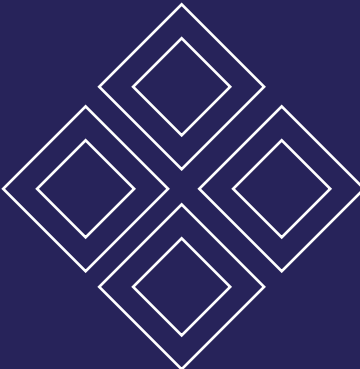


NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN MYANMAR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

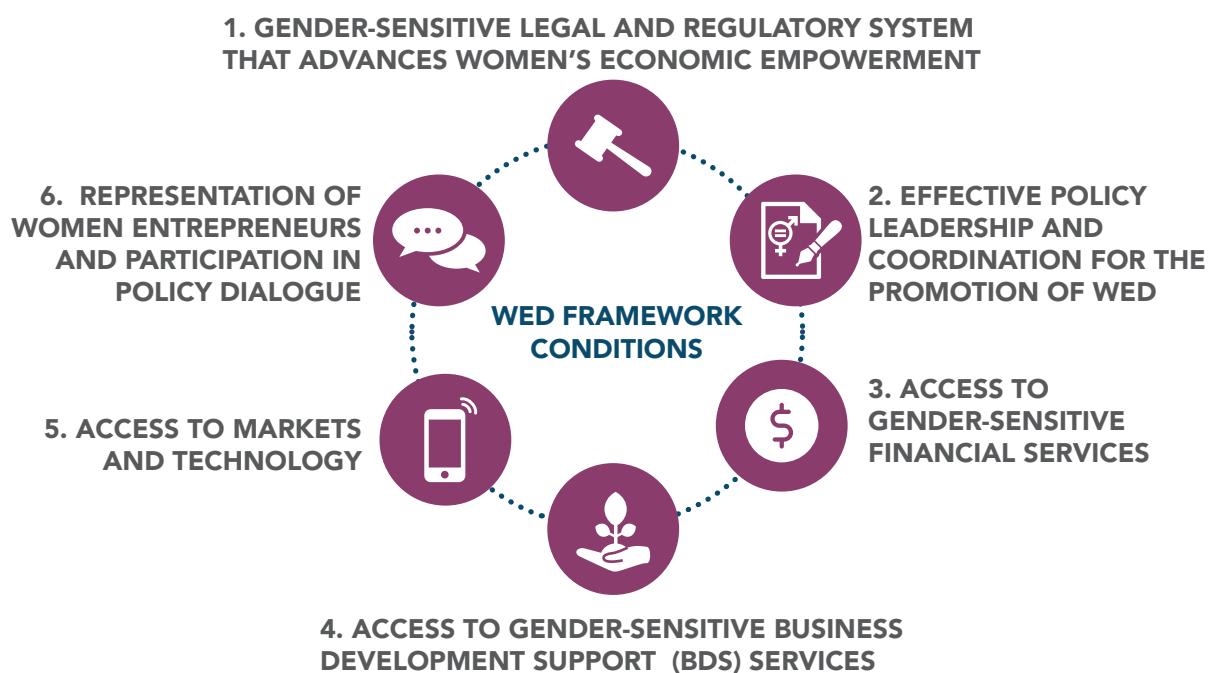
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The overarching goal of Myanmar's national assessment of Women's Entrepreneurship Development (WED) is to identify deficiencies in the conditions that affect the emergence of women entrepreneurs, and the ability of existing women-owned enterprises to access resources and support they need to secure their sustainability and growth on an "equal opportunities" basis. The International Labour Organization's (ILO) WED assessment methodology is based on a review of six framework conditions. These have been identified as key influencing factors in creating a favourable environment for women's entrepreneurship. These lead to the formulation of a set of recommendations for national stakeholders.



The WED assessment process in Myanmar took place between October 2018 and March 2019. It combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches to assess the strengths each of the six WED framework conditions in the country. These approaches included: i) a desk review of relevant documents, reports and statistical data, coupled with the identification of organizations that provide business development, financing and other forms of support to micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and specifically to women entrepreneurs; ii) interviews with key informants from 23 stakeholder organizations in Nay Pyi Taw and Yangon; iii) three focus groups attended by 18 women entrepreneurs, primarily from Yangon and surrounding townships; and iv) a face-to-face questionnaire survey of 208 women entrepreneurs. This survey used the ILO's standardized "Women Entrepreneurs Survey" (WES) questionnaire, adapted for Myanmar's context.

“

The goal of Myanmar's national assessment [...] is to identify deficiencies in the conditions that affect the emergence of women entrepreneurs

“

Findings from the WED assessment can be used to inform a range of stakeholders on actions needed to advance the profile and status of women entrepreneurs

Myanmar has significant potential to benefit from its “gender dividend” by supporting women entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses, as well as by promoting gender equality and non-discrimination in the workplace through both public organizations and private enterprises. Findings from the WED assessment can be used to inform a range of stakeholders on actions needed to advance the profile and status of women entrepreneurs in the country. These stakeholders include policy-makers, business development service providers, financial service providers and institutions, member-based business and sectoral associations, employers’ organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), researchers and development partners. The recommendations can form a solid foundation for the design of a national strategy to unleash the underdeveloped potential of women as entrepreneurs, including policy and programme actions to address identified challenges facing women’s entrepreneurship development in Myanmar.

THE STATE OF WOMEN’S ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN MYANMAR



37.7 per cent of employed women surveyed are self-employed **vs**



47.3 per cent of employed men



25.6 per cent of employers are women

Although the Government produces some official data on MSMEs, it does not include sex-disaggregated data on the percentage of businesses owned by women. However, data on self-employment from the 2014 Population and Housing Census reveals that 37.7 per cent of employed women are self-employed, compared to 47.3 per cent of employed men (Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, 2017b). This indicates that there are approximately 3.3 million self-employed women and 6.4 million men in Myanmar, with men almost twice as likely to be self-employed. Additionally, self-employed women are half as likely as men to be employers – an estimated 3 per cent of all self-employed women are employers, compared to 5.7 per cent of all self-employed men. However, the greater likelihood of men being self-employed or employers than women is a trend observed in all member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as in all world regions. Women in Myanmar account for an estimated 34 per cent of own-account self-employed persons (excluding employees) in the country, but only 25.6 per cent of employers (Ministry of Immigration and Population, 2017a). This may suggest that women face more challenges in growing their micro-enterprises into small- and medium-sized enterprises, and in creating additional jobs.

