

WEAVE

Women Entrepreneurs Amplifying Ventures and Economies



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Women Entrepreneurs Amplifying Ventures and Economies (WEAVE) was a Cherie Blair Foundation for Women project that used digital technology to support, empower and bring entrepreneurship skills to over 12,000 women running small and growing businesses in Vietnam and Indonesia.

WEAVE was delivered from May 2020 to November 2021. The project promoted women's economic empowerment through a three phased "learning journey" tailored to women's progression within their business' development: mobile learning app HerVenture, online business management training programme Road to Growth, and online professional mentoring with a carefully-matched expert business mentor through the Mentoring Women in Business programme. We also piloted our new leadership and influencing training offered as a bolt-on to Road to Growth and found high demand for this type of soft skills training.

WEAVE was delivered collaboratively by the Foundation, Qualcomm® Wireless Reach™, and local, in-country implementing partners Kinara (Indonesia) and WISE (Vietnam), with funding from the former Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Initiative, with technology and assets developed in partnership with ExxonMobil Foundation. The contract was awarded by the ASEAN-USAID Inclusive Growth in ASEAN through Innovation, Trade, and E-Commerce (ASEAN-USAID IGNITE) program, a USAID-funded activity.

Most women taking part were aged 18 to 35 and ran micro-businesses in urban and peri urban areas, with 10 or fewer employees, across a range of sectors

including food and hospitality, retail, and manufacturing. While HerVenture is for women entrepreneurs at early and initial growth stages of their business, Road to Growth is designed for those who have been generating profit for at least two years and are ready for additional investment to grow their business. Mentