

Women's Economic Empowerment in the Pacific: Presentation of Key Findings

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Presentation overview



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Questions



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Key Findings



Research Gaps



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Research Questions

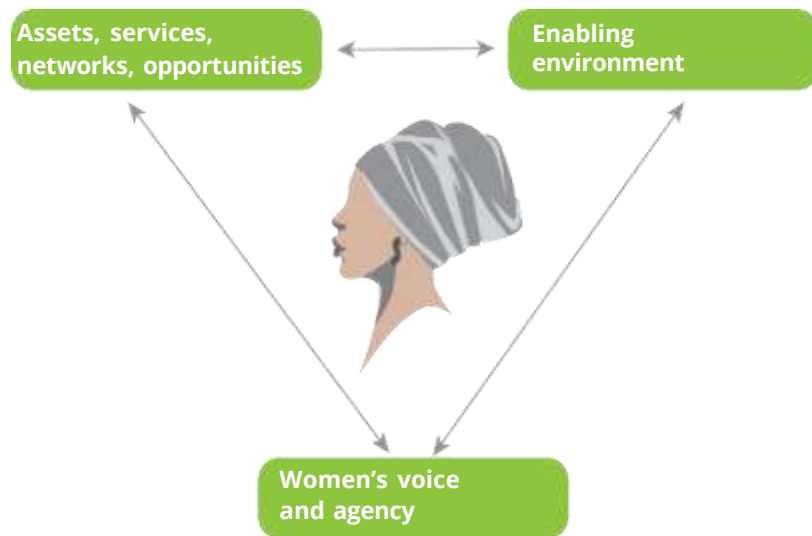
Review of the state of knowledge on women's economic empowerment in the Pacific, focusing on women entrepreneurs and women-owned MSMEs in the formal and informal economies

- Status and trends in women's economic empowerment in the Pacific
- How women are owning, formalizing, and expanding their businesses
- The association between women's economic empowerment and violence against women and girls
- Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's economic empowerment
- Key evidence gaps on women's economic empowerment in the Pacific



Methodology

Women's Economic Empowerment: Conceptual Framework



Source: Calder (2019) cited in Hearle et al. (2020).

Methodological approach

Stage 1: Scan

200+
publications

11 quantitative
databases

- Literature covered from 2010, in English language, peer-reviewed and grey literature.

Stage 2: Evidence Mapping

- Literature coded into an Excel matrix template, with columns correlated to research questions.

Stage 3: Report Writing

- Evidence synthesized under each research question.

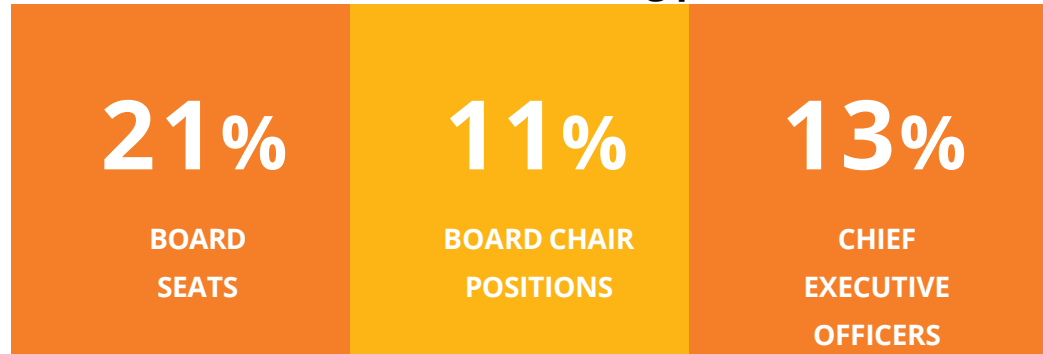


Key findings



Current status and trends in women's economic empowerment

- Women's **labor force participation** remains low, varying from 84% in Solomon Islands to 34% in Samoa.
- Women face poor working conditions, risks of sexual harassment and abuse, and limited collective bargaining voice. Women are **more likely to live in poverty** as a result.
- Women have **less decision-making power** than men.