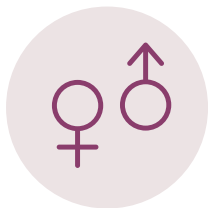
Cultural gender norms and attitudes concerning women’s role in society are the leading impediment to the emergence of women entrepreneurs in Myanmar,

“

Women may face more challenges in growing their micro-enterprises into small- and medium-sized enterprises

according to key informants and focus group participants consulted during the assessment. This finding is reaffirmed by studies on gender equality in Myanmar by a number of organizations, including the Gender Equality Network (GEN) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Norms that pose a particular challenge include the double time burden of work and unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, families discouraging daughters and wives from becoming entrepreneurs, and mobility restrictions that constrain women's access to markets, such as places where women cannot go and security issues. According to ILOSTAT, 60 per cent of working-age women outside the labour force in Myanmar reported "household/family responsibilities" as their primary reason for either not wanting employment, or not being available to work (2017). Equally challenging is a general lack of respect for women as entrepreneurs and business leaders, as men's leadership is more highly valued, alongside occupational segregation and the difficulties women face in achieving credibility in male-dominated sectors. These are the most significant challenges women must overcome in order to become entrepreneurs in Myanmar. Although women entrepreneur role models are emerging, more should be done to change restrictive gender norms and attitudes towards women as entrepreneurs.

In addition to gender-based cultural norms, women entrepreneurs in Myanmar face a range of challenges experienced by most entrepreneurs in terms of accessing the resources needed to start and grow their business. These challenges are particularly acute for women entrepreneurs. According to the assessment's Women Entrepreneurs Survey (WES), the greatest start-up challenge for respondents is accessing financing, followed by getting customers, obtaining information on how to start a business, and finding a suitable location. In terms of challenges to growing their businesses, over three-quarters of the women entrepreneurs surveyed reported accessing financing as their principal challenge. A significant proportion of respondents also identified finding qualified workers as a potential challenge, alongside using information communications technologies (ICTs) and taxation issues. It is notable that "gaining support from my family" was perceived as a growth challenge by a higher percentage of respondents than it was a start-up challenge (30.8 per cent compared to 8.7 per cent of WES respondents, respectively).



GENDER NORMS
concerning women's
role in society



LACK OF RESPECT
for women as
entrepreneurs/leaders



**LIMITED ACCESS
TO RESOURCES**
(financing, ICT,
information, etc.)



**LIMITED FAMILY
SUPPORT**
for women
entrepreneurs

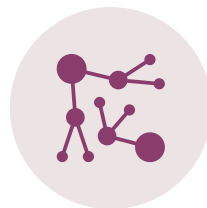
KEY CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS



**WORK-LIFE
BALANCE**
challenges



LOW AWARENESS
among women
entrepreneurs of
rights, procedures
and opportunities



FEW EFFORTS
to link women
entrepreneurs
to supply chains



**LIMITED GENDER-
SENSITIVE SERVICES**
e.g. financial and BDS
services

“

The greatest start-up challenge for [WES] respondents is accessing financing

This is most likely due to increased time commitments as a business grows, potentially reducing the time women have available to attend to domestic responsibilities, which fall disproportionately on their shoulders. Resulting tensions at the household level can thwart women entrepreneurs’ ability to develop their businesses.

GENDER-SENSITIVE LEGAL AND REGULATORY SYSTEM THAT ADVANCES WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



GENDER EQUALITY
is enshrined in Myanmar’s labour, property and inheritance laws



ENFORCEMENT
of the equality principle is weak and traditions disadvantage women



LIMITED EFFORTS
to raise women entrepreneurs’ awareness of rights and registration procedures

Labour laws and regulations: In general, Myanmar’s labour laws promote gender equality and equal pay for similar work. They do not restrict the hours of work for women employees – for instance, in terms of night shifts – and stipulate non-discrimination in the employment of women. However, key informants consulted during the assessment indicated that the equality principle is often not enforced by labour law regulators or employers. The assessment finds limited evidence of efforts to make women aware of equal employment rights, in order to ensure that women are well-informed of their rights as workers, while supporting the protection of these rights. To better address these issues, the Labour Law Reform project should ensure the inclusion of gender equality in all labour-related laws, as well as prioritizing stronger enforcement mechanisms to protect women’s employment rights and provide effective legal recourse, including on eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work, which disproportionately affects women.

“

The women entrepreneurs consulted find it difficult to access information on labour regulations

While Myanmar has ratified three core ILO Conventions, the two core gender equality Conventions have not yet been ratified: the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and C111, the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). Women entrepreneurs who participated in the assessment’s focus group sessions indicated that, in their experience, government officials do not make special efforts to inform women entrepreneurs about labour laws, regulations and compliance requirements – whether through awareness raising sessions, or by assisting women entrepreneurs to navigate the complexities of registering workers. Overall, the women entrepreneurs consulted find it difficult to access information on labour regulations. This is especially complicated as each sectoral ministry has its own labour laws and regulations.

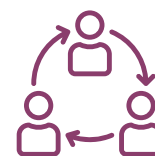
Business registration and licensing regulations and procedures: Myanmar has no legal requirement obliging married women to obtain their husband's permission before registering a business. However, in some cases women may register a business in their husband's name, as the head of the household. This may be due to cultural or customary practices, and it has important implications on women entrepreneurs' ability to access financial and non-financial business services. It also impacts their economic empowerment, status and decision-making capacities within their business. Incorporated companies in Myanmar are required to register with the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA), a process which can be completed entirely online. Online registration may afford women with such businesses significant time savings. As the Government moves to digitalize many of its services, online registration is expected to be increasingly adopted by sectoral ministries with their own business registration requirements.

Many women in Myanmar may be unaware of business registration and licensing requirements. Only 26 per cent of WES respondents agreed that information on business regulations is widely available to women entrepreneurs. By contrast, almost half of the respondents disagreed with this statement. Moreover, there is no evidence of any special efforts by the Government to ensure that women are informed about the "what" and "how" of business registration or licensing procedures. Similarly, there is no evidence of the presence of women's desks in business registration or licensing offices to assist women entrepreneurs with limited business knowledge, low literacy levels, or from a linguistic minority. The network of government SME Centres can be a natural focal point for the dissemination of information on business issues, in partnership with business associations and women's organizations. This would improve outreach to under-served groups of women entrepreneurs, such as those from ethnic minorities or women with disabilities, among others.

Property and inheritance rights: By law, women and men in Myanmar have the same rights to own and use property, as well as the same inheritance rights. Nevertheless, the assessment finds that culture and tradition favour men in land certification and inheritance practices. Women are also disadvantaged in jointly-held property ownership and land tenure. In essence, customary practices prevail and women's legal property and inheritance rights are not well-respected or enforced. Avenues for legal recourse, moreover, are limited. Women – especially in rural areas – are not sufficiently aware of, or adequately informed about, their land and property rights. Advocacy groups continue to push for the inclusion of gender equality requirements in the draft Land Use Law under review. In the meantime, more targeted actions are needed to inform women of their property and inheritance rights, while providing them with mechanisms for legal recourse to exert these economic rights established under the law.

