How women are leveraging digitally-enabled networks and how governments can help through COVID-19
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ABOUT GIF

The Global Innovation Forum (GIF) is a nonprofit effort to connect entrepreneur, small business, development, and university communities with policymakers and select corporations to explore the opportunities and challenges of engaging in the global marketplace. GIF serves as a hub for business, university and development communities around the world to communicate with officials and corporations, discover public and private resources to help them succeed, and improve the public policy landscape to enable global innovation. GIF is a project of the 501(c)(3) National Foreign Trade Council Foundation.

To find out more visit www.globalinnovationforum.com

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When women entrepreneurs succeed, local economies flourish.

However, while women represent around 50 percent of the population, in most countries, female-led businesses still only make up a fraction of companies, despite the fact that the growth rate of female entrepreneurs has doubled that of their male counterparts in recent years.¹

If women participated in entrepreneurship at a rate equal to men, it would boost global gross domestic product (GDP) between 3 - 6 percent.²

This report focuses on the value to women entrepreneurs in cultivating a global network of peer, professional and government advisors to overcome challenges and build an international brand.

Inside, female entrepreneurs leading small businesses in the United States, Africa, Europe, Australia, Southeast Asia and Latin America, as well as advisors, offer advice, resources and lessons learned on how to succeed globally.

Entrepreneurs describe how they have leveraged networks and resources to overcome barriers, including access to capital, identifying new business opportunities and complying with foreign regulations—and why networks alone are not enough.

Those digitally-enabled networks were critical long before the COVID-19 crisis. Now, these platforms and relationships are more important than ever, as businesses utilize digital tools more intensively to keep close to their networks of advisors, peers and customers.

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, governments around the world were stepping up to prioritize support for women’s entrepreneurship. As governments develop policy plans to respond to unprecedented economic challenges, it is critical that they make efforts to support women’s entrepreneurship and digital trade core to recovery efforts.

This report is meant to serve as a resource to help inspire the continued growth of women entrepreneurs to power the global economy.
Kimberly and Priscilla Addison, Co-Founders of '57 Chocolate
01. THE IMPORTANCE OF GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES

Global markets improve the resilience of small businesses and can be particularly important for women entrepreneurs.

THE ROLE OF GLOBAL MARKETS IN THE SUCCESS OF SMALL BUSINESSES

Small businesses that are global are stronger, more resilient and generally more likely to succeed.

Exporters enjoy higher productivity, a stronger workforce and greater opportunities for growth and diversification than non-exporters. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that export are 1.7 times more likely to experience accelerated growth than businesses that operate exclusively in domestic markets. Another study found that, when SMEs begin to export to foreign markets, overall profitability increased by 16 - 26 percent.4

Other studies emphasize that globally engaged small businesses are more likely to plan major capital investments, employ more staff, pay higher wages, be more productive and grow faster.5

Small businesses recognize the importance of this global opportunity, as 87 percent of U.S companies believe that international expansion is necessary for long-term growth.6

“Overseas markets are 20 percent of our sales,” noted Claudia De Heredia, the Co-Founder of Kichink, a Mexico-based e-commerce platform connecting over 45,000 merchants with global customers.

The importance of global markets for small businesses will continue to increase in the coming years. By 2022, a projected 20 percent of overall e-commerce will represent cross-border activity.7
By 2022, cross-border purchases will be 20 percent all of worldwide e-commerce

Engaging in the global marketplace can be especially important to women entrepreneurs as a means of bolstering business fundamentals and gaining traction and confidence.

Women in particular benefit from an “exporter premium.” Women-owned exporting businesses pay an average of 1.6 times more than firms that only sell domestically, a figure that is higher than the export premium for businesses owned by men.8

In addition, women-owned exporting businesses are 3.5 times more productive than counterparts who do not export and 1.2 times more productive than exporters led by men. Women-owned exporting businesses also tend to hire more employees and earn more revenue than those which do not.9

Kavita Shukla, Founder and CEO of The FRESHGLOW Co. and inventor of FreshPaper, an innovative solution to the global challenge of food waste, saw early traction in foreign markets that helped her grow her business in America.

