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Accelerate Women's Entrepreneurship and Access to Capital in Cambodia: Lessons and Recommendations



Supported by:

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The Asia Foundation

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Executive Summary

This document presents the lessons and recommendations of the project “Accelerate Women’s Entrepreneurship and Access to Capital” in Cambodia, an initiative funded by the VISA Foundation and implemented by The Asia Foundation. By providing training courses to a large number of entrepreneurs in Cambodia, this program aimed to provide participants with digital skills and greater financial literacy to grow their businesses. Between February 2021 and January 2023, more than 1,100 women entrepreneurs had the opportunity to access training, which consisted of four modules: financial literacy, access to capital, digital literacy, and e-commerce/social media.

The results show that the “Accelerate Women’s Entrepreneurship and Access to Capital” initiative positively improved specific managerial practices of women entrepreneurs. Such practices included separating their personal/domestic financial affairs from those of their businesses, increasing social media usage to expand their market, and adopting bookkeeping as a regular practice. This is a relevant lesson for tailoring the content of further short-term upskilling interventions and setting specific, measurable goals.

The implementation of the project also revealed that the growth of micro and small businesses is particularly intertwined with social context and dynamics. First, many women entrepreneurs have not registered their businesses, which poses difficulty in accessing social networks, the formal financial system, and the potential benefits of business-friendly public policies such as tax incentives, loans, or training. Accordingly, this report shows that upskilling initiatives oriented toward underserved populations should also aim to bring micro and small businesses to the formal economy. This can be achieved with an appropriate incentive scheme, and will allow women entrepreneurs to access social safety nets and obtain the proof of income needed to access loans.

Additionally, not all entrepreneurs see their businesses as a primary long-term source of income. During the data collection process, about one-quarter of the women entrepreneurs reported being active in the job market, seeking more profitable and stable employment. Moreover, when asked about the factors that motivated them in seeking a loan, most respondents stated that they need liquidity for personal purposes rather than to grow their businesses. Thus future upskilling programs could offer orientation and training on specific skills needed to succeed in the job market to a subset of the target population.

This report also shows that, despite offering a curriculum suitable to the needs of micro and small businesses, delivered by experienced trainers, the majority of women entrepreneurs who did not complete the program (i.e., dropped out) did so because they did not have time to attend the training sessions. This affects many women entrepreneurs, regardless their age, province of residence, or educational status. There is scope to develop innovative new methodologies to expand the benefits of programs oriented toward marginalized groups, particularly women—for example, by offering courses with scheduling flexibility or combining social policies for care with upskilling training programs.

Finally, lack of confidence and trust undermines the adoption of tools that might be helpful to grow micro and small businesses. A significant subset of women entrepreneurs distrusts the formal banking and financial system, reinforcing the prevalence of informal loans. Similarly, this lack of trust also affects the adoption of e-commerce and e-payment tools. Thus, the challenge for policymakers is to implement interventions that build in formal systems—for example, through peer learning—punctuated by practical examples and transparency.

1. Micro, Small, and Medium Businesses in Cambodia

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are vital to the Cambodian economy. They drive economic and social development¹ by creating jobs, generating income for low-income individuals and vulnerable populations, and promoting social stability. MSMEs dominate Cambodia's economy, comprising 99% of firms, 58% of annual GDP, and 70% of employment.² However, these enterprises operate primarily in the informal sector and are typically only licensed and regulated by local authorities. Notably, only 3.4% of all enterprises are registered with the Ministry of Commerce, and most unregistered enterprises are micro-enterprises.³ Additionally, studies indicate that women are less likely to register their businesses, with only 1.7% of women-led enterprises registered compared to 6.6% for men-led enterprises.⁴

The Office of the Council of Ministers revised the definition for micro, small and medium businesses in 2021. The new definition is categorized into three sectors: agriculture, industry, and services, including commerce. Furthermore, the classification is based on two criteria: the number of employees and the amount of turnover or assets. The turnover or assets are determined based on the higher value.⁵

Table 1. The Definition of MSMEs in Cambodia

Industry	Number of employees			Turnover (\$)			Asset (\$)		
	Micro	Small	Medium	Micro	Small	Medium	Micro	Small	Medium
Agriculture	< 5	5 – 49	50 – 199	< 62,250	62,250 – 250,000	250,001 – 1,000,000	< 50,000	50,000 – 250,000	250,001 – 500,000
Industry	< 5	5 – 49	50 – 199	< 62,250	62,250 – 400,000	400,001 – 2,000,000	< 50,000	50,000 – 500,000	500,001 – 1,000,000
Service and Commerce	< 5	5 – 49	50 – 99	< 62,250	62,250 – 250,000	250,001 – 1,500,000	< 50,000	50,000 – 250,000	250,001 – 500,000

Despite the importance of this sector, micro and small businesses face a variety of growth challenges, including access to capital, markets, low productivity, and a need for more qualified and skilled labor.⁶ These issues also disproportionately affect women-led enterprises. Access to capital is one of the most significant barriers for Cambodian MSMEs and can limit their growth, success, and competitiveness in local and international markets.⁷

Digital skills gaps in Cambodia are another significant challenge to MSMEs' competitiveness. Internet penetration in Cambodia was 60% in 2021, with only 29% of the population having basic digital skills. In addition, connectivity remains a challenge; while access has improved in recent years, still only 50% of urban and 30% of rural households are able to access the Internet at home.

Finally, Cambodia's MSMEs have limited market access. Many operate in remote and rural areas. This is compounded by weak logistics infrastructure,⁸ making transporting goods to market complex and costly. Most MSMEs also lack international quality standards to compete in foreign markets. Furthermore, MSMEs in Cambodia face regulatory and compliance challenges owing to a complex and ever-changing regulatory environment that can be difficult to navigate.

2. Improving Skills: The Case for Accelerate Women's Entrepreneurship and Access to Capital Initiative in Cambodia

The "Accelerate Women's Entrepreneurship and Access to Capital" (Accelerate) initiative is a project funded by the VISA Foundation and implemented by The Asia Foundation. The initiative aims to provide digital skills to women-led micro and small businesses in Cambodia and the Philippines. The courses include financial literacy training, business skills and financial planning, and training in how to use e-commerce platforms. The project also aims to link women entrepreneurs with financial institutions and services.

