

FULL REPORT

MULTI-COUNTRY STUDY ON WOMEN-LED MSMES, WITH A FOCUS ON MICROENTERPRISES

in China, Indonesia, Thailand,
Rwanda and Uganda



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UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

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CONTENTS

Introduction

	PAGE
1	1
Study's Scope and Methodology	3
1.1 The Scope of This Study	
1.2 What This Study Offers	
1.3 Who This Study Is For	
1.4 The Study's Framework and Methodology	
1.4.1 Research Framework	
1.4.2 Methodology	
1.4.3 Limitations of This Study	
2	6
Key Findings and Solutions to Address Challenges Faced by Women-Led Microenterprises	
2.1 Access to Finance	
2.2 Access to Markets (Including E-commerce)	
2.3 Digital Inclusion	
3	18
Unlocking Opportunities for Women-Led Microenterprises Through Effective Utilization of Business Development Services	
3.1. Key Barriers in Access to, and Effectiveness of, BDS in Supporting Women-Led Microenterprises	
3.2. What Works for BDS? A Practical Framework for Action to Support Women-Led Microenterprises	
3.2.1 Principle 1. Address Constraints Specific to Women in the Design of BDS	
3.2.2. Principle 2. Tailor Content to Women's Needs	
3.2.3. Principle 3. Localise Services	
3.2.4. Principle 4. Institutionalise Gender-Responsive Monitoring and Evaluation	
4	37
Key Recommendations for Women's Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Actors	
Annexes	40

ACRONYMS

BDS Business Development Services

FSP Financial Services Provider

GDP Gross Domestic Product

MFI Micro Finance Institutions

MSME Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises

SDGs Sustainable Development Goals

INTRODUCTION

Women's economic and digital empowerment is central to realizing women's rights and accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 (gender equality), Goal 8 (sustainable economic growth and decent work for all), Goal 1 (no poverty), and Goal 10 (reduced inequalities). Against this backdrop, advancing women's and girl's economic rights through enhanced access to education, training, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities is a key pillar in UN Women's Strategic Plan and its Youth and Gender Equality Strategy.

Enhancing Women's Economic and Digital Empowerment Sits at the Core of UN Women's Priorities Globally and Across Regions

In alignment with a series of international commitments towards women's economic empowerment, including the [Beijing Platform for Action](#), the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) and a set of International Labour Organization [conventions on gender equality](#), UN Women works with a wide range of partners, including governments, businesses, and civil society, to promote women's ability to secure decent jobs, access entrepreneurship and other livelihood opportunities, accumulate assets, and influence institutions and public policies determining growth and development. Through many programmes on the ground, which have empowered millions of women economically, UN Women reaches women most in need – including rural women, domestic workers, migrants, and low-skilled women – by engaging with key local stakeholders, including grass-roots and civil society organisations.



BOX 1

Micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) are at the heart of economic development in all countries; they account for 90 percent of businesses, more than 60 percent of employment, and half of gross domestic product worldwide.¹ Women are active players in this MSME space;² they own a third of all small, medium and large enterprises operating worldwide,³ are likely to employ more women in their enterprises than their male peers,⁴ and in the next five years, are likely to significantly contribute to employment worldwide.⁵ Being a key driver of economic growth, job creation, and sustainable development, women's entrepreneurship is critical to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

1 [UN Secretary General's Message for 2022](#) on the UN Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Day, 27 June 2022.

2 As shown by Halim, Daniel in [Women Entrepreneurs Needed – Stat!](#) (2020), the percentage of small, medium, and large businesses owned by women varies across continents; it is higher than the global average in East Asia and the Pacific (47 percent) and similar to the global average in sub-Saharan Africa (29 percent).

3 Hailm, Daniel. "[Women Entrepreneurs Needed – Stat!](#)". Data Blog: World Bank Blogs. 5 March 2020.

4 Felicia Siegrist. [Supporting Women Entrepreneurs In Developing Countries: What Works?](#) Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi), World Bank Group, 2022. Accessed September 2022.

5 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM). [Women's Entrepreneurship 2020/21: Thriving Through Crisis](#). Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), 2021. London. Accessed September 2022.

Enterprise growth is challenged by several factors, which are magnified in the case of women-owned and -led enterprises. As compared to enterprises owned and led by men, women-owned and -led enterprises face several challenges: Those operating in developing countries tend to stay confined to small businesses in the informal sector⁶ and face structural and gendered barriers in accessing and deploying resources to grow their enterprises. These challenges persist, as systems and institutions, such as markets, are designed to better suit the needs of men than of women as entrepreneurs⁷

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit women-led enterprises disproportionately hard⁸ have exacerbated the inequalities they face. In part, this has been due to the increased reliance on digital tools and e-commerce platforms, globally.⁹ As just one example, women make up 54 percent of those financially excluded from the digital economy and are 5 percentage points more likely than men to need help using their mobile money accounts.¹⁰

However, this shift towards the digital economy also provides a number of new opportunities to overcome some of the challenges, such as increasing the scope of the markets that women-owned and -led enterprises serve and improving access to new financial tools and other support services they need to grow their businesses. Against this backdrop, in 2022, UN Women in China, together with the Ant Foundation, launched the **“Together Digital Programme”** (see Box 2 for details) to support women-led MSMEs and to empower them to participate and thrive in the digital economy.

About the “Together Digital Programme”

UN Women, jointly with the Ant Foundation, launched, in 2022, “Together Digital”, a five-year programme to support women-led MSMEs and to empower them to participate and thrive in the digital economy. Currently being piloted in the Asia and the Pacific region through country projects in China and Indonesia and other regional initiatives, the “Together Digital Programme” has reached several thousand women entrepreneurs with training on digital skills and business management, including gender-sensitive digital entrepreneurship. Under the programme, UN Women is also partnering with China’s International Centre for Economic and Technical Exchanges to set up two dedicated training hubs that will support over 30,000 women entrepreneurs to start, grow, or expand their businesses. The programme will also support women entrepreneurs’ increased access to mentorship and other opportunities through the establishment of a regional partner network, all towards promoting women’s digital empowerment.



BOX 2

6 [UN Women and Ant Foundation Launch “Together Digital” to Empower Women Entrepreneurs in the Digital Economy](#). UN Women in Asia and the Pacific. Press release, 21 July 2022.

7 Criado Perez, Caroline. *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Women*. Abrams Press, 2019.

8 Goldstein, M., et al. *The Global State of Small Business during COVID-19: Gender Inequalities*, World Bank Group, 2020. As stated in the blog, the study found that, in terms of the gender gap, globally, women-owned businesses were 5.9 percentage points more likely to have closed their businesses than men-owned businesses, taking into account regional attributes. Globally, the sectors with the most business closures were: travel or tourism agencies (54 percent closed), hospitality and event services (47 percent), education and childcare services (45 percent), performing arts and entertainment (36 percent), and hotels, cafes and restaurants (32 percent).

9 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). [Digital Transformation in the Age of COVID-19: Building Resilience and Bridging Divides, Digital Economy Outlook 2020](#). Supplement. OECD, Paris. See also, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). [Fostering Women Entrepreneurship in the Digital Economy](#): Insights from UNCTAD’s eTrade for Women Advocates, 2019-2021 Cohort. UNCTAD, 2022.

10 World Bank. [The Global Findex Database 2021 – Financial Inclusion, Digital Payments, and Resilience in the Age of COVID-19](#). World Bank Group, 2022.

This multi-country study on women-led MSMEs, with a focus on microenterprises in China, Indonesia, Rwanda, Thailand, and Uganda, is a key output of the “Together Digital Programme”. It is intended to inform the design and implementation of programmes, initiatives, and strategies supporting women’s entrepreneurship. Of particular note is that it provides critical insights for future multi-stakeholder dialogue on emerging issues relating to women’s entrepreneurship and economic and digital empowerment, including as part of the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, whose 2023 priority theme focuses on “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”.

1 STUDY’S SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 The Scope of This Study

There are a range of interventions that support women’s entrepreneurship. These include policy interventions, financial support programmes, market access support, business incubation and acceleration interventions, and other capacity-building and business training programmes. While all of these are required to unlock the full growth potential of enterprises, this report dives deep into the role of business development services (BDS) as a key entry point for supporting women-led businesses.

BDS refers to a wide range of non-financial services that support enterprises to operate efficiently and grow, including services that facilitate access to markets, inputs, and finance and that support improvements in business strategy, management, and technical skills, amongst others.¹¹ **This report looks at the role that BDS is playing, and has the potential to play, in the three priority areas that are critical to supporting women’s entrepreneurship: access to finance, access to markets, and digital inclusion.**

The MSME sector is heterogenous; as such, MSMEs’ challenges, opportunities, and needs also vary by size, local context, and industry. Given these differences and given the unique potential of microenterprises to provide both livelihoods¹² and a pathway to business growth, **the report focuses on women-led microenterprises.**

The countries covered in this study – China, Indonesia, Rwanda, Thailand, and Uganda – were selected on the following bases:

- The role of entrepreneurship in these countries’ economic growth and sustainable development
- Existing development cooperation and trade relations amongst target countries, including under the Forum on China Africa Cooperation Dakar Action Plan 2022-2024
- The existence of UN Women’s women’s entrepreneurship and other relevant women’s economic empowerment programmes in these countries

¹¹ Please see the Methodological Note in Annex 1 for a detailed explanation of BDS, including the non-exhaustive list of BDS services offered globally.

¹² International Labour Organization (ILO). “Small Matters: Global Evidence on the Contribution to Employment by the Self-Employed, Microenterprises and SMEs.” ILO, October 2019.

1.2 What This Study Offers

This study brings forward the voices of women entrepreneurs and key stakeholders in the entrepreneurship ecosystem to:

Bring to the surface challenges faced by women-led microenterprises in the five countries and identify solutions to enhance their access to finance, markets and digital inclusion through Business Development Services.

Identify the specific barriers these microenterprises face in utilizing Business Development Services to address their growth challenges.

Offer a practical, 'what works' framework for action to guide the design and implementation of Business Development Services programmes to support women micro-entrepreneurs to access finance, digital platforms and markets, including through e-commerce.

Recommend high potential areas for future support of key stakeholders from the women's entrepreneurship ecosystem - including governments, UN and other multilateral organizations, donor agencies, business development service providers, financial service providers, women's business associations and networks, and other entrepreneurship support organizations.

1.3 Who This Study Is For

This study is intended to be a practical resource for various stakeholders in the entrepreneurship ecosystem, including:



BDS providers



Governments



Women's business associations and networks, and other entrepreneurship support organisations



United Nations & other multilateral organisations



Donor agencies



Financial services providers (FSPs)

1.4 The Study's Framework and Methodology

1.4.1 Research Framework

The role of BDS in enhancing women-led microenterprises' access to finance, markets, and digital inclusion – in order to ultimately drive women-led microenterprise growth – sits at the core of this study's research framework. As such, the primary question the study seeks to answer is:

How can BDS providers (i.e., government agencies, private sector actors, and entrepreneurship support organisations) help overcome the growth challenges that women-led microenterprises have, particularly related to digital inclusion and access to finance and markets?

1.4.2 Methodology

A key aspiration of this study is to uncover the lived experiences and voices of women micro-entrepreneurs and key stakeholders in the entrepreneurship ecosystem, and for these to drive the study's recommendations. The study applies qualitative research methods and uses both primary and secondary sources of data to investigate the role of BDS in supporting women-led microenterprises' growth in the three priority areas: access to markets, access to finance, and digital inclusion. Further details on the methodology and key definitions used are available in the Methodological Note (Annex 1).

1.4.3 Limitations of This Study

Given the practical orientation of this report, it is meant to surface contextualised insights from the five target countries, to help learn more about what works to improve BDS for digital inclusion, access to finance, and access to markets for women-led enterprises.

