

A Regional Discussion Paper



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Abbreviations

ACE	Action Community for Entrepreneurship
ACRA	Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority
AED	Agency for Enterprise Development
CamDX	Cambodia Data Exchange
CWE	Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship
DTI	The Department of Trade and Industry
FFMH	Female Founders Mentoring Hours
GAD	Gender and Development
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
ORS	One-Roof System
OSS	One Stop Shop
OTOP	One-Town-One-Product
SCORE	The SME Competitiveness Rating for Enhancement
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEWA	Self Employed Women's Association
SMEs	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
SMERA	SME Roving Academy
STEAM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics
WE Hub	Women Entrepreneurs Hub
WEP	Women Entrepreneurship Platform

I. Introduction

Entrepreneurship helps promote innovation, offer employment and income generation opportunities, as well as address multiple challenges that can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It offers diversity through business participation and opportunity, and has the potential to contribute to women's empowerment, as well as help create opportunities to bridge regional and urban-rural gaps. Entrepreneurship is a critical element for driving economic growth. In Asia Pacific, micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) are the backbone of the economy, accounting for an average 97 per cent of all enterprises and 69 per cent of the national labour force.¹

Although many enterprises, both female and male-owned, face challenges, women entrepreneurs face additional layers of constraints, undermining their ability and potential to contribute to the economy. This is largely owing to existing gender inequalities in terms of gendered roles and the care burden, lower female labour force participation rates, and lower levels of engagement of women in wage employment and the formal sector, as compared to men. In the small and medium sized enterprise (SME) sector, women-owned enterprises are found to be consistently smaller, concentrated in less profitable sectors, and often part of the informal sector as they face barriers to registration and formal start-up, and are further limited in their ability to access capital and finance for scale up and growth. Advancing entrepreneurship is a pathway to advancing women's economic empowerment. While at the same time increasing their participation in the economy could add an additional US \$12 trillion to annual global output by 2025, and add \$3.8 trillion to the total regional GDP in Asia Pacific.² But gender disparities in entrepreneurship continue to limit the economic potential for women, their families, communities, and countries.

Recognizing these gaps, and the opportunity that comes with supporting women's entrepreneurship, several countries are taking positive policy measures and creating better infrastructure to foster women's entrepreneurship. The objective of this paper is to showcase good practices of portals and hubs in the Asia Pacific region in support of women's entrepreneurship. The different types of approaches highlighted in the paper range from one-roof system (ORS) to facilitate business registration processes, entrepreneurship hubs which provide access to networks and knowledge, and one-stop shops (OSS) that offer support covering the life-cycle of a woman entrepreneur's journey. The paper also discusses good practice examples of building an entire ecosystem to support entrepreneurs, which may not specifically target women, but could be adapted towards this end. For ease of reference, the different approaches are referred to, under a generic term of OSS. This paper aims to build a case and spur discussion among countries in the region to adopt a comprehensive support system that can accelerate the potential of women's entrepreneurship in the region.

¹ ADB. 2020. Asian Development Outlook 2020 Supplement: Lockdown, Loosening, and Asia's Growth Prospects. Manila. <https://www.adb.org/publications/ado-supplement-june-2020>.

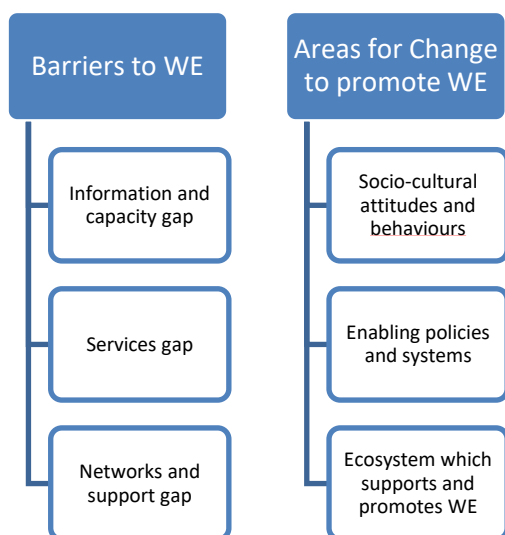
² McKinsey Global Institute, The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Asia Pacific (New York, McKinsey and Company, 2018).