At the initial stage, the project conducted a Rapid Need Assessment with 200 women-led small and micro-businesses, 13 e-commerce platforms, and 14 financial institutions. The main objectives of this assessment were to i) assess the knowledge gaps on financial literacy, access to capital, digital literacy, and online market platforms; ii) select banks and/or microfinance organizations best suited to the needs of the project's beneficiaries; and iii) identify and select several best-fit online platforms suited to the needs of the women entrepreneurs to move forward with onboarding.

From February 2021 to January 2023, the program benefited more than 1,100 women-owned micro and small businesses. The women entrepreneurs were selected from underserved peri-urban areas of Phnom Penh and certain provinces, such as Siem Reap, Battambang, Steung Treng, Kampong Cham, Tboung Khmum, Kampong Speu, Kampot, Preah Sihanouk, Svay Reang, Odor Meanchey, and Kampong Thom.

The program consisted of four core modules: i) financial literacy;⁹ ii) access to capital;¹⁰ iii) digital literacy;¹¹ and iv) e-commerce/social media.¹² All modules were delivered in-person and online. The courses were delivered by local implementing partners specialized in each respective modules, including Agile, Khmum, Kokkpon, WeMall, Amrita, Youth Council of Cambodia (YCC), the Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability (CISA), and the Federation for Associations for SMEs of Cambodia (FASMEC). The project also included pre and post-tests during the training sessions and group discussions with MSMEs. Table 2 describes the summarized information of the women entrepreneurs by module.

Table 2. Main indicators

Module I: Financial literacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,117 women entrepreneurs • 193 mentored
Module II: Access to capital <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 848 women entrepreneurs trained
Module III: Digital literacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 848 women entrepreneurs trained
Module IV: e-commerce and social media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 503 women entrepreneurs trained on Facebook • 54 women entrepreneurs trained on TikTok • 163 mentored

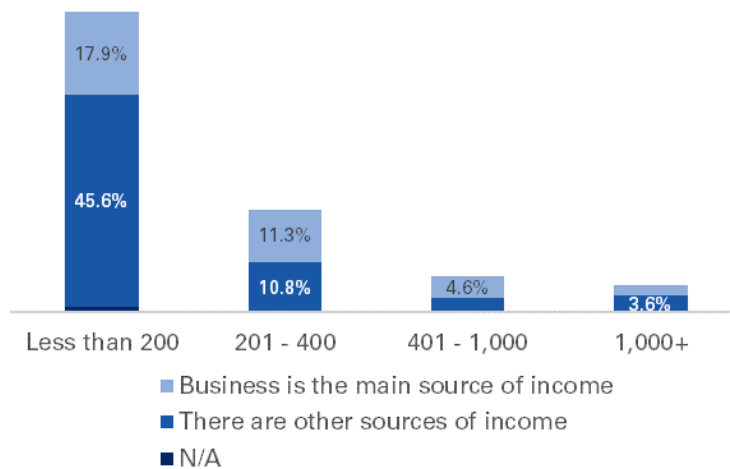
3. Quantitative Assessment of the Women Entrepreneurs

To better understand the impact of the training, the Agile Development Group surveyed 195 women entrepreneurs of the program. The data was collected online between September and October 2022 through online forms and phone calls. The survey questionnaire consisted of more than 70 questions: basic demographic information about the women entrepreneur and their business, financial literacy of the women entrepreneur, access to capital and loan access, digital literacy, and post-training improvement. The rest of this section will briefly outline the main results and lessons of the data gathered.

3.1 General Information

In the survey sample, 63% of respondents were married, while 75% had at least completed secondary education. Regarding age groups, 31% of respondents were in the 18 to 24 years old category, 41% were between 25 and 34 years old, 23% were between 35 and 44, and 6% were 45 years old or more. Most respondent’s businesses generated less than US\$400/month, with most generating less than \$200/month (63.6% of the total). In addition, entrepreneurs often had other household income sources (63.1% of the total).

Figure 1. Monthly income from the business (in US\$)



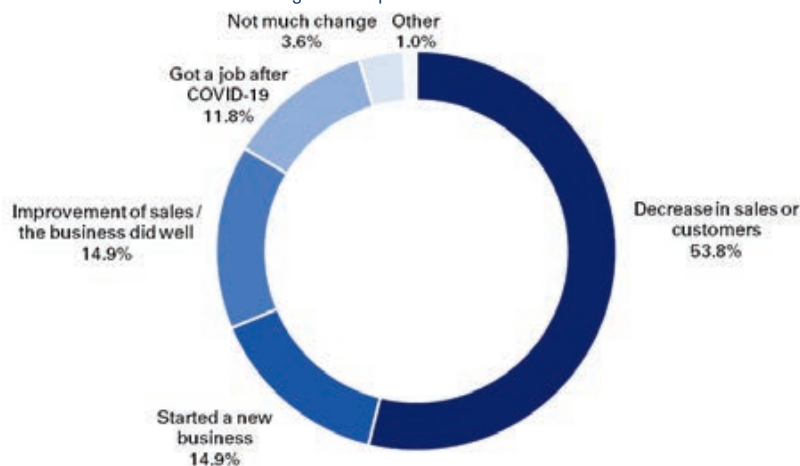
Businesses that had operated for less than two years represented 55% of firms surveyed, with more than 80% not registered as formal entities. Moreover, there was no correlation between the firm’s age and formalization, as most older businesses (5+ years) were not registered. In total, only 12% of survey respondents were formally registered, while 8% were in the process of registering their businesses.

Figure 2. Business age and registration status



The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns heavily impacted most businesses. More than 50% of respondents reported a decrease in sales or customers, and 11.8% had to find a job after the first lockdown phases of the pandemic. Despite this, nearly 30% either experienced an improvement in sales or started a business due to the pandemic effects. Further research is needed to understand better the causes of the increase in revenues (such as the expansion of the consumer base, competitors going out of business due to the crisis, or other factors) and the drivers for creating new business (i.e., if the entrepreneur used to have a permanent job before the COVID-19 pandemic or started a business to supplement other household's income losses).

Figure 3. Impact of COVID-19



Many women entrepreneurs were transitioning to the job market as an alternative to their own entrepreneurial ventures, while 27% were already active in the job market. Moreover, job seekers were more frequent among entrepreneurs who are their household's main income source.

