



Implemented by:

**giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

# WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN CAMBODIA: STUDY ON SUPPORT PROGRAMS FOR INNOVATION AND STARTUP

Sponsored by

Strengthening Regional Structures for Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion in ASEAN

Ratana Phurik-Callebaut

Phnom Penh, June 2021

**Published by the**

Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
Registered offices  
Bonn and Eschhorn, Germany

Strengthening Regional Structures for Small and Medium  
Enterprises Promotion in ASEAN “ASEAN SME”  
Delano Development Co. Ltd. #144, Street 169, Sangkat Veal Vong,  
Khan 7 Makara 12253, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.  
[www.giz.de](http://www.giz.de)

**Author**

Ratana Phurik-Callebaut, Phnom Penh

**Editors**

Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MISTI)

Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA)

Strengthening Regional Structures for Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion in ASEAN (ASEAN SME)

**Acknowledgements**

The author would like to extend sincere thanks to all the respondents and organizations for their time, patience and dedication.

**Disclaimer**

This publication was produced with financial support from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Its contents are the sole responsibility of the MISTI, MoWA, and ASEAN SME project and do not necessarily reflect the views of the BMZ.

MISTI, MoWA, and GIZ do not take responsibility for any use or interpretation by any third party that may be made of the contents of this publication.

Responsibility for the content of any external websites linked in this publication always lies with their respective publishers. MISTI, MoWA, and GIZ expressly dissociates itself from such content.

© - 2021, MISTI, MoWA, and ASEAN SME Project. All rights reserved.



***Woman is weaving loom in Cambodia.*** Photo courtesy: ASEAN-SME Project

## Table of Contents

<b>ACRONYMS .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>I. WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS ECOSYSTEM IN CAMBODIA .....</b>	<b>11</b>
A. CAMBODIAN SME ECOSYSTEM AND IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS .....	11
B. LEGAL AND REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS .....	12
C. WHY ARE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS DIFFERENT? .....	14
D. KEY BARRIERS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENTS .....	16
<b>II. FIELD STUDY: MAPPING OF THE SUPPORT PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS.....</b>	<b>19</b>
SNAPSHOT: WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS SUPPORT PROGRAMS AND STAKEHOLDERS MAPPING .....	19
INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY.....	20
A. GOVERNMENT-LED SUPPORT .....	20
1. Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA).....	20
2. Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) .....	24
3. Other Ministries .....	26
B. DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS .....	28
1. Main players and programs: WE Act, CWE and Development Innovations.....	28
2. Other Partners: UNDP, UNCDF, Asia Foundation.....	33
C. PRIVATE SECTOR .....	35
1. Business Associations.....	35
2. Social Enterprises and Incubators: SHE Investments, Agile and Impact Hub Phnom Penh.....	38
3. Other Projects Targeting WE .....	41
4. Innovative Projects Targeting Girls.....	43
<b>III. KEY TAKEAWAYS: ANALYSIS OF THE CAMBODIAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS ECOSYSTEM.....</b>	<b>46</b>
A. MAIN AREAS OF INTERVENTION COVERED .....	46
B. INTERVIEW FINDINGS AND FEEDBACK FROM THE EXPERTS .....	49
C. SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORT ECOSYSTEM .....	55
<b>IV. RECOMMENDATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES.....</b>	<b>56</b>
A. INCLUSIVENESS AND TARGET BENEFICIARIES: LEVERAGING THE NETWORK OF WDCS .....	56
B. SOME AREAS OF INTERVENTION TO LOOK AT .....	58
1. Business Environment (regulatory constraints, advocacy) .....	58
2. Access to Market .....	59
3. Access to Finance.....	59
C. PARTNERSHIPS .....	61
D. IMPLEMENTING A STRONG CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM .....	62
E. PROMOTING A SYSTEMATIC GENDER MAINSTREAMING COMPONENT IN EXISTING PROGRAMS.....	64
F. A PILOT PROJECT TO BUILD STRONGER COMMUNITIES AROUND ENTREPRENEURSHIP .....	65
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>ANNEX: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>68</b>

## Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AF	Asia Foundation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEAN-SME	Strengthening Regional Structures for Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion in ASEAN
CAMWEN	Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs' Network
CWE	Catalyzing Women Entrepreneurship
CWEA	Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Association
EBA	Everything but Arms
EMC	Emerging Markets Consulting
GDCE	General Department of Customs and Excise
GDT	General Department of Tax
Go4eCam	Go for E-Commerce Cambodia
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IFC	International Finance Corporation
KE	Khmer Enterprise
MISTI	Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation
MOC	Ministry of Commerce
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
MEF	Ministry of Economy and Finance
MPTC	Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications
MSMEs	Micro, small and medium sized enterprises
NBC	National Bank of Cambodia
NGO	Non-Government Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
STEMEOC	STEM Education Organization for Cambodia
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and training
UN	United Nations
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Program
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
USD	United States Dollar
WB	World Bank
WE	Women Entrepreneurs
WDC	Women's Development Centers
WEDC	Women Entrepreneurship Development Center
YEAC	Young Entrepreneurs Association of Cambodia
YWE	Young Women Entrepreneurs

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) development is a key priority in ASEAN countries, including Cambodia. However, SME-related policies have not been always tailored to the specific needs of women-led entrepreneurs and founders. The issues of women entrepreneurs (WE) have increasingly captured the attention of policy makers and international donors, as can be shown by the number of new initiatives and studies on the topic.

The purposes of this study are to map the existing support programs for women entrepreneurs and to look at the factors of success in supporting the development of a concept note for innovative support programs and start-ups in Cambodia by GIZ. The goal is to gain a better understanding of the WE ecosystem and identify suitable pilot projects that would fit the existing needs of WE.

This work employed a qualitative approach through desk research and one-hour interviews with 20 key respondents from both the private and public spheres, in order to capture practical insights as well as recommendations for future programs.

The first part of the study provides a brief overview of the WE ecosystem in Cambodia. The important role of SMEs in the economy is well-known but the contribution of WE to private sector development is often understated. Statistics vary but show that WE are predominant in most segments of SMEs. However, their role in the economy does not necessarily translate into full access to equal opportunities. This does not mean that WE are less successful, but rather suggests significant untapped potential.

A review of the legal and regulatory environment for WE shows that Cambodian law does not hold any literal gender bias against women. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are both key national development objectives in Cambodia. Yet, despite this, WE face more obstacles than their male counterparts in establishing businesses and conducting business. These social and gender norms continue to play an important role in the Kingdom, especially in rural areas.

While the Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA) is the main government body tasked with gender policies and female empowerment, each ministry also includes a gender focal point and a gender working group tasked with developing and implementing a gender mainstreaming action plan. The Neary Rattanak, a five-year strategic plan developed first in 1999 by the MoWA, is now in its fifth edition, Neary Rattanak V. It is a comprehensive strategy that encompasses recommendations, lessons learnt, and the findings of the 2019 Cambodia Gender Assessments. It was also formulated during the drafting of the first National Policy on Gender Equality. However, an effective implementation of gender mainstreaming across policy-making has not been possible due to weak institutional capacity as well as a general lack of willingness and awareness.

Furthermore, individual WE present different profiles and cannot be considered or perceived as a homogeneous group. Different criteria should be taken into account when establishing the type of target population and the desired impact of a program. Motivation is often the main criterion measured when assessing women's decisions to become entrepreneurs (whether they are pulled or pushed by necessity) is despite its ability to help better certain programs.

Barriers faced by SMEs in Cambodia are well documented and are usually experienced by both genders. Only the social and cultural constraints are specific to WE. Nonetheless, it is useful to

highlight such barriers to gain insight into whether the existing programs are adequately addressing the corresponding needs.

Social and cultural constraints can represent some major obstacles for WE in their daily life. Negative stereotypes and traditional norms can limit WE in their i) physical mobility: ii) ability to network and negotiate: iii) economic independence; and iv) their leadership skills. These constraints can also impact the existing regulatory constraints, leading WE to use “intermediaries” when dealing with administration. Access to networks, especially mixed ones, is also limited by social constraints. Access to finance is also constrained due to WE having comparatively lower levels education, confidence and a tendency towards conservative lending from banks. Lower education or literacy standards have also been flagged by observers as making the entrepreneurial journey of WE more difficult.

The second part of the report analyses the programs and initiatives classified by types of stakeholders (government, development partners and private sector). It is not an exhaustive list, but it provides a good snapshot of the main actors and their impact on the WE ecosystem. Additional innovative projects were also added to the list to provide a different perspective.

Regarding government-related initiatives, MoWA offers comprehensive and relevant solutions that need to be strengthened and supported further. The Women Development Centers (WDCs) form a unique yet undervalued network that are not leveraged and promoted to their full capacity and tend to be ignored by potential donors and partners. The future Women Entrepreneurship Development Center (WEDC) will bring additional synergies and opportunities. Implementation remains a known weakness for most government projects. However, the recent success of Khmer Enterprise suggests that with a strong commitment, a good project design and clever partnerships, it is possible to achieve positive results in a short period of time.

Moreover, development partners are more and more active in the WE sphere. Three projects stand out as noteworthy. WE Act, led by PACT, is probably the most comprehensive program with proven results, working with a large number of partners and surmounting existing barriers. The Catalyzing Women Entrepreneurship (CWE) Program from UNESCAP is similarly doing important work, focusing on innovative financing. A technically-focused project, it emphasizes increased private sector involvement with innovative partnership solutions. The Development Innovation (DI) program was also successful in terms of impact and reach by strengthening the entirety of the IT ecosystem. Smaller scale but meaningful informal initiatives also deserve mention: those led by female ambassadors such as the WOMEN Forum in Singapore, or the involvement of the British embassy in STEM education.

In the private sector, Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Association (CWEA) is the key partner for the government. CWEA is a resilient and active association and the recent inclusion of more young women entrepreneurs (YWEs) in the new board is evidence of a positive trend for more diversity in CWEA. YWE is an emerging topic that deserves attention because young WE are often not represented enough. The work done by WE Act to include them in CWEA and in the Young Entrepreneurs Association (YEAC) is sensible and laudable.

One notable company that stands out among social enterprises and incubators is SHE investments. AGILE is also an effective, small program. Finally, Impact Hub cannot be ignored due to its wide impact and their gender conscious attitude. Various interesting projects and initiatives can be listed here. The STEM Sisters project from STEMEOC is particularly inspiring as it promotes role models and is based on coaching and empowerment. The program is replicable, self-sustaining, cheap and impactful.

The most challenging areas faced by WE are addressed by the existing programs with some weak spots, such as access to market or the business environment constraints, but these ones are not particularly gender-specific. More can be done for financial literacy, and access to digital skills initiatives remain a must due to a strong digital gender divide.

The final part of the report focuses on the recommendations. The feedback from the experts offers interesting and relevant insights. In general, it is important to keep in mind that the support system is still young and needs to be further improved and strengthened. For example, the quantity of trainings offered has increased, but the quality is still uneven. The best private initiatives have difficulty to scale their activities. Mentoring is a key factor of success but doesn't take into account enough the social and cultural norms aspects. The importance of feminine role models, still rare in the country, has been also emphasized, as well as the increasing role of YWEs. Expectations are sometimes too high and it takes time to build a strong support ecosystem environment. Nonetheless, drawing from the analysis of the support ecosystem and from the feedback of the experts, some recommendations can be provided.

One important recommendation is to increase the pipeline of target beneficiaries. Many observers noted that a main limitation of the existing pipeline of WE is that most have the same profile: they are young, educated, often tech-savvy and urban. Targeting provincial SMEs would orient support towards WE who have not had support never joined any program and, therefore, would stand to benefit most. In this regard, there is the possibility to leverage the unique network of WDCs as we see an untapped potential here. Doing so would require developing more resources in Khmer, to leverage synergies, to create more partnerships and to strengthen internal WDC capabilities, but it would be a more efficient use of resources. Underserved categories, such as street vendors or disabled people, should also not be forgotten: they are the ones suffering a lot from COVID restrictions and need to be seen as specific target beneficiaries.

Looking at areas of intervention, some small and inexpensive pilot projects can help tackle some issues. For business environment constraints, for example, there is the possibility to boost public-private dialogue with more gender perspective through an advisory group or the creation of a think tank by having a wider perspective with YWEs. For access to market, a low hanging fruit could be to encourage the inclusion of a gender lens strategy to some existing programs like GIZ internationalization program or UNDP/MOC Go4eCam. Access to finance offers also some good potential for improvement with well-thought-out initiatives encouraging a better gender mainstreaming approach with banks, for example. Offering the service of a "Bank-ready" session for WEs can be helpful and of course, digital skills training continues to be a must.

Building partnerships is extremely important, in public and private partnerships, of course, but also by recognizing the importance of using implementing partners who know how to design impactful programs. In addition, it is essential to align the interests of all the parties: entrepreneurs, financing donors and also governments.

In general, more impact can be achieved by simply advocating, encouraging and implementing a conscious gender lens strategy to any programs, starting with the most successful ones.

Finally, pilot projects to build stronger communities around entrepreneurship can provide interesting results. WEs often have a strong sense of solidarity. Peer mentoring is quite efficient, especially within the YWE communities. Building bridges between generations of WE and between urban and rural WE can be also particularly impactful and inspiring.



In conclusion, the analysis of the WE support system shows an ecosystem which is still young, but promising. Programs run by passionate individuals and the main specialized players, which are quite few, have developed a varied expertise and are quite successful. However, these agencies experience difficulties in taking programs to scale. Increased synergies between the different stakeholders are needed. New WE programs tend to focus on the same areas of intervention – training, capacity building, financial and digital literacy. In general, there is a need for more diversification (targeted audience) and for more adapted tools (learning materials in Khmer). Implementation is a key factor of success to get the desired impact: working with suitable implementing partners is a solution and building internal capabilities at the institutional level. We can only encourage more awareness and advocacy for conscious gender-mainstreaming policy in existing SME programs. Finally, new perspectives can be added when looking at the importance of role models, peer mentoring or community focused programs.

## BACKGROUND

Small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) development is a key priority in the strategy of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, including Cambodia. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has taken steps to accelerate the implementation of policies and strategies to support SMEs and Micro SMEs (MSMEs), especially since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these policies have not been necessarily tailored to the specific needs of women-led entrepreneurs and founders.

WE issues have increasingly captured the attention of policy makers and international donors. Numerous studies regarding the WE ecosystem are available and capture extensively the issues faced by WE across Southeast Asian countries. Valuable studies specific to Cambodian WE are also widespread and offer good insights and recommendations on the challenges faced by WE. This is especially prominent in the field of digitalization and access to finance, as well as across the strategies put in place by various stakeholders to overcome these challenges.

The purpose of this assignment is to map the existing support programs for WE and/or founders in Cambodia and assess the programs' outreach and impact. This involves studying factors for success and lessons learnt in order to make clear potential ways to support WE in entering the business sector or strengthening their existing businesses.

It was agreed among the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation (MISTI), and GIZ to explore this topic in an effort to support the development of a concept note for innovative support programs for WE and start-ups in Cambodia.

### *Methodology*

This research employed a qualitative approach, combining desk research and interviews with 20 key respondents from the private and public sectors. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately one hour each.

The desk research involved reviewing all recent literature on WE in Cambodia. Some reports were particularly useful, including "Exploring the Opportunities for Women-owned SMEs in Cambodia" published by IFC in 2019 and "Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in ASEAN" from OECD in 2017. The latter offers a comparison between different practices of women support programs in ASEAN countries. This report will not summarize all findings of this research, but will refer to or extract relevant points from them in order to provide a general assessment about the ecosystem and environment faced by SMEs and WE.

This study intends to capture practical insights from existing programs and relevant stakeholders and to suggest potential measures and recommendations for future support programs, notably incubation programs. Key respondent interviews were critical in obtaining this information. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in person as well as via online platforms. Principal themes discussed were the following:

- An (self) assessment about existing programs and the key challenges they faced;
- A candid assessment about Cambodian WE support ecosystems;
- The relevant and important trends noticed;
- The gaps that still need to be filled; and
- What recommendations can be provided for future programs.

The list of interviewees includes persons from not only traditional stakeholders (MoWA) and programs exclusively targeting WE (SHE Investments, CWEA, PACT), but also representatives of programs with innovative components or a gender-lens in their curricula (such as Liger Leadership Academy, STEM Cambodia or AGILE) to identify alternative practices that can be applied in the future. For the most important programs (WEC, SHE Investments, CWE, Development Innovations, CWEA, AGILE and Impact Hub Phnom Penh), an in-depth assessment will be provided.

The last part of the study will summarize the analysis and recommendations. This analysis will include an assessment of the remaining gaps in the support ecosystem, a thorough and qualified feedback from the interviewees and a list of recommendations that can be provided for future programs. No specific direction has been given regarding potential pilot projects; therefore, the content of these recommendations will remain general at the present and simply include suggestions for improving existing support programs as well as for developing new concepts.

Although COVID-19 is an extremely important factor that could shape the future of programs for WE, it was not discussed as a separate topic. None of the stakeholders mentioned it without prompting, likely because this factor has been already integrated. One aspect of the pandemic that arose is an increasing reliance on ICT (spell out) digitalization tools. It seems likely that future programs of WE will need to incorporate this reliance in order to face the “new normal” brought about by the pandemic.

The existing literature on WE programs in ASEAN countries is quite extensive and informative. The scope of this research, however, does not allow for review of such aspects as existing best practices and success stories other ASEAN countries. Therefore, this report will forego other ASEAN projects.

## I. WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS ECOSYSTEM IN CAMBODIA

### A. Cambodian SME Ecosystem and Importance of Women Entrepreneurs

SMEs play an essential role in Cambodia's economy. According to MISTI, SMEs account 70% of employment in the country, are 99.8% of all companies, and contribute to 58% of Cambodia's GDP.

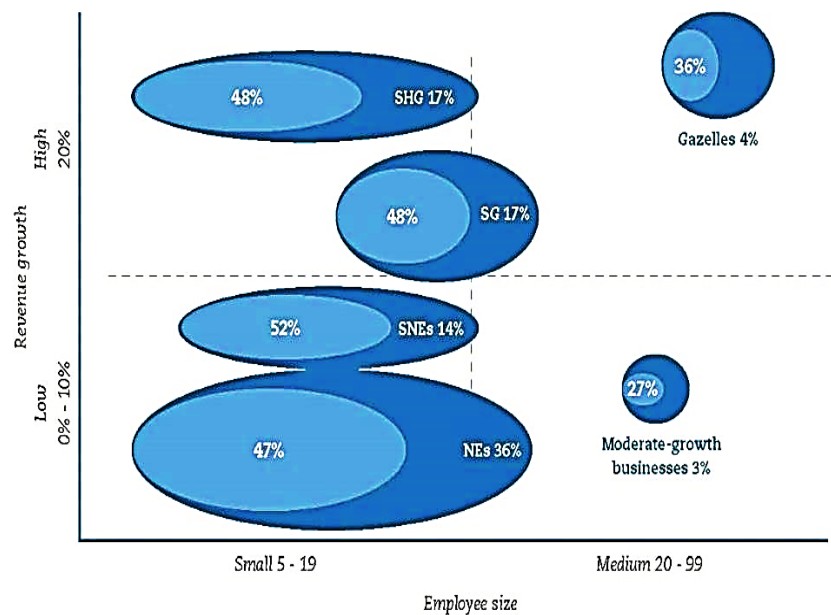
The Cambodia SME ecosystem and the role of WE have been discussed extensively in previous literature and research papers. However, reliable and extensive data on Cambodian SMEs is lacking and/or outdated. The few surveys that are relevant will be cited in this report to give a general overview and profile of the SME and WE ecosystem.

The 2014 Cambodia Inter-censal Economic Survey of the National Institute of Statistics claims a total 513,760 firms with micro SMEs (MSMEs) representing 97.6% of the total. Of these, 61% are female owned and 92.9% are non-registered. Like many developing countries, Cambodia has a large number of micro companies; these, combined with with large companies, form a significant part of the country's employment. There is a lack of medium-sized enterprises. The majority of SMEs are located in Phnom Penh (23 %), Siem Reap (19 %), Battambang (9 %), and Kampong Cham (8 %).