“Having customers internationally for me was, personally, a really big deal,” Shukla recalled, who notched customers in 35 countries early in her business journey.10

“Going direct to [global] consumers, and showing that there was a market there and getting international press got us in front of distributors domestically,” Shukla said.

Similarly, Helianti Hilman, Founder and CEO of Javara, a social enterprise that works to promote Indonesia’s biodiversity and traditional techniques and recipes, noted that it was difficult to market organic food solely in her domestic market.

She turned to exporting, which served as an important driver for her business and at one point accounted for 90 percent of total sales of her unique products like ancient grains, rare spices, teas, coffees and single-blossom raw honey. Those early exports helped her grow her network from 10 farmers and 8 products to 52,000 farmers and 800 goods.11

Yet, despite benefitting from a higher export premium, women-owned businesses are not exporting to a greater extent than their male-owned counterparts. Fewer than 2 percent of women-owned businesses export.12
While women entrepreneurs are developing new enterprises, transforming established industries and building innovative products faster than ever before, they often encounter unique challenges that can hinder them from matching the success of their male counterparts.

Investors, advisors and global leaders should cultivate an environment that encourages their success.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL

For new entrepreneurial endeavors, access to capital is especially crucial. While difficulties obtaining funding are the biggest challenge for entrepreneurs across the board, women are often at a disadvantage when it comes to access to money.

Women are less likely to receive funding in early-stage decisions from private investors, as well as venture capital firms. In 2019, women-founded companies acquired only a 2.8 percent share of the capital invested in U.S. startups.\

Women also raise smaller amounts of startup capital and ultimately rely on personal sources of income more than men.\

“I imagine every woman has cited the fact that women are totally underfunded,” explained Emma Sinclair, Co-Founder of EnterpriseAlumni, an alumni and retiree management platform. “The perpetually negative narrative around this is demoralising as much as confusing given women raise less money but exit more successfully and perform better in the interim,” she added.

One challenge is that women are less likely to have advisors in their networks who can make the necessary introductions to potential business investors or financial opportunities.
“One of our biggest challenges is that we have a huge network of women and not a lot of men. The problem is it’s still primarily men in leadership positions that are making the decisions, including the financial decision to hire companies like ours,” shared Kristin Haffert, the Co-Founder of Mine the Gap, a company that equips leaders, industries and organizations with the strategies and tools needed to create and sustain gender-inclusive work environments.

There is a substantial gender disparity in investment and decision-making. Only 8 percent of investing partners at the top 100 global venture firms are women.15

With so few women in decision-making roles, the selections are dictated primarily by male viewpoints, often creating homophily, the tendency to associate with others who look and act like you.

“People invest in ideas they can relate to. They invest in people who, whether we like it or not, look like them,” shared Kathryn Parsons, Co-Founder & CEO of Decoded, a technology education company.

She observed that “to unlock the vast economic opportunities presented by female entrepreneurship...we need to change the world of investing.”

Financial constraints may be amplified in countries where laws or attitudes limit women’s rights.

“In Cambodia, to receive a loan [as a woman entrepreneur], you need to own property to be actually considered by the bank,” explained Vannary San, Founder and Designer for Lotus Silk. San added that if a female business owner wants to use property as collateral at a bank, her husband or a male family member is required to be a part of the process.

**UNDERSTANDING AND COMPLYING WITH COUNTRY-SPECIFIC REGULATIONS**

Engaging in the global marketplace brings new challenges complying with regulations and administrative burdens in different jurisdictions.

Complying with these new rules and procedures—from customs clearance rules to data privacy regimes to tax regimes—can be difficult and time-consuming for a small business.

“Just talking to someone in the industry is not enough,” explained Rupa Ganguli, Founder and CEO of Inclusive Trade, a UK-based e-commerce platform that allows consumers to shop by impact to benefit social, environmental and development goals.

She noted that local policies and regulations can impact her business decisions. “For example, the privacy rules set in a country make or break certain decisions including if I should be selling in a country,” she said.