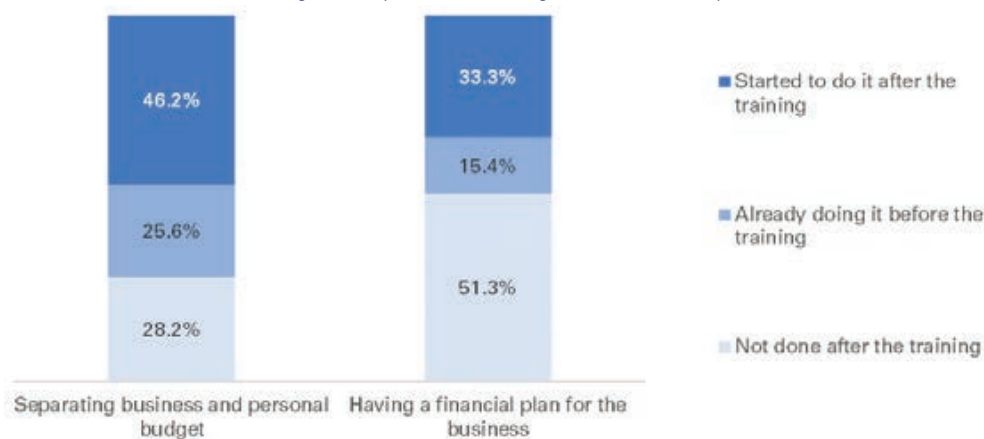
Table 3. Job market participation and household income sources

	The entrepreneur is the main source of income in the household			
	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
Seeking for a job during the last six months	25	28	1	54
Not seeking for a job	43	95	-	138
Don't know	2	-	1	3
Total	70	123	2	195

3.2 Financial Literacy

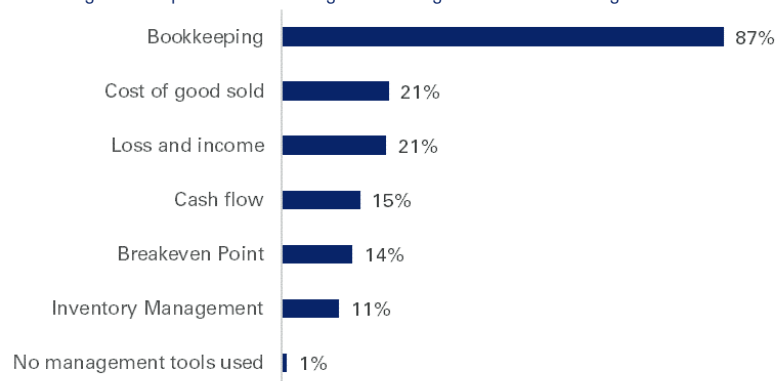
Financial tools are critical for entrepreneurs to grow their businesses, and improving financial literacy allows them to plan better, have a detailed budgeting structure, manage their inventory and costs, and potentially invest. In this context, this program has successfully persuaded many of the participating entrepreneurs to separate their business and personal/domestic budgets; nearly two-thirds of attendees who did not previously have that practice in place implemented it after the program. Nevertheless, challenges remain in having a financial plan as a recurrent practice, as most surveyed (51.3%) still needed a financial plan for their business after training.

Figure 4. Impact of the training on financial literacy



Additionally, the training program was particularly relevant in promoting bookkeeping tools used as a financial management practice, as 87% of respondents reported using them after the program. Other relevant management tools used as a result of the program included the cost of goods sold and loss and income¹³ (21% frequency of usage each). Only one percent of respondents did not use management tools after the training.

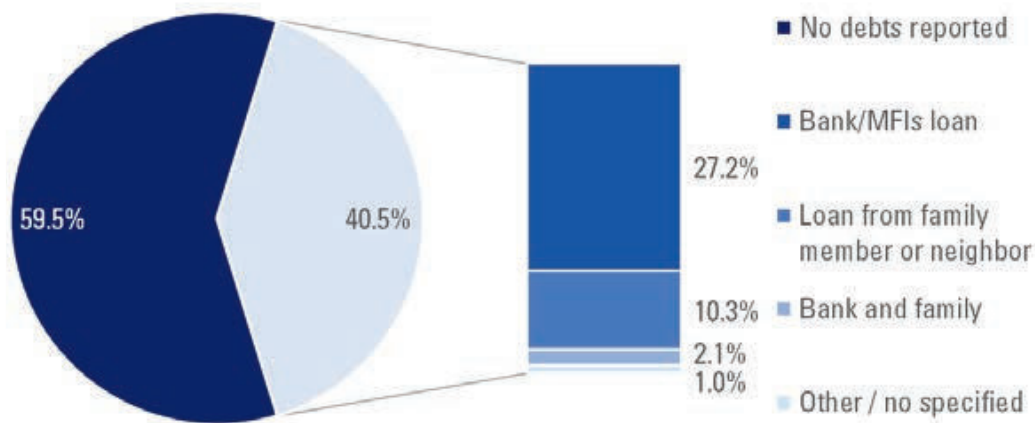
Figure 5. Impact of the training on the usage of financial management tools



3.3 Access to Capital and Loans

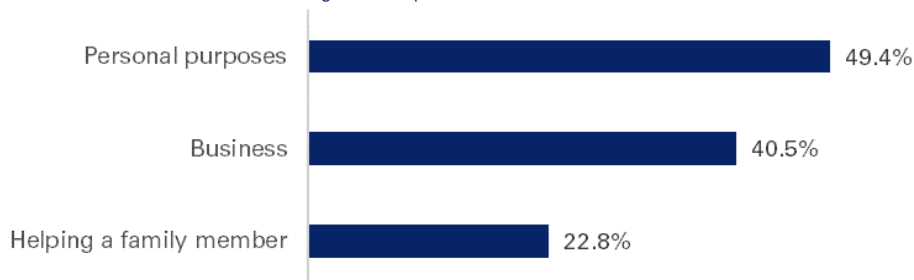
Access to capital and loans is critically important in enabling entrepreneurs to more effectively allocate resources over time and explore new products, services, or markets. Most respondents (59.5%) did not declare having debts for personal or business purposes. Among those surveyed who indicated that they bore debts, most (27.2% out of 40.5% of the total) reported that loans were received from banks or microfinance institutions. Still, informal loans with family members or neighbors are a relevant source. Nearly one-third of the entrepreneurs who pay debts are using these informal channels.

Figure 6. Debts reported and sources



Despite its importance, business growth is not the main reason for acquiring debt. Entrepreneurs often must deal with scarcity within their households. Nearly half of the respondents paying debts declared receiving a loan for personal purposes, and 22.8% are helping family members pay debts.