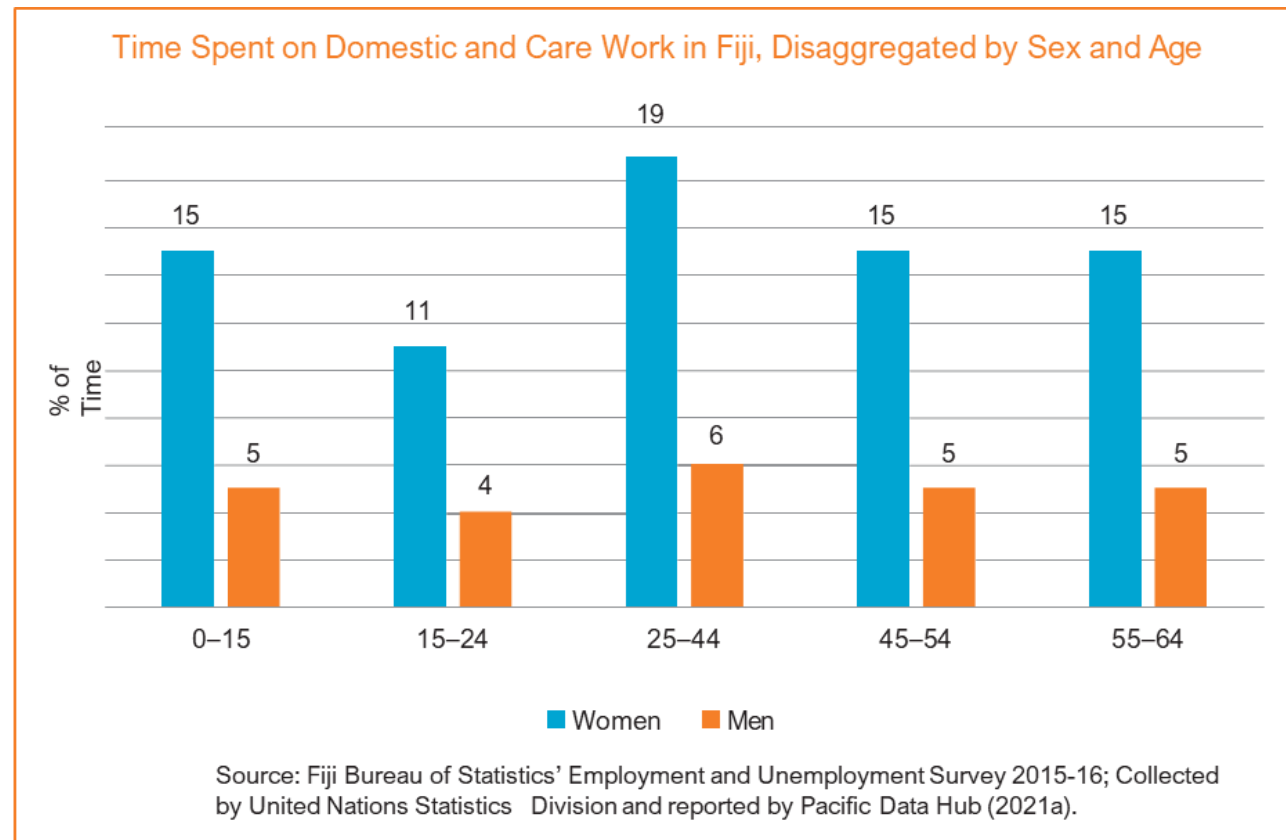


- Many Pacific Island countries have laws protecting women's rights, **but legal and policy gaps and barriers persist.**
 - Many women are excluded from **inheritance rights to customary lands.**
 - Laws mandating equal pay and prohibiting sexual harassment at work **the least enacted.**