A study conducted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2015 estimated that 84.2 percent of women-owned businesses operated with one or two individuals, compared to 68.9 percent of male-owned businesses operating at the same size. The same study identified that WE are primarily present in four sectors: wholesale and retail trade and services (66 percent), accommodation and food (17 percent), manufacturing (10 percent), and other services (4 percent). (Asian Development Bank, 2015)

Regarding access to markets, #ClosingtheGap Mekong, a study on Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Assessment in Cambodia, conducted by Emerging Markets Consulting (EMC) on behalf of Dutch Good Growth Fund, provided an interesting segmentation based on the World Bank Enterprise Survey (WBES) methodology. The analysis provided a tentative segmentation of the SMEs in Cambodia according to their growth and size characteristics.

Figure 1 shows the Cambodia SME sub-segments by gender of ownership (EMC analysis based on Enterprise surveys-World Bank, 2016). The graph shows that women owning or managing companies have less representation in the higher segments for revenue growth and company size but a larger representation in all other segments, including necessity entrepreneurs (NE), successful NEs (SNE), small and growing business (SG) and small and high growth businesses (SHG).



The WBES confirmed

that women are overwhelmingly present in all segments of the micro and small enterprises, including the most successful ones (SHG and SG).

WE make a significant contribution to private sector development, but their role in the economy does not translate into full access to equal opportunities. This, however, does not mean that WE are less successful. The IFC report published in 2019 claimed that 90 percent of SMEs owned by women were profitable in 2018, suggesting that women entrepreneurs constitute an untapped potential of opportunities (citation?).

## B. Legal and Regulatory Environment for Women Entrepreneurs

In Cambodia, MISTI is responsible for implementing SME policies and programs. The SME Sub-Committee (SCSME), consisting of representatives from more than 10 ministries, is responsible for formulating an SME development framework.

SMEs are now recognized in government strategy as having a central role in Cambodia, but progress had been slow through 2019 due to policy implementation limitations and challenges posed by a lack of human and financial resources. Since 2019, however, certain shifts have enabled greater action on the part of certain government ministries, and several initiatives in favor of SMEs have been implemented, mainly through the Ministry of Economy and Finance (SME Tax Incentives Scheme, Khmer Enterprise, Techo Startup Center, Cambodia SME Bank)

While MoWA is the main government body tasked with gender policies and women's empowerment, each ministry also includes a gender focal point and a gender working group (Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups, GMAGs) tasked with developing and implementing a Gender Mainstreaming Action Plans (GMAPs). Some groups are more active than others, and capacity similarly varies.

Cambodian law does not hold any gender bias against women. They are, from a legal standpoint, on an equal footing with their male counterparts in terms of rights relating to registering and owning a

business, buying land, and even inheritance. Despite this, WE in Cambodia are facing more difficulties than their male counterparts in establishing and in doing business.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are both key national development objectives in Cambodia as reflected in the Government's Rectangular Strategy (RS) and the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP). The Rectangular Strategy Phase III (2013-2018) specifically mentioned women, gender equality, and the goal of reducing domestic violence as key priorities. The subsequent Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Employment, Equity, and Efficiency Phase IV (2018-2023) promises continued efforts across these key priorities, including the involvement of a greater number of women in leadership positions in line ministries.

Additionally, the Neary Rattanak (NR), a five-year strategic plan developed in 1999 by the MoWA, is Cambodia's strategic framework and plan for implementing greater gender equality provisions. The current plan, the Neary Rattanak V, encompasses all the recommendations and lessons learnt from the NR IV, but also the findings of the 2019 Cambodia Gender Assessments (2019). It was also formulated in the framework of drafting the first National Policy on Gender Equality.

#### **The Neary Rattanak V (2019-2023) priorities**

The NR V focuses on gender mainstreaming as the core strategy with 6 sectoral strategies including for women (and girls, when relevant): (1) Economic Empowerment (2) Education (3) Health (4) Legal Protection (5) Public Leadership and Politics (6) Gender and Climate Change.

The NR V is comprehensive and has the following priorities:

- Expand research and assessment programs on gender in order to formulate and implement the first National Policy on Gender Equality and sectoral programs;
- Promote and facilitate gender mainstreaming in important programs such as the Public Administration Reform (PAR), the Decentralization and Deconcentration (D&D) and the Public Financial Management Reform (PFMRP) Programs;
- Strengthen the capacity of gender mainstreaming mechanisms at all levels, including the Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups (GMAGs);
- Raising awareness for the promotion of Gender Mainstreaming including programs of public behavior change to reduce discrimination and negative stereotypes.

Among the 6 main pillars, "Women Economic Empowerment" pillar is seen obviously as one of the key priorities and also includes leveraging existing initiatives launched by the MEF with the Cambodia SME Bank, the creation of Khmer Enterprise or the SME Development Policy under preparation to promote further gender equality and women's entrepreneurship in line with the digital age.

Strengthening partnerships with the private sector, the development partners and relevant stakeholders is important in this regard. Some priorities have been set such as improving the development of innovative entrepreneurship and women-led businesses with inclusiveness or focus on the training needs linked to digital economy or support women's activities in the informal economy.

In addition, in 2013, MoWA initiated the UNDP 'Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Acceleration Framework (MAF)', which identified the following three strategies:

- Strengthening vocational skills for women based on market demand;
- Developing micro, small, and medium enterprises;
- Improving livelihoods in rural areas.

One of MoWA's roles is to support gender mainstreaming across all national policies, but the Ministry lacks adequate resources to oversee and follow up on the implementation of gender policies. Some other ministries are involved in policymaking, but their roles are often ambiguous and lack clear mandates on responsibility and accountability. In sum, policy implementation and institutional capacity for gender mainstreaming remain quite weak and need to be enhanced.

In addition, social and gender norms still play an important role in Cambodia. Many reviewers mentioned the influence of "Chbab Srey" ("women's code") which defines how Cambodian women should behave in society, especially with regard to their housework, families, and husbands. Although the MoWA successfully campaigned for removing the full text of the Chbab Srey from official school curricula, a summarized version is still being taught to girls in secondary schools. The Chbab Srey is also often passed on from mothers to daughters, especially in rural areas. Whether the influence of "Chbab Srey" is real or overestimated, social and gender norms are a reality in Cambodia.

### C. Why are Women Entrepreneurs different?

Women entrepreneurs differ from their male counterparts. As mentioned above, women face unique barriers in doing business and setting up companies, as well as more informal constraints regarding time and mobility, namely due to their need to prioritize family concerns as primary decision makers in family matters. Recognizing these differences and barriers can help identify the gaps that exist in the current ecosystem in Cambodia and can shape more efficient policy and programs.

The identified barriers for WE not only influence their activities but also their ability to access resources and support from the entrepreneurial system. Their expectations might also be different when participating in a program, incubator or other support or empowerment mechanism. Failing to recognize the different expectations could also lead to false prioritization. For example, it is generally true that women-owned businesses are smaller, grow more slowly, and use less external financing. Men and women also differ in their concept of what defines success. One metric of success for women includes empowerment through which women can gain power and status in the household, market, and community.

Another example is the motivation to become an entrepreneur. They are more likely to be forced, or "pushed" into entrepreneurship due to economic necessity - i.e., lack of jobs or insufficient family income - rather than "pulled" by opportunity (i.e., a creative idea for a new business).

Women also tend to have lower growth aspirations than men do and usually prefer a slow and steady business to a fast-growing or risky one. Some of these preferences are exemplified by differences in risk aversion as well as the need to achieve a necessary work-life balance. Women who are pulled into entrepreneurship have higher growth aspirations than those who are pushed.

Four different drivers can be considered: (1) choices and preferences; (2) endowments; (3) external constraints; and (4) internal constraints. These drivers are defined as:

- Choices and preferences pertain to risk preference, motivation, goals and aspirations;
- Disadvantages in endowments refer to education, skills and experience, networks and social capital;
- External constraints are linked to social norms, financial discrimination, business environment and family constraints; and

- Internal constraints are linked to lack of confidence, perceived lack of opportunities or reluctance to seek credit.

Furthermore, women's motivations and goals are also influenced by their stage of life, career, family, preferences and values. There is significant heterogeneity among women entrepreneurs. Different drivers call for different policies and an accountability of these endowments, specifically external and internal constraints that can help when targeting gender mainstreaming policy or shaping efficient women-targeted programs.

Any policy that helps in relaxing restrictive social norms will help equalize the playing field for women, though it is not always easy to impose novel social norms (i.e., how to make it socially acceptable for women to have freedom of movement outside of the home, how to interact with non-relative males, how to delay marriage or how to have more control over assets).

Actions to address internal constraints may include supporting women in developing greater self-esteem, especially as it associates with career related tasks, educating women about debt and reducing their negative perceptions of banks, and creating mentorship and group support programs.

Women entrepreneurs present different profiles and cannot be considered or perceived as a homogeneous group. Different criteria can be taken into account when establishing the type of target population and the impact a program may want to reach. This can include the following:

- Age: young women entrepreneurs and more mature ones;
- Geographical profile: urban or rural;
- Education level: low literacy/educated;
- Languages: Khmer only/English;
- Sectors: traditional/tech-oriented;
- Type of business: start-ups/SMEs; and
- Other factors, such as disability and digital literacy

An interesting distinction that is not always highlighted is the motivation behind whether or not women become entrepreneurs due to necessity or to being driven by an idea - i.e., whether they are pulled or pushed. While knowing this distinction is useful this report will not use this difference as a criterion to characterize the varied population groups. Motivation is a factor worth keeping in mind as it is an important factor that is sometimes underestimated.

#### **DEFINITIONS: TYPES OF ENTREPRENEURS**

**Necessity-driven entrepreneurs:** started their business to supplement household income. They report unchanging or declining trends in customer base and income, and they have taken few actions to expand their businesses.

**Stable entrepreneurs:** mostly began their businesses out of necessity to supplement household income but have shown some signs of a desire to grow their businesses.

**Growth-oriented entrepreneurs:** entered business after identifying an opportunity, or to take advantage of a unique skill or background. They show consistent signs of business growth.

**Source:** Arsana, I.G., & Alibhai, A. (2016)



## D. Key Barriers and Needs Assessments

Barriers faced by SMEs are well documented, therefore the list below will not be exhaustive, but will instead highlight the gender dimensions that are present. The objective is to identify the main components needed to overcome these barriers and to assess later whether or not the existing programs have covered these needs. While the social and cultural constraints are not the only ones that are gender specific, adding a gender dimension can help to better define gender mainstreaming strategies in the future.

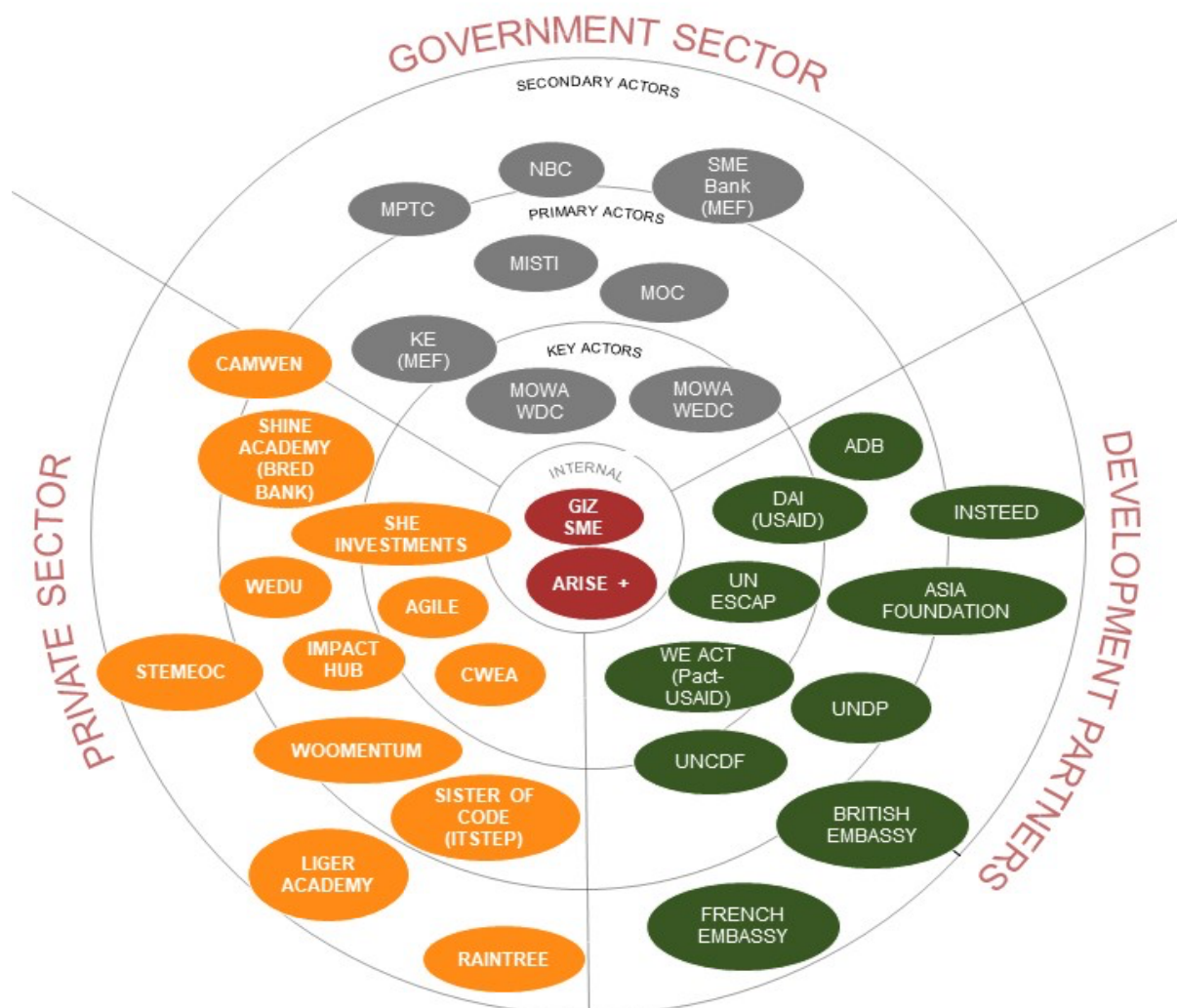
Key Barriers	Gender Dimensions to take into account
<b>Social &amp; Cultural Constraints</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Traditional and gender norms are assigned to girls and young women (early marriage, household chores, taking care of younger siblings, etc.) resulting in limited educational opportunities.</li> <li>- Women's subordination to men (under the Chbab Srey or simply due to education norms) limits their economic independence and opportunities especially in rural areas.</li> <li>- Negative and discriminatory stereotypes subsist with economic consequences: limited mobility, limited ability to network or limited control over their assets.</li> <li>- Gender relations will influence the ability of WE to negotiate and their leadership skills.</li> </ul> <p>NEEDS IDENTIFIED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A more suitable multidimensional approach, which accounts for gender specificities as well as for relevant drivers (such as motivation)</li> <li>- WE program</li> <li>- Changing mindset</li> <li>- Educating girls through innovative leadership programs</li> <li>- Designing more specific programs (with well identified targets: young women entrepreneurs, rural entrepreneurs)</li> <li>- Providing coaching, mentoring, soft skills training</li> <li>- Promoting role models and success stories</li> </ul>
<b>Unfriendly Business Environment (Regulatory Constraints, Corruption)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- WE are reluctant to become "compliant"</li> <li>- Compliance process is tedious, time-consuming and costly. This is particularly true for women MSME which often use "professional" services or intermediaries to navigate the procedures needed to register and pay their taxes.</li> <li>- Registration is also complicated by the different ministries involved in obtaining the various licenses as well as the continued confusion as to which ministries an SME can be registered (MISTI or MOC), which leads to more informal fees being paid.</li> </ul> <p>NEEDS IDENTIFIED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advocacy program highlighting women specific needs and constraints</li> <li>- More gender mainstreaming policies to be implemented</li> <li>- A more systematic gender lens approach should be taken into account when defining important measures supporting SMEs. For example, initiatives to help access to finance (SME bank, seed funding, incubator programs...)</li> </ul>

<b>Access to services (information, training, education and skills)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low education and low literacy standards are quite common for women entrepreneurs in rural areas and, due to the cultural norms, such as limited mobility, it is even more difficult for them to have access to training.</li> <li>- Limited access to information is worsened by the lack of skills and similarly restricts WE from finding solutions for their problems.</li> <li>- Finding qualified staff is also more difficult for WE.</li> <li>- Increase resources and capabilities in areas where training is the most needed, such as through greater financial literacy, financial management, marketing, digital literacy, digital marketing, accounting but also production techniques (in agriculture).</li> </ul> <p><b>NEEDS IDENTIFIED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implement alternative means and strategies for women to get greater access to information, such as physical centers, hotlines, digital platforms, media, associations, etc.</li> <li>- Diversify and apply best practices to improve training, such as by supporting the potential services providers and exploring how to leverage partnerships.</li> <li>- Fine-tuning trainings to maximize design is essential (target population, quality of the delivery).</li> <li>- Topics of the training should be based on the needs of the participants. Raising awareness about the importance of these skills needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (STEM, ICT) should be a key priority.</li> </ul>
<b>Access to Networks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Networking activities are less accessible to women because of social and cultural norms that make claims to deter staying late after business hours, interacting with male business owners or interacting with Government officials.</li> <li>- COVID-19 has also further limited physical networking.</li> </ul> <p><b>NEEDS IDENTIFIED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide more opportunities to network in an environment where women feel safe;</li> <li>- Provide soft skills training (presentation skills to boost confidence);</li> <li>- Provide coaching and mentoring to change mindset;</li> <li>- Create online group support program for peer-to-peer interaction;</li> <li>- Acknowledge importance of Role Models;</li> <li>- Leverage all these existing online communication tools (Facebook) to provide alternatives for physical networking.</li> </ul>
<b>Access to Finance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MSME financing gap is estimated at 4.2 billion USD for women-owned SMEs (IFC 2019).</li> <li>- Majority of women business are self-funded.</li> <li>- When growing, most of SMEs choose financing through banks.</li> <li>- Although most banks do not officially discriminate between men and women-owned SME, they tend to apply a conservative lending approach requiring collaterals or documented credit history or lack of financial records. Women are usually more penalized for that due to low levels of education (financial literacy) and confidence.</li> <li>- Limited availability of seed funding for start-ups, even more for women-led ones.</li> </ul>

	<p>NEEDS IDENTIFIED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relevant financial literacy training</li> <li>- Solving information asymmetry and lack of credit history through fintech solutions or alternative sources of data</li> <li>- Need for banks to have a specified approach to women entrepreneurs</li> <li>- Need for specific support services to make women SMEs more “bank ready” (mentoring or support desks)</li> <li>- Need for more adapted financial instruments (use of Fintech)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Access to Markets (trade, logistics and customs related issues)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multi-dimension challenges: local vs. international markets, difficulty in accessing information, laws and regulations regarding quality, labeling, product differentiation, scale of the production, marketing, scale, etc.</li> <li>- Internationalization usually requires official registration to import or export and women led SMEs are usually not registered.</li> <li>- Dealing with customs, licenses and trade regulations is usually more difficult for women. Reasons given are lower levels of literacy and social norms (fear, lack of confidence...).</li> </ul> <p>NEEDS IDENTIFIED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Market internationalization/export promotion training;</li> <li>- Onboarding of e-commerce platforms (for local and international markets);</li> <li>- Possibility to integrate value chains;</li> <li>- Tools to get access to market information (platforms, export desks or advisors...).</li> </ul>

## II. FIELD STUDY: MAPPING OF THE SUPPORT PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Snapshot: Women Entrepreneurs Support Programs and Stakeholders Mapping



The above mapping combines institutions and programs. Please consult the list of acronyms below for .

