THE SHETRADES INITIATIVE

SheTrades is a flagship initiative of the International Trade Centre (ITC) that provides women entrepreneurs around the world with a unique network and platform to connect to international markets. The initiative aims to connect.

March 2018

March 2022

OBJECTIVE

To increase economic growth and job creation in Commonwealth countries by enabling the increased participation of women-owned businesses in international trade. The project is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office and implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC) under the framework of the SheTrades Initiative.

• Provide governments with tools, information, and capacity to implement gender-responsive policies as well as offer a platform for governments to work collectively and share best practices, including through SheTrades Outlook and in-country technical assistance on policy reform;
• Provide direct support to women-owned businesses, build their competitiveness and their capacity to participate in trade through intensive training, mentoring, and coaching;
• Work with business support organizations to improve the service offering for women entrepreneurs; and
• Engage private sector partners to adopt business practices that create economic opportunities for women-owned businesses.

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THE SHETRADES COMMONWEALTH PROJECT

COVERAGE

Commonwealth-wide support – providing governments with information and resources to implement gender-responsive trade policies and share best practices.

Country projects in Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria – building competitiveness of women-owned businesses and connecting them to trade and investment opportunities.

TIMEFRAME

March 2018

March 2022

3 million women entrepreneurs to market by 2021

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INTRODUCTION

Mauritius achieved a high-income country status during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, structural challenges started to emerge just before the crisis and have been persisting. These include declining export competitiveness and shrinking market share of the country’s exports in goods and services. While the government implemented rapid and effective measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, the strict measures strained the country’s supply chains and tourism sector. This contracted economic growth from 3% in 2019 to –14% in 2020.

The forecast for Mauritius indicates a strong economic recovery in 2021. Addressing the underlying challenges on trade exports is critical to revive the economy. It is also important to integrate women in the strategy to boost export competitiveness. This could include upgrading skills to increase employment and labour productivity and driving investments in technology and business innovation.¹

WHY DOES WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT MATTER?

Women represent 40% of the total labour force in Mauritius. Yet, from 2019 to 2020, the unemployment rate among women increased from 10.2% to 11.1%. Data indicates that unemployed women are more skilled than unemployed men. This could be a huge opportunity to use women’s skills to increase economic output and competitiveness.

The National Export Strategy 2017-2021 provides a framework to enhance long-term export competitiveness and includes some gender components. Nevertheless, gender may be further mainstreamed in the overall strategy. The legal framework in Mauritius is conducive for women to participate in economic activities. National institutions have been actively implementing various initiatives that support gender equality and women’s economic empowerment.

The recovery from the COVID-19 crisis provides an opportunity for Mauritius to reinforce existing initiatives and establish more gender-responsive strategies and frameworks. SheTrades Outlook presents critical data to assess the country’s status on trade and gender equality and identify priority areas for improvement.¹

WHAT IS SHETRADES OUTLOOK?

SheTrades Outlook is an innovative, evidence-based policy tool designed by the International Trade Centre. It can be used to identify policies, laws or programmes that contribute to or prevent women’s participation in the economy and trade. This first-of-its-kind tool is based on 83 indicators, which are grouped under six interlinked pillars – Trade Policy, Business Environment, Legal and Regulatory Framework, Access to Skills, Access to Finance, and Work and Society.

SheTrades Outlook is based on data collected by national consultants from an average of 20 national institutions and organizations per country. Data is collected through interviews based on semi-structured questionnaires. Examples of institutions surveyed include ministries of trade, education, and finance, public procurement authorities, customs authorities, central banks, national statistics offices, ministries of technology, ministries of women’s affairs, business associations, chambers of commerce, and other trade support institutions.

SheTrades Outlook also makes use of reliable, publicly available, and recently updated databases from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Statistics Division, the World Bank, and the World Economic Forum. National experts identify an average of three good practices per country.

RESULTS

Twenty organizations – 16 national institutions and four private sector organizations – were interviewed to collect data. Institutions were chosen based on their strategic objectives and relevance in relation to the six pillars of the initiative. The institutional survey was carried out in 2019. This policy brief reports the latest available statistics from national and international databases.

