



The importance of perceptions in promoting women's entrepreneurship in Thailand

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Preface

As the ‘Future of Work’ is being discussed around the world, women continue to be the most under-utilised and potentially game-changing factor for fair and prosperous economic growth. Recent research shows that a reduction in the gap in participation rates between men and women by 25 per cent has the potential to increase the GDP in Asia Pacific by as much as US\$ 3.2 trillion. A recent report by the International Labour Organization and Gallup confirmed that the majority of women and men worldwide would prefer that women work in paid jobs and find it perfectly acceptable for women to have paid work outside of the home. Why then does female labour force participation still lag behind that of males in all countries of the region?

To examine the opportunities and challenges of the future at work for women, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Australian Government’s Department of Jobs and Small Business have partnered in a project called “Women and the Future of Work in Asia and the Pacific”.

The following paper was part of a competitive ‘call for proposals’ under this project. It will be one contribution into the ILO’s forthcoming ‘Women and the Future of Work in Asia and the Pacific regional report’. These selected papers are meant to provide evidence-based policy recommendations to inform decision-makers on where best to invest efforts and resources to achieve the best returns for the future of work.

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The responsibility for opinions expressed in articles, studies and other contributions rests solely with their authors, and publication does not constitute an endorsement by the International Labour Office of the opinions expressed in them, or of any products, processes or geographical designations mentioned.

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Abstract

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations reached a major milestone by implementing the ASEAN Economic Community (ASEAN) at the end of 2015 with the overall purpose to build a region with “sustained economic growth, accompanied by lasting peace, security and stability as well as shared prosperity and social progress”. In this context, women entrepreneurs are comparatively more affected than their male counterparts by challenges, including individual constraining factors such as low levels of entrepreneurial skills’ perceptions, as well as external factors: restricted access to finance, lack of market information, and the prevalence of general administrative procedures and regulations. This study explores influencing factors for female entrepreneurship rates in a comparison of Thailand to the four ASEAN countries Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam with a focus on a limited number of cross-country variables on the individual entrepreneur’s entrepreneurial skills’ and opportunities’ perceptions and the availability of business networks, especially for quality entrepreneurship. Factors of cultural support and attributes towards entrepreneurs, if entrepreneurship is perceived as a good career choice and prevalent media attention, are investigated as equal contributor to women entrepreneurship rates.

The findings suggest, that – in order to overcome the deep-rooted structural constraints women face- policy makers need to address trainings and educational programs which enable women to not only (1) improve their entrepreneurial skills but also the (2) perceptions of their skills, (3) develop more appropriate networks and mentoring relationships, and (4) re-assign domestic work. This approach shifts the attention of policy makers away from generic constraints in the ecosystem or framework conditions towards the individual, hence the woman entrepreneur herself which intensifies the impact any policy might have.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurship; Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM); entrepreneurial skills

Executive summary

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) reached a major milestone by implementing the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) at the end of 2015 with the overall purpose to build a region with “sustained economic growth, accompanied by lasting peace, security and stability as well as shared prosperity and social progress”(ILO & ADB, 2014). Both policy makers and academics agree that entrepreneurs and their businesses as stakeholders in the economy play a pivotal role in the development and well-being of their societies with gender gaps adding up to income losses of 30 percent and an average loss of 17.5 percent for a country in the long term (Teignier & Cuberes, 2014).

In contrast to the world average, the participation of women in business ownership is relatively high in the region (OECD, 2017; Schwab et al., 2016), ranging from 69 percent of firms with female participation in ownership in the Philippines, over 59 percent in Viet Nam to 43 percent in Indonesia (Xavier, Sidin, Guelich, & Nawangpalupi, 2016). An estimated 61.3 million women entrepreneurs own and operate businesses in the ten member countries, accounting for 9.8 percent of the total ASEAN population (ADB, 2014a; UNESCAP, 2017). Out of these women entrepreneurs, ILO and ADB (2014) project a sizable increase for street and market salespersons, an area with high rates of informal employment and micro/small entrepreneurship, particularly for women.

One of ASEAN’s outstanding features and contributing to the high women entrepreneurship rates is the existence of a high female to male TEA¹ ratio in at least five of its member countries: 1.3 in the Philippines and Vietnam, 1.2 in Thailand, and 1.0 in Indonesia and Malaysia (D. Kelley, Singer, & Herrington, 2016) suggesting common socially supportive cultures, which also relate to the overall levels and the quality of entrepreneurship (Stephan & Uhlaner, 2010).