Government Sector		Development Partners/NGO		Private Sector	
MOWA	Ministry of Women Affairs	WE ACT	Project led by PACT and financed by USAID	CAMWEN	Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs' Network
KE	Ministry of Economy and Finance	UN ESCAP	"Catalyzing Women Entrepreneurs Program"	CWEA	Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Association
MEF	Ministry of Commerce	DAI	Innovate Support for Emergencies Diseases	Wedu	Name of a Social Enterprise
MOC	Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology, and Innovation	InSTEDD	UN Capital development Fund	STEMEOC	STEM Education Organization for Cambodia
MISTI	National Bank of Cambodia	UNCDF	UN Development Program		
NBC	Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications	UNDP	Asian Development Bank		
MPTC		ADB			

## Introduction and Methodology

Entrepreneurial activities are rarely successful when carried out in isolation. Therefore, a support network for entrepreneurs that includes organizations, private institutions and the government is a critical component for SMEs' general growth, especially for women entrepreneurs. This section aims to highlight many of the important programs and stakeholders that are supporting the WE ecosystem in Cambodia in order to assess their global and individual impact.

However, this is not an exhaustive list. Women's empowerment is an important and diverse topic, and it is difficult to list all the efforts and initiatives that have been undertaken by different stakeholders to tackle the different barriers faced by WE. Therefore, this section will offer a semi-structured approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Cambodian WE support ecosystem.

### **A mixed approach to mapping the different programs and stakeholders**

The above mapping illustrates this semi-structured approach wherein three stakeholder categories are considered: (1) Government; (2) Development Partners and civil society (NGOs and other actors); and (3) the Private Sector.

The map includes institutions, companies and programs in an effort to recognize impact as opposed to the core financing donor. For example, the report mentions WE Act, the program and not PACT, the implementor, or USAID, the financing donor. The report will, however, sometimes mention the names of institutions and discuss the specific programs they are implementing. An example is NBC and its Financial Literacy for Women Entrepreneurship Development program. While combining implementing stakeholders and programs could be more complex for proper classification, it is more intuitive.

The level of analysis also deserves mention. On the map, programs and stakeholders are classified according to their degree of importance. Criteria are quite intuitive so that impact, institutional presence, and size can be considered.

Certain outsiders or initiatives are also presented here, such as the French and British Embassies, innovative schools such as the Liger Leadership Academy. Adding them to the mapping helps to offer a comprehensive overview of the ecosystem, however they are not seen as potential partners to work with.

Finally, we will provide an in-depth analysis of the key actors (MoWA, SHE Investments, AGILE, CWEA, We ACT and the UNESCAP program) and provide an abridged analysis of other independent initiatives as well.

## A. Government-led Support

### 1. Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA)

Under MoWA's Economic Development Department, one office is tasked with Women's Entrepreneurship Development, which oversees different programs that provide support and help for WE. The Ministry has 18 Women Development Centers where basic training is provided for trainers in women entrepreneurships, financial management, financial literacy, digital tools and business plan

writing. Some specific training is also provided for certain industries, including weaving, food processing and cosmetology. Stronger collaboration with the private sector is expected to materialize soon, likely in 2021, with the inception of the Women Entrepreneurship Development Center (WEDC) in Phnom Penh that would provide a space for learning, cross-discipline exchanges, networking and training. The project which is still being finalized seems well designed and includes many of the features deemed necessary to support WE in the Cambodian capital, particularly regarding the women-led and women-owned MSMEs. In addition, there are also specific “Women Economic Empowerment” (WEE) projects included, which would specifically target women-led SMEs.

MoWA is also the focal point for gender mainstreaming policies for ASEAN through the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC). The Ministry participates in discussions on policy development and acts as a link between local Cambodian women business associations and the ASEAN women’s networks. In this regard, the Ministry has been the initiator of the CamWEN initiative, explained in greater detail below.

#### **Cambodian Women Entrepreneurs’ Network (CamWEN)**

CamWEN aims to bring together WE associations, federations and organizations that have strong women memberships with a national advisory board of representatives from relevant Ministries and National Institutions. This structure translates into a collective and joint commitment of the government and the private sector to promote women’s entrepreneurship development through boosting networking and collaboration with the ASEAN WE Network (AWEN) and other networks. This initiative aims to enable a collective female voice representing Cambodia in the business sector and also at international meetings. The objectives are the following: (1) to boost WE development by promoting networking and information sharing; (2) to promote inclusiveness and respond to the diversity of WE associations; (3) to promote dialogue between the Government and the private sector dialogue; (4) to create more opportunities through AWEN and other networks; and (5) to promote best practices in the structure and the process.

CamWEN’s structure is unique. CamWEN’s Advisory Board is chaired by MoWA, and it aims to be inclusive with the involvement of various Ministries and departments (MEF, MoC, MISTI, MoT, Ministry of Rural Development, Secretariat of National Committee on One Village One Product and Cambodia Chamber of Commerce). Difficulties presented by COVID-19, have rendered initial implementation slow, but enabling government support to the private sector is recognized as a move that will improve the coordination among Ministries – often lacking in initiatives of this nature. The composition of the advisory board is designed to raise awareness about challenges faced by WE with the different ministries. As of late 2021, CamWEN has 4 main founding associations: YEAC, CWEA, CATA and JCI. The CamWEN president is currently Dr Eng Lykuong, former president of CWEA.

CamWEN does not aim to be in competition with its members, but rather aims to become a voice for all women entrepreneurs, to promote best practices and standards and to be actively involved in the AWEN initiative.

Regarding MoWA, two existing programs can be highlighted for assessment:

- The Women Development Centers; and
- The Financial Literacy for Women Entrepreneurship Development Program in partnership with VISA and the National Bank of Cambodia.

Furthermore, the concept note of the new Women Entrepreneurship Development Center (WEDC) in Phnom Penh has been added here as a reference:

<b>The Women Development Centers (WDC)</b>	
<b>Short Description</b>	<p>The Women Development Centers (WDCs) were launched in 2009 by MoWA as a tool to support the Neary Rattanak V plan (2009-2013) and provide business services and capacity-building to MSME.</p> <p>There are a total of 14 Women's Development Centers in 14 Cambodian provinces, with approximately 138 administrative and training staff assigned to them and an average of 1,900 trainees who complete their courses every year.</p> <p>The WDC aims are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitate the development of savings groups and women's associations</li> <li>- Offer life skills and vocational training (weaving, handicraft production, hairdressing, tailoring and food processing)</li> <li>- Some WDC also offer entrepreneurial skills and business development training to prepare women to start and grow their business (business counselling, networking opportunities, mentorship, support for registration/tax compliance)</li> <li>- Build capacity and quality standards in order to facilitate access to import and export markets along with organization of trade fairs and exhibitions</li> <li>- Build capacity by placing WDC trainees in internships/job placements</li> <li>- More recently, some ICT literacy trainings were offered in selected WDC</li> <li>- A program is currently developed in collaboration with MPTC to bring the products of WE from the WDCs online through a dedicated platform.</li> </ul>
<b>Target</b>	<b>LARGE SCALE:</b> accessible to all, with a focus on rural women with low levels of literacy.
<b>Geo. Reach</b>	14 Cambodian Provinces but the 24 provinces are covered
<b>Areas of work</b>	Access to Information, Training, Networking, Access to Market
<b>Value proposition</b>	<p>The network in 14 provinces is unique and can be further leveraged to grant access to this category of rural women entrepreneurs who are unserved and in need of additional resources.</p> <p>The services offered to WE are free of charge.</p> <p>Some centers have more opportunities than others and the centers try to adapt to the local needs (some have showrooms to better connect with the tourism industry, some offers IT skills training, some offer some dormitories for WE).</p> <p>The WEDC will provide many more opportunities in the future. Programs will be rolled out to some WDCs (5 at the beginning up to 10 centers in 5 years), helping also to upscale the existing offer and improve existing internal capacity through training of trainers' program.</p>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited budget: difficulty to find suitable staff</li> <li>- Training mainly focused on "traditional topics" but limited training on market needs or skills of 21<sup>st</sup> century needed (ICT, leadership or financial skills)</li> <li>- Limited visibility</li> <li>- Lack of strong partnerships to develop their capabilities</li> <li>- WDCs has much more potential to grow as community spaces accessible to women and girls and that reflect better their needs and interests.</li> </ul>
<b>Analysis</b>	<p>The impact is still limited</p> <p>The value of the trainings is not recognized by WE and there is no proper branding around these centers. This lack of visibility might be improved, and more opportunities can be created.</p> <p>The launch of the future WEDC could provide a great opportunity for these centers to rethink completely their future strategy. Ideally, it should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A more tailored training program based on practical needs of the main target population which is rural women</li> <li>- Propose an alternative or complementary program to the WEDC in Phnom Penh</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduce more skills trainings including on digital literacy to avoid any digital gender divide in the future and raise awareness about the importance of these 21<sup>st</sup> century skills</li> <li>- Train the existing staff to these skills as well</li> <li>- Build new partnerships, especially Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). An idea is to find local companies who can help to develop the WE ecosystem around the WDC (sponsorship, promotion, seminars) through their CSR strategy for example.</li> </ul> <p>Before that, the WDCs unique reach can be leverage by partnering with some service providers and implementing strategies targeting WE in the provinces.</p>
--	---

### The Cambodia Women Entrepreneurship Development Centre (WEDC) Project

The project is ambitious. The Centre aims to provide capacity-building and services to WE through a PPP and 4 components: (1) Training and Development (2) Business Incubator (3) Research and Knowledge Hub and (4) Collective Space and Resources. In addition to the Women MSME and SMEs, the Centre also aims to serve young WE with a target of 15,000 WE receiving training and 450 using the business incubator.

- The training component expects to leverage digital modules and tools like e-learning and e-mentoring to reach its objectives. Enhancing digital skills will be a cross-cutting theme across all WEDC programs. These services will be provided to 5 WDCs in 10 provinces by the end of the program.
- The business incubator includes training, mentoring, networking, information and access to finance support systems. The incubator will be a 6-month program, similar to the SHE Investments Incubator. Industry specific incubators are also anticipated, and e-commerce will similarly be a focus.
- The research component is new but will be a beneficial addition given its innovative dimensions. The WEDC will include a library with digital media assets and collaborate with different partners to promote gender equality. The WEDC will also establish a university degree program on Gender Equality topic, to specifically address issues facing WE.
- Finally, the space will be able to welcome producers' fairs, a co-working space and a theater/auditorium. It is expected that best practices will be replicated to create a community, especially for WE. Competitions can also be organized. Some other nice features would include a child-care center, showroom for MSME products and a restaurant.

International best practices will be sought after, as well as technical partnerships to seek tried and tested expertise and to avoid competing with the other existing programs.

The budget planned for the center is large and under a PPP which will last 5 years.

The center is expected to be professionally managed and run with a certain level of independence.

### Financial Literacy for Women Entrepreneurship Development Program

<b>Partnership</b>	MOWA with National Bank of Cambodia and support of VISA
<b>Short Description</b>	<p>One-year Program (launched in January 2020) but the program should be extended until end of 2021 due to Covid19.</p> <p>The project has a particular focus on strengthening women empowerment through financial literacy via digital platforms. It also focuses on building technical capacity of staff within MoWA.</p> <p>3 pillars are targeted:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) A training of trainers' program with Government officials from different Ministries. The goal is to raise awareness and provide a better understanding for these government officials on financial literacy so that they can work better also with the private sector on the ground.</li> </ol>



	<p>2) Financial literacy and Safe Finance Forums targeting mainly university students. The objective is to provide to the younger generation of future workers, women entrepreneurs with the adequate financial skills. The results are particularly effective with this target category, usually more tech savvy and the impact are good.</p> <p>3) Workshops with Women Development Centers to provide vocational training, as well as workshops covering themes such as “Financial and Digital Literacy for Entrepreneurship Development” and “Access to Safe Financial Services”</p>
<b>Target population</b>	<b>QUITE LARGE:</b> Young women and female entrepreneurs, especially in rural areas, who aspire to set up new businesses or already run micro-businesses, in addition to female high school and under-graduate students.
<b>Geo. Reach</b>	4 provinces Kratie, Stung Treng, Preah Vihear and Siem Reap
<b>Areas of work</b>	Financial literacy, financial inclusion
<b>Factors of success (value proposition)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong and relevant partnerships (NBC and VISA)</li> <li>- Design of the program seems to be relevant: topic, needs, target population</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- COVID-19 has complicated the implementation of the program which started well in early 2020.</li> <li>- Working in the provinces is challenging, particularly in finding the appropriate instructors and trainers.</li> <li>- The design of the program is mainly based on one-time trainings or single conferences. It is worthwhile to investigate how to make these trainings recur on a regular basis.</li> </ul>
<b>Analysis</b>	<p>The launching event in Phnom Penh was successful as were the first events organized. Newspapers and some recent studies mentioned the positive impact of the initiative however, implementation has been delayed due to COVID-19, especially, activities for the third pillar targeting women entrepreneurs in the provinces through the respective WDCs could not be organized yet.</p> <p>Synergies were well deployed with a strong public-private partnership, leveraging the expertise of each partner.</p> <p>Some attention has been given to the post evaluation survey to see what can be improved in the future. Overall, an interesting program, well designed but short-term by nature. It would be worthwhile to have this type of program renewed or even institutionalized to become a permanent or long-term program.</p>

## 2. Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF)

The role of the MEF is to implement and contribute to the government’s economic and financial policies. To implement all its tasks, the Ministry is organized into various general departments, including the General Department of Taxation (GDT) and the General Department of Customs and Excise (GDCE). The MEF plays a key role in Cambodia and has recently emerged as a key ministry in supporting SMEs with the launching of novel initiatives, including Khmer Enterprise, Cambodia SME Bank, TECHO Startup Center and Skills Development Funds.

The MEF has a Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Plan, which also aims to support gender responsive policy and programming and capacity development, and to promote more women in the institutional program (though they do not seem to promote this openly). In parallel, new initiatives that were launched in 2019 benefit from adequate resources, such as strong leadership, competent and skilled staff and substantial funding. Flexible and efficient operating principles are also applied, which lessens

the need for a gender strategy. Nonetheless, the voluntary and systematic implementation of a large-scale gender lens strategy could be an effective pilot project and case study in examining the potential benefits of a similar, future strategy at the national level.

For now, two main MEF initiatives (the Entrepreneurship Development Fund and Cambodia SME Bank) can be highlighted.

- the Entrepreneurship Development Fund (EDF) is a policy instrument of the Royal Government of Cambodia. Founded in 2019, this government trust fund aims to support entrepreneurs, innovative startups, potential SMEs and partnering institutions who will implement any innovative activity and create economic value-added aspects to the Cambodia's economy. The EDF has 4 main components: (1) Capacity upgrading through a cost-sharing model to support SME and startups in main areas including training, quality mentoring, market, product and legalization; (2) Networking; (3) Entrepreneurial culture promotion; and (4) Seed funding. Khmer Enterprise (KE) is the EDF Program Operator.

Khmer Enterprise plays a significant role in the SME support ecosystem because it is involved most levels through its different partnerships. Recently, KE have begun implementation of a large scale and ambitious incubator program in partnership with 500 Startups. As KE is better known than the EDF, we will profile its activities below.

<b>KHMER ENTERPRISE (KE)</b>	
<b>General Description</b>	<p>KE is the new national SME promotion and development center. The focus is on business owners, scalable SMEs and entrepreneurial communities.</p> <p>They provide financial and non-financial support through different programs. They work at both the level of startups (seed financing) and through Support Entrepreneurship Programs (SME support package during COVID-19 and capacity upgrade).</p> <p>KE is working to become the national platform for promoting entrepreneurial activities through public-private partnerships.</p>
<b>Incubator and/ or Women Specific Program</b>	<p>In 2020, KE partnered with UNDP for the incubator, Bluetribe, and recently, KE has also partnered with 500 Startups, a venture capital (VC) firm, to launch <a href="#">the Angkor 500 incubator program</a>.</p> <p>Over the initial two-year partnership, the VC firm will bring together founders throughout the country to form teams and technology companies. It's striving to help Cambodian startups engage with international markets and investors, as well as connect them to industry stakeholders and corporate partners.</p> <p>KE does not have a gender mainstreaming strategy and has not yet developed any specific programs for women. However, KE is working with several different partners to support key stakeholders within the ecosystem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The SHE Investments KOTRA Riel project (financed by/in partnership with UNESCAP) which provide basic tools for digital literacy</li> <li>- CWEA through the sponsoring of one of their events.</li> <li>- MOWA: possible training through CWEA for digital skills upgrade</li> <li>- Tech4kids (for teenagers)</li> </ul>
<b>ANALYSIS</b>	<p><i>KE is a young entity but so far, they have recorded a high success rate in attaining quickly their goals and objectives. Led by a competent leader, KE has adequate resources and a large pipeline of projects and partners. In addition, KE has a large mandate and could be a strong partner in implementing a gender lens strategy across all far-reaching projects, including its new incubator program. KE is definitely a potential partner to consider in any SME activity going forward.</i></p>

- The Cambodia SME Bank has played a crucial role during the COVID-19 crisis. The bank has a strong social mandate and is interested in collaborating with the private sector in efforts to help companies become more compliant, such as working with accounting firms to help prepare financial statements. A profile is below.

SME BANK	
<b>General Description</b>	<p>The SME bank was soft launched in April 2020 and opened its door in November 2020. They plan to expand to other provinces in the future.</p> <p>The mission of the bank is to provide better and affordable access to financing for SMEs in key priority sectors.</p> <p>They aim to provide four main value-added benefits to the SME community, including better and more affordable access to financing, technical assistance to SMEs to enhance productivity and efficiency, downstream business advisory support and facilitating access to regional markets.</p> <p>The SME Bank of Cambodia provides a wide range of SME loan products and services including an SME Co-Financing Scheme (SCFS) and Cambodia SME Scheme (CSS).</p> <p>The SME Co-Financing Scheme of \$100 million that was launched because of the COVID-19 pandemic and distributed in April 2020 had been fully developed by mid-October to the benefit of 753 SMEs.</p>
<b>Women focused program</b>	<p>No gender specific program yet.</p> <p>The bank is planning to extend various loan schemes to organizations such as the Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Scheme (CWES) and Cambodia Digital and Automation (CDAS) in 2021.</p>
<b>Analysis</b>	<p><i>MoWA shared that according to numbers, there are not enough WE who have benefited from the SME fund. The SME bank could also be a good partner in implementing a more proactive and differentiated strategy to allow more women entrepreneurs to access financing. MoWA could play a role in channeling and informing more about the requirements and administrative support.</i></p>

### 3. Other Ministries

#### a. Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation (MISTI)

As mentioned above, MISTI is the main body responsible for implementing SME policies and programs. The General Department of SME and Handicrafts, as the chair of the SME Sub-committee, is responsible for the SME manufacturing sector and officiates coordination to engage with line ministries. MISTI has only AAAA policy to support women entrepreneurs and they are in the process of preparing a gender specific strategy. In terms of projects, they have received some funding to help WE gain greater access to information, through the “One Roof System” project (an extension of the CamDX). Additionally, MISTI is involved as an official partner in projects with GIZ and UNESCAP related to WE, though their involvement in these has been limited until now.

MISTI is also the lead Ministry in the implementation of the Strengthening Regional Structures for Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion in ASEAN” (ASEAN-SME) project implemented by GIZ. [This project](#) aims to improve the information and promotion of services for SME within the framework of the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development 2025 by implementing the following thematic fields: (1) Improving the ASEAN SME Service Centre; (2) Strengthening national SME information centers; and (3) Promoting national SME services for internationalization. A key component of the project activities in Cambodia focus on the establishment of a national SME information website (KhmerSME), and a national SME information center owned and operated by MISTI.

**ASSESSMENT:** This project, as it is designed, is anticipated to improve access to markets for WE. Adding gendered components and specific promotional awareness of WE through key partners (WECs, business associations) could be useful given the current deficit in projects targeting access to international markets for SMEs and the dearth of projects that target women specifically.

*b. Ministry of Commerce (MOC)*

MOC is the government ministry responsible for regulating and promoting commerce and trade in Cambodia. It is responsible for business registration and supplying trade-related documents. MOC does not have any specific gender mainstreaming strategy, but their new **Go4ECAM project** on e-commerce, co-financed by UNDP, aims to be inclusive. It specifically targets women and provincial SMEs, with one third of the beneficiaries being WE (See UNDP Section).