The results from the Outlook data

The SheTrades Outlook indicator scores range from zero to one. Mauritius performed the highest in the Legal and Regulatory Framework. It has medium-high performance in Access to Skills, Access to Finance and Work and Society. Mauritius registered medium performance in Trade Policy and Business Environment. Detailed information on the scores under each pillar is presented below. This includes strengths and bottlenecks, as well as gaps identified in the data.

As of 2021, SheTrades Outlook has been rolled out in 38 countries from all geographical regions with different levels of economic development.
**TRADE POLICY**

**Consultation process**
- Official mechanisms in place to involve women’s associations or organizations in consultation process
- Women associations or organizations participate in consultation processes
- Initiatives in place to encourage women’s business associations or organizations to participate in consultation processes

**Gender-related concerns included in policies and regulations**
- Trade-related concerns are included in the policy or plan of action on gender equality and women’s empowerment
- Gender provisions are included in trade agreements or regional economic integration agreements

**Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation**
- Gender ex-ante and ex-post assessments are carried out for trade agreements
- Gender indicators are used in policies, programmes or projects

**Sex-disaggregated data**
- Laws or regulations exist that mandate the collection of gender-disaggregated data
- Gender-disaggregated data on companies are collected

**Women’s participation in strategic roles**
- Women are represented in ministerial positions
- Women are represented in national parliaments
- There is a gender quota to promote women’s political participation at national and subnational levels

**Capacity building on gender issues**
- Trade ministry staff have been trained in gender issues in the past 12 months
- There is a gender focal point or similar representative focusing on trade and gender issues

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The Trade Policy pillar focuses on the inclusiveness of trade policies, agreements and practices. It also includes the adoption of gender-sensitive practices in trade and trade-related institutions.

Mauritius’ medium performance in this pillar is primarily associated with the use of gender indicators in policies, programmes and projects; the appointment of a gender focal point handling issues including on trade; and the existence of a law mandating the collection of gender-disaggregated national statistics. However, there is a lack of ex-ante and ex-post gender impact assessments and gender-disaggregated data on exporting companies.

**WHAT WORKS?**

Mauritius supports the Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment. It has made progress in delivering on its commitment to gender equality in trade by actively engaging women in policy consultations, including gender concerns in trade agreements, collecting gender-disaggregated data on socioeconomic indicators and building the capacity of the ministry responsible for trade on gender issues.

The Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) and the Mauritius Exports Association typically participate in policy consultations. These two umbrella organizations represent the concerns of their members, including women’s business associations such as the National Women Entrepreneur Council and the Association des Femmes Entrepreneurs.

In SheTrades Outlook, trade agreements can receive three ratings: ‘limited’, ‘evolving’ or ‘advanced’ levels of gender responsiveness. Mauritius is a party to several regional and bilateral trade agreements, which mostly have advanced or evolving gender responsiveness.

The Statistics Act 2001 mandates the collection of gender-disaggregated national statistics. In 2018, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare published a report on gender-disaggregated statistics on socioeconomic outcomes. The Statistics Office Mauritius also collects data on companies by industry, geographical location, size, employment and value of exports. However, the data on companies is not gender disaggregated.

To develop capacity on gender issues, gender-sensitivity training was provided to the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade. Further, various government ministries have appointed gender focal points.

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1 Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Southern African Development Community (SADC), EU-Eastern and Southern Africa States, United Kingdom-Eastern and Southern Africa States, China-Mauritius, India-Mauritius, and Mauritius-Pakistan, and Turkey-Mauritius.
More effort is needed to mainstream gender in trade policy. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare has been developing a new national gender policy. This presents a good opportunity to include trade-related concerns in the country’s main policy to advance gender equality.

The National Export Strategy 2017-2021 identifies gender inequality as a constraint to boosting competitiveness and aims to support trade promotion activities of business associations to increase employment among women. However, the strategy could be improved by highlighting gender equality and women’s economic empowerment as crosscutting issues. Policymakers may consider mainstreaming gender in future trade policies and strategies to ensure that women are able to participate in trade.

