



# 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 Viet Nam 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 Agency of Enterprise Development, Ministry of Planning and Investment

ESCAP's partnership with the [Agency of Enterprise Development, Ministry of Planning and Investment \(AED-MPI\)](#) was formalized through a letter of agreement approved by the Prime Minister of Viet Nam. Numerous activities and initiatives carried out in Viet Nam serve as exemplary models for other countries implementing the CWE programme.

Through CWE program advocacy, AED-MPI effectively forged partnerships with 20 organizations, resulting in the establishment of a registration form that drew over 26,000 women entrepreneurs and individuals to join the network. This expert network has significantly bolstered and expanded the women's entrepreneurship ecosystem nationwide.



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## KEY PROGRESS MADE

### ECOSYSTEM OF STAKEHOLDERS AND FORMALISED GOVERNANCE MECHANISM

- A [national consultation](#) in collaboration with AED-MPI, brought together more than 100 stakeholders from across the public and private sector. The national consultation served to map the ecosystem of stakeholders working to advance women's entrepreneurship and facilitated a diverse dialogue around the opportunities and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Viet Nam. Building on the contributory and consultative nature of the national consultation, AED-MPI facilitated follow-up meetings with the relevant key ministries to identified specific barriers faced by women entrepreneurs and developed key evidence-based priority actions for catalyzing women's entrepreneurship in Viet Nam. The press release can be accessed [here](#).
- The Project Advisory Committee is now owned by the Government and is locally referred to as the **Technical Advisory Group (TAG)** which includes representatives from various government ministries including the State Bank of Viet Nam, private sector and women entrepreneurs. Government ownership has allowed for the institutionalization of the TAG, which is currently chaired by the Ministry of Planning and Investment. This coordination platform has been instrumental at **stocktaking of different initiatives focused on women-led MSMEs (WMSME)** and identifying key interventions needed in the policy domain to advance the WMSME agenda in the country.

### EVIDENCE GENERATION

- **The SME Law and its Impact on Women Entrepreneurs in Viet Nam** – ESCAP and AED-MPI jointly assessed the national SME Law (Decree 39/2018/ND-CP) and its impact on women entrepreneurs in Viet Nam. The report analysed eight articles of the SME Law: access to credit; tax and accounting support; production space; technology and incubation; market expansion; information and legal advice; human resource development and transforming household businesses into enterprises; regarding their impact on women-owned SMEs.

The report assessed challenges faced by women-owned SMEs at national and provincial levels, offering actionable recommendations to address gaps and structural constraints, thereby enhancing the implementation effectiveness of laws supporting women entrepreneurs. Decree No. 80, with provisions on incubation, human resource development, and counseling support, was adjusted to address regulatory limitations faced by women entrepreneurs. In 2022, a national stakeholder consultation workshop was organized, attended by over 75 in-person delegates and 95 online participants, in Hanoi to discuss provisions of the new decree and devise an action plan. Recommendations from the workshop informed an implementation circular drafted by AED-MPI, resulting in tangible outcomes including the development of a digital portal for women entrepreneurs, capacity-building support for 1,000 women, improved business efficiency, and expanded access to international markets.