Current status and trends in women's economic empowerment

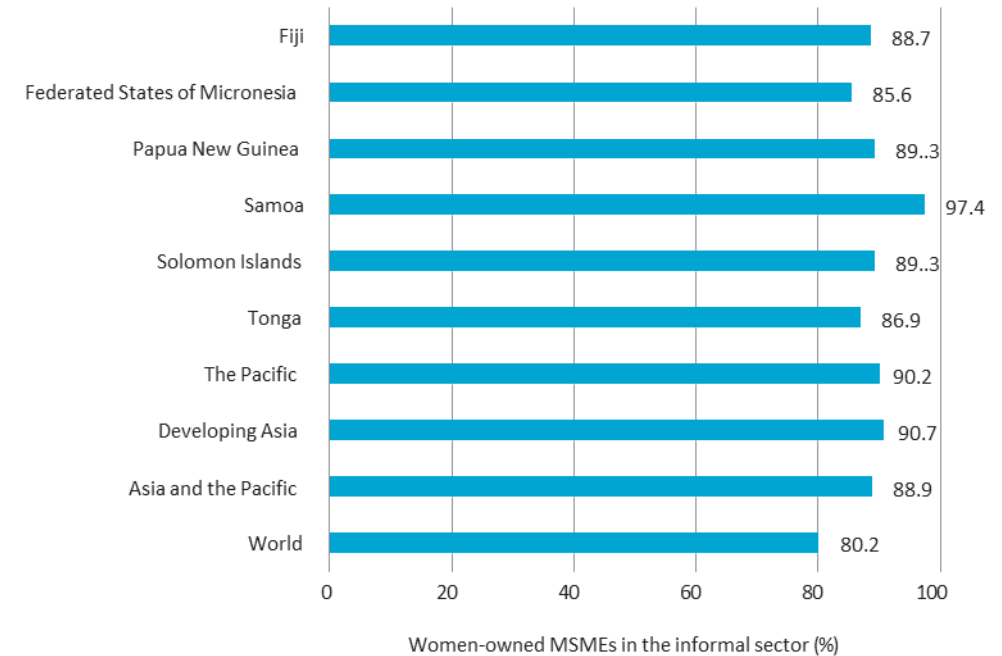
- Women carry an **unequal burden** of unpaid domestic and care work. Access to **affordable and quality childcare** is a key barrier for women and working parents.
- **Unequal access** to training, job opportunities and finance. Access to assets, finance and services is **limited by sociocultural norms**.
- Productivity is lowered by **poor infrastructure coverage and maintenance**, particularly for women in remote areas.
- Pacific women, especially those in remote areas, have **lower levels of access to digital technology** than men despite strong evidence of its potential to improve business outcomes.
- Pacific women are more likely to experience the **negative effects of climate change** and less likely to have access to resources and information to adapt and respond.



How women are owning, formalizing, and expanding their businesses

- Women predominate in the **informal economy**, in low productivity jobs, and in the lower segments of the informal work hierarchy, as **unpaid domestic and care workers**.
- Women's entrepreneurship is common in the Pacific region. Female ownership remains most prevalent in **family-run, smaller, and informal firms**.
- Women's businesses are disproportionately represented in **informal and MSME sectors**. 90.2% of Pacific women-owned MSMEs are in the **informal sector**.
- The percentage of **women-owned micro-firms** ranges from 9% in Fiji to 66.3% in Tonga. Most Pacific island countries have between **40% and 49%** of micro-sized firms owned by women.
- Women-owned businesses are concentrated in industries that **experience intense competition and generate lower returns**, in agriculture and in the services sector in retail, restaurants, hospitality and tourism, and handicrafts.

Percentage of Women-Owned MSMEs in the Informal Sector



MSME = micro, small, and medium-sized enterprise.

Note: Statistics do not include the Marshall Islands; Myanmar; Nauru; Palau; Taipei, China; Tuvalu; and Vanuatu.

Source: International Finance Corporation Enterprise Finance Gap Database (accessed April 2019) cited in ADB (2019).



