



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 Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation

ESCAP's partnership with the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation ([MWCPA](#)) was formalized through a Letter of Agreement that provided the framework for implementing activities in Fiji. To kick off the CWE programme, a national consultation, in collaboration with MWCPA, brought together more than 50 stakeholders including policymakers from key ministries and experts in the field of gender equality, SME development, ICT, trade and finance.





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KEY PROGRESS MADE

ECOSYSTEM OF STAKEHOLDERS AND FORMALISED GOVERNANCE MECHANISM

- The programme was launched through a [national consultation](#) that brought together more than 50 participants including policy makers from key ministries and experts on ICT, finance, SME development and gender. It mapped the ecosystem of stakeholders working to advance women's entrepreneurship and provided a platform to exchange knowledge, best practices and lessons learned in the design, implementation, and monitoring of sectoral policy and non-policy measures that contribute to women's entrepreneurship in Fiji.
- The **Working Group on Women's Economic Empowerment**, known as the PAC in Fiji, overseen by the MWCPA, serves as a platform for various stakeholders to collaborate in addressing the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. Positioned within the National Task Force on Women's Economic Empowerment, the PAC contributes to the national action plan on this issue, aligning women's entrepreneurship with broader economic empowerment objectives. Endorsed by the Cabinet, the PAC reports directly to the Prime Minister, lending government-wide legitimacy and visibility to its initiatives. Comprising over 15 agencies, Ministries, women entrepreneur associations, and banks, the recent meeting on December 2, 2022, facilitated by ESCAP and chaired by the MWCPA Director, highlighted insights from other countries and the ASEAN Policymakers Toolkit. Discussions centered on streamlining business registration processes and reducing renewal fees, prompting the formation of a committee led by MSME Fiji to advocate for these changes with the Ministry of Justice.

EVIDENCE GENERATION

- A **rapid assessment** on enabling policy environment for women MSMEs was built in partnership with the MWCPA, included impact of COVID-19. Specifically, the assessment generated actionable policy recommendations for the Government of Fiji to considered addressing the **impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women-led MSMEs**. The recommendations include addressing increased levels of informality in women's entrepreneurship post pandemic. This was followed by a policy roundtable consultation which brought together key stakeholders to discuss the recommendations of the study and developed a roadmap addressing other intersectional challenges, such as capacity gaps, unpaid care burden and unpaid labour, as well as financing gaps for women entrepreneurs. The Fiji Bureau of Statistics further highlighted the lack of collection and dissemination of data, specifically regarding women-led businesses in Fiji.





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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND POLICY SUPPORT

- A **review of national MSME Policy** was undertaken by ESCAP with the [MSME Fiji](#) unit under the Ministry of External Trade, Cooperatives and SMEs. The main recommendations of the review included improving access to finance by using targeted approaches and setting aside dedicated funds for women entrepreneurs to increase their uptake of grants; digitization and improving access to information by developing digital toolkits to assist MSMEs, particularly for WMSMEs to improve the availability of information by leveraging Fiji's high internet connectivity; development of WMSME definition in the new MSME Act to create specific language to reflect recognition and empowerment of women led entrepreneurs.
- A **review of the [Young Entrepreneurs Scheme \(YES\)](#)** was undertaken by ESCAP with the MSME Fiji unit under the Ministry of External Trade, Cooperatives and SMEs. The YES Scheme provided grant funding of up to FJ \$30,000 for young entrepreneurs with innovative ideas. The review highlighted women's access to finance as a key challenge and identified the need for a strategic review of the entrepreneurship ecosystem, collection and use of sex-disaggregated data, increased partnerships between incubator and accelerator programmes and women's business councils and ensured more inclusivity in the application process with women entrepreneurs as a separate segment for the YES grants.