*c. Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPTC)*

MPTC is highly involved in the field of startups and digital economy, having established a Capacity Building and Research Development (CBRD) fund to promote the mobilization of young talent and tech startups in the country. The National Institute of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Communication Technology (NIPTICT) was created in 2014 under the supervision of MPTC to address ICT research and training, with a Digital Innovation Center launched in 2019. Since 2018, a targeted initiative, the “**Cambodian Women in Tech**” Award has been powered by MPTC to reward women who are actively contributing to the development of the ICT sector in Cambodia. Since its launch, more than 70 women have been recognized, signaling a success in the promotion of new role models in tech and women specifically.

*d. National Bank of Cambodia (NBC)*

The NBC has launched and supported several initiatives to promote financial literacy, including the above-mentioned Financial Literacy for Women Entrepreneurs Program, which was established in partnership with MoWA and Visa Inc. H.E. Chea Serey, the Assistant Governor and Director General of Central Banking, has also been recognized internationally as a role model and champion of women’s empowerment efforts in Cambodia.

*e. Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS)*

The MoEYS actively supports all programs and initiatives targeting girls, technology, STEM and coding, such the STEM Sisters and Sisters in Code programs. They are particularly involved in the TECHNOVATION competition, initially organized by Development Innovations (please see Development Innovation section) and now organized by the Institute of Technology of Cambodia with the support and cooperation of the MoEYS and the Association of Technovation Cambodia. Young girls from 13 to 16 are offered a computer coding training program, prototyping and mobile application over 12 weeks of weekend classes. The culmination is students preparing proposals that present solutions to social problems. Every year, the proposals are judged during the national pitch event and one winning group is invited to the global Technovation final competition held in the United States.

## B. Development Partners

### 1. Main players and programs: WE Act, CWE and Development Innovations

The WE Act Project from PACT Cambodia, Catalyzing Women Entrepreneurship (CWE) from UNESCAP and Development Innovations (DI), are three sizable and comprehensive programs, financed by donors which include USAID and the Government of Canada. They share the following features:

- Working mainly with implementing partners;
- Utilizing an approach based on needs assessment and gap analysis; and
- Strengthening the ecosystem by supporting existing programs and players.

While it is too early to assess the entirety of the UNESCAP project, certain factors of success for WE act and CWE programs can be highlighted. They usually pertain to:

- Building a trust-based relationship with partners;
- Leveraging as much as possible the existing synergies created by the network;
- Providing real support and expertise that exceeds financing; and
- Creating a strong and enabling environment and ecosystem by strengthening partnerships.

While the WE Act Project specializes in the WE demographic, the program also addresses issues across the whole ecosystem, including the barriers previously identified. UNESCAP specializes in access to finance projects, primarily through investment funds. The Development Innovations program closed definitively in 2019, but was a significant and influential model for future programs, having focused on strengthening the IT ecosystem. The DI program developers applied a gender mainstreaming strategy and supported several women-focused programs as well as implementing their own program (Technovation) dedicated to girls in coding.

These three programs are poised to build upon their own expertise and provide technical support to partners. In addition, all program leaders are women who express passionate responses to their work.

#### a. WE Act Project

WE ACT PROJECT	
<b>Structure</b>	Financed by USAID and Implemented by PACT (10 million USD)
<b>Short Description</b>	<p>Women Entrepreneurs Act “WE Act” is a 5-years project that supports YWEs in strengthening their skillsets, business linkages, and participation with relevant associations.</p> <p>Their role is to work with the existing actors to strengthen the ecosystem, as well as the individuals and services they deliver.</p> <p>WE act provides institutional capacity on organizational aspects to their 17 partners: AGILE, Advocacy and Policy Institute, CWEA, Community Translation Organization, Facebook, Glean, Impact Hub Phnom Penh, JCI Cambodia, Lady Savings Group, PDP Center, Sevea, SHE Investments, Sound Initiative, The Asia Foundation, Wapatoa, and YEAC.</p> <p>Some particularly interesting projects to watch closely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>YWE (Young Women Entrepreneur) Accelerator with CWEA:</b> The project aims to increase inclusion of more diverse members (especially Young Entrepreneurs) in CWEA.</li><li>- <b>SHE Investments</b> (Projects: members network for Young Women Entrepreneurs; Trains the trainers and Incubator Programs).</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Entrepreneur Platform for Engagement and Exchange</b> (advocacy with the government) with Impact Hub Phnom Penh.</li> <li>- Access to finance project (to be finalized): they work with one MFI to provide loans with no collateral, no registration and with good terms - decent interest rate. This could be an exemplar business case for the MFI to showcase as a potential for what the WE can offer.</li> </ul>
<b>Target</b>	<b>(Medium and Large Scale) – Youth and Young Women Entrepreneurs</b> (aged from 15 to 35y). They work with different archetypes in order to generate and apply different approaches. It also supports identifying the right target and the right programs to support.
<b>Geo. Reach</b>	Phnom Penh, Battambang, Siem Reap and soon, 2 additional urban centers
<b>Areas of work</b>	<p>They have six pillars that cover almost all the barriers faced by Women Entrepreneurs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Networks</li> <li>- Business skills-building</li> <li>- Access to finance</li> <li>- Advocacy: participation in policy formulation</li> <li>- Changing social norms</li> <li>- Advocacy: appropriate engagement platforms</li> </ul>
<b>Value proposition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- WE Act aims to fill the current gaps in each of the six aforementioned key pillars.</li> <li>- They also work on the demand side, listening to the needs and adjusting if necessary.</li> <li>- They provide support to their partners on the organizational aspects through capacity-building which helps in the sustainability of maintaining and recruiting partners.</li> <li>- The policy and leadership pillar were particularly successful in creating awareness with the Government for this category of WEs.</li> <li>- They have a diversified pipeline or beneficiaries including disabled women.</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access to market: this pillar has generated the lowest success due to a lack of specificity.</li> <li>- Access to finance: this pillar has also been under-performing. Nonetheless, there is a need for more support in order to provide women with safe access to financing</li> <li>- More skill-building and knowledge sharing are needed. However, it is essential to ensure the quality of this training, which is not always easy.</li> <li>- Young WEs attract significant donorship but their ability to absorb and utilize funding remains tenuous. It seems that capacity-building has become oversaturated in this segment.</li> <li>- Increasing the current pipeline of target beneficiaries is not easy. WE Act also intends to reach out to more necessity-driven entrepreneurs such as street vendors.</li> </ul>
<b>Analysis</b>	<p><i>The success factors of this program can be summarized as follows:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>The program focused on the gaps and on the needs. The main recommendation is to take the necessary time to better understand what would maximally support WEs.</i></li> <li>- <i>Trust building: constructive feedback and exchange is important for a smooth implementation. Therefore, working closely with the partners to build strong network relationships is essential.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>WE Act model has been measurably successful to date in applying a holistic approach and working at different levels to cover all the barriers faced by WE.</i></p> <p><i>Instead of investing in its own program, WE Act has prioritized supporting and strengthening the ecosystem, working with a variety of partners, including civil society, business associations and social enterprises.</i></p> <p><i>The program director is optimistic about the progress accomplished in building WE self-confidence in Cambodia.</i></p> <p><i>The lingering question begs whether it is feasible to be both effective and relevant in all areas of intervention, given the wide scope of work.</i></p>



*b. Catalyzing Women Entrepreneurship (CWE)*

<b>Catalyzing Women Entrepreneurship (CWE) Program</b>	
<b>Partners</b>	UNESCAP program in six countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Fiji, Nepal, Samoa and Vietnam Financing from the Government of Canada
<b>Short Description</b>	<p>“Catalyzing Women’s Entrepreneurship” is a five-year project that aims to advance WE and market participation in the Asia-Pacific region. The program works to develop an enabling environment for WEs to effectively start up and/or expand their businesses. The program takes a facilitative approach to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem through 3 pillars:</p> <p>1- Policy and advocacy  <b>“Policy recommendations for supporting women-owned MSME affected by COVID-19 in Cambodia”</b></p> <p>2- Innovative financing  The program works through partnerships aimed at leveraging public and private capital to pilot, test and scale financing models that support WEs.  Three key financing mechanisms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Women MSME FinTech Innovation Fund</b></li> </ul> <p>Projects: BANHJI’s <b>“Digital and financial literacy to women MSME project”</b>, SHE Investments’ <b>KOTRA Riel</b> project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A women livelihood bond</li> <li>○ An impact Investment fund</li> </ul> <p>The Women Enterprise Impact Investment Fund was launched in 2019.  In 2020, UNESCAP partnered with SEAF (Small Enterprise Assistance Funds) to launch the <b>SEAF Women’s Economic Empowerment Fund (SWEEF)</b> in South East Asia, a private equity impact investment fund to invest in women-owned SMEs (150 Million).  Another partnership worth highlighting is that established with GOOD RETURN, a social enterprise to help women SMEs in accessing the capital needed to support their business operations through the creation of a multi-country credit guarantee scheme. International impact investors will be providing the funds to guarantee the participation of partner financial institutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Women Enterprise Reco Fund</b></li> </ul> <p>In 2021, a collaboration with UNCDF (with financing from FMO, the Government of Canada and Visa Inc.) aims to support innovative business solutions that address the constraints faced by WEs in Asia. The fund will provide up to US\$ 50,000 in co-funding to private sector innovators. The UNCDF Challenge Fund is seeking to test models and determine what is working in the market.</p> <p>3- ICT, digital solutions and business skills  Project: <b>Women ICT Frontier Initiative (WIFI)</b> training program to strengthen digital platform skillsets</p> <p>The project support MoWA to develop WEDC operational framework and is also involved in the conception and fundraising for the WEDC project within MoWA.</p>
<b>Target</b>	<b>LARGE SCALE:</b> Start-ups to SMEs through the use of different financing instruments, ranging from payments to fintech
<b>Geo. Reach</b>	Large, by leveraging the partners
<b>Areas of work</b>	Access to finance
<b>Factors of success / Value proposition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Market system approach: based on the needs and gaps</li> <li>– Take into account social and cultural norms</li> <li>– Have a fruitful experience working with ministries like MoWA and MISTI, and banks like NBC</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Funding, technical assistance, a network of experts and knowledge on the processes provided by ESCAP</li> <li>– In Cambodia, you have good synergies and complementarity with the different UN agencies (UNCDF, UN Women)</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Working with the private sector was quite challenging but UNESCAP succeeded in raising more money than expected.</li> <li>– Ensuring maximal impact is not easy.</li> </ul>
<b>Analysis</b>	<p><i>impressive project and technical.</i></p> <p><i>Implementation regarding the impact investment still needs to be evaluated, particularly given Cambodia's lack of investable SMEs pipeline.</i></p> <p><i>On the ground, UNESCAP provides support by developing a strong/sustainable structure for future mainstreaming, by including a gender lens approach and best practices. They bring an expertise novel to Cambodia and work with a vast network of partners. Implementation does not seem to be an issue - they have mentioned strong working relations with the government and their partners.</i></p> <p><i>There appears to be a positive shift among donors' mindsets and their interest in more innovative projects.</i></p> <p><i>Overall, while challenges remain, substantial improvements have been recorded in Cambodia. The recent UNCDF challenge fund received 85 applications, showing a certain dynamism of the ecosystem.</i></p> <p><i>Regarding financial accessibility, noteworthy topics include: COVID-19 funds, digital trends (e-commerce) and formal remittances (the impact on the payment side). UNESCAP's effective approach in implementing a technical project on the ground has been particularly interesting. Access to finance is a crowded sector but the projects appear complementary.</i></p>

### c. Development Innovations Program

<b>Development Innovations Program</b>	
<b>Structure</b>	Implemented by DAI (Development Alternatives Inc.), financed by USAID
<b>Short Description</b>	<p>Development Innovations (DI) was a six-year USAID-funded project (2013-2019) that helped civil society organizations, technology companies, social enterprises and young innovators in designing and using ICT solutions to employ innovative processes that will tackle Cambodia's development challenges. DI's activities focused on advancing opportunities in tech and entrepreneurship for Cambodian innovators, youth and women; projects included digital skills courses, business incubators and accelerators and social media campaigns to young professional programs.</p> <p>The programming and services evolved around four areas:</p> <p>(1) innovation support projects (2) technology coaching (3) ICT solutions projects and (4) research and toolkit.</p> <p>The program was not gender specific; however, a gender lens strategy was applied to all the programs and some components of the program were focused specifically on women and girls.</p> <p>For women specific activities, DI was involved in the following projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Innovation support projects</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Sisters of Code</b> (IT Step Academy)</li> <li>– <b>Technovation</b></li> <li>– <b>#IAmRachana</b> communication initiative under Technovation Cambodia to champion girls in tech</li> <li>– <b>SHE incubator and accelerator programs</b></li> <li>– <b>WEDU mentorship activity</b></li> <li>– <b>Raintree</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>ICT Solutions Project</i></li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Scale up of Ngeay Ngeay, the Business Information Platform of SHE Investments</li> <li>• <i>Publications</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– “Factors affecting women engaging in tech careers in Cambodia”</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Technovation</b> is another project worth highlighting as it was managed directly by DI. This three-month coding and business plan competition was open to young girls aged 10 to 18. Over the six years, 800 girls learned to code and, in 2019, a Cambodian team arrived 2nd in the prestigious Technovation World Pitch. Ultimately, the program helped Cambodian girls develop soft skills, in addition to proficient tech skills and demonstrated that with proper and formal training, Cambodian girls could compete and succeed on the world stage. Overall, the program helped build a strong, vibrant and inclusive ecosystem.</p>
<b>Target</b>	<b>LARGE SCALE in general.</b> Technovation attracted more than 800 girls
<b>Geo. Reach</b>	Large through the partners
<b>Areas of work</b>	For the women specific projects: access to services (training), access to finance (incubator), access to information, advocacy, social and gender norms barriers
<b>Value proposition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The approach was also based on needs assessment and gap analysis.</li> <li>– The program covered the whole IT ecosystem.</li> <li>– They had an outstanding network of partners to whom they offered support to facilitate growth.</li> <li>– They favored a hands-on and practical approach, working both on innovation and ICT solutions projects.</li> </ul> <p>According to their self-assessment of the program, successes have included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Adaptive management over DI’s lifespan and improved activity focus and quality.</li> <li>– DI catalyzed behavior changes among partners, beneficiaries and the private sector, demonstrating distinct approaches from their partners.</li> <li>– DI assistance, networks and convening power increased partner credibility, attracting the attention, support, and respect of government ministries, international donors, and the private sector.</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Regarding the program, the mentorship activity with Wedu was deemed relatively unsuccessful due to a lack of flexibility and hyper-fixation on formalities.</li> <li>– In general, mentorship needs to be closely monitored given the difficulties surrounding universal commitment and quality.</li> <li>– Cultural and social norms are also relevant and worth highlighting as their exclusion, at times, led to misunderstanding and wrong expectations.</li> <li>– There is also a need for more coordination at donor level.</li> </ul>
<b>Analysis</b>	<p><i>Outstanding results and a mass impact on the Cambodian IT ecosystem as a whole but also for their gender lens strategy.</i></p> <p><i>When DI started, the tech space was disproportionately male, with no female founders, signaling an obvious gender gap.</i></p> <p><i>It was a conscious choice to not separate men and women. There was an agreement that inter-connectivity was needed but instead, gender-mainstreaming was adopted to ensure the inclusion of men in the promotion of female role models</i></p> <p><i>The overall program benefited from strong leadership and expertise from DAI.</i></p> <p><i>DI program is a great model because it specialized in on one area - ICT solutions and innovations - so there were targeted efforts to maximize the project and build a vibrant and gender inclusive Tech Startup ecosystem in Cambodia.</i></p> <p><i>Finally, they conducted a self-assessment at the end of the program, providing recommendations and sharing their best practices (toolkit, etc.) so that the program could be replicated or scaled.</i></p> <p><a href="https://dai-global-digital.com/lessons-learned-from-usaids-development-innovations-adapt-serve-users-and-tell-your-story.html">https://dai-global-digital.com/lessons-learned-from-usaids-development-innovations-adapt-serve-users-and-tell-your-story.html</a></p>

## 2. Other Partners: UNDP, UNCDF, Asia Foundation

### *a. UN Development Program (UNDP)*

Regarding the SME sector, UNDP Cambodia is quite active in the field of innovation (innovation lab) and incubator programs (**Blutribe**). The agency has financed previous sustainable innovation programs with incubators through Impact Hub Phnom Penh. They also have a mandate to support countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) through establishing integrated programs (SDG 5 Gender equality).

UNDP will also take the lead on the **Ebiznest project**, a component of the MOC's Go4eCam project. The project is an e-commerce bootcamp, using mentoring and coaching to enable 50 digital SMEs per year to go online. The program will also provide small grants (US\$ 5000) to 25 SMEs every year to help with project development. Like the other components of the Go4eCam project, there is a gender specific condition requiring that at least one third of the beneficiaries be female start-ups or entrepreneurs.

Although UNDP is not running any WE programs, the organization is supporting gender inclusive practices -, similar to other UN organizations - by encouraging women to apply and by setting gender inclusive key performance indicators in their recent programs (not only through GO4Ecam but also with their e-commerce project that aims to onboard more SMEs onto e-commerce platforms.)

Target population: Dependent on program type (varying between incubator programs, and tech start-ups, e-commerce, etc.). For final beneficiaries (such as WEs onboarded onto e-commerce platforms), it can include both necessity entrepreneurs and growth-oriented ones.

**ASSESSMENT**: The Go4eCam project implementation has just started; therefore, it is not yet possible to provide an analysis of the program. As it is a UN agency, it is recommended to use gender inclusive practices.

### *b. UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF)*

UNCDF offers catalytic finance models that unlock public and private resources in last mile environments, especially at the domestic level, to reduce poverty and support local economic development.

UNCDF is currently implementing **the Shaping Inclusive Finance Transformations (SHIFT)** program to accelerate financial inclusion and women's economic participation in Southeast Asia. UNCDF SHIFT utilizes a big data analysis of Cambodia's top banks to understand the needs and gaps within customer services and invests in innovative business models that expand women's economic participation and empowerment.

SHIFT works on changing the behavior of market actors to stimulate investment, business innovations and regulatory reform to advance financial inclusion and accelerate economic participation of and opportunities for low-income groups, especially women.

The program works on four components:

- (1) Policy and advocacy to influence policy makers, financial service providers and governments and emphasis towards gender strategies within financial inclusion policies to meet the needs of women;

- (2) Data and analysis strengthen the availability and use of both supply and demand to conduct regional and sector-wide research on specific themes including gender, remittances and green finance;
- (3) Learning and skills development through learning and investment readiness tools to strengthen the capacity of financial service providers and women-owned enterprises; and
- (4) The Challenge Fund facility is a flexible common platform for crowding in investors and donors to support projects targeting financial inclusion. The Fund offers competitive matching grants to catalyze investments by private sector financial institutions and businesses. The most recent Challenge Fund was hosted in partnership with UNESCAP's "**Women Enterprise Reco Fund**" (see UNESCAP analysis).

Target population: large scale for the beneficiaries

**ASSESSMENT:** SHIFT contributes to the achievement of the SDGs by focusing on the financial inclusion of poor women as well as Women entrepreneurs. It will also contribute to the achievement of the goal of ending poverty (SDG1) and the goal of achieving gender equality and economic empowerment of women (SDG 5).

#### *c. Asia Foundation (AF)*

The Asia Foundation (AF) is a non-profit international development organization committed to improving lives across Asia. Financing partners with Cambodia programs, including USAID, the ADB, Smart, and the Stone Family Foundation.

AF is committed to developing programs that leverage the use of technology to empower women and youth. The foundation has developed a comprehensive program to favor economic inclusion of women. Below is a selection of prominent examples of their commitment:

- Tek4Good, established in 2016, to support tech start-ups in Cambodia by providing physical office space, networking, mentoring, and business coaching opportunities. Since its establishment, Tek4Good has hosted four start-ups that have grown and gained recognition for their success, and which employ more than 80 young Cambodians.
- Partnership with Krawma called Bong Srey, a job listing and referral service platform, initially focusing on the garment industry, that contains links to employment opportunities to increase accessibility to job information and improve choices for jobseekers and employers.
- Women in Tek is a network of 20 start-ups that can benefit from individual support in services such as mentoring, networking, working space, marketing, visibility (video).
- In 2021 The Asia Foundation will also be implementing a new 11-month program funded by the VISA Foundation to address women-led micro- and small businesses' lack of access to capital. The project will increase women entrepreneurs' access to capital and ability to grow their businesses by building financial and digital literacy and business planning skills. The project will also link WE with financial institutions and services, while working with capital providers to better facilitate and meet the needs of women entrepreneurs.