How women are owning, formalizing, and expanding their businesses

Reasons for Remaining in the Informal Sector

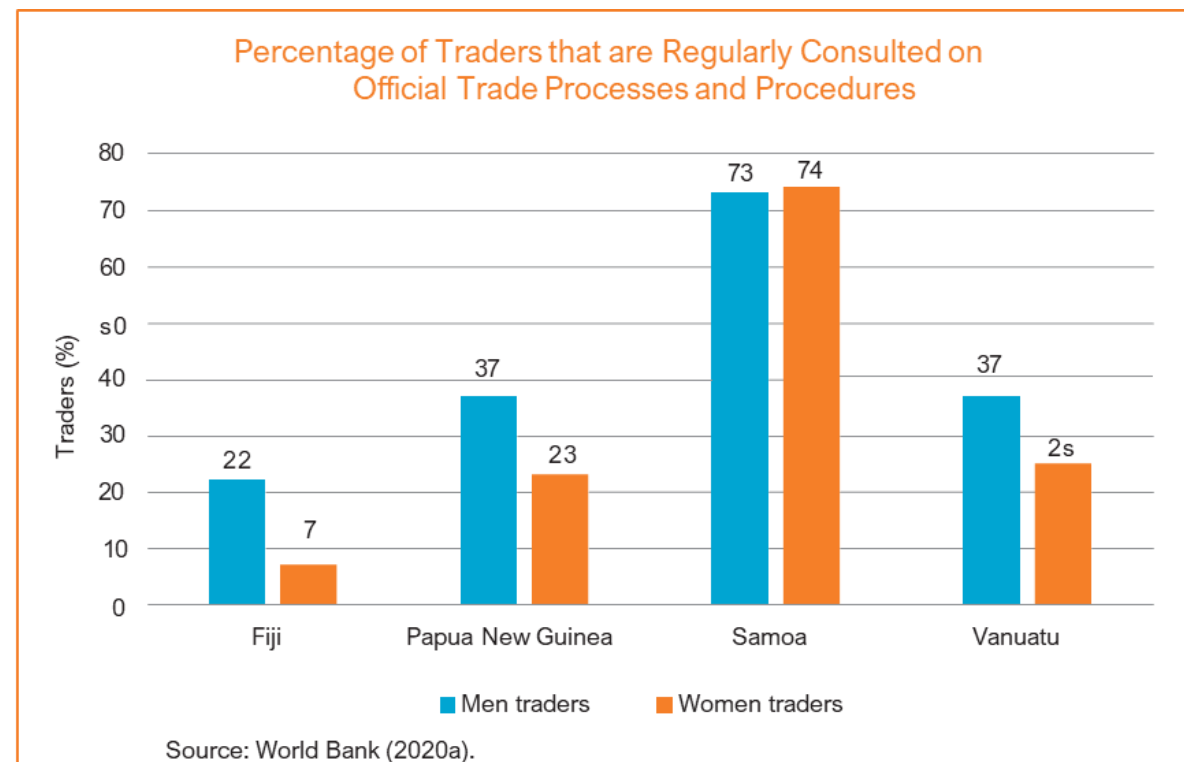
- Flexibility in managing multiple responsibilities, including **unpaid care work**.
- **Compliance costs** associated with labour regulations, taxes, and license fees.
- Lack of awareness of **the formalization process**.
- Limited access to **regulatory authorities** in remote areas.
- Difficulties in accessing opportunities and markets due to **geographical remoteness and lack of infrastructure**.
- Demands from **family and community** for money when in paid work.
- **Formal business structures** may not suit women currently operating in the informal economy.

