



Vietnam

Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship Creating a Gender-Responsive Entrepreneurial Ecosystem



REPORT EXPERT GROUP MEETING: PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES

18th September 2020
Hanoi

Introduction

Within the SME sector in Viet Nam, it is estimated that women-owned SMEs comprise 21% of formal enterprises while facing numerous barriers, including limited access to finance and technology, low levels of financial and digital literacy, and discriminatory sociocultural norms. Despite having made considerable advances as entrepreneurs, they continue to face social prejudices and other social and economic barriers. Given that women are the primary caregivers, they face the additional pressure of care responsibility for ageing population, children as well as unwell family members, thus finding it hard to maintain the balance between family and business life.

Under the project “*Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship (CWE): Creating a Gender-Responsive Entrepreneurial Ecosystem*,” an expert group meeting (EGM) on “**Psychosocial Support Services**” was conducted in Hanoi on **September 18, 2020**, wherein 20 representatives from over ten expert agencies were invited to present perspectives on psychosocial aspects in advancing women's entrepreneurship in Vietnam (Annexure 1 for participant list). The EGM was co-chaired by Ms. Bui Thu Thuy, Deputy Director General-AED and Ms. Trinh Thi Huong, Director of General and Policy Department-AED- CWE Project Manager, with virtual participation of ESCAP representative Ms. Sudha Gooty, CWE Programme Manager, ESCAP. The objectives of the meeting were:

- Conduct a needs assessment with women entrepreneurs' associations and psychosocial experts on unique issues faced by women entrepreneurs in their psychosocial environments and their support requirements
- Identify existing psychosocial support resources as well as obstacles that women entrepreneurs face while accessing or using the existing resources.
- Mobilize and Collate existing resources for supporting women entrepreneurs to access learning materials, learning community, social support networks, and mentoring opportunities on psychosocial wellbeing
- Develop an action plan to collate and consistently update additional resources on "Psychosocial Support and Self-Care for women entrepreneurs" on the “Women Entrepreneurship Ecosystem”¹ sub-portal.

¹ "Women Entrepreneurship Ecosystem" as a sub-portal of the National SME Support Portal (www.business.gov.vn) managed by AED/MPI (as stipulated in the SME support Law) is being developed. The sub-domain (wee.business.gov.vn) as a part of the portal will focus on making resources specific to women entrepreneurs easily accessible and usable.

The panel discussions and group discussions that were conducted provided a substantive background on women entrepreneurs' psychosocial support needs, ranging from constraints in accessing resources to broader sociocultural norms in Vietnam (Annexure 1 for full agenda). The discussions also included presentations from psychological counselling organizations, SME development organizations, and a startup organization. This represented a critical first step in supporting the access and use of psychosocial support services for women entrepreneurs and its impact on women's capacity to engage in a profitable, productive, and competitive entrepreneurial activity in Vietnam. The information resulting from the expert group meeting will also contribute to the content being developed for the Women Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Sub Portal as part of the National SME Support Portal.



Opening Remarks

Speaking at the meeting, Ms. Bui Thu Thuy, Director General AED, highlighted the significance of women entrepreneurs in Vietnam and their strengths in contributing to the country's social and economic development. Ms. Bui Thu Thuy underlined that by the end of 2019, women-owned about 31 percent of the 758,610 businesses operating in Vietnam, but about 99 percent of these enterprises were micro and concentrated in specific service sectors. Building on this, she emphasized how women-owned SMEs played a critical role in creating jobs and incomes for workers, contributing to poverty reduction, improving women's socioeconomic status, promoting investment in health and education of children, and advancing gender equality and promoting economic growth in Vietnam. It was pointed out that despite great contributions to Vietnam's socioeconomic development, women-owned SMEs face many challenges and disadvantages compared to their male counterparts. Cultural norms, family responsibilities, and social context especially contribute to these difficulties. Drawing from this, Ms. Thuy asserted the importance of understanding the needs of women entrepreneurs, following which, the policy making agencies like the AED can propose more gender-responsive policies to ensure the development of a conducive entrepreneurial ecosystem for women entrepreneurs in Vietnam.



Ms. Bui Thu Thuy, Director General AED, MPI

Context Setting: CWE and Psychosocial Support Services for Women Entrepreneurs

Ms. Sudha Gooty, CWE Programme Manager, ESCAP, presented an overview of the project “Catalyzing Women’s Entrepreneurship”- a five-year project (2018-2023), funded by the Government of Canada with the aim to create an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs across 6 countries in the Asia and the Pacific. The CWE project aims to strengthen women’s entrepreneurship through three interrelated goals (a) strengthened enabling environment; (b) increased access to finance, and (c) improved use of ICT to manage a business. Ms. Gooty also expressed admiration for Vietnam’s commitment towards and success in poverty reduction. It was iterated that 2020 has been a very important year- both in terms of development related milestones as well as the difficulties that have emerged in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Initial evidence suggesting that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted women, the need for psychosocial support to women entrepreneurs was emphasized. Ms. Sudha Gooty highlighted the EGM’s role, wherein delegates will exchange ideas to address women entrepreneurs’ psychosocial support needs- in building an overall favourable environment for female entrepreneurs in Vietnam.