Target Populations: Usually small scale entrepreneurs, Women Tech Startups, young, educated

**ASSESSMENT:** AF offers good services to a limited number of women start-ups in their program. Although the feedback is positive, the existing WE programs do not appear to be intensive, but look like more like a network with benefits (space, access to services, etc.).

### The French Embassy: implementing a strong feminist diplomacy

In Cambodia, the French Embassy has been exemplary in the advancement of “feminist” diplomacy. A strong gender-lens approach was implemented following the arrival of H.E Eva Nguyen Binh, the first female French Ambassador in Cambodia.

Under her leadership, initiatives and projects for WEs have been launched. As such, the embassy has been recognized by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs for being a model of gender inclusive initiatives. Projects include:

- The coordination and organization of a Cambodia Delegation of Women leaders at the WOMEN FORUM in Singapore in 2018 and 2019. The two editions were successful with more than 50 women participants from Cambodia. The embassy helped to reduce the costs by negotiating special conditions for Cambodian representatives; it was ultimately opened free of charge for most participants.
- The organization of soft skills training in collaboration with BRED Bank’s SHINE academy: training on “decision making process” and on “motivating staff “for a target group of high potential and women leaders.
- The sponsoring of a publication on Women in Tech with Woomentum
- AFD has also some initiatives to support Women with BRED bank.

While no specific funds were allocated for this type of projects, the Ambassador set a platform to show her support and solidarity by implementing a series of conscious initiatives. The overall goal was to inspire and motivate young women leaders (importance of role models) and to create/extend women networks. The impact was surprisingly high. The high visibility that Ambassador Eva Nguyen brings to all her initiatives for women is also a great way to raise awareness about women empowerment.

Led also by a female Ambassador, the British Embassy has also been active in empowering women. Financial commitments to projects around STEM education (STEM Cambodia) are well known. Financing the SHE Growth Accelerator to provide scholarships for 20 Cambodian women-owned SME or strengthen women’s voice through CUFA are some other examples. Every year, there is a call for proposals to finance small projects with allocation from 15 to \$US 80,000.

## C. Private sector

The private sector has been active recently in Cambodia in the field of women’s empowerment. We will examine 3 sub-categories: business associations, incubators (often led by social enterprises) and other programs, which are innovative or outstanding initiatives worth to highlight. Not all of them have had a large impact in terms of number of target beneficiaries but these programs have achieved visible results and offer best practices and lessons learned.

### 1. Business Associations

Business associations play a key role in the SME ecosystem in Cambodia and have evolved significantly in the last several years. The main challenge that business associations face is limited funding. Most are self-financed, with limited revenues derived from membership fees or services provided. They also have a limited number of professional staff.

The main associations directly involved with SMEs and MSMEs are the Federation of Small and Medium Enterprises of Cambodia (FASMEC), Young Entrepreneurs Association of Cambodia (YEAC) and Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Association (CWEA).

Business associations play a crucial role in information dissemination networking. They are often the first source of information for SMEs and micro-enterprises regarding business news, government regulations and initiatives, compliance, and tax incentives, and also offer training to their members. They also play an important role in advocacy.

a. CWEA

<b>Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Association (CWEA)</b>	
<b>Short Description</b>	<p>CWEA is the main association for women entrepreneurs and the closest to the MoWA. They are also actively part of the CamWEN network</p> <p>CWEA started in year 2011, with the support of World Bank and Ministry of Women's Affairs. Their mission is to encourage and support the growth of women-owned businesses in Cambodia.</p> <p>More specifically, the association offers capacity-building programs in production, marketing, accounting and leadership; individual mentoring to members and trade shows for local products of members.</p> <p>They are also implementing <b>the Empowering Women in Business Development (EWBD)</b> programs in partnership with the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation to deliver mentoring, training and study tours to address issues affecting women entrepreneurs.</p> <p>One of their strength is their activities in advocacy: CWEA is present in many GPSF with the Government.</p> <p>Recently CWEA receive the support of WE Act to implement the <b>YWE (Young Women Entrepreneur) Accelerator</b>. This initiative will help the inclusion of more young women entrepreneurs in an association which is more mature in the composition of its membership.</p> <p>They also tried to set up a BUSINESS CLINIC that can answer most questions from their members but the whole initiative relies on the capacity of the executive director Onie LUNA who is knowledgeable.</p>
<b>Partnerships</b>	<p>Government: MOWA, MOC, MISTI</p> <p>Private sector: CEO MasterClub, CATA, CCC, YEAC, AWEN</p> <p>Financing from: WE Act, Swiss, CIPE</p>
<b>Target</b>	<p>Women Entrepreneurs, including mature business and more "traditional" WE.</p> <p>New focus: Young Women Entrepreneurs through the WE Act program</p>
<b>Reach</b>	Mainly Phnom Penh, Siem Reap (2016) and expansion planed in Battambang, Kampong Chnang, Kandal
<b>Areas of work</b>	Advocacy, capacity-building programs, mentoring, networking
<b>Value proposition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognized as a strong advocacy partner by donors and Government</li> <li>- Active in CamWEN</li> <li>- Propose a range of interesting trainings on several topics (tax, compliance)</li> <li>- Strong leadership with their executive director Onie</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financing remains an issue: despite the high number of members, not all of them are active nor paying their fees.</li> <li>- Since the COVID pandemic, the membership fees are declining and CWEA choose to reduce their membership fees to support their members.</li> <li>- The organization relies a lot on the director and on the volunteers. An enhanced support with a stronger permanent team could boost results.</li> <li>- The most useful support they are providing is done in an informal way, thanks to the knowledge of the director but the (much needed) technical assistance provided as an institution is missing.</li> <li>- CWEA is providing a lot of training but a follow-up system could be useful to track needs and potential progress.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Governance can be improved: feedback is that until recently, the Board might not be completely representative of the majority of the members.</li> <li>- Until recently, CWEA was not seen as strong, modern, open or dynamic and did not attract so many young women entrepreneurs. However, the recent election of CWEA which takes place in April was encouraging with a transparent election and many new faces elected.</li> </ul>
<b>Analysis</b>	<p><i>CWEA is improving over the years and their foundations are solid, but their institutional capacity can be further strengthened. It is unsure whether they would be able to run a long term and complex project as they do not have yet so many internal human resources to rely on. Implementation in general, such as delivery and quality of outputs can also be improved.</i></p> <p><i>The new YWE project that aims to diversify the membership by adding more young women entrepreneurs is particularly interesting, as it will bring new blood and new expectations inside the organization. It can also be disruptive.</i></p> <p><i>Nonetheless, CWEA has proven to be resilient and relevant and the recent election of the new Board of Directors, well organized, provided some interesting results: many candidates belong to this new generation of women entrepreneurs, the new President Keo Mom is also a well-known and respected women entrepreneur. The election showed also the strong support and relationships between MoWA and CWEA.</i></p> <p><i>Although it is a bit early to say, CWEA will be quite an interesting association to watch in the near future.</i></p>

#### *b. Young Entrepreneurs Association in Cambodia (YEAC)*

The YEAC focuses on registered SMEs and young entrepreneurs. They do not have a proper gender strategy. They are, nonetheless, a valuable and dynamic association.

YEAC has benefitted from the support of WE Act to establish an associate member program to increase female members in YEAC, though this is more business networking). They actively encourage women's membership by subsidizing the membership cost. They also provide training for young women entrepreneurs.

#### *c. Women in Tech Network*

This informal community has been initiated by the founder of Sisters of Code. The group uses Telegram to share and post information that can be useful for their community members. As an informal network, it does not have the ambition of more well established entrepreneurship entities, but has the potential to serve as a channel to reach out to a specific category of women leaders involved in tech or simply active in women empowerment. Networking will be organized regularly.

#### *d. Cambodia Women Business Federation (CWBF)*

Formed in 2014, the association has around 110 members. Due to limited staff and institutional capacity CWBF does not receive much institutional financing. The Federation has some strong women entrepreneurs as affiliates, though as yet they are not active. One interesting CWBF initiative was an informal peer-to-peer lending mechanism where larger, well-resourced members loaned funds to SME members.

#### *e. Woomentum Cambodia*

Singapore-based Woomentum is a community crowdfunding platform for women who are founders and entrepreneurs. It aims to foster communication, resource sharing, mentoring, and early-stage funding among their start-ups. The Cambodian chapter is led by Socheata Touch, a prolific entrepreneur who is active in promoting women in business. While the crowdfunding activities has

been ineffective, its digital platform allows access to an diverse international network. Woomentum has also launched several publications in partnership with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) and the French Embassy to raise awareness about women in tech.

## 2. Social Enterprises and Incubators: SHE Investments, Agile and Impact Hub Phnom Penh

### a. SHE Investments

<b>SHE INVESTMENTS</b>	
<b>Short Description</b>	<p>Support Her Enterprise (SHE) Investments is a social enterprise that started in 2015. It is an umbrella of 3 separate entities working together to fill different gaps in the entrepreneurial ecosystem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SHE delivers the only business incubators and accelerators for women in Cambodia</li> <li>- SHE delivers the THRIIVE program, granting 0 percent interest loans of max US\$10,000</li> <li>- Ngeay Ngeay is the first business information and e-learning platform</li> </ul> <p>Recently, SHE has launched the KOTRA Riel App, a mobile bookkeeping app for WE through the Women Fintech MSME Innovation fund of ESCAP and UNCDF.</p> <p>They design and deliver industry-specific incubators for partners.</p> <p>Finally, they provide training as a service, as well as consulting and advisory services.</p> <p>Both incubator and accelerator programs are well designed and rely on a few principles that SHE applies quite strictly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants pay a deposit which will be reimbursed at the end.</li> <li>- All the programs are long-term (6 months + 6 months).</li> <li>- They are delivered in Khmer by Khmer female facilitators and include mentoring sessions (peer to peer and group sessions). Programs include both soft skills and business skills.</li> <li>- The curriculum has been built based on needs. Recently, they have added a layer linked to technology.</li> <li>- Cultural and gender lens are applied to all workshops.</li> <li>- The impact is measured with key performance indicators such as business growth or financial sustainability.</li> </ul>
<b>Partnerships</b>	Impressive list of partners including: DGGF (Netherlands), UNDP, British Embassy, PACT, UNCDF, UNESCAP, Development Innovations, USAID, Nexus, etc....
<b>Target</b>	Committed small-scale WE in both rural and urban areas, across all sectors, already operating a business. No start-ups, no university students. In addition, they target businesses with the ability to formalize and grow.
<b>Geo. reach</b>	They are present in five provinces now and have four partners in Cambodia (and one in Myanmar) that have a license to deliver the SHE program.
<b>Areas of work</b>	<p><b>Incubator/Accelerator</b></p> <p>Capacity-building programs, mentoring, networking, digital training</p>
<b>Value proposition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All trainings are delivered in Khmer</li> <li>- Have developed their programs based on <u>the needs of the participants</u>, to fulfil the gaps in the ecosystem</li> <li>- Proven success in their methodology and in the quality of their curriculum and execution</li> <li>- Long-term vision</li> </ul>



<b>Challenges (self-assessed)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Scaling</b> is challenging. SHE has been extremely successful in diversifying, adapting, expanding their reach and fulfilling all the gaps they see in the ecosystem. Nonetheless, the rapid growth of their activities brought some challenges: how to ensure the quality of the delivery and how to find good trainers? There is also a need to invest significantly into the learning material and its design.</li> <li>- Investment in technology in the future is also significant to scaling. Efficient tools (data collection, survey, online tools) are necessary to ensure SHE will move to the next level and expand. Smoothly rolling out all these new tools will take some time and will be costly.</li> <li>- Trainings are still reliant on the guidance of the founders.</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment</b>	<p><i>SHE Investments is undeniably a great success story. They have started small and succeeded in every single project they launched. They have a strong track record, and all their partners are positive about their work, ethics, commitment and execution.</i></p> <p><i>They delivered consistently, managed prudently and planned accordingly. There is not much missing in their program. They say that they start new things only if they feel they have the capacity to deliver and be successful. They are extremely knowledgeable about the women entrepreneurial ecosystem. The only issue is their ability to scale at a rapid pace.</i></p>

*b. AGILE Development Group*

<b>AGILE DEVELOPMENT GROUP</b>	
<b>Short Description</b>	<p>Agile is a social enterprise with a focus on innovation and entrepreneurship for people with disabilities (PWD).</p> <p>On the innovation side, they create products to provide opportunities for PWD. They used a human-centered approach and ran several programs for women entrepreneurs with disabilities.</p> <p>On the entrepreneurship side, they run the Bodhi Tree incubators, promote inclusive business approaches through advocating for women with disabilities, but also design specific curriculum with Energy Lab.</p> <p>Agile offers short-term training and workshops, as well as business incubators. Most trainings are two-day sessions on a selected topic. These are also partly funded by PACT under the WE Act program.</p> <p>Incubators are structured as followed: they include five one-day sessions on leadership, building a value proposition, paying salaries to oneself and bookkeeping. Participants have two weeks break between each workshop. In between, they have homework and a private Facebook group.</p> <p>Incubators applied interesting concepts such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They have strong gender-focused, culturally tailored programs.</li> <li>- They start with the concept, teach the knowledge and move immediately to the application of this knowledge.</li> <li>- Mentoring and peer cohort is important, especially for WE.</li> <li>- They do a systematic follow-up (even at their own costs) because this is how you see where the gaps are.</li> </ul> <p>In addition, the founder of the company has launched Mekong Inclusive Ventures, a venture capital company that aims to do inclusive finance and bridge the financing gap with alternative financing solutions.</p>
<b>Partnerships</b>	Impressive list of partners including: (DFAT) Australian Aid, USAID, World Bank, UNDP, EnergyLab, PLAN International, Word Vision, SHE, DAI (Development Innovations)
<b>Target</b>	(Small scale) - Focus on people who have never joined a program, low literacy, no writing or reading, but who have a business. Groups are limited to 12 people for the WE programs.



<b>Geo. reach</b>	For the incubators: Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Kampong Cham, Kampong Speu and Battambang
<b>Areas of work</b>	Incubator program: Innovation, advocacy, capacity-building programs, mentoring, networking
<b>Value proposition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All trainings are delivered in Khmer</li> <li>- Specialized in curriculum building and incubator, their strength is their ability to contextualize everything and to make it appropriate to the situation</li> <li>- Specialized in design thinking</li> <li>- Design any program based on needs assessment</li> <li>- The key is the immediate application of the concepts learned</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges (self-assessed)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disabled women are facing even more constraints in Cambodia</li> <li>- Capacity to scale is an issue as well</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment</b>	<p><i>Agile is able to deliver much more than what they communicate about. Founder Ian Jones is a specialist in design thinking, and he is extremely knowledgeable about how to design a curriculum. He is a problem solver.</i></p> <p><i>Agile might be an excellent service provider to design innovative, practical, tailor-made and impactful curriculums.</i></p>

*c. Impact Hub Phnom Penh*

<b>IMPACT HUB</b>	
<b>Short Description</b>	Impact Hub Phnom Penh is a social enterprise which started in 2015. They are well known for their involvement in the start-up communities. They have successfully delivered many entrepreneurship programs (SmartStart, SmartSpark, Dakdam in Agriculture or in tourism). They also have a strong community with the Hub Entrepreneurs Club (HEC) with ongoing mentoring and network of all the alumni. Recently, they have extended their activities in the provinces with Phum Impact, in Siem Reap and in Battambang, with the support of Khmer Enterprise.
<b>Partnerships</b>	Partners include: SMART, Khmer Enterprise, PACT, Swisscontact
<b>Target</b>	(Medium to large scale) – Focus is definitely on the youth. Young entrepreneurs, university students and start-ups. Usually educated and tech savvy.
<b>Geo. reach</b>	Phnom Penh and recently Siem Reap and Battambang with Phum Impact For Siem Reap and Battambang, a study has been commissioned by PACT to apply a gender lens screening for their study: “Youth perspective on entrepreneurship and business in Siem Reap and Battambang.”
<b>Areas of work</b>	Incubator programs Innovation, advocacy, capacity building programs, mentoring, networking
<b>Value proposition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impact Hub team is seen as dynamic, talented and committed.</li> <li>- They are strong in communication skills and group mentoring, as well as in activities linked to start-up competition and pitching (pre-seed)</li> <li>- They have a strong knowledge of the start-up ecosystem, new trends and tech innovation</li> <li>- They have a strong network internationally (through their impact hub network) that they can leverage.</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges (self-assessed)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The team is quite young, and they do not have any in-house specialists or experts.</li> <li>- They have a more limited knowledge and networks in the ecosystem of local SMEs.</li> <li>- They have limited expertise in access to the international market and they do not have an in-house mentor, specialized for example, in all the issues they’re targeting.</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment</b>	<p><i>Impact Hub occupies a niche (start-ups and youth), but they do it well.</i></p> <p><i>They cannot be considered as a technical incubator, but they fulfill a need.</i></p>

	<p><i>They are strong partners in what they can do and they also have the ability to learn and leverage on their networks.</i></p> <p><i>Regarding gender strategy, Impact Hub did not apply any gender lens in the past, but it is also linked to their positioning. They are working with start-ups and the youth community. These start-ups are usually teams of students or young entrepreneurs, already well-educated and where gender is not a significant issue. Internally, they have a strong team of female team leaders, and they are much conscious about gender strategy.</i></p> <p><i>Recently, their expansion in the provinces brought the question of gender lens.</i></p> <p><i>Impact Hub can be a good partner in implementing large scale incubators, they have strong assets for them. They also have been able to build a strong community.</i></p> <p><i>Technical quality in the delivery can be questioned but it is also linked to the fact that size matters.</i></p>
--	--

### 3. Other Projects Targeting WE

#### *a. Women Initiative Program from BRED Bank*

The initiative, launched in 2018, aimed to:

- (1) Inform through breakfast talks on different topics, including public speaking.
- (2) Empower with Shine Academy: 11 independent business modules of three-hour tiered sessions, each on soft skills needed to grow the business (six on leadership and management and five on communication) based on the interviews and feedback of 100 Khmer female business owners., in three categories: business owners, management and staff. The topics reflect real working life situations and are contextualized for the Cambodian workplace. All courses are delivered in Khmer and some can be done in English.
- (3) Specific financial support for WE, such as emergency loan, limited collaterals for new loan, suspension of interest payments for three months during pregnancy.
- (4) Recently, new partnership with the French Embassy to deliver specific trainings
- (5) Partnership with ADB to provide a “bank ready” program which will offer a reduced interest rate loan with no collateral needed through a guarantee scheme of ADB.

Target population: (Small scale) WE and promising young leaders. Initially, more educated. More SMEs than MSMEs.

Areas covered: Capacity building, access to finance

**ASSESSMENT:** There are many lessons to be learned from this program. The program was comprehensive and designed professionally, benefitted from adequate resources, and was run by motivated professionals. However, it has not yet reached its goal for various reasons: i) launched just before the Covid-19 pandemic, expectations regarding the target population were lofty; ii) inflexible design of the program that did not allow for rapid adjustments; and iii) a lack of visibility. The program content is of high quality, and the bank is expecting to relaunch some elements of the program after making adjustments.

#### *b. WING Cambodia*

WING is one of the leading mobile financial service providers. The company prides itself on being gender-inclusive, and empowers women within and across the Kingdom. Currently, 80 percent of its agents and a large part of its workforce are women. For WING, investing in women can indeed lead to a positive return: embracing gender inclusiveness is a critical factor for sustainable growth. They have founded initiatives such as micro-lending projects to female garment workers without any

documentation. WING aims to work actively on innovative financial services that empower WE and participate in several group discussions on women empowerment. Recently, WING entered a collaboration with Women World Banking.