In light of this, the scope of this report is not meant to be an exhaustive assessment or survey of the demand and supply for BDS, nor a comparative analysis of countries' performance on digital inclusion, access to finance, and access to markets; nor is it meant to provide sectoral deep dives in each country. Nor is it meant to provide an exhaustive overview or analysis of government policies and programmes or of BDS implemented by other stakeholders to support enterprises in the five countries. Instead, the report highlights strategies and examples of ongoing BDS, where relevant.

2

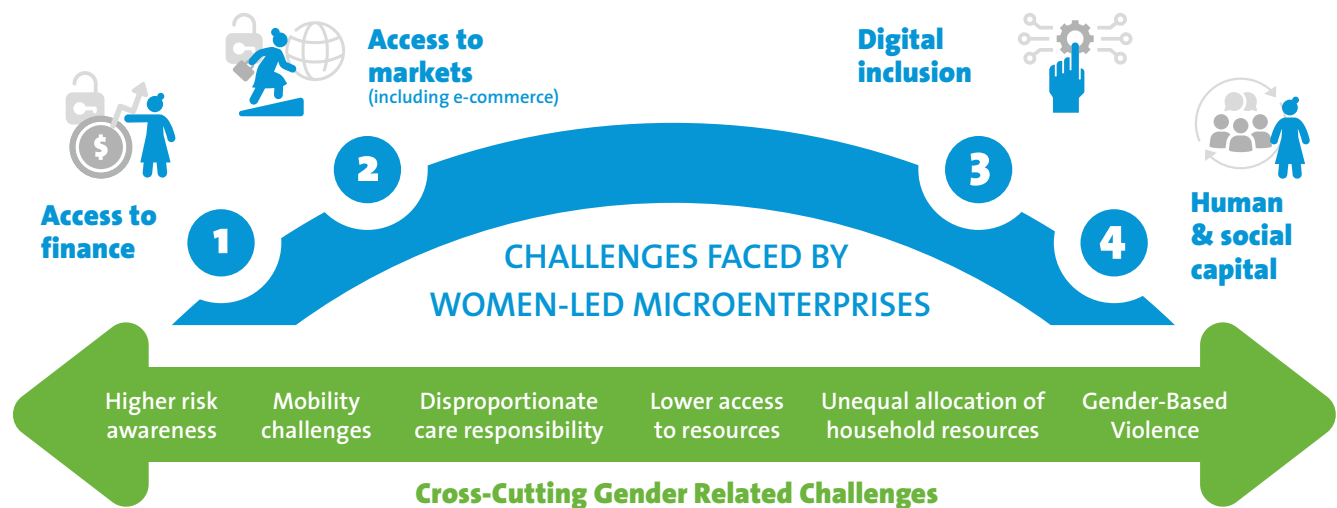
KEY FINDINGS AND SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN-LED MICROENTERPRISES

Overview of Key Challenges Faced by Women-Led Microenterprises

As underlined in the introduction, women-led enterprises are under-resourced and under-financed in developing countries, both objectively and as compared to men, despite the fact that women represent half of all entrepreneurs.¹³

Underlying social norms and several structural barriers, such as lower education and literacy levels, are key challenges limiting women micro-entrepreneurs' access to resources, including capital, networks, business information, training, and market knowledge, amongst others. Being "time poor", due to domestic and care responsibilities, their capacity to engage in productive economic activities is also significantly reduced, in comparison to men who run enterprises. Chart 1 outlines these challenges of entry and growth faced by women-led microenterprises.

Chart 1. Challenges Faced by Women-Led Enterprises



¹³ Hailm, D. [Women Entrepreneurs Needed – Stat!](#). Blog. World Bank, April 2020. See also: International Labour Organization (ILO), [World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2022](#). ILO, 2022.



1

Access to finance

Limited financial literacy and knowledge of basic financial tools.

Limited availability of tailored products.

Poor financial infrastructure.

Limited trust in the banking system.

Lower confidence in navigating financial procedures.



2

Access to markets

Less access to high-value markets and value chains (concentration in services and retail sectors).

Less access to digital platforms & marketing know-how.

Less access to appropriate local, national, and international business networks.



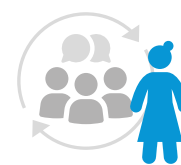
3

Digital inclusion

Limited access to digital devices, shared mobile ownership.

Poor digital infrastructure and high internet-related costs.

Lower digital literacy and digital skills.



4

Human & social capital

Limited availability of tailored BDS.

Limited business skills in areas such as planning and forecasting.

Limited access to experts and mentors.

Sources: Women's World Banking,¹⁴ Oxfam.¹⁵

The next section looks at the challenges underpinning women-led enterprises' limited access to finance, access to markets, and digital inclusion, and how BDS providers can increase this access and inclusion. It recognizes that BDS focuses specifically on tackling immediate opportunities to level the playing field for women entrepreneurs.



2.1 Access to Finance

2.1.1 Key Findings

Women-owned enterprises account for 32 percent of the MSME finance gap in developing countries.¹⁶ Low financial literacy and limited knowledge of financial systems and products deter women from accessing finance. This gap is particularly acute for women micro-entrepreneurs, as most are unable to meet the typical lending requirements of financing institutions, such as collateral and financial records. This results in women micro-entrepreneurs mostly relying on informal money lenders, friends, and family for affordable financing options.

14 Women's World Banking. [Unlocking Credit for Women-Owned Enterprises in Southeast Asia through Value Chain Digitization](#). Women's World Banking, 2020. Accessed September 2022.

15 Oxfam, Babson College, and Value for Women. [Understanding Structural Barriers & Hidden Bias in Access to Credit for Women-Led Businesses](#). Oxfam, 2018. Accessed August 2022.

16 SME Finance Forum. [MSME Finance Gap](#), data for 2017.

The study surfaced three key challenges underpinning the finance gap for microenterprises in the five countries:

A **Despite greater availability of financing options, there remains a lack of tailored products suited to the needs of women-led microenterprises.** Financial products to address economic and climatic adversities (e.g., cash flow lending, emergency loans, insurance) are critically limited for microenterprises, the majority of which are led by women, due to the high risks associated with these adversities.

Access to Finance for Business Needs

Access to finance is a common challenge for women micro-entrepreneurs across the five countries in this study, but with some differences. **Rwanda** and **Uganda** have made progress in increasing women's access to finance at the individual level, such as through opening bank accounts for savings and other personal finance needs. Fewer gains are evident in meeting business finance needs, such as through loans or enterprise insurance. **China, Indonesia, and Thailand** have seen significant developments around access to microenterprise credit. Yet they need to enhance the diversity of financial offerings, which remain limited mostly to lending products.



BOX 3

B **Women often are under-confident about engaging with formal financial systems.** Many BDS experts noted seeing a general sentiment of mistrust and lack of confidence in the financial system amongst women entrepreneurs (particularly in geographies such as Indonesia, Rwanda and Uganda). Underlying issues of men's dominance within financial institutions, historic exclusion, and inexperience with formal banking systems have contributed to this. Women's under-confidence manifests both in the loan application process and loan size, for women not only tend to self-exclude from the loan application process, but they also apply for fewer loans or smaller loan amounts than men.

“One of my biggest challenges when it comes to accessing finance is my fear of not being able to repay it. I have a small business, and before taking the loan, I need to be confident I can pay it back.

– **Woman entrepreneur, Indonesia**

C

Basic financial literacy remains lower amongst women micro-entrepreneurs than their male peers, in all five countries, a lack of training on loan management and repayment is a significant gap. Women microenterprises commonly face challenges related to the knowledge and practice of separating business and household incomes, using earned revenue effectively, and financial planning, financial management, accounting, and record keeping skills. It is important to note that the financial literacy needs of women micro-entrepreneurs vary, depending on the stage of their enterprise, accessibility to financial systems, and years of experience. For example, some of the owners of more mature enterprises interviewed for the study stressed that they require support to understand tax liability, based on business income rather than on basic bookkeeping. Additionally, BDS providers mentioned that the lack of training around loan management and repayment often deters women from unlocking credit opportunities.

With women micro-entrepreneurs commonly running cash-in and cash-out businesses, they often fail to grow their businesses significantly as they do not have the right systems in place for it, such as financial tracking.

– Helle Dahl Rasmussen, Director of Business Growth, Inkomoko, Rwanda

After taking the loan, we need support on understanding how to manage that loan. I really would like to know more about financial planning, forecasting revenue, taxes – how to make that money work for us. It is also important for us to learn about debt management.

–Woman entrepreneur, China

2.1.2 Solutions for BDS Providers on Enabling Access to Finance

BDS providers serve as a key bridge between women micro-entrepreneurs and FSPs (e.g., microfinance institutions or MFIs and banks). Based on evidence available from literature and the experience of experts and practitioners, through the following solutions, BDS providers can address the three key challenges:

A

Work with financial institutions in building financial products suited to the needs of women-led microenterprises. One, with FSPs, co-design tailored financial products that are responsive to specific women's needs. Having first-hand knowledge of engaging with women microenterprises, BDS providers can offer FSPs useful design insights to make their products more inclusive. Two, partner with FSPs to offer products to meet short-term capital needs (e.g., buying machinery, increasing sales, overcoming emergencies) – a highly demanded financing need by women micro-entrepreneurs. Three, support FSPs, including MFIs, to go beyond loans and provide other customised financial products that women micro-entrepreneurs require as they grow their businesses (e.g., savings, insurance, cash flow lending, emergency funding).

B

Support financial institutions to better engage with women entrepreneurs and better serve the needs of women-led microenterprises. This can entail providing entrepreneurs with support on funding applications and preparing entrepreneurs to engage with loan officers, both of which redress women entrepreneurs' lack of trust in FSPs, as well as training micro-entrepreneurs to pitch their enterprises to potential funders. Additionally, many of the BDS experts interviewed pointed out that bundling access to finance, loans, or cash grants with business-focused training led to higher participation and retention rates of women entrepreneurs and increased business growth. They added that entrepreneurs perceive programmes with a financial component to be more 'useful' even though, in many instances, the need for cash is not immediate nor the financial offer high.

INDUSTRY EXAMPLES**BDS Provisioning by Financial Services Providers**

For FSPs foraying into BDS provision to complement their financial offerings, providing such support alongside or before loan transfers can positively impact loan repayment rates. Some experts highlighted that training on basic business management and financial product usage has improved the portfolio performance of banks and MFIs.

MFIs such as Grasslands Finance in China and Amaritha in Indonesia are beginning to invest heavily in training for their customers.

■ Grasslands Finance, China

In a recent initiative, Grasslands Finance found that women are more receptive to training that complements financial products. While only 25 percent of its MFI clients are women, women make up 60 percent of people registering on its newly launched education platforms.

■ Amaritha, Indonesia

Amaritha encourages digital product learning for its customers through two methods. First, compulsory borrower training focuses on basic financial and digital literacy. Basic financial literacy covers topics such as how to manage daily cash flow, and how to separate business and household cash flow. Basic digital literacy includes topics such as using an app to monitor the loan repayment progress, creating accounts, and managing usernames and passwords, among others. It also offers dedicated WhatsApp business training. Since WhatsApp is a widely used social media platform, the training focuses on enabling borrowers to use it effectively to expand their customer base.

**BOX 4**



Address the financial literacy needs of women entrepreneurs by understanding their differentiated needs on bookkeeping and accounting topics, and helping them to better understand terms and conditions related to financial products. For micro-entrepreneurs ready to grow their businesses beyond the seed stage, BDS providers highlighted the importance of designing training and curricula focused on managing finances.



2.2 Access to Markets (Including E-commerce)

2.2.1 Key Findings

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, globally, women-led micro- and small enterprises were more likely to increase the use of digital platforms than men-led enterprises.¹⁷ And, while BDS providers have rapidly adapted their programmes to provide support around e-commerce and online selling platforms, the full potential of women micro-entrepreneurs on these platforms remains unrealised. At the same time, the level of e-commerce penetration varies significantly, across the five countries. Whilst China, Indonesia, and Thailand have significantly developed markets with both big and small e-commerce platforms, the e-commerce markets in Rwanda and Uganda are in nascent stages and have smaller platforms.

The study surfaced three key challenges underpinning the market gaps women microenterprises face, particularly in e-commerce:



Multiple facets of transitioning from physical to digital selling commonly challenge micro-entrepreneurs, in all five countries, who prefer to sell on social media platforms. Women micro-entrepreneurs lacked insights and experience to create digital content and optimally showcase their products online. Women micro-entrepreneurs in China and Indonesia reported finding challenging the onboarding requirements of formal e-commerce platforms, and, instead, preferred selling on social media platforms – such as WeChat and TikTok as well as Instagram and WhatsApp, which are highly popular in China and Indonesia, respectively. Furthermore, they pointed to high advertising costs as a barrier to effectively selling online.

Going digital is the biggest trend in China, and the single most demanded training by entrepreneurs, including women micro-entrepreneurs. They want [to know] how to sell online.

– **Shu Chen, Social Impact Program Manager, Corporate Communications, Visa, China**

¹⁷ Iacovone L., et al. [COVID-19 and Women-Led Businesses: More Innovation but Greater Financial Risk](#). World Bank Blogs. World Bank, July 2021.

We don't have the expertise to manage social media. For digital marketing, you have to regularly post pictures and do promotions and that can become burdensome. We cannot hire a professional to do this because costs will then go up. My husband helps me out but if he does not post, then our sales suffer.

– Woman entrepreneur, Indonesia

Transitioning to Digital Selling: Country Experiences

Selling products through digital channels offers new growth opportunities for women micro-entrepreneurs. But the ability to transition from physical to digital markets depends on local market and contextual factors.

Women micro-entrepreneurs interviewed in **China** noted that digital markets offer great opportunities to expand their businesses but the experience of transitioning from selling in physical markets to selling in digital markets was easier for entrepreneurs from urban areas compared to those in rural ones.

As an example of such opportunities, a woman micro-entrepreneur making and selling curtains in Chifeng City for 20 years had to close her shop during the COVID-19 pandemic. The shop was her family's only source of income. She saw that many people were selling goods on Douyin (TikTok), so she transitioned to the platform by sharing the process of cutting and sewing curtains with everyone, explaining how to select fabrics and showing the effect of curtains after installation. As a result, she quickly attracted hundreds of local followers. This led to growth in her business. To manage costs, she gave up her rented shop and turned her balcony into a studio. She says she now earns several times more than she used to.

While the digital realm can be an opportunity to access new markets, the transition has been more challenging in some contexts. For example, BDS experts in **Uganda** indicated that digital selling has been particularly challenging for women micro-entrepreneurs given the high costs of data packages, limited access to mobile phones, and a lack of knowledge of which platforms to use and how to optimise consumer targeting. Additionally, a lack of infrastructure to support e-commerce, such as logistics partners and reliable delivery mechanisms, limits the potential for women micro-entrepreneurs to sell goods online.



BOX 5

B

Women micro-entrepreneurs' lack of market information limits their competitiveness, their innovation, and their ability to develop differentiated market strategies.

E-commerce experts pointed out that low-value and low-margin sectors (such as agriculture, food processing, catering, and beauty) are often dominated by women entrepreneurs, thereby leading to lower sales performance on the platforms, in comparison to men, who dominate high-value sectors (such as electronics and general merchandise).¹⁸ Lacking adequate market information on better performing sectors, market trends, potential customer segments, and areas of promising innovation prevents them from moving into high-value sectors or innovating to enhance competitiveness and realise higher sales.

C

Women often face challenges in expanding their markets, particularly export markets.

Women micro-entrepreneurs are predominant in food, beverage, and handicraft sectors, sectors which are particularly challenging for the standardisation of products, meeting regulatory requirements, and having appropriate labelling and packaging, including when selling online.

2.2.2 Solutions for BDS Providers on Enhancing Access to Markets

This study's analysis points towards three specific actions BDS providers can take to address the key market challenges just mentioned:

A

Develop curricula focused on various aspects of accessing digital markets. Basic curricula need to include training on digital marketing and marketing tools. Beyond those basics, BDS offerings on inventory management, growth planning, packaging, creative storytelling, finding suppliers, and pricing are currently scarce and under-developed. These need to be strengthened to keep up with the fast-evolving digital landscape.

We have seen that there is strong demand for accessing tools that can help with digital marketing. We, for instance, provide basic training on how to use Canva and even Google Maps and apps for deliveries. These tools have been transformative for women micro-entrepreneurs who are running their businesses from their homes and are looking to grow.

– Robin Bush, Country Representative, Malaysia, The Asia Foundation

¹⁸ International Finance Corporation (IFC). Women and E-commerce in Southeast Asia. IFC, 2021.

E-commerce Platforms Widely Used by Women Entrepreneurs in China and Indonesia



BOX 6

In the countries with high e-commerce penetration, women entrepreneurs tend to use diverse platforms. In **China**, e-commerce platforms like Pinduoduo (focused on agricultural products), Taobao, 1688.com, and DHGate are highly popular amongst women micro-entrepreneurs. In **Indonesia**, women micro-entrepreneurs favour Evermos, Tokopedia, and Lazada.

INDUSTRY EXAMPLES



BOX 7

Marketing Support for Micro- Merchants

To support small and micro-merchants in China, the **Alipay** platform has launched **merchant services** that provide them with basic capabilities across business operations, including merchant management, credit financing, marketing support and digitalisation. To further facilitate the digital operations of small and microenterprises and help them improve efficiency and reduce costs, Alipay launched enhanced measures to support them, including zero fees for cash withdrawals and 100 percent money-back protection scheme against certain types of fraud.

B

Address the market information gaps faced by women micro-entrepreneurs. Market research services – including information and data on market sizing, customer trends, and product types – will be highly beneficial for women micro-entrepreneurs, who do not have the time or resources to invest in such research.

There are challenges around the standardisation of products. Often these women run home-based businesses and so find it difficult to have standardised products of certain quality, or meet requirements for certification that allow them to trade. Support on these aspects is very much needed.

– Juliet Kasita, Country Manager, Sinapis, Uganda



Partner with e-commerce platforms to strengthen access to market offerings. Whilst the potential of e-commerce in enabling market access – including through emerging channels such as influencer marketing¹⁹ – is recognised by most BDS providers, partnerships in this area remain largely untapped. BDS providers can explore several ways of partnering, such as incentivising platform access for micro-entrepreneurs, who are part of the BDS programme, developing e-commerce training to be delivered as part of BDS offerings, or strengthening customer support to, or training offered for, platform sellers.²⁰

Influencer Marketing and E-commerce

As part of the e-commerce boom, in **China, Indonesia, and Thailand, influencer marketing**, which offers new channels for market access and entrepreneurship, has become highly popular. In Indonesia, for example, Tokopedia recently launched an initiative called “Tokopedia Affiliate” that allows people to share information about products on social media and earn commissions based on sales.



BOX 8



2.3 Digital Inclusion

2.3.1 Key Findings

Recent research²¹ also points out that women micro-entrepreneurs are more likely to primarily use basic mobile services than men, with available data suggesting that women usually use “low stakes” tools for business that are simple, low-cost, or free. While the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the process of digital uptake and use, it also widened digital inclusion gaps. The study reveals two key challenges that underpin this digital inclusion gap:



Contextual challenges inhibit digital inclusion for women micro-entrepreneurs. These challenges include the absence of adequate digital infrastructure, ownership of devices, weak regulatory frameworks, and high costs of internet services that increase the cost of doing business. BDS experts in Uganda and Rwanda pointed to the challenge of mobile phones often being a shared asset amongst family members in these countries. This is in contrast with conditions in China and Indonesia, where most women in the focus groups had their own mobile phone. In China, all focus group participants had a smartphone.

¹⁹ Influencer marketing is a collaboration between popular social media users and brands to promote brands’ products or services. [What Is Influencer Marketing?](#) McKinsey & Co., 2023.

²⁰ Women’s World Banking. [Social Commerce Entrepreneurship and New Opportunities for Women’s Financial Inclusion in India and Indonesia](#). Women’s World Banking, 2019.

²¹ GSMA. [Empowering Women Micro-Entrepreneurs Through Mobile](#), GSMA, 2023.

B**Lack the know-how to leverage digital technology within business processes.**

Whilst the adoption of digital payments and mobile money has accelerated amongst women's micro-businesses, these businesses still struggle to digitalise such key aspects as inventory management, record keeping, and supply chain management. In China, with a high degree of digital adoption, for example, women entrepreneurs need support to understand and use market data on pricing, market trends, and changes in consumer preferences to reduce risks around product selection and inventory management. As more businesses go digital, the lack of knowledge of cybersecurity issues also poses a significant risk to businesses of all sizes.

We are moving online and adopting digital tools in our everyday business operations. But at the same time, I am very concerned about cybersecurity and safety issues. Business scams and frauds also can happen, and I don't have enough knowledge about these things. How to protect my business from these things is what I would like more support on.

– Woman entrepreneur, China

We want to understand digital tools that can help us in decision-making. I want to learn how data on market trends, customer behaviour and buying patterns can be used so that I can improve my business.

– Woman entrepreneur, China

2.3.2 Solutions for BDS Providers on Enhancing Digital Inclusion

The study's analysis points to two crucial actions BDS providers can take to address the digital inclusion challenges just mentioned:

A

Address digital literacy needs of women micro-entrepreneurs. The majority of BDS providers and experts highlighted that digital inclusion begins with digital literacy. Training and support to improve digital literacy for women micro-entrepreneurs must be highly contextualised to the entrepreneur's digital competence level and the maturity of their microenterprise. Where digital adoption is low, programmes should start with building women micro-entrepreneurs' trust in digital tools. In contexts where digital adoption is more advanced, it is more valuable to provide support on the use of data analytics and enhancing cybersecurity within digital business processes.

There is a difference between digitisation and digitalisation. We (BDS providers) need to help people to first digitise (take pictures, scan documents, store records digitally) and then move to digitalisation with adoption of platforms, transforming their businesses with technologies and apps.

– **Angela Bageine, Sector Head, SMEs in Uganda, Private Sector Foundation Uganda**

B

Support women micro-entrepreneurs' transition from digitisation to digitalisation by integrating digital technology within business practices. A spectrum of interventions is available to BDS providers to enhance the digital inclusion of women-led microenterprises – from microenterprises' digitisation (converting records and information into digital formats) to digitalisation (making changes to business processes through the adoption of digital technologies).²² BDS providers have a critical role to play in training entrepreneurs on the digital technologies and applications that help enterprises build their online presence, manage inventory and supply chains online, and perform other business functions. Today, this offer is weak within BDS.

Through e-commerce, I sell cat litter not only in China but also around the world. We rely on data to guide our production and would like to learn how to use it more effectively. Our production is based on sales history, determining how much to produce in the next month, and which region is a growing market.

– **Woman entrepreneur, China**

22 International Labour Organization (ILO). [Small Goes Digital – How Digitalization Can Bring About Productive Growth for Micro and Small Enterprises](#). ILO, 2021. Geneva.

3

UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN-LED MICROENTERPRISES THROUGH EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

3.1. Key Barriers in Access to, and Effectiveness of, BDS in Supporting Women-Led Microenterprises

While BDS plays an important role in enabling and addressing access to finance, markets, and digital inclusion (as discussed in the previous section), the design and implementation of BDS, itself, faces barriers that limit its effectiveness.

