



# Sierra Leone

SHETRADES OUTLOOK | 2021



ITC | SheTrades

KOICA

Korea International  
Cooperation Agency



# About

## 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.

3 million women entrepreneurs  
to market by 2021

## SHETRADES WEST AFRICA PROJECT

TIMEFRAME	November 2019	COVERAGE		
	September 2023	Funded by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), the project is active in the cashew, cassava and shea sectors in:		
		 	Côte d'Ivoire	Guinea
			Liberia	 Sierra Leone
OBJECTIVE	To improve the livelihoods of 10,000 women in selected agricultural value chains.	The project supports inclusive policymaking by strengthening women's inclusiveness and competitiveness in these value chains. It also provides governments with information and resources to implement gender-responsive trade policies – including actionable recommendations based on data from the SheTrades Policy Tool.		

## ACTIVITIES

- Raising the awareness and capacity of policymakers to boost women's economic empowerment through the SheTrades Outlook tool.
- Developing the capacities of business support organizations and service providers to serve micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), well as women producers with improved services.
- Enhancing the competitiveness of value chain operators, especially women-owned businesses
- Creating market linkages between value chain operators and international buyers
- Building the capacity of women farmers through tailored trainings

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## INTRODUCTION

### SHETRADES OUTLOOK

# Creating trade opportunities for women in Sierra Leone

This policy brief presents analysis and recommendations for Sierra Leone to unlock women's participation in trade by improving the policy ecosystem. It is based on the results of the SheTrades Outlook project, which collected and analysed data from 17 national institutions and four private sector organizations, and several international databases.

## WHY DOES WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT MATTER?

In Sierra Leone, women represent half of the population and the total workforce. Poverty remains widespread with more than 50% of the population living below the national poverty line. Inequality in access to resources and jobs, which affect individuals' economic opportunities, also persists in particular for women. In this regard, government policy plays a critical role in enabling an environment in which women can translate their resources into labour, labour into paid work, and paid work into greater control over their lives.

From an economic point of view, the argument for women's economic empowerment is compelling: boosting the number of female workers and entrepreneurs will translate into employment generation, productivity, better resource allocation, poverty reduction, and inclusive long-run growth. Also, women's involvement in economic activities generates positive returns for family's well-being, including their children's well-being.

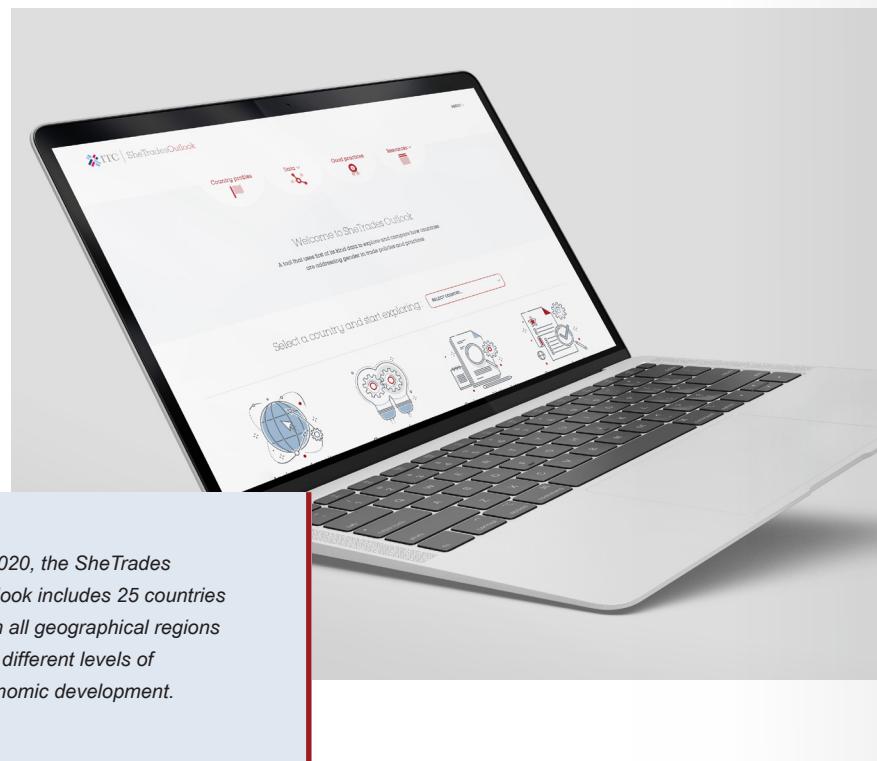


*The National Development Plan 2019-2023 (policy cluster five) provides the framework by aiming to improve the ecosystem, including monitoring mechanisms. Before COVID-19, the economic growth forecast for Sierra Leone was among Africa's highest, driven by minerals, tourism, and agriculture. COVID-19 has caused significant disruptions in these sectors. Therefore, increasing women's participation in the economy should be prioritised in the economic recovery plan to ensure the economy significantly leaps forward. SheTrades Outlook provides critical data to identify priorities for improvement.*