While the government conducts ex-post impact assessments of trade agreements, they do not include gender considerations. Conducting gender impact assessments, before and after a trade agreement has been signed and ratified, can help ensure that women benefit from expanded trade opportunities.

There is no official definition of a woman-led business in Mauritius. Using an internationally recognized definition of a women-led business could improve the targeting of beneficiaries of women’s economic empowerment programmes and collection of internationally comparable data on women entrepreneurship. In this regard, Mauritius may consider adopting the definition of a woman-led business prescribed in the International Organization for Standardization’s (ISO) International Workshop Agreement (IWA) 34: Women’s entrepreneurship – Key definitions and general criteria.

Women’s representation in ministerial and parliamentary positions can help advance policy discussions on gender issues. In 2021, women accounted for only 20% of the seats in the parliament and 13% of ministerial positions. The government may wish to encourage women’s participation in political roles by prescribing a minimum quota on the number women in electoral positions.
### LEGAL & REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

**Signature, ratification and implementation of international conventions**
- Country has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the CEDAW optional protocol
- Laws, policies, and procedures are reviewed to ensure compliance with CEDAW articles and the Committee concluding remarks
- International Labour Organization conventions 100, 111, and 183 are ratified and enforced in the country

**Restrictions to access productive resources**
- Women and men have equal inheritance rights
- Women and men have equal ownership rights to immovable property
- Women and men have equal access to financial services

**Restrictions related to the labour market**
- The law mandates non-discrimination based on gender in employment
- The legal framework offers women legal protection from sexual harassment in the workplace
- The law mandates equal remuneration for females and males for work of equal value

**Paid parental leave**
- Maternity leave policies exist
- Parental leave is available for both parents

**Child-care facilities**
- Families with children under school age receive any support for early childhood education and care
- Parents receive child-care support
- Initiatives are in place to encourage investment in child-care preschool facilities

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**WHAT WORKS?**

At the international level, Mauritius has signalled a high level of commitment to gender equality by ratifying CEDAW and its optional protocol and ILO Conventions 100 (equal remuneration), 111 (non-discrimination in employment) and 183 (maternity protection).

At the national level, the country has established a strong legal framework to ensure gender equality. For example, the Civil Code provides men and women with equal rights to inheritance and immovable property. The Equal Opportunity Act guarantees equal rights for men and women to access formal financial services, including credit. The law also provides legal protection from sexual harassment at the workplace and mandates equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value.

Parental leave is available for employed mothers and fathers, as enshrined in the Workers’ Rights Act. Further, financial support is given to families with children registered under the Social Register of Mauritius (SRM). A child allowance of MUR 576 ($13.5) per month is provided to parents with children up to three years old. Single mothers receive a larger child allowance of MUR 603 ($14.1) per month.
**BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT**

**Presence and participation of women’s business associations**

- Women’s business associations are represented at the national level.
- Women’s business associations are represented in all key sectors and subsectors.
- Women-owned businesses have participated in activities carried out by chambers of commerce in the past 12 months.

**Business start-ups**

- Support services are available when establishing a company.
- An incubator or accelerator programme exists in the country.

**Access to trade-relevant information**

- Help and information desks are available at government offices to assist companies complying with national regulations and export/import requirements.
- Key updated information on customs procedures and trade regulations is visible at borders and published or notified online in a timely manner.

**Public procurement**

- Access to information on public procurement is available.
- The public procurement process is transparent.
- There is a preferential scheme for public procurement for women-owned enterprises.

**Grievance mechanisms to report unfair practices**

- Means exist for women and men to report complaints of wrongdoing on regulations and procedures.
- Official mechanisms in place to monitor working conditions and data are collected on workers in export-processing zones.

**Existence of special frameworks and initiatives**

- A single-window electronic interface exists, and digital trade facilitation mechanisms are in place.
- National institutions use gender-sensitive guidelines developed by the World Customs Organization or other national monitoring framework.
- Training and sensitization have been provided to border-level agents and officials in the past 12 months.