“

There is no evidence of special efforts [...] to ensure that women are informed about the “what” and “how” of business registration or licensing procedures



NETWORK OF SME CENTRES

can be a natural focal point for the dissemination of information on business issues



TARGETED EFFORTS

are needed to inform women of their property and inheritance rights



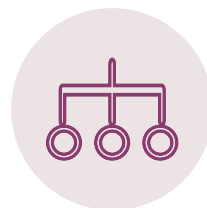
EFFECTIVE POLICY LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF WED



GENDER EQUALITY
and women's economic participation are policy priorities



MYANMAR LACKS
an inter-governmental strategic framework for WED



NATIONAL FOCAL POINT STRUCTURE
concerning WED requires further institutionalization

“

The Action Plan for Women's Entrepreneurship falls short of being a national, inter-governmental strategic framework for WED

Gender equality and women's economic participation are emphasized as policy priorities in Myanmar's national policy documents, albeit with only weak references to the importance of women's entrepreneurship development (WED) as a policy priority. The SME Development Policy does not specifically address the issue of women's enterprises as a strategic target or component. This is expected to change in the future as Myanmar takes actions to align its SME Policy with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) Strategic Action Plan for SME Development (SAP-SMED).

The primary evidence for WED as a policy priority in Myanmar is the Central SME Development Department's Action Plan for Women's Entrepreneurship (Ministry of Industry). This recognizes the policy importance of targeting and supporting women entrepreneurs as part of the country's economic growth and stabilization agenda. However, the Action Plan for Women's Entrepreneurship falls short of being a national, inter-governmental strategic framework for WED that includes a comprehensive set of support measures to foster both the start-up and growth of women-owned enterprises. With a national government budget allocation for the Action Plan anticipated in 2020, securing inputs from stakeholders on the priority focus of an extended Action Plan through a consultation process is essential. This would provide a stronger foundation for developing a truly comprehensive national strategy and action plan for the development of women's entrepreneurship.

A certain number of other ministries are engaged in the WED Action Plan with the Ministry of Industry, such as the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Agriculture. Nevertheless, more needs to be done to institutionalize the national focal point structure, including budget resources and staffing, the inclusion of additional relevant ministries, and a mandate to provide cross-governmental policy leadership and coordination for the promotion of WED and supporting actions. Without adequate inter-governmental coordination and gender analysis, programmes and services may not effectively address women entrepreneurs' needs or eliminate the systemic barriers to the emergence of women's entrepreneurship.



GENDER ANALYSIS

and inter-governmental coordination are essential for effective programmes to address women entrepreneurs' needs

ACCESS TO GENDER-SENSITIVE FINANCIAL SERVICES



INFORMAL SOURCES

of external financing tend to be used by women entrepreneurs



NO GENDER-SENSITIVE

approach evident in financial institutions' design of products/services



MICROFINANCE INSTITUTIONS

often target the borrowing needs of women from low-income households

Overall, women entrepreneurs in Myanmar mainly use their own personal savings to finance their entrepreneurial activities, alongside informal sources of external financing. These sources include loans from family and friends, savings and lending groups, and informal moneylenders. The assessment finds little evidence that formal financial institutions, such as commercial banks, are reaching out to the market of women-owned enterprises. Nor is there evidence of these institutions demonstrating a gender-sensitive approach in the design of financial products and services to address the financing needs of women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs are particularly disadvantaged in terms of meeting the collateral requirements for bank loans, as they are far less likely than men to hold titles to land and property. In addition, women entrepreneurs who responded to the WES have low expectations regarding formal lenders' ability to meet their businesses' financial needs in terms of loan costs and flexibility – for example, regarding loan size and repayment terms. Banks require evidence that an entrepreneur has been in business for at least three years in order to approve loans, which limits access to start-up financing for both women and men. Another requirement when applying for a bank loan is the possession of a bank account. However, according to the latest available data from the World Bank's Global Findex database, in 2017 almost 75 per cent of women in Myanmar did not have a bank account.

Significant progress is needed to create a women-friendly banking environment in Myanmar and, thereby, to increase the participation of women entrepreneurs in banking and financial services. This would require the recognition of the potential and needs of the women entrepreneurs' market, coupled by active efforts to reach out to this market through promotional activities, as well as by designing products and services that meet their needs. Simultaneous efforts are essential to prepare women entrepreneurs, through training and coaching, to engage effectively with commercial banks. To this end, it will be important to improve their financial literacy, in addition to their "know-how" vis-à-vis approaching banks – for instance, in terms of presenting the purpose of a loan, ensuring that financial statements are up-to-date, etc.



Women entrepreneurs are particularly disadvantaged in terms of meeting the collateral requirements for bank loans



A WOMEN-FRIENDLY BANKING

environment requires designing products/services to meet women entrepreneurs' needs and building women's capacities

¹ The exchange rate on the 31st of December 2018 was MMK 1 million = US\$645.44.



LOAN PRODUCTS FOR WOMEN-

owned enterprises and a government-backed credit guarantee programme for loans should be developed

Despite low levels of engagement with commercial banks, women comprise most of the microfinance clients in Myanmar. Several microfinance institutions (MFIs), many small and informal, target the borrowing needs of women from low-income households, in to support their both their personal needs and income-generating activities. Group lending is the most common methodology in use, with loans capped at MMK 6 million, while individual loans are capped at MMK 10 million by law (approximately US\$6,454).¹ This yields a significant financing gap for women entrepreneurs interested in taking their micro-enterprise to the next level in terms of growth, as the minimum threshold for bank lending is an estimated MMK 50 million. This figure is based on information provided by a banking sector official, who reported that banks are reluctant to provide loans worth less than MMK 50 million (approximately \$32,500).

Banks should be encouraged to develop loan products for women-owned enterprises. The development of a government-backed credit guarantee programme for bank loans to women-owned enterprises could be instrumental in encouraging banks to be more inclusive in their lending practices. It also stands to compensate for women's relatively lower capacity to provide the required hard collateral as security for loans, for example, through targeted loan guarantee provisions. To facilitate the transition from microfinance to bank financing, a Transition Loan Fund for Women Entrepreneurs could be established. This would make loans worth between MMK 10 million and MMK 50 million available to cover the capital acquisition and working capital needs of women-owned enterprises, with loans disbursed through banks.

There is also a need for more sex-disaggregated data on bank clients and loan applications, as well as on the tracking of disbursed loans. In addition, microfinance institutions should document the loan purposes of borrowers, so as to determine what percentage of all microfinance is supporting income-generating and micro-enterprise activities, compared to personal and household financing needs.