## WHAT IS THE SHETRADES OUTLOOK?

The SheTrades Outlook is an innovative evidence-based policy tool designed by the International Trade Centre, aiming at identifying policies, laws or programmes that contribute 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.

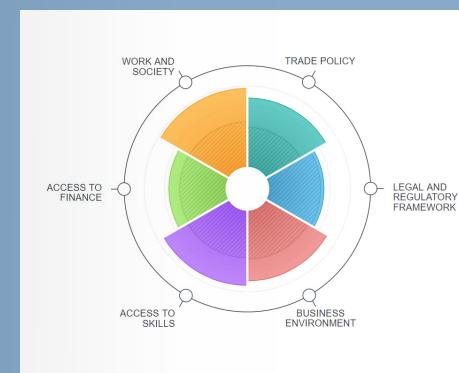
SheTrades Outlook is based on data collected by national consultants from an average of 20 national institutions and organizations per country. Data is collected through interviews based on semi-structured questionnaires. Examples of institutions surveyed include ministries of trade, ministries of education, ministries of 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.



## RESULTS

# The results from the Outlook data

**Twenty-one organizations** – 17 national institutions and four private sector organizations – were identified through a mapping exercise. Institutions were chosen based on their strategic objectives and relevance in relation to the six pillars of the initiative. Data was gathered between August and November 2019.



The SheTrades Outlook indicator scores range from zero to one. Sierra Leone's performance across the six pillars is not uniform. Its lowest score is in Access to Finance followed by the Legal and Regulatory Framework. The highest score is in Work and Society, followed by Access to Skills. Detailed information on the scores under each pillar is presented below. This includes strengths and bottlenecks, as well as gaps identified in the data.

# TRADE POLICY

Indicator	Performance
<b>Consultation process</b>	<div style="width: 80%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 80%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
Official mechanisms in place to involve women's association or organizations in consultation processes	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
Women association or organizations participate in consultation processes	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
Initiatives in place to encourage women's business associations or organizations to participate in consultation processes	<div style="width: 50%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 50%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div></div>
<b>Gender-related concerns included in policies and agreements</b>	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
Trade-related concerns are included in the policy or plan of action on gender equality and women's empowerment	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
Gender provisions are included in trade agreements or regional economic integration agreements	<div style="width: 50%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 50%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
<b>Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation</b>	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
Gender ex-ante and ex-post assessments are carried out for trade agreements	<div style="width: 50%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 50%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
Gender indicators are used in policies, programmes or projects	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
<b>Sex-disaggregated data</b>	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
Laws or regulations exist that mandate the collection of gender-disaggregated data	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
Gender-disaggregated data on companies are collected	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
<b>Women's participation in strategic roles</b>	<div style="width: 10%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 10%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div></div>
Women are represented in ministerial positions	<div style="width: 50%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 50%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
Women are represented in national parliaments	<div style="width: 50%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 50%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
There is a gender quota to promote women's political participation at national and subnational levels	<div style="width: 50%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 50%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div></div>
<b>Capacity building on gender issues</b>	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>
Trade ministry staff have been trained in gender issues in the past 12 months	<div style="width: 50%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 50%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div></div>
There is a gender focal point or similar representative focusing on trade and gender issues	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #ccc;"></div><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #2e9e9e;"></div></div>



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. Medium-performance for the Trade Policy pillar is primarily attributed to the existing gender-responsive policies, sex-disaggregated data availability, and information about the participation of women in policy design.

## WHAT WORKS?

Sierra Leone is getting some important policies right. In SheTrades Outlook, Free Trade Agreements can receive three ratings; trade agreements can have 'limited', 'evolving' or 'advanced' levels of gender responsiveness. Sierra Leone belongs to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which overall have 'evolving' gender responsiveness (score between 0.33 and 0.66). The agreements incorporate some best practices, but there is still significant room for improvement. Before committing to a new trade agreement, an ex-ante assessment is carried out, which incorporates gender considerations.