**Public-private dialogue and frameworks**

- The regulatory framework for public-private partnerships includes gender concerns.
- Structured dialogues have taken place with the private sector regarding gender equity policies, programmes, and activities in the past 12 months.

A conducive business ecosystem is essential to ensure women succeed in trade. This pillar focuses on the inclusiveness of the business ecosystem and covers industry bodies that support women’s entrepreneurship. It also includes the ease and costs of establishing and running a business, trading across borders and accessing information and public procurement markets.

**WHAT WORKS?**

There are two main associations focused on supporting women in business – the National Women Entrepreneur Council (NWEC) and the Association Mauricienne des Femmes Chefs d’Entreprises. The two associations are represented at the national level and in all key sectors.

Various national institutions provide support and guidance when establishing a company. The Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection sets out guidelines and provides information on company registration. The Economic Development Board assists individuals establishing a company on a demand basis. The Business Support Unit at SME Mauritius offers counselling for start-up businesses and provides awareness campaigns, information desks and step-by-step guidelines on how to register a business.

Help and information desks are also available at different government offices to assist companies in complying with import/export requirements. An online portal, Mauritius Trade Easy, has been established to provide comprehensive information for traders. The portal contains information on import and export procedures, trade agreements, market intelligence and intellectual property.

Incubator and accelerator programmes are also available to support start-ups. Since 2017, the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council (MRIC) has implemented the National SME Incubator Scheme. This scheme provides a training and mentoring approach in three phases: pre-incubation (nine months), incubation (18 months) and acceleration (six months). To date, the costs of six accredited incubators are partially funded by MRIC. One of the six incubators, Future Females Invest, is focused on building the capacity of women-led start-ups. SME Mauritius has an SME start-up programme, which provides technical assistance to formalize businesses, training and mentoring to start-ups, and support for business scale-up for 12 months.

Trade-related institutions provide support to exporters and importers. These include the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection and Economic Development Board, which support exporters in complying with trade regulations. SME Mauritius assists on export readiness of small and medium-sized enterprises. The Mauritius Revenue Authority (MRA) provides information on authorized operators, pre-arrival processing and cross-
border management. Key updated information on customs and trade regulations are made visible at the borders, published online and notified, however, with some delay.

The government has also set up a public procurement portal that contains information such as procurement notices, legislations, bidding documents and awarded contracts. An e-procurement system (e-PS) is also available to carry out public procurement procedures digitally. This platform also includes a directory of suppliers. The e-procurement system sends e-mail alerts to registered suppliers whenever new public tenders are open for bidding.

The MRA uses a gender-sensitive customs framework such as the World Customs Organization’s (WCO) Customs Integrity Action Plan. The MRA is aware of the WCO’s Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool but has not yet adopted this framework.

Women and men can report complaints on malpractices in trade to the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection – Consumer Affairs Unit; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration, and International Trade; the Ministry of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives; and the MRA. However, these institutions do not regularly collect gender-disaggregated data on the number of complaints.

In 2018, SME Mauritius, together with the Ministry of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives and the NWEC, organized Entrepreneurship Expresso, a workshop that facilitated dialogues between the public and private sectors on issues faced by women in business. Similar dialogues may be conducted on a regular basis to inform the private sector regarding gender equality programmes, policies and activities.
WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

National institutions in Mauritius have set up various frameworks and mechanisms to facilitate a conducive business environment. However, there is room to improve the collection of gender-disaggregated data on the suppliers in the public procurement database, beneficiaries of the available incubator and accelerator programmes and business support services, and the number of complaints on malpractices in trade.

The government may also consider establishing a gender-responsive public procurement system, including a preferential scheme for women-led businesses. This could help women overcome challenges in accessing public procurement opportunities and increase their prospects to compete successfully in public tenders.

