and growing a business to the development of entrepreneurial skills (know-how on how to start and run a business, finance, market identification and customers, financial planning and management, human resource management).

All interlocutors insisted on the importance of the quality of their respective domestic education system for the development of their business. In developed countries, businesswomen noted that they had access to skilled personnel. In France, the Netherlands, Japan, they recruited young graduates or freelancers from university and trained them. They underlined the highly competitive labor market and difficulties in retaining qualified staff once trained. They considered the training offered to their staff an indicator of their own competence and ability to develop the skills and capacities of their manpower and a marker of quality of their own

business. However, they admitted to difficulties that high turnover represented and the ensuing impact of the too many changes on the company's development. High turnover may also impact the ability of an enterprise to effectively maintain its knowledge and innovative processes.

In developing countries, all women who have been in business for some time noticed that the education system was delivering lower level skilled and less trained persons than in the past (Turkey, Tunisia, and Morocco). They also reported engaging in training of the young recruits to ensure that their skills match those of the company's needs.

All women with larger teams considered that **the most difficult element in their business is the human capital component** and specifically **team building** (Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco). They also stated that team building had taken some time and that they experienced some turnover prior to finding the right set of persons with the adequate skills indispensable for the company's development.

Several businesswomen observed that due to labor market considerations, in particular high social protection rights which their company cannot afford, they work with autonomous workers (Japan and Netherlands). While those can be more experienced than young recruits, they suggested that these persons also need **counselling** and **mentoring** to support the development of their capacities and respond to the specific business needs of the company. Women entrepreneurs need to mitigate between investing in human resources that have a higher cost and can be an asset for the growth of their company and more affordable autonomous workers that may not remain within the company. Most of the women we have met have chosen the second option and personally supplied the training, thus adding another task to an already full agenda. In the Dutch and Japanese cases, it would appear that these companies operate only when there is a client's request or an event to be organized, which is an excellent way of limiting costs but may in the long run hinder the company's development.

Most women of the sample referred to the benefit of **mentorship both as beneficiaries and as mentees**. Indeed, many stressed that they had benefitted at some point in their own business development from the support of a mentor. Most of those having benefitted from mentorship are involved in giving back to society and have become mentors for other entrepreneurs or potential entrepreneurs.

The Filipino entrepreneur interviewed has developed a vegetable farm with a café and a restaurant. She also produces embroidered handbags, for which she received training (see Box 7). This entrepreneur has fifty women embroiders that she has trained and work from home.

They are paid for each piece that they produce but the entrepreneur also takes care of giving them access to a small fund from which they can borrow without interest, they are taught to save and open a savings account in a cooperative that operates like a bank.

Box 7. Philippines “the GREAT WOMEN’s Project”

The Gender-Responsive Economic Actions for the Transformation of Women Project 2

Known as the GREAT Women Project or more formally as the Supporting Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE) in the Philippines Project, the initiative has expanded since 2015 into its second phase. The Project thought to expand economic opportunities to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of women micro enterprises and the enabling environment for women’s economic empowerment in the Philippines. The implementation of this project should decrease women’s vulnerability to human trafficking and domestic violence. It provides a platform for fostering women’s role in propelling enterprises and creating jobs in the Philippines. It builds on the joint interventions of national government agencies involved in micro-, small- and medium-scale enterprise (MSME) development and private sector partners in the implementation of its Women Economic Empowerment programs and activities through funding provided by the Government of Canada.

The initiative was conceived with the understanding that women are the backbone of the economy and that they must be empowered as actors. The point of departure being that in an inclusive, gender sensitive ecosystem for enterprises, a woman will be able to move up the value chain by preparing her products for other markets, be part of a network and learn how to access finance, services and markets.

The necessary institutional reforms address issues such as financial access, market readiness and access to markets, capacity training, technological understanding, and support for entrepreneurial management of businesses. The initiative also builds up leadership, self-confidence, creativity and enhances a network of enterprises. Mentoring is provided in market access, in financial literacy, in purchasing and trade directions. Institutions, government aid agencies, groups and associations work together to ensure that women learn to use technology in advancing their business, whether it is a startup or an established enterprise that wants to innovate.

It is noteworthy that in the Department of Trade and Industry’s (DTI), gender was identified as a key area in the country’s MSME Development Plan. The DTI focused more attention on women entrepreneurs as movers of inclusive growth and significant contributors to domestic and global economic activities. It has been providing them with essential tools and skills and identified the needed strategies in seven Ms—**Mindset, Mastery, Mentoring, Markets, Money, Machines and Models**—to further boost the participation and contribution of small enterprises in overall production and jobs.

Furthermore, through the private sector project born out of GREAT Women Project (2007-2013), the initiative has been expanding women’s capacity through the network of a new regional market: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic community (AEc). And concretely the network of women microentrepreneurs has expanded to MSMEs in Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Laos PDR and Cambodia.

The initiative was able to bring together women microentrepreneurs and small businesses into the global supply chain, which allows to build skills and capabilities, foster business linkages among women in the region, allow them to help other women in their own supply chains, and help them access national or international markets.

The ambition is to allow a strategic and focused direction for mapping needs of a regional and integrated supply chain from the bottom of the pyramid (BoP) to the target market. This should allow the further capacity building and development of domestic and regional supply chains specific to the diverse products of ASEAN. The initiative is also advocating men to play the role of champions and believers in the power of networks to increase the incomes of women and enterprises in general.

The initiative has supported the development of one of the women interviewed in the course of this study. She provided an extraordinary testimony of her own development, the growth and consolidation of her business and the increased role they play for the community: The women working in her business and the youth which she trains and to which she gives back.

Sources: Philippine Commission on Women, <https://www.pcw.gov.ph/gwp2> and *Women Beyond Borders: The Beginning of GREAT Women in ASEAN*, 2019.

In the Moroccan company, which was incorporated twenty-five years ago, some employees, who have now been promoted to management level, were hired at inception and have contributed to the growth of the company. In her interview the owner recalled, rather emotionally, the first fairs that she organized to promote her coffee business with young hostesses who worked late and during weekends and have now become sales managers responsible for an entire region of Morocco.

The women entrepreneurs also noticed that it was critical for them to speak about their work during conferences, to university students and even pupils. This is obviously a form of corporate social responsibility, which is only occasionally identified as such.

5. The importance of the national business enabling environment

To facilitate a growing private sector and enterprise development, which in turn produce enhanced economic and social development and improve the performance of a country, it is essential to create a business enabling environment. Under this heading are included legal and regulatory provisions; reduced burdens on the private sector measured in time and cost for starting and operating a business, for licensing and registration.²¹ As noted in a recent OECD study,²² regulatory inefficiencies, complexities and high compliance costs are particularly critical to new firms and SMEs, which are disproportionately affected by regulatory burdens or face greater constraints than large companies when seeking legal redress. In addition, some SMEs regulations, especially if they have elements of discretion, can be biased and can entail

²¹ These and additional areas are identified in the World Bank “ease of doing business” list of indicators and the indicators of economic freedom by the Heritage Foundation.

¹⁹ Lois Stevenson (2010).

²² OECD/EU (2017).

an asymmetric gender burden, by making for instance registration processes more difficult for women than men.

Measures:

The two Zambian entrepreneurs had experienced positively the swift, online registration process of their business and viewed their official entry into business as an opportunity to receive services from the State and participate in State-organized events that eventually led them to obtain a grant to develop their business.

Digital instruments, such as government portals, are increasingly used by governments in OECD countries to provide information and allow citizens to access public services. They also ease the interaction of citizens and businesses with the government and the administration. Digitalization offers opportunities to simplify administrative processes and improve public service quality and outreach. This includes digital “one-stop-shops,” i.e., single-entry points providing government services and reducing public administrative requests. Furthermore, it allows handling the complexity of licensing systems. However, digitalization can compound existing inequalities and create new divides—including for women entrepreneurs.

Recommendations:

1. To streamline business registration and licensing processes and make them user-friendly as well as improve public governance for better service delivery by strengthening e-government services;
2. to consider for national and local governments the importance of registering women who have a business idea, in order to establish a direct link to them and thereby create numerous opportunities for their development and for the administrative services that those governments will be able to offer;
3. to promote the inclusion of a gender indicator to increase women’s visibility in *Doing business*,²³ the World Bank Group’s Flagship Report which compares business regulation for domestic firms in 190 economies. This may mean including an indicator on “*women’s access to public services*” or alternatively inserting an indicator on “*women in business and management*.”

²³ https://www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/media/Annual-Reports/English/DB2019-report_web-version.pdf

Findings:

Women from OECD countries usually agreed that they had benefitted from an effective and transparent regulatory environment that supported their experience as entrepreneurs at different stages of the business cycle (entry, investment, expansion, transfer and exit). They mentioned that the administrative process of incorporating a company had been alleviated in recent years and made faster.

This approach, which indicates the concern of governments to stimulate company creation, is not diffused in the overall regulatory environment that by contrast has become increasingly complex. In addition to an overall complex French administrative system, an entrepreneur running a consulting company singled out in particular the recent adoption of regulations imposing new standards on data collection and communication, which affect their business operation on a daily basis. These more stringent regulations, which they consider easier to implement for larger companies, call for more time and manpower on administrative jobs, thereby impacting businesses productivity and profitability.

In developing countries, some entrepreneurs mentioned that they had faced a number of lengthy and complex regulations to formalize their business. All wished for easier administrative processes and licensing procedures, permit systems and simpler access to public services. They noted that they had been aware of the difficulties they would be facing when deciding to establish their business but that they factored this in as a necessity for their business creation and development. They admitted, though, that it was burdensome in many ways and constituted a constraint impacting the overall business context. They all underlined the fact that many persons are deterred by such complicated processes and therefore remain in the informal sector. This notably means that businesses do not operate on a level playing field.