Compliance with local tax regimes can also be confusing and time-consuming. According to the World Bank’s “Doing Business” report, in Mexico, it takes an average of 20 hours per month for a business to comply with its tax requirements. In Brazil, the burden can be more than a hundred hours per month.16

The absence of access to clear and easily-accessible information about government policies and regulations is a frequent complaint for small businesses entering new markets. While private and public sector programs offer assistance to small businesses in their global endeavors, entrepreneurs do not often know they exist.
Audrey Ng, Founder of the Singapore-based Elly Store for children’s clothes and toys, shared that there are a series of EU regulations on child safety that require drawstrings and ties to be a certain length. However, she could not access the details of the regulation online.

“When we found out about [the set of EU regulations] we tried to get ahold of all of them, which proved to be a challenge. They were not readily available; we were just told about a name and number, but couldn’t get our hands on the documentation,” said Ng.

Further, rules and regulations are constantly changing. Even with access to correct and up-to-date information, abiding by these rules and regulations can be complex and time-consuming. Businesses need to consider tax changes, tariffs, local content requirements, and many more issues when taking their businesses global.

“Each market has its own requirements and we just have to follow it. Some of them are easy and some of them are not so easy. We are still not a huge business yet, but we try our best to comply with everything,” explained Thuy Nguyen, Founder of Bobi Craft, an exporter of premium hand crochet children toys and accessories in Vietnam.
SPECIFIC CHALLENGES WOMEN FACE AS ENTREPRENEURS

Women face other specific challenges as well, including gender bias, a gap in household responsibilities and, in some cases, discriminatory laws that limit their ability to grow a business.

Balancing responsibilities and the gender gap in household work

Women entrepreneurs often still face expectations to play a larger role in family care and handling a household.

During a series of roundtables the Global Innovation Forum held in 2019, entrepreneurs frequently called out the gender gap in household work as a challenge to building their businesses.\(^{17}\)

“Nobody wants to talk about gender roles, but when women are in their twenties they can give all of their time to their business,” said Sasibai Kimis, Founder and CEO of Earth Heir, a Malaysian ethical lifestyle brand, which sells handcrafted heritage pieces made by women, refugees and indigenous people. “However, as soon as they get married and have kids, managing time between running a full-time business and running a family becomes challenging,” she observed.

FINDING LOCAL PARTNERS, ADVISORS AND EMPLOYEES

Entrepreneurs often express frustration identifying and engaging the right partners, advisors, employees and contractors as they expand to new markets.

Steph Nachemja-Bunton, Co-Founder of Meaningful Gigs, a Washington, DC-based startup that matches top design talent from Africa with impact-driven companies, sees businesses struggle with determining whether and where to find local advisors or talent. “There is an amazing amount of talent in the areas that we work with, but they constantly struggle to connect with the right kind of clients” whom they could assist, Nachemja-Bunton shared.

For Ganguli of Inclusive Trade, identifying the right talent has proven difficult. “One of my biggest challenges has been accessing a sufficient number of people with the right entrepreneurial mindset and experience to help take us to the next level.”

Even once you have those resources in place, managing them can be complicated. “[Global human resources] are a challenge,” counseled Dr. Catriona Wallace, Founder of Flamingo, an Australian-based AI-powered knowledge-sharing and collaboration hub for business. When it came to doing payroll and health benefits, she observed that “we learned the hard way of how to [operate] our HR systems in different countries.”
Gender inequality and legal discrimination

Women entrepreneurs also face gender discrimination in the workplace.

“Women are constantly asked questions that no man would be asked,” noted De Heredia of Kichink. “What happens when you get pregnant, or what happens when you get divorced, or who is taking care of your kids, or how many hours will you try to spend at your company? My husband has never been asked those kinds of questions.”

In some countries, discriminatory laws jeopardize women’s access to institutions, their ability to build capital and their protection under the law.

While the landscape of equal rights varies dramatically by country, around the world, women have an average of three-fourths of the legal rights granted to men.\(^{21}\)

Of the 189 economies evaluated in the World Bank’s “Women, Business and Law 2018” report, 90 percent had one or more regulations that obstruct women’s economic opportunities.\(^{22}\)

In certain countries, laws prohibit women from owning property, starting a business, obtaining financing, working the same hours as men or even leaving the home without permission.

These restrictions create an unequal economic environment for women and depress overall economic prospects.