#### *c. Raintree*

Raintree was originally an office space, but evolved over time to be a respected player in the start-up and entrepreneurial community in Phnom Penh. The team defines Raintree as a catalyst. Raintree is building bridges in the community, as they have expertise in the Cambodian ecosystem and a great network outside the country. Co-founded by a female leader, Zoe Ngy, Raintree has several priorities, which include inclusion and diversity. It is implementing the “I am remarkable” Google Initiative. The idea is that the ability to advocate for oneself is a skill. Raintree is organizing workshops for women only, most notably with ministries. These recent leadership trainings were viewed as successful and will probably take place more frequently if possible within the constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Another project in which Raintree is a local partner is the “She Loves Tech” competition. Feedback about the quality and the number of WE in the tech sector from the research team revealed the number of WEs to be quite limited. The need for longer interaction between mentor and mentees for the competition was also noted.

**ASSESSMENT:** The Raintree example shows that several projects targeting women entrepreneurs are taking place. Getting the right quality and targeting the right audience are challenges for implementation of these projects, especially if they are short term. Basing them programs on building confidence and leadership, however, can help ensure impact.

#### *d. WeMall*

WeMall is a sustainable e-commerce platform for women entrepreneurs. The founders are passionate about promoting women’s economic empowerment, gender equality and digital innovation. The idea centers on bringing unique products and handicrafts from women entrepreneurs on a single platform and supporting their promotion internationally. It is a niche market, targeting few companies at the beginning, and aiming to provide visibility and international reach and promote a strong female community. Led by Socheata Touch, who is well-known in the community, the project benefits from good visibility and support from the government. There have been discussions regarding the possibility to partner in the future with MoWA to set up a training center and a one-stop shop with all the local brands in the new WEDC.

**ASSESSMENT:** As the platform has started only recently it is difficult to assess the results. The project has good visibility and seems to be professionally managed.

#### *e. Wedu*

Wedu is a social enterprise providing a mentoring and coaching framework through leadership programs. In Cambodia, Wedu had several activities and programs in partnership with USAID Development Innovation and the British Embassy. In total, Wedu has impacted more than 500 women across the country, with over 100 enrolled in the Global Rising Star program. This program takes place twice a year, with one-on-one mentoring. Each cohort is quite small and is mixed in diversity. In 2019 Wedu signed a MOU with MoWA to advance women’s leadership in Cambodia. The expected first outcome from this five-year partnership is to reach thousands of women in Cambodia and provide them with access to personal and professional growth opportunities. The second outcome is to

encourage more women to become leaders of their own development and participants in decision-making on all levels of the public and private sectors in Cambodia.

**ASSESSMENT:** It is difficult to assess the impact of the program as yet, due largely to the COVID-19 pandemic. Wedu's approach is novel and noteworthy, with significant Facebook activity so far.

*f. InSTEDD*

InSTEDD is a not-for-profit organization using tech and innovation to help sustainable development and doing social innovation projects. InSTEDD partners with DAI to provide digital literacy training across all sectors on MSME, and with the Asia Foundation to support SME in the provinces with support from Google financing.

InSTEDD designs optimally suitable curricula and delivers training to people who teach MSME groups in their communities. One of the goals of this course is to ensure that target beneficiaries are able to make effective use of currently trending social media using storytelling to create stories for their products

#### 4. Innovative Projects Targeting Girls

The following three programs target girls. They are usually well-recognized, innovative and successful. The Ministry of Education is the lead ministry for these programs.

*a. STEM Education Organization for Cambodia (known as STEM Cambodia or STEMEOC)*

STEM Cambodia is an organization which is known for organizing the popular annual Cambodia STEM Festival. It is not directly involved with women's entrepreneurship, but is developing 21st century skills for girls at a young age. The aim is to drive innovation and creativity, which are the cornerstones of entrepreneurship. STEM education is a learning approach that is highly successful in building critical thinking, collaboration, problem solving and communication skills. The impact in changing mindsets and building confidence in these young girls is also very impressive. Other activities include **Robotics Cambodia**, a program where girls learn robotics. The program has won awards with World Robotics in 2017 with Liger Academy team.

STEM Sisters Cambodia is another key program and aims to promote gender equality. Financed by the British Embassy, it aims to create STEM clubs across the country. The idea is to put the spotlight on Cambodian Women in STEM by promoting role models. It also increases awareness about careers in STEM and builds a supportive community. The design of the project is effective because:

- Boys and girls are together, but girls are leader on the project;
- It is completely online and is accessible across the country; and
- Its impact is scaled.
- 

One cycle involved eight female STEM Professionals (STEM Pro Sisters) who are mentoring 10 university students (big sisters) from five universities, who are mentoring 40 little sisters from five public schools in three different provinces. This involves nearly 60 people. STEM has a leadership academy that provides (provided by SHE Investments) over eight weeks. The top two-thirds of the pro- and big sisters also receive mentoring and coaching skills. The eight little sisters in each school will create four clubs led by girls, but which include boys.

The clubs are conducted in Khmer and English, and participants discover one career per week. The concept is fun, using low-cost materials to do science experiments. The program uses Facebook as the main online channel through a public page and a closed group page. It is open to other schools to join.

Target population: (Large scale) Young girls, but also some female entrepreneurs as role models

Areas covered: Skills training, social norms barriers

**ASSESSMENT:** The results are outstanding for the Sisters' program: from 60 people involved, they succeeded in creating around 150 clubs in 12 provinces. The program has spread organically. It is replicable, self-sustaining, cheap and impactful in promoting women in STEM and to change mindsets.

#### *b. Sisters in Code Project by IT STEP Academy*

IT STEP Academy is a leading education provider in IT skills. Launched in 2019, Sisters of Code is the first female coding club in Cambodia with an aim to provide after school coding training for free to female students from 10 to 20 years old. During the 18-week program, female students meet weekly with their female trainers to learn the secrets of coding, work on projects and present their work in the teams. The project has received several awards, including the prestigious MIT Equals in Tech award. The main goal is to build confidence in these young girls.

The project aims to create a supportive environment for girls, build their confidence and teach them skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has also introduced a component with personality workshops and training.

Target population: Each year, they expect between 150 to 175 students in total, in 2 or 3 groups. The target is young girls with no experience at all in IT.

Area: Capacity building in IT Skills

**ASSESSMENT:** The impact is real. The program has received a prestigious distinction and is supported at the national level by the MoEYS (education). It is professionally delivered and led by a motivated leader, the founder of the IT STEP Academy herself.

#### **Liger Leadership Academy**

Notably different from other entrepreneurship projects in Cambodia, this academy worth mentioning for several reasons.

The mission statement is as follows: *"Liger Leadership Academy (LLA) educates promising youth of today to develop into socially conscious, entrepreneurial leaders of tomorrow. We provide a residential scholarship program for economically disadvantaged students that combines a comprehensive, internationally competitive education with an innovative STEM and entrepreneurship curriculum. Liger believes a meaningful investment in the right few will change the lives of many."*

Financed for now by a single private benefactor, the academy simply aims to produce the next generation of leaders of Cambodia.

The goal was ambitious, but the results are phenomenal. The first cohort just graduated last year and 80% of them received prestigious scholarships in the best universities around the world, including Princeton and Colombia.

The program is based around few principles, including gender equality and their curriculum keeps challenging gender norms, educating girls to code and boys to cook. The curriculum is based around real life projects: the kids are put into real situations and problems to solve constantly. Indeed, experiential learning is the best way to change mindsets. Kids are taught entrepreneurship and autonomy since the beginning.

Social conditioning is not easy to change but they succeed in doing it because they teach them in an environment where they feel safe, but which is not removed from real life.

Among the leadership competencies they are taught, self-awareness is probably the most important one.

**ASSESSMENT:** *The project is simply one of the most ambitious, innovative and efficient education projects implemented in Cambodia, but the financial cost is huge. The individual impact is high, but time will tell if these young leaders will be able to collectively have an impact on the future of Cambodia.*

*Nonetheless, the number of awards, local and international distinctions all these students have won can make us dream. Education can make a significant difference.*

*A few takeaways to keep in mind for the future:*

- *The importance of experiential learning: nothing is better than real-life experiences and empowerment. Active learning amplifies the impact*
- *Build the curriculum around the goal and not the contrary*
- *Mentors are important*
- *Do not raise girls in isolation, you also want to empower girls in front of boys and challenge gender norms. The earlier you start training them, the better it is.*
- *They have to learn how to work both as a team and individually.*
- *Always adapt to the local environment and build the curriculum around it*
- *Empathy and critical thinking: they are taught to look at a problem with different perspectives*
- *It is not about academic excellence. Some were struggling in class, but all succeeded to find a way to excel (and validated their practical experience academically).*

### III. KEY TAKEAWAYS: ANALYSIS OF THE CAMBODIAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS ECOSYSTEM

#### A. Main Areas of Intervention Covered

Before examining the existing gaps in the ecosystem, we will first outline the main areas of intervention are (which are in fact the main barriers we discussed at the end of the part I of the report) covered by the existing programs.

The table on the next page provides an intuitive overview of the main areas for the previously listed programs covered in the report. We put in bold the major programs for women in Cambodia; for more accuracy, we put in grey the programs that do not have a dedicated component for women but that have some gender-sensitive or gender-inclusive practices.

Here is a first assessment and few observations:

- **Social and Cultural norms: Good coverage in general, more to do for role models**

Norms can be addressed by programs by working on self-esteem, confidence or by actively promoting role models. These barriers have significant consequences at all levels for WE. Overall, this area is well-covered by the private sector (SHE Investments) and by development partners (WE Act). Although MoWA is working actively on this field, WDCs do not have a specific strategy to reduce these barriers as they prioritize other activities, such as training in the field. The establishment of the new WEDC in Phnom Penh will certainly bring more opportunities to address norms. The importance of promoting role models is fully acknowledged by these actors, but this has proven difficult to enact in large scale programs. However, small informal initiatives are taking place, often by motivated individuals (My VOICE) and informal communities in Phnom Penh (Generation C and Women in the City). These programs target mainly urban populations. This report does not cover these more informal, yet effective initiatives, but we can emphasize the positive effect of these initiatives and note their potential for growth in the future.

- **Business environment constraints: weak areas**

Advocacy and work on improving the business environment for women is not a main focus for this report, since: i) these areas are common to all SMEs (and therefore largely covered by many associations or support programs); and ii) the MoWA plays this role of advocacy inside the Government. MoWA also has economic empowerment as a main focus, but considering the vastness of this topic, it faces difficulty in addressing specific areas linked to business registration and tax for WE. However, as we mention, the existing measures supporting SMEs do not include a gender lens approach at all and advocacy programs highlighting women-specific needs and constraints are missing. Only CWEA and WE Act are working actively in this field. The other programs help indirectly in their actions to improve business. Agile is mentioned here for their actions regarding disabled women. In the case of advocacy, there is a clear need for a more systematic gender lens approach and gender mainstreaming policies, starting with some newly launched government-led projects such as Go4ECAM (MOC) or Angkor500 incubator programs (Khmer Enterprise). How to promote this gender mainstreaming advocacy is, unfortunately, neither simple nor straightforward.

**Table: Areas of intervention and potential impact of the different programs**

	Social & cultural norms (role models)	Unfriendly business environment (advocacy)	Access to services (info, training, skills)	IT digital skills training	Access to networks	Access to finance	Access to markets
<b>Government</b>							
<b>Women Development Centers</b>							Local only
<b>Financial Literacy for Women Entrepreneurs</b>							
CamWEN							Potentially
Khmer Enterprise							
SME Bank							
GIZ SME project							potentially
Go4ECAM							
Women in Tech Award							
<b>Development Partners</b>							
<b>WE Act</b>							Weak action
<b>CWE Program</b>							
<b>Development Innovations</b>							
Ebiznest incubator							
SHIFT program							
Tek4Good							
Women in Tek							
French Embassy Women Forum							Potentially
<b>Private Sector</b>							
<b>CWEA</b>							No structured
YEAC							
Women in Tech							
CWBF							
Woomentum							
<b>SHE Investments</b>							
<b>Agile</b>						Potentially	
Impact Hub							
Women Initiative Program (BRED)							
WING							
Raintree							
WeMall							
WEDU							
InSTEDD							
STEMEOC							
Sisters in Code							
Liger Leadership Academy							

Source: Based on author analysis - Grey areas: programs with no specific women components (but with some gender inclusive approach)  
Names in bold: major programs with a dedicated women-focused approach



- **Access to services: strong coverage in terms of quantity**

- Unsurprisingly, the main area of intervention is the access to services and particularly *capacity-building and training*. Almost all programs we analyze have included this component. We have even highlighted in the table a specific category linked to IT and digital skills training to see if this important topic was covered; the answer is positive, although the delivery and the impact vary. Capacity-building is not only covered by the major actors, but also through various actors - big and small, local and international - in small-scale initiatives targeting women. It is impossible to list and cover all as they are not widely advertised. The Indian Embassy, for example, is working with some WDCs to train WE on IT skills in Strung Treng and Kratie provinces (). While any initiative may be seen as positive, it is difficult to assess their overall impact. The sizable number of trainings in English has also raised some criticism from some observers, who noted that training was available for the same target population, while the largest category of beneficiaries - necessity-driven, low educated WE - could not have access to this offer.
- *Access to information* is more difficult in assessing results. Business associations remain one of the most efficient ways to get access to specific information for women entrepreneurs. For online information, SHE Enterprises has excelled with Ngyay Ngyay, not only to make digestible online information to WE, but also to give access to templates and factsheets. The YEAC platform also offers good information to the general public. Here again, reaching out the most underserved population of WE is trickier, even if a majority of this population possesses smartphones. Physical centers or hotlines continue to play a necessary role and, in this regard, WDC should serve as places where women can easily access information. Having a large and better-coordinated social media strategy can also be part of the solution; namely utilizing Facebook, which is widely used by Cambodians.
- *Access to digital skills* is largely covered by many players but remains a must, simply because the digital gender divide is particularly strong in Cambodia and cannot be left as such. More efforts need to be made in this field.

- **Access to networks: STRONG coverage**

Access to networks is also a field well-covered by the different initiatives. This does not mean that the beneficiaries are actively engaged in new networks, but this increased access is often a natural outcome, since being part of a program often translates to being part of a larger network, even if it is virtual. The COVID-19 situation has recently limited physical networking and brought on a need to rethink strategies that target this topic to include more online groups on Facebook. These new trends were naturally well adopted by the urban and young generation of WE, and are a good way to overcome the social and cultural norms that prevent girls and women to stay late or interact physically with male counterparts. In the provinces, it is important to make sure that the absence of opportunities to network physically will not have a negative impact, particularly because the community spirit plays an important and positive role that should be maintained despite the Covid-19 restrictions.

- **Access to finance: increased coverage but more is needed**

Access to finance plays a distinct role. Like access to markets, the subject is vast. There is little to compare between the set-up of impact funds to invest in women entrepreneurs (CWE) and the financing provided by some incubators at the end of their programs. The multidimensional feature of this type of constraint cannot allow a straightforward analysis. Many initiatives have achieved

a certain impact, though they cannot be labelled as globally significant. More efforts are needed to educate the banking sector, for example, and to continue to raise awareness about the huge potential that women entrepreneurs can offer collectively. Including some financial literacy training for WE within the services offer by banks could be beneficial and increase the demand. The recent large-scale financial literacy program offered by MoWA, NBC and Visa can be seen as positive. Still, training is not sufficient to close the existing financing gap for WE. Training should be done also from the offer side (the banks, MFIs and other financial institutions) and more dedicated financial instruments need to be created. Regarding bookkeeping, we can highlight two initiatives financed by “Catalyzing WE” from UNESCAP: i) the app newly created by SHE investments, KOTRA Riel, will help WE to track simply their riel cash flow; and ii) the BANHJI project, which provides a simple yet powerful accounting and point of sale software to support MSMEs (which is included the beginning of some financial literacy and bookkeeping training). The BANHJI project should also allow improved data collection and analysis in the future that can lead to data-driven credit assessment models, which can be developed for more accurate lending decisions from banks. A large advocacy program under the leadership of the NBC for some gender mainstreaming activities in the lending strategy of banks and MFIs would be positive.

- **Access to market: weak area of intervention**

The subject is vast and multiform. The WDCs have local initiatives to provide better access locally, but these are still relatively small-scale and have limited geographical reach (such as products being promoted for local tourism). The development of simple platforms connecting the different WDCs, an initiative of MoWA, seems more promising, but the multiplication of e-commerce platforms and their limited success invite more forward thinking regarding the design and implementation for this platform to be truly impactful. On another level, CamWEN and the Women Forum in Singapore may provide opportunities in the future by connecting Cambodia WE to their counterparts. Even WE Act, though successful in covering the whole ecosystem, has limited impact market access. We Mall, as an e-commerce platform, has a clear position (local products produced by WE) and aims to provide access to products on the international market, but for the moment, the number of women SMEs onboarded is still limited. CWEA is also working on the topic with Khmum, another e-commerce platform for women SMEs, but its approach is not structured as yet. Here again, a more effective way would be to include a gender mainstreaming component in existing programs, helping target access to the market. One example is the SME internationalization project of GIZ; while another is the Go4ECAM of UNDP/MOC.

## B. Interview Findings and Feedback from the Experts

### *1. The support ecosystem can be improved and strengthened*

#### **Limited interconnectivity**

Respondents of this study find the increased interest from development donors and the private sector for WE-related topics as positive. However, many of them note that, despite the increased number of projects, there is **limited coordination or exchange of information**. Some report that there is no coordination among the donors and no coordination between the different ministries, and that MoWA is not always informed when a new WE project is launched.

This limited coordination is not limited to WE projects. A study published by Swisscontact and conducted co-jointly by Impact Hub, “Connecting the Phnom Penh Entrepreneurial Ecosystem” offers

insight regarding the quality of the interconnectivity of the different support organizations in the start-up ecosystem in Phnom Penh. The study shows that the overall connectivity between the Ecosystems Support Organizations (ESO) is low. “On average, ESOs interact with six other support actors but reciprocity is low with only 0.17.” This means that there is interaction but little collaboration. The least-connected actors found were academic institutions, financial players and service providers. The few actors who drive the ecosystem are well connected, with a larger portion disconnected. The study is related to the start-up ecosystem in Phnom Penh; the same type of analysis for the WE ecosystem would be useful and informative. The main players are all well connected: SHE Investments, for example, receives the support of almost all main programs dedicated to WE. CWEA also receives a lot of support. Overall, however, the interviewee comments confirm that initiatives are not always optimally coordinated.

### **A more differentiated approach needed**

Many projects are doing the same thing and many training programs target the same population. Clearly, we can witness many redundant trainings and overlapped initiatives, leading to a waste of resources. Our respondents wish to see **more specialization and differentiation among the different programs**. For some of them, there is also the temptation to try to do more by extending the areas of intervention beyond the initial scope of expertise.

*“Say what you do but also what you do not. The risk when you are successful is that people have too high expectations, but you cannot do everything.”*

In practical terms, programs must improve **needs assessment** and must be transparent regarding their **capacity to deliver**. Implementation is often the main area needing improvement. Regarding the measure of impact, it is also mentioned that the design of some programs is not realistic; development donors still rely heavily on traditional measures which are more quantitative instead of focusing on qualitative measures.

Many programs are also trying to do everything and diversify too much, losing focus and consequently being less effective in their execution.

### **Limited impact and low level of collective learning**

The ecosystem is quite young, as are its the programs and service providers. There is a competition for funding sources as well. The overall consequence of this lack of connectivity and specialization is the low level of collective learning for WE and the difficulty for WE to access full 360-degree support. It is costly and time-consuming, especially for women-led MSMEs, to find the right answers to their questions or services to meet their needs.

## **2. Capacity-building: Training and Quality of the Delivery**

The need for more capacity-building is recognized widely, but the respondents are skeptical about the general quality of what is currently offered to women entrepreneurs. This is likely because implementation is often complicated to manage in Cambodia due to the scarcity of quality human resources. Other aspects questioned relate to the design of trainings and suitability of content for the audience) as well as overall reach and impact.