In Ireland, our respondent, working in the development of a smart phone application, felt that the business climate is more favorable to large corporations than SMEs. Support granted to small companies is limited and programs for women entrepreneurs are deemed not adapted to businesswomen's requirements. As an employer, however, she praised the flexibility of the labor market. By contrast, in the Netherlands the woman entrepreneur explained that she could not hire employees, as in her coaching business she does not have the cash to fund the workforce in advance of her payments. She has to revert to freelancers and this prevents her from creating a stable, long-lasting workforce.

In Turkey our businesswoman, working in international insurance brokerage, was concerned with the US Government's sanctions against Iran that are depriving her of access to the Iranian market. Threats to impose sanctions against Turkey could further deteriorate the situation. The Turkish government's politics has frozen business in all sectors, however, by opening towards Russia it has favored the development of Turkish business, including hers, in that region of the world.

Generally, and although the registration process may have been eased over time, almost all businesswomen were of the view that the overall business climate deteriorated in recent years making it much more complex for most to develop and expand their business.

Box 8. Peace Villages for Respect of Differences and Equality of Residents

Southeast Asia faces Islamist radicalization that presents an enduring threat to security and safety, as well as to socio-economic, political and societal development. In Indonesia, through the involvement of civil society, a gendered perspective aims at preventing radicalization and violent extremism. Indeed, the **Wahid Foundation** seeks Women's Participation for Inclusive Society (WISE) by strengthening and promoting the capacity of grassroots communities to build peace and tolerance. This is done through collaboration with nine villages (Kelurahans) in West Java, Central Java, and East Java, which have committed to initiate Peace Villages with shared social order, based on respect for differences and equality among residents. Eventually, the initiative should grow to include 30 Peace Villages. Specific rules and procedures based on education and tolerance have been developed,²⁴ which are implemented and monitored by the participating villages.

Women's empowerment and entrepreneurship are central; household tasks and duties should be the responsibilities of both women and men and women's participation is broadened to build humanity-social cohesion, to perform conflict resolution efforts, and to build peace. In view of the latter and to prevent radicalization and terrorist recruitment, it is important to develop secure economic activities. Hence, women are also involved in entrepreneurship. In 2017, and in collaboration with UNWomen, a program was set up to develop the private sector to improve women's well-being and that of their families. Today, over 20,000 women are involved, which accounts for approximately 100 businesses.

Developed with the support of confirmed trainers, the project is articulated around cooperatives, which provide three types of economic activities to individuals as well as companies and larger client groups.

1) *One Laundry*: a woman manages the cleaning centers in which trained women workers wash, iron and dry clean clothes, which are collected from, and brought back to, the neighborhoods.

2) *One Shop*: stands for the production and sales of snacks and handicrafts. Four existing on-line companies ensure the advertisement of the villages' products. Online sales have notably supported the development of women's technical skills and their technology savviness. In addition, locally produced goods are also sold in two shops which have been set up outside the villages.

²⁴ See: The Standard Operating Procedures Of 9 Indicators for Peace Villages/Kelurahans.

3) *One cookies bakery*: about 80 women produce various types of Indonesian cookies, which are attractively packaged and labelled with a variety of peace narrative stickers.

Thanks to the cooperative approach and mutual lending, more women can engage in these commercial activities. But although the Foundation works in partnership with different stakeholders, including the private sector, interlocutors confirmed that accessing finance and justice were the main areas that warrant improvement.

Due to language limitations, it was only possible to engage in an exchange with the administrators of the Wahid Foundation. They provided fruitful insights. They mentioned that regions or countries facing radicalization may, by learning more about the initiative, envisage its replication and adoption in other contexts.

Useful sources:

<http://wahidfoundation.org/eng/index.php/publication/detail/Southeast-Asia-The-role-of-women-in-the-prevention-of-Islamist-radicalization-and-violent-extremism>

<http://wahidfoundation.org/eng/index.php/publication/detail/Public-Consultation-Report-on-National-Action-Plan-for-the-Prevention-of-Violent-Extremism-RAN-PE>

<http://wahidfoundation.org/eng/index.php/publication/detail/Policy-Recommendation-on-Implementation-of-National-Action-Plan-on-Women-and-Children-Protection-and-Empowerment-in-Social-Conflict-RAN-P3AKS-2014-2019>

<http://wahidfoundation.org/eng/index.php/publication/detail/Intolerance-and-Radicalism-Amongst-Women-Research-in-Five-Regions-Bogor-Depok-Great-Solo-Malang-and-Sumeneq>

<http://wahidfoundation.org/eng/index.php/publication/detail/National-Survey-Report-of-The-Potential-of-Social-Religious-Tolerance-among-Muslim-Women-in-Indonesia>

6. Competition and public governance

The rule of law, public sector integrity, effectiveness and quality of public service are critical for the confidence of entrepreneurs in institutions as policies affect their short-term business plan as well as long term investment strategies.²⁵

Market power abuse and anti-competitive practices will affect SMEs disproportionately as they typically face greater constraints than larger firms when seeking legal redress to confront anti-trust breaches.

Also, in light of businesses' multiple interactions with the administration, it is essential that public services act with integrity, transparency, efficiency and with good quality. Those elements shall indeed be drivers of companies' competitiveness. Public sector opacity and lack

²⁵ OECD (2012): "*Competitive Neutrality: Maintaining a Level Playing Field between Public and Private Business*," OECD Publishing, Paris.

of integrity will create particular problems to SMEs, which have fewer capacities than larger companies to design and implement anti-corruption mechanisms.

Arbitrary decision making, which is often closely associated to corruption in public administration, discourages the formalization of business activities and can even encourage formal companies to “de-formalize” some of their operations.²⁶

Measures:

In context of a perceived economic deterioration and a weakened business climate, improving public management and the development of data, including gender disaggregated information, would allow to conduct further research. The latter would allow developing informed and adequate rules and policies that ensure that gender is mainstreamed into the measures that relate to entrepreneurship.

Regulatory authorities in OECD countries have made important progress to reduce regulatory barriers to entrepreneurship, including by engaging in reforms to their competition regimes. Competition authorities are lowering the legal barriers to entry and limiting anti-trust exemptions. And indeed, about half of the OECD countries have adopted a national strategy to open government data. A few also actively encourage the re-use of the data both by the public sector or by external stakeholders. However, competition policy is largely gender blind and further studies are necessary to examine whether this neutrality is adequate for women’s entrepreneurship development.

Enhanced attention is also paid by governments to public integrity as a means to supporting more competitive and fair business environments; these measures remain, for the time being, gender blind.

Recommendations:

1. To ensure that all reforms are designed in support of a merit-based, transparent economy as this will benefit the population at large, including women and their business development;
2. to further research the need to add to the mandate of competition authorities a test on public interests as sustained by some authors,²⁷ which would include gender inequality amongst those public interests;

²⁶ G20/OECD (2015).

²⁷ Estefania Santacreu-Vasut and Chris Pike (2018).

3. to further research, document and report about women's economic achievements. This will also imply improving the development and collection of data, including gender disaggregated information.

Findings:

A number of interviewed women highlighted a lack of confidence in the existing framework and underlined the desirability to work in more transparent and competitive business environments.

Many desired more competitive markets with more entrants and additional firms, including women-owned and led, which would challenge incumbents. They were of the opinion that there is space for more competition and competitors.

Several businesswomen referred to concerns over anti-competitive practices and potential power abuses, which discourage market entry and innovation. This was notably linked to insufficient transparency and an inconsistent application of rules, which are important elements for predictability and manageability. These factors can have a bearing on the costs and sustainability of a business.

Applying the rule of law is sometimes not enough, as in Morocco, where our businesswoman sued several times for illegal importation of coffee, counterfeit of the brand and won. She mentioned her appreciation for the work of the judiciary, the renewed efforts of the customs but she regrets the waste of money, time and resources to defend many cases.

Interestingly some sectors such as communications and advertising are not generally prone to informality, this was stressed both in Japan²⁸ and Mexico. This sector, that provides mainly services to large brands, whether national or international, requires official invoices and adheres to international standards and rules. Communications, which is a costly business, needs to be justified in the accounts of the companies and towards shareholders. In Mexico, our entrepreneur reported how the shift from television to smart phones and the ensuing necessity to adapt more closely to client's needs favors SMEs like hers, that are more flexible, to the detriment of larger companies that have not yet adapted to a less TV-oriented market.

²⁸ The Japanese entrepreneur founded a creation company.

Box 9. Exploring the Linkages between Corruption and Gender Equality

Some researchers have started looking at the gender equality/lower corruption link since the early 2000s. This work, which is mostly theoretical, proposes various mechanisms including: 1) the role of gender egalitarian norms in developing and strengthening support for impartial institutions (Alexander 2018a, 2018b); 2) differences in gender role socialization leading to greater female intolerance of corruption (Dollar et al. 2001; Ersarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2017; Swamy et al. 2001); 3) women's power marginalization and the need to break up collusive networks to overcome this (Bauhr et al. 2018; Echazu 2010; Goetz 2007); and, 4) women's reliance on an effective state for public service provision and occupational opportunities that increase their empowerment (Alexander and Ravlik 2015; Bauhr et al. 2018; Stensöta et al. 2015).

Obviously, further concrete observations and assessments are required to understand the link and impact of corruption on gender equality. This could notably be achieved by including an analysis of the differences in gender exposure and vulnerability to corruption in integrity and anti-corruption programming.

It is also noteworthy that most women did not benefit from any particular support system and that they were not aware of any public institution that is monitoring women entrepreneurship. This undoubtedly impacts on the capacity to identify and inform women entrepreneurship.

As experienced by the authors at a much smaller scale, data on women entrepreneurs is scarce in many countries. This hinders the analysis of the measures to be adopted as well as their implementation, since there does not seem to be a match between the State that wishes to reach out to women and the women entrepreneurs who wish to obtain the necessary support. In developing and emerging economies, where many women operate informally, this information is even more incomplete. And although donors are willing to support women entrepreneurship, it is difficult to assess the impact of support measures without data. It would certainly be interesting, and even advisable, that initiatives such as the French Women Equity Program (see Box 10) be supported publicly and by the private sector and widely advertised by the media notably.

