



Addressing
Gender Barriers to
Entrepreneurship and
Leadership Among Girls
and Young Women in
South-East Asia



Citi Foundation



Acknowledgements

This report was commissioned by the UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office and the UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub under the Youth Co:Lab initiative co-led by UNDP and the Citi Foundation.

The research was conducted and consolidated by Ayush Chauhan, Aditya Prakash, Chitrangna Dewan, Mallika Vaznaik and Shelly Sharma from Quicksand Design Studio. Support to field research in the three focus countries was provided by researchers from Empatika (Indonesia), Lao Social Research (Lao PDR), and InsightPact (Thailand). The authors are grateful to all the research participants who gave their time to share their experiences and knowledge on this topic.

The authors are also grateful for the support and inputs provided by the country teams of UNICEF and UNDP: from Indonesia, Ticiana Garcia-Tapia, Vania Santoso and Lady Diandra; from Lao PDR, Maryam Abdu, Maria Fernandez, Vipapone Aphayvanh and Maniphet Phengsavatdy; from Thailand, Vilasa Phongsathorn, Jomkwan Kwanyuen, Nitchakan Daramatat and Kirke Kyander. The authors are also grateful to the regional teams of UNICEF and UNDP: from UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, Roshni Basu, Maida Pasic, Gerda Binder, Rachel Harvey, Allison Morris, Sol Han and Maria Dolores Picot; and from UNDP

Bangkok Regional Hub, Shamha Naseer and the team of the Youth Co:Lab initiative co-led by UNDP and the Citi Foundation. UNDP is grateful for the co-leadership and generous support of the Citi Foundation, without whom this research would not have been possible.

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Citation: UNDP and UNICEF (2021). Addressing Gender Barriers to Entrepreneurship Among Girls and Young Women in South-East Asia. Bangkok: UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub and UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office.

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About Youth Co:Lab

Co-created in 2017 by UNDP and the Citi Foundation, Youth Co:Lab aims to establish a common agenda for countries in the Asia-Pacific region to empower and invest in youth, so that they can accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through leadership, social innovation and entrepreneurship.

Learn more at youthcolab.org or follow @youthcolab

Foreword

Across Asia and the Pacific, gender inequalities continue to limit girls and women from realising their rights and their full potential. Despite some progress in recent decades, women in the region earn less than men, have lower access to resources, and remain underrepresented in economic and political leadership.

Crucially, barriers to women's empowerment do not suddenly appear in adulthood. As early as age five, girls and boys are impacted by gender socialisation. Their aspirations, the traits that they are encouraged to exhibit, and the choices made regarding their access to education and opportunities are all shaped by gender norms. Adolescent girls in Asia-Pacific do three times more domestic work than boys. This limits the time they have to build skills, knowledge, and networks outside the home.

By the time they reach adulthood, these and other barriers have layered onto one another and compounded to constrain young women's agency and to limit their economic, social, and political participation. This has huge resulting costs to women, and to their communities and societies.

Gender equality is fundamental to human rights; it is also one of the strongest drivers of inclusive growth. Currently, the COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately impacting women and girls. Conversely, it is projected that taking

actions now to increase gender equality in the recovery would add US\$13 trillion to global GDP by 2030. Through urgent interventions to shift the ecosystems around young people, we can dismantle barriers to girls' and women's empowerment and chart a gender-equal pathway beyond recovery, towards 2030.

This research was initiated to build the evidence base to guide a gender-transformative approach to youth empowerment in Asia-Pacific. Through primary research in three countries in South-East Asia (Indonesia, Lao PDR, and Thailand), the study applies an innovative human-centred approach to map the journeys of girls and young women – relative to boys and young men – to understand how their capacity and agency for entrepreneurship and leadership are shaped by their household, community, and wider ecosystem as they move from adolescence to early adulthood.

The research found that girls and young women experience significantly lower self-confidence and higher fear of failure than boys and young men; they feel that their individual needs and choices must come second to their family duties; and that their career possibilities are limited by societal pressures on appropriate roles for women. Additionally, the findings suggest that the lack of female leadership in decision-making positions and the existence of gender-blind policies and laws limit the potential for advancing gender

equality and women's empowerment.

Globally, UNICEF and UNDP are committed to working alongside every adolescent and youth, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalised, to realise their rights and their full potential. In Asia-Pacific, the two agencies have entered into a new partnership to work jointly, and together with national stakeholders, in twelve countries in the region over the Decade of Action (2020-2030) to invest in youth empowerment.

We hope that the findings of this report will serve to galvanise actions by governments, private sector, civil society, and development partners across Asia-Pacific to transform the ecosystems around adolescents and young people – particularly young girls – and to promote gender equality as the cornerstone of inclusive growth and sustainable development.

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Abbreviations & Acronyms

ADB - Asian Development Bank

ASEAN - The Associations of Southeast Asian Nations

AVPN - Asian Venture Philanthropy Network

AWEN - ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network

CEO - Chief Executive Officer

CSO - Civil Society Organisation

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

ICT - Information and Communication Technology

IFC - International Finance Corporation

ILOSTAT - The International Labour Organization
Department of Statistics

IPU - Inter-Parliamentary Union

IWAPI - Indonesian Business Women Association

IWEF - Indonesia Women Empowerment Fund

MICS - Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

MNCH - The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child
Health

MSMEs - Micro Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training

NGO - Non-governmental organisation

NTT - East Nusa Tenggara (Indonesia)