BDS providers and experts and women entrepreneurs, alike, pointed to multiple ways BDS is carried out today that limit BDS's role and effectiveness in supporting women-led microenterprises. Specifically, they pointed both to demand-side barriers (barriers women entrepreneurs face) and supply-side barriers (barriers BDS providers and related ecosystem actors face), many of which derive from the same cross-cutting gender-related barriers described at the start of Section 2. Charts 2, 2.1 and 2.2 highlight these supply-side and demand-side barriers. In particular, they highlight country-specific gaps and practices as noted by both BDS experts and providers, and women micro-entrepreneurs.

Chart 2. Demand and Supply Barriers in Access to and the Effectiveness of Business Development Services



 Demand-side barriers	 Supply-side barriers
Lack of awareness about BDS offerings	Limited on-the-ground efforts by BDS providers to reach women
Delivery-related factors, such as programme flexibility and modalities, as well as gender norms impede access to and active participation in BDS	Budget constraints limit longer-term and consistent support for BDS delivery
Mismatch between basic-level BDS offerings and the advanced requirements of growth-oriented women micro-entrepreneurs	Misalignment between participant expectations of programme impact and actual impact
High fees for some advanced BDS programmes exclude entrepreneurs with fewer resources	Fragmented and uncoordinated training ecosystems
Lack of implementation support after training and associated training fatigue, which restricts effectiveness of BDS	Trade-offs inherent in effectively serving the needs of women entrepreneurs

Chart 2.1. Demand-Side Barriers

1. Lack of awareness about BDS offerings	Several BDS stakeholders across all five countries pointed out that despite the growing demand for BDS, additional actions are required to ensure women's uptake of BDS training. Women are often not aware of the availability of such programmes. This is magnified for both men and women entrepreneurs based in rural or remote communities. Many services remain limited to urban and peri-urban areas.
2. Delivery-related factors, such as programme flexibility and modalities, as well as gender norms impede access to and active participation in BDS	<p>The delivery factors with the greatest impacts on women micro-entrepreneurs' demand for, access to, and completion of BDS training are: flexibility in timing (synchronous or asynchronous), mode (online or offline), and location of services. Around the world, women must balance income generation with household and care-related responsibilities, leading to a condition known as "time poverty".²³ As women's time poverty increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, BDS providers found that some level of online and self-learning modules drove uptake and commitment to complete training modules. This depended, however, on access to phones, particularly smartphones, and internet connectivity.</p> <p>Further, safety concerns and norms around travel reduce women entrepreneurs' access to BDS. Women are hesitant to engage if their participation is seen as breaking local social norms, especially around their roles inside and outside homes. Where norms necessitate spousal or family approval to participate, access is more difficult. Finally, enterprises that are informal are unable to access government trainings that require proof of business registration.</p>
3. Mismatch between basic-level BDS offerings and the advanced requirements of growth-oriented women micro-entrepreneurs	Women business owners require tailored BDS offerings that respond to their sector of operation, size, geography, market context, and stage of growth. The current "one size fits all" approach seen in the study's primary research, entailing an offer of basic financial, business, and digital training, not only does not meet microenterprises' differentiated needs but also leads to low demand for and the limited effectiveness of BDS. Currently, the bulk of BDS offerings focuses on basic training and cannot match the needs of growth-oriented micro-entrepreneurs who have moved beyond this level.
4. High fees for some advanced BDS programmes exclude entrepreneurs with fewer resources	There is conflicting evidence about the effect of charging women entrepreneurs a fee to access BDS services. Some BDS providers noted that women are more likely to value and better engage with BDS if they pay a fee. However, from the demand-side perspective, when a woman micro-entrepreneur has limited resources, a BDS fee can prevent her from enrolling in a training programme.
5. Lack of implementation support after training and associated training fatigue, which restricts effectiveness	Feedback from BDS ecosystem stakeholders, particularly from entrepreneurship support organisations in Indonesia and Uganda, highlighted that women-led enterprises often need support to apply training content to their business practices. Yet BDS do not always provide post-programme support to help entrepreneurs transition from learning to practice. This can lead to "training fatigue" amongst recipients or a perception that such support is low in value. This can subsequently affect the demand for future BDS offerings.

23 Hyde, Elizabeth, Margaret E Greene and Gary L Darmstadt. [Time Poverty: Obstacle to Women's Human Rights, Health and Sustainable Development](#). Journal of Global Health, 2020, 10(2): 020313. Accessed October 2022

Chart 2.2. Supply-Side Barriers

<p>1. Limited on-the-ground efforts by BDS providers to reach women</p>	<p>As previously described, reaching women micro-entrepreneurs can require not only identifying interested entrepreneurs but also taking steps to make participation more accessible for women given prevailing gender norms. This can require substantial efforts, involving higher costs and resources. For example, when targeting women in marginalised or vulnerable communities (e.g., refugees in Rwanda) or communities in geographically remote regions (e.g., communities in smaller Indonesian islands or rural areas), BDS providers have to engage extensively at the community level – including with host communities and family members – to first get buy-in, and then to build a support system for the entrepreneur.</p>
<p>2. Budget constraints limit longer-term and consistent support for BDS delivery</p>	<p>Cost constraints often lead to BDS interventions that are ad hoc, short term, and/or provide only training, without offering any transition support. While such programming may be appropriate to meet time-bound goals (such as accompanying a loan), several regional experts and BDS providers in Indonesia and Uganda highlighted that outside of such situations, returns to both BDS training and enterprises improve when post-training support to implement learning is also provided. Yet post-training support is inherently more customised to the individual entrepreneur, which requires additional resources.</p>
<p>3. Misalignment between participant expectations of programme impact and actual impact</p>	<p>BDS suppliers must manage participants' common expectation that BDS will impact their business outcomes relatively quickly after training. Outcomes and impacts, however, depend on both contextual economic factors and effective application of training in business practices, and may manifest over a longer period. Some BDS providers also pointed out that some participants expect financial support as part of the BDS programme, even if this is outside the programme scope.</p>
<p>4. Fragmented and uncoordinated training ecosystems</p>	<p>There is a notable lack of partnerships in the BDS ecosystem to provide a continuum of specialised support for microenterprises as they grow. In particular, growth-oriented enterprises graduating from the micro to the small firm categories do not receive adequate support in making that transition. Entrepreneurs often receive financial skills training as microenterprises, for instance, but then need loan management, market strategy and investment knowledge as the business grows. Competition amongst BDS providers for customers and revenue (i.e., grants and paid subscriptions) limits the propensity to collaborate.</p>
<p>5. Trade-offs inherent in effectively serving the needs of women entrepreneurs</p>	<p>Women entrepreneurs stated that whilst they appreciated the flexibility of digital-first offerings, they also value the social capital formation that comes from in-person exchanges with peers. This was particularly pronounced in peri-urban and rural areas, where women have access to fewer networks with other business owners. BDS providers contend with a trade-off between investment in virtual offerings that respond to time and travel constraints, and investment in in-person engagements that support peer learning and network building.</p>

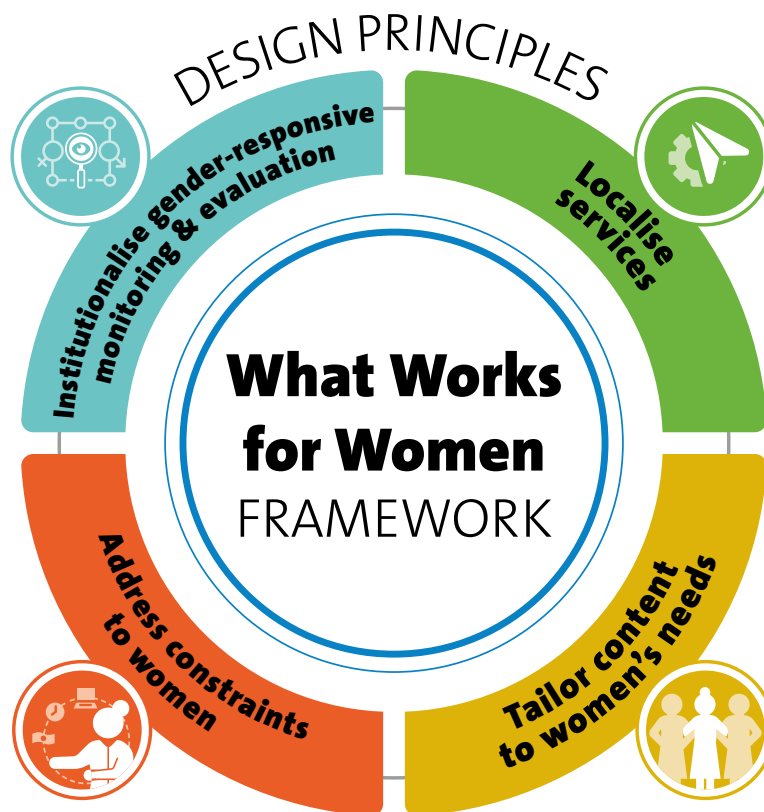
3.2. What Works for BDS? A Practical Framework for Action to Support Women-Led Microenterprises

Based on the findings on challenges women-led microenterprises face in accessing finance, accessing markets, and on digital inclusion, as well as taking up BDS themselves, the report offers a **practical framework for action** for those stakeholders interested in, or already funding, designing, or implementing BDS.

The proposed framework for action, an output from this research, captures **four core design principles** (see Chart 3) to enable stakeholders to better unlock the opportunities for women-led enterprises in accessing finance and markets, and for digital inclusion. By bringing a “gender lens”²⁴ to BDS design and implementation, these four core design principles address the underlying gender constraints that face women-led microenterprises. Therefore, these principles are also applicable to other, non-BDS-related interventions and programmes that support women’s entrepreneurship or the growth of women-led enterprises.

The framework is both informed by the specific findings of this study and grounded in evidence from practitioner and evaluation literature on BDS, women’s entrepreneurship, and entrepreneur training and capacity-building from other emerging country contexts.

Chart 3. Core Design Principles of BDS to support women-led microenterprises



24 Applying a “gender lens” refers to taking the existing differences between women and men into account when analysing a situation or when developing specific approaches or programmes (UNFPA).

PRINCIPLE 1

Address Constraints Specific to Women in the Design of BDS



BDS offerings that have a gender-inclusive approach are designed to meet the specific needs of women micro-entrepreneurs and lower barriers to access interventions that catalyse enterprise growth. This can look like: addressing low digital literacy rates; building in flexibility to support women entrepreneurs to balance household, care, and business responsibilities while seeking training; tackling gender norms and biases that restrict women's participation in markets; and making BDS affordable for women entrepreneurs, including factoring in the costs of access to these services.

PRINCIPLE 2

Tailor Content to Women's Needs



Using a gender lens to tailor content to women entrepreneurs' needs leads to improved BDS uptake and impact. This can look like: assessing content that delivers best value to the participants; providing spaces for women entrepreneurs to learn from, and network with, peers locally and in other contexts; supporting the development of leadership and negotiation skills; and developing a continuum of support for entrepreneurs to access follow-on BDS for their next phase of growth.

PRINCIPLE 3

Localise Services



When service providers, entrepreneurship support organisations, and trainers are local, they enable support that is highly contextualised to socio-cultural norms and contexts.²⁵ Co-design and delivery of BDS with local partners also allows such interventions to reach a wider range of communities and potential participants.