On the other hand, women in some ASEAN countries also experience some of the highest fear of failure rates, spearheaded by Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia, where more than 50 percent of the women entrepreneurs fear to fail with a tendency to limit themselves to less innovativeness, lower growth expectations and fewer investments.

This study explores influencing factors for female start-up and young business rates in Thailand and four ASEAN countries Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam by utilizing Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) data. GEM assesses the level of start-up activity or the prevalence of nascent firms as the prevalence of new or young firms that have survived start-up. In contrast to other data sources, GEM also captures informal activity, which is extensive within ASEAN. We explore, if perceptions of entrepreneurial skills and opportunities or networking with other entrepreneurs can positively support start-up rates and how cultural support and attributes towards entrepreneurs, such as entrepreneurship as a good career choice and media attention, help contribute to entrepreneurship rates, especially to quality entrepreneurship.

¹ Total early-stage entrepreneurial activity (startups and young businesses up to 42 months)

1. Background

Women entrepreneurs are comparatively more affected than their male counterparts (ADB, 2014b; AsiaPacificEconomicFoundation, 2013) by opportunities and challenges in the context of AEC. Challenges include individual constraining factors such as low levels of entrepreneurial skills as external factors with restricted access to finance, lack of market information, and the prevalence of general administrative procedures and regulations. At all levels of economic activity, women in the region are clustered in sectors that limit their mobility and restrict them to lower productivity, more often than men leading to operations in informal sectors (UNESCAP, 2017). On the other hand, various studies suggest that countries with greater levels of gender equality –as is the case in the five surveyed ASEAN countries- are generally more competitive and prosperous (Gonzales, Jain-Chandra, Kochhar, & Newiak, 2015; Razavi, 2012; WorldBank, 2011). Motives for starting a business can be to perceive a business opportunity or an improvement of one’s own conditions or simply having no better option for work. Being pushed into entrepreneurship out of necessity tends to lead to less sustainable business conditions than actively pursuing opportunities (Xavier et al., 2016). Overall, women in ASEAN are more likely than men to be pushed into entrepreneurship with 27 percent versus 19 percent for their male counterparts.

1.1 Fear of failure

According to Deniz, Boz, and Ertosun (2011), fear as a strong emotion can hinder progress toward goals’ achievement and thus limits innovation in products, services and processes. Positive and negative emotions significantly decrease time and resource allocation of entrepreneurs to exploit new opportunities and to innovate (Grichnik, 2008). Fear of failure can act as a motive to avoid disappointment (Carsrud & Brännback, 2011) and is a perceptual variable in the decision process influencing an individual’s start-up decisions (Arenius & Minniti, 2005; Welp, Spörrle, Grichnik, Michl, & Audretsch, 2012). It is closely related to uncertainty and risk-taking and therefore an important constraining factor for entrepreneurial activity, especially for start-ups (Caliendo, et al., 2009). The sense of fear shapes an individual’s attitude and beliefs in the entrepreneurial process (Cacciotti & Hayton, 2014; Wood & Rowe, 2011) which eventually influences the outcome of the intentions.

From a gender perspective, women in general and in Thailand and Vietnam specifically experience higher fear of failure rates than their male counterparts and tend to be deterred from growing their businesses by their fear (Guelich, 2014; UNESCAP, 2017; Xavier, Guelich, Kew, Nawangpalupi, & Velasco, 2015). Especially prevalent in the more collectivistic societies of Southeast Asia, the fear to “lose face” is a present constraint, and failure is a stigma in many societies, reflecting socio-cultural attitudes, values and perceptions, mirroring a wide range of inequalities constraining women in entrepreneurship: lack of access to resources and infrastructure, additional household responsibilities and limitations in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. In business, entrepreneurs who fear to fail might limit themselves to less innovativeness, lower growth expectations and fewer investments.

1.2 The role of business networks or knowing other entrepreneurs

In Asian countries and Thailand specifically, social networking in order to access resources is an important business success factor (Chittithaworn, et al., 2011). Knowledge transfer tend to be more successful through informal channels than official attempts of technology transfer (Belton, 2012). With different constraints, entrepreneurial networks change and firms strategically adapt them to receive access to newly relevant resources and information for their entrepreneurial progress and success (Greve & Salaff, 2003). Entrepreneurial networks not only provide access to tangible resources like