“

There is [...] a need for more sex-disaggregated data on bank clients and loan applications, as well as on the tracking of disbursed loans

ACCESS TO GENDER-SENSITIVE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT (BDS) SERVICES



LIMITED EFFORTS
by BDS providers to make their approach more gender-sensitive



INFORMAL SOURCES
tend to be used by women entrepreneurs for BDS



LACK OF AWARENESS
among women of available BDS services and training opportunities

Overall, women entrepreneurs in Myanmar make use of informal sources for business development support. Principal sources are other business owners in their personal networks, alongside family and friends. A lack of awareness of BDS services on offer appears to be a challenge. Focus group participants explained that many women entrepreneurs do not know what BDS services are available, when, where, or by whom they are provided. Further efforts to promote the availability of advisory and training services for women entrepreneurs are likely to lead to greater reach and participation. While the Central SME Development Agency aims to provide BDS services to SMEs through its network of SME Centres, focus group participants indicated that there is limited awareness of the centres' service offer among women entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship and business management training is the most prevalent form of organized BDS service delivery in Myanmar. Despite this, almost three-quarters of WES respondents reported never participating in any entrepreneurship or business management training programmes. Furthermore, only 4.3 per cent sourced business advice from a small business or enterprise centre in the past year, and only 6.3 per cent obtained business advice from a professional business consultant or adviser. This indicates a need for increased marketing of BDS services and more attention to the needs of women entrepreneurs.

Key reasons cited by WES respondents for not participating in training programmes include a lack of time, a lack of information on available programmes and the limited availability of programmes in their areas of residence. Other constraints include training scheduled at times when they are unable to attend sessions, as well as the lack of child care available. These reasons highlight a need for attention to design and the organization of what works, in addition to diverse delivery mechanisms using online, blended and/or classroom approaches that respond to women's time demands, scheduling needs and location-related limitations. Focus group participants confirmed interest in online training programmes due to women's time and mobility constraints.

“

A lack of awareness of BDS services on offer appears to be a challenge



PROMOTING BDS ADVISORY AND TRAINING

services for women entrepreneurs are key to greater reach and participation

WOMEN'S UPTAKE OF BDS IS LOW DUE TO THE FOLLOWING CONSTRAINTS:



LACK OF INFORMATION
on available programmes



LACK OF AVAILABILITY
of BDS programmes in their areas



LACK OF TIME
due to unpaid care and family responsibilities



LACK OF ACCESS TO CHILD CARE

“

Some [...] NGOs are highly committed to providing BDS-related services to women entrepreneurs



INCREASING BDS OUTREACH

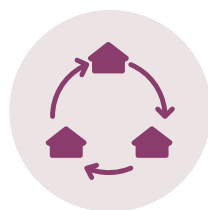
in marginalized areas and offering services that meet women’s needs would enhance availability and accessibility

The assessment finds limited evidence that public and private BDS providers are taking measures to make their approach more gender-sensitive, in order to better respond to the needs of women entrepreneurs. Although exceptions exist, this overall situation suggests that BDS provision is not sufficiently friendly to women entrepreneurs. Thus, efforts are needed to create more awareness of these services, as well as to assess how to adjust service offerings with a view to making them more attractive, accessible and responsive to women’s needs. This is especially important in terms of scheduling, accessibility and the availability of child care. . It also relates to content regarding women’s knowledge of their rights and their economic empowerment.

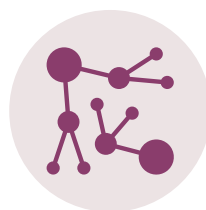
The assessment affirms that some entities in Myanmar – most of whom are NGOs – are highly committed to providing BDS-related services to women entrepreneurs. However, the reach of their service provision is not country-wide. As a result, many regions are not adequately covered by existing initiatives. The findings of the WES and focus group discussions clearly indicate that the uptake of BDS services by women entrepreneurs is low.

To enhance the availability and accessibility of BDS services for women entrepreneurs in both urban and rural areas, BDS providers should increase their outreach, utilize technology to promote their services in marginalized areas, and offer services that respond to women’s specific needs. Increased efforts are needed by BDS providers to collect and report sex-disaggregated data on BDS clients. This would provide a more accurate account of specific gaps in services relevant for women entrepreneurs, as well as of gender imbalances in the rate of service uptake.

ACCESS TO MARKETS AND TECHNOLOGY



DOMESTIC MARKETS
are the primary area of operations for women entrepreneurs



FEW EFFORTS
to link women entrepreneurs to supply chains or support their participation in public procurement



ICT USAGE
is low and interest in improving ICT skills is high among Myanmar’s women entrepreneurs

Export promotion for women entrepreneurs: The results of the WES indicate that women entrepreneurs in Myanmar primarily operate in domestic markets, selling largely within their local communities. Only 8.2 per cent of WES respondents sell their products to international markets. This could be a function of the sectors they operate in, the production scale of their enterprises, or language barriers; however,



a lack of know-how is also a critical issue. Focus group participants reported that women entrepreneurs find it difficult to access information on foreign markets and how to reach them, citing this as a major constraint to the development of women's businesses. Although women entrepreneurs have some, albeit limited, opportunities to participate in international promotion initiatives, focus group participants stressed that women entrepreneurs need access to programmes designed to bring them up to the export-ready stage. Thus, increased efforts are needed to ensure that women-owned enterprises are included in export-readiness and capacity building programmes to improve their product quality and marketing skills. Focused efforts are also required to offer export orientation seminars and programmes that provide women entrepreneurs with export development services related to compliance with international standards, basic export training, export marketing and international trade fairs.

Government procurement: Myanmar's public procurement system does not include special initiatives to encourage or support the participation of SMEs in government tendering, nor are quotas set for a percentage of awards to be issued to SMEs. Many businesses in the country are unaware of tender calls, which are not made publically accessible online, or lack the experience and knowledge needed to compete in the public procurement market. Actions should be taken to ensure that women entrepreneurs are aware of government tendering opportunities and requirements. They should also be provided training on how to prepare bids. In addition, the Government could consider implementing a procurement policy to target women-owned enterprises. This should include the dissemination of information on tendering procedures and moves to promote tendering opportunities to women-owned enterprises through various channels, including, for instance, employers' organizations and women entrepreneurs' associations.

Supply chains and linkages that integrate women-owned enterprises: The assessment finds no evidence of a strategic, national focus on linking women-owned enterprises or women producers to local and global supply chains. While some supplier development and value chain programmes are being implemented in Myanmar – most notably in the tourism and fisheries sectors – most lack a focus informed by gender analysis, or specific targets and approaches for the integration of women-owned SMEs. As such, women-owned enterprises are often inadvertently excluded from strategies to upgrade their businesses, access potential market and capitalize on growth opportunities. A greater effort is required to facilitate the access of women producers to financial and non-financial support programmes. This is vital to enable them to upgrade their production facilities, technologies and management capacities, while enabling them to compete in supply chain and business linkages initiatives. Such initiatives include the acquisition of quality certifications required by large and multinational enterprises.