Panel Discussion 1: Psychosocial Support Need Assessment and Potential Solutions

To facilitate and guide the open discussion with participants, Ms. Trinh Thi Huong, Director of General and Policy Department-AED, MPI invited representatives of women support organizations and psychology experts to discuss the psychosocial support needs of women entrepreneurs.

Ms. Tu Thu Hien, the representative from *WISE SOCIAL* stressed on women’s care responsibilities, highlighting that women spend a considerable amount of time on work, leaving them with no time for self-care. A direct challenge is that women feel guilty over their lack of presence in their children’s lives and are held more accountable for care responsibilities. It was also expressed that with persistent gender norms, women may feel the pressure from their husbands’ success. In response to these challenges, the representative highlighted the need for a smart approach to identify women entrepreneurs that need psychological support. The first suggested approach was through mentorship; the second was through platforms wherein a small group of women entrepreneurs could meet for support. Another proposed approach was through developing and running a campaign “SHE CAN”, that will promote communication around support for women entrepreneurs.

Ms. Doan Huong, the representative from *Consultancy and Life Psychology Joint Stock Company* further pointed out that very few people in Vietnam seek professional psychological help in times of need. The tendency is to wait for the situation to worsen. Emphasized was the need to raise awareness and normalize mental health care for female entrepreneurs.



Ms. Doan Huong, psychology expert, *Research and Life Psychology JSC Company*

Ms. Do Ngoc Anh (MA) from *Vietnam-France Psychology and Psychiatry Institute* presented some key global numbers: a) 70 percent of female entrepreneurs are anxious; b) 50 percent of female entrepreneurs are depressed. She further stressed that while these are global statistics, no such information was available for women entrepreneurs in Vietnam. Drawing from this, the need for an organized system and a network to provide psychological support to women entrepreneurs was emphasized. A representative from *Impact Business Support Joint Stock Company- MEVI* further added on the pressures women face in finding capital resources and distribution channels and the need for a tool for women entrepreneurs to save time in business, so they have more time to cater to their psychological needs.



Ms. Do Ngoc Anh (MA), *Vietnam-France Psychology and Psychiatry Institute*

Ms. Trinh Thi Huong concluded the session by highlighting the urgent need for awareness around the psychosocial support needs of women entrepreneurs as well as normalizing the conversations around their mental health.

Panel 2: “Women Entrepreneurship Ecosystem” sub-portal

Building on the discussion during the first panel, Ms. Trinh Thi Quyen from AED-MPI shared the action plan and design of the "Women Entrepreneurship Ecosystem" platform as a sub-portal of the SME portal, calling for collaboration with AED-MPI on the platform operations. During the open discussion, representatives of different agencies presented ideas for collaboration with AED-MPI on psychosocial support services on the platform and otherwise.

Dr. Tran Thu Huong, Dean of *LUMIERE Psychology Research and Practice Institute*, suggested a need assessment survey (online and offline) to identify women entrepreneurs' psychosocial support needs. Based on the survey findings, it was suggested that counsellors could collate the list of topics for talk shows as well as small group meetings targeted at raising psychological awareness among women entrepreneurs. Another proposal was to provide women entrepreneurs with psychological screening tools, followed by a formal psychological counselling mechanism. Offering couples counselling to women entrepreneurs was also suggested by Dr. Huong. Based on the learnings from counselling, Dr. Huong further suggested consolidating and developing psychological support guidelines for women entrepreneurs.



Dr. Tran Thu Huong, Dean, *LUMIERE Psychology Research and Practice Institute*

Ms. Doan Huong, a psychology expert from *Research and Life Psychology JSC Company*, proposed organizing online and offline talks on a list of psychological care topics for women entrepreneurs. It was emphasized that the wide dissemination of these talks would be critical. She further suggested developing an interactive tool for psychological support services as well as reviewing and screening existing trusted, high-quality resources that can be made readily available to women entrepreneurs. Another critical point noted was to research and measure women entrepreneurs' capacity to access these resources in Vietnam.

Conclusion and Way Forward

Closing Remarks were delivered by Ms. Trịnh Thị Hương, Director of Policy & General Affair Division, Agency for Enterprise Development and Ms. Sudha Gooty, CWE Programme Manager, ESCAP.