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- TAG have set up working group meetings where experts met regularly to address **barriers and opportunities for women entrepreneurs from ethnic minorities**. A study and assessment were carried out amongst the ethnic minorities residing in the northern mountainous region of the country. Notable challenges for women entrepreneurs from ethnic minorities include limited access to capital and credit, lack of awareness about business registration and bank loan processes, socio-cultural barriers such as entrenched patriarchal norms, and limited knowledge of information technology. Recommendations to address these issues involve targeted programs and business development support, increased outreach to raise awareness about support policies and regulations tailored for ethnic minorities and streamlined administrative processes for business registration and development.
- An **Agri-tech study** was conducted to identify internal and external challenges regarding businesses' access to and application of technology. Internally, limited knowledge and expertise, along with a lack of information and access to technology, hinder progress. Financial constraints and time limitations further exacerbate these issues. Externally, businesses grapple with strict legal procedures and the challenge of market instability. Moreover, addressing changing workers' perceptions on technology and adapting to the effects of climate change add layers of complexity to the industry's landscape. Advisory and consulting services are crucial for assisting women-led agribusinesses in adopting technology. These services provide mentoring and guidance to understand the latest technologies, enhance production efficiency, improve product quality, develop business strategies, and secure funding and investment capital.
- ESCAP in partnership with AED-MPI, organized a sub-national consultation on **"Challenges and Actions to Support Women Entrepreneurs Coping with Climate Change and COVID-19 in Mekong River Delta"** in the Ben Tre province of the Mekong region in Viet Nam. Over 60 participants including government officials, climate change experts, women MSME support organization and women entrepreneurs from the region participated. The consultation analyzed the network of stakeholders assisting women MSMEs in the agricultural sector in addressing the challenges posed by drought, saltwater intrusion, and COVID-19 in the area. It specifically identified effective strategies and technological advancements that empower women MSMEs to adjust to these challenges. The insights gathered from the consultation have led to the development of a government action plan to aid women MSMEs in their response to climate change.
- A [rapid policy assessment on the impact of COVID-19 on women-led MSMEs in Viet Nam](#) was undertaken in partnership with AED-MPI. Utilizing the survey findings and analysis, the study provides actionable policy recommendations to address structural constraints and support the development of the MSME sector in Viet Nam (Link: [Infographic](#)).



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## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND POLICY SUPPORT

- The [first expert group meeting](#) for prioritizing actions for **addressing psychosocial barriers of women entrepreneurs in Viet Nam** was organized by AED-MPI, in partnership with ESCAP. Representatives from expert agencies provided a substantive background on women entrepreneurs' psychosocial support needs and constraints, especially pertaining to the sociocultural norms in Vietnam.
- Information collected from these sessions were channelled to develop content for inclusion in the **Digital One-Stop Portal** for women entrepreneurs, a sub-portal - Women Entrepreneurship Ecosystem, under the National SME Support Portal - was launched by AED-MPI with support of ESCAP. The portal offers **targeted and more accessible resources on policy, finances, support measures, e-learning resources and mental health support services**. To ensure platform sustainability, strategic measures include ongoing website upgrades and maintenance, regular integration of research and policy insights, expansion of contact and resource databases, facilitation of webinars, online consultations, and collaborative projects, continuation of interactive features like forums and chatrooms, implementation of feedback mechanisms for continuous improvements, and securing ongoing partnerships and funding for longevity.

As of December 2023, the portal boasts 179,640 registered businesses and has garnered 5.3 million visits since its launch.

- A series of online talk shows titled **"Mental Health Care for Women Entrepreneurs"** were organized by AED-MPI in partnership with [KisStartup](#) and [Vietnam-France Psychology and Psychiatry Institute](#) to address the **psychosocial barriers** that women entrepreneurs face when engaging in entrepreneurial activities. The show consisted total of four episodes aired in December 2023 and engaged over 18,000 viewers. The episodes were posted in the one-stop portal and included the following topics:
  1. Facing Pressure: Control of Stress and Psychological Challenges
  2. General Emotional Disorders: Recognition and Solutions
  3. Family and Business: The Art of Balance
  4. Establishing a Mental Health Consulting Network for Women Entrepreneurs

In response to the increased demand for psychosocial support and mental health services, **over 115 women entrepreneurs received counselling and coaching sessions**.

ESCAP's assessment of the **National SME Law led to a revision of the law and issuance of new Decree No. 80/2021/ND-CP** that have targeted provisions for women entrepreneurs. A subsequent national stakeholder workshop to discuss the Decree and agree on an action plan led to a **set of recommendations that fed into an implementation circular** drafted by the MPI.



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## CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

- A **monitoring and evaluation (M&E)** theory of change and results measurement framework was developed to measure the effectiveness of CWE programme activities and beyond, enabling AED-MPI to identify data gaps on WMSMEs, prioritize systematic data collection, and monitor project impact and policy implementation. A total of 82 participants from various Ministries, the State Bank of Vietnam, Vietnam's Women's Union, and Women Entrepreneurs' Association, received capacity-building sessions on the M&E framework and its operationalization, alongside monitoring and evaluation methods for implementing the revised National SME Law and Decree No. 80/2021/ND-CP. This integration of gender considerations into monitoring mechanisms enhanced various SME development initiatives.



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