When women are given the same opportunities as men, a country’s productivity and competitiveness surges, resulting in poverty reduction and economic growth. The elimination of all forms of discrimination against women could raise per capita productivity by 40 percent.\(^{23}\)
OVERCOMING CHALLENGES TO BUILDING A GLOBAL BRAND

Peer and professional networks are particularly important sources of mentors, investment and new business opportunities for women.

Parsons of Decoded noted the importance of discovering a corporate investor via her network early in her business. The investor “walked through the doors of my company curious to experience our first product “Code in a Day.” It was a multimillion-pound investment and was game-changing.”

Today, there are a variety of nonprofit, university and professional networks that focus on elevating the success of women entrepreneurs.

For example, Vital Voices identifies, invests in and brings visibility to extraordinary women around the world by unleashing their leadership potential.

“We have found that most of the women entrepreneurs and business owners we work with feel isolated. Having a group of like-minded women who have gone through similar challenges is extremely valuable in troubleshooting problems, getting referrals, specific information and opportunities,” highlighted Eugenia Podesta, the Senior Director of Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship for Vital Voices.

A critical piece of Vital Voice’s value is physically bringing people together. “You don’t build that network when you’re doing online training,” said Kimis of Earth Heir, who is part of Vital Voices’ network.

“When you meet people in person and you spend a few days together, that’s when all those bonds are built. You have a face, you met that person, and after you leave, it’s very exciting because we now know who that person is who is doing the next online webinar,” she added.
Networks allow entrepreneurs to reinforce their credibility and trustworthiness with existing investors and to build relationships with a more diverse pool of funders. Women who are active in entrepreneurial networks and workshops see greater improvement and access to capital than those with no such involvement.  

Formal networks are also valuable for connecting women business leaders with peers because, as a demographic, they are often less likely than men to professionally know other entrepreneurs.

Ganguli of Inclusive Trade utilizes her peer and professional networks to make connections to the partners and employees that she needs to grow her business. “Access to the right people and employing the right people has been really hard. Networks and global resources helped me in overcoming that challenge.”

**GOVERNMENT RESOURCES & ADVISORS**

Government programs and networks can also provide important sources of advice and assistance to women entrepreneurs.

**Southeast Asia**

The countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations all maintain programs and networks to engage small businesses and women entrepreneurs.

For example, the government-run SME Corp. Malaysia coordinates a host of programs and events for Malaysian small businesses throughout the country. It has a history of providing resources and advice specific to women entrepreneurs, including through their Women Netpreneur Programme, which helps women entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses online.

Elsewhere in ASEAN, institutions including the Philippines Bureau of Small and Medium Enterprise Development, Federation of Associations for Small and Medium Enterprise in Cambodia, Enterprise Singapore, Lao Trade Portal and Plaosme.com and Indonesia’s Ministry of Trade all provide services to small businesses and women.

**Australia**

Australia maintains a variety of efforts to support small businesses in exporting, including an SME Export Hubs programme, a separate Entrepreneurs Programme, Austrade’s Landing Pads programme, an Incubator Support Initiative, and a Digital Solutions Programme hosted by the Australian Small Business Advisory Service.

Several public and private sector entities in Australia provide support specifically for women entrepreneurs, including the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, the Australian Human Rights Commission, Australian Businesswomen’s Network, Women in Global Business and the Australian Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

**Canada**

Canada’s federal and provincial governments offer support for small businesses to export, including dedicated support for women entrepreneurs. Export Development Canada and Global Affairs Canada help provide
export-focused support, including through the Trade Commissioner Service’s Business Women in International Trade initiative.

Canada has developed a comprehensive Women Entrepreneurship Strategy (WES), an over $2 billion whole-of-government approach to help women grow their businesses through increasing access to financing, talent, networks and expertise.

In 2019, the federal government invested $30 million through the Women Entrepreneurship Fund (WE Fund) directly in women-led businesses to help them grow and reach new markets, and $85 million through the WES Ecosystem Fund to help non-profit, third party organizations deliver support for women entrepreneurs and address gaps in the ecosystem.