Ms. Trinh Thi Huong summarized the key findings of the discussions and suggested the inclusion of a number of activities to support women entrepreneurs:

- Survey to identify psychological support needs of women entrepreneurs
- Collaboration on knowledge sharing and awareness building about psychosocial support for women entrepreneurs through written articles and other publications
- Organize online and offline counselling and training on psychological support
- Develop a toolkit for helping women entrepreneurs to identify psychological problems and find suitable resources and counsellors
- Review existing psychosocial support services, screen high-quality service providers, connect and match them to women entrepreneurs
- Research innovative and interactive methods for facilitating psychological counselling by experts

In her closing remarks, Ms. Sudha Gooty appreciated the high quality of the discussions in the EGM. Ms. Sudha highlighted the importance of some solutions, especially the development of toolkits and guidance documents to support women entrepreneurs in Vietnam. It was stressed that having these resources easily accessible on the “Women Entrepreneurship Ecosystem” sub-portal will be a critical first step in addressing women entrepreneurs' psychosocial support needs in Vietnam.

To conclude the meeting, Ms. Huong and Ms. Sudha Gooty thanked the participants for their interactive and engaged discussions in supporting women's entrepreneurship and the creation of a gender-responsive entrepreneurial ecosystem in Viet Nam.

News and pictures about the event on the MPI website:

http://www.mpi.gov.vn/pages/tinanhchitiet.aspx?idAlbum=1053&VHCS=0&QPTDNNVV=0&utm_source=zalo&utm_medium=zalo&utm_campaign=zalo&zarsrc=30

Annexure 1: Concept Note and Agenda

CONCEPT NOTE

ACTIVITY 1.1: EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON PSYCHOSOCIAL BARRIERS AND SUPPORT NEEDS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN VIETNAM

A. Background

The Project “Catalyzing Women’s Entrepreneurship: Creating A Gender Responsive Entrepreneurial Ecosystem” (hereafter CWE) aims to foster women’s economic empowerment, reduce poverty and increase gender equality through supporting women’s entrepreneurship in selected countries of the Asia-Pacific region. It will enhance women entrepreneurs’ access to capital through innovative financing mechanisms, increase women entrepreneurs’ use of ICT through relevant training and tools and support the development of gender-responsive business development and investment policies and programs. The project undertakes on-the-ground implementation activities in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Fiji, Nepal, Samoa, and Viet Nam.

The project was launched in Vietnam on **February 17, 2020**, through a national consultation with more than 100 participants, and in collaboration with the **Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI)** as the lead implementation partner. The consultation ensured engagement and stakeholder participation from partners across the private and public sector.

Based on a co-developed action plan with MPI, an LOA was formalized between **Agency for Enterprise Development, MPI (AED-MPI), and ESCAP** in **July 2020** to support some of the activities under the project on three specific areas: research, coordination, and capacity development; monitoring and evaluation; and sub-national consultations. Following the signing of the LOA, AED-MPI is now drafting an implementation plan that will further support the operations and completion of the activities listed in the LOA.

B. CWE Activities in Viet Nam

The ‘*Expert group meetings for prioritizing actions for the advancement of women entrepreneurs in Vietnam*’ are being organized under the key focus area of *Research, Coordination and Capacity Development* to deep dive into some suggestions that emerged at the national consultation and steer existing resources for advancement of women MSMEs. This concept note elaborates on the *first expert group meeting*.

The first expert group meeting will build on the commitment towards an online platform “*Women Entrepreneurship Ecosystem*” as a sub-portal of the National SME Support Portal (www.business.gov.vn) managed by AED/MPI (as stipulated in the SME support Law).

The National SME support portal was developed by the Ministry of Planning and Investment (the Agency for Enterprise Development) as a one-stop portal for information about SME support policies, regulations as well as the latest information related to business activities, business licenses that is regularly updated to the Business Portal.²

The sub-domain for **women enterprise ecosystem** (wee.business.gov.vn) as a part of the portal, is now under development and will focus on making resources specific to women entrepreneurs easily accessible and usable. In addition to support on policies/ programmes, mentorship, and e-learning resources, one key focus area identified is support on **psychosocial services**, especially self-care resources for women entrepreneurs.

² <https://www.economica.vn/Portals/0/Documents/6fd8e89c5a75959c1a0d31bd10a1d939.pdf>

The **first expert group meeting** will be on the key focus area of “**Psychosocial Support Services**” wherein AED will invite experts to integrate perspectives on psychosocial aspects in advancing women’s entrepreneurship in Viet Nam.

C. Rationale

Within the SME sector in Viet Nam, it is estimated that women-owned SMEs comprise 21% of formal enterprises³ while continuing to face numerous barriers including limited access to finance and technology, low levels of financial and digital literacy, lack of opportunities for capacity development, and discriminatory socio-cultural norms. While there have been efforts to advance women’s entrepreneurship through increased access to finance and other resources, there is insufficient focus on pressure confronted by women in their psychosocial environment that keep them from realizing their full potential as women entrepreneurs.

