

# WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS FINANCE INITIATIVE

[www.we-fi.org](http://www.we-fi.org)

## WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

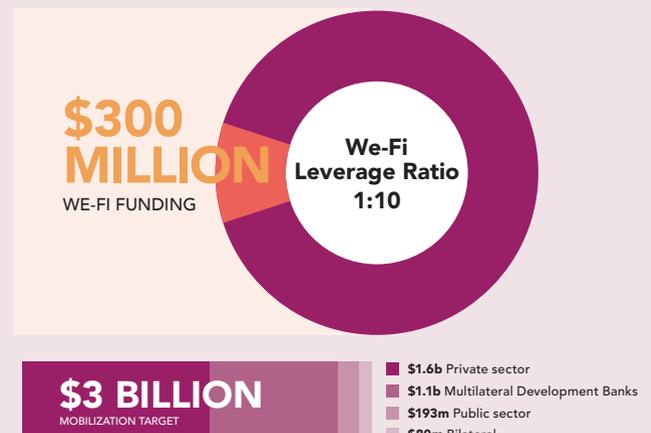
Women entrepreneurs around the globe are creating jobs, driving prosperity in their communities, strengthening industries, and fueling innovation. While the focus on empowering women-owned and led small and mid-sized enterprises (WSMEs) has been on the rise in recent years, women entrepreneurs in many low-income countries still encounter significant obstacles that their male counterparts do not. Stark financial, legal, cultural, and social barriers prevent women entrepreneurs from advancing their businesses. Workplace changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have disproportionately impacted women and women-led businesses through job and market losses and greater burdens of domestic care work.

The Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) is on a mission to break down these barriers – especially the lack of access to finance – and help women

entrepreneurs in developing countries advance their businesses and uplift their communities. Within three years of its launch in 2017, We-Fi has allocated nearly \$300 million in donor contributions to programs. These allocations are mobilizing an additional \$3 billion, achieving a leverage ratio of 1:10 which far exceeds We-Fi's initial goal of mobilizing one billion dollars to support women entrepreneurs.

Achieving ambitious targets requires a multi-faceted approach. We-Fi programs are designed to increase WSMEs' access to financial products and services; to opportunities for skills, training, mentorship, and networking; and to markets, both domestic and global. We-Fi programs also tackle the laws and practices that keep women from thriving in business.

### EXPECTED MOBILIZATION



**\$355 million in contributions from 14 donor governments**

**\$300 million total allocation for programs supporting women entrepreneurs**

**\$3 billion expected mobilization, achieving a financial leverage of 1:10**

**Planned activities in 60 countries of which 65% are in low-income and fragile countries**

**Reaching over 130,000 WSMEs**

**Engaging 75 partner organizations**

## WHAT WE DO

### We-Fi empowers women entrepreneurs in four key ways



#### Increasing access to finance

We-Fi provides capital, risk mitigation, and capacity building to enable financial intermediaries to expand women entrepreneurs' access to debt, equity, venture capital, and insurance.



#### Increasing access to markets

We-Fi enhances linkages between WSMEs, buyers and suppliers, enabling them to better compete in domestic and global supply chains.



#### Increasing access to training, mentoring, and networks

We-Fi builds the capacity of women entrepreneurs and connects them to mentors and networks, so they can take their businesses to the next level.