Sierra Leone's National Gender Policy identifies trade, employment and economic development as priorities. **The Statistics Act 2002 mandates the collection of sex-disaggregated data.** The Ministry of Trade and Industry has a gender focal point and has official mechanisms in place to involve women associations in consultation processes. A nationwide database is comprised of six women's associations and organizations in the country – 50/50 Group, Women in Business, Market Women, Petty Traders, the Women's Cooperative, and the Women's Farmers Association. These associations and organizations regularly participate in the consultation processes.

Gender indicators inform projects and policies, for example, in the Small and Medium Enterprises Policy and the Sierra Leone Agribusiness Competitive Project. There is a national definition of a woman-owned enterprise, mentioned by almost all respondents. A woman-owned enterprise is defined as a company registered, operated and managed by a woman (or women), as well as one whose capital is owned by a woman.

## WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

More efforts are needed to translate actions into outcomes. Women representation in ministerial and parliament positions oscillates between 12% and 17%, which is below the global average of 20% to 24%, respectively. **Sex-disaggregated data collected on exporting companies estimates that roughly one-in-20 companies are woman-owned.** This is a low number in comparison to ITC's global average of one-in-five exporting companies. Gender-sensitive practices can be reinforced by providing capacity building on gender issues to the officials from the Ministry of Trade and Industry. This will support them as they build the necessary skills to conduct gender ex-post assessments of trade agreements that have not yet been implemented.

# LEGAL & REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Signature, ratification and implementation of international conventions	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 50%;"></div></div>
Country has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the CEDAW optional protocol	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>
Laws, policies, and procedures are reviewed to ensure compliance with CEDAW articles and the Committee concluding remarks	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>
International Labour Organization conventions 100, 111, and 183 are ratified and enforced in the country	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>
Restrictions to access productive resources	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 50%;"></div></div>
Women and men have equal inheritance rights	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>
Women and men have equal ownership rights to immovable property	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>
Women and men have equal access to financial services	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>
Restrictions related to the labour market	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 50%;"></div></div>
The law mandates non-discrimination based on gender in employment	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>
The legal framework offers women legal protection from sexual harassment in the workplace	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>
The law mandates equal remuneration for females and males for work of equal value	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>
Paid parental leave	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 50%;"></div></div>
Maternity leave policies exist	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>
Parental leave is available for both parents	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>
Child-care facilities	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 50%;"></div></div>
Families with children under school age receive any support for early childhood education and care	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>
Parents receive child-care support	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>
Initiatives are in place to encourage investment in child-care preschool facilities	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>



This pillar assesses Sierra Leone's adoption of laws and regulations that protect and promote women's rights. It also covers laws and policies that encourage women's entry, continuity, and advancement in labour markets by supporting women to, for example, combining work with child care responsibilities. The best scores under this pillar are attributed to international commitments, i.e. Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions 100, 111 and 183, signed to ensure gender equality and gender-sensitive laws are in place concerning access to productive resources.

More than 50% of the data for this pillar has been sourced from the World Bank Women, Business and the Law 2019, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the ILO Information System on International Labour Standards.

## WHAT WORKS?

Sierra Leone ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on 11 November 1988. Following the CEDAW ratification process, the country reviewed laws, policies, and procedures to comply with it.

The National Policy on the Advancement of Women and the National Gender Mainstreaming Policy were developed by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs in 2000. Following the adoption of these two key policies, in 2007, the Domestic Violence Act, the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, and the Devolution of Estates Act were enacted, followed by the Sexual Offences Act in 2012. Additionally, Sierra Leone ratified the ILO Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration For Women and Men And ILO Convention 111 On Discrimination in Employment and Occupation.

**The law guarantees equal inheritance rights for women (as surviving spouses and daughters) and men as well as equal legal treatment and thus control over spousal property.** Women can also open a bank account with the same rights and obligations as men. Similarly, women receive equal legal treatment when signing a contract, registering a business, travelling outside her home and country, and when getting a job or pursuing a trade or profession. All female workers are entitled to fully-paid maternity leave for 90 days.



### WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

While many policies have been developed in early 2000, no new gender-responsive policy has been enacted in the last eight years. Policies are in place to reduce discrimination against women as workers, producers and entrepreneurs. However, some policies, in particular those related to parental care, are yet to be adopted. Those policies can be a game-changer and can make a difference in women's choices between a full-time job, a part-time job, or starting a business and expanding her operations, among others. Parental leave continues to be limited to women. No provisions to support early childhood education and care, either directly or indirectly, are stipulated in national laws.

Existing non-discrimination policies in place could, in part, explain the almost parity in labour force statistics. However, few laws are in place to ensure women's decent work. **There is no national law offering women legal protection from sexual harassment in the workplace or stipulating equal remuneration for females and males for work of equal value.** The former despite that the country signed the ILO convention 100, which focuses on this issue.

## BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Presence and participation of women business associations	<div style="width: 50%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
Women's business associations are represented at the national level	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
Women's business associations are represented in all key sectors and subsectors	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
Women-owned businesses have participated in activities carried out by chambers of commerce in the past 12 months	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
<b>Business start-ups</b>	<div style="width: 100%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
Support services are available when establishing a company	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
An incubator or accelerator programme exists in the country	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
<b>Access to trade-relevant information</b>	<div style="width: 50%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
Help and information desks are available at government offices to assist companies complying with national regulations and export/import requirements	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
Key updated information on customs procedures and trade regulations is visible at borders and published or notified online in a timely manner	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
<b>Public procurement</b>	<div style="width: 50%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
Access to information on public procurement is available	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
The public procurement process is transparent	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
There is a preferential scheme for public procurement for women-owned enterprises	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
<b>Grievance mechanisms to report unfair practices</b>	<div style="width: 50%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
Means exist for women and men to report complaints of wrongdoing on regulations and procedures	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
Official mechanisms in place to monitor working conditions and data are collected on workers in export-processing zones	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
<b>Existence of special frameworks and initiatives</b>	<div style="width: 50%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
A single-window electronic interface exists, and digital trade facilitation mechanisms are in place	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
National institutions use gender-sensitive guidelines developed by the World Customs Organization or other national monitoring framework	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
Training and sensitization have been provided to border-level agents and officials in the past 12 months	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
<b>Public-private dialogue and frameworks</b>	<div style="width: 50%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
The regulatory framework for public-private partnerships includes gender concerns	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>
Structured dialogues have taken place with the private sector regarding gender equity policies, programmes, and activities in the past 12 months	<div style="width: 25%;"><div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #e64a59;"></div></div>



A supporting business ecosystem is essential to achieve resilient growth through the business cycle. This pillar focuses on the inclusiveness of the business ecosystem in terms of industry bodies supporting women entrepreneurship, the ease and costs of establishing and running a business, trading across borders, and access to information and public procurement markets.

Medium-high performance is primarily attributed to the presence of women associations and business start-up support, and, on a lesser extent, to business targeted support.

### WHAT WORKS?

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2019-2023 establishes the advancement of gender equality as a policy cluster goal in itself and as a cross-cutting issue in other policy clusters. The NDP guides business support programmes and initiatives. Myriad national institutions are involved to achieve this.

At the early stages of business start-up, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDA) provides an accelerator programme – the SMEDA Sensi Tech Innovation Hub. The Corporate Affairs Commission provides support when establishing a company. Free counselling on the registration process is provided and paid services such as the name search form are offered online or at front desks.

Concerning access to relevant information, both public and private sector organizations offer support. The Sierra Leone Content Agency (SLCA), the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA), the National Revenue Authority (NRA), the Chamber of Commerce and the Sierra Leone Importers Association provide step-by-step guidelines, information desks, and free counselling ranging from business start-up to compliance with national regulations and export-import requirements. Information on public tenders is available through the National Public Procurement Authority (NPPA) online platform and newspapers. There is also a user's guide developed to support businesses.

In relation to gender-sensitive practices, the NRA uses the World Customs Organization Customs Integration Action Plan as well as the national code of conduct.

Women entrepreneurs have a supportive private sector business ecosystem. **There are at least five women umbrella organizations to assist them that are present at the national level and cover all economic sectors.** Women-owned companies and associations are active participants in activities held by the Sierra Leone Chamber of Agribusiness Development; 25% of the participants are women. In addition, national public-private dialogues usually tackle gender concerns.



## WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

Trade-related national institutions, which are an important enabling actor in easing trade operations, need to advance progress in some areas. Updated information on changes in customs procedures and trade regulations is disseminated with some delay. **Trade facilitation mechanisms and the availability of electronic services and procedures in place are still at the infant stage.** The Single Window Electronic Interface is not yet implemented and the electronic services in place are limited to alert messages to importers/exporters regarding document application status.

To ensure that nationwide programmes and supporting services benefit both women and men, proper monitoring mechanisms are needed to ensure transparency and accountability. Based on the information collected, only a few institutions collate sex-disaggregated data. Some institutions estimate that 40% of total recipients in the last 12 months are women.

Sex-disaggregated information on the number of officials trained on gender-sensitive guidelines is not always recorded. This is the case for training and sensitization workshops held in the last 12 months targeting border-level agents and officials.

Similarly, the existing database of vendors and transactions from public procurement processes is not sex-disaggregated. The database is managed by the different ministries, departments, agencies and local councils.

Concerning gender-sensitive policies and practices, the regulatory framework for public-private partnerships does not include gender issues.

## 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 rate in technical and vocational programmes for people aged 15–24 years (female/male ratio)	MISSING DATA
Targeted programmes to enhance skills for workers	
National industry placement programmes are available for undergraduates	
Programmes to enhance production skills for workers have been available in the past 12 months	
Targeted programmes to enhance skills for companies	
Training opportunities to support micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprise 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 capabilities to help reduce inequality of opportunities and break the vicious cycle of poverty. 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 skills they need to compete and succeed in international markets and occupations traditionally dominated by men.

High performance in this pillar is primarily attributed to targeted programmes to enhance skills for workers and access to information.

### WHAT WORKS?

Education is compulsory from age three until senior secondary school. National numeracy tests on mathematics are sex-disaggregated. Sierra Leone offers scholarships to continue tertiary education based on merit. This scheme also provides a full scholarship for women enrolled in the sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. In 2019, 60% of beneficiaries were women.

New graduates from various fields have the option to participate in the national industry placement programme under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and National Youth Commission. This programme is usually coordinated directly with universities.

Various national institutions offer training for workers and entrepreneurs. This includes the Corporate Affairs Commission, Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA), SMEDA, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Company (SLPMC). **Training courses include export rules and procedures. Data on participants is gender-disaggregated and female beneficiaries account for 40% to 60% of participants.**

Programmes exclusively targeting women are offered by the Corporate Affairs Commission, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School Education (the Girl Child programme and the Mothers Club), and the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (the Gender and Entrepreneurship Programme).

Training and technical support is regularly offered to women associations and organizations. A women's business association noted that "technical support is relevant because having the right skills can improve businesses".



### WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

Technical programmes and specialized training are outstanding not only in terms of their number but also the monitoring mechanisms and availability of sex-disaggregated data. However, there is room for improvement in terms of monitoring and collection of gender statistics in education.

Monitoring mechanisms on dropout ratios from primary to tertiary education are not established. Similarly, enrolment rates in technical and vocational programmes are not available. This is relevant given that historical data and anecdotal evidence suggest that women continue to be under-represented among graduates. The female adult literacy rate is 35%.

Specialized training in public procurement is currently focused on local councils, but not on entrepreneurs. Existing policies and programmes supporting business innovation continue to be gender-neutral.

## ACCESS TO FINANCE

Access to financial services	<div style="width: 75%; background-color: #c8e6c9; height: 10px;"></div>
Coverage of financial service providers	<div style="width: 50%; background-color: #f2f2f2; height: 10px;"></div>
Digital financial services are available	<div style="width: 100%; background-color: #c8e6c9; height: 10px;"></div>
There is access to formal financial resources (female/male ratio)	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #f2f2f2; height: 10px;"></div>
Gender responsive strategies and programmes	<div style="width: 75%; background-color: #c8e6c9; height: 10px;"></div>
The government is committed to using gender budgeting	<div style="width: 50%; background-color: #f2f2f2; height: 10px;"></div>
Financial inclusion strategies and programmes exist	<div style="width: 100%; background-color: #c8e6c9; height: 10px;"></div>
Financial training has been provided in the past 12 months	<div style="width: 50%; background-color: #f2f2f2; height: 10px;"></div>
Support for women-owned businesses and business associations	<div style="width: 100%; background-color: #c8e6c9; height: 10px;"></div>
Women-owned businesses receive financial support to participate in trade fairs	<div style="width: 100%; background-color: #c8e6c9; height: 10px;"></div>
Women's associations and organizations receive financial support from institutions	<div style="width: 100%; background-color: #c8e6c9; height: 10px;"></div>
Fiscal and targeted trade finance schemes	<div style="width: 75%; background-color: #c8e6c9; height: 10px;"></div>
Financial institutions are mandated to report gender-disaggregated data	<div style="width: 50%; background-color: #f2f2f2; height: 10px;"></div>
Fiscal schemes are available to facilitate entrepreneurial opportunities	<div style="width: 100%; background-color: #c8e6c9; height: 10px;"></div>
Trade finance schemes are available in the country to facilitate trade	<div style="width: 50%; background-color: #f2f2f2; height: 10px;"></div>
Financial instruments and other financing opportunities	<div style="width: 75%; background-color: #c8e6c9; height: 10px;"></div>
Financial instruments are available to support entrepreneurial opportunities	<div style="width: 50%; background-color: #f2f2f2; height: 10px;"></div>
Venture capital financing opportunities are available to support women entrepreneurs	<div style="width: 50%; background-color: #f2f2f2; height: 10px;"></div>