One respondent highlighted the fact that many entrepreneurs - particularly WE - usually do not have time to take part these trainings, as they need to focus on their businesses. In addition, many programs simply the same type of short trainings to the same audiences, creating unnecessary competition among the programs, wasting resources and limiting the impact.

Successful programs like SHE Investments and Agile have small cohorts, and they admit that scaling up is not easy because of the difficulty of finding skilled trainers and trainers who can use in Khmer language, as well as challenges of targeting a long-term program in the provinces.

Taken in isolation, these remarks could seem to picture a negative landscape of what capacity-building has to offer. The reality needs is nuanced, as the ecosystem is quite young and not yet mature. Services targeting SMEs are still limited and services targeting MSMEs as a separate entity remain quite niche. It takes time to build capacity and skills among trainers. Despite a certain level of competition among the main players, there is overall a sense of solidarity, respect and mutual support among the participants of this ecosystem. People running this type of gender-specific program show usually high personal commitment, which may elevate their expectations, but which also create a strong drive and energy that sets this support ecosystem apart in a positive way.

That said, the ecosystem is not particularly easy, and in the case of WE programs, it would be unfair to measure the impact only through quantitative indicators. Qualitative indicators should capture better the importance of more intangible, yet important indicators, such as the progress made on soft skills and self-confidence. The best incubator programs will be those which have a long-term view and focus the design of the curriculum around the needs of the participants.

### *3. Mentorship, Coaching, Culture and Social Norms*

Mentorship and coaching play an essential role in any capacity-building program of, especially those targeting WE because of the importance of addressing cultural and social norms barriers.

Challenging cultural and social norms that act as barriers to WE is usually a main task for SMEs, especially those with family business owners. The degree of difficulty depends on the type of industry—challenging norms is easier in services or tech sectors, but more complicated in traditional industries such as agriculture or handicrafts. Gender norms make challenging to change SME owners' mindsets even more difficult.

One respondent said that culture and tradition are not differentiated enough. The local culture needs to be respected, but traditions can be challenged for the better. Modifying certain negative aspects of social conditioning takes a lot of time, especially with adults. Language is more than just a tool to communicate; it also conveys people's culture as well as their social conditioning. Khmer language and the way it is structured reflects these traditions, with different words that describe actions depending on who is the interlocutor. It is a language which translates hierarchy and a strong gender differentiation. Therefore, using English, which is more culturally neutral, might be useful to help consider things from another perspective. This is also the reason why mentoring done by a foreigner can provide very different results to that provided by a local. As such, female Cambodians are recommended as the most appropriate mentors for first-time female entrepreneurs.

All these points reflect the importance of quality of mentoring in any long-term training program, such as incubator or accelerator programs. Another point raised by an expert is that mentorship might not have the same definition in Cambodia as it does in Western countries, because social norms and informal codes of conduct will influence the mentor-mentee relationship. Therefore, it is particularly important to define roles at the beginning and make clear what a mentor does and what he or she does not do, especially if the mentor is a foreigner. This will clarify the level of expectations and align interests from both sides. It is not unusual in Cambodia to consider that a mentor should decide everything and that the mentor is always right, resulting in deferring to the mentor's judgment in all

situations. In Western countries mentoring focuses on guidance and empowerment, with the onus on the mentee to make and execute decisions.

Structured programs should require a real commitment from mentors. This might be reflected in compensation, though not necessarily financial compensation. An ideal scenario for fresh and inexperienced mentors is to provide guidance is recommended in an initial training, with regular follow-up and feedback or an evaluation at the end. For long term mentoring and one-to-one coaching, it would likely work best if mentors and mentees could choose each other or at least express their preferences in the other. Improving relationships and mentor-mentee fit would probably increase collaborative impact due the importance of trust and personal relationships for women.

Peer mentoring can be particularly successful and rewarding with WE. SHE Investments has introduced a training that targets previous participants of the program. One of the interviewees - a young WE - took part in the SHE incubator program and was later trained to become a mentor, then an advisor. Her feedback was extremely positive. Women are usually keen to transmit their knowledge and give back to the community. As they grow personally during this journey, they feel particularly empowered. In addition, a strong sense of community is created and the whole support ecosystem is strengthened.

#### 4. The Importance of Role Models

All experts agree on this point. There is a need for more feminine role models. Role models in entrepreneurship are defined as those who can encourage others to pursue certain career paths or goals. They inspire, transmit values, are usually committed to the community and are seen as strong in overcoming their challenges. They can significantly strengthen the entrepreneurial culture among young WE in particular. Successful traditional female entrepreneurs such as the founder of Attwood, Madam Lim Chivv Ho, are not seen as role models for the new generation. Influencers on Facebook are followed but not seriously considered.

The Swisscontact and Impact Hub study surveyed the most important role models for Cambodians. The study shows the positive influence of local role models in Cambodia. A second observation is that role models come from diverse backgrounds and are relatable to the different types of entrepreneurs. Finally, the study evidenced that that role models in Cambodia are primarily male.



Among the role models cited in the study, around one third are women. Several programs such as Woomentum have tried to highlight some successful businesses founded by women, but few have emerged as true role models. Keo Mom of Lyly Foods is one notable example - she received the support of numerous programs and she has been cited in several publications. Keo Mom was listed among the top three role models; this is interesting because the sample population is more related to the start-

up ecosystem and Keo Mom is seen more as a “traditional” WE. This reflects the importance of traditional perception.

The lack of female role models cited in the report is not surprising. Only 38 percent of the entrepreneurs surveyed were women, which may contribute to this low percentage, but the truth is that there are fewer well-known WE in general. In addition, male success stories conveyed by traditional media are usually more common. There are opportunities to champion a more diverse range of role models, especially in the fields of innovation, tech and social business. Interesting and notable WEs like Sreylin Meng or Sokneang Nodzak should be followed as examples. Social media now offers more opportunity to promote feminine role models. A talk show project just initiated by Kim Tol Tan, called “**Her Voice**,” is an example of a platform featuring Khmer women as role models who inspire and empower other Khmer women by sharing the struggles and successes of their personal journeys.

In summary, having more Cambodian role models for women entrepreneurs would be a positive development. Feminine role models - especially women who are running big businesses - are particularly needed in rural areas;. For rural WEs, especially the youngest ones, parents still play a very important role. Therefore, the influence of established role models would help to counterbalance the influence of family and tradition.

#### *5. Focus on the Young Women Entrepreneurs*

It is important to recognize the intersectionality of the different groups of WEs. Intersectionality is a lens for seeing the way various forms of inequality operate together and separately. It is a strong concept because it recognizes the fact that the gender discrimination or norms will not have the same influence depending one’s age or geographical situation.

WEs are not a homogeneous group in Cambodia. At the level of the programs, impact will be conditioned by a thorough understanding of the target group and their needs. Solutions will need to be multifaceted, and a certain amount of flexibility is required.

Recently, there is increased interest in YWEs, especially in the tech start-up arena. One reason can be attributed to the success of various programs in targeting young girls or fresh graduates in the field of STEM or IT. The increasing availability of training (such as Technovation) and the rise of pitching competitions targeting not only the tech sectors, but also agriculture, tourism, and services, have seen the rise of young female entrepreneurs (YWE). They are dynamic, eager to succeed, often well-educated and ready to overcome certain challenges linked to social norms. The majority of these YWEs speak English.

The study done by Impact Hub and financed by PACT, “Youth Perspective on Entrepreneurship and Business in Siem Reap and Battambang,” gives a gender perspective with a focus on young women (either aspiring or current entrepreneurs) and offers good insight into their aspirations. The study shows that almost 70 percent of male and female respondents think that both genders have equal access to education and opportunity. However, it does not mean that the efforts are the same for both groups to have access to these opportunities. The main challenges appear in restrictions imposed by the family, perceived lack of safety, lack of self-confidence and lack of outstanding female role models in their province. YWEs pay more attention to education as a factor of success, and they will apply to a program if they feel that they have 100 percent of required qualification. Both genders in the provinces listed “creating jobs for others, launching innovative solutions and making money to support my family” as main reasons for becoming an entrepreneur. A final stated by YWEs is limited



family resources. Women are also more naturally interested in social impact and focused programs in comparison with technology-focused programs. Interestingly, a finding of the report is that in Siem Reap and Battambang, the data does not show “lack of family support” as a significant barrier when it comes to starting a business, even for young women aspiring to be entrepreneurs. This might be also linked to the fact that women who have family already doing business are more likely to become entrepreneurs themselves. The study also shows low awareness of any support ecosystem for aspiring entrepreneurs in the provinces. Most respondents rely exclusively on their close circle of family and parents to help them solve their problems.

#### *6. Girls/Women-only or Mixed Gender Incubator programs?*

Interestingly, there is no consensus on this question. Experts agree on the fact that girls and women do not learn differently. However, depending on the type of program, some prefer to clearly focus on a women-only strategy while some others argue that there is no point to empower women if men cannot witness it. Of course, there are pros and cons for both sides.

The women-only advocates argue that women will be provided a safe space, where they will not feel judged and where they can express their skills and potential fully. There will probably be more interactions, no self-censoring, more transparency, more self-confidence and more efficiency, especially in a context like Cambodia where social and cultural norms play a significant role.

Some experts have consciously chosen to promote a mixed-gender environment, stating that boys also need to witness female role models and women in order to be empowered. For them, it is better not to empower girls in isolation, as girls will learn to interact and lead faster. Gender diversity is always good because of the different perspectives that are brought.

An active participant of several incubator programs agrees that both approaches have their advantages. She offers her advice, saying that the best approach from the point of view of a WE is a gradual approach. The level of experience and openness also needs to be taken into account. When it is a first experience, it is often better to provide a women-only environment. As soon as WEs get more experience and confidence, it is good to expose them to a mixed-gender environment. The next challenge would be for them to learn to network with diverse nationalities; the final step is to travel abroad and gain international experience. Level of education and sector also matter, but it seems that for women entrepreneurs with a low level of education, a women-only environment would have more positive effects.

### C. SWOT analysis of the Women Entrepreneurial Support Ecosystem

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Numbers – 62 percent of SMEs are women-owned</li> <li>- Vibrant community and dynamic scene</li> <li>- Cambodia is seen as the hub for financial inclusion policy projects</li> <li>- Motivated leaders from the community</li> <li>- Limited number of players, but who are quite strong in their expertise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MoWA needs to build more internal capacity</li> <li>- Limited number of players focusing on WEs</li> <li>- Limited number of gender-inclusive programs</li> <li>- Many programs are targeting the same populations: educated, urban and speaking English</li> <li>- Training programs' quality is uneven</li> <li>- Social and gender norms still influence women strongly</li> <li>- More access to finance is needed</li> <li>- More female role models are needed</li> <li>- More female trainers are needed</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased interest from the Government and donor programs for women SMEs</li> <li>- Untapped potential</li> <li>- Geographic opportunities in provinces</li> <li>- Launch of the new Phnom Penh WEDC</li> <li>- Young Women Entrepreneurs (YWEs)</li> <li>- E-commerce and digitalization</li> <li>- COVID-19 funds can provide more opportunities</li> <li>- Thoughtful co-working spaces for women</li> <li>- Nice showroom to present the products of MSME</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of coordination among stakeholders</li> <li>- Inability to improve the business-enabling environment for women SMEs</li> <li>- Increased digital gender divide</li> </ul>



## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

Following our analysis of the existing ecosystem and drawing from the valuable feedback from the experts, women SMEs, and program managers we interviewed, this section provides suggestions for possible innovative pilot projects to support and strengthen WEs in Cambodia.

A few considerations to note in advance:

- It was agreed among MoWA, MISTI and GIZ that the lead ministry in this assignment will be the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA). Therefore, all the recommendations that involve MoWA might take an active role, probably through the WDCs or the future WEDC.
- For implementation of any support project, we strongly recommend working with one or several implementing partners. Strengthening the internal capacity of MoWA regarding skills and program implementation could also help the whole ecosystem, especially the provincial WDCs. Therefore, working with strong partners could also contribute to reaching this goal in addition to providing quicker results.
- No specific recommendation was provided regarding the design of a potential project: size, area of intervention, or target population. Therefore, the following recommendations will present a range of measures can be taken as a whole or enacted separately.

### A. Inclusiveness and Target Beneficiaries: Leveraging the Network of WDCs

The analysis of the ecosystem shows that the systemic support for women is not inclusive. It is neither accessible nor open to those who want to participate. Improving the level of inclusiveness can improve the impact of the programs. Two cross-cutting categories emerge as in need of much more support and inclusion: provincial SMEs and projects targeting underserved populations.

#### *Provincial SMEs*

This result is not surprising. The entrepreneurship ecosystems in general are new, even in the main provincial towns of Siem Reap and Battambang. Some venues such as co-working spaces could be found in Siem Reap, but they were targeting the tech community or foreigners. For WEs, some progress has been made by the expansion of Impact Hub (in Siem Reap and Battambang) and of CWEA in several cities as well. SHE Investments and Agile offer training and small incubator programs in four or five provincial locations as well but the overall offer to provincial WEs is small.

**The WDCs can be useful partners to leverage** in reaching out to this category of SMEs. Physically present in 14 provinces, they nevertheless cover nonetheless all 24 provinces in Cambodia. In addition, they have different features and different capabilities, but also try to answer local needs as much as they can, within their limited resources. Some provincial WDCs offer showrooms or stores for local products to be displayed to support local tourism, while others have dormitories to facilitate the training of the WEs. Some WDCs organize mobile training to give access to minorities. Using this existing network is logical and advisable. Here again, strengthening the internal capacities of the staff and the WDCs as a whole would potentially have a positive impact in the whole ecosystem by significantly increasing the geographic reach of target beneficiaries.

Working with WDCs could also involve other implementation partners, especially for training or incubator programs.

- Different ideas can be proposed:
  - A first step would be to have a more detailed assessment of the capabilities and the needs of the different provinces and local women development centers.
  - An easy solution can be to focus on the provinces where the different support programs have already expanded (Siem Reap and Battambang) and where the needs are already better identified. A collaboration can be considered with these programs and/or with the WDCs to offer complementary services and strengthen the services offered. From there, the services can be rolled out to other provinces through trainers at other WDCs.
  - Conversely, a choice can be made to focus exclusively on the provinces that receive little support. The associated WDCs could play an even bigger role by implementing the future strategy of the WEC in Phnom Penh or by collaborating with implementing partners in other provinces to get access to services, markets and information usually available in bigger cities.
- Another way to collectively support these provinces can be to support the development of more resources in Khmer language and adapt them to the local context. This means making these resources accessible, simple and attractive. The Khmer used for administrative documents, for example, is not easy to read. The resources needing development include digital ones - books, videos, platforms, and training materials - as well as human resources such as trainers and mentors. Female resources are particularly needed and as mentioned earlier, peer mentoring can be an effective way to develop local training, as trainers will stay in the province. The need of having well-trained staff in the different WDCs cannot be understated. Therefore, a pilot project developing local training resources in Khmer, and particularly training more female coaches, mentors or trainers, can be beneficial.

the overall recommendation is to implement a pilot project that can increase the services on to provincial WEs. Considering the immense needs of this category, a realistic approach is needed in designing any pilot project and defining the target objectives. Using the existing resources is also the most effective way to leverage possible synergies.

*Pilot projects targeting underserved and particularly fragile categories: urban necessity entrepreneurs, disabled women or rural minorities*

Many observers noticed that a lot of programs are targeting the same population: namely, the most educated, urban, often young people who already have some potential. A pilot project specifically targeting an underserved category such as urban necessity-driven WEs (street vendors), disabled WEs or rural minorities might not offer the same visibility as other programs, but can be as impactful, especially during a time such as the Covid-19 pandemic. These populations are particularly impacted by the economic downturn induced by the current situation. The needs assessment and the design of any dedicated pilot projects should aim for simplicity and practicality. In this regard, Agile has done a laudable job in designing programs for these types of entrepreneurs - low literacy, Khmer-speaking only, and who have never joined any support program before- and can provide strong support. WDCs are well poised to give support to minority populations, as some of them already provide mobile training.

## B. Areas of Intervention to Examine

### 1. Business Environment: regulatory constraints and advocacy

As mentioned previously, regulatory challenges faced by SMEs are common to both genders and are often imposed by the private sector and business associations. The Royal Government of Cambodia has quite proactive and generally favorable in implementing public-private business dialogue. The creation of the different Government Private Sector Forums (GPSFs) specialized in various sectors and the success of initiatives such as the yearly EuroCham White Book are two examples of this smooth dialogue. However, more can be done to raise awareness about the specific issues faced by Women Entrepreneurs in doing business. There are no straightforward solutions but increasing representation and enhancing collaboration between MoWA and the main stakeholders will bring positive developments. The following points do not suggesting formal actions for GIZ to take, but are ideas that can be raised at MoWA level or initiated by the private sector.

#### *Increased Representation Needed for YWEs*

CWEA is recognized for being successful in providing a voice for WE and in creating a fruitful dialogue with the government, particularly the MoWA. However, CWEA might not be fully representative of all categories of women entrepreneurs in the country. WE Act is also active in advocacy and has initiated some good programs, such as the Entrepreneur Platform for Engagement and Exchange, piloted with Impact Hub, and to raising concerns about youth and tech start-ups. Their YWE accelerator program, which aims to increase inclusion of Young Entrepreneurs in CWEA, is an impactful initiative giving YWEs their first space to express their concerns. The recent creation of the informal Women in Tech group and other small and personal initiatives such as like Women in the City or Generation C show a willingness for more action. Some persons interviewed for this study also mentioned their wish to see the creation of a Young Women Entrepreneurs Association, like the one that exists in Myanmar, and which would be the equivalent of the YEAC. While the need for another association in Cambodia in this already crowded space is questionable, it shows that supportive initiatives, such as the YWE accelerator program, can be useful.

#### *Boosting the Public-private Dialogue with More Gender Perspective*

##### ● **Create an advisory group within MoWA**

A suggestion is to create an advisory group - (either formal or informal - with different representatives from organizations, programs and the private sector, in direct line with MoWA. Several options are possible:

- Having an informal group of close advisors (chosen by H.E Ing Kantha Pavi), comprised of a mixed group from different backgrounds, to help brainstorm someone key entrepreneurship questions. H.E Sun Chanthol created such a group at MOC and then at the Ministry of Public Works and Transport. This approach can be effective, but needrequires a time commitment, trust and personal relationships to allow it to work efficiently. The main advantages are flexibility and the possibility to quickly leverage a group of solution-oriented experts who can provide recommendations.
- Having an official working group/group of advisors inside the ministry: the group will be composed of representatives from the main WE programs from different categories of Women Entrepreneurs and donors. The goals would be more information sharing and soft

advocacy. The advantage is to have representatives, such as CWEA, young entrepreneurs (often tech start-ups), provincial entrepreneurs and main programs (WE Act, CWE, SHE Investments, Agile, Impact Hub). The group needs to be inclusive, and the group members need to be empowered with the objective to give recommendations and concrete solutions. An inter-ministerial committee already exists, but what is needed is a group of people who have a direct interest so that access to information can be increased at several levels: from the participants to the MoWA and vice versa, and among the participants of the group.

- **Support the creation of an informal think tank of WEs**

The idea was discussed with one key expert from the private sector with a positive response. The expert further tested the idea with other WEs and received the same positive answer. The think tank would be independent, but with a direct communication link with the minister. With strong leadership - ideally a female Cambodian entrepreneur with some previous experience in advocacy or dealing with the government - an all-female think tank could bring a different perspective and diversity to the dialogue. This initiative needs to be followed closely.

## 2. Access to Market

Two dimensions need to be considered: local and global markets, as more can be done for both categories. E-commerce, while a prominent topic, is not straightforward for SMEs or for women SMEs. A UNDP study on the capacity of marketplaces to onboard more SMEs shows that marketplaces are generally motivated in having more local SMEs, but that it is time-consuming and costly to onboard them because of their limited digital literacy. In addition, managing limited stock and online inventory is complicated for women-led MSMEs.

### *Add a Gender Lens Strategy to the GLZ Programs*

ARISE Plus Cambodia and the ASEAN-SME Project, implemented by GIZ present flexibility in project design and decision-making. We recommend adding a gender component to the action plan of the program as well as considering the following suggested initiatives to promote export and internationalization for women:

- Promote women who export. Update a prior publication for ASEAN women to include Cambodian WE who are able to export.
- Use the network of WDCs promote the SME Internationalization Program to WEs. Deliver training on how to use the future Khmer SME website.