Box 10. The Women Equity Program: The First Impact Investing Scheme Dedicated to Women-led SMEs in France

The Women Equity Program is the first initiative in Europe dedicated to providing financial and operational support to women-led growth SMEs, and to promoting their success models, so as to contribute to a better gender balance in business leadership for a more sustainable growth in Europe.

This program is implemented by Women Equity for Growth, a not-for-profit organization. It builds on the observation that despite strong fundamentals (an employment rate of 80 percent for women between 25 and 49, and a high level of education—60 percent of masters degrees held by women) France was ranked 67th worldwide in 2013

(down from 53rd in 2008) for female contribution to the economy, according to the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report. SMEs, as principal contributors to growth and economic prosperity, are a key issue, given that a minority of SMEs is run by women. Moreover, today 52 percent of French SMEs, which employ two thirds of workers, have no women in their executive staff (compared to a world average of 34 percent). And research confirms that for those companies led by women, access to private equity (PE) financing is very limited. As an illustration, the proportion of private equity backed women-led companies is significantly inferior to the proportion of women led companies in the economy: they represented less than 4 percent of the PE small and mid-market (5<EV<75 M €) transactions in 2013.

This absence of women SMEs in private equity is not due to a lack of attractiveness, given the studies that have shown the consistent higher performance of these businesses that have developed under multiple constraints. Library House – Dow Jones published the results of research showing that out of 600 Private Equity backed European companies, those led by women demonstrated higher capital efficiency, requiring 35 percent less capital to generate 12 percent more revenues.

In addition, analyses by Women Equity for Growth of 40,000 French SMEs with revenues of more than 4 M € have shown that the 5,000 companies strictly led by women (Chairmen and CEOs) were more resilient during the crisis. A majority of them even maintained growth. Moreover, their revenues and their profitability declined less than their sector. Currently in France, there are more than 5,000 women led SMEs with over €4 million in sales and less than 250 employees. Even if these companies remain in the minority, they constitute a substantial investment universe, demonstrating relative higher performance in terms of growth, profitability, and job creation, with regards to the invested capital. This higher performance is essentially the result of the harder constraints they face as managers, and notably the drastic social selection process they have endured before and during the development of their companies. In general, these companies and their management suffer from low visibility, which does not contribute to change in the prevailing gendered entrepreneurial leadership model.

A rebalance of this situation has been shown to be one of the main growth factors in European economies, and an essential contributor to the societal equilibrium that conditions a more sustainable growth. Supporting companies that help promote a more gender balanced management model is a financial opportunity as well as responsible and socially useful.

So, Women Equity brings strategic support and finance to growth companies. As a long-term partner they support sponsored companies by providing access to capital for the development of plans, leveraging engaged business networks and bringing visibility to the companies they sponsor.

Women Equity also brings visibility to the media, which reports adequately about women entrepreneurs.

The program benefits from substantial institutional recognition, including that of the General Assembly of the European Council (resolution 55 – March 2011).

Source: <https://www.women-equity.org/women-equity/what/en>.

7. The impact of taxation on businesses

An effective regulatory environment also includes corporate and business taxes. High compliance costs and complex tax regimes may act as a deterrent to companies and even more so to SMEs since the proportion of resources that they divert to these functions are usually proportionally higher than for larger firms.

Certain aspects of business taxation, including asymmetric treatment of profits and losses, the distribution between capital and labor income taxation as well as tax credits for R&D may disadvantage small firms and particularly young ones.

Within OECD countries, there is a trend towards reducing Corporate Income Tax, which also applies to some SME specific regimes. Simplification measures in OECD and non-OECD economies have also been introduced, including exemptions on thresholds, special presumptive tax regimes and special replacement taxes.

This move is accompanied by efforts to reducing tax compliance costs by introducing electronic filing and payment systems.

Measures:

With a 22 percent corporate tax, our Turkish entrepreneur reckons that taxation is comparatively competitive and acceptable. In the current political and financial crisis that Turkey is undergoing, the government took measures to reduce the corporate tax by 5 percent and to pay the employer's share of the employee's taxes for six months when a new employee is hired. These very beneficial measures however do not cover the financial sector where she works.

In Tunisia, the progressive corporate tax decrease, from 40 percent to 38 percent and now 35 percent, fostered the development of SMEs. New recruitment contracts that allowed to hire staff for 12 to 24-month projects, without all the labor law constraints, were a determining factor in hiring more people, who were later retained by our Tunisian entrepreneur with full benefits. A fourth of the work force was hired with these project contracts.

Recommendations:

1. Governments should consider supporting measures that alleviate the burden of taxation in the first years of a company or business to foster its development.
2. These temporary measures should be extended to workers' social welfare so that entrepreneurs may hire and retain staff more easily when they are in the inception phase.

3. In addition, women entrepreneurs are often mothers and childcare benefits for women entrepreneurs should be particularly addressed, including nurseries. These should be accessible on an equitable footing to all parents.

Findings:

Women entrepreneurs tend to believe that overall tax policies and specific tax policy arrangements, which have a direct impact on the appropriability on returns by businesses, were not of principal consideration.

In general, they did not refer to any incentives' policy that particularly supported them in their choice to establish a business. Nor did they mention any provisions that helped an established firm to diversify: the scope of its activities, its location, the form of distribution of the business income, or to undertake investments and expand.

And although almost all businesswomen expressed concern over access to financial resources, these were not mentioned in relation to tax consideration at national, regional or municipal level.

In Zambia where our entrepreneur is in her first year of business in clothes manufacturing, pursuant to the turnover tax, she pays every month 3 percent for every sale she makes. She also pays the withholding tax, which amounts to 10 percent of her rentals. Considering the very small size of the company, she is satisfied with her current tax regime.

For small and micro enterprises in the Philippines, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), issues a certificate that exempts the company from paying income taxes. However, our Philippine's entrepreneur, who manages several businesses in the same location (arts, agriculture, handicraft, restaurant and tuition) expressed her frustration as she still has to pay taxes to the Bureau of Internal Revenue as the agencies do not seem to have aligned their policies.

Both Mexican entrepreneurs who are also engaged in not-for-profit ventures, regretted that their investments in these fields, that provide benefits to the country, could not be deducted from the taxes paid by their respective companies.

Some referred to family and tax policies, which are imposed on all but do not support entrepreneurs to fully participate in the labor market. For instance, in France, women entrepreneurs benefit less from social welfare and family policies than women employees. This impacts on the cost and feasibility of women's entrepreneurship, who may be deterred to be a

business owner and leader.²⁹ One of our French entrepreneurs running a consulting company suggested that a special status for women entrepreneurs should be created.

References were also made to women's need and limited ability to reconcile family obligations with working outside the home, in particular if public or private childcare and elder care services are lacking. Some women who had to face the absence of these services as employees decided to become self-employed to be able to work on a more flexible basis (see also last section of the report).

8. National or international sector-specific actions

It is widely recognized that trade and foreign investment are key drivers of global economic integration, growth and prosperity, that they are increasingly interlinked, but they generate fears regarding their distributional impact in a context of rising inequalities. This interconnectedness is strengthened by three related developments in the global economy: 1) global value chains (GVCs) linked to the increasing weight of multinational enterprises, 2) the growing importance of services, and 3) digitalisation that is deeply changing the organisation of economic activities.

International trade and investment are closely related and may be complementary (vertical FDI) or may substitute each other (horizontal) from a company's perspective.

Research suggests that international trade and regional integration have multiple impacts on producers and consumers. The outcomes may affect gender dynamics; they can reduce disparities or on the contrary widen the gender gap in the following areas:

- employment structure, type of work and qualifications, income and work conditions;
- access to resources (land, credit, technology);
- access to basic services; and
- consumption.

Research demonstrates that international trade and regional integration have multiple impacts on producers and consumers, including on women. The links between trade and investment liberalization and gender equality are complex, affecting different sectors of an

²⁹ France has recently aligned certain social welfare policies for women entrepreneurs and autonomous workers such as paid maternity leave: *Décret n° 2019-529 du 27 mai 2019 relatif à l'amélioration de la protection sociale au titre de la maladie et de la maternité des travailleurs indépendants.*

economy in dissimilar ways. Furthermore, trade and investment interact in shaping economic opportunities for men and women.

Some recent free trade agreements (FTAs) include trade and gender chapters, e.g., Chile-Uruguay³⁰ and Chile-Canada FTAs. While these provisions can promote cooperation initiatives for women's economic empowerment, the trade and gender chapters remain a "soft" component of the agreements: they do not establish gender-related rules that the parties should comply with, or thresholds to be reached. Neither do they imply harmonization of gender-related legislation between the parties or refer to the possible impact of the agreement on women. The Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment of the WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires in December 2017 is another recent example of a mild approach to mainstreaming gender in trade. Its signatories agreed to collaborate on making trade and development policies more gender responsive, including by engaging in a series of seminars³¹ in coordination with relevant international organizations to explore gender-related issues. A report on progress towards implementation of this joint declaration was announced for 2019 but remains to be published.³²

A recent IMF Working Paper³³ considers foreign direct investment (FDI) in relation to two composite gender indices by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index (GII) and the Gender Development Index (GDI). The paper finds that flows are positively associated with gender equality and negatively correlated with increased gender disparities, i.e., gender inequality. The authors state that: *if countries want to benefit fully from FDI inflows, improving the business environment for women and access to resources need to be lifted so women can enjoy free access to the labor market and to new income.* The IMF concludes that FDI may increase gender inequality in countries where women face higher and significant procedures to open and run a business. Low female access to resources, i.e., land,

³⁰ Chile-Uruguay Trade Agreement available at: <https://legislativo.parlamento.gub.uy/temporales/D2018070981-017945760.pdf>

³¹ The issues to be addressed include the promotion of female entrepreneurship and trade; identification of barriers that limit women's participation in trade; promotion of financial inclusion as well as access to trade financing and financial assistance for women traders; enhancement of women entrepreneurs' participation in public procurement markets; inclusion of women-led businesses, in particular MSMEs, in value chains; impact of trade facilitation in providing equal access and opportunities for women entrepreneurs; inventory of information sources, their complementarity and the identification of data gaps.