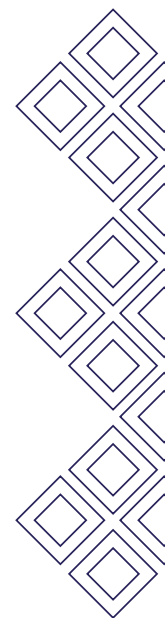
“

Women entrepreneurs find it difficult to access information on foreign markets and how to reach them



**AWARENESS
RAISING
AND
SUPPORT**

for women entrepreneurs on government tendering opportunities is needed





DIGITAL LITERACY TRAINING

is needed to increase the ability of women entrepreneurs to use ICTs



AWARENESS OF THE INTERNET'S

marketing potential and capacity building are required for women entrepreneurs



The WED assessment finds no specific efforts to [... support] women entrepreneurs to update the use of technology in their production processes

Information and communications technologies (ICTs) and women entrepreneurs'

access to technology: Nationally, there is a need for digital literacy training to increase the ability of women entrepreneurs to use ICTs – including mobile phones, smartphones and computers – in their business operations. WES respondents only make basic use of ICTs in their businesses, primarily using mobile or smartphones to communicate with customers and suppliers. Very few respondents use computers for any purpose.

Women entrepreneurs in the focus groups and WES respondents reported low levels of confidence in their ICT skills and a high degree of interest in learning how to improve these skills. Of the WES respondents, 83 per cent have never participated in a training programme to learn how to use a computer or ICTs in their business operations. However, over 60 per cent identified training in the use of ICTs as the form training they most want to take in the future to help manage their businesses.

Although the Internet offers great potential for expanding the market reach of the products and services of women-owned enterprises, this requires considerable online selling capacities. Only one-third of WES respondents sell their products online, the vast majority of whom use Facebook as their sole online platform. Fewer than 20 per cent have a business website. There is a clear opportunity to increase the online capacities of women-owned enterprises through enhanced awareness of the Internet's marketing potential, combined with capacity building. This could include providing a cost-sharing incentive for women entrepreneurs to engage professional consultants to design appropriate business websites with an online payment capability.

The WED assessment finds no specific efforts to provide advice, technical assistance or funding to women entrepreneurs to update the use of technology in their production processes. It is vital to address the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in terms of scaling up production by integrating modern technologies. In addition to assisting women entrepreneurs in gaining technical know-how, important steps could include the implementation of a national programme to make financing available for updating production technologies. This would help cover the costs of new production technologies, as well as costs of engaging the professional expertise required to support needs assessments and the adaptation of modern technologies in production processes.

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AND PARTICIPATION IN POLICY DIALOGUE



WOMEN'S MEMBERSHIP

in Myanmar's business and sectoral associations is very low



NO GENDER-SENSITIVE

approach evident in financial institutions' design of products/services



MICROFINANCE INSTITUTIONS

often target the borrowing needs of women from low-income households

There is limited public data available on the gender composition of business association membership in Myanmar. Focus group participants and key informants who are members of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) and other sectoral associations estimate that the proportion of women members in these associations is very low. Essentially, the evidence suggests that these associations are heavily male-dominated. Without the sufficient representation of women in the membership and leadership of such associations, it is unlikely that matters concerning women entrepreneurs will be heard or raised in policy dialogue. Numerous studies have revealed significant benefits associated with gender-inclusive business cultures and policies. Enterprises with such practices in place may be 65.3 per cent more likely to experience increased profitability and productivity. However, WES respondents expressed a very low level of agreement with the statement, "Business and industry associations advocate to the Government on policies to meet the needs of women entrepreneurs".

Employers' organizations, alongside sectoral and business associations in Myanmar, should be encouraged to create a friendlier, more gender-sensitive environment for the inclusion of women as members. In particular, the UMFCCI should be encouraged to devise approaches for reaching out to more women who could benefit from membership, as well as designing programmes of interest to businesswomen. These programmes could include information sessions, workshops and enhanced opportunities for participating in international trade missions, among others. The ILO could consider providing programme support to employers' organizations and sectoral associations, including associations for youth or younger women, in order to build their capacity for greater gender inclusivity.

The Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association (MWEA) is the country's largest association for women entrepreneurs. With its headquarters in Yangon, the MWEA has a branch office in Mandalay and "satellite groups" in each region. Overall, the association has about 2,300 members. It is the major national "voice" of women



Without the sufficient representation of women in [...] associations, it is unlikely that matters concerning women entrepreneurs will be heard



A GENDER-SENSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

should be created by business/sectoral associations



SAVINGS AND LENDING GROUPS require additional support

entrepreneurs in Myanmar, although its membership is fairly small relative to the entire population of women entrepreneurs in the country. Major challenges faced by the MWEA include expanding its membership base and enhancing services for its members. Addressing both challenges requires additional resources and capacity.

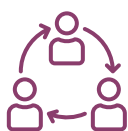
Many women in rural areas form savings and lending groups, the objectives of which are mutual support and solidarity. If these groups are provided with additional support, they stand to advance the economic empowerment of rural women micro-entrepreneurs.

In terms of advocacy and policy influence, the MWEA is a member of the Executive Committee of the Ministry of Industry's Central SME Development Department. Its membership offers the MWEA the opportunity to provide inputs on SME policy issues, including on the further development and implementation of the Action Plan for Women Entrepreneurs. As an organizational member of the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNCWA), the MWEA also has the opportunity to contribute to discussions regarding the implementation of the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW). However, fewer than 20 per cent of WES respondents agreed that "businesswomen/women entrepreneurs' associations are able to effectively represent my interests and concerns as a woman entrepreneur to the Government". Only 22 per cent of respondents agreed that "businesswomen/women entrepreneurs' associations are influential in the policy and decision-making processes of government". At present, there is no evidence of a unifying women-led organization or federation with the capacity to bring together both formal and informal women entrepreneurs, so as to represent their collective voice.



There is no evidence of a unifying women-led organization [...] with the capacity to bring together both formal and informal women entrepreneurs, so as to represent their collective voice

The Government of Myanmar employs mechanisms to consult SMEs on issues that concern them. The MWEA, for instance, is a member of the Private Sector Development (PSD) Committee, in addition to its membership on the Central SME Development Department's Executive Committee. This affords it the opportunity to provide input on issues that affect women entrepreneurs and women-owned MSMEs, including issues related to access to finance, human capital, trade, investment and the legal and regulatory environment. Moreover, the UMFCCI is represented on the Inter-ministerial SME Development Central Committee and SME Development Working Committee. However, as very few of its members are women, it appears unlikely that issues which affect women entrepreneurs are routinely raised or considered.



CREATING AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE on Women in MSMEs should be considered

Within the context of the new Central SME Development Agency, consideration should be given to creating an Advisory Committee on Women in MSMEs. Such a committee could provide guidance and inputs on policies, programmes and support initiatives to meet the needs of women during the start-up and growth stages of their businesses. It would also have the potential to improve women-owned enterprises' participation in the special provisions offered by the SME Development Law.

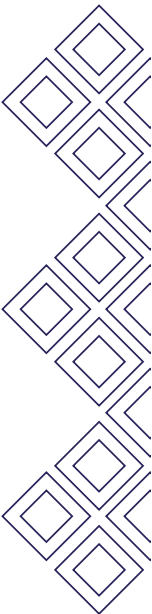
ASSESSMENT OF THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF WED FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS IN MYANMAR

The report concludes with an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the six WED framework conditions in Myanmar, based on the scores assigned to indicators in the scoring matrices at the end of each section on a framework condition. A framework condition is assessed as being weak if the average score for the associated sub-conditions falls below 2 out of 5. It is considered strong if the score assigned is 3 or higher.