**France**

Through Business France and La French Tech, the French Government offers a range of opportunities to engage with a global network of French entrepreneurs, advisors and government officials, including via trade missions to large international conferences like SXSW. The two platforms also host specific conferences to facilitate access to networks of women working for startups and large companies.

**The United Kingdom**

Through the Department of International Trade (DIT), the UK Government provides a range of trade assistance programs, including face-to-face support for exporters via a network of hundreds of International Trade Advisers throughout the nine English regions.

The Government’s flagship Global Entrepreneur Programme (GEP) reaches out globally to support high potential, overseas-based entrepreneur founders looking to relocate their innovative companies to the UK. GEP consistently seeks to support female founders.

The UK Government has also launched specific initiatives to enable women entrepreneurs.

During London Technology Week in June 2019, DIT launched a GEP Female Founders Group to identify key challenges facing female entrepreneurs and champion their businesses.

The initiative includes a speaker series, which brings founders together to share best practices and hear from inspirational speakers championing gender diversity in business. DIT also launched a Women In FinTech Global Initiative, which aims to help successful female-foundered FinTech firms expand into the UK.

**The United States**

In the United States, federal and state governments offer a range of services through networks including U.S. Export Assistance Centers, District Export Councils, and Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs). Many of these initiatives provide specialized advisory services and networking opportunities for women-owned businesses.

From early on in her business, Dr. Wei-Shin Lai, CEO and Founder of AcousticSheep and creator of SleepPhones, the first headphone for sleep and RunPhones for fitness, worked with her local SBDC to learn basic business skills and to publicize her successes.

She also relied on the network Ben Franklin Technology Partners, a long-standing economic development program administered by Pennsylvania’s Department of Community and Economic Development.

“As we grew, we needed more specific help in certain areas, and Ben Franklin Technology Partners provided numerous hours of expert
EXAMPLES OF NETWORKS FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

**eTrade for Women Network**
Collects, nurtures and showcases the experiences of successful women leaders in e-commerce and provides them with opportunities to network.

**The Wing**
A women-focused, co-working space collective and club with offices around the world.

**WEConnect International**
Connects women-owned businesses to qualified buyers around the world.

**Vital Voices Global Partnership**
Works with women leaders in the areas of economic empowerment, women's political participation and human rights.

**The International Alliance for Women**
Works with women entrepreneurs, professionals, educators and public servants to leverage their reach and resources to create a global community of economically empowered women.

**Village Capital**
A venture capital firm that finds, trains and invests in early-stage ventures solving major global problems.

**SheTrades**
A platform for women entrepreneurs to showcase their businesses, build strong networks, increase their credibility and connect to markets.

**Miller Center for Social Entrepreneurship**
Accelerator programs to help social entrepreneurs affect transformative change, manage risk and multiply their impact.

**Women Entrepreneurs Grow Global**
Educates, inspires and nurtures women business owners and entrepreneurs worldwide on how to go global and run healthier businesses.

**Endeavor**
Selects, mentors and accelerates high-impact entrepreneurs to drive long-term economic growth.

**EY Entrepreneurial Winning Women**
A national competition and executive leadership program that includes year-round education, networking and events.
assistance in accounting, human resources, and marketing,” she recalled.

Dr. Lai encourages women to take advantage of local business assistance programs because “they will help you fill knowledge gaps, widely increase your networking circle, and help you win awards for publicity and recognition for free or fairly low cost.”

“We continue to ask for help on occasion even 12 years in because there are always new sticky situations, and because they know us so well, they can quickly give an opinion,” she added.

TECHNOLOGY ENHANCES THE VALUE OF NETWORKS FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS.

Digital tools play a critical role in boosting the value of entrepreneurs’ global networks.

Sinclair of EnterpriseAlumni emphasized that the WhatsApp group that developed out of a Silicon Valley Comes to the UK (SVC2UK) programme she attended “has been one of my most valuable and consistent sources of support and advice in the last few years,” keeping her connected to a group of fellow female entrepreneurs in the UK and the US.

Similarly, Kimis of Earth Heir noted the importance of using online tools to leverage the relationships she built through her mentorship programs to solve challenges that crop up.