PRINCIPLE 4

Institutionalise Gender-Responsive Monitoring and Evaluation²⁶



There is still much to learn, and building an evidence base will allow each BDS provider to better respond to the evolving needs of its women entrepreneurs. **This requires applying a gender lens to the monitoring and evaluation of BDS.** This consists of: defining and measuring success and engagement at a gender-disaggregated level, especially where BDS delivery includes both men and women entrepreneurs;²⁷ continuous monitoring to ensure real-time feedback to drive design improvements; and going beyond measuring outputs to document outcomes and impacts on key enterprise growth metrics.

²⁵ World Bank Group, [Enterprising Women: Toward a Targeted, Gender-Informed Entrepreneurship Policy](#), World Bank, 2021.

²⁶ Gender-responsive programming, including monitoring and evaluation, refers to intentionally employing gender considerations to affect the design, implementation, and results of programmes. Gender-responsive programmes reflect girls' and women's realities and needs, in components such as site selection, project staff, content, as well as monitoring and evaluation.

²⁷ International Labour Organization (ILO). [Gender Inclusive Service Provision: A Quick Guide for Financial and Business Service Development Providers](#). ILO, 2022. See also, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). [Business Development Services How to Guide](#). UNDP, 2004.

Box 9 explains in detail the approach taken to arrive at the proposed “What Works” framework for action to unlock opportunities for women-led microenterprise growth.

What Works for BDS

The framework illustrated in Chart 3, comprising the four principles to unlock opportunities for women-led microenterprises, brings together the specific findings from this research with practitioner experiences and evaluation literature on BDS, women’s entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurship training. Constructing the framework drew on analysing data from the following three sources:

- 1.** Primary research in the five countries of interest, consisting of interviews with practitioners and experts, alongside discussions with women micro-entrepreneurs in China and Indonesia, as described in the Methodological Note (Annex 1).
- 2.** Evidence from reviews and meta-analyses of impact evaluations from emerging economies. This evidence base compiles results from over 200 studies deploying a mix of research methods, including randomised control trials, to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions relevant to BDS, women’s entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurship training.²⁸
- 3.** Other available literature on interventions on BDS, women’s entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurship training.

This evidence base review was heterogeneous as the studies varied in scope, the countries involved, the research methods applied, and the focus on gender differences in assessing outcomes. For instance, evidence reviews and meta-analyses provided direction on the overall impact of a set of interventions and assessed the availability of evidence. Other studies were limited to a specific country or a particular intervention. Further, analyses used different terminologies for assessments. Given this heterogeneity, and towards grounding the framework in this evidence base, the evidence reviewed was organised based on:

- The source, i.e., whether evidence underlying each of the principles came from primary research, evidence reviews and meta-analyses, and other available literature, and;
- The direction of impact, i.e., whether the analysis shows positive, mixed or no impact.

The evidence was then divided into three categories (orange, blue and green) as described below. In the following sections, tags with these colours on the principles and sub-principles indicate the evidence source, and where relevant, the evidence on the direction of impact.



BOX 9

²⁸ The evidence review draws from the following sources: the [Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative, Revisiting What Works: Women, Economic Empowerment and Smart Design](#), the World Bank (including from its Gender Innovation Labs in [Africa](#) and [East Asia and the Pacific](#) and [other programme evaluations](#)), and the [Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab](#).



An ORANGE tag indicates practices and recommendations on interventions shared by practitioners, experts, and other stakeholders in the study's interviews.



A GREEN tag indicates practices and recommendations where interventions show largely positive outcomes, and/or are proven with robust evidence using a variety of research methods, including randomised controlled trials, quasi experimental studies, mixed methods, etc.



A BLUE tag indicates practices and recommendations on interventions that, i) have been noted in practitioner and other literature, including case studies and industry reports, and/or ii) impact evaluations that have shown mixed outcomes on interventions.

3.2.1 Principle 1. Address Constraints Specific to Women in the Design of BDS

For BDS providers to help overcome the growth challenges that women-led MSMEs face, they need to take a gender-inclusive approach. This requires designing interventions to meet the needs of women micro-entrepreneurs and lower barriers to entry, towards catalysing enterprise growth. Key elements are investing in understanding and addressing women micro-entrepreneurs' preferences around the modes, times, and locations of training and support delivery, and addressing technology and mobility constraints.²⁹



3.2.1.1. Address Inherent Limitations Around Digital Programming

To successfully provide online BDS that reaches women micro-entrepreneurs, BDS providers need to **factor in inherent limitations to women's digital participation in programme design and delivery.** These include:

- Addressing access issues stemming from poor internet connectivity, high costs for internet access, lack of devices, or sharing of devices.³⁰
- Addressing digital literacy issues,³¹ such as the lack of familiarity with solutions or concerns around digital safety that can impede women's use of digital channels to grow their business. BDS providers flagged that women from rural communities or older entrepreneurs can be more apprehensive about using digital solutions.

29 A gender-inclusive design approach involves the following components: understanding the needs, wants, and barriers for women; defining and synthesising the top problems and opportunities; ideating new ways to serve women; testing early ideas and concepts rapidly with women; and, adapting and designing new products and services that meet women customers' needs.

30 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). [Fostering Women Entrepreneurship in the Digital Economy](#): Insights from UNCTAD's eTrade for Women Advocates, 2019-2021 Cohort. UNCTAD, 2022. Geneva.

31 International Labour Organization (ILO). [Gender-Inclusive Service Provision: A Quick Guide for Financial and Business Development Services Provider](#). ILO, 2022

Simple tips can go a long way in helping women micro-entrepreneurs showcase their products online. For instance, women may take photographs of their products and not think about framing, lighting, backgrounds, etc. Even trainings on how to build your brand, how to create a logo, and how to reach out to customers are topics women micro-entrepreneurs lack expertise in.

– **Angela Bageine, Sector Head, SMEs in Uganda, Private Sector Foundation Uganda**

We developed an e-commerce module to help women micro-entrepreneurs understand how to navigate online platforms like Jumia,³² and we now have to generate awareness about this training being available. Often the women may not know that this kind of support is available, and we are taking steps to address this information gap.

– **Alice Waweru, Regional Programme Manager, Technoserve**

Good practices to address inherent limitations around digital programming with a gender lens:

- Collection of disaggregated, baseline data to understand women entrepreneurs' use of and preference for different communications channels (e.g., phones, video meetings, texts/SMS, social media).
- Development of short, easy-to-access modules that are both smartphone and featurephone friendly. This includes the deployment of voice response training alternatives that provide training over short phone calls.
- Provision of training and support through community-based options where women have no or poor access to phone services.
- Allocation of a budget and time to build participants' comfort in utilising online platforms and videoconferencing used for BDS.

³² Jumia is a large e-commerce platform in Africa.



Reducing Barriers to Digital Uptake

■ Accelerate Programme, Indonesia

The **Accelerate Programme** in Indonesia and Malaysia partners with State-run digital access centres to provide women with access to computers with internet connectivity. Women micro-entrepreneurs come to these centres to access online training modules.

■ Inkomoko, Rwanda

Inkomoko, an advisory and impact investor that provides BDS support to its client entrepreneurs, has scaled up its business support through a voice response training system. Entrepreneurs receive a five-minute lesson over a phone call, and can participate in a short quiz on topics covered in the module.



3.2.1.2 Build in flexibility and plan around women's disproportionate care and household responsibilities

Women entrepreneurs often have different preferences on content delivery. BDS interventions need to be flexible in adjusting to these preferences.³³ BDS experts highlighted how building in such flexibility ultimately improves training uptake and completion. It includes:

- In the design of interventions, acknowledgement and redressal of time-related constraints faced by women entrepreneurs due to greater caregiving and household responsibilities.
- Addressing childcare and mobility needs related to on-site training.³⁴

33 International Labour Organization (ILO). [Gender-Inclusive Service Provision: A Quick Guide for Financial and Business Development Services Provider](#). ILO, 2022.

34 For more recommendations on gender-based violence prevention as part of women's entrepreneurship programming, see Oxfam's [Women's Economic Leadership in LAC: Book 3](#).

Good practices to build flexibility and plan around women's needs:

- Incorporation of participants' time preferences in programme delivery. Some BDS providers highlighted, for instance, that women often prefer weekends or hours outside their business and household-related work hours for facilitated and/or group learning sessions.
- Incorporation of reasonable timelines to allow for self-paced learning based on entrepreneur time convenience. Some BDS providers find that having a broad timeline with assignment deadlines and pre-recorded training modules is an effective approach to ensure flexibility and improve participant accountability.
- Incorporation of childcare and mobility support, including ensuring access to transport in cases of on-site training. This may include, for example, subsidised grants for day-care, on-site childcare spaces/creches, and subsidised transportation costs or provision of transportation to and from in-person training sites.

INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Building Flexibility Around Women Entrepreneurs' Household and Care Responsibilities

■ Accelerate Programme, Indonesia

When the Accelerate programme in Indonesia switched from fixed-hour training to self-paced learning, it saw a marked increase in participation rates amongst women entrepreneurs.



3.2.1.3 Tackle Gender Norms and Biases

Prevailing gender norms and social contexts shape the ability of women to participate in employment and market activities. Where gender norms dictate that women are primarily responsible for managing the household, there may be resistance to their participation in market activities. Therefore, BDS providers need to engage with **communities and family members** to tackle such challenges and better enable the active participation of women micro-entrepreneurs. This can also help to mitigate risks of gender-based violence that are sometimes associated with an increase in women's agency and ensuing changes in household dynamics.³⁵ The process includes:

³⁵ Revenga, Ana, and Meagen Dooley. [What Works for Women Entrepreneurs: A Meta-Analysis of Recent Evaluations to Support Female Entrepreneurship](#). Working Paper No. 142, Global Development and Economy. Brookings Institution, 2020.

- **Supporting potential and current participants to navigate and negotiate prevailing social norms**, especially in places where women do not traditionally work outside their homes.
- **Being mindful of inter- and intra-familial dynamics and gender norms** in the delivery of in-person training, such as the ability of participants to speak or speak freely in the presence of family, elders, or community members.
- **Balancing power dynamics within the classroom**, which is critical in mixed-gender spaces. When BDS providers are conscious of power imbalances, they can seek to address them through creating small groups or holding activities in single-sex settings, and by proactively supporting the participation of women.

In our experience, when we ran competitions that were not women-only competitions, we did not see a high number of applications. So, one year, we announced a women-only competition and they applied... Do they think they have a bigger chance? Are they more comfortable or confident? That is a guess.

– Helle Dahl Rasmussen, Director of Business Growth, Inkomoko, Rwanda

Good practices to tackle gender norms and biases:

- Engagement with community leaders (e.g., senior village heads, local role models) to encourage women’s participation in BDS.
- Building awareness and capacity among broader BDS provider teams to identify, assess, and respond to risks associated with gender-based violence, such as through training service providers. Partnerships with local organisations working to combat the risk of gender-based violence are particularly helpful.
- Recruitment of trainers who are women, as women entrepreneurs are often more comfortable with them.³⁶
- Use of local women role models or champions to encourage more women to grow their businesses.
- Use of both gender-inclusive communications (e.g., portraying both women and men in promotional material images) and outreach targeted to women when reaching out to prospective participants.³⁷

36 International Labour Organization (ILO). [Gender Inclusive Service Provision: A Quick Guide for Financial and Business Service Development Providers](#). ILO, 2022.

37 Using gender-inclusive communications means speaking and writing in a way that does not discriminate against a particular sex, social gender, or gender identity, and does not perpetuate gender stereotypes.

BDS providers need to go back to the ground and focus on everyone's mindset, every other person around that woman who they are training.