finance but also to intangible resources, such as knowledge, advice and external skills, all of which add competencies and thus reduce uncertainties for future entrepreneurs. First-hand information from other recent start-ups helps to deliver a clearer picture of the so far uncertain future for the potential entrepreneur. In addition, gender affects the entrepreneur's access to a network, its composition and effectiveness (Blake & Hanson, 2005) and makes it less accessible for women entrepreneurs (ADB, 2013). Both genders use their networks for opportunity recognition, but differ significantly in the process itself. For all entrepreneurs, challenges change over time and –as a result- their networks change through the phases of their “business life cycle” (DeTienne & Chandler, 2007). Women entrepreneurs overall tend to have smaller networks than male entrepreneurs (Blake & Hanson, 2005). The female network is targeted preferably at family and spouses within their personal relationships and private environment, whereas men -despite also using this network- tend to seek advice mainly from their friends. Moreover, men use additional network resources like their work environment or professional advisors (D. Kelley, Bosma, & Amorós, 2011). No gender differences prevail in entrepreneurial networks' density, business relations, proportion of emotional support relations and in their total network size, but women tend to have more females and more kin in their networks than men do (Dunbar & Spoors, 1995; Klyver & Terjesen, 2007).

1.3 Entrepreneurial opportunity recognition and skills

The ability to identify and to access opportunities is regarded as an important entrepreneurial capability (DeTienne & Chandler, 2007; Hanson & Blake, 2009; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). The perception of one's own entrepreneurial skills has a significant effect on entrepreneurial intentions with a more favorable own skills perception leading to higher entrepreneurial intentions (UNCTAD, 2013).

Previous studies suggest that entrepreneurship may still be perceived as a “male” field, and that women may have lower entrepreneurial aspirations because of their own perceptions of entrepreneurial skills and abilities (AsiaFoundation, 2012). Contradicting discussions about the impact of entrepreneurship education imply on the one hand, that entrepreneurship education can increasingly close the existing gender gap in entrepreneurial activities, however also, that it does not have the intended effect to actually increase entrepreneurial intentions and activities (ThailandToday, 2015). Gender differences prevail especially in an individual's perceptions, and more men than women believe to have sufficient knowledge, skills and experience to start a new business (McKinsey, 2014). This could stem from actually existing differences in entrepreneurial skills between men and women (WorldBank, 2012) or from different apperceptions (ADB, 2010; Mengleng & Vrieze, 2009; UnitedNations, retrieved May 30, 2015; WorldBank, 2009).

1.4 Media, status and respect – influencers of the entrepreneurial ecosystem:

Media reports on entrepreneurship are commonly regarded as a major influential factor on a wide range of entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors (ADB, 2011, 2014a, 2014b). ADB (2012) suggest that especially mass media communication might be able to foster entrepreneurial intentions, but cannot shape or alter individuals' perceptions in this regard. Part of the ecosystem is the media outreach about women entrepreneurs which consistently covers fewer female than male entrepreneurs (AmCham Singapore & US Chamber of Commerce, 2015; Xavier et al., 2016). Women entrepreneurs in the Asian region are more regarded as “silent contributors” to the economy, being largely unnoticed by the public and the media (WorldBank, 2017).

2. Research Methodology

Utilizing Global Entrepreneurship (GEM) data from 2015 from the five ASEAN countries, regression analysis is used to answer the question, which factors impact entrepreneurship rates and how Thailand differs from the other countries. The total number of the respondents was N=14,620, with Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam each N=2,000, Thailand N=3,000 and Indonesia N=5,620. Dependent variable was TEA and independent variables were: (1) knowing another entrepreneur, perceptions of (2) opportunity, (3) skills, (4) fear to fail, (5) entrepreneurship as desirable career choice, (6) high levels of status and respect and (7) media attention for entrepreneurs.

3. Key findings

There seems to be a pattern in the region that women entrepreneurs are positively influenced in their start-up activities by their own perceived skills similar to their male counterparts (Table 1). However, other influencing factors vary by country and gender: The case of Thailand for women entrepreneurs in this study significantly differs from the findings for male entrepreneurs. Contrary to other ASEAN countries and their male counterparts, Thai women entrepreneurs tend to be positively influenced only by the perception of their own entrepreneurial skillset (.162/.000), similar to Malaysian female entrepreneurs (.169/.000). For Thai women, this perception alone might trigger them off to start and run a business, whereas Thai men are additionally influenced by entrepreneurial networks, perceived opportunities and media attention for entrepreneurs. Similar to Thailand, Malaysian women –and men– are solely influenced by perceived skills, while women in Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam are enabled by the same additional factors as the Thai men.