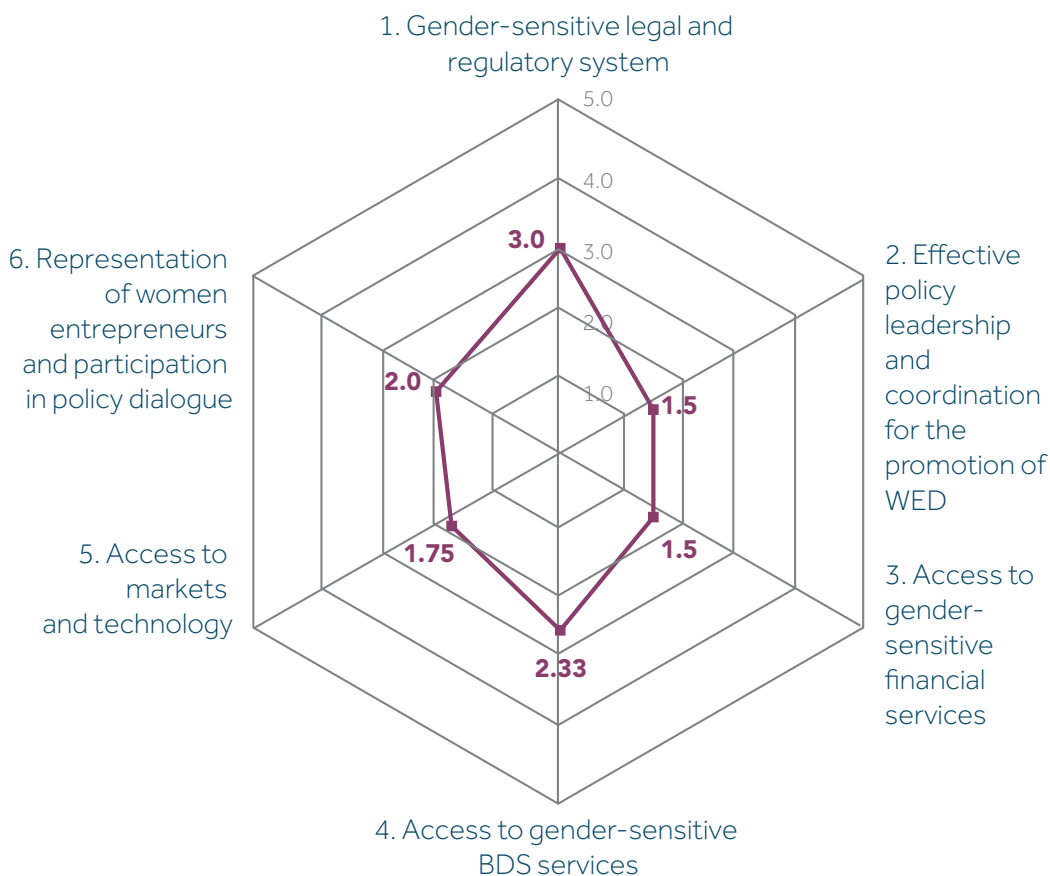
The strongest WED framework condition in Myanmar is **condition 1, "gender-sensitive legal and regulatory system"**, with an average score of 3 out of 5 (see the figure below). The weakest framework conditions are **condition 2, "effective policy leadership and coordination for the promotion of WED"**, and **condition 3, "access to gender-sensitive financial services"**, each with an average score of 1.5. **Condition 5, "access to markets and technology"**, is also very weak, with an average score of 1.75 based on the assessment of its four sub-conditions. **Condition 4, "access to gender-sensitive BDS services"** also scores below 3 out of 5. Therefore, action is clearly needed to strengthen WED condition 4, as well as **condition 6, "representation of women entrepreneurs and participation in policy dialogue"**.



The strongest WED framework condition in Myanmar is condition 1, "gender-sensitive legal and regulatory system"



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FIGURE 1. Overall scoring results of the six WED framework conditions