³² The report was not public at the time of the drafting of this study.

³³ IMF Working Paper (January 2018): *Foreign Direct Investment and Women Empowerment: New Evidence on Developing Countries*, Rasmané Ouedraogo and Elodie Marlet

non-landed assets or financial resources, is negatively correlated with FDI and there FDI is found to increase gender disparities.

Measures:

Our Zambian entrepreneur working in agro-processing explained that the Zambia Development Agency facilitates women's international trade to neighboring countries when the required quality of products is met.

Helping SMEs overcome difficulties in accessing global markets has become an important dimension of a number of national export strategies in OECD countries. Some countries also include expert support in new industrial-innovation policies. Countries have furthermore revised governance arrangements with a view to improving efficiency in their expert support. Yet, no specific gender aspect was envisaged to support women entrepreneurship and to close the gender entrepreneurship gap. No gender considerations are associated with the financial and non-financial support, which is developed for SMEs, although stronger attention is provided for multinational enterprises (MNEs) for expanding markets abroad.

Recommendations:

1. To engage in further data collection and research on women's participation in international trade and investment with a view to identify the reason(s) explaining their limited involvement.
2. To examine further the links between trade and investment liberalization and gender with a view to determining the impact on women entrepreneurs, including by sectors and determine possible government actions. To that effect, it will be important to notably monitor the findings of the follow-up work to the joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment of the 2017 WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires.
3. To identify and put in place mechanisms promoting women that wish to export by providing them training and facilitating their participation in international fairs and exhibitions.
4. Involving women entrepreneurs into reflections about trade and investment and securing their participation in trade and investment agreement negotiations can help

identify adequate support measures to ensure inclusion and enhanced women empowerment.

Findings:

Many women entrepreneurs involved in the study offer services and very few are involved in foreign trade. When they do engage in international business transactions, they participate in different regimes and procedures. The women entrepreneurs referred to experienced no particular difficulty, except in Turkey where our entrepreneur explained that she exports insurance and brokerage services outside of Turkey and she imports foreign insurance into Turkey. This requires a substantial amount of procedures as every country has a specific regulation that needs to be complied to.

When trading in goods, we learned that often the different trading provisions act as barriers to internationalization and that it is very difficult for smaller producers to remain competitive in an environment with large actors that practice very low prices. In such cases, women employers noted that they face difficulties to remunerate their employees with fair and decent salaries. Establishing and maintaining decent salaries and working conditions were considered particularly challenging in economic environments in which informality is high.

“We have a lot of support for women in Zambia and regulation has never been a challenge. What you need is to attain the quality required. The Zambia Development Agency is looking for women to take them to Congo or Angola to facilitate their exports.”

Women entrepreneurs interviewed in the context of the study are not involved in operations of Global Value Chains (GVCs). GVCs have provided opportunities for SMEs to participate and specialize in tasks within value chains that offer access to foreign markets.³⁴ Yet, they also increased competition from lower-cost producers, which may have forced many companies to close their business. International investments were extremely rare, and the women interviewed had no experience with the regulatory framework for investment.

Women’s limited exposure to internationalization may be the consequence of the sector in which women in general operate. Women are not always represented in the sectors that are liberalized by trade and it may be more difficult for them to be able to export.

³⁴ OECD (2019): OECD SME and Entrepreneurship Outlook 2019, Paris, 2019.

Other factors can relate to the nature of the business, which is usually rather small. It could also be due to women's limited involvement in networks that can have a meaningful effect on their businesses (see section below).

9. Third-party investment

We have seen above, under the access to finance section, that bank lending is a common source of finance for SMEs; yet women have difficulties accessing such funding (see section 3 above).

Business owners may call on alternative sources to fund their companies, including asset based and equity funding. In that case, businesses agree to the participation of a third party who invests in their company. Such investors may present numerous advantages for entrepreneurs, including accessing capital and thereby avoiding bank loans. Procuring capital from investors eliminates constraints related to the limits of an entrepreneur's personal funds, it also constitutes a form of guarantee for the banker. In involving a third-party investor in the company, a part of the business burden can be shared. Furthermore, businesses may involve other investors to extending markets or having access to new processes and technologies.

Measures

Women generally have greater difficulties than men in approaching and being taken seriously by investors. For instance, according to a recent study female-founded companies get less than 1 percent of total UK venture capital, while male-founded ones get 89 percent.³⁵ The Boston Consulting Group found a clear funding gap but also showed that companies founded by women performed better over time, generating 10 percent more revenue on average over a five-year period than male-founded companies.³⁶ But could things possibly be changing? The authors note that initiatives to develop female investors networks are on the rise, while women experienced in venture capital are setting up new networks and encouraging women to learn about angel investing.

Such initiatives might look into the United Kingdom *Aspire Fund for Women* initiative,³⁷ launched in 2008 with public money to co-invest alongside other private investors in women-led enterprises to increase the number of high-growth women-led businesses.

³⁵ Financial Times, "Why female founders are tapping female investors for cash," 7 May 2019 quoting a study of the British Business Bank.

³⁶ Boston Consulting Group: "Why Women-Owned Startups Are a Better Bet."
<https://www.bcg.com/publications/2018/why-women-owned-startups-are-better-bet.aspx>

³⁷ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/united-kingdom/aspire-fund-providing-equity-womens-businesses>

Recommendations:

1. To further investigate adequate gender rebalancing measures in order to understand if businesswomen's reticence to engaging in third party investments should be confirmed as a wider trend;
2. To attract more women investors and advisors as part of capital and angel networks. Whilst women may rightfully choose to remain the sole owners of their businesses, they should not deprive themselves of an opportunity to grow and to find alternative business funding;
3. To create women-led venture capital funds specifically directed at investment in women-owned enterprises;
4. To look into the possibility of benefitting from public policies that encourage the formation of women-focused venture capital investments.

Findings:

For the women involved in this study, bank credit is the primary source of external funding as is usually the case for SMEs. Most women mentioned have no experience with third party investors. Others were approached by potential investors that had expressed an interest in participating in their company; some had received very attractive proposals. Yet, they did not follow up and nor would they do so in the short term.

The few that experienced dealing with third party investors mentioned:

- One case related to a full sale of the company
- In the Netherlands, our entrepreneur working in executive coaching referred to the creation of a joint venture with another party, mostly to share the returns and risks. The two co-owners also share decision-making and governance. The company pursued this business form to access a wider range of markets, including emerging markets, and take advantage of different regulatory provisions and facilities in the country of the co-owners
- Our Zambian entrepreneur working in agro-processing has transferred 20 percent and 10 percent of her shares to two of her friends but her partners are not active and this third-party investment has not helped her sufficiently to develop, which she did by obtaining a grant to buy machinery

- Our Turkish entrepreneur, working in insurance brokerage, mentioned the desire to modernize the business through the exchange of new practices and technologies with a third-party investor. However, as the investor appeared to be only interested in the contacts and the revenues of the company, the transaction did not take place.
- One French businesswoman noted that she had met with different investment funds but in so doing she also learned that they all had a different mode of operation and that it was not easy to determine how funds can support an innovative company. She decided to remain the sole owner but to look for funds supporting her R&D.

Box 11. Access to Venture Capital in Silicon Valley

Since a few highly-publicized USA law suits, the press has started to inquire about Silicon Valley's culture, where in 2015, 96 percent of the venture capitalists were males, and described the culture as "savagely misogynistic".³⁸ A study has highlighted the abyssal difference of treatment between women and men with only 2.7 percent of the 6,517 companies that received venture funding from 2011 to 2013 having women CEOs.³⁹ If this was not enough, the level of funding is also the lowest, as venture capitalists typically fund women at USD100,000.⁴⁰

None of the women ruled out that in the longer term they may consider third party investors. However, most mentioned that they would in that case have to call on external advice prior to engaging in any such transaction.

The authors considered that women's discreet attitude may be due to the size of their business. There seems, however, to be no correlation as the larger business owners also showed reluctance in engaging in third party transactions. A conclusion could be that women tend to keep their working tool. Another factor may be related to the fact that many SMEs, whether owned by women or men, are viewed as a family asset to be passed on to the next generation. The intervention of a third party could be seen as running counter to that project.

10. Access to knowledge, technology and innovation

By a process of accumulation of their stock of knowledge-based capital, companies will engage in innovation. Business investment in knowledge-based capital (of which R&D is part) is considered critical by all, even though not all sectors have the same needs.

³⁸ Newsweek: What Silicon Valley Thinks of Women, by Nina Burleigh, January 28, 2015 <https://www.newsweek.com/2015/02/06/what-silicon-valley-thinks-women-302821.html>

³⁹ Babson College, Diana Report, Women entrepreneurs 2014: *Bridging the gender gap in venture capital*, by Professors Candida G. Brush, Patricia G. Greene, Lakshmi Balachandra, and Amy E. Davis, September 2014.

⁴⁰ Newsweek, *ibidem*

Knowledge-based capital, including artificial intelligence (AI), impacts businesses building on science and technology related fields more than may investments in fixed assets, which are crucial in production related businesses. Yet, AI is obviously increasing dramatically in all businesses.

Scientific, technical and managerial skills are essential for a firm to produce, use and absorb innovation and new technologies and in turn be more competitive.

Access to innovation assets is particularly critical for SMEs. They are the primary source of innovation and may benefit from new and diversified innovation models. But they generally also face higher challenges in finding and managing technology, data and networks that enable innovation, often due to the rapidly changing nature of innovation.

Indeed, smaller firms may be less familiar of the potential of new technological and digital tools, which could improve their business and are less inclined to engage in R&D, including for capacity considerations. Moreover, their integration into networks that generate knowledge spillovers may be limited, which restricts their exposure to external sources of understanding and competence acquisitions.