This pillar focuses on women's access to formal financial institutions. It also covers whether countries – alone or in partnership with the private sector – have developed innovative solutions to promote financial inclusion for women, for example by addressing the lack of physical collateral or verifiable cash flow requirements. The pillar also includes gender-budgeting consideration, data collection and fiscal schemes.

### WHAT WORKS?

Promoting access to finance, in particular digital financial services, is among Sierra Leone's priorities. This commitment is reflected in two major initiatives – the National Financial Inclusion Strategy and the programme on financial inclusion launched in 2017 by the Bank of Sierra Leone.

Women business associations, organizations and women entrepreneurs receive financial support in two different ways. Women business associations receive financial support from the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (SMEDA) and the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA).

Women entrepreneurs also receive financial support from SLIEPA and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. **Women entrepreneurs in the agribusiness and textile sectors are supported to participate in international trade fairs.** To qualify for assistance, the business needs to be registered. Financial support offered ranges from air tickets, registration fees, and setting up booths at trade fairs. SLIEPA estimates that 25% of total beneficiaries are micro, small and medium-size companies owned by women.

Fiscal incentives are available to support entrepreneurs. The National Investment Incentives and Finance Act 2019 makes provision for tax exemptions for new businesses, a tax exemption (at 6%) on the remunerations of women hired in senior managerial positions in all industries, and export incentives for companies in the agriculture and energy sectors.

Trade finance schemes in the form of guarantees and letters of credit are available. Between 2010 and 2014, the government negotiated with financial institutions a special interest rate for businesses –15% compared to the standard interest rate of 25%. Some commercial banks provide tailored loans for specific sectors with a special interest rate as well as microloans and a credit guarantee scheme.

Digital financial services are available in the country such as mobile banking, issuing payments, sending and receiving money internationally, peer-to-peer lending, as well as SMS alerts for account transactions and bills payment.



## WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

Despite the number of programmes and initiatives in place as well as the various fiscal incentives and financial instruments, further efforts are needed to ensure that both women and men are benefitting. Concerning internal practices, government commitment to using gender budgeting continues to be at early stages despite some attempts made in this regard.

Limited physical infrastructure continues to be an ongoing challenge when accessing financial resources. In terms of monitoring mechanisms, there is no mandatory reporting of sex-disaggregated data for financial institutions. This prevents Sierra Leone from understanding the gender gap in terms of access to financial instruments and schemes. **There is no financial instrument tailored for women entrepreneurs.** Better data and targeted schemes are essential to reduce the existing gender gap in access to finance.

## WORK & SOCIETY

### Woman'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 (female/male ratio)



### Division of labour

Labour force participation rate (female/male ratio)



Female share of employment in managerial positions (%)



### Gender occupational biases

Unemployment rate with advanced education ratio (female/male 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



This pillar addresses unconscious or conscious gender biases that prevent women from participating equally in the economy. This includes existing patterns of job segregation and the interventions set up by governments to address these biases.

High performance is primarily attributed to women's participation as workers, and the narrow gender gap in unemployment with advanced education as well as government support provided to private and non-profit initiatives on gender equality and women's empowerment.

### WHAT WORKS?

Available statistics show that there is near gender-parity in women's participation in the labour market as workers and managers. It is important to note that these statistics do not refer to women's participation in the informal sector.