Figure 7. Purpose of the loan received



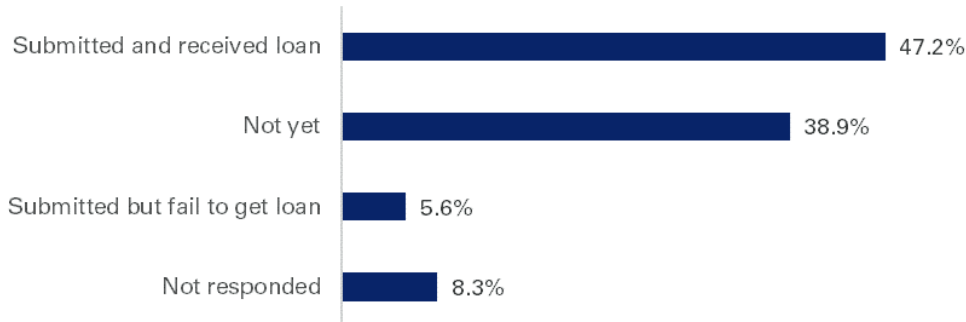
Moreover, the demand for loans to expand businesses was low. Only 18.5% of respondents reported needing a loan to grow their business after taking the training program.

Figure 8. Demand for loans after taking the training



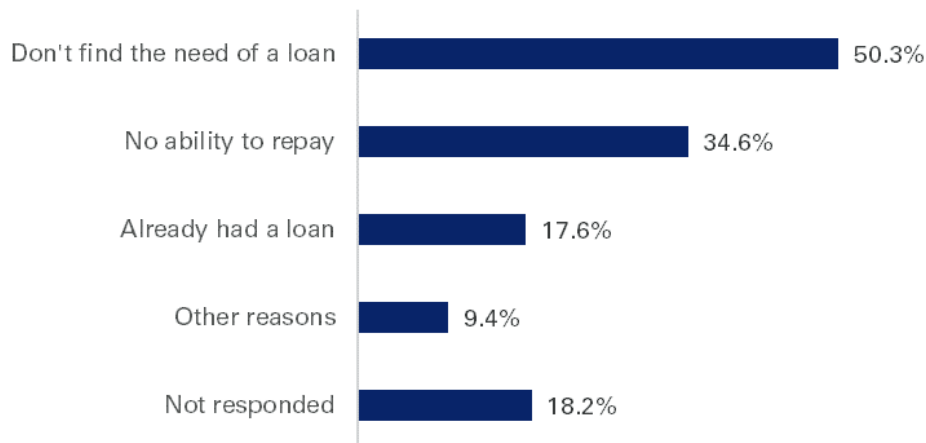
Despite the low demand for loans to grow their businesses, when entrepreneurs do apply for loans in the formal financial system, they often successfully access the capital requested. Thus, a significant percentage of respondents prepared to assume debt for such purpose have submitted and received a loan (47.2%).

Figure 9. Actions taken by entrepreneurs needing a loan



Finally, most of the surveyed entrepreneurs who reported that they did not seek loans for expanding their business indicated they did not see a need to seek a loan (50.3%). This may reflect a combination of lack of managerial capabilities and the fact that some entrepreneurs are actually transitioning to the labor market, seeking permanent paid jobs rather than pursuing independent business ventures. The second most frequent reason for not seeking a loan to expand the business is the inability to pay back the debt (34.6%).

Figure 10. Reasons why the entrepreneurs don't need a loan



3.4 Digital Literacy and Platform Usage

A final component of the survey analysis is based on the knowledge and integration of women entrepreneurs in the digital economy. In this context, the survey assessed the digital literacy qualification level (using MS Excel as a proxy for a basic understanding of computer usage) and included a set of questions regarding social media usage and e-commerce tools.

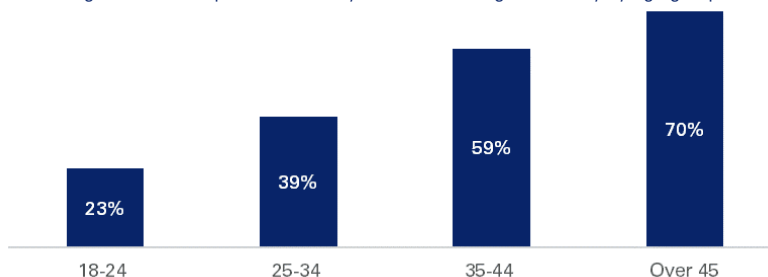
Most respondents (58%) reported having a very low or low degree of knowledge of MS Excel, while only 11.2% of those survey had a high or very high degree of MS Excel skills. Moreover, most respondents declared they were not using e-commerce platforms, such as delivery or e-payment apps, for their business. Only 28% of respondents are active e-commerce platform users for their businesses, with most having intermediate or higher knowledge of MS Excel.

Figure 11. Digital literacy: MS Excel skills and e-commerce usage



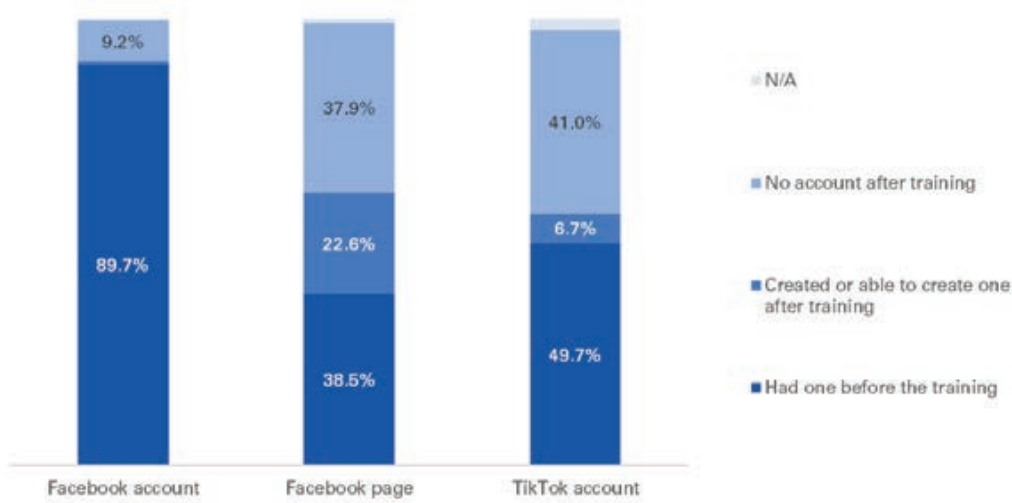
Additionally, digital literacy is highly correlated with age. The survey shows that participants in younger age groups were less likely to declare a very low knowledge of MS Excel compared to older groups. Thus, only 23% of women entrepreneurs between 18 and 24 years old reported having low digital literacy knowledge, compared to 70% of those above 45 years old. As observed in the graph below, the trend increased by the age group of respondents.