STRONGEST WED FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS IN MYANMAR



1. Gender-sensitive legal and regulatory system that advances women's economic empowerment

WEAK WED FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS IN MYANMAR



4. Access to gender-sensitive business development support (BDS) services



6. Representation of women entrepreneurs and participation in policy dialogue

WEAKEST WED FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS IN MYANMAR



2. Effective policy leadership and coordination for the promotion of WED



3. Access to gender-sensitive financial services



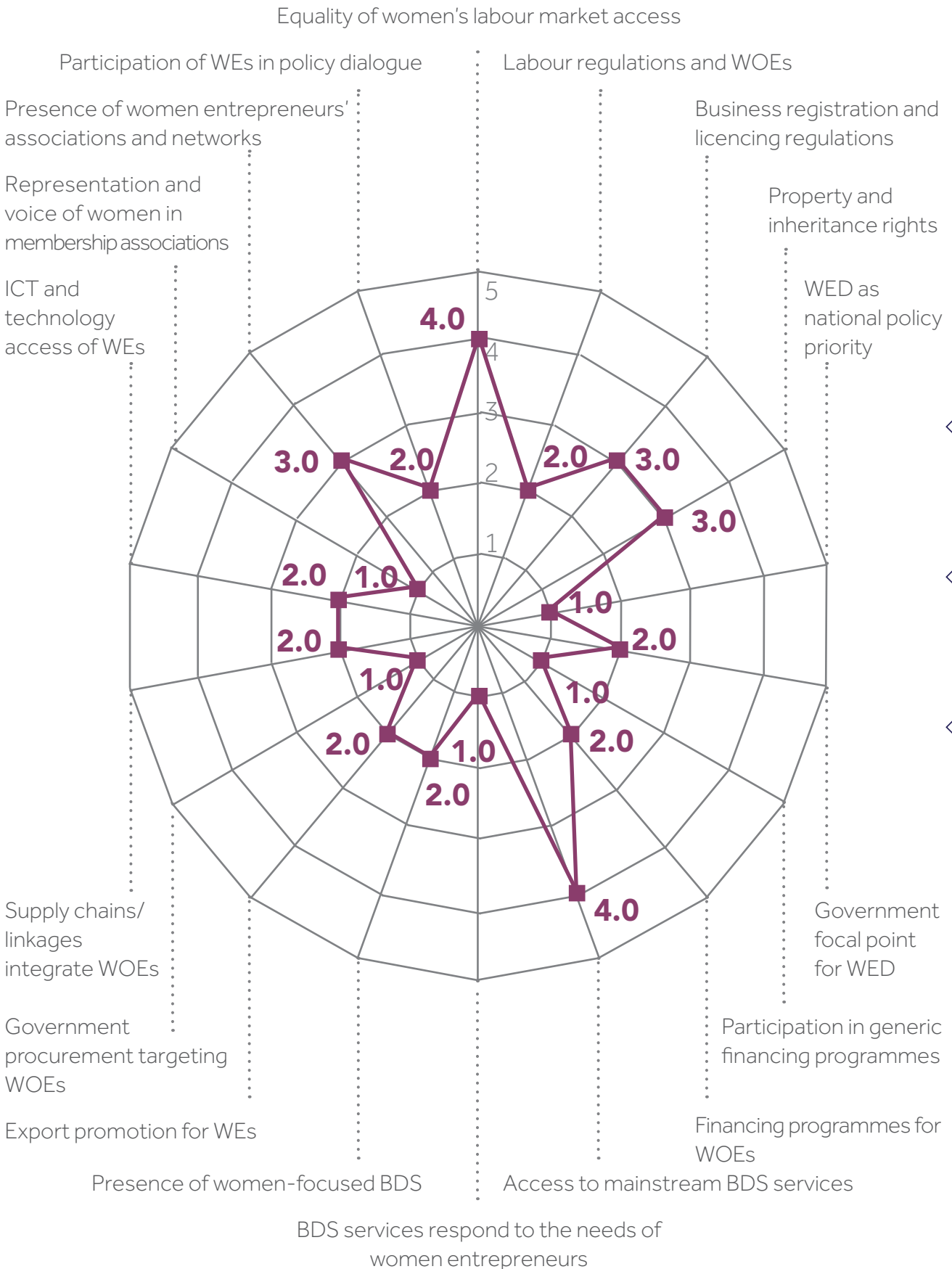
5. Access to markets and technology

The detailed quantitative assessment (see the figure below) presents a more granular view of the strengths of each WED framework sub-condition, giving an overview of the strongest and the weakest sub-conditions in Myanmar. As it illustrates, the strongest sub-conditions, with a score of 4 out of 5, are:

- **Sub-condition 4.A., "women's access to mainstream BDS services".** This assessment is based on the mathematical estimate that women, on average, constitute at least 26 per cent of the beneficiaries of BDS services in Myanmar. This is calculated on the basis of the understanding that, if the proportion of BDS clients were equal for women and men, women would make up 35 per cent of BDS clients. As noted above, this calculation uses the proxy of women's share of total self-employment, which is 35 per cent.
- **Sub-condition 1.A-1, "equality of women's labour market access".** This is based on the equality provisions in the law, although these provisions are not necessarily upheld in practice and are in need of improved enforcement.

² Details about the capacity for implementation are explained under "key findings".

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FIGURE 2. Detailed quantitative assessment of WED framework conditions by sub-condition



“

The weakest WED sub-conditions [...] receive] the lowest possible score of 1 out of 5

The weakest WED sub-conditions, with the lowest possible score of 1 out of 5, are:

- **Sub-condition, 2.A., “WED as a national policy priority”**, receives a low score as more work needs to be done to institutionalize the national focal point structure, including budgetary and human resources, alongside the inclusion of additional relevant ministries. The structure requires a clear mandate to provide cross-governmental policy leadership and coordination for the promotion of WED and support actions.²
- **Sub-condition 3.A., “women entrepreneurs’ participation in generic financing programmes”** is assigned a low score due to the passive approach of formal financial institutions, particularly banks, in terms of recognizing or engaging with the potential of the women entrepreneurs’ market. This score is also based on evidence that women entrepreneurs generally do not access bank financing for a number of reasons, many of which are gender-related.

Sub-condition 4.B., “mainstream BDS services responding to the needs of women entrepreneurs” receives a low score due to the lack of evidence that mainstream BDS providers are making concerted efforts to accommodate the specific needs of women entrepreneurs. Such efforts could include, for instance, scheduling training to accommodate women’s work-life time demands, delivering online training to accommodate mobility restrictions, or actively reaching out to women with information on the availability of services.

- **Sub-condition 5.B., “government procurement actively targeting women-owned enterprises”** is considered weak given the lack of actions taken to consider gender in procurement policies.
- **Sub-condition 6.A., “representation and ‘voice’ of women in business/sector membership associations”**, is considered weak due to the extremely low numbers of women among members of Myanmar’s main business and sector-related associations.

Weaknesses (reflected by assessment scores of 2 out of 5) are also evident in the sub-conditions related to the presence of a government focal point for WED, financing programmes for women entrepreneurs, women-focused BDS services, export promotion for women-owned enterprises, supply chains and linkages for women-owned enterprises, ICT and technology access of women entrepreneurs, labour regulations and women-enterprises, and the level of participation of women entrepreneurs in policy dialogue. The remaining sub-conditions with a score of 3 out of 5 would also benefit from improvements.

“

Sub-conditions with a score of 3 out of 5 would also benefit from improvements

² Details about the capacity for implementation are explained under “key findings”.



To strengthen WED framework conditions and sub-conditions in Myanmar, in order to improve the situation of women entrepreneurs, the assessment proposes the following recommendations. These may be implemented by a variety of stakeholders, following a review and consultation process, perhaps led by the Central SME Department. Such a consultation should lead to the formulation of an agreed national WED Action Plan encompassing commitments from the Government, employers' organizations, business associations, financial institutions, private sector actors, NGOs, and international cooperation partners to lead on the implementation of specific actions to strengthen women's entrepreneurship, according to defined timelines.



GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Improve the system for data collection and analysis on the state of women's entrepreneurship and SME ownership in Myanmar, so as to establish an evidence base for the design of effective policies and programmes.
- ii. Collect and report sex-disaggregated data on SMEs registered in the database of SMEs eligible for benefits under the SME Development Law, as well as the uptake of these benefits by women-owned SMEs.
- iii. Launch a promotional campaign, nationally and locally, to highlight the role of women as entrepreneurs and their contributions to the economy.
- iv. Develop policies and awareness raising campaigns to promote work-life balance and the equal distribution of care and domestic responsibilities between men and women, in order to address women's time poverty, including that of women entrepreneurs.
- v. Disseminate good practices by the private sector to promote women in high-level leadership positions and encourage gender-sensitive workplaces.
- vi. Allocate adequate budgetary and staff resources for the implementation of the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) and its gender mainstreaming activities across the Government.



WED FRAMEWORK CONDITION 1 GENDER-SENSITIVE LEGAL AND REGULATORY SYSTEM THAT ADVANCES WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



Sub-condition 1.A. Labour laws and regulations

- i.** Uphold gender equality provisions and safeguard women's employment rights in the Labour Law, as the work of the Labour Law Reform Project progresses.
- ii.** Enforce the wage equality provisions of the Minimum Wage Law to close any gender pay gaps, including for work of equal value.
- iii.** Strengthen provisions on non-discrimination that support women's career advancement in non-traditional sectors, including as entrepreneurs.
- iv.** Special efforts should be made by government officials to inform women entrepreneurs about labour laws, regulations and compliance requirements, such as through awareness raising sessions. Women entrepreneurs' associations should be included in these efforts.