OECD - Organisation for Economic Cooperation and
Development

OECD SIGI - The OECD Development Centre's Social
Institutions and Gender Index

OTOP - One Tambom (Village) One Product

PDR - People's Democratic Republic

PISA - Programme for International Student Assessment

SDGs - The Sustainable Development Goals

SEAF - Small Enterprise Assistance Funds

SME - Small and Medium Enterprise

SSC - SME Service Center

STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

TPSA - The Technology Professional Services Association

TVET - Technical and Vocational Education and Training

UNCDF - United Nations Capital Development Fund

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNESCAP - United Nations Economic and Social
Commission for Asia and the Pacific

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

USAID - The United States Agency for International
Development

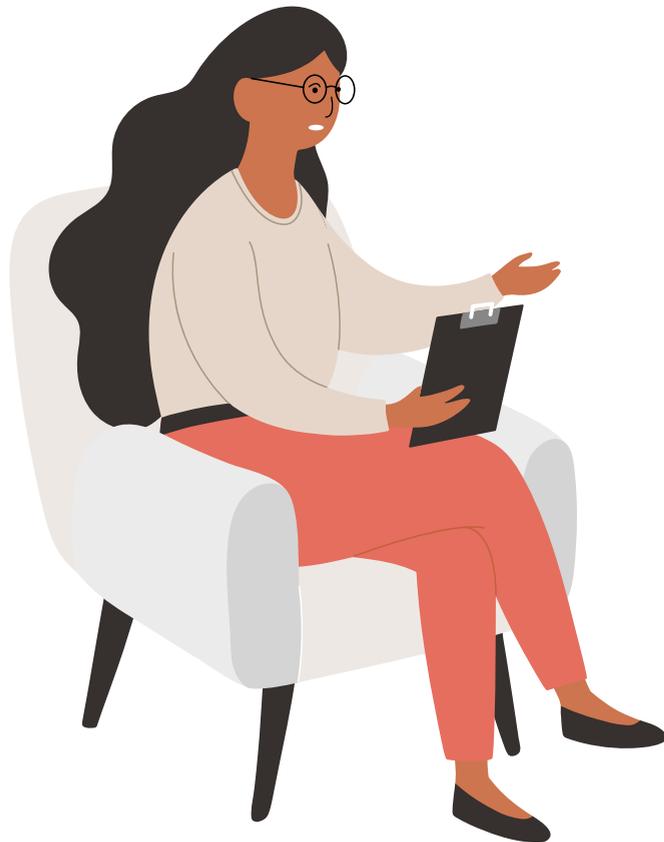
VBSP - Vietnam Bank for Social Policies

WEPS - Women's Empowerment Principles

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Executive Summary



Entrepreneurship is vital to the economic and social fabric of the countries of Asia and the Pacific. Across the region, small economic units – which comprise micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and the self-employed – are the largest contributor to GDP and the strongest driver of job creation. Entrepreneurship provides a pathway for income generation, poverty reduction, and improvements in household welfare. Small enterprises also play crucial roles in their communities. They provide the goods and services to meet local needs, and are more likely to create job opportunities for those with lower chances of finding employment. Moreover, entrepreneurship catalyses the innovation to drive productivity and to generate solutions to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, across Asia-Pacific, entrenched gender inequalities continue to constrain women's contribution to their communities and societies through entrepreneurship. While women's labour force participation rates are higher in South-East Asia compared to other parts of the world, they still remain lower than those of men. Girls and young women in the region are more likely than boys and men to not be in employment, education or training (NEET) in adolescence and early adulthood, and are less likely to access high-skilled jobs. These barriers begin at an early age, as UNICEF reports that a sizeable proportion of girls

in-school do not receive quality education; leading to gaps in skills and competencies required to thrive in the 21st century. Moreover, women are concentrated in less productive sectors with lower earnings; and women-owned enterprises lag behind their male counterparts in terms of their size, profitability, formality, scalability and resilience to shocks.

While all entrepreneurs face significant challenges, women entrepreneurs in the region face higher structural barriers as a result of discriminatory gender norms, high unpaid care burden, lower access to productive assets, more limited opportunities to develop relevant skills, constraints on access to finance, absence of entrepreneurial networks and mentors, and gender-blind policies, laws and regulations. These barriers jeopardise women's capacity to start and grow businesses and thereby limit their ability to act as agents of change in their communities and societies.

The barriers that women face to entrepreneurship are deeply interconnected and compounding — layering onto one another to damaging effect. Crucially, these barriers do not suddenly present themselves in adulthood. Throughout their journey through childhood and adolescence, girls and young women are subject to relational dynamics and institutional structures that constrain their voice, choice, and decision-making power; and their access to the resources,

time, skills, information, and opportunities that determine their capacity and agency to participate in economic activity and control the resulting economic gains.

For example, as a result of gendered social norms, young women in Asia-Pacific spend triple the time on unpaid care and domestic work than young men,¹ limiting the time they have for other pursuits. In parallel, girls and young women do not have equal access to the spaces where they can acquire the knowledge, skills and connections to pursue economic opportunities. They have more limited access to and control over productive assets. Their options may be constrained by gendered expectations regarding appropriate roles for women — affecting the choices that are made for them from an early age as well as their own aspirations. By the time they reach adulthood, these dynamics have compounded to limit their equal economic participation,

the interdependence of people, collectives and institutions. Hence, it applies a systemic lens to build the evidence base on the structural barriers and enablers to young women's empowerment and to identify strategies that can unlock the entrepreneurial potential of young women in South-East Asia and beyond.

The research situates entrepreneurship in a broader framework of women's agency and empowerment. The research looks beyond the narrow act of starting and operating a business; to women's capacity to exercise agency, make decisions, lead, take action, and pursue goals. In the same way, capacity for entrepreneurship reflects a set of capabilities and skills that can be applied in diverse fields.

This research applies a mixed methods approach using



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