Figure 12. Participants with “very low” level of digital literacy by age group



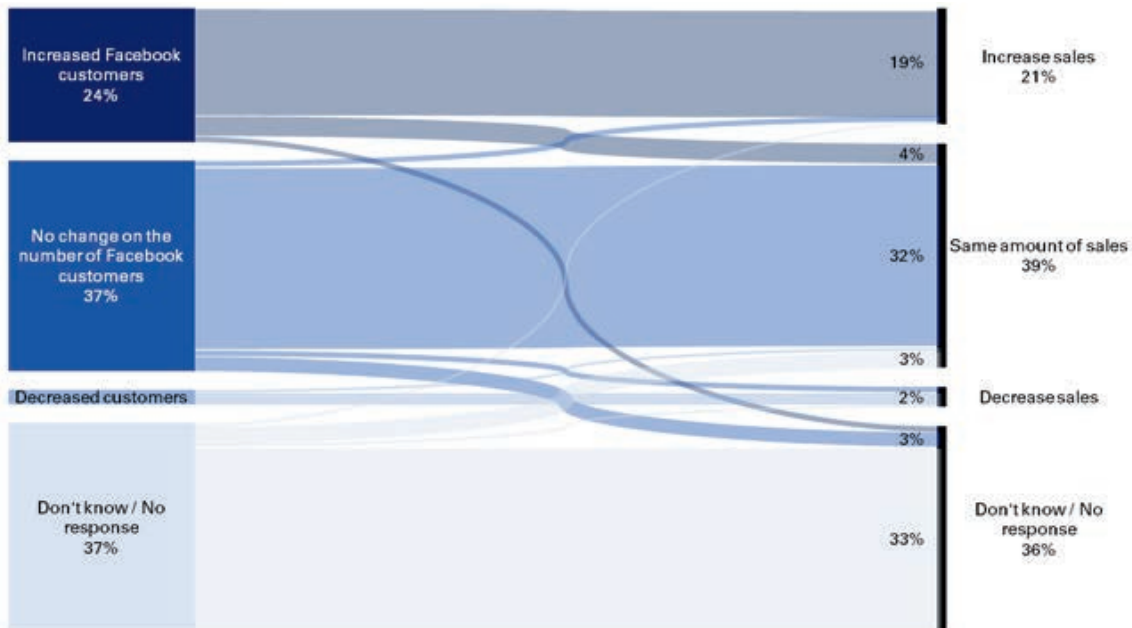
Regarding the usage of social media platforms, the training had a moderate impact in motivating participants to introduce social media accounts for their business. Most of the respondents who did not have a Facebook account before training opened one following the program, with 99% of respondents having Facebook accounts after the training. After the program, 61% of respondents declared having a Facebook page for their business, of which 22% represented new users after attending the training. Finally, only 6.7% of respondents created or were able to create a TikTok account after the program.

Figure 13. Social media usage before and after the training

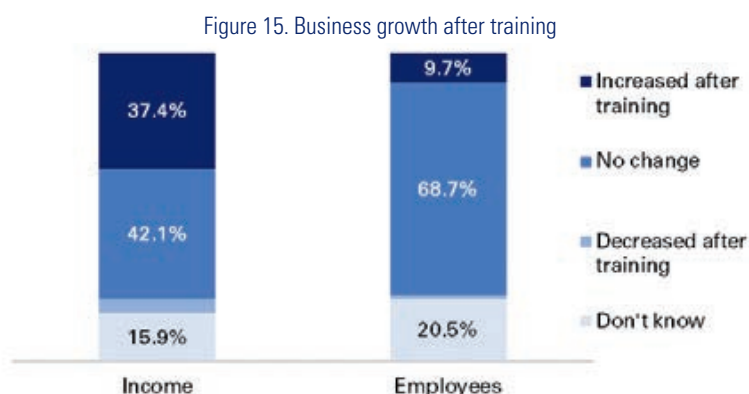


It is important to note that the addition of new Facebook accounts correlated with increased overall sales. Conversely, there appears to be a correlation between non-Facebook use and decreasing sales. Potentially, a third variable may have driven up both the number of customers and sales—such as the introduction of a new product.

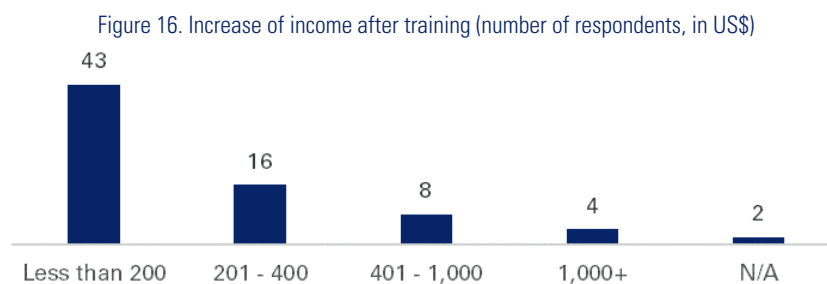
Figure 14. Number of Facebook customers and sales during the previous month



The women entrepreneurs who accessed the training program showed a recent increase in their income and number of employees (one month before answering the survey). Figure 15 shows that, after completing the training, 37.4% of respondents declared an increase in their income after participating in the program. Only 4.6% of respondents declared that their income was reduced after the training. Few businesses increased their number of employees after taking part in the training (9.7%).



The income increase was concentrated in the lower-range categories. Of the respondents who declared an increase in their monthly income, most were in the range of US\$200 or less. Additionally, a few isolated cases where entrepreneurs increased their monthly income by more than US\$1,000 were observed.



4. Qualitative Assessment of the Women Entrepreneurs

A qualitative assessment of the women entrepreneurs was conducted through focus group discussions with 69 women entrepreneurs to capture their opinions and experiences. The objective was to gather information regarding the challenges and opportunities they faced, how the curriculum helped them access finance and credit, and the role of e-commerce and social media in their businesses.

