



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 Commerce, Industry and Labour

ESCAP's partnership with the [Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour \(MCIL\)](#), Samoa through a letter of agreement. The project was launched in Samoa under the leadership of Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa.

KEY PROGRESS MADE

ECOSYSTEM OF STAKEHOLDERS AND FORMALISED GOVERNANCE MECHANISM

- The project was launched through a [national consultation](#) that brought together more than 60 participants including policy makers from key ministries and experts on ICT, finance, SME development and gender. This consultation pinpointed key policy and advocacy areas for advancing women's entrepreneurship in Samoa. These include engaging the private sector to



CATALYZING WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMME .

devise innovative solutions for overcoming obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs. Participants emphasized the importance of capacity building at rural and village levels and recognized the potential of digital solutions for market access via mobile phones. Enhancing computer literacy at grassroots levels was deemed crucial for accessing these solutions. Additionally, participants discussed the utility of ICT solutions for delivering Government services to MSMEs, proposing the establishment of an online portal for business registration. The press release of the event can be assessed [here](#).

- Initiated as the Project Advisory Committee, the platform has evolved into a government-led **Project Advisory Group (PAG)**. Under the leadership of the Trade, Commerce, and Industry Board of Samoa, the PAG has ensured the institutionalization of the coordination platform. The PAG engages representatives from relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Women, Community, and Social Development (MWCSD), financial institutions, and women entrepreneurs. Four PAG meetings have been convened, during which priorities concerning the advancement of women's entrepreneurship were identified and corresponding actions were undertaken. Through the PAG platform, MCIL has successfully forged strong partnerships and collaborations with relevant key agencies. Furthermore, it will continue to be spearheaded by the TCI Board beyond the completion of the CWE programme, resulting in its institutionalization.

EVIDENCE GENERATION

- In partnership with MCIL and the Samoa Bureau of Statistics, a **baseline assessment** was undertaken to provide **evidence on the number of women-led businesses in Samoa** as well as barriers they face named **"A data overview: taking stock of women entrepreneurs in Samoa" report**. The assessment captures baseline information on women entrepreneurs based on various national data sources such as the labor force survey, business enterprise survey, among others. The report also provided recommendations on additional data needed to measure changes in the sector over time, to contribute to policy development. Several recommendations were made including:
 1. Developing a measurement framework
 2. Measuring the size and quality of the sector through the census
 3. Developing monographs, surveys and census briefs
 4. Mainstreaming gender- disaggregated data
 5. Conducting secondary studies between censuses
 6. Enhancing communications on available data
 7. Innovating with data and mobile engagement
 8. Designing the data project outlined in the national MSME Policy
 9. Embracing global datasets for the Pacific
- ESCAP supported the **Business licensing in Samoa: a review of the business license process from the perspective of women entrepreneurs report**, aiming to facilitate their transition from the informal to the formal sector. The study focused on simplifying the licensing process, raising



CATALYZING WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMME .

awareness, and addressing barriers faced by women entrepreneurs, particularly those operating micro and small businesses in the informal sector. Conducted in partnership with the Ministry of Customs and Revenue and the MCIL, the review highlighted challenges such as limited awareness, high fees, tax avoidance, and a centralized application system. Recommendations include increasing awareness, streamlining licensing processes, and enhancing women-focused business support services. Subsequently, an awareness-raising program targeted 30 women entrepreneurs in collaboration with multiple ministries and organizations, with 18 policymakers also participating.

- A [rapid assessment on the barriers and opportunities](#) for women entrepreneurs **including assessing the impact of COVID-19**. Examining and drawing on existing literature and studies, the paper discusses the key barriers and opportunities for women entrepreneurs in Samoa. Findings revealed intersectional challenges in starting, growing, and sustaining businesses, worsened by the pandemic. Many women-led MSMSEs diversified into new markets due to the pandemic, facing difficulties with loan repayments, layoffs, and reliance on remittances. Recommendations from the assessment include prioritizing gender components in the MSME Policy and Strategy, enhancing business support for women-led MSMSEs, and improving data collection systems.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND POLICY SUPPORT

- ESCAP supported MCIL to undertake an [analysis](#) (Link: [Infographic summary of the paper](#)) of the goals in the MSME Development Policy and Strategy 2020 related to women entrepreneurs and developed a results measurement framework of Samoa's **MSME Development Policy and Strategy**. The framework aids the Government in implementing the proposed goals and monitoring the implementation effectiveness over time. To ensure uptake and optimal use of the framework along with a basic orientation about monitoring and evaluation, a workshop was carried out to capacitate 23 MCIL officials and key partners in September 2022.