Barriers to Expansion and Formalization of Women-Owned Businesses



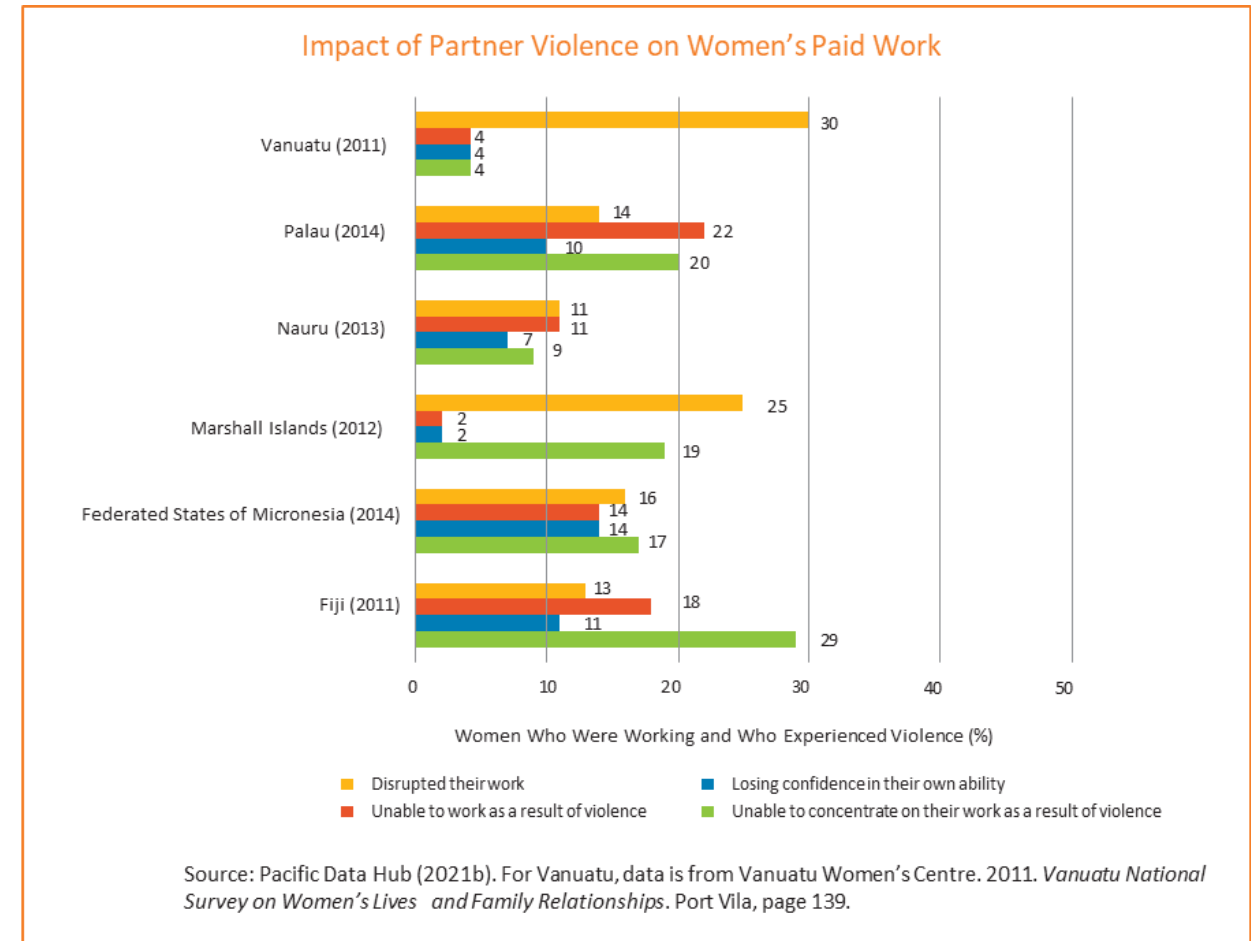
How women are owning, formalizing, and expanding their businesses

- **A weak enabling environment** for promoting business and entrepreneurship disproportionately impacts women.
- Women in business are **less likely to be consulted** for their views in legislative and reform processes.
- **Information on the impact** of access to finance, digital technology and other resources on women's businesses is limited, but **access to finance initiatives** have brought positive outcomes.
- **Digital processes** are the most widely cited positive change in the enabling environment. For example, women can **apply for a business license** via traditional paper-based forms or through an online system.
- Emerging evidence of potential benefit of **gender-responsive procurement** but few countries have policy or legislative frameworks that explicitly support or actively promote it.
- There are a wide variety of **women's business networks** in the Pacific. Due to **capacity and funding gaps** their remit is mainly around building assets, capabilities, and opportunities for women.



The association between women's economic empowerment and violence against women and girls

- Rates of VAWG across the Pacific region are among **the highest in the world**, though prevalence differs widely between countries.
- Economic abuse is prevalent in the Pacific region, negatively impacting women's economic empowerment by **impeding their control over economic assets** and ability to make business decisions.
- Partner violence **impacts women's income generation**. In Fiji, almost half of women who experienced violence said their work was **disrupted in some way**.
- Economic empowerment can be **a risk factor for intimate partner violence** but can also enable women to **leave an abusive relationship**.
 - There is some evidence that **women's increasing income** is correlated with increased intimate partner violence.
 - Economic empowerment can also **enable women to leave a violent relationship**, requiring careful design of interventions to **mitigate the risk** of increased partner violence or retaliation.