Mauritius has started to implement a single-window electronic interface to facilitate trade, but the mechanism has not yet fully integrated all relevant government bodies. However, services are available online, including customs declarations, application and issuance of import and export permits, submissions of sea/air cargo manifests, application and issuance of a preferential certificate of origin and payment of customs duties and fees.

Aligned with the Customs Integrity Action Plan adopted by the MRA, providing training on gender awareness to customs officials could help increase the capacity of customs staff in conducting gender-responsive practices. Working conditions may be monitored in export processing zones (EPZs) to mitigate gender-related malpractices in trade.

In addition, policymakers may consider including gender concerns in the regulatory framework for public-private partnerships.
ACCESS TO SKILLS

Universal access to education
Law mandates compulsory education
Adult literacy rate (age 15 years and over) (female/male ratio)

Monitoring frameworks
National numeracy tests are gender-disaggregated
Data on drop-out ratios are available by gender

Access to tertiary education
Scholarships are available to continue tertiary education
Enrolment ratio in technical and vocational programmes for people aged 15-24 years (female/male ratio)

Targeted programmes to enhance skills for workers
National industry placement programmes are available for undergraduates
Programmes to enhance production skills for workers who have been available in the past 12 months

Targeted programmes to enhance skills for companies
Training opportunities to support micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises owners’ skills and knowledge have been offered in the past 12 months
Special training to facilitate access to markets has been available in the past 12 months

Targeted support to enhance skills and access to information
Support was provided to women’s associations and organizations in the past 12 months
Programmes exclusively targeting women with incentives were provided in the past 12 months

Access to information and communication technologies
Policies and programmes are in place to support business innovation exclusively targeting women
National statistics on access to information and communication technologies are available
Access to information and communication technologies (female/male ratio)

Improved access to education is essential to build the necessary human capital skills and reduce the inequality of opportunities between men and women. This pillar focuses on measures designed to enhance women’s capabilities and business-related skills. The objective is to close the education gap and equip women with the capacity to compete and succeed in international markets and occupations traditionally dominated by men.

Mauritius’ medium-high performance in this pillar is attributed to the existing education and skills-upgrading programmes for workers and entrepreneurs, support for women’s business associations and policies to promote women’s business innovation.

WHAT WORKS?
The National Export Strategy 2017-2021 underlines that improving women’s participation in the labour market can help boost competitiveness. It is imperative to increase women’s technical capacity to participate in income-generating activities. Mauritius has made progress in this regard by ensuring universal access to education, implementing skills-upgrading programmes, with some specifically targeted to women, and providing support to women’s business associations.

In Mauritius, education is compulsory for children aged five to 15, typically attending primary and secondary levels. Gender-disaggregated data on dropout ratios is also available at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Adult literacy rate was 89% among females and 93% among males in 2018. Scholarships are available to continue tertiary education. These include scholarships under the Ministry of Education, which are funded by donor countries. Other higher education scholarships include the Government Laureate Scheme and other postgraduate education schemes such as the State of Mauritius Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme and the Postgraduate Scholarship in Digital Technologies.

National industry placement programmes are available for undergraduates. For example, the Human Resource Development Council offers the Youth Employment Programme and Service to Mauritius to enable newly graduates to access job opportunities. Similar programmes are provided by higher education institutions such as the University of Technology and the Fashion and Design Institute to assist their students to find employment.

Various programmes are designed to enhance skills of workers and entrepreneurs. For instance, the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training has several skills-upgrading programmes for workers. These include the National Skills Development Programme and the Trainee Engineer Scheme. The Ministry of Labour has implemented the Back-to-Work programme, which facilitates the integration and reintegration of women into the labour market. The National Productivity and Competitiveness Council
(NPCC) offered an English literacy for using IT targeted to women entrepreneurs. Apprenticeship programmes are also available at the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development and the Mauritius Maritime Training Academy.