Analysing the gender gap in time allocated to unpaid domestic chores and care work, ILO statistics show that even though women dedicate more time than men, the gap is narrowing. However, the latest available data was collected in 2010.

To create awareness on the importance of gender equality, the government is participating in regional and international dialogues and supporting initiatives launched by the private sector, international organizations and non-profit organizations. The private sector is raising awareness through awards recognizing women entrepreneurship and outstanding achievements.

### WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

Notwithstanding almost gender parity in participation in labour markets, women continue to be paid less than men. There are gaps in the legal framework to guarantee equal rights to work in the mining, transportation, infrastructure, and manufacturing industries. (This data is sourced from World Bank Women Business and the Law 2020).

Finally, national institutions are active in supporting and participating in dialogues and campaigns organized at the regional and international level, or initiated by external parties. But, a limited number of national institutions have launched or started a campaign by themselves.

## CONCLUSION

# The way forward

Sierra Leone has made significant progress to advance gender equality. This commitment is also reflected in the National Development Plan 2019-2023; a policy dedicated to empowering women and gender equality as a crosscutting issue. However, further efforts are needed to build an inclusive ecosystem for both women and men.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, governments are prompted to address its adverse impacts in an inclusive manner. This presents an opportunity to adopt a coherent and strategic approach towards gender mainstreaming in policies and programmes, increase coordination across trade and trade-related institutions and engage the private sector to come up with innovative solutions.

Two important areas for investment and reforms are digitalization and labour laws, and childcare. Digital technologies play an important role in two critical areas: trade facilitation and access to finance. Digitalization can help overcome women's limited access to basic infrastructure and deliver timely information on trade regulations and customs procedures. As such, investment in digitalization remains a priority for Sierra Leone.

There is an urgent need to review existing laws to ensure that women enjoy the same rights and protection in labour markets. These include laws regarding equal pay for an equal job, protection from sexual harassment, and the right to work in the same industries as men. Putting in place paternal leave and establishing public childcare centres could help reduce women's double burden of paid and unpaid activities and narrow the gender wage gap.

In the short-to-medium term, Sierra Leone could consider strengthening the monitoring mechanism of policies and programmes, and design targeted interventions.

## 01

### THE WAY FORWARD: MONITORING MECHANISMS

Strengthening monitoring mechanisms, including the collection of sex-disaggregated data, is critical to ensure Sierra Leone leverages public spending on education, technical and business support programmes, fiscal schemes and access to finance initiatives for gender equality. Encouraging the collection of sex-disaggregated is essential to inform policy decisions and drive change where it is most needed.

#### Suggestions:

- Including gender indicators in implementation plans;
- Building the capacity of officials, in particular, trade officials on the gender impact assessment of trade agreements through existing gender focal points;
- Collecting sex-disaggregated data on drop-out ratios and enrolment and graduation from TVET programmes; and
- Requesting financial institutions to collect and report sex-disaggregated data on bank account ownership, security loans, non-performing loans and product use.

## 02

### THE WAY FORWARD: TARGETED INITIATIVES

Data on the number of exporting companies owned by women (one-in-20 exporting companies) and the number of women in high-level positions (between 12% and 17%) show that interventions are needed. An example of an initiative that can be followed is presented below: Improving farm management and gender equality in agricultural value chains.

#### Suggestions include:

- Developing policies or strategies to increase women entrepreneurs' participation in public procurement;
- Implementing initiatives to increase women entrepreneurs' participation in international trade, for example, through women's exporters programmes;
- Conducting skills development and entrepreneurial development programmes in agro-processing and mining; and
- Encouraging financial institutions to develop targeted financial products for female entrepreneurs, such as venture capital

#### GOOD PRACTICE: IMPROVING FARM MANAGEMENT & GENDER EQUALITY IN AGRICULTURAL VALUE CHAINS

*The Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Company, in partnership with GIZ's Employment Promotion Programme (EPP III), supports improved farm management, employment, opportunities for youth, and gender equality in agricultural value chains. (GIZ – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH – is Germany's leading provider of international cooperation services.)*



*The programme worked with SMEs and smallholder farmers in Sierra Leone to increase production, quality of produce, and employment in the cocoa and coffee value chains. EPP III provided farmers with financial support and training to help them set up and manage cocoa seedling nurseries, and distribute them to farms. The programme achieved gender balance among its 208 total farmer beneficiaries in five communities.*

Source: [<http://www.slpmc.sl/>]

## 03

### THE WAY FORWARD: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase coordination across institutions and the private sector;
- Boost investment in digital technologies; and
- Review existing laws to ensure gender equality.