Building on the observation that women are less involved in core business networks in which major domestic companies are active and which are mostly dominated by men, the authors consider that there is probably a technological and a knowledge gap, which should be addressed through education for women-owned companies. This gap also impacts on their capacity to grow larger and technology-driven companies.

Measure

In the Moroccan company reviewed, a new server was bought in 2017 with the most up-to-date technology to accelerate access to information. The decision was taken one year in advance of the purchase in order to evaluate all existing financial and technological options. For the expertise and the smooth integration of this technology, the company benefitted from an annual training program called *les Formations Programmées*, which was 70 percent financially supported by *Maroc PME* and the remainder by the company.

Recommendations:

1. To address the gap in women's involvement in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) by reinforcing their capacity to participate in STEM

teaching at schools, universities and trainings throughout their career (as initiated in several OECD countries).

2. To use government-funded technology extension policies and programs to provide tailored support for the expansion and adaptation of technologies (e.g., equipment but also management skills) and increase companies' absorption capacity.
3. To ensure that a gender lens is applied when governments are providing SME-targeted financial support, technical assistance and innovation support packages to ensure that SMEs keep pace with technological change and industrial transformations.

Findings:

All businesswomen emphasized the importance of being abreast of new technological developments and underlined that knowledge is of major importance for innovation, which was identified as key for all businesses reviewed.

Some women mentioned that they were constantly seeking the right information. Different options were mentioned. While skills may be held inhouse, all referred to innovation and knowledge acquired externally. Some mentioned seeking specialists to obtain advice, others referred to outsourcing advice to consultancy firms with a variety of skills and competencies.

One entrepreneur in Turkey mentioned that she had envisaged to merge with another company, hoping that this would enlarge her business basis with new skills and competencies. Regrettably, the investor was only interested in her customer base and not in sharing technological skill, so the deal did not go through.

Investing in the right technology at the appropriate moment was a key challenge identified by some entrepreneurs from Morocco and France. The inadequate investment can be fatal for a business.

Innovation is essential to the women interviewed. Creativity in terms of product development was a concern for all women. In Mexico, Zambia, the Netherlands, and the Philippines, the entrepreneurs were particularly concerned in their development with applying and respecting high environmental standards. Interestingly, this is not necessarily correlated with the size or the type of business since it is a preoccupation of the very big and the small companies. Rather, it was a common position on how to engage in their community and the need to share common values for a better society at large.

In Ireland, access to cutting-edge technology is fundamental for the development of the mobile application of our entrepreneur. The special technical skills required can only be acquired on the international human resources market. SMEs have difficulties in recruiting the right talents as they are often more attracted to working in large firms who offer competitive salary packages. Another challenge is to set up collaborative agreements with technology-oriented universities that often rely on complex Intellectual Property (IP) frameworks agreements. These agreements may affect the SME's IP protection rights, thereby limiting their capacity to develop proprietary services.

11. Public procurement

Government spending in public procurement represents a large part of GDP. Because public sector procurement is funded with public money, great importance is given to transparent and accountable procurement mechanisms, which should ensure probity and value for money. Public procurement should also promote a competitive and open market. Countries use public procurement as a tool to foster secondary policy objectives, including SME development.

Public procurement was identified over the last decades by international institutions, legislators and judges as a corruption prone activity and number of policy recommendations, supported by a wealth of literature, aim at reducing the risks that are associated with this activity.

Women are relatively less involved in public procurement than men, as there are fewer women business owners and they often operate companies in sectors in which tenders are not the norm.

The public procurement mechanism towards supporting gender equality may potentially be strong, as illustrated by initial efforts and considerations described in Box 12. Hence, further work on the implementation approach of different countries could be desirable to identify whether and when measures attain the expected impact and public procurement promotes gender equality. Applying a gender lens may also help identify mechanisms involving more women entrepreneurs and overcome their reservation to getting involved as described in the findings.

Box 12. Introducing a Gendered Dimension into Public Procurement

Some countries seek to bring gender equality considerations into their public procurement procedures as a prerequisite to public procurement contracts to advance social change and promote equality.

One approach, for instance, is to ask suppliers applying to a tender to demonstrate their compliance with gender equality in the workplace. In Switzerland, wage equality for companies of more than 50 employees is requested. In Australia, companies of more than 100 employees must demonstrate, with specific indicators, their compliance with the 2012 Workplace Gender Equality Act.

Some countries use public procurement in a strategic manner to support the participation of women-owned businesses in the procurement process. Indonesia, Israel, Korea, South Africa and the United States implement set-aside measures targeted at women-owned businesses. In Korea, for instance, 5 percent of the procurement tenders on goods and services are to be directed to female entrepreneurs.

Austria, Belgium and Canada use broader gender assessment requirements in the case of public procurement to bring to light the differentiated impacts that procurement projects have on men and women. For instance, gender equality can be assessed ex ante (e.g., Austria) or a gender-based analysis has to be integrated into the Treasury Board submission for a procurement (Canada).

The principle of non-discrimination is at the center of public procurement systems in Sweden with the adoption of the National Public Procurement Strategy in 2016.

The United Kingdom reports planning to extend the requirement of the Social Value Act in central government to ensure that all major procurements explicitly consider social values where appropriate, which means that it goes beyond the sole principle of value for money.⁴¹

Measure:

Generally, the trade sectors in which women work mostly (agri-business, care and education services) are not taken into consideration in public procurement tenders. Public tenders should, therefore, be more oriented towards businesses where women work. For instance, if public money is systematically dedicated to building and maintaining roads women will not be involved in the public tenders. If, on the other hand, a tender is attributed to feeding children in schools, it is highly likely that women will have a much greater opportunity of participating.

Recommendations:

1. To set requirements favoring gender equality in public contracts and grants, at least as a temporary measure to ensure the participation of disadvantaged groups;

⁴¹ OECD (2019) [Fast Forward to Gender Equality](#)

2. To make women's participation in companies' boards and in higher management an adjudication criterion;
3. To ensure that civil servants, who are defining, awarding and implementing public procurement contracts, are trained on how to integrate gender considerations into their work.

Findings:

Only a few entrepreneurs in our sample have participated in public tenders and reported limited success rates. The two businesswomen in France participated in a tender, which helped develop their business, the company's growth and visibility both among the public administration as well as with other companies. Interestingly, one of the tenders' objectives was to monitor gender-sensitive policies. Being a woman entrepreneur had not been considered in the selection process.

Almost all mentioned that they had no confidence in tendering processes. For some, the principle is too heavy and burdensome, the time to invest too long in regard of the uncertainty of its outcomes. Several expressed doubts concerning the transparency of the awarding of contracts, noting that the criteria are not as clear and fair as the regulation would want the processes to be. Entrepreneurs in more innovative businesses also mentioned that the persons defining the tendering criteria were sometimes themselves not at the very fore of economic and technological developments.

12. Involvement into a supply Chain

Supply chains, which ensure the integration of all activities involved in the process of sourcing, procurement, conversion and logistics so that products may reach the final customer, are considered essential in economic development literature. Indeed, information and communications technologies (ICT) enabled the organization of spatially dispersed complex tasks. This contributed to the industrialization and high rates of economic growth in several Asian developing economies and this modified the distribution of incomes across countries.⁴²

Participation in supply chains, initiated by the successful completion of low value-added manufacturing tasks, may represent important business opportunities for entrepreneurs that can enter the network of suppliers of companies to produce and distribute products. Appropriate

⁴² The supply chain perspective
https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/aid4tradesupplychain13_part1_e.pdf

institutional and industrial support can help to drive the private sector to develop supply chains. This can be achieved by ensuring that entrepreneurs are sufficiently competitive and attain high performance levels.

Measure:

The United Nations *Women's Empowerment Principles* were adopted by over 2,000 business leaders around the world, to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community. Also called *Equality Means Business*, the principles emphasize the business case for corporate action to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Its 5th principle is to implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women. The UN proposes that businesses should look at opportunities to invest in women's empowerment and advance gender equality across their full value chains, from challenging restrictive gender stereotypes with marketing and advertising efforts to procuring from women-owned businesses and improving conditions for women workers in their value chains. According to UN Women, only 12 percent of the businesses are effectively including gender equality criteria in supply chain management tools.⁴³

Recommendations:

Supply-chain processes can represent an opportunity for women-owned SMEs to develop their business and have stable revenues. However, they can, as we have seen in the example mentioned in this section, potentially jeopardize their business. A cautious and informed approach is recommended.

For Governments and relevant stakeholders such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Industries or Sector Associations:

1. To be aware of and monitor supply-chain processes;
2. To adequately inform and advise SMEs, especially if women-owned, on the costs and benefits of supply-chain processes;
3. To set up an office, or an efficient online service liaising with chain-suppliers to advise SMEs on the supply-chain processes.

⁴³ https://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/publications/2018/WEPs_Trends_Report_2018.pdf

Findings:

Surprisingly, and despite the economic significance of supply chains in today's economies, only one entrepreneur in the sample had some experience in this matter and another had made inconclusive negotiations. The others mostly considered that this issue was not relevant to their business, and that supply chains had not come across their way in the past and nobody referred to the matter for further consideration in the future.

Our Zambian entrepreneur working in clothes manufacturing was once involved in a sub-contracting arrangement and produced 300 pieces of clothes. The experience was not positive as the company was delaying in bringing their fabric and not paying on time. It has helped her, however, with learning how to handle this type of business. She is currently negotiating with companies that "brand," i.e., she produces clothes in accordance with the third party's requirements and they brand and sell them.

The businesswoman from the Philippines who mentioned having briefly envisaged engaging in a wider network also noticed that she had found out that integrating with a bigger company's network from Asia would have substantially reduced her revenues thereby deteriorating the working conditions of the women she employed, which would have had negative consequences on the living conditions of the families of the community. She decided to abstain from this business proposal. She remarked that the offer that she had received was to produce a large number of products of a lower quality. She felt that her know-how, her artistic prowess and the quality of the craftsmanship that she had taught to her employees would have been lost in the process.