Table 1: Regression analysis of influencing factors on female versus male TEA*

		<i>Indonesia</i>		<i>Malaysia</i>		<i>Philippines</i>		<i>Thailand</i>		<i>Vietnam</i>	
		<i>Beta</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
desirable career choice	female	.024	.287	.041	.243	-.029	.360	.015	.589	.019	.547
	male	-.003	.912	.040	.219	.035	.371	.025	.373	-.017	.605
high level of status and respect	female	.027	.235	-.058	.119	.040	.202	.035	.217	.038	.226
	male	.039	.080	-.090	.007	.021	.592	-.007	.802	-.003	.919
public media	female	-.017	.456	.056	.111	-.003	.919	.022	.397	.049	.122
	male	.030	.185	.022	.469	-.023	.547	.079	.003	-.004	.893
know another entrepreneur	female	.061	.008	.051	.139	.085	.011	.053	.059	.087	.006
	male	.033	.149	.024	.452	.064	.128	.069	.013	.097	.004
opportunities	female	.108	.000	.036	.312	.205	.000	.044	.125	.093	.003
	male	.097	.000	.060	.068	.218	.000	.089	.001	.065	.052
skills	female	.125	.000	.169	.000	.148	.000	.162	.000	.175	.000
	male	.132	.000	.168	.000	.149	.000	.149	.000	.139	.000
fear of failure	female	-.031	.177	-.017	.621	-.002	.942	.012	.650	.069	.031
	male	-.050	.024	-.018	.569	-.037	.313	-.041	.130	-.047	.161

* *highlighted in blue for female entrepreneurs, highlighted in grey for male entrepreneurs*

However, Thai women's skill perception in itself is only regarded as adequate by 39.8 percent of the women entrepreneurs, lower than in most other ASEAN countries and lower than for their male counterparts (Table 2). In a comparison between the five countries, Thai women entrepreneurs score poorly in three more categories: knowing another entrepreneur who started businesses (female 30.9 percent versus male 35.8 percent); opportunity perception (female 39.8 percent versus male 44.0 percent) and entrepreneurial skill perception (female 42.5 percent versus male 50.9 percent).

Table 2: Prevalence of influencing factors for female and male TEA entrepreneurs in the five countries

		<i>Indonesia</i>	<i>Malaysia</i>	<i>Philippines</i>	<i>Thailand</i>	<i>Vietnam</i>
desirable career choice	female	73.6%	37.8%	77.5%	70.1%	74.0%
	male	73.8%	40.1%	73.1%	71.1%	72.6%
high level of status and respect	female	80.6%	51.2%	76.3%	70.3%	78.1%
	male	81.4%	49.8%	76.9%	68.0%	73.3%
public media	female	79.7%	62.2%	86.3%	73.3%	73.3%
	male	79.7%	66.4%	80.1%	71.7%	73.8%
know another entrepreneur	female	68.5%	31.9%	44.4%	30.9%	64.3%
	male	73.2%	41.2%	49.0%	35.8%	65.3%
opportunities	female	52.6%	25.9%	55.5%	39.8%	56.1%
	male	50.6%	29.2%	54.3%	44.0%	57.7%
skills	female	64.9%	25.4%	70.2%	42.5%	54.7%
	male	67.1%	28.2%	66.3%	50.9%	59.1%
fear of failure	female	52.6%	32.6%	39.4%	55.6%	53.1%
	male	48.5%	30.0%	34.5%	47.4%	51.1%

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The particular challenge to fostering women entrepreneurship in Thailand and ASEAN as a vital part of the agenda of ASEAN is to find the relevant supporting factors for their start-up entrepreneurship rates. Even though female participation in TEA is high, Thai women entrepreneurs are mostly concentrated in micro, small and partly medium-sized enterprises in low value-added, lower-skilled retail and service businesses, particularly at the micro level in the informal sector (Xavier et al., 2016). In addition, women's limited access to quality jobs, causes a loss in economic growth to the Asia-Pacific region of around 42 to 47 billion USD annually (UNESCO & KWDI, 2013)

4.1 Entrepreneurship education: Entrepreneurial skillsets

There seems to be a pattern in the region that women entrepreneurs are positively influenced in their start-up activities by their own perceived skills, confirming previous findings of DeTienne and Chandler (2007), Hanson and Blake (2009) and Shane and Venkataraman (2000). With reference to the high female TEA rates in the region, the influence of the skill perception however is only relatively small, thus not supporting Linan (2008), whose findings suggest that higher entrepreneurial intentions and start-up rates would result from a more favorable own skills perception. Especially in Thailand, women entrepreneurs have one of the lowest skill perception rates in the region, lower only for Malaysian entrepreneurs. Despite this low perception however, women are highly represented as entrepreneurs. In education, science gaps between men and women have increasingly narrowed (OECD, 2017) with potential for future positive returns if the underlying constraints are addressed as well. "This poses a conundrum, particularly in the innovation-driven group: Most women do not think they are capable of starting a business, but those who do start one are likely to have a college or greater level of education. It suggests that higher education does little to prepare women or instill confidence in their business-creation abilities (Kelley et al, 2017, p.43). With skills' perception being the sole

influencer for Thai female entrepreneurs, an important starting point for action of policy makers and other stakeholders is made visible.