“When I am traveling to a specific country, I know that I can ask the network that I already have ‘Do you have a contact here, or do you know anyone who can assist me with this?’ ”

she said, “and then I get a slew of responses” over social media and communications tools.

De Heredia shared that, by making it easy to solicit advice from her network, Linkedin has been vital to Kichink’s hiring process. “LinkedIn...opens up your network to a scale that you’re not used to, so you’re not only hiring people from your city or country,” she noted.

Other social media channels offer free or low-cost opportunities to create loyal networks of supporters, customers and advisors. Deering Banjo, a California-based family-owned banjo manufacturer led by Jamie Deering, uses social media channels, like Instagram and Facebook, to foster a community of enthusiasts around high-quality banjos and increase their brand visibility in the international music community.

Social media can also be a tool to engage with global markets that could otherwise be out of reach. ‘57 Chocolate, a luxury chocolate brand in Ghana, uses platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp to promote their products globally. “Our chocolate is well-traveled. It’s been to Russia, the Maldives, Australia, Japan, China, all around the world. Right now, international sales make up the majority of our business,” shared Priscilla Addison, Co-Founder of ‘57 Chocolate.

Technology can also free up entrepreneurs’ time. For example, digital tools have helped reduce the average time it takes for a business to comply with tax requirements by 84 hours, and have reduced compliance burdens for goods to clear customs.
Businesses that use technology are more likely to engage globally. In the United States, a whopping 72 percent of women-owned small businesses that use PayPal export.27

The role of digital tools in enabling advisory, peer and government networks to flourish is even more important amid the global COVID-19 pandemic.

SHE Investments, a social enterprise delivering business development programs for women in Cambodia, has introduced an array of new technology tools to keep their team connected and productive in response to COVID-19, utilizing new-to-them electronic platforms for team meetings, webinars, online classes and timesheets.

“We are using tools to create video tutorials on our laptops to help our team and our participants to learn [how to work from home],” observed Celia Boyd, Co-Founder and Managing Director of SHE Investments.

Every year, Sunshine Quem Tenasco, Founder of the Pow Wow Pitch, hosts a pitch competition for Indigenous entrepreneurs in Canada. The competition is usually held at the largest pow wow in Ontario to provide a supportive, empowering environment that addresses the challenges of Indigenous entrepreneurs and presents the opportunity to access mentors and micro-grants. In light of the pandemic, with the help of digital tools, the Pow Wow Pitch is moving online.

“I actually think it’s better because we’re going to reach all of these entrepreneurs online who would not have been able to travel to us otherwise,” shares Tenasco.

“Mentorship may seem like a small piece of the whole puzzle, but it’s so important because entrepreneurs just starting off always have so many questions. This way, we can open up these opportunities to any entrepreneurs throughout our communities as long as they have access to the internet.”

For all of the value of networks, they are not enough.

“It’s good business to back women, but there is no evidence of anything more than a glacial shift, in terms of an increase in venture capital money going to women,” said Sinclair of EnterpriseAlumni. She advises women to consider different ways of funding, for example through debt as much as equity, in addition to seeking out female-led or female-focused angel networks.

The private sector and governments have a role to play in creating an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs and a legal environment that fosters gender parity.

Haffert of Mine the Gap has spent a great deal of time thinking about how governments can create a better environment for women entrepreneurs.

“The number one answer is lowering the barriers of access to funding. More money needs to get into the hands of women business owners, but we have to focus on how governments can approach this through policy mechanisms,” Haffert shared.

“More money needs to get into the hands of women business owners.”
Governments have an opportunity to contribute to the success of globally-engaged women entrepreneurs by generally fostering the right climate for small business growth and by focusing specifically on the needs, challenges and opportunities of women.

The following recommendations can assist governments in enabling women entrepreneurs to overcome challenges and leverage global networks and technology tools to succeed.

The COVID-19 crisis has made efforts by governments to support women’s entrepreneurship even more critical. Governments should ensure that support for women’s entrepreneurship is core to their economic recovery efforts.

1. **Leverage trade policies and international economic organizations to create an enabling environment for women-owned businesses.**

High-standard trade agreements generally promote access to the global marketplace for small businesses by creating a policy framework that permits the use of global technologies and payments, eliminates tariffs and other trade barriers, and reduces red tape at the borders between the parties involved.