13. Network engagement

Entrepreneurial networks increase business opportunities and, through a healthy exchange of information between their participants, can help improve the effectiveness of the companies they represent. Networks can also, when well-introduced, politically-accepted and culturally-established, interact with governments and policy makers and defend the interests of their members.

They range from very informal mutual support arrangements up to national and international membership organizations equipped with formal rules, substantial membership fees and employed professional staff. Network examples are notably: chambers of commerce, business and alumni associations focused on business development, community-based business clubs, industry associations, investment clubs with thematic aims, some venture capital

organizations and women's associations, which can represent the same interests as the organizations mentioned above or have a human right's and advocacy approach.

Measures:

Like the “He For She” UN campaign for the advancement of gender equality, launched in 2014, which encourages both genders to partake as agents of change and take action against negative stereotypes and behaviors, other initiatives and networks increasingly seek to involve men and boys in support of gender equality and in furtherance of economic empowerment.

Over the last decade, all international organizations have increased attention on gender equality and women empowerment. This focus was notably catalyzed by the 2015 negotiation and the subsequent adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development, Sustainable Agenda and countries worldwide committed to achieving gender equality (SDG5). This commitment translates into specific gender studies and analysis for stakeholders, the creation of policy networks in support of policy changes, the establishment of voluntary policies—including the balancing of speakers in conference panels or the voluntary policy to ensure balanced recruitment at all levels of employment. But these efforts need to be carried further at domestic levels. Various employer associations (Italy, France, Morocco notably) have been led by women in recent years; yet the different committees of these associations are frequently missing women's participation. Women all too often are in women's separate networks, although recently some have thought to open and attract men to supporting their initiatives (e.g., Les Premières).

Recommendations:

1. To identify the benefits that come with wider, mainstream networks, encourage women entrepreneurs to be more assertive and join such networks.
2. To encourage major business networks to provide businesswomen with adequate opportunities to hold leading positions in such networks to ensure that women benefit from wider social capital.
3. To ensure adequate links between women networks and mainstreaming networks so that the concerns of businesswomen are better understood and considered, including in public private dialogue (see next section).

Findings:

Entrepreneurial networks are recognized as an important source of information. They usually evolve around experience exchanges, identifying problems and opportunities, policy and advocacy developments at national or international levels, including regulatory matters that impact a business, technical developments within the field and effective methods of communication or administration. Networks can also inform entrepreneurs on where to find resources. In emerging markets and developing countries, although there may be a number of institutions supporting and promoting entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial networks are often in their early stages. In those countries, cultural settings are not yet supportive of a transparent and competitive private sector and this limits the representativeness of the networks and hence their impact. In environments where there is a lack of private entrepreneurial sector, there is also a lack of understanding by governments and policy makers of the value of non-governmental organizations' advocacy work.

All women interviewed noted that the local, national and international networks to which they have access are very important for their personal development. They are of the opinion that their networks have the potential of providing support to their business development and stimulate them to innovate. They noted that network relations are frequently trusted sources of advice and support.

Only a few of the women interviewed are part of the mainstreaming, formal business associations at domestic, regional or sectoral levels. Rather, they are to a very large extent mostly involved in their own networks, generally women's networks, as maintaining relations with others is a constitutive part of their business. This impact is further analyzed in the section on public-private dialogue as it covers women's position in society as well as of society's capacity to identify and hear their specific needs.

Women can also be innovative. For instance, our French entrepreneur managing a consulting company, by being involved in a network that takes care of the arts, has developed a way of getting in touch with high level philanthropists. She has thereby created a precious web of contacts that she can use for her company's business.

Women's networks, however, tend to be smaller than men's and more oriented towards specific goals. They may be considered as less significant by policy makers who tend to react to larger and what they perceive as more powerful interest groups. Although the businesswomen interviewed report on important moments of exchange with governments, such as for our Irish-

based, Mexican and Moroccan entrepreneurs, it may be questioned whether they can draw as much as their men counterparts on crucial social capital. This consideration could be linked to women entrepreneurs' lack of access to capital and whether it could be due to the fact that they have less exposure to the decision makers of their country.

14. Involvement into public-private dialogue

The Public Private Dialogue (PPD), which is a particular form of social dialogue process, builds on an institutional arrangement bringing together a group of public and private sector actors.⁴⁴ This type of dialogue is advanced in some countries, mostly in developed democratic market economies and is hardly introduced in others. For instance, in the North Africa region, public-private dialogue has not yet reached maturity. But with the wealth of complex, articulated decisions that policy makers need to make today, as well as the increasing importance of taking effective decisions addressed to well-informed citizens, the authors are confident that the private and the public sectors will want to build on their respective relationships over the coming years.

Measure:

The United Nations' "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs) recognize the importance of creating dynamic and systematic partnerships with the private sector and civil society. In particular, they are included in Goal 17, which is based on common principles, values and objectives, in order to mobilize essential resources to achieve the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals and ensure the proper implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The rationale being that businesses and non-governmental organizations are sometimes better qualified than public institutions to deal with particular problems.

Recommendations:

1. Much in the same way as the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 has imposed the participation of women in peace building processes, women should always be present in PPDs so that their interests may be represented.
2. It would be important to engage in awareness raising campaigns and clarify the difference between participating in networks and in a public-private dialogue; a distinction which is not always fully understood.

⁴⁴ [OECD 2007, Constructing Inclusive Public-private Dialogue.](#)

3. Governments, policy makers and relevant stakeholders should commit and implement procedures that guarantee women's representation in the public private dialogue.

Findings:

PPD is a powerful means for mutual understanding between policy makers and entrepreneurs allowing to find policy solutions that are targeted, mutually agreed, and sustainable. It has the potential to uncover policy solutions for entrepreneurship, whether it relates to financing policies, taxation, innovation, education, or any other aspect of the business enabling environment.

Thus, for an entrepreneur the involvement into a PPD process can represent an opportunity to positively influence the business environment.

While all women are involved in networks, the majority does not engage in PPDs. Less than a third of them mentioned being active players and supporters of PPD processes in their communities (both Mexican entrepreneurs, Morocco, Turkey and Ireland). Those involved, the authors observed, are more assertive in the local and international networks and have a strong engagement within them.

In Turkey, for instance, our entrepreneur advises the government on how to analyze specific aspects of the construction sector in order to define whether it would be adequate to make certain insurance policies compulsory as is done in other countries.

In Morocco, our entrepreneur was able to bring to the attention of the government proposals in favor of SMEs. In particular, thanks to her contribution, the *Confédération Générale des Entreprises du Maroc* (CGEM) has managed to enter the *Chambre des Conseillers*, the Senate, since 2014, thereby dramatically improving its capacity to influence the public-private dialogue. The CGEM, for example, makes proposals to the annual budget bill passed in parliament.

The women engaged in PPD are convinced of the usefulness of their actions. The benefit is not only for themselves, although some admitted that being involved in these dialogues allowed them to learn about opportunities, which could benefit their company. They saw in those dialogues a wider social impact for their community at large.

On the other hand, several women expressed concerns that their voice is not heard. Interestingly, women engaged in the PPD referred to this concern, but were of the view that it was important to be at the table and participate to allow society to eventually progress. Those

not involved in a PPD were not in favor of engaging, precisely because they fear that their contribution would have no bearing.

Other women not engaged in PPDs mentioned that they were eager to participate but having little available time, an understandable argument considering that most of them are entrepreneurs and mothers, they felt that it was better to leave the PPD engagement to others.

15. Other factors of success: the role of the families

At the end of the interview, our women entrepreneurs made comments on other factors that had had an impact on the development of their business.

Measures:

Equal parenting is increasingly being debated and progressively inserted in national legislations. Several OECD countries address affordability of early child-care and childhood education through increased subsidies, benefits or rebates.

Furthermore, in an effort to share caregiving more equally between parents, many countries now offer incentives to fathers to take parental leave to ensure that mothers can remain in the labor force and progress in their career. These efforts should be extended to entrepreneurship activities.

Recommendations:

1. Access to early childcare and childhood education is crucial for gender equality and women entrepreneurship; it is a major issue in many countries and should be dealt with either by creating child care centers or offering financial support to women. Addressing childcare support would greatly alleviate women entrepreneurs' heavy schedule and favor the creation and expansion of SMEs.

Findings:

Interestingly, although no specific mention was made to that effect, several women clearly evidenced the importance of family and family ties in their entrepreneurial experience. Some underlined that their individual choices to become entrepreneurs and the characteristics of their businesses cannot be understood without the "family" dimension. The interviews brought to light how the family acted as an "obligation" but more often as an "opportunity" and a crucial "supporter" for the women's individual career choices.

We learned about one case where a high career performing lady in Japan created a company in order to be able to deal with a good work-life balance and accompany her husband

abroad. The family acted to some extent as an obligation by influencing the woman's choices in pushing her towards entrepreneurship. The family also influenced the way the business was run; first as self-employed and in the later expansion the company allowed her to come back to her home country to take care of the communication of major international European firms. For her and for a few other interviewed women (in Zambia, Mexico and France), the perceived flexible schedules of entrepreneurship were a determining factor for the business choice.

"I started my business as a necessity, I had two children and didn't want to be away from home too long. Having my own business was the only way to remain in business"

Others referred to the fact that they pulled towards entrepreneurship as an opportunity, allowing them to achieve their objectives and satisfy their ambitions. Women from Mexico, France, India and the Philippines noted the different ways in which family had played an essential role in providing them support in their role as entrepreneurs. Family offered moral and psychological support. Married women felt in particular that their husbands had a fundamental role and had encouraged their choice to become an entrepreneur. Women also claimed that they would not have been able to run their business without their husband's concrete support and help. This is particularly true when they also had family responsibilities and young children with their husbands taking care of them at times (France, Mexico, India). For an unmarried woman, the mother's support was particularly determining (Philippines).

