



# CATALYZING WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMME .

## COUNTRY BRIEF – POLICY AND GOVERNANCE COMPONENT



### Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship

Funded by Global Affairs Canada, the Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship (CWE): Creating a Gender Responsive Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Programme was developed with the objective of enhancing women's economic empowerment and contributing to gender equality in Asia and the Pacific, two of ESCAP's key areas of work under its Social Development Division.

The CWE programme implements on-the-ground activities in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Fiji, Nepal, Philippines, Samoa, and Vietnam and provides regional policy and advocacy support across Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific. The programme works across three inter-connected pillars that address barriers hindering the growth of women-led enterprises: 1) enabling policy environment 2) access to finance and 3) access to ICT and business skills development.

### Partnership with Ministry of Industry Science Technology and Innovation

The CWE programme was launched in Cambodia in partnership with the Ministry of Industry Science Technology and Innovation ([MISTI](#)) through a national consultation that brought together more than 80 stakeholders. Participants included government leaders from key ministries, alongside agencies in the areas of gender equality, SME development, trade, ICT and finance.





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## KEY PROGRESS MADE

### ECOSYSTEM OF STAKEHOLDERS AND FORMALISED GOVERNANCE MECHANISM

- The [national consultation](#) provided substantive background on women's entrepreneurship and the need to create an enabling environment, from formal policy and regulatory environment to wider informal institutions and their impact on the capacity of women to engage in entrepreneurial activities. The press release can be accessed [here](#).
- The institutional set-up of the **Project Advisory Committee (PAC)** has been instrumental to **increase coordination** among relevant stakeholders for policy engagement on women's entrepreneurship issues. It has allowed for discussions on pertinent issues impacting women entrepreneurs among key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Industry Science Technology and Innovation (MISTI), the National Bank of Cambodia (NBC) and the Ministry of Women Affairs ([MOWA](#)). The PAC platform has also provided **opportunities to advocate with entities** such as the Ministry of Economy and Finance to **explore entry points to integrate the needs of women entrepreneurs** in the Entrepreneurship Development Fund and other SME-related initiatives. The mechanism improved coordination with stakeholders for policy engagement and identified areas to advance women's entrepreneurship in Cambodia, including developing one-roof services and addressing business registration challenges. Three PAC meetings resulted in establishing a National Task Force for sustaining WMSME development post-project, enabling ongoing dialogue on evolving needs and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs.

### EVIDENCE GENERATION

- A **study on the impact of unpaid care work** on 100 women entrepreneurs generated evidence that was disseminated at a national workshop on the care economy. The study helped raise the importance of **incorporating care work considerations in the design of policies and programmes** for strengthening women's entrepreneurship. As a result, and with technical assistance from ESCAP, **MOWA is incorporating and developing gender-responsive policy measures** to recognize, redistribute and reduce unpaid care and domestic work to enable women's engagement in entrepreneurial and other economic opportunities.
- A **national-level study on best practices in uncollateralized lending** was carried out at the request of the National Bank of Cambodia and was completed in late 2021.
- A **rapid policy assessment** on the impact of COVID-19 was generated in partnership with MISTI. The report, titled the [“Policy Guidelines for Supporting Women-Owned Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises \(WMSMEs\) Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Kingdom of Cambodia,”](#) drew feedback from various sources, including both national and international organizations working towards mitigating the impact of COVID-19 in Cambodia. The report consisted of policy recommendations for the government to address the impact of COVID-19 on WMSMEs, focusing on ensuring support for women entrepreneurs during the pandemic and





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recovery phase. Furthermore, it advocated for easier access to business development services for women entrepreneurs, especially those in the informal sector.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND POLICY SUPPORT

- ESCAP provided technical assistance to review **Cambodia's SME Development Policy and Five-Year Plan** through a policy recommendations paper titled **"Policy Provisions for Women SMEs."** The paper explored unique set of challenges that WMSMEs face, laying out clear and actionable policy interventions to be considered for women entrepreneurs in Cambodia. All recommendations are being considered, with a focus on defining WMSMEs. This will be discussed in upcoming meetings led by the National Taskforce for WMSMEs, with input from various stakeholders. The final definition will then be reviewed by the **Ministry of Economy and Finance.**
- ESCAP supported MOWA to set up a **framework for the Women Entrepreneurship Development Centre (WEDC) to build a positive entrepreneurship ecosystem for women** through four key components. These include 1) training, 2) business incubators and accelerators, 3) research and





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knowledge generation, and 4) offering collective spaces. ESCAP provided technical support to WEDC to raise 23 per cent of its \$13.5 million budget requirement. The WEDC serves as a technical hub for women entrepreneurs and has the potential to impact over 20,000 women entrepreneurs over the next five years. ESCAP piloted an incubation and training programme for 126 women entrepreneurs on critical financial management, business modelling, and digital innovation skills.

- ESCAP partnered with NBC and Good Return to launch “Let’s Talk Money: Little by Little”, a **financial literacy campaign** to foster financial inclusion and reduce over-indebtedness among low-income households and vulnerable communities. This campaign includes a **four-part video series on financial education**. As of May 2024, over 12,000 individuals viewed the content.
- A total of 126 policymakers attended the dedicated policy dialogue during the **ACCMSME meeting on women's SME policy innovation**. Discussions from the event were critical in designing and implementing country-level CWE initiatives in Cambodia - by building evidence of how women’s care work impacts their engagement in entrepreneurial activities and devising ways to cater to the challenges.
- The CWE programme implemented a **monitoring and evaluation framework** equipped with indicators, allowing MISTI and MOWA to assess the effects of policy changes and program interventions on women entrepreneurs. This framework also facilitated the gathering of evidence to inform the design of future programs.

## CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

- ESCAP, in partnership with MISTI, developed **policy guidelines on the development of the One-Roof Service (ORS)**, including increasing business registration for women led MSMEs. Accounting for unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, the guidelines provide an action plan to improve business registration for women entrepreneurs, especially those in rural areas. In July 2021, ESCAP and MISTI organized a stakeholder consultation on the ORS and online business registration for women entrepreneurs, involving 68 participants from key institutions. The primary aims of the consultation include streamlining processes, enhancing gender responsiveness, and improving access to capacity-building opportunities. Following this, training was provided to 120 women entrepreneurs in four provinces on using the ORS, resulting in 20 successful online business registrations. As of January 2024, 296 women entrepreneurs had accessed the ORS.