Some countries have also begun to implement provisions in trade agreements that specifically address gender. These provisions have included affirming commitments to international treaties on gender equality, establishing government-to-government mechanisms to address globally-engaged women entrepreneurs, including binding and enforceable commitments on gender equality in the workplace, acknowledging the right to regulate and promote gender equality, and providing for preferences for government procurement and trade promotion programs for women and minority-owned businesses.

Governments and the private sector can also seek to leverage international organizations including the World Trade Organization and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum to encourage members to remove barriers to women’s entrepreneurship through new trade commitments.
Governments are increasingly creating channels to involve small businesses in trade promotion workshops and programs, by orienting national trade promotion efforts towards small businesses, establishing new bilateral mechanisms like the US-UK SME Dialogue, and creating programming through regional frameworks like APEC.

Yet these efforts are often distinct from other offices and programs tasked with engaging or assisting women-owned businesses. A report prepared by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade points out that women entrepreneurs are “significantly underrepresented” as clients of government trade promotion organizations. Governments should address this disparity by actively recruiting women-owned businesses into trade promotion programs.

In addition, government agencies involved in international trade promotion programming should prioritize the involvement of women-owned businesses and advisors in conferences and panel discussions, including by adopting gender parity pledges, following the lead of agencies including the UK Government Digital Service (GDS).

Governments should prioritize efforts to develop sustainable networks of women-owned small businesses and government officials rather than one-off events.

In the United States, government-backed District Export Councils and Small Business Development Centers provide models of efforts that foster long-term relationships and feedback between local officials and small businesses.

As Eugenia Podesta of Vital Voices notes, “there are not enough [government programs] that look at intervention and are in it for the long haul. You can’t just do a one-week training and think that it will solve the problem and give women the support that they need to be successful.”
4. Improve the regulatory landscape for small businesses.

Governments should generally create the conditions for small businesses that will reduce administrative burdens and encourage global engagement, including:

- Fostering simple, fair tax and trade policies and regulatory structures with clear rules and means of compliance.

- Publishing trade, tax, and related regulatory information via intuitive, electronic one-stop-shops for business, along with contact information for relevant agencies who can provide assistance when needed.

- Adopting digital trade policies that foster the entire e-commerce ecosystem that the women entrepreneurs profiled in this report rely on to access global markets and run their businesses on a global basis. Governments should adopt digital trade rules that allow access to global technologies, enact procedures to facilitate goods trade and customs clearance, and enable non-discriminatory access for services sectors that are critical for e-commerce to function, such as financial, distribution, telecommunications, and computer and related services.

- Encouraging the use of technology solutions, including Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), electronic receipt capture tools, electronic signatures, and e-payments, to facilitate compliance and reduce administrative burdens on small businesses. Governments should evaluate their use of technology regularly as new technology solutions using blockchain and Artificial Intelligence hold promise for improving security, trust and speed for shipping, payments and supply-chain traceability.

- Coordinating with other governments to promote understanding of, and compliance with, foreign regulations. Where governments cannot agree to harmonize or mutually-recognize regulations, certifications or standards, they should offer a clear pathway for compliance to foreign companies. Regulatory frameworks like the EU-U.S. Privacy Shield can help small businesses understand the requirements for complying with foreign regulations that differ from domestic ones.
ENDNOTES


12. “Women and Trade.”


17. “New Faces of Trade: ASEAN Women in e-Commerce”


Front Cover: From top left, includes the Dr. Wei-Shin Lai (AcousticSheep), Sasibai Kimis (Earth Heir), Emma Sinclair (EnterpriseAlumni), Kimberly and Priscilla Addison ('57 Chocolate), Kathryn Parsons (Decoded) and Rupa Ganguli (Inclusive Trade).

Page 5: JAVARA Founder and CEO Helianti Hilman with artisans in Indonesia
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Page 7: Inclusive Trade artisan, photo courtesy of Lisa Bretherick
Page 8: Shop by Impact® products from Inclusive Trade
Page 9: Earth Heir CEO and Director Sasi Kimis discussion new patterns with artisans
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