For entrepreneurs, SME Mauritius offers training programmes on starting and managing a business, accounting, marketing, business communication and customer care, among others. Most of the beneficiaries of the training are women. The NWEC also provides training opportunities, specifically for women, on various topics, including business management, finance, sales, e-marketing, information and communications technology, pricing and branding, and leadership and entrepreneurship development. To improve the technical capacity of SMEs, SME Mauritius, in collaboration with NPCC, developed the SME Productivity Improvement Scheme.

National institutions provide training to facilitate access to markets. The Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection and Economic Development Board provides training and awareness workshops in trade rules and procedures. The Procurement Policy Office provides training workshops on public procurement to staff and suppliers, specifically on the use of the e-procurement system platform.

Women’s business associations have received targeted information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade and SME Mauritius on programmes and activities that may benefit women entrepreneurs.

The MRIC has several policies and programmes to support business innovation. These include the Collaborative Research and Innovation Grant Scheme, Intellectual Property Promotion Scheme, Proof of Concept Scheme and Research and Innovation Bridges.
WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

National institutions in Mauritius are implementing several programmes and projects to improve women’s access to skills and education. However, monitoring and evaluation of these initiatives entail the collection of gender-disaggregated data and statistics. This presents an opportunity to report the results of students’ numeracy tests by gender and collect gender-disaggregated data on the beneficiaries of scholarships and skills training programmes.

While data on internet and mobile usage is collected via a national statistical survey, no gender-disaggregation is reported. Nevertheless, access to ICT is almost equal between men and women based on data from the International Telecommunications Union.

In 2018, female students accounted for only 35% of enrollees in technical and vocational education and training (TVET). National institutions may consider providing scholarships targeted to female students to improve their participation in TVET. Information dissemination about the training on public procurement may also be improved to reach more women-led businesses and enable them to access public procurement opportunities available in the online platform.
ACCESS TO FINANCE

This pillar focuses on women's access to formal financial services. It also covers whether governments – alone or in partnership with the private sector – have developed innovative solutions to promote financial inclusion for women. Examples include addressing the lack of physical collateral or verifiable cash flow requirements.

Mauritius has a medium-high performance in this pillar. This is mainly due to the availability of trade finance schemes and financial instruments to facilitate trade and entrepreneurial activities, as well as financial support to women-led businesses and women's business associations.

WHAT WORKS?
The Financial Services Commission (FSC) has the mandate to develop the financial sector and promote financial literacy. It recognizes that the lack of financial education is a main challenge for women entrepreneurs to access financial services such as loans. This reduces the capacity of women-led businesses to fully engage in business ventures. In this regard, the FSC runs various financial literacy activities, including outreach sessions, radio and online publicity campaigns, and an awareness programme on women's economic empowerment through financial inclusion. SME Mauritius and the NWEC provide training to entrepreneurs on costing, finance and pricing.

In 2017, account ownership at a financial institution was 87% among women and 93% among men. In 2020, there were 51 automated teller machines (ATMs) and 14 commercial bank branches per 100,000 adults. Digital financial services are also available, including online banking, payments and digital international transfers.

Women-led businesses and women's business associations receive financial assistance from national institutions. For example, the Economic Development Board provides financial support to women's business associations. It also helps women-led businesses to participate in international trade fairs by providing a maximum of MUR 200,000 ($4,700) per year for accommodation and flight. In 2018-2019, women-led businesses participating in trade fairs, organized by the SME Mauritius, received a subsidy of MUR 3,000 ($70) from the Ministry of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives.

To facilitate trade and entrepreneurial activities, trade finance and fiscal schemes are available. For instance, all SMEs benefit from tax incentives and subsidies are provided to various sectors including manufacturing and other value-added sectors. Importers and exporters can also use guarantees and letters of credit to finance trade.

Various financial instruments are available for entrepreneurs, including microloans from the State Bank of Mauritius, Mauritius Commercial Bank and credit unions. Women can also apply for various financial products from the Development Bank.
WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

While financial institutions in Mauritius offer various financial instruments that can help support women entrepreneurs, there is an opportunity to encourage financial institutions to collect gender-disaggregated data on financial product usage. This can help understand the differences in the financial needs and benefits of product usage between men and women and provide financial services that are more tailored to women entrepreneurs.