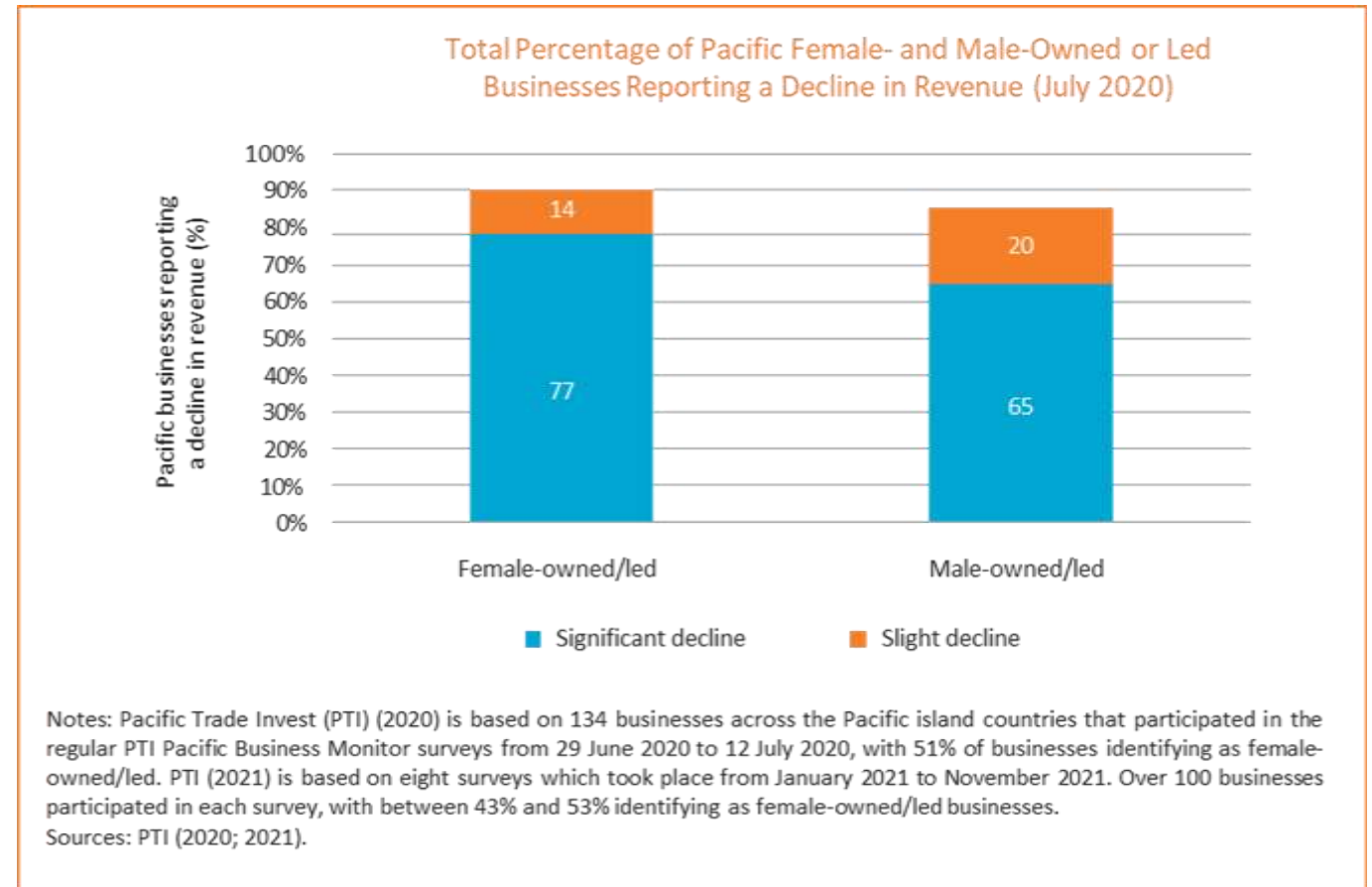
The association between women's economic empowerment and violence against women and girls