II. One-Stop Hubs: their relevance and benefits for women entrepreneurs

A large majority of women entrepreneurs remain in the informal sector, owing to (i) cultural expectations and barriers which lead to them bearing a disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work; (ii) regulations and legislation which discriminate against them and limit their access to resources; (iii) limitations of human and social capital, which in turn restricts women entrepreneurs' access to finance and market. Aggregation of women's businesses in the informal sector is detrimental to their longer-term growth and expansion potential, as well as impedes their ability to access government support, subsidies or any social protection provisions. For governments as well, this informality reduces compliance, and lowers the ability to collect taxes from unregistered women-owned businesses.

Gaps that often act as barriers for women entrepreneurs and can be addressed through different OSS models by addressing:

- limited access to information about how to register their business and how to seek financial assistance;
- limited access to services and finance to start-up, manage and grow their business;
- limited networks or support structures that can provide mentorship and a peer support structure.

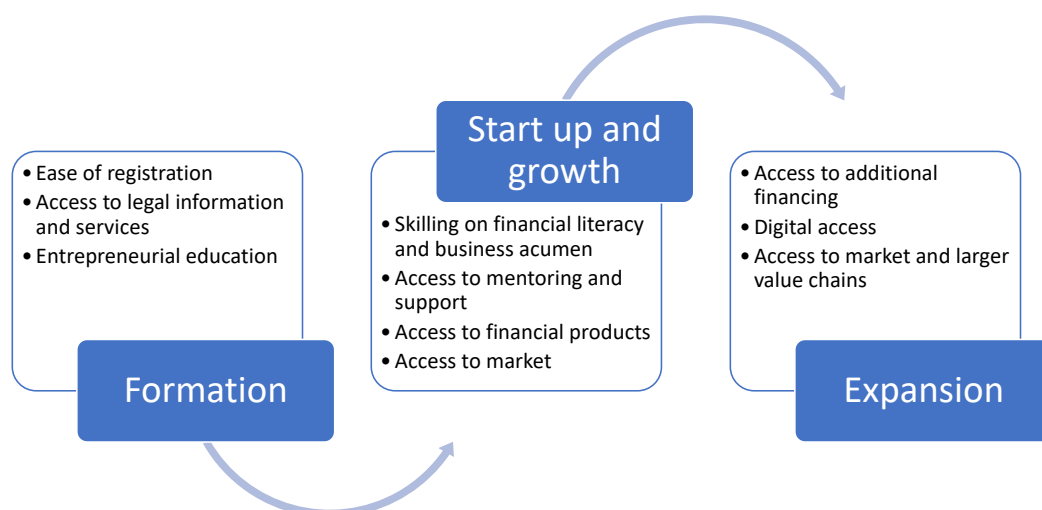


The positive developments to promote MSMEs and entrepreneurship in the region are not typically targeted towards women-owned and managed enterprises, despite them being sizable in number and facing distinct challenges compared to their male counterparts. To address these gaps, a broad range of changes are needed- from long-term cultural and attitudinal shifts about the roles and capacities of women; to government policies, systems and an enabling ecosystem for women to access services, develop their capacities, grow and expand upon business opportunities. Targeted interventions through an OSS which can bridge information gaps, provide greater access to services, and connect women entrepreneurs with a broad network can be an important step in democratizing the entrepreneurial journey for women.

An OSS which centralizes databases and registration processes can have several benefits for women entrepreneurs by making it easier to transition from the informal to the formal sector- from savings in time and cost, to increased productivity. Simplified and streamlined processes can also help to create a more transparent and business friendly climate to bring in additional investors, both large and small, domestic and foreign- thus increasing access to additional capital and financing. Women-owned enterprises are likely to be big winners of administrative simplification offered through an OSS, as they often bear the biggest barriers to entry and burden of compliance.

III. Building blocks for a one-stop hub that can support women entrepreneurs

To overcome the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, an OSS should ideally provide comprehensive and integrated support across the life-cycle of a woman entrepreneur's journey. These should include building blocks that cover the formation, start-up and growth, as well as expansion and acceleration of their enterprise. Some critical elements are discussed below.



Registration and compliance: Support for acquiring a business license and registration is an important step for women entrepreneurs to transition their business into the formal sector, and thus have more access to finance, subsidies, and skills for their business. Women entrepreneurs face legal, regulatory and social barriers which include complex and time-consuming application procedures. Thus, an OSS should be able to provide easily accessible information as well as a streamlined process that makes business registration efficient. This should also include information related to taxation, and other legal requirements that women must be aware of, to ensure compliance. On-line and other forms of easily accessible regulatory information and services can increase the rates of formalization of women MSME's and improve public service delivery to such enterprises.