The government may also wish to fully adopt a gender-responsive budgeting approach to promote transparency and understand how budget allocation contributes to gender equality. Implementing gender-responsive budgeting can help ensure the allocation of public funds to women’s economic empowerment programmes and the involvement of women in budget preparation. This can also enable the government to conduct a gender budget analysis, which contributes to a more effective use of funds to promote gender equality.
Women’s opportunities in the labour market

- Women are allowed to work in the same industries and perform the same tasks as men.
- Estimated annual earned income, purchasing power parity (male/female ratio).

Division of labour

- Labour force participation rate (male/female ratio).
- Female share of employment in managerial positions (%).

Gender occupational bias

- Unemployment rate with advanced education (male/female ratio).
- Time spent on unpaid domestic chores and care work (male/female ratio).

National and regional awareness initiatives

- National public campaign has been launched including gender considerations in its message or designed exclusively to promote gender equality and women’s economic empowerment in the past 12 months.
- National organizations have participated in regional or international initiatives, working groups, or dialogues aimed at promoting gender equality and women’s economic empowerment in the past 12 months.

Support of private and non-profit initiatives

- Awards and recognition programmes have been used to highlight companies’ best practices or initiatives to promote gender equality and women’s economic empowerment in the past 12 months.
- National institutions have supported awareness initiatives launched by the private sector, non-governmental organizations, or international organizations to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment in the past 12 months.

WHAT WORKS?

The legal and institutional environment is conducive for women to participate in the labour market. In Mauritius, women are not restricted from working in the same industries and performing the same tasks as their men counterparts. In 2019, women accounted for 30% of employment in managerial positions.

To eliminate gender biases in the society, national institutions have launched public campaigns that aim to promote gender equality and women’s economic empowerment. The Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development, and Family Welfare has launched various campaigns such as the Walk the Talk Towards Gender Equality, Monthly Talks for men and women, and capacity building campaigns for public officials on gender mainstreaming. The MRIC has also run a campaign to increase opportunities in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education and career for women and girls.

The Ministry of Gender Equality and NWEC have participated in regional and international dialogues on gender equality. For example, Mauritius has been active in the meetings of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, whose areas of focus include women’s economic empowerment. Mauritius and the European Union have also conducted dialogues to agree on key objectives and actions to be jointly monitored to advance gender equality. Awareness initiatives on gender equality have been supported by national institutions, such as the Ministry of Gender Equality, Economic Development Board, National Social Inclusion Foundation and NPCC.

Awards and recognition programmes have been used to highlight best practices and initiatives that support gender equality. The Ministry of Gender launched the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Award to recognizes the best corporate gender champion and encourages the private sector to showcase their gender-responsive activities and practices. Other awards in the country include the Women of Wonder Awards, 100 Most Influential Women in Mauritius and Africa Leadership Awards.
WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

Mauritius has established several legislations and initiatives to provide men and women with equal access to economic opportunities. However, data shows that there is a need to ensure that these legislations and initiatives translate to concrete outcomes for women. To do this, monitoring the number of women beneficiaries of skills upgrading, encouraging enrolment among women in TVET and investing in childcare facilities and support may be considered.

Although there are many skills-upgrading programmes for workers and entrepreneurs and no legal restrictions for women to work in various industries, women still tend to participate less in the labour market compared to men. In 2019, labour force participation was 80% among men and only 53% among women. In the same year, the unemployment rate was around 4% among highly educated men and 9% among women with advanced education. Further, according to the World Economic Forum 2021 Gender Gap Report, men earn twice as much income as women annually ($30,700 and $15,200, respectively).