4.1 Challenges

As noted earlier, the survey assessed the knowledge and integration of women entrepreneurs in the digital economy, based on a proxy measure of digital literacy qualification level (ability to use MS Excel) and a set of questions on social media usage and e-commerce tools. The focus group conclusions indicate that while the women entrepreneurs benefited from the digital training provided, ongoing challenges still need to be addressed to support the growth and sustainability of micro and small businesses in Cambodia. In particular, the assessment revealed several key areas of difficulty, including external conditions, market conditions, and business capabilities. External conditions such as unpredictable weather and the ongoing COVID-19 crisis significantly impacted the operations of businesses and directly impacted sales and stock. Counterfeit products and smuggling were also major issues damaging businesses. In addition, market conditions, including fluctuating prices from competitors and suppliers and products that quickly become outdated, posed difficulties for the trainees. Entrepreneurs were

unable to sell their products at competitive prices and were unable to predict demand due to shifts in customer preferences. Finally, some women entrepreneurs acknowledged their lack of creativity to implement more innovative ideas and processes as well as a lack of knowledge of financial management as key business capabilities holding them back.

4.2 Opportunities

One of the key opportunities identified during conversations with the women entrepreneurs was product quality and variety. Many women entrepreneurs were confident that what they offer is unique and high quality and regarded this feature as their main comparative advantage over competitors.

Additionally, many women entrepreneurs acknowledged that there are market opportunities to improve intangible features of their business, such as communication and service, e-marketing and delivery service, and hygiene and shop appeal. In this regard, the trainees reported the need to improve their ability to reach more customers and increase sales by focusing on these areas, providing a good starting point for future upskilling programs oriented to growing MSMEs.

Finally, the women entrepreneurs identified the need to improve their skills to expand their online presence and develop a marketing strategy, recognizing that this would enable them to reach more customers and increase sales.

4.3 Finance and Access to Credit

Women entrepreneurs acknowledged that finance and credit access were key to growing their businesses. The focus groups revealed that some women entrepreneurs effectively allocate part of their income to savings that can later be used for purchasing stock or developing other business pipelines.

However, the women entrepreneurs also identified challenges that impeded them from establishing bank accounts and accessing the financial system in general. Trainees noted that access to formal loans from banks or MFIs is constrained by a broad set of difficulties, such as proof of steady income, high interest rates on loans, lack of collateral or guarantors, and residential or marital status. Additionally, the focus groups revealed a general lack of trust in the banking system, which may also discourage women entrepreneurs from seeking financial services.

Given these challenges, many women entrepreneurs resorted to informal networks, such as family members and neighbors, as a prevalent source of loans. While this can provide quick access to funding, it also comes with high interest rates and can lead to dependency on these sources. Furthermore, the lack of access to the formal banking and financial system hinders business growth, making it difficult to expand a business and increase income.

4.4 E-commerce and Social Media

The focus group discussions revealed that Facebook and TikTok are the platforms that women entrepreneurs most frequently use to promote their businesses. Although some women entrepreneurs reported using e-payment systems, these have yet to reach widespread use among the women entrepreneurs. The use of e-payment systems relates to access to the formal financial and banking system, so sharing experiences on how e-payment tools can improve business efficiency can also be used to promote the formalization of businesses.

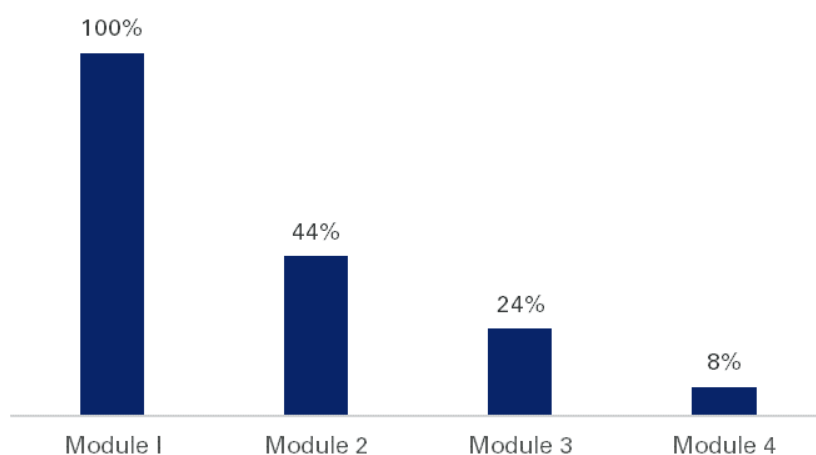
Finally, digital bookkeeping has yet to be broadly embraced among women entrepreneurs. In fact, most record keeping is still done manually. Future training programs could be designed to promote digital bookkeeping tools. This could make record keeping more efficient and accurate, as well as provide valuable insights into business performance.

5. Quantitative Assessment of Dropout

Capturing the experience of women entrepreneurs who dropped out of the program is important for improving future iterations of training. The study included an online survey of 50 drop-out trainees. Since the respondents did not show much interest in the program (by not attending), a small incentive for responding to the survey was provided. This survey was conducted in October 2022 by Asia Foundation staff.

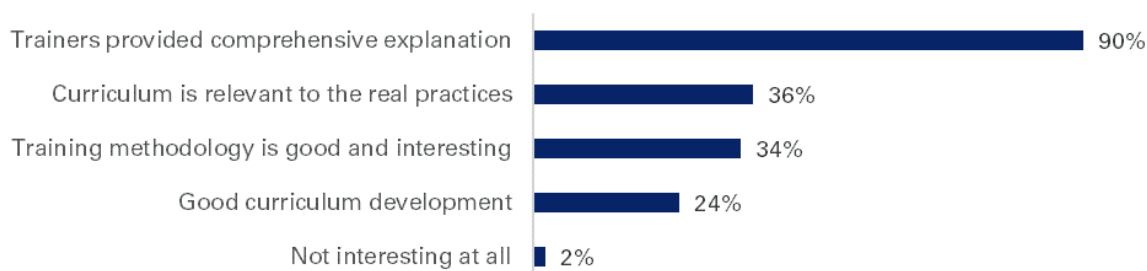
All surveyed dropout women entrepreneurs attended Module I. Thereafter, attendance decreased significantly, with only 8% attending Module IV.