- Developing entrepreneurial skills through training and education to increase Thai women's relatively low skill perception rate might positively influence their future way of starting-up or operating their businesses with a positive impact on the quality of Thai women entrepreneurship.

4.2 Entrepreneurship education: Fear of failure

Despite a high fear of failure rate compared to other countries across the globe, the prevalent fear to fail does not hinder entrepreneurial start-up activities per se. Closely related to uncertainty and risk-taking (Caliendo et al., 2009), the fear to fail might however influence the way entrepreneurs in the ASEAN region operate their businesses, limit their growth expectations and their internationalization of businesses or impacts the choice of business sector in which they start up, confirming Welpel et al (2012). Since a sense of fear shapes an individual's attitude and beliefs in the entrepreneurial process with influence on the outcome (Cacciotti & Hayton, 2014; Wood & Rowe, 2011), individuals might deviate to less challenging assignments in situations of high-perceived risk and might give fewer efforts to challenging tasks and seek easy routes leading to less important entrepreneurial outcomes.

- Training and education in entrepreneurship capacities could lower the high fear of failure rate and lead to quality entrepreneurship with more innovativeness, growth expectations and investments.

4.3 Entrepreneurship ecosystem: Culture

It is important to know, if women entrepreneurs really face gender-specific challenges in setting up a business compared to their male counterparts. Previous research indicates particular differences in the ability to mobilize resources, including financial, social and human capital (ASEAN, 2004, 2013). The results above highlight that women entrepreneurs in Thailand require slightly different support systems than their male counterparts and different attention from policy makers than women in neighboring countries. Apparently it is not enough, that stakeholders in the ecosystem perceive entrepreneurship as a positive cultural aspect; even though this can be a supportive element, it does not trigger female start-up rates in the respective countries.

- Gender-specific approach and support in start-up activities, especially in rural areas.

4.4 Entrepreneurship ecosystem: Business networks

The measures laid out in the AEC Blueprint 2025 are expected to affect the prospects for small and medium-sized businesses and their growth in various ways. Best prospects for start-up activities and business success are forecast for entrepreneurs with good business networks and partnerships (WorldBank, 2014), a field in which Thai female entrepreneurs underperform. Besides facing constraints to develop key business skills, women entrepreneurs in ASEAN also lack the opportunity to access entrepreneurial networks, often due to additional domestic work duties (UNESCAP, 2017).

- Develop supportive and easy-to-access entrepreneurial networks to foster financial, social and human capital for women entrepreneurs.

4.5 Government role in facilitating female quality entrepreneurship

As the findings have shown, there is no single solution to foster quality TEA rates in Thailand and surrounding countries. An important policy approach to improve women entrepreneurship is to focus on removing constraining barriers for women in starting up or operating their businesses. This requires policy makers and support organizations to have a clear focus on the specific requirements for successful entrepreneurship of women (ILO & ADB, 2014) to create adequate political and socio-economic framework conditions – rather with better comprehensible and verifiable measurements than just with improvements in the ecosystem to facilitate better access to resources.

Quality entrepreneurship for women includes:

- Availability of childcare services
- Entrepreneurship training education with the development of entrepreneurial skills.
- Facilitation of the fear to fail, which will positively affect these emerging economies by increasing revenues of women entrepreneurs, their job creation potential, expanding women's contributions to their community and facilitating informed leadership styles (Soans & Abe, 2015; UNESCAP, 2013).
- Investment to improve skills and skills' perceptions of women entrepreneurs, since projected changes in ASEAN as the result of the AEC include high growth expectations for semi- to high-skilled occupations.
- A barrier-focused approach towards women entrepreneurship appears to be able to remove the barriers women face through own individual action.

Despite the need to also change and remove deep-rooted socio-cultural constraints women face, we suggest that it is necessary, that policy makers and all stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem create the supportive environment for women, that enables them to train or educate themselves better as a faster step which is easier to achieve and a milestone on the way to change the society:

- (1) improve women entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial skills AND
- (2) the perceptions of their skills,
- (3) develop more appropriate networks and mentoring relationships
- (4) re-assign domestic work.

This approach shifts the attention of policy makers away from constraints in the ecosystem or framework conditions towards the empowerment of the individual, hence the woman entrepreneur herself which intensifies the impact any supportive policy might have.

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