One reason might be related to how women spend their time between unpaid chores and income-generating activities. Gender-disaggregated data on time use patterns is collected via a national living conditions survey. In 2018-2019, women spent an average of 2.4 hours more on unpaid domestic services for household and family members, relative to men. In this regard, it may be beneficial to strengthen the provision of childcare facilities and support and ensure that these services are accessible to women.
Mauritius has made extensive progress to promote gender equality and women’s economic empowerment. This includes establishing a legal framework that facilitates women’s participation in the economy, engaging women’s business associations in policy consultations, monitoring socioeconomic outcomes for women through gender-disaggregated data, establishing gender focal points, providing trade and business support services, using gender-sensitive guidelines in customs, conducting skills-upgrading programmes for women workers and entrepreneurs, and providing several financial instruments to support women in business and trade.

In the country’s recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that national institutions strengthen their initiatives and establish more gender-responsive strategies and frameworks to open economic opportunities for both men and women. Mauritius can also take advantage of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement to increase women’s participation in trade and ensure that women drive economic recovery.

The way forward

Mauritius has undertaken several initiatives to deliver on the 2017 Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment by collecting gender-disaggregated data on socio-economic indicators, engaging women’s business associations in policy consultation processes and building the capacity of the trade ministry on gender issues. In this regard, the government is well positioned to design and implement gender-responsive trade and trade-related policies.

Recommendations:

- Include trade-related concerns in the new national gender policy and mainstream gender in future trade policies and strategies, for example, an updated national export and competitiveness strategy;
- Conduct ex-ante and ex-post gender impact assessments of trade agreements; and
- Adopt an internationally recognized definition of a women-led business, specified by the ISO International Workshop Agreement 34: Women’s entrepreneurship – Key definitions and general criteria.

The government may also wish to establish frameworks that support women to trade and do business.

Recommendations:

- Design and implement a preferential public procurement scheme for women;
- Adopt a gender-responsive budgeting approach in government ministries, agencies and departments;
- Include gender concerns in the regulatory framework for public-private partnerships; and
- Fully integrate government agencies in the single-window electronic interface to further facilitate trade processes.
THE WAY FORWARD: MONITORING MECHANISMS

While gender-disaggregated data on socioeconomic indicators is collected via national statistical surveys, there is a lack of gender-disaggregated data on companies and beneficiaries of various services and initiatives.

Recommendations:
• Collect gender-disaggregated data on:
  • Exporting companies and suppliers in the public procurement database;
  • Beneficiaries of available incubator and accelerator programmes and business support services;
  • Recipients of scholarships and training on trade rules and public procurement; and
• Encourage financial institutions to collect gender-disaggregated data on product usage.

THE WAY FORWARD: TARGETED INITIATIVES

Targeted initiatives can help improve women’s access to skills and finance.

Recommendations:
• Encourage the women’s enrolment in TVET through scholarships targeted to women; and
• Provide venture capital financing opportunities, specifically to women-led start-ups.

GOOD PRACTICE: LOANS TO HELP WOMEN-LED BUSINESSES EXPAND IN VALUE-ADDED SECTORS

Women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses often cite access to finance as a major challenge to economic participation. To address this issue, the Development Bank of Mauritius (DBM) designed a special loan scheme for women wanting to start or expand their business. Women typically lack the network to access formal credit that requires a loan guarantor. The DBM loan scheme helps overcome this challenge by removing the requirement of a loan guarantor.

The loan scheme for women entrepreneurs has a ceiling of MUR 500,000 ($11,700) and a preferential fixed interest rate of 0.5% per annum. It offers a repayment period of up to seven years and a moratorium of up to one year. It is designed to cover up to 90% of the cost of the beneficiary’s business venture. DBM has a monitoring mechanism to ensure that beneficiaries implement their projects and properly utilize the funds.

Since its inception in 2019, more than 300 women-led businesses have benefited from the loan scheme and over Rs 20 million ($468,400) has been disbursed.

Source: Development Bank of Mauritius

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

More information about this Policy Brief and the SheTrades Outlook project can be found at: www.shetrades.com/outlook
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Contribution to UN Sustainable Development Goals:

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Women’s economic empowerment is not a matter for government policy, the private sector, or social change alone. All have critical roles to play. This is why the International Trade Centre (ITC) launched the SheTrades Initiative, which seeks to connect three million women entrepreneurs to market by 2021.