- Women workers and entrepreneurs face violence and harassment which can **restrict their income-generating activities**.
- Marketplaces can be unsafe, especially **open markets in urban areas**.
- When employees experience violence at home, there is a **high cost to businesses**.
- There is an absence of comprehensive legislation on gender-based violence, particularly **sexual harassment in the workplace**, across the region.
- Businesses and women's business networks play a key role in **awareness and support** to address violence against women and girls.
- **Effective interventions** promote women's economic empowerment and address gender-based violence simultaneously.
- Interventions **partnering with the private sector** are effective in addressing violence experienced by women workers.
- Development partners are increasingly focused on the **unintended risks** of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment in their projects



Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's economic empowerment

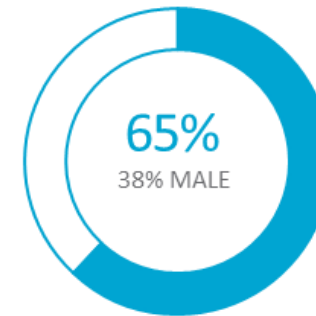
- Women-owned MSMEs have been **worse affected by the pandemic** than male-owned businesses, especially those which are newer and have more than 5 employees.
- There is mixed evidence on the effects of COVID-19 on women entrepreneurs and workers **in the informal economy**.
- Women entrepreneurs experienced increases in **unpaid care work**.
- COVID-19 worsened **pre-existing gendered barriers in access to finance** for women entrepreneurs. During the pandemic, women owned businesses were more likely to **need financial support**.



Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's economic empowerment

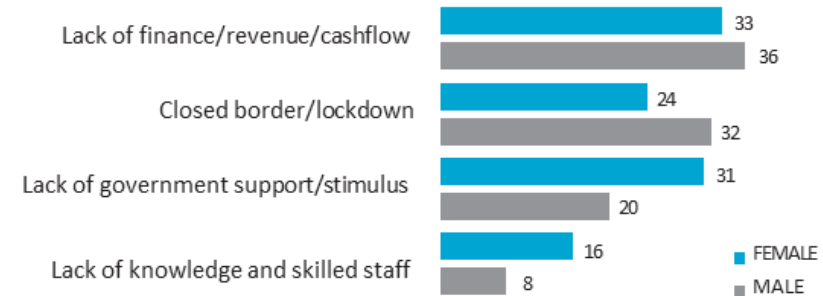
- Women-owned MSMEs struggled to access COVID-19 **government support packages**.
- There were promising examples of COVID-19 support for women entrepreneurs e.g. through **one-off payments**, though these were often insufficient to meet their needs and **evidence is not available** on their impact.
- Government stimulus packages for women-owned MSMEs focused on credit, thereby excluding many **women-owned businesses in the informal economy**.

Barriers to Accessing Initiatives to Support Businesses (July 2020)



BARRIERS TO ACTIONING INITIATIVES

Of female-owned/led business, 65% reported that barriers are preventing them from actioning initiatives to support their business, nearly double that of male-owned/led businesses (38%)



Source: PTI (2020).



Lessons learned from development partner programs

Development Partner Programs

- DFAT's Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (2012–2021)
- DFAT's Market Development Facility (2011–2022)
- ADB's Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (2007–present)
- DFAT's Pacific Readiness for Investment in Social Enterprise (RISE) (2016–2021)
- DFAT-funded, UN Women and UNDP implemented Markets for Change (2014–2020)

Lessons Learned

- **Strategic public-private partnerships** can lead to improvements in women's working conditions and can be effective in scaling up provision of financial services and women-targeted products.
- Disrupting **harmful social norms** is important for women's economic empowerment. Promising approaches have emphasized the need for **local groups to lead the change**.
- The **"family teams" approach**, which encourages male and female family members to work together, can lead to more gender-equitable outcomes.
- Integrating women's leadership development in financial inclusion initiatives can increase **women's confidence and skills** resulting in greater community support.
- It is important to **engage with male leaders** to build support for women's financial inclusion initiatives such as women's savings clubs.
- **Mobile banking services** can increase women's independence, privacy, control, and decision-making.