Figure 17. Modules attended by dropped-out beneficiaries surveyed



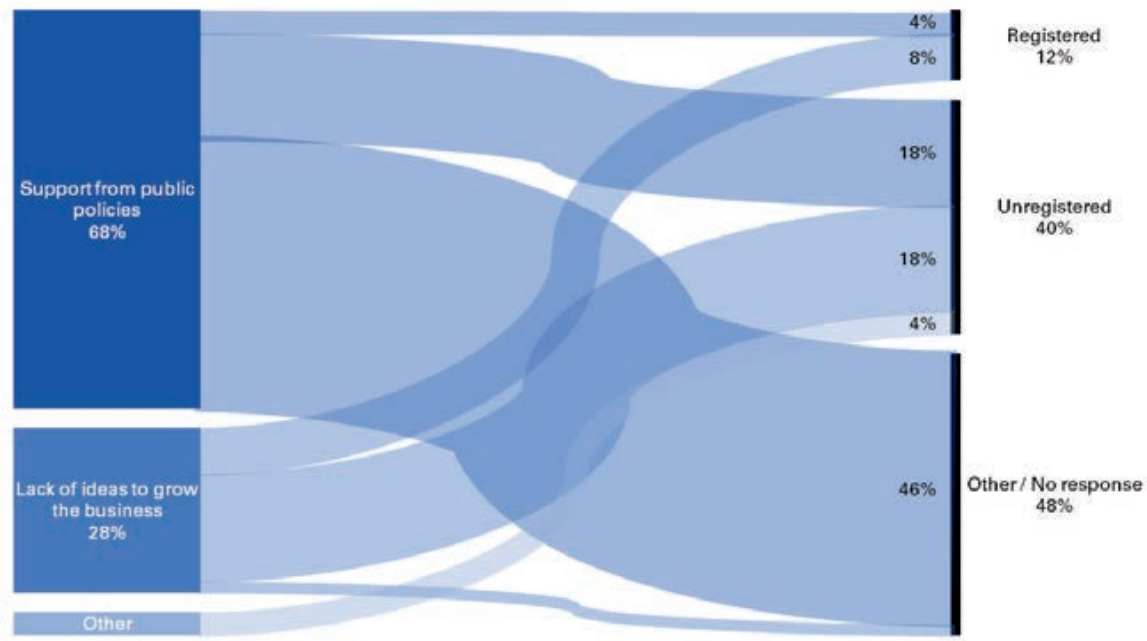
Despite most drop-outs abandoning the training program after Module I, they appreciated the quality of instruction by the trainers, with 90% of respondents declaring that trainers provided a comprehensive explanation of the topics covered. Nearly one-third of respondents indicated that the curriculum was suitable for real-life practices, while one-third reported that the methodology was good and interesting. The single respondent who was completely unsatisfied with the program only attended Module I.

Figure 18. Topics of interest of the program (% of respondents that agree with the following statement)



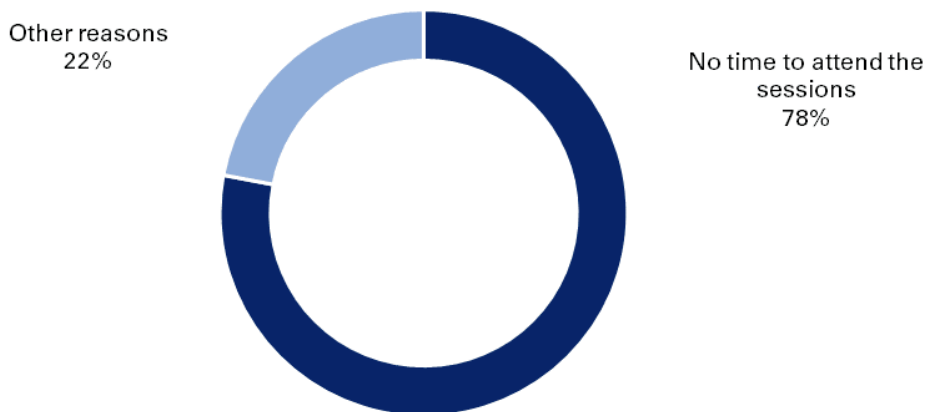
The survey results indicate that most of the dropout women entrepreneurs expected more direct support from public programs, such as formal training or credit guarantees. Among the total respondent base, 68% reported needing more support from public policies. However, it is important to note that, despite this expectation, very few respondents reported formally registering their businesses. This suggests that there may be a lack of understanding or knowledge about the benefits of formal registration and the necessary steps to be followed in doing so.

Figure 19. Main needs to grow the business and registration status



The main reason why the women entrepreneurs stopped attending the training program was that they did not have time to attend the sessions. The survey showed that 78% of women drop-outs did not have time to attend the training sessions.

Figure 20. Reasons to drop the program



6. Focus Group Discussions: Inputs from Closing Workshop (January 2023 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia)

The Asia Foundation hosted a closing event to share the findings and lessons from the Accelerate Women's Entrepreneurship and Access to Capital program. This dialogue was held in Phnom Penh on January 24, 2023, where focus group discussions were conducted with 40 women entrepreneurs from micro and small businesses from seven different provinces. What follows is a summary of some key points discussed under the themes of financial literacy, access to capital, and digital markets:

6.1 Financial Literacy

Recording business transactions plays an important role in business success and growth by helping to raise awareness of profits, losses, and all previous transactions. More importantly, it helps entrepreneurs to familiarize themselves with the actual status of their inventory. However, the participants acknowledged several obstacles impeding an accurate recording of their business transactions. For example, those who use income from the business for both personal and business expenses tend not to record the daily/small amounts spent either because it is too time-consuming or involves a significant effort, or because they are occupied with domestic chores.

6.2 Access to Capital

While the majority of participants hesitated to borrow capital due to their income instability or level, some suggestions were made to ease accessing loans for women-led MSMEs. One proposal was for financial institutions to provide details and transparent information about loan services. The conditions of loans could be reduced for seasonal and small and micro businesses. Participants also suggested that different interest rates are being offered depending on the size of the firm receiving the loan. Finally, financial institutions could offer repayment applications to alert borrowers in order to avoid being fined.

6.3 Digital Markets

Most participants are familiar with and use social media for business and personal purposes. Facebook and TikTok are the most common digital platforms they use to sell and promote their products and businesses. Participants were also aware of several e-commerce platforms in the market. Even though they acknowledged the benefits of digital market access, they were still unable to use it to scale up their businesses due to connectivity issues, the cost of the service, and a lack of trust in the safety of the platforms (particularly e-payment). Participants also shared that high commission levels charged by e-commerce platforms are unaffordable for micro and small businesses.