Sub-condition 1.B. Business registration and licensing

- i.** Partner with relevant women's groups and associations and the Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs' Association to disseminate information on business registration and licensing formalities to women entrepreneurs in urban and rural areas.
- ii.** Extend online business registration to all regions and build capacity of relevant rural and regional organizations and NGOs to support women entrepreneurs to complete the registration of their business.



Sub-condition 1.C. Property and inheritance rights

- i.** Government officials should establish a baseline to gauge the status of women's land ownership, and put in place mechanisms to effectively enforce women's equal rights to land ownership, use and development.
- ii.** Provide training and build awareness of women's landholder and ownership rights, including the right to joint landholder rights, as per the National Land Use Policy.
- iii.** Ensure that local land use plans prepared by District Land Use Committees comply with the gender-related provisions of the Land Use Policy before these plans are formally adopted.
- iv.** Guarantee women's equal rights to the inheritance, ownership and use of land and property, including by implementing provisions for the enforcement of existing laws and ensuring mechanisms through which women can seek legal recourse.



WED FRAMEWORK CONDITION 2 EFFECTIVE POLICY LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF WED

- i. Develop a multi-stakeholder National WED Strategy and Action Plan with policy targets, objectives, actions, a budget, and a monitoring and evaluation framework.
- ii. Conduct a gender impact review of the SME Development Law and the SME Development Policy to identify opportunities for the inclusion of objectives and targets to strengthen support for women-owned SMEs and women's entrepreneurial activities.
- iii. Perform a gender lens review of the Myanmar Private Sector Development Framework and Action Plan to more effectively incorporate gender issues and explicitly target women and women entrepreneurs in proposed actions to promote and support women's entrepreneurship.
- iv. Create an Advisory Committee on Women in SMEs – consisting primarily of women entrepreneurs and their representative associations – led by the Central SME Department. This should provide input to the Central SME Development Agency on policies, programmes and support initiatives to address women's needs during the start-up and growth stages of their businesses. It should also work to strengthen the participation of women-owned SMEs in the special provisions offered by the SME Development Law.
- v. Allocate a budget to the Central SME Development Department to implement the Action Plan for Women's Entrepreneurship, in order to strengthen and accelerate national leadership of its implementation.



WED FRAMEWORK CONDITION 3 ACCESS TO GENDER-SENSITIVE FINANCIAL SERVICES

- i. Support microfinance institutions and commercial banks to develop linkages and form collaborative working relationships with one another, in order to work together to strategically increase women's access to commercial credit.
- ii. Perform a gender evaluation of commercial banks, led by the Central Bank and with the ILO's technical support using the FAMOS Check tool, with a view to developing gender-sensitive approaches, including collecting and analysing sex-disaggregated data on loan applications and loans granted.
- iii. Create a government-backed loan guarantee scheme to foster the growth of existing women-owned businesses which mitigates the specific constraints they face in terms of providing required hard collateral for bank loans.
- iv. Develop and launch a Transition Loan Fund for Women Entrepreneurs in order to address the lending gap between the microfinance ceiling of MMK 10 million and the minimum threshold for commercial bank credit of MMK 50 million. Where relevant, negotiate agreements with existing international

women's enterprise fund opportunities, such as the World Bank's Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-fi).

v. Deliver a standardized financial literacy programme to women clients who borrow to finance their income-generating activities, which could be combined with capacity building on digital literacy.



WED FRAMEWORK CONDITION 4 ACCESS TO GENDER-SENSITIVE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SERVICES

i. Design and implement an online, gender-sensitive government portal to disseminate business-related information and available business support services to women-owned and led MSMEs.

ii. BDS service providers should collect and analyse sex-disaggregated data to better inform their programmes and services, and tailor these to the needs of women entrepreneurs.

iii. With the ILO's technical support, enhance the technical capacity of BDS service providers to provide gender- and diversity-sensitive services for women entrepreneurs, as well as to improve providers' awareness of the challenges and opportunities involved in serving women clients (for example, using the FAMOS Check tool).

iv. Create a dedicated women entrepreneurs' kiosk or desk at all SME Centres and raise awareness among women-owned SMEs of the services offered. Services should include business registration support, the use of social media for promotional purposes and the dissemination information through the MWEA, microfinance institutions and other women's networks.

v. Further develop and implement the plan for the creation of a Women's Enterprise Centre or Women Entrepreneurs' Development Centre, based on proposals made by the MWEA and the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs, and endorsed in principle by the Central SME Development Department. This should be an innovative means of providing a range of business development services to women entrepreneurs, including technical, ICT and management training, support for product design and quality, advice on getting products to markets, and for showcasing women's products.



WED FRAMEWORK CONDITION 5 ACCESS TO MARKETS AND TECHNOLOGY

- i. Adapt or design and deliver a “New Exporters Training and Mentoring” programme for women entrepreneurs, building on international good practices, such as SheTrades³ and the GREAT Women in ASEAN initiative.
- ii. Sector-specific export trade fairs for women entrepreneurs should be organized by the Ministry of Industry, the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI), MWEA, the Great Women in ASEAN initiative and international chambers of commerce, among others.
- iii. Government procurement offices should take action to ensure that women entrepreneurs and women’s groups are aware of government tendering opportunities and requirements. They should also be provided with training, in cooperation with BDS providers, on how to access public procurement opportunities and prepare bids.
- iv. Scale up existing good practices on value and supply chain linkages for women entrepreneurs, for example, the Mennonite Economic Development Associates’ (MEDA) “Improving Market Opportunities for Women” programme and ILO value chain programmes.
- v. Adapt or develop and deliver “digital literacy for business” training programme for women entrepreneurs. This should include an introduction to information communications technologies in business operations, the use of ICT tools – including social media and online trade platforms – and basic computer skills.
- vi. Explore the development of an ICT voucher scheme for women-owned micro- and small-sized enterprises, in order to increase their access to training and other consultancy services that support women to use ICTs in their businesses.



WED FRAMEWORK CONDITION 6 REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AND PARTICIPATION IN POLICY DIALOGUE

- i. In dialogue with tripartite and other relevant stakeholders, identify measures to ensure the representation of women entrepreneurs in policy dialogue on private sector development.
- ii. Support employers’ organizations, including the UMFCCI, and sectoral associations by building their capacities for gender-responsive service provision, including women entrepreneurs in their activities and policies, and increasing female membership.
- iii. Further strengthen the capacities of women entrepreneurs’ associations to advocate for reforms and programmes that support the development of women’s entrepreneurship in Myanmar.

³ For more information, see: <http://www.shetrades.com>



ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

United Nations Building
Rajdamnern Nok Avenue
Bangkok 10200, Thailand
Tel.: +662 288 1234
Fax: +622 280 1735
Email: BANGKOK@ilo.org
www.ilo.org/asia

Sasakawa Peace Foundation

The Sasakawa Peace Foundation Building
1-15-16 Toranomom, Minato-ku
Tokyo 105-8524, Japan
Tel.: 03-5157-5430
Fax: 03-5157-5420
Email: spfpr@spf.or.jp
www.spf.org/en