– Juliet Kasita, Country Manager, Sinapis, Uganda

3.2.1.4 Make BDS Affordable

There was no consensus amongst BDS providers and experts on whether BDS should be offered for a fee and, if so, what the fee should be.^{38,39} Many BDS experts highlighted that a small fee associated with programme participation helps increase accountability amongst participants, thereby resulting in higher retention and lower dropouts. There is a perception amongst some entrepreneurs that “good” BDS programmes charge a fee. Therefore, even a nominal fee may **improve commitment and retention**, and may also incentivise BDS providers to offer **better and more value-added services**, customised to clients' needs. Charging for BDS interventions can contribute to the **long-term financial sustainability of providers**.

On the other hand, some respondents emphasized that charging a fee is **detrimental to attracting a pipeline of programme participants**, especially as the capacity to pay for BDS has drastically decreased since the pandemic. In fact, some BDS providers have reported that **providing a financial incentive** – such as a small grant to fund implementation of new business activities – has been instrumental in maintaining participant engagement in the face of competing obligations.

BDS must be made low cost as price sensitivity is critical for women entrepreneurs who are running small businesses and cannot afford these kinds of services at high prices. I feel it should not be free so that there is an incentive to finish the training and implement it.

– Mrinalini Venkatachalam, Regional Director, South-East Asia and Oceania, WeConnect International

Good practices to improve BDS affordability for women entrepreneurs:

- Consideration of the wider economic context, and the ability and willingness to pay in determining what fee might be levied.
- Consideration of alternatives to fees, such as cash rewards and scholarships to bring in more women entrepreneurs.

38 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). [Business Development Services How to Guide](#). UNDP, 2004.

39 The majority of BDS providers interviewed for this research provide services for free as these are subsidised by donor funding.

3.2.2. Principle 2. Tailor Content to Women's Needs

BDS content should meet the needs of both women entrepreneurs and their businesses. There is no “one size fits all” as women-led MSMEs are not a homogenous group. Their needs differ based on contextual realities; BDS and training content need to be tailored to those. For BDS providers and programmes, factoring in contextual economic and social nuances and better responding to the specific needs of businesses would lead to greater BDS uptake and impact.



3.2.2.1 Assess content needs to deliver best value for participants

In designing content, BDS providers need to consider multiple levels, including:

- **Gathering and using data on specific business and personal challenges** that women micro-entrepreneurs face in growing their enterprises.⁴⁰
- **Aligning content to support both business growth and business resilience.** The COVID-19 pandemic has brought an increasing focus on both supporting business growth and **building business resilience**. This comprises assisting entrepreneurs to improve risk mitigation and contingency planning. As the pandemic has fuelled the movement of businesses online, **digital marketing** is another area for support to improve business growth and resilience. Women micro-entrepreneurs in all countries in this study indicated increased demand for learning about digital marketing. BDS providers may need to build their in-house capacities and expertise to support microenterprises to leverage social media platforms for business growth, covering topics such as customer diversification, selling in digital spaces, and paid promotions.
- **Responding to foundational BDS training support needs,** which are still widely sought, including on **basic financial training, business management, record keeping, and accounting**. The demand for these services and training support is relatively higher in Rwanda and Uganda compared to China, Indonesia, and Thailand. In contrast, more mature or growth-focused microenterprises often require more advanced business management support for **inventory management and supply chain and customer relationship management**.
- **Providing sector-specific training and specialised support** within BDS offerings. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, demand has increased from micro-entrepreneurs in tourism, handicrafts, food and beverages, and retail sectors. Women micro-entrepreneurs view **expert advisory support on business topics** such as loan management, legal issues, tax compliance, and market information as particularly useful.

⁴⁰ World Bank Group. [Enterprising Women: Toward a Targeted, Gender-Informed Entrepreneurship Policy](#). World Bank, 2021.

Good practices to assess context and business-specific content needs:

- Conducting a thorough needs assessment with a sample of target participants to account for priorities before launching a support programme for participants or clients.⁴¹
- Developing and communicating curricula that provide a clear learning curve for entrepreneurs at different levels of maturity.
- Packaging and combining solutions to provide holistic support to manage business growth, such as financial, legal, and marketing services.
- Based on participants' sectoral focuses, sector-related components integrated into BDS training.

Approaches to Providing Sector-Specific Support

BDS providers interviewed for this study had tested a range of approaches to providing sector-specific support. These included partnering with sector experts to co-develop training, curating sector learning sessions, and designing opportunities for participants to interact with sector experts.



BOX 12



3.2.2.2 Include Mentorship, Coaching, Referrals, and More

Mentorship and coaching⁴² and access to networks are important areas of support for women micro-entrepreneurs, and emerged as key asks from these groups, especially from those whose businesses are experiencing rapid growth. In focus groups in China and Indonesia, the demand for mentorship and coaching support was higher than for classroom-style trainings. For example, the Cherie Blair Foundation's "Women's WEAVE" programme⁴³ in Indonesia found that 96 percent of women reported that their network had increased since participating in the "Mentoring Women in Business" programme.

Some BDS experts pointed out that mentorship and coaching sessions act as safe spaces for women micro-entrepreneurs not just to discuss business issues but also gender issues, such as gender-based violence and harassment. Bundling these services within BDS programmes is therefore an important consideration for service providers.

BDS providers also play key roles in facilitating access to **connections** and **referrals**, such as to financial institutions, market platforms, and other business service providers (legal experts, digital marketing experts, accountants, etc.). Gender barriers and the lack of know-how are often challenging for women micro-entrepreneurs in terms of accessing finance, markets, business networks, and appropriate advisory support. This kind of support therefore provides much added value for women micro-entrepreneurs.

⁴¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). [Business Development Services How to Guide](#). UNDP, 2004.

⁴² While these terms are often used interchangeably, a mentor is someone who is generally drawn from the same business sector and thus supports the entrepreneurs to grow by sharing skills, knowledge, networks, and/or experience. A coach is someone who provides individualised guidance on setting and achieving goals.

⁴³ For more, see the [Cherie Blair Foundation](#) and the "[Women Entrepreneurs Amplifying Ventures and Economies \(WEAVE\)](#)" programme.

Good practices on mentorship and coaching support:

- Matching mentors and mentees based on specific need for support (e.g., on marketing, financial management, etc.) and similar interests and backgrounds (e.g., sector of operations, culture, language, geography).⁴⁴
- Recruiting more women mentors to match women micro-entrepreneurs' needs for mentorship.
- Creating partnerships, including with corporate groups and women's entrepreneurship networks to provide mentorship, coaching and other specialised support.
- Providing coaching or mentorship support at the site of the microenterprise as this supports women micro-entrepreneurs and their mentors, and coaches better engage on business and other issues.



3.2.2.3 Create peer sharing spaces

Peer networks and spaces created by BDS providers add significant value as they facilitate peer exchange and learning that support business and personal growth.⁴⁵ Some BDS experts emphasised that these networks open opportunities that otherwise may not be available to women entrepreneurs. Building structured networking opportunities and peer-to-peer sessions into BDS helps women micro-entrepreneurs prioritise these opportunities.

INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Building Peer Networks for Women Micro-entrepreneurs

■ Sinapis, Uganda

Sinapis, a community of entrepreneurs that provide BDS support, has found that peer groups are crucial in building communities at the local, regional, and national levels, where women can find connections, references, financial and market linkages, and more.

■ Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, Indonesia

The foundation's "**Road to Growth**" programme moved fully online due to COVID-19, with some initial concerns that this would limit women entrepreneurs' ability to network with their peers. The programme specifically enabled networking during the online delivery by encouraging participants to join virtual study groups and participate in weekly chat sessions with their trainers and peers. Ninety-nine percent of participants reported their network had improved since participating in "Road to Growth".



BOX
13

⁴⁴ World Bank. [Enterprising Women: Toward Equal Business Opportunity in Southeast Asia](#). World Bank, 2022. Washington, DC.

⁴⁵ World Bank Group. [Enterprising Women: Toward a Targeted, Gender-Informed Entrepreneurship Policy](#). World Bank, 2021. Washington, DC.

Peer networks give that boost you get from like-minded people around you. They serve as a platform for authentic sharing – where women can learn, discuss, and collaborate, and that is very powerful.

– Jenn Weidman, CEO, Space Bangkok (“WE-Can Program”), Thailand

Good practices to encourage peer sharing:

- Investment by BDS providers in building targeted, women-only peer networks and platforms as safe space for learning and sharing. Alternatively, these can be women-only groups within mixed-peer networks.
- Supporting an increase in interactions between the BDS cohort, which will organically support “entrepreneur-to-entrepreneur” business partnerships.



3.2.2.3 Invest in building soft skills

Whilst most BDS providers have developed business and technical training curricula, **structured soft-skills training could encourage the development of an entrepreneurial mindset, personal initiative, coping skills for stressful situations and resilience**, all of which are critical to entrepreneurial success. Topics such as **leadership, communications, advocacy, and negotiation** have multiple benefits for women entrepreneurs (see Box 14). For instance, negotiation training could equip women micro-entrepreneurs to not only work with business stakeholders (banks, suppliers, market representatives, etc.) but also to negotiate within their families for access to resources and support. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, one BDS provider said it included a **self-care module** in its programme, delivered by psychologists. It was highly valued by women entrepreneurs.

INDUSTRY EXAMPLE

Psychology-Based Mindset Training

A personal-initiative programme run by the World Bank’s Gender Innovation Lab in Togo offered psychology-based “mindset” training for both men and women business owners. It covered soft skills such as goal setting, innovation, and overcoming obstacles. The training programme found business performance improvements for both men-led and women-led enterprises. Interestingly, the main impacts on women-led enterprises came from women’s increased personal initiative.⁴⁶



BOX 14

46 World Bank. [New Mindset, Increased Profits: Lessons from an Innovative Entrepreneurial Training in Togo](#). World Bank, 2018. Washington, DC.



3.2.2.4 Develop a continuum of support beyond the immediate BDS

A demand for post-training support, when women micro-entrepreneurs are implementing learning, emerged in focus group discussions in China and Indonesia. Support to operationalise learning is often not factored into programme budgeting or the cost of BDS packages. Women micro-entrepreneurs highlighted this as a key gap. **Allocating a budget for post-programme support by BDS providers** could improve overall returns on investment for such services.

At the ecosystem level, **partnerships and the pooling of resources among BDS providers can help create and sustain a continuum of services.** The lack of specialised and additional services was another key gap according to BDS providers and experts, and women micro-entrepreneurs, whose needs evolve as their businesses grow. Other ecosystem actors supporting microbusinesses in the same market – such as technology providers, corporations, fintech companies, start-ups, and e-commerce bodies – offer new partnership opportunities to help BDS providers close this gap. Large tech companies (such as [Gojek](#)) and market/e-commerce platforms (such as [Evermos](#)) have dedicated programmes for microbusinesses. BDS players can tap into these to provide participants with holistic, practical, market-driven solutions.

Good practices to develop support beyond immediate BDS needs:

- Resourcing for partnership and programme sustainability by BDS providers at the programme inception stage.
- Designing of practical post-training interventions or touch points. These could be a mix of high- and low-intensity efforts.
- Facilitation of inter-cohort interactions and extended post-training support, including with programme alumni.
- Provision of post-programme follow-on services, including by embedding time-limited training programmes into local networks, private bodies, or government agencies.⁴⁷
- Incentivisation of participation in post-training activities.
- Building of partnerships between BDS providers and other mission-aligned ecosystem players to graduate women entrepreneurs into other programmes and networks.

⁴⁷ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). [Business Development Services How to Guide](#). UNDP, 2004.

3.2.3. Principle 3. Localise Services

When service providers, entrepreneurship support organisations, and trainers are local, they are well positioned to provide support that considers prevailing norms and practices, and is relevant in prevailing socio-cultural contexts.⁴⁸ Many BDS providers operating at the global level reported that co-designing and delivering BDS with local trainers has allowed them to reach more women entrepreneurs and better understand their nuanced needs.