The authors also identified the role of the family in the context of a form of generational continuity with the children being integrated and supportive of the mother's business (Mexico).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In this diverse, dense and complex analytical exercise a number of conclusions can be drawn which could be the basis for further action and research on women's entrepreneurship.

Overall, women entrepreneurs remain largely invisible despite their major achievements and outstanding involvement in their respective business sectors. As in many other aspects of women's lives, their successes appear to be unaccounted for or even disregarded.

Access to finance is certainly the stumbling block to women's lives as entrepreneurs. It seems to capture in a nutshell all the difficulties that they need to face: the cultural aspects, as women are—or were—taught in many cultures not to speak about money; the entrepreneurial aspects as their companies often do not correspond either by size of the product or service to the standards that lenders expect; and the social aspects as the women often lack the training

needed to talk to lenders and lenders are not always used to dealing with women-owned businesses.

But the potential for women entrepreneurs is large and should be better exploited by governments and the many stakeholders that gravitate around small entrepreneurship: BDS, banks, employer's unions and trade unions, large corporations and NGOs. All should streamline women in their processes and ensure that women's respective sectors and services are sufficiently addressed, involved and evaluated. It is not sufficient to have women trained, to offer them services and ensure their presence in the ranks of their offices. Their needs, requirements and standards should be specifically analyzed and tailor-made service should be offered.

Women's horizons also need to be expanded whether it is in technology, exports, public procurement, third party investment or public private dialogue. Governments should lead by example by imposing women's presence in the public arena whether it be in STEM education, in international fairs and state missions abroad, in adapting the rules of public procurement to better involve women and in including them in the public private dialogue.

The women interviewed are dynamic, profoundly committed to their companies and employees and have a strong innate or nurtured business sense. This has led the authors to consider that public policies towards entrepreneurial creation should ensure that a careful selection of the women that they wish to promote should be made as not everyone can become an entrepreneur. Dedicating time and resources to this selection is important as, if the women entrepreneurs succeed, they will hire and train the staff that is better at employment work.

Annex 1

The Study Methodology

1) Identification of cases and countries

The particularity of this study lies in its review of concrete business cases led by women from around the world. Through the interviews held, they all brought evidence of their individual agency, autonomy and empowerment through entrepreneurship and that of their environment. They also allow to exemplify the agents of change supportive of their personal success. Interestingly, the authors found that these different witnesses direct to some common traits.

This study is rather unique as it looks through the lens of the women entrepreneurs who assess the positive factors that contributed to their engagement and success. Obviously, they also bring to light the difficulties they had to overcome. Some are essential components of enterprise creation and development. It is for instance striking that all women, except one, faced difficulties, to different degrees and at different moments of the lifecycle of their company, to accessing finance.

There is an abundant literature describing different actions that various stakeholders, including governments, may warrant to put into place in support of women agency through employment. Literature on entrepreneurship development, including through SME policies, also addresses women's empowerment and increasingly women-specific recommendations are being made. But the authors are not familiar with a wealth of studies building on case descriptions as this study does.

Differently from many events such a women's entrepreneurship conferences where women will tell their stories and return to their work on the next day, here their experiences are collected, the issues that they raise are analyzed and compared.

The authors would like to put into perspective that one of the study's most surprising findings is the invisibility of women entrepreneurs and the difficulty that they had to face to find them, in an environment which, almost at worldwide level, is sensitive to the need to focus on supporting women's economic empowerment and agency. This invisibility in their view has a detrimental effect on the collective perception of entrepreneurship and it deprives women from passing on their know-how to other women and to society at large. Generally, women have lost the tradition of handing down and passing on their knowledge to other women, and other generations. This study demonstrates that this tradition can be rekindled as women volunteered to transmit their stories and share their experience with other women.

A notable exception is the dissemination platform set up by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) around 2013.⁴⁵ It aimed at building the capacity of the European Member States for effective implementation of gender mainstreaming strategies and gender equality policies. Building on a set of criteria, the platform informs in a standardized and practical manner on “good practices” by explaining methods or tools for capacity enhancement such as gender training, competence development, awareness-raising, monitoring, networking, funding, and benchmarking. The examples raised highlighted the measures that had successfully worked and provided useful advice and contact points. The authors contacted some of the beneficiaries of the entrepreneurship good practices identified as contact points for those practices. Some of them were no longer pursued, and it is the authors’ impression that some good practices, which may have been extremely beneficial at a time, are now no longer operational.

In spite of these difficulties the authors were able, thanks to relations and connections, to identify women entrepreneurs through different networks involved in women’s economic empowerment. Eventually, and having addressed about a hundred persons through different channels and in a very persevering manner, the authors were able to collect the contributions of the twenty women included in this report. In fairness, it should also be stated that entrepreneurs in general and women entrepreneurs in particular are very busy people and often have limited time to dedicate to international gender studies.

The following countries were envisaged in the original list:

- from developed countries: Canada, France, Germany, UK, USA;
- from MENA countries: Bahrain, Morocco, UAE;
- from emerging economies: Brazil, China, India, Israel, South Africa, South Korea and Turkey.

Cases in the following countries were analyzed:

- from developed countries: France, Ireland, Japan and the Netherlands;
- from MENA countries: Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia;

⁴⁵ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices?ts=entrepreneurship>

- from emerging economies: India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Philippines, Turkey and Zambia.

Interestingly, despite the many differences in the countries, measures and business climate, the women interviewed have often lived through similar events.

2) Criteria for case selection

The authors consider that eventually all entrepreneurs would benefit from formal employment conditions. Indeed, all economies should strive towards formalizing businesses. This does ensure a number of benefits to business owners and their employees as well as the population at large. It also limits economies' exposure to risks of illegal acts, including corruption and other crimes.

With this concern in view, they were eager to interview women formally engaged in the economy. For the case selection, the authors retained the ILO definition of "successful enterprise," excluding entrepreneurs working in the informal sector.

Box A. The ILO's Successful Enterprise has the Following Criteria

- the business has been in existence for at least a year;⁴⁶
- employs at least one person in addition to the owner – this can be a direct or indirect employment;
- is formal or on the way to formalization;
- has reached its break-even point;⁴⁷
- seeks to establish decent working conditions within it.

3) Mechanisms to support women's entrepreneurship

During the study, the authors contacted a number of formal support mechanisms for the development of women's entrepreneurship. They may support and work for and with women in the informal sector as well. Insofar as these mechanisms represent interesting business development options as they can lead to operate formally, they are included in the perimeter of this study and their key characteristics are described.

Generally speaking, a wide number of support mechanisms have been developed over the last decades to support women's empowerment, including through entrepreneurship. These mechanisms were the result both of government and non-government institutions.

⁴⁶ One entrepreneur in Zambia has registered her business in 2019.

⁴⁷ Not all the businesses of the entrepreneurs had reached breaking point at the time of the interview.

Box B. Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming: Complementary Concepts

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development. Policies may specifically be designed to redressing situations that result from gender inequality.

Gender mainstreaming relates to the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action to ensure that the gender perspective becomes an integral dimension in the design, implementation and monitoring of any policies, programs and institutions. It encompasses the anticipation of potential differential impacts of policy actions on women and men and the possibility to design and implement gender-sensitive policy actions in order to maximize opportunities for all and avoid the adoption of measures that increase gender disparities. It is the process that affects the ability to understand the specific challenges and opportunities that defined policies present for women and girls and men and boys.

From a policy perspective the two concepts have different approaches. Gender equality measures will focus on ensuring that women are not discriminated, which means, for instance, that they enjoy the same rights in the Constitution. Gender mainstreaming measures will guarantee that women's requirements are met. For instance, that a well is built near their homes to avoid that they have to walk several kilometers to bring water to their families. Ideally, policies should apprehend both approaches so that women may be empowered and have the necessary tools to lead independent and autonomous lives.

Source: UN Women, [OSAGI Gender Mainstreaming - Concepts and definitions](#)

It would seem that there is a general tendency in developing countries to engage in gender equality policies by mainstreaming measures rather than addressing women as a specific group. At the same time, there is a large variety of programs in emerging and developing countries where specific mechanisms targeting women are still in place, frequently also supported by donors. For the latter, the authors were surprised by the dearth of information on these many financed projects. This begs the question whether their efficiency is regularly evaluated, and the women entrepreneurs monitored.

4) Collection of witnesses by way of standard questionnaire

In preparation of the study and the case collection, a desk review was carried out to determine the key factors of "successful enterprise." Building on entrepreneurship literature, a questionnaire was drafted that covers the main challenges that entrepreneurs face when launching and developing their businesses.

The authors reached out to contributors who could potentially lead to women entrepreneurs, including representatives from international organizations (OECD, ILO, World Bank, etc.), regional organizations (CAWTAR), NGOs, the private sector, and academia from the different countries included into the work's perimeter, as well as their own network of contacts. They diffused the questionnaire among these stakeholders and briefed them on the purpose of the initiative and the results that were expected.

The questionnaire was submitted to the women entrepreneurs who agreed to give a testimony to be included in the study. Eventually, the authors engaged in oral exchanges of about 90 to 120 minutes with the different women willing to share their business experiences and practices, going systematically through all the sections of the questionnaire.

The overview of the sample of the women interviewed is in Annex 2.