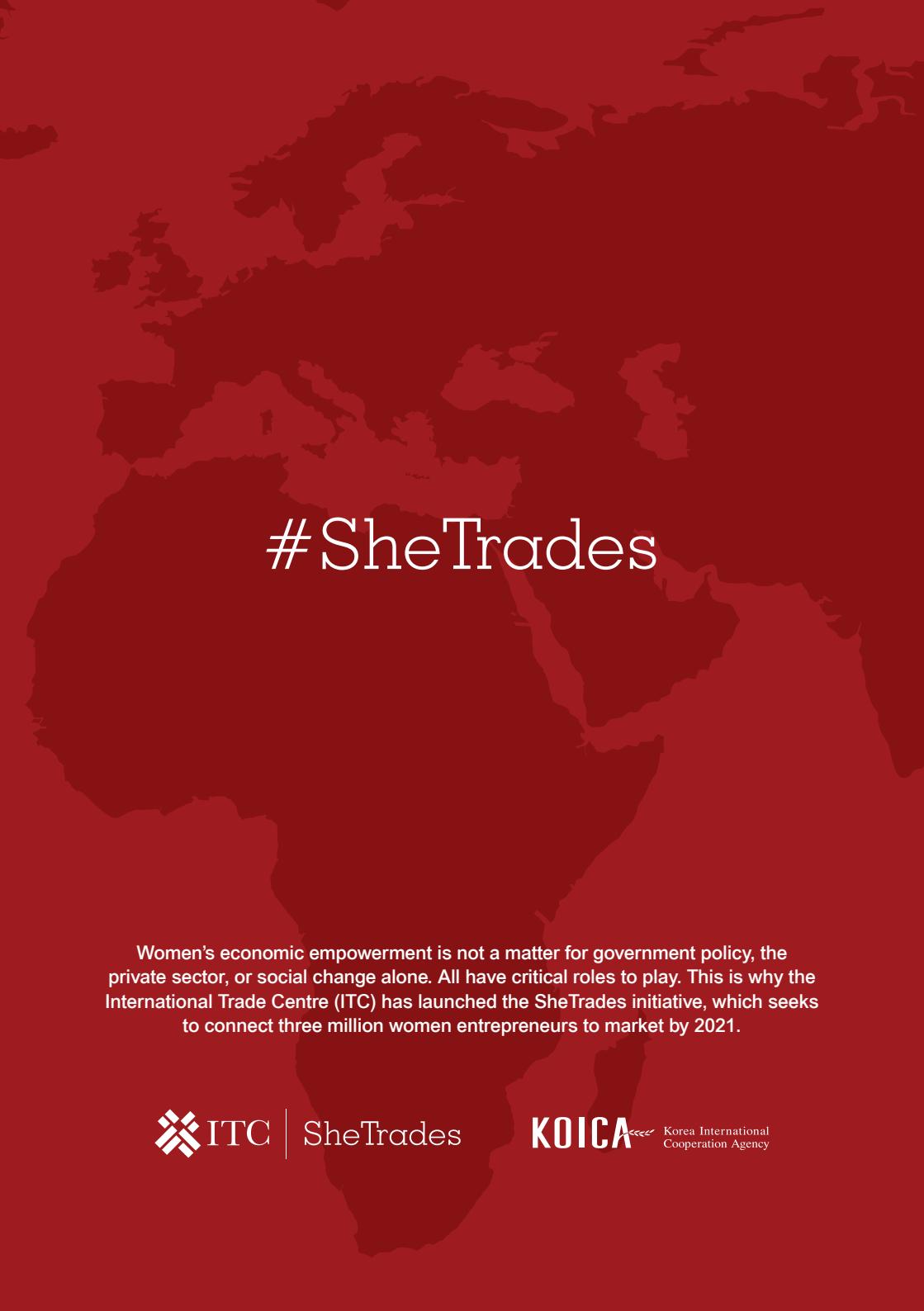
#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

More information about this Policy Brief and the SheTrades Outlook project can be found at: [www.shetrades.com/outlook](http://www.shetrades.com/outlook)

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#### Contribution to UN Sustainable Development Goals:





# #SheTrades

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) has launched the SheTrades initiative, which seeks to connect three million women entrepreneurs to market by 2021.