We typically enter into partnerships with local or country-specific BDS providers to deliver our programmes. Historically, we always collaborate with one BDS provider per country, but there is a growing realisation of the importance of expanding the pool and forging multiple, partnerships.

– Elizabeth Wells, Head of Entrepreneurship, Cherie Blair Foundation for Women

Good practices to localise services:

- Identification of and investment in local service providers and trainers that can co-deliver BDS.
- Engagement of women entrepreneurs from the local region and communities to share their learning and experiences, inspire peers and enhance their participation in BDS programme design.

3.2.4. Principle 4. Institutionalise Gender-Responsive Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation processes that capture gender-disaggregated information are needed not just to measure the success of BDS interventions but also to provide evidence to inform on-going and future programming.⁴⁹

At a process and output level, global BDS experts running large-scale programmes pointed to the importance of **continuous monitoring**⁵⁰ to ensure real-time feedback and data-driven decision-making. As BDS include virtual components, monitoring becomes easier. For example, in some BDS programmes, indicators to measure participant engagement – such as time spent on different modules, retention levels across modules, frequency of pauses, etc. – have been directly built into digital BDS platforms. Global BDS experts highlighted that in addition to quantitative data collection, frequent **qualitative interviews** with participants enable them to understand more nuanced views on individual learning journeys. Together, this enables providers to better understand, target, and respond to content and learning preference needs, often in real time.

48 World Bank Group. [Enterprising Women: Toward a Targeted, Gender-Informed Entrepreneurship Policy](#). World Bank, 2021. Washington, DC.

49 International Labour Organization (ILO). [Gender Inclusive Service Provision: A Quick Guide for Financial and Business Service Development Providers](#). ILO, 2022. See also United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). [Business Development Services How to Guide](#). UNDP, 2004.

50 Impact SA. [Why Monitoring and Evaluation Is Essential for Business Development Service Providers](#). Impact SA, 2021.

Some BDS providers stressed the **need to move beyond the measurement of output metrics, such as the number of trainings, number of participants, and completion rates, to the on-ground outcomes and impacts of interventions.** This is not a common practice and is not resourced well. But it is critical in informing future interventions. It includes metrics such as changes in revenue, sales, market reach, etc..

Good practices to institutionalise gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation:

- Ensuring gender disaggregation of all monitoring and evaluation processes by BDS providers.
- Development of metrics and associated tracking mechanisms to understand the effectiveness of digital and other BDS interventions.
- Establishment of mechanisms for both receiving real-time feedback during programme delivery and making quick adjustments to the user experience.
- Inclusion of output and outcome indicators to track the impact of BDS programmes over time, and contribute to the evidence base on what works for BDS provision for women micro-entrepreneurs.

One way we monitor the effectiveness of our programme is using a WhatsApp group to collect baseline and endline photographs. For instance, maybe before the training a woman micro-entrepreneur ran a small mom-and-pop shop. But after implementing the good practices she learned during the training, the “after” image is of the mini-mart her shop has become.

– Alice Waweru, Regional Programme Manager, Technoserve

4

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECOSYSTEM ACTORS

The previous section offers recommendations and a practical framework for action to guide the design and implementation of BDS programmes to support women-led enterprises in accessing finance and markets, and on digital inclusion. This section outlines broader recommendations that are critical to fostering an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs. This entails strengthening gender-responsive laws and policies that promote women's digital financial inclusion, deepening engagement with women's cooperatives and networks, and addressing broader structural barriers such as unpaid care work. These are central to establishing the role of BDS and other key strategies to better unlock opportunities for women entrepreneurs. Hence, drawing on the findings and recommendations of this report, and in alignment with key international, United Nations and other policy frameworks and tools,⁵¹ the study makes the following key recommendations for creating an enabling environment, with the strong engagement of the women's entrepreneurship ecosystem, *including governments, UN and other multilateral organisations, donor agencies, business development service providers, financial service providers, women's business associations and networks, and other entrepreneurship support organisations:*



Enhance gender-inclusive policy and regulatory frameworks and strategies to improve women's digital and financial inclusion to enable the creation and growth of women-led MSMEs, particularly microenterprises. This requires mainstreaming gender perspectives in digital policies and strategies to increase women entrepreneurs' access to and use of digital technologies, particularly in underserved areas. Ensuring universal connectivity, accessibility and affordability of the internet are prerequisites to achieving digital and financial inclusion, which in turn enables women entrepreneurs to access and better leverage digital platforms, including e-commerce platforms, to support enterprise growth. This also entails removing multi-dimensional and discriminatory barriers faced by women, such as limitations to women's rights to own property and other assets restricting access to collateral, which in turn hinder their access to finance to successfully start or grow their businesses.

⁵¹ This includes the UN Secretary-General's report on the priority theme for the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women: "Innovation and Technological Change, and Education in the Digital Age for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls".



Leveraging financing for women's entrepreneurship. This can be enabled through the promotion of public and private investments to support women-led MSMEs, particularly microenterprises, in entering the digital economy and enhancing their participation therein. Tapping into innovative financing sources, including social impact investment, is also key to secure greater long-term investments and boost the growth of women-led MSMEs. To maximize women entrepreneurs' opportunities and abilities to access finance, it is imperative to incentivize and support financial institutions to develop adequate financial products and services – including digital financial services – addressing the specific needs of women micro-entrepreneurs. These efforts should be coupled with increased investments and targeted interventions to enhance women entrepreneurs' digital financial capabilities, including by leveraging technology, behavioural insights, and other effective approaches deepening their digital financial inclusion.



Unlocking the full potential of women's entrepreneurship through the expansion of digital upskilling opportunities. Sustaining and accelerating women entrepreneurs' participation in the digital economy will require additional efforts and enhanced public-private collaboration to strengthen women's digital inclusion. The private sector plays a vital role in increasing the affordability and access to the internet, devices and digital upskilling opportunities for women entrepreneurs, and supporting the digital transformation of their businesses.



Deepen engagement with and build the capacity of women's organisations and networks and other key local actors to support women entrepreneurs and build trust in and effectively engage with the entrepreneurship and digital ecosystems. Working with women's organisations and other local civil society organisations should also be prioritized for women entrepreneurs' enhanced participation in policy making and advocacy for sustained investments in public services that meet their specific needs. Civil society organisations also play a vital role in monitoring the effectiveness of support services provided by government and other ecosystem actors, and in enabling women entrepreneurs' improved access to these, particularly for marginalized women in rural and hard-to-reach areas. Women's networks also serve as an important platform for knowledge sharing, networking, peer mentoring, and coaching as well as for building social capital, which is beneficial for expanding and strengthening business resilience.



Foster multi-stakeholder partnerships to harness technology and innovation to bridge the gender digital divide and enhance women's entrepreneurship in the digital economy. Promoting multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral collaboration is vital to foster an enabling environment for the development of women's entrepreneurship in the digital economy. To this end, it is vital to forge new and leverage existing multi-stakeholder partnerships and platforms, such as the Generation Equality Forum's Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality to mobilize knowledge, skills, and resources, and catalyse collective actions to unlock opportunities for women entrepreneurs.



Remove adverse social norms and other underlying barriers to women's entrepreneurship.

This includes reducing and redistributing unpaid domestic and care work, which is disproportionately borne by women and hinders their education, training and economic opportunities, including employment and entrepreneurship. The SDGs, particularly SDG target 5.4, call for governments, the private sector, and civil society to “recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work”, and stress the critical importance of the provision of public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility between men and women. UN Women’s “Toolkit on Paid and Unpaid Work: From 3Rs to 5Rs”⁵² provides guidance for key actors to *mobilize for change by taking action* across the “5Rs” of care - recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work, and rewarding and representing paid care workers - and ensuring the resilience of care systems in response to compounding global crises, including climate change, conflict, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Tackling adverse social norms and practices is also critical to improve women entrepreneurs’ access to resources and opportunities. This includes norms limiting women’s independent mobility, which restrict their in-person participation in support programmes. Concerted efforts by stakeholders are required to reduce access barriers, such as through providing safe and affordable infrastructure as well as engagement with families and communities to address social constraints.

⁵² The toolkit is available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/A-toolkit-on-paid-and-unpaid-care-work-en.pdf>.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. Methodological Note

Research approach and methods

Given the scope of our report, we applied qualitative research methods, using both primary and secondary sources. The research for this report was conducted between July and October 2022.

Primary sources:

- 01. Interviews with 42 stakeholders within the BDS ecosystems**, including 36 national, regional, and global experts, local BDS providers, entrepreneurship support organisations, e-commerce platforms, and financial services providers in the five countries. Having engaged with and served women entrepreneur networks in these countries, the experts, BDS providers, and organisations interviewed represent the collective experience of several thousand women microentrepreneurs. A list of stakeholders interviewed is available in Annex 2.
- 02. Focus groups with women entrepreneurs in China and Indonesia.** In China, 28 focus group participants were identified by our partner [Grassland Finance Limited](#), a microfinance company, from its client base in Inner Mongolia. In Indonesia, 21 focus group participants were identified by our partner, the [Indonesian Technology Innovation Foundation \(Inotek\)](#), a business incubator, from its programme participants in Jakarta and elsewhere. Focus group participants were identified on the basis of being mostly microentrepreneurs, based in urban or peri-urban areas, and, where possible, previously receiving some BDS and related support.
- 03. Six deep dive interviews with women entrepreneurs in China and Indonesia**, who had previously received BDS support.
- 04.** The report also draws on the profile of **135 women-led MSMEs surveyed in China** by the China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges (CICETE), a key partner for UN Women China, on their access to finance and markets, and on digital inclusion.

Secondary sources:

- 05.** Desk review of existing literature, including meta-analyses and evidence reviews on: entrepreneurship and related challenges and opportunities, interventions on access to finance and markets, digital inclusion, and business development services, with a particular focus on the five countries.
- 06. Country diagnostics data** from global databases including the World Bank's [Women, Business and Law Database](#) and [Findex databases](#), GSMA's [Mobile Economy](#) reports, the World Economic Forum's [Women Global Gender Gap](#) reports, and the International Telecommunication Union's [Digital Data Dashboard](#).

Key Definitions

■ Business Development Services

Business development services include a wide range of non-financial services to help MSMEs operate efficiently and grow. These services include the following:

1. Facilitating access to markets, including export markets
2. Improving access to less expensive and/or higher-quality inputs
3. Introducing new or improved technologies and products
4. Improving strategy, management, and technical skills
5. Supporting business formalisation (understanding steps in, and facilitating support for, registration, permits, tax payments, exports, and other formal procedures)
6. Improving access to appropriate financing mechanisms
7. Counselling on business proposal development
8. Offering shared office spaces and office equipment
9. Providing technical services (legal advice, bookkeeping, information, digitization, communications technology)

■ Business Development Services Providers

BDS providers include companies and non-profit organisations that provide entrepreneurs with a wide range of non-financial services to help them operate efficiently and grow. These institutions are sometimes referred to as providing “business support services”, “small enterprise advisory services”, or “enterprise support”. BDS providers may include different types of players, including financial service providers, governments, or any other organisation that may be providing business-related training or services to entrepreneurs.

■ Digital Inclusion

Digital inclusion usually refers to processes and activities that are focused on reducing barriers to accessing and utilising technology. It covers the spectrum of activities and infrastructure required to access and use all forms of information and communications technologies for all groups, including those who are marginalised or vulnerable.

Defining digital inclusion for microenterprises

Digital inclusion for microenterprises refers to access to, and adoption of, digital technology for receiving and making payments for businesses, selling products online, invoicing for businesses, inventory management and supply chains, amongst other business functions, which benefit business growth for all groups, including women. In particular, “access” refers to the availability and affordability of internet-enabled hardware and software products and services. “Adoption” refers to the understanding and application of digital literacy skills, technical support, and applications and online content based on accessibility and availability in local contexts.