Research Gaps & Recommendations



Research Gaps

- Status and trends of women-owned MSMEs and women entrepreneurs **in islands with smaller populations** (Cook Islands, Niue, RMI, Palau, Tuvalu)
- Women's economic empowerment status and trends for women from groups that have **historically been marginalized**, such as people with disabilities.
- Forms of support to women-owned businesses to become more **resilient to climate change**
- Effectiveness of **government stimulus and support packages** aimed at women-owned businesses and women entrepreneurs
- Incentives for **business formalization** and the entry points and mechanisms for expansion of formal businesses
- Interconnections between women's economic empowerment and **violence against women and girls**.
- Strategies to **influence social norms** on women's roles in business.
- Social protection for **workers in the informal economy**, including women-owned informal micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises



Recommendations - Policy



- Ratify ILO Convention No. 190 on **violence and harassment in the world of work** and adopt and enforce sexual harassment legislation and policies in employment.
- Reform tax, finance, and licensing policies and systems to remove barriers and disincentives for **women-owned businesses to formalize**.
- Enact **parental leave policies** to contribute to changing social norms.
- **Introduce childcare policies** to help women who manage their own businesses, or those who want to return to, or stay at work after having children.
- **Incentivize gender-responsive procurement processes** in the public and private sector.
- Regulators, such as central banks or banking authorities, to require **sex-disaggregated data** to be collected, publicly released and reported.



Recommendations - Program

- Encourage financial institutions to accept **non-land assets as collateral** and increase uptake of secured transaction frameworks.
- Develop and implement targeted measures to help self-employed women **restart their businesses** that collapsed or are in “survival mode” because of challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises and shocks.
- Invest in evidence-based programming to **shift harmful social norms that sustain violence** against women and girls in the world of work, focusing on women entrepreneurs and women-owned micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises.
- Building on good practice and experience in the Pacific, work with banks to **adjust risk assessment criteria and models** in favor of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises and informal businesses and ensure that financial products and services are adapted to women clients.
- Support in-country stakeholders to **disrupt social norms** that act as barriers to women’s business and work with men and boys to support women’s economic empowerment.



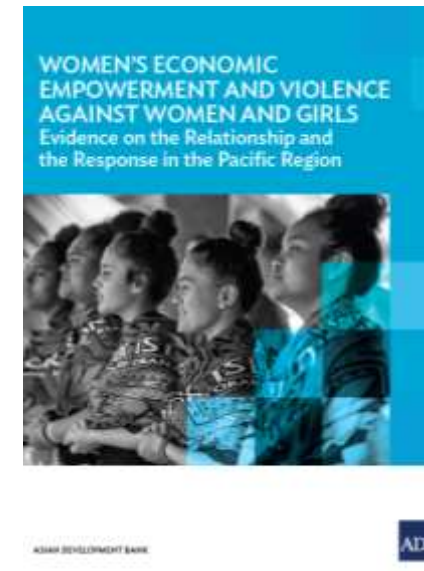
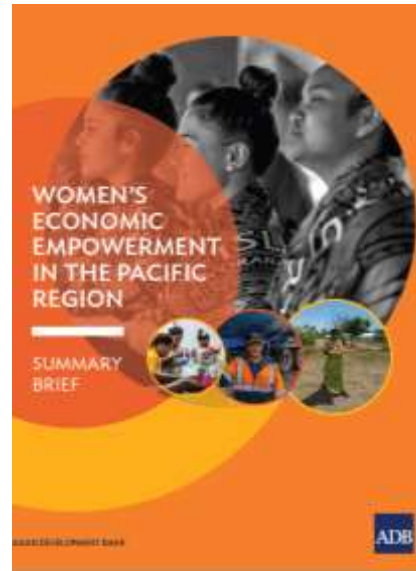
Recommendations - Program



- Develop the **unpaid and paid care provider economy and infrastructure**, to support quality and affordable care services.
- Fund **women's business networks** in the region and increase their capacity to engage in more diverse activities.
- Leverage **digital access and increase access to mobile phones** for women, accompanied with skills building on digital literacy and scale up promising initiatives.
- Partner with the private sector to address violence experienced by **women workers in the formal sector**.
- Mobilize capital for **women-owned businesses** by encouraging financial intermediaries to increase the % of loans meeting 2X Challenge criteria
- Work with technical and vocational education and training and other educational institutions to increase availability and accessibility of **business and entrepreneurship courses** for women and increase their capacity to be adequately equipped for work



Thank you!



<https://www.adb.org/publications/women-economic-empowerment-pacific-region>