Annex 2

Overview of the Sample of Collected Testimonies

COUNTRY	SECTOR	REGION	TYPE OF COMPANY	No. of EMPLOYEES	YEAR	REVENUES/ YEAR	Level of instruction	Former experience	SUPPORT MEASURE	IDEA
France	Communications and Technology	Europe	Limited Liability company	4	2005	500.000 €	University degree	Prior experience in large US company	Women entrepreneurs generally obtain support. There are many measures applicable and structures that provide adequate training such as Les Premières (see report).	Her own idea based on her former experience
France	Consultancy for HR recruiting in luxury brands	Europe	Limited Liability company	11	1990	3 million €	French business school	Taking care of finance at a luxury fashion designer company	None	Her own idea based on her former experience
India	Online marketing platform	Asia	NA	NA	2016		NA	NA	The multilingual platform (Hindi and English) was set up by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. It is part of the 'Digital India' and 'Stand Up India' initiatives.	National Government's initiative

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COUNTRY	SECTOR	REGION	TYPE OF COMPANY	No. of EMPLOYEES	YEAR	REVENUES/ YEAR	Level of instruction	Former experience	SUPPORT MEASURE	IDEA
Indonesia	Cooperatives that develop retail activities (mainly laundry, sale of handicrafts online and pastry)	Asia	Cooperatives	NA	2013	NA	NA	NA	Based on United Nations Resolution 1325, on women, peace, and security, the Peace Villages were created to empower women and reduce violence and extremism. They received support from UN Women in 2017 to develop women's empowerment.	The Wahid Foundation wished to empower women and bring peace to rural areas in innovative ways
Ireland	Development and sale of mobile software services	Europe	Limited Liability company	14	2017	10.000 Euro ⁴⁸	University degree	ICT executive	None, but obtained capital from angel investors	Her own idea based on her former experience
Japan	Export company and brand marketing	Asia	Limited Liability company	Limited no. of consultants, max 20	1994	3/4 million USD	University degree	Private banker	Small loan for cash flow after loss of major customer due to external circumstances	Her own idea prompted by the need to work more flexibly due to her two children

⁴⁸ Application is offered free of charge, only business customers pay.

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COUNTRY	SECTOR	REGION	TYPE OF COMPANY	No. of EMPLOYEES	YEAR	REVENUES/ YEAR	Level of instruction	Former experience	SUPPORT MEASURE	IDEA
Lebanon	Jewellery	Asia	Join stock company	20	2004	1.8 million USD	Graphic designer	Advertising employee	The <i>We Initiative</i> launched in 2012 by BLC Bank, empowers women by providing women with equal banking rights and opportunities, giving women access to business power sessions, workshops, articles, studies and inspirational success stories.	Her own idea supported by the BLC Bank with adequate training

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COUNTRY	SECTOR	REGION	TYPE OF COMPANY	No. of EMPLOYEES	YEAR	REVENUES/ YEAR	Level of instruction	Former experience	SUPPORT MEASURE	IDEA
Malaysia (4)	Financial Technology (FinTech)	Asia	Peer-to-Peer (P2P) financing & investment platform	Less than 70	2017	NA	NA	NA	Regulation of FinTech sector by the Securities Commission (Malaysia was first country to regulate FinTech). To accelerate the growth of the nation's Digital Economy, the MSC Malaysia status provides eligible ICT-related businesses with incentives such as: 10 years of no corporate tax on MSC status activities.	
Mexico	Marketing and communications	Central America	Limited Liability company	16	2011	1.7 million USD	University degree	NGO and media experience	None	Her own idea based on her former experience

Annex 2

Overview of the Sample of Collected Testimonies

COUNTRY	SECTOR	REGION	TYPE OF COMPANY	No. of EMPLOYEES	YEAR	REVENUES/ YEAR	Level of instruction	Former experience	SUPPORT MEASURE	IDEA
Mexico	Real estate	Central America	Holding company with 8 subsidiaries	1,000	1990	30-50 million USD	Attended psychology classes but did not graduate	Created magazine for young girls	None	Her own
Morocco	Import-Export for agro-business	North Africa	Limited Liability company	70	1994	4.7 million Euros	University degree	Administrator of various perfumery chains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Special guarantee for women - Maroc PME government agency offered 4-year framework contract covering 70% of costs for information services and market studies. 	Her idea was to represent with her husband a European brand in Morocco.

Annex 2

Overview of the Sample of Collected Testimonies

COUNTRY	SECTOR	REGION	TYPE OF COMPANY	No. of EMPLOYEES	YEAR	REVENUES/ YEAR	Level of instruction	Former experience	SUPPORT MEASURE	IDEA
Philippines	Art, handicraft, agriculture, restaurant	Asia	Registered business	50 freelance working from home	2017	Not disclosed	University degree	Business experience in USA	GREAT Women Project support mechanism	Her own idea based on her former experience. Supported by international designer that taught her marketing approach
The Netherlands	Executive coaching	Europe	Two limited liability companies, based in Amsterdam and New York	7 free agents employed for the duration of the project	2018	600.000 USD	University degree	Coaching	None	Her own idea based on her former experience
Tunisia	Plastic extrusion products	North Africa	Limited Liability Company	29	2001	640.000 Euros	University Degree Chemistry, Training in plastic sector	Managed Engineering Family business	Japanese Development agency's Kaizen program; EBRD Women Leadership Program	Company founded by her husband
Turkey	Insurance broker and insurance services	Asia	Limited Liability Company	23	1999	15/16 million USD	University degree IT Engineer	Banking and insurance executive	None	Her own idea based on her former experience

Annex 2

Overview of the Sample of Collected Testimonies

COUNTRY	SECTOR	REGION	TYPE OF COMPANY	No. of EMPLOYEES	YEAR	REVENUES/ YEAR	Level of instruction	Former experience	SUPPORT MEASURE	IDEA
Zambia	Agro-processing	Africa	Limited Liability Company	7 full-time, 4 part-time	2018	62,700 USD	Bachelors' Degree in Development Studies	Sales and Marketing	Funding of machines Training Guarantee	Her own idea supported by training to manage the concept professionally
Zambia	Manufacturing of clothing products	Africa	Registered business	4 permanent staff, 12 temporary	2018	31.000	University degree in Business studies Advanced Diploma in Business management	Sales manager and business development	Grant to buy machines Training on access to finance marketing training to sell products abroad	Her own idea supported by training to manage the concept professionally

Annex 3

Questionnaire

This questionnaire is addressed to women entrepreneurs in the framework of the project on *Women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship: a direct investigation in the results of policy reforms* (see description in Annex 2).

The project's objective is to review and analyze twenty significant women's entrepreneurship cases that led to women's agency, autonomy and empowerment and to identify which drivers and agents of change ensured the success of the selected cases. Case studies will be selected in countries from around the world.

Entrepreneurs contacted are asked to fill in the template here below to the best of their ability. **Questions that are not relevant should be ignored.**

An oral discussion to follow-up will allow to further detail the particularities of the case and seek to assess whether and how policy and support measures could be replicated in a different context.

1. IDENTITY OF THE RESPONDENT

2. COMPANY

- 2.1. Please mention the name of your company and country of operations
- 2.2. In which year was your company incorporated and your business launched?
- 2.3. What is the legal form of your business?
- 2.4. What is the shareholder structure, how many shareholders are there, and how much stock do you own?
- 2.5. In which sector do you work?
- 2.6. What are your annual sales and what is the percentage of sales made abroad?
- 2.7. Who are your direct customers?
- 2.8. Do you take all major decisions related to the company?
- 2.9. How many employees/salaried persons do you have, in addition to yourself?
- 2.10. Does anyone else in the company take important decisions?
- 2.11. When did you start your business and how long did it take between initiating procedures to start the business and its development/expansion?

3. FACTORS OF SUCCESS

Entrepreneurs are invited to mention the concrete circumstances that allowed success to occur and identify whether and how different key factors came into force separately or concomitantly. The questions below may guide in describing the success factors.

3.1. Improved national business enabling environment

In creating and/or expanding your company, were you stimulated by measures that levelled the playing field and ensured that you were not delayed to unnecessary factors such as red-tape?

3.2. Taxation

Do you consider that your country and/or region and/or municipality has a competitive taxation system that effectively incentivizes the development of companies? Can you please provide examples?

3.3. Competition and public governance

In what way did the public policies implemented by your regional or national governments affect your business? Can you rely on the quality of the public service of your country/region to develop your strategies? Can you provide examples?

3.4. International or national sector specific actions

Are you satisfied with the terms and conditions affecting the sector in which your business is involved, including international trade, customs and port procedures? Do you have any relevant example that you would share, in particular if involved in global value chains?

3.5. Access to finance e.g. low interest loan, guarantee

What is your experience in relation to requesting funds for your company? Which type of credit organizations did you address and why? What do you think of alternative forms of finance? What in your view would you need to access a loan or have a guarantee?

3.6. Human Capital and skills development - Training, counselling or mentoring

What is your experience of recruiting and retaining human capital? What tools have you used to train your staff and which, in your view, were the most successful? Can you exemplify?

3.7. Business Development Services (BDS)

Have you ever used BDS and if so how? How would you rate your experience? Do you think their services should be further developed, different or more widespread?

3.8. Access to knowledge, technology and innovation

Do you have access to scientific, technical and managerial skills that can help innovate your company's products or services and if not, can you acquire this knowledge in the job market of your country? Do you have any experience of this type of innovation and how important do you think it is to your company to remain competitive?

3.9. Infrastructure

How would you rate the quality and efficiency of the infrastructure available to your company? Do you believe improvements are necessary and if so which? Has an information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure been built by your country to provide services to companies and, if so, would you like to share your experience in relation to it?

3.10. Public procurement

What is your experience of public procurement, has it benefited your company and if so how?

3.11. Third-party investment (national/foreign)

Did you ever resort to third-party investment either with a national or foreign investor? If so what was your experience and what were the advantages that you derived from it?

3.12. Involvement into a supply chain

Have you been involved in a supply chain and if so can you describe your experience? Did you receive any training on how to supply specific companies and if so was the training delivered by companies or was there any institutional involvement?

3.13. Involvement in a network

Have you engaged in a network of stakeholders and in particular in one or several national or international business organizations? Furthermore, have you cooperated with higher education or research institutions in order to foster innovation? If so, could you describe how the network was composed, how it operated and what benefits it brought to your company?

3.14. Inclusion into a public-private dialogue

Have you been included in discussions with policy makers in order to develop policies in relation to your sector of activity? If so, can you describe your experience and the impact on your business?

3.15. Other supportive factors of the success of the company

Are there any other elements that supported the success of your company? If so, please name and describe them briefly.

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