■ Gender Lens

Applying a “gender lens” refers to taking the existing differences between women and men into account, when analysing a situation or when developing specific approaches or programmes.

■ Micro-, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises

There are wide variations in how countries classify MSMEs. Classifications may be a combination of some of the following factors: number of employees, turnover, sales, assets, and capital investment, amongst others. Classifications may differ across industries, within each country, and multiple government agencies may be involved in defining the criteria, in order to measure enterprise size.

In our countries of study, for instance, the definition of MSMEs in China varies by number of employees, annual revenue, and gross assets, based on the specific industry of operation. Indonesia’s Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs defines businesses based on net assets and annual revenues, whereas the Central Bureau of Statistics uses the number of employees to categorise enterprises. In Thailand, although criteria across the three categories of micro-, small, and medium are the same (i.e., number of employees and annual revenues), the thresholds for “small” and “medium” differ, based on whether they are located in the manufacturing or the trade and services sectors. Table A displays the variety of definitions used, across the countries, to classify MSMEs.

A note on defining microenterprises for this report

Given the wide variety in definitions of MSMEs, and in order to be able to draw up a practical framework on what works for BDS across different contexts, we have utilised the International Labour Organization definition of MSMEs. This defines:

- *Microenterprises* as having up to 9 employees;
- *Small enterprises* as having as many as 49 employees; and
- *Medium/large enterprises* as having 50 or more employees.²³

■ Women-Led Enterprises

International organisations and governments have different definitions of what qualifies as a woman-led enterprise. For microenterprises, where sole proprietorship and informality are typically the norm, it is easier to identify women-led firms based on the gender of the owner, but defining a women-led enterprise becomes harder when dealing with small firms with multiple owners or decision-makers.

Generally speaking, “women-led” refers to firms with women in key decision-making positions (e.g., president, CEO, general manager). For this report, at the microenterprise level, women-led enterprises are those where women run daily operations and make key business decisions.

Table A: Definitions of MSMEs in the Five Countries

Country	Micro	Small	Medium	Criteria Used to Define MSMEs
China ⁵³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, fishing Annual revenue: less than 500,000 ¥ • Construction sector Annual revenue: less than 3 million ¥ Wholesale trade: Employment: less than five employees Annual revenue: less than 10 million ¥ • Transportation Employment: Less than 20 employees Annual revenue: less than 2 million ¥ • Retail Employment: Less than 10 employees Annual revenue: less than 1 million ¥ • Hospitality and catering Employment: Less than 10 employees Annual revenue: less than 1 million ¥ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, fishing Annual revenue: 500,000 to 5 million ¥ • Construction sector Annual revenue: Equal to or more than 3 million ¥ Wholesale trade: Employment: Equal to or more than five employees Annual revenue: Equal to or more than 10 million ¥ • Transportation Employment: equal to or more than 20 employees Annual revenue: equal to or more than 3 million ¥ • Retail Employment: equal to or more than 10 employees Annual revenue: Equal to or more than 5 million ¥ • Hospitality and catering Employment: equal to or more than 10 employees Annual revenue: Equal to or more than 1 million ¥ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, fishing Annual revenue: Equal to or more than 5 million ¥ • Construction sector Annual revenue: Equal to or more than 60 Million ¥ Wholesale trade: Employment: Equal to or more than 20 employees Annual revenue: Equal to or more than 50 million ¥ • Transportation Employment: Equal to or more than 300 employees Annual revenue: Equal to or more than 30 million ¥ • Retail Employment: Equal to or more than 500 employees Annual revenue: Equal to or more than 5 million ¥ • Hospitality and catering Employment: Equal to or more than 100 employees Annual Revenue: Equal to or more than 2 million ¥ 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of employees 2. Revenue <p>Note: Employment and revenue criteria also available for other sectors, including industrial engineering, information transfer, software and information technology, warehousing, postal services, real estate, property management, and leasing and business services from the China Government Procurement Network Portal</p>

53 Chinese Government Procurement Network. [China's Classification Standards for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises](#). China Government Procurement Official Website Service Information Platform, 6 August 2018.

Indonesia ⁵⁴	<p>Net assets: up to 50 million Indonesian rupiah, exclusive of land and the building of their place of business</p> <p>Or:</p> <p>Maximum annual sale proceeds of 300 million Indonesian rupiah</p> <p>Employment: 1-4 employees</p>	<p>Net assets: 50 million to 500 million Indonesian rupiah exclusive of the land and building of their place of business</p> <p>Or:</p> <p>Maximum annual sales of 300 million to 2.5 billion Indonesian rupiah</p> <p>Employment: 5-19 employees</p>	<p>Net assets: 500 million to 10 billion Indonesian rupiah, exclusive of land and building of the place of business</p> <p>Or:</p> <p>Maximum annual sales of 2.5 billion to 50 billion Indonesian rupiah</p> <p>Employment: 20-99 employees</p>	<p>Classification as defined by the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Net assets 2. Maximum annual sale proceeds classification as defined by the Central Bureau of Statistics 3. Number of employees
Thailand ⁵⁵	<p>Manufacturing, trade and service sectors</p> <p>Annual revenue: not more than 1.8 million baht</p> <p>Employment: not more than 5 employees</p>	<p>Manufacturing sector</p> <p>Annual revenue: 1.8 million baht to 100 million baht.</p> <p>Employment: 5-50 employees.</p> <p>Trade and service sectors</p> <p>Annual revenue: 1.8 million baht to 100 million baht</p> <p>Employment: 5-30 employees</p>	<p>Manufacturing Sector</p> <p>Annual revenue: 100 million baht to 500 million baht</p> <p>Employment: 50-200 employees</p> <p>Trade and service sectors</p> <p>Annual revenue: 50 million baht to 300 million baht.</p> <p>Employment: 30-100 employees</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Annual revenue 2. Number of employees based on sector (manufacturing, trade, services) <p>Note: In the event that the number of employees fits a type of enterprise but the revenue fits another type, the higher shall be used to determine the type of enterprise.</p>
Rwanda ⁵⁶	<p>Employment: 1-2 employees</p> <p>Annual sales: Less than 1 million Rwandan francs</p>	<p>Employment: 3-20 employees</p> <p>Annual sales: 1 million to 20 million Rwandan francs</p>	<p>Employment: 21-100 employees</p> <p>Annual sales: 20 million to 500 million Rwandan francs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of employees 2. Annual sales
Uganda ⁵⁷	<p>Employment: up to 4 employees and;</p> <p>Total assets: not exceeding 10 million Ugandan shillings.</p>	<p>Employment: 5-49 employees and;</p> <p>Total assets between 10 million and 100 million Ugandan shillings.</p>	<p>Employment: 50-100 employees and;</p> <p>Total assets between 100 million and 360 million Ugandan shillings.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of employees and total assets <p>Note: The Uganda Bureau of Statistics has adopted the categorisation of enterprises based on the fulfilment of the minimum requirements of any two of the criteria of: number of employees, capital investment and annual sales turnover.⁵⁸</p>

54 [SMEs Definition According to the Law No. 20/2008 on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises.](#)

55 [Ministerial Regulations on Designation of the Characteristics of SME Promotion Act B.E. 2562 \(2019\) and Announcement of the Office of SME Promotion Subject Designation of Characteristics of Micro Enterprises,](#) Office of SME Promotion.

56 Ministry of Trade and Industry, Government of Rwanda. [Rwanda Entrepreneur Development Policy.](#) April 2020.

57 [Uganda Investment Authority.](#)

58 [Uganda Micro, Small & Medium \(MSME\) Policy.](#)

Annex 2. List of Stakeholders Interviewed in the Five Countries

Country/ Region	Name	Designation	Organisation
China	Shu Chen	Social Impact Programme Manager, Corporate Communications	Visa
	Dai Ye	Ecological financial Business Senior Staff Expert, Product Operation	MyBank
	Song Xuanyi	Policy Director	SME Centre China Centre for promotion of SME Development
	Zhang Li	Director General	JYFH Women Entrepreneur Alliance
	Yan Xiaoqi	General Manager, Inner Mongolia	Grassland Microcredit Company
	Chee Wei Chang	Senior Director, Lending Operations	Grassland Finance Ltd.
	Valeriy Voronin	ESG consultant appointed by Serica Investment Management.	
	Zhou Zhimei	President	Women Entrepreneurs Association in Hunan Province
	Xiao Yue	Vice President	Women Entrepreneurs Association of Chaoyang District, Beijing City
	Chen Tiantian	Deputy General Manager	Financial Business Department in Hunan Post Group Corporation.
	Liu Ping	Senior Operation Expert	Ant Group Merchant Platform Operation
Indonesia	Ivi Anggraeni	Executive Director	Innovation Technology Innovation Foundation (Inotek)
	Dewi Suryani	General Manager	
	Dr. Robin Bush	Country Representative, Malaysia	The Asia Foundation
	Sharifah Shahirah Idid	Senior Programme Officer, Malaysia	
	Salmiah Ariyana	National Board of Director	
	Emmy Astuti	Executive Director (2021-2025)	ASSPUK Women's Small Business Network (Indonesia)
	Mohammad Firdaus	Expert staff	
	Iqbal Muslimin	Co-Founder & Chief of Sustainability	Evermos
	Novi Meyanto	Associate Director	PLUS – Platform Usaha Sosial
	Henny Rahmawati Putri	Senior Project Associate	
	Pritha Oktania Aritonang	Community Engagement Specialist	
	Andi Ikhwan	Director of Programs, Agriculture, Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion	Mercy Corps Indonesia
	Salma Sulthanh	Enterprise Development Officer	Instellar
	Katrina Inandia	Head of Impact & Sustainability	PT Amarthia Mikro Fintek
	Nistria Harsolumakso	Sustainability Research Lead	
	Felix Sharief	Head of Government Relations	Dana Indonesia
	Dike Armelia Saviera	Public Affairs Associate	

Thailand	Supapim Wannopas	National Coordinator	<i>Adelphi, SEED</i>
	Jenn Weidman	CEO	<i>Space Bangkok (WE-Can Program)</i>
Rwanda	Helle Dahl Rassmussen	Director of Business Growth Services, Rwanda	<i>Inkomoko/(African Entrepreneur Collective)</i>
Uganda	Angela Bageine	Sector Head, SMEs in Uganda. Board Member Private Sector Foundation Uganda	<i>Private Sector Foundation Uganda</i>
	Grace Nshemeire-Gwaku	Chief Operating Officer.	
	Eddie Sembatya	Chief Executive Officer	<i>Finding XY</i>
	Juliet Kasita	Uganda Country Manager	<i>Sinapis</i>
	Arigye Munyangabo	Investment Executive	<i>Grofin Uganda</i>
	Sarah Kitakule	Board member, Cherie Blair Foundation Founder and Director, Kitakule Foundation	<i>Cherie Blair Foundation and Kitakule Foundation</i>
Regional/ Global Experts	Sarah Leedom	Chief Operating Officer and Co - Founder	<i>Inkomoko</i>
	Cait Nordehn	Global Gender Manager	
	Alice Waweru	Regional Programme Manager	<i>Technoserve</i>
	Catherine Mwangi	Associate Business Advisor	
	Mara Bolis	Advisor – Gender and Business	<i>Value for Women</i>
	Mrinalini Venkatachalam	Regional Director, South-East Asia and Oceania	<i>WeConnect International</i>
	Elizabeth Wells	Head of Entrepreneurship	<i>Cherie Blair Foundation for Women</i>
	Peter Donelan	Country Coordinator, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Pacific	<i>Enhanced Integrated Framework, WTO</i>