Access to finance: The barriers in accessing finance for women entrepreneurs can have significant implications. High regulatory and capital costs of starting-up a business and requirements such as the need for bank accounts tend to be a major roadblock for women entrepreneurs.³ On one hand, women are less likely to be able to assemble collateral or formal documentation, while on the other hand financial institutions tend to have limited exposure to small businesses due to a higher risk perception. Women entrepreneur's limited financial and digital literacy can further compound these challenges, often leading them to informal sources of finance like moneylenders with

³ United Nations Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific, Asian Development Bank and UN Development Programme (2015). Technology, Finance and Statistics for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific Asia-Pacific Regional MDGs Report 2014/15. Bangkok: ESCAP, ADB and UNDP.

higher rates of interest. For example, 19.4 per cent of Cambodian women turn to informal sources to borrow money, compared to less than 5 per cent of adults turning to such sources globally.⁴ There are new approaches like impact investing, capital market financing, digital financial services and crowdfunding that can expand financial accessibility for women entrepreneurs. It would be extremely valuable for women to have access to consolidated information on financing options. An OSS can also include provision of training services and linkages with organizations that are investing in financial or digital literacy skilling. This type of integrated package of services and support on financial access can help women entrepreneurs meet their start up, as well as further growth requirements.

Training and capacity building: Entrepreneurship education and training is another important element for women, and in particular for a new and younger cadre of women entrepreneurs to receive relevant skills and knowledge in areas of digitalization, entrepreneurial leadership, business planning and operations management. Several non-profits, industry associations, international development actors as well private sector companies are investing in skilling women entrepreneurs. Consolidation of information about these initiatives, and collaboration can ensure equity in benefits of such capacity building efforts across sectors and regions, size of the enterprise, as well as create multiplier and magnified impact by improving access to information about opportunities.

Digital skills: As most OSS systems will rely on the use of technology, it is important to invest in digital skills of women, which remain low in many countries and can pose a major challenge for the adoption of technology. A complementary approach of creating simplified digital applications, while investing in or collaborating with partners to enhance digital literacy and skills of women entrepreneurs should ideally go hand-in-hand.

Access to a network: Network development as a mechanism for enhancing the entrepreneurial potential of women can be another integrated feature of an OSS. Being connected with other entrepreneurs can provide exposure to role models and mentors, and provide connections to relevant stakeholders and potential business opportunities. Women entrepreneurs can benefit from being part of networks in a number of ways- by building a strong social capital base, being able to access entrepreneurial learning and knowledge-sharing, as well as promoting their mental health and well-being.

⁴ Demircuc-Kunt, A., Klapper, L., Singer, D & Van Oudheusden. (2015). The Global Findex Database 2014: Measuring Financial Inclusion around the World. Policy Research Working Report 7255, World Bank, Washington, DC

IV. Case Studies/ Good Practices Examples

4.1 Government-led initiatives

This section showcases examples and approaches of one-stop hubs that have been created to promote an entrepreneurship ecosystem, as well as target the development of women-led enterprises. The examples are in no way a comprehensive listing of all efforts, but rather a small showcase of good practice examples that can spur discussion and inspire other countries to take positive actions to foster women's entrepreneurship.

Women Entrepreneurs Hub (WE Hub) | Telangana, India

About the initiative

WE Hub is India's first and only State led incubator to promote and foster women's entrepreneurship by way of incubation, access to government services and creating a collaborative network for women-led enterprises to thrive. WE Hub's mission is to ensure that women entrepreneurs have access to technical, financial, governmental and policy support required to start-up, scale up and sustain, and accelerate growth. Their vision is three-fold:

- Incubate businesses and enable women entrepreneurs from various sectors to start-up, scale and sustain, and grow their business.
- Build an ecosystem through multi-stakeholder collaborations with international aid agencies, corporates, government entities, and incubators to create programs and mechanisms to enable girls and women to pursue entrepreneurship.
- Make government schemes accessible and operational through policy research, and implementation support.

The key objective

To provide an OSS service to women led start-ups and promote Hyderabad as a business destination for women entrepreneurs from across India.

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