#### Improving the enabling environment

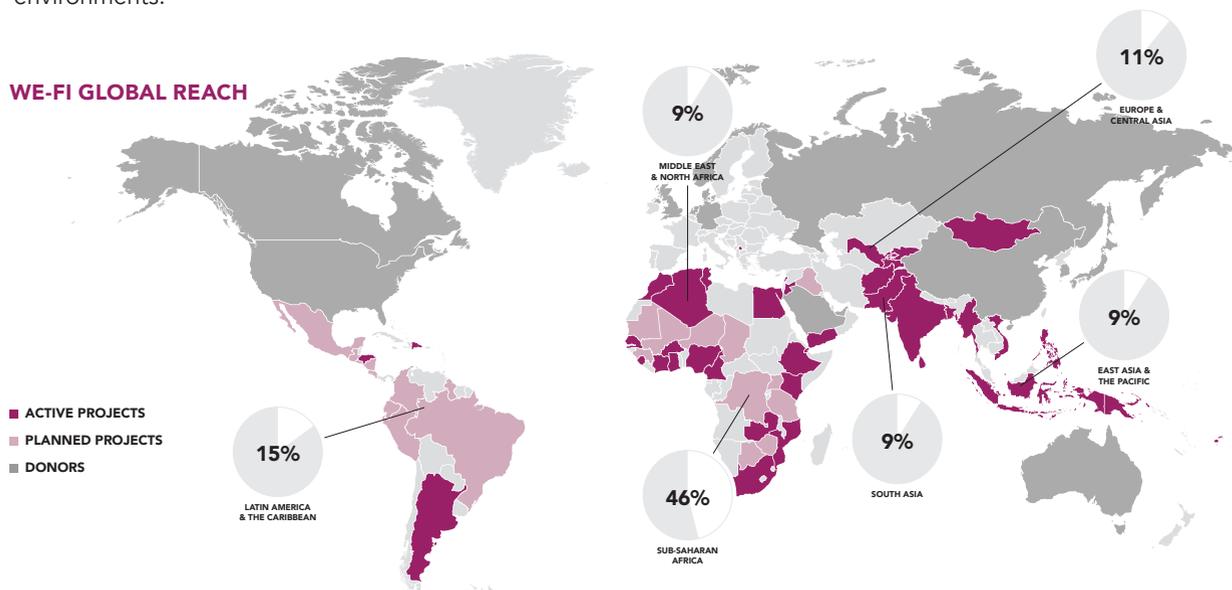
We-Fi assists governments in easing the legal and regulatory constraints and gender biases that impede women entrepreneurs in running their businesses.

## IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

- African Development Bank Group (AfDB)
- Asian Development Bank (ADB)
- European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)
- Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)
- Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)
- World Bank Group (WBG; World Bank and IFC)

At the core of We-Fi's approach to unlocking finance and growth for WMSEs are its Implementing Partners—multilateral development banks (MDBs) that develop and implement We-Fi projects. They work with government and private sector partners and networks around the world to maximize the impact of We-Fi funding. Implementing Partners help We-Fi achieve global reach, mobilize resources, and build collaborative partnerships to attain scale and systemic impact for women across the entrepreneurial ecosystem, including in the most challenging environments.

## WE-FI GLOBAL REACH



## WE-FI IN ACTION THROUGH IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

### We-Fi is bridging the finance gap for WSMEs

- **Supporting women in starting and growing their businesses.** In Sri Lanka, blended funding from ADB and We-Fi is enabling 10 financial institutions to provide nearly \$30 million in lending to women entrepreneurs. Renuka Nelum Devi is using her loan to expand her plant nursery.
- **Leveraging digital finance to increase lending to WSMEs.** In Nigeria, the World Bank is supporting the development of a digital cashflow-based lending product that reduces the reliance on collateral and allows WSMEs to apply for loans on their phones.

### We-Fi is strengthening market linkages for women

- **Helping WSMEs expand market access through e-commerce.** The World Bank has partnered with international shipper UPS to train WSMEs in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) on leveraging e-commerce platforms to boost sales and adapt to consumer demand during the pandemic.
- **Opening markets for WSMEs by encouraging inclusive value chains.** In Honduras, IDB Invest has provided a We-Fi-funded incentive to Elcatex, a leading clothing manufacturer, to increase its share of WSME suppliers and the volume of purchases from women-owned firms.