Psychosocial refers to the “interrelation of social factors and individual thought and behaviour” (Oxford Dictionary, 2012). This indicates that the **interplay of social factors, including community context and cultural restrictions**, may have psychological impact that may influence the decision of women to **become or stay an entrepreneur**.⁴

Despite having made considerable advances as entrepreneurs, women in Vietnam continue to face social prejudices as people tend not to believe in the talents for WEs.⁵ Additionally, given women are the primary caregivers, they face the additional pressure of responsibility for aged as well as unwell family members, thus finding it hard to maintain the balance between family and business life.⁶

This represents a critical **need to first understand and then improve access and use of psychosocial support services** for women entrepreneurs in Vietnam, to enable them to participate fully in entrepreneurial activities through a well-integrated support system that offers comprehensive information on financial, training and psychosocial resources.

D. Objectives

AED plans to organize a psychosocial expert group meeting in Quarter 3, 2020, to mobilize expert ideas and leverage existing resources on psychosocial support for the advancement of women entrepreneurs. The **objective** of this expert group meeting is to provide experts with a platform to:

- Conduct a **needs assessment** with women entrepreneurs’ associations and psychosocial experts on unique issues faced by women entrepreneurs in their psychosocial environments and their support requirements
- **Identify** existing psychosocial support resources as well as **obstacles** that women entrepreneurs face while accessing or using the existing resources
- **Mobilize and Collate existing resources** for supporting women entrepreneurs to access learning materials, learning community, social support networks and mentoring opportunities on psychosocial wellbeing
- **Develop an action plan** to collate and consistently update additional resources on “Psychosocial Support and Self-Care for WEs” on the sub-portal

³ GSO, 2014.

⁴ https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/52273/Nambiar_Psychosocial_2016.pdf?sequence=1

⁵ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_100456.pdf

⁶ Ibid.

E. Timeline and Participants

AED plans to organize the first expert group meeting in Quarter 3, 2020 during the third of September. The meeting will bring together representatives from about 10 agencies from including stakeholders from ministries, psychosocial experts, gender experts, and representatives from women entrepreneurs' associations.

No	Organizations	Number of participants
1	Women entrepreneurs support organizations; Business support organizations	4
2	Psychology Experts	3
3	Organizers (AED), coordinator	3
	Total	10

F. Agenda

Time	Activity	Responsible Participant
8:00 – 8:30	Welcoming Delegates	Agency for Enterprise Development
8:30-8:45	Opening Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Bui Thu Thuy, Deputy General Director, Agency for Enterprise Development, Ministry of Planning and Investment Ms. Sudha Gooty, Programme Manager, Project of Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship
8:45 – 9:15	Discussion on determining the need for psychosocial support for women entrepreneurs: Issues that need to be addressed to reduce pressure and raise morale for women entrepreneurs	Associations, organizations supporting female entrepreneurs, and representatives of female entrepreneurs sharing forum
9:15 – 9:45	Identifying existing resources for supporting women entrepreneurs in accessing learning material on psychosocial support	Psychology Experts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dr. Tran Thu Huong, Dean of LUMIERE Psychology Research and Practice Institute Ms. Doan Huong, Psychology expert, Counselling, Research and Life Psychology JSC Company Ms. Do Ngoc Anh (MA), Vietnam-France Psychology and Psychiatry Institute
9:45-10:15	Assess the level of current access and ability to access resources that support psychological counselling for women entrepreneurs, Identify problems and obstacles faced by women	Women entrepreneurs' associations, Women business support organizations; women entrepreneurs

Time	Activity	Responsible Participant
	enterprises in accessing current psychological support resources	
10:15-10:25	Introduction of the “Women Entrepreneurship Ecosystem” Platform as a sub-portal of SME Portal	Ms. Nguyen Thi Le Quyen, Agency for Enterprise Development, Ministry of Planning and Investment
10:25-11:15	Open Discussion: Ideas for collaborations on the key focus areas of the portal	Psychology Experts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Tran Thu Huong, Dean of LUMIERE Psychology Research and Practice Institute • Ms. Doan Huong, Psychology expert, Counselling, Research, and Life Psychology JSC Company • Ms. Do Ngoc Anh (MA), Vietnam-France Psychology and Psychiatry Institute • Women entrepreneurs’ associations: VWEC, VAWE, Women Union) • Women business support organization: WISE SOCIAL)
11:15-11:30	Summary of Key findings Conclusion Closing Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Trinh Thi Huong, Director of Policy & General Affair Division, Agency for Enterprise Development, Ministry of Planning and Investment • Ms. Sudha Gooty, Programme Manager, Project of Catalyzing Women’s Entrepreneurship

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