Local markets: many initiatives are related to e-commerce platforms. Here again, UNDP is already implementing some gender-inclusive components in the implementation of the program. More can be done to promote their program specifically to WE, including establishing one dedicated cohort with only women.

In this regard, promotion of a gender lens strategy could be further promoted by MoWA together with GIZ. This will be discussed later.

## 3. Access to Finance

Access to finance is one of the top constraints for SMEs. The importance of targeted incentives for formalization of Cambodian SMEs has been demonstrated several times. Access to finance for WEs is a topic which is complex, multi-dimensional and requires time, strong partners and a strong design,

because it is also sensitive. In this regard, IFC published an excellent report in 2019, “Exploring the Opportunities for Women-owned SMEs in Cambodia.” The report explained all the issues related to the access to finance for WEs well, giving a good analysis from both perspectives: the supply and the demand sides, also showing clearly the gap in financing for WEs (estimated at \$4.2 billion for women-owned) but also the opportunities it could bring for both parties.

The statistics provided speak for themselves: 72 percent of women are interested in borrowing a loan in the future, the first-time experience with the bank is decisive for them and they often are not well-prepared for that. As such, women face more difficulties in pledging collateral (58 percent of their loan applications are rejected due to insufficient collateral). In fact, they often require specific support and mentoring in fulfilling the bank’s requirements, particularly when it comes to first-time experience.

Many recommendations are made in the report, including gender-awareness training for bank staff to offer a more tailored approach to female clients and also to collect gender disaggregated data to better assess the potential of this category. With the multiplication of ICT and financial technology solutions, there is a possibility to overcome certain challenges faced by WEs, such as mobility and time limitations but that would require certain coordination among the different players.

#### *Support a Strong Advocacy Action Done by MoWA in Collaboration with NBC to Encourage a Collective Gender Mainstreaming Approach with Banks and MFIs.*

While GIZ is not specialized in access to finance, support can be provided to MoWA through a consultant or technical assistance to build a case to encourage the financial institutions to adopt certain best gender mainstreaming practices in evaluating loans (such as a large-scale gender awareness training through their respective associations, such as the Association of Banks (ABC) or the Cambodian Microfinance Association (CMA)). The buy-in and active support of NBC would be essential in this. Considering that NBC is a strong advocate of financial inclusion, as well as the recent and fruitful collaboration between NBC and MoWA on financial literacy, there are good chances of success.

#### *Support the Development of a “Bank-ready” Service for WEs*

From the GiZ and MoWA perspectives, there is no need to occupy a field which is already occupied by experienced stakeholders. However, there is the possibility to support WEs from the demand side with the perspective of these “stable entrepreneurs” who are thinking about developing their businesses. It is possible to demystify the loan application process, not only through financial literacy training or mentoring, but also as a service that WDCs can offer on a regular basis in association with a bank. ACLEDA, with its extensive coverage of the country, could be an effective partner, as could WING, which is active in promoting financial inclusion for WEs. The goal is to offer hands-on mentoring and training in the form of one-to-one coaching to make them more “bank ready.”

#### *Support the Development of Financial Management Skills Training by SHE Investments*

Another idea is also to work on financial products or training specifically designed for this category of financial entrepreneurs. Access to finance is not always the main constraint; there are successful women-owned SMEs who have low capacity in financial management. Some succeed in getting funds from banks or other channels, such as including venture capital, but do not have the capacity to manage a large amount of money and may not always heed the advice of accountants.

Short-term training or single-issue training programs in the field of access to finance are not useful according to experts, because the associated barriers associated are multifaceted and cannot be solved during a one-off training. Cultural barriers are significant. In such cases, it is recommended to

support the most successful players to include multi-issue programs in their curricula. For example, SHE Investments intends to develop a more advanced financial management skills training in the future.

#### *Digital literacy program / Access to IT skills*

As explained before, digital literacy programs remain a top priority, together with financial literacy. The topic is extensively covered by many players but is not addressed enough in the provinces, despite the recent joint initiative from NBC and MoWA. Any initiative that would help to decrease the digital gender divide is useful. Having a pilot program involving the WDCs and applying the best practices recommended by our experts would be impactful. One recommendation is to allow the relevant players more digital and financial literacy practice. Another best practice is to access the younger generation of entrepreneurs to help in the mentoring and training process. It can be done through formal mentoring or using the peer community to support coaching.

### *C. Partnerships*

#### *Public-private Partnerships*

Public-private partnerships are welcomed and encouraged in Cambodia. Although these have not always been successful in the past, the current environment may be more conducive for this type of partnership, even in the field of women's entrepreneurship.

Some large partnerships that can be explored are the ones with financial institutions (banks, MFIs, and financial technology) but also with some large conglomerates led by women (Attwood and Soma). Many opportunities can be created as long as the design of the partnership reflects mutual benefits and potential synergies. It is not only about financing the project, but about creating value. In this regard, recruiting a professional to explore these options can be helpful.

#### *Implementing Partners*

Not everyone can do everything. It is strongly recommended to have an implementing partner for the successful execution of WE trainings or incubator projects. A partner will be able to save time and energy in designing and adapting a good curriculum, but also be able to deliver consistently. Many observers and participants of some programs mentioned the quality and relevance of certain training programs as issues.

There are few suitable partners that have developed an expertise regarding WEs. In Cambodia, SHE Investments is the only well-known women-focused incubator and accelerator program with proven impact. WEs are underrepresented across business incubators and accelerators, especially when the incubator is focusing on technology. Agile also has an incubator program for disabled women. The feedback from the community is excellent regarding these incubators, but they are small with the capacity to incubate only a small number of WEs on an annual basis. Scaling is an issue for these programs because it takes time to adapt them and to find suitable trainers and mentors. Any curriculum, no matter how solid it is, needs to be adapted to the local environment and the audience. Partnering with incubators like SHE Investments or Agile, despite their current difficulties in scaling, would nonetheless be helpful as they would bring valuable practical experience. Impact Hub can be another option. They are also experienced in running incubator programs at a much larger scale than SHE Investments or Agile, but as their target is more English-speaking, educated and young people,

there would be some adjustments at the beginning to adapt their style to the more diverse target audience.

Other possibilities exist. For example, the new incubator at Khmer Enterprise, Angkor 500, is run by 500 Startups, which is well known in the community. Each solution should be assessed carefully and in line with the desired outcome.

Here are some general recommendations based on the experience of the existing programs in Cambodia:

#### Factors of success for a successful partnership

- **Vision:** In the topic of women empowerment, it is good to work with actors who have already established a strong vision and will co-create the program together.
- **Financial Independence:** It is better if the implementing partner is not dependent on partnership funding. It will guarantee a more balanced partnership and stronger collaboration.
- **Commitment:** Strong leadership and commitment from the implementing team can make a real difference in the results.
- **Active Collaboration from Both Sides:** As a partner is not only a service provider, the lead organization or donor needs to show the same commitment and should bring something in the relationship: PACT provides support on the organizational aspects, development innovation provided as strong technical assistance and UNESCAP offers its financial expertise in the field.
- **Build a Strong and Trusting Relationship:** The best programs work closely with their implementing partners. The donor or the lead organization should guide and leave enough freedom, not impose. However, they should also be able to listen and have a say if the results are not what are expected.
- **Flexibility:** The donor or lead organization needs to be able to listen and adapt the strategy if needed.

There is often a gap between what is needed and the way donors are working. Designing a program involves having a strong trust and relationship. Sometimes tensions arise between implementers, who are afraid to give fair feedback and donors, who are reluctant to adapt their initial programs.

#### D. Implementing a Strong Capacity Development Program

Numerous types of short training are provided by different organizations as part of their programs and at the request of their members (business organizations are offering financial literacy programs).

Full capacity development programs are provided by public and private services providers, usually with the support of international donors or the sponsorship of big companies (usually for accelerator programs). As already mentioned, few have a long-time track record like SHE Investments or Impact Hub, and only SHE Investment and Agile offer women-focused programs.



Overall, local incubators/accelerators and hubs are mainly focused on the ideation and start-up phases, not on the expansion and growth phases. Most are interested in the digital sector because of the low cost of entry. Connections between entrepreneurship support organizations and traditional SMEs from sectors other than digital sectors are still quite weak. Capacity-building programs in Cambodia can be found at various costs and vary in terms of quality. In fact, SMEs are usually reluctant to pay for services, often wanting to see if there is value for money is there. When a program has proven results and a good track record, it might be seen as an investment; this, however, is the exception rather than the rule.

Regarding WEs, most training or incubator programs are offered free of charge. The only program which tried to introduce fees is the BRED Bank's Shine Academy, using fees that are highly subsidized (\$30 to \$60 USD for a session of three hours). Despite the efforts in designing a good curriculum, the audience remained limited. SHE Investments introduced a deposit that is reimbursed at the end of the program, but these incubator programs are usually financed by donors or sponsors. For short-term training provided regularly by business associations like CWEA, a small fee is often required. In fact, when there is a clear value behind the service proposed, fees are not always an issue.

The following is a compilation of the best practices recommended by the best women-focused programs in Cambodia.

#### Best practices and recommendations provided by experts of the industry

- The most important aspects to take care of are **the design and the implementation phase**. A careful needs assessment should be performed. The best programs are designed around the goals.
- **Single-issue, one-off training programs should be avoided**, especially if there is no follow-up after. For WEs, it is important to contextualize.
- **Follow-up is a must**. So many programs do not integrate follow-up in the design of the training. So how can you measure impact?
- **Learning by doing** is the most efficient strategy to acquire knowledge: practice, practice, practice. The most successful programs include a practice part: concept, knowledge, direct application.
- If possible, utilize a specialist to build the curriculum and design the training. It is less about the content and more about the delivery. **The best incubator programs succeed to contextualize and adapt the contents to their audience**. Not everyone can do it. You need to understand how people think and make it fun, especially with people who have never joined a program. It is possible to get results even with WEs with very low literacy. Learning in class is not enough; simulations of real situations are invaluable.
- **Delivery in Khmer language** is more effective, especially for first-time participants and obviously for certain target beneficiaries (such as rural WEs with low education). However, some long-term programs may require English, especially in IT.
- A **female instructor or mentor** is recommended for WEs who are participating for the first time in training programs.
- **Classroom, online tools and the COVID-19 effect**: In Cambodia, online methods are not ideal; classrooms and in-person training remain the most effective way to learn, especially because

women prefer to have in-person contact. Working in small groups as a team can also be very effective: for young girls or young entrepreneurs in provinces, it is more socially acceptable.

- Access to information is a recurrent issue. Whenever it is possible, **using existing and popular channels of communications (even if informal) are much more effective** than creating new ones. Facebook groups remains popular simply to create a link.
- If there is a small cohort, it is **always good to have some diversity** (age group, micro, small, medium and background). It works quite well, as it creates a sense of community. You can also define some typical profiles (like the “Archetypes” of WE Act). It helps in identifying realistic targets. The only common denominator should be motivation - you need committed people.
- Any training should include also **some soft skills**: women need to be taught that they have the power to act in their environment (i.e. that the teacher is not always right).
- Adapt **the curriculum** from Phnom Penh to the province: the profile of entrepreneurs in different locations is different and it is important to focus on needs assessment.
- **Never underestimate the impact of social norms.** Even if they are not mentioned publicly, there are tacit codes, and they might have significant influence in doing training.

#### E. Promoting a Systematic Gender Mainstreaming Component in Existing Programs

A proposed solution is to promote and support the implementation of gender mainstreaming components in existing programs and particularly in incubator programs in Cambodia. The benefits to having more gender equality in programs are numerous.

The impact of applying a gender lens to organizations can help them to better understand their customers, make better decisions, attract and retain more talents, be more competitive and perform better.

When applied to the programs, a gender lens helps to increase their accessibility and their effectiveness. It can also support increased innovation and generate higher economic return. Women-led start-ups are less likely to fail and use less capital for a higher return according to a US study.

Finally, when a gender lens is applied to ecosystems, studies showed reduced income disparity and more sustainable development and, therefore, an increase in resilience against major crises.

Two guides can be used as a reference; both offer interesting approaches and include valuable tools for practical implementation.

The first is a publication from Impact Hub Global and the INCAE Business School entitled “Accelerators as Drivers of Gender Equality,” a guide to gender lens acceleration. The guide can be used by any entrepreneur support provider or other intermediaries supporting entrepreneurs to make their programs more accessible to WEs. The guide breaks down the different phases of the acceleration process and applies them to a gender lens. It covers the design and set-up of the program, promotion, scouting and application, the selection of the participants and the program delivery. For each phase, recommendations are given as to how to make their program processes gender inclusive. Finally, guidance on how to measure this gender lens is also provided. Most recommendations included in

this guide mirror the ones mentioned by the experts in the box “Best Practices and Recommendations,” but they are structured following the stages of the accelerator program.

The second guide is the “Gender Lens Incubation and Acceleration (GLIA) Toolkit” published by Frontier Incubators and Asia Women Impact Fund. The creation of this toolkit was a collaborative effort and the GLIA toolkit was piloted by several partners in Southeast Asia including SHE Investments and Agile. The material is relevant to any organization, but the toolkit was initially developed for social entrepreneurs. In this toolkit, three areas are explored: the organization, the program and the whole ecosystem. The toolkit was developed with two main considerations in mind: first, that context is important; and second, that diversity and inclusion are broader than gender (race, background, culture, personality, religion, and age must also be considered). A self-diagnosis tool is provided to get a snapshot of the current state of an organization in terms of gender inclusivity.

Strategies are then provided for the three areas mentioned:

- Organization: the goal is to promote an awareness and greater understanding of gender diversity, equality and inclusion. Strategies and recommendations will be provided at the level of the board within the team as well as the culture of the organization.
- Program: the goal is to implement the same within the incubator or accelerator programs and take steps to make both more inclusive. To this end, the following steps will be covered: recruitment, selection, program design (location, content), program delivery (content, mentors, pitch events) and potentially other supports.
- Ecosystem: the goal here is to influence the key players (mentors, funders/investors and government) to be more accessible and inclusive of all genders.

The guide also provides feedback and a summary of best practices from influential partners including SHE and Agile. Interesting examples are also provided, such as how to apply a gender lens to investments or an example of inclusive and empowering school curricula.

Many pilot projects can be structured around the implementation of gender mainstreaming activities with the existing stakeholders involved in SMEs as well as MoWA. A suggestion is to implement it within the GIZ internationalization program as a start with?

## F. A pilot project to build stronger communities around entrepreneurship

Building stronger communities both online and offline can be an effective way to improve the entrepreneurial ecosystem. In general, there is a need for greater peer exchange as well as building a strong community of entrepreneurs. In Phnom Penh, studies show that the entrepreneurial culture has been highly competitive and marked by fear that others will steal ideas and take over business relationships. In addition, the entrepreneurial mindset was more focused on individual success as opposed to an understanding of collective gain. With the new generation of entrepreneurs, this mindset is still evident but is changing. For WEs, the sense of community is stronger and peer exchange and collaboration would likely be more effective if encouraged. In this sense, the STEM sisters’ program from STEMEOC is a real inspiration. Instead of STEM as a main topic, however, entrepreneurship should be the main focus. This will allow some “big sisters” to act as mentors and train community-based leaders that will train other “sisters” on various topics linked to entrepreneurship. The system, when well designed, can provide promising results and also equip younger girls in school with the knowledge and capacity to take the lead and learn more about entrepreneurship.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the WE support system shows an ecosystem which is still young, but is promising, since the topic of women's entrepreneurship has recently attracted significant attention from donors and the private sector. The main specialized players, which are quite few, have developed specific expertise and are increasing their connectivity, but which still operate at a small scale. Interestingly, the most successful programs, despite having local components, are at least partly led or implemented by foreign-led social enterprises (SHE Investments, Agile, WE Act). Overall, the majority of needs faced by WE covered by different programs in terms of quantity, but the quality and the impact of these programs is uneven. Access to international markets is not adequately addressed by the different programs, while some areas, such as access to finance, still need to be reinforced.

Training on digital skills remains a priority, as it will help to alleviate the increasing digital gender divide in the provinces.

Launching pilot projects for WE would be more important in the provinces than in Phnom Penh. We recommend leveraging the network of the WDCs. While the centers' resources are quite limited, they may be the best positioned to reach out to the most underserved populations of WE.

Alternatively, advocating and extensively promoting the implementation of a gender lens strategy through different existing programs would be beneficial. The ASEAN-SME project implemented by GIZ and Khmer Enterprise are poised to support in this regard, as they present two different toolkits which provide practical tools to reach this objective. Other, smaller pilot projects which enable peer mentoring or role models can also be envisioned.

Most important in improving the overall support ecosystem for WE is to have a long-term vision and qualitative objectives. While profound changes will not happen tomorrow, it is important to note that improvements are currently taking place.

## Annex: List of Interviewees

### Acknowledgements:

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH would like to extend sincere thanks to all the respondents from the below organizations for their time, patience and dedication.

<b>Institutions / Programs</b>
<b>Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation (MISTI)</b>
<b>Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA)</b>
<b>MoWA : WDC</b>
<b>MoWA : WEDC consultant</b>
<b>MoWA : Financial Literacy Program + CamWEN</b>
<b>Khmer Enterprise</b>
<b>Go4ecam (women component ) - MOC</b>
<b>PACT - WE Act</b>
<b>UNESCAP (CWE)</b>
<b>Development Innovations</b>
<b>UNDP</b>
<b>Asia Foundation - Women incubator</b>
<b>French Embassy</b>
<b>Cambodia Women Entrepreneur Association (CWEA)</b>
<b>Womentum</b>
<b>SHE Investments</b>
<b>Agile</b>
<b>Impact Hub</b>
<b>SHINE Women Initiative (BRED Bank)</b>
<b>Shen loves tech (incubator) – Raintree</b>
<b>WeMall</b>
<b>Wedu</b>
<b>InSTEED</b>
<b>STEMEOC</b>
<b>IT STEP academy - Sisters in code initiative</b>
<b>Liger academy</b>
<b>My Voice Initiative</b>
<b>Kokopon</b>

## Bibliography

**ADB, 2015:** Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment in Cambodia

**The Asia Foundation, 2018:** Emerging lessons on women's entrepreneurship in Asia and the Pacific, Case studies from the ADB and the Asia Foundation.

**Emerging Market Consulting (EMC), 2018,** Dutch Growth Fund: *Closing the Gap Mekong, Country report Cambodia, Entrepreneurial Ecosystem assessment*

**Frontiers Incubators, Asia Women Impact Fund, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, 2020:** Gender Lens Incubation and Acceleration Toolkit, supporting intermediaries to be more inclusive of all genders

**Impact Hub, INCAE Business School, 2020:** Accelerators as Drivers of Gender Equality, a guide to gender lens acceleration

**International Finance Corporation (IFC), 2019:** Exploring the Opportunities for Women-owned SMEs in Cambodia

**Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF-UTS), 2017:** Women in WASH Enterprises learning from female entrepreneurship in Cambodia, Indonesia and Lao PDR

**Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), Woomentum, 2020:** The Path to Success, how women-owned Businesses transform in the Era of digitalization, Case study from Cambodia

**USAID, PACT, Impact Hub, 2020:** Youth Perspective on Entrepreneurship and Business in Siem Reap and Battambang

**MOWA, 2019-2023:** Neary Rattanak V: Five-year Strategic Plan for strengthening gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment

**MOWA, 2020:** Concept Note: Women's Entrepreneurship Development Center

**OECD, 2017:** Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in ASEAN, towards increasing women's participation in economic activity

**Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia (PIC), 2019:** The Empowerment of Women in Cambodia

**Swisscontact, Impact Hub Phnom Penh, 2020:** Connecting the Phnom Penh entrepreneurial ecosystem

**UNESCAP, 2020:** Women's Entrepreneurship Development: Relevant initiatives and Lessons Drawn

**Arsana, I.G., & Alibhai, A. (2016).** Women entrepreneurs in Indonesia: a pathway to increasing shared prosperity.