### We-Fi is enhancing the business resilience of WSMEs

- **Enhancing the business resilience and adaptability of WSMEs.** In Yemen, IsDB is supporting women entrepreneurs with business resilience training and matching grants. Over 340 women entrepreneurs have received matching grants to develop their business operations, including Nadia Ali, owner of a small sewing shop. With the purchase of new machinery, she has been able to grow her business and produce face masks and protective gear during the pandemic.
- **Tailoring advisory services to high-growth WSMEs.** In Central Asia, EBRD is providing one-on-one business advice to over 40 high-growth WSMEs to help them adopt digital technologies and embrace e-commerce. One of these entrepreneurs, Madina Balahisheva, the manager of a hotel and café in the Kyrgyz Republic, has been able to generate income during the pandemic by completing the automation of her food and bakery delivery service.

### We-Fi is breaking down gender biases & building evidence

- **Helping remove gender-biased legal and regulatory constraints.** The World Bank's program Women, Business and the Law has developed reform recommendations for 12 countries on removing barriers to women's entrepreneurship. This work has led to Pakistan eliminating discriminatory business registration procedures and Jordan prohibiting gender-based discrimination in accessing finance.
- **Supporting research to highlight what works in addressing gender disparities.** A recent study supported by We-Fi reveals that accelerator programs designed to help entrepreneurs raise funding work better for men than women. The research is raising awareness of the gender disparities in accelerators' impact and serving as a call for action.

## PRIORITIES

Rebuilding the global economy after the COVID-19 crisis demands women's full participation. To support the recovery phase, We-Fi is intensifying its efforts to scale up women entrepreneurs' access to finance, markets, and training. The goal is to equip them with the skills they need to adapt to the new context, nurture their businesses, and lift up their families and communities.

We-Fi's third financing round of \$49.3 million awarded in August 2020 was heavily shaped by the circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis. Allocations were made to IDBG, EBRD, IsDB, and World Bank Group (World Bank and IFC), for projects designed to support women entrepreneurs in responding and

adapting to the disruptions caused by COVID-19. Financing is expected to benefit over 15,000 WSMEs by enabling their participation in value chains, supporting disruptive technologies and digital financial inclusion, and scaling early-stage finance for women entrepreneurs—all areas of significant importance for WSMEs' resilient recovery.

In the immediate future, We-Fi will continue to support women entrepreneurs in the post-pandemic economic recovery in particular by expanding access to finance, technology and gathering and monitoring gender financial data and thereby incentivizing more capital for women-led businesses.

## FACES OF RESILIENCE



*Omaira Saucedo, a Bolivian entrepreneur, understands that close communication with clients is key – surely in times of economic uncertainty. She is co-founder of tuGerente, a startup in Bolivia that offers SMEs an all-in-one software to manage daily operations and finances. Burdened with so many unknowns early on in the COVID-crisis, many current and potential clients hesitated to sign up for tuGerente's services. Omaira and her team launched a proactive response that involved webinars to train clients on managing their businesses remotely. They also introduced monthly and annual subscription options for their software.*

**After gaining their trust again, we saw clients coming back... We now have 500 SME clients compared to 350 in the beginning of the year."**

Omaira Saucedo, co-founder of tuGerente and beneficiary of IDBG We-Fi program 🌍 Bolivia



*Adeyemi Yetunde leads a successful food production and distribution company, including a bakery. As a beneficiary of a World Bank We-Fi project in Nigeria focused on expanding access to finance for women entrepreneurs, Adeyemi has received two loans from Nigeria-based Access Bank. Her company's bread factory has increased production from 1000 to 30,000 loaves between 2015 and 2020, and the number of employees grew from 7 to 120. The ability to access finance has enhanced Adeyemi's resilience and prepared her company to face shocks in demand resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. "2020 was challenging," she says. "But it also taught me to be creative. We came up with a new package-friendly product and continued delivering food."*

**If you have a passion about a business, go for it. Don't mind starting small."**

Adeyemi Yetunde, CEO of Active Foods Ltd. 🌍 Nigeria