7. Lessons and Recommendations

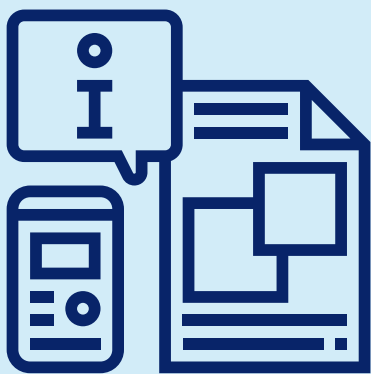
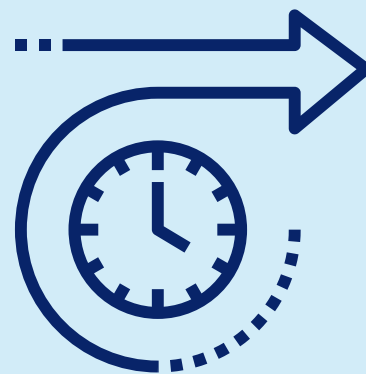
The Accelerate Women's Entrepreneurship and Access to Capital initiative provided four core modules to women entrepreneurs from micro and small businesses: financial literacy training; access to capital; digital literacy; and training in how to use e-commerce platforms. From February 2021 to January 2023, the program benefited more than 1,100 entrepreneurs from underserved peri-urban areas of Phnom Penh and select provinces such as Siem Reap, Battambang, Steung Treng, Kampong Cham, Tboung Khmum, Kampong Speu, Kampot, Preah Sihanouk, Svay Reang, Odor Meanchey, and Kampong Thom.

After surveying nearly 200 women entrepreneurs and 50 drop-out trainees and conducting focus groups and a validation workshop, five main takeaways emerged:

Short-Term Interventions

Short-term interventions, such as the current training program, can successfully incorporate bookkeeping as a practice. Women entrepreneurs valued the training received in basic financial management skills and maintained the practice after the conclusion of the program.

This initiative has successfully persuaded and taught most entrepreneurs to separate their business and personal budgets. This is essential in helping entrepreneurs understand their business's actual profitability, make better informed business decisions, and improve their household consumption.

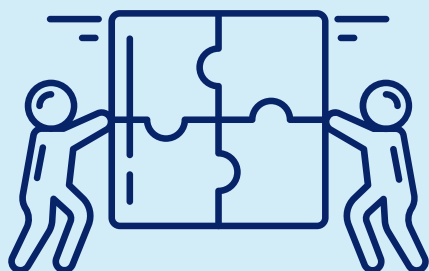


Mind the Gap: Not All Businesses are Registered

Formality and job market participation should be considered when designing micro and small business support programs. Upskilling initiatives should incorporate incentives to bring businesses to the formal economy and be tailored to support the specific needs of the entrepreneurs. For those looking to grow their business, the training should focus on improving the necessary capabilities for increasing revenues and income, including budgeting, managerial skills, and access to the digital economy. Moreover, informal financial networks (i.e., family and neighbors) remain an alternative for access to capital for most women entrepreneurs. Still, many loans are acquired through banks or microfinance institutions (MFIs). This highlights the need to provide training and support in accessing formal financial services and loans.

All you Need is a Job

About a quarter of the women entrepreneurs reported being active in the job market, motivated by seeking more profitable and stable employment. When asked about the need for a loan, most respondents stated that they need liquidity for personal purposes rather than to grow their businesses. Hence, accessing tools for the job market is often preferred over business growth. Improving capabilities is not the only pathway to increase women's income. Considering this, future programs and interventions should consider providing job market access opportunities by closing the skills gaps between employers' demands and the knowledge and capabilities of the women entrepreneurs.



Take Care of Care

Although the women entrepreneurs selected the training times and schedules, most beneficiaries who did not complete the training program dropped out because they did not have time to attend the lessons. This is common among women entrepreneurs, despite their age, province, or educational status. Policymakers should take into account the challenges posed by internet accessibility and caregiving responsibilities when expanding public service delivery.

Trust Matters

A significant subset of women entrepreneurs distrusts the formal banking and financial system, reinforcing the prevalence of informal loans. Similarly, the lack of trust also affects the adoption of e-commerce and e-payment tools. This lack of confidence in the financial system is a constraint to accessing it. Therefore, future support programs should incorporate training and support to help entrepreneurs build trust and confidence in the financial system. This will enable them to access the financial services and loans they need to grow and sustain their businesses.



Endnotes

[1] International Finance Corporation (2010). "Understanding Cambodian Small and Medium Enterprise Needs for Financial Services and Products." Phnom Penh, Cambodia

[2] Ministry of Planning, National Institute of Statistics (NIS, 2015). "Cambodia Inter-censal Economic Survey 2014 -Analysis of the Survey Results, Report No.2, Analysis by Scale." Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

[3] Ministry of Planning, National Institute of Statistics (NIS, 2012). "Economic Census of Cambodia 2011 -Analysis of the Census Results, Report No.11, Application to National Accounts." Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

[4] Robin Gravesteyn, Mayank Kumar Jain & Jonggun Lee (2018). "Examining Customer Journeys at Financial Institutions in Cambodia: Using Big Data to Advance Women's Financial Inclusion." The United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF).

[5] Sambath, T. (2021). "Roles of SMEs in Cambodian Economic Development and Their Challenges." 8th Annual NBC Macroeconomic Conference.

[6] International Finance Corporation (2010). "Understanding Cambodian Small and Medium Enterprise Needs for Financial Services and Products." Phnom Penh, Cambodia

[7] ITU (2022). "ITU, World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database." Digital Development Dashboard - Cambodia

[8] Asian Development Bank (2020). "Asia Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise Monitor." Volume I—Country and Regional Review

[9] Topics covered: information, practical examples, and exercises on topics such as financial planning, record-keeping, cash flow, managing expenses, and forward planning.

[10] Topics covered: contract requirements, decision-making for loans, how to manage repayments, and how to use online banking.

[11] Topics covered: how to access the Internet, use spreadsheets, access online services, and online banking.

[12] Topics covered: introduction to e-commerce and its terms and conditions, such as sign-up fees, payment terms, commissions, additional clauses, non-delivery penalties, and other penalties.

[13] Cost of goods sold (COGS) refers to the direct costs of producing or manufacturing a product. This includes the cost of the materials used in production, the cost of labor, and any other direct expenses incurred in the production process. COGS is an important metric that businesses use to determine their gross profit margin.

On the other hand, loss and income refer to the difference between a company's revenue and expenses. This metric is important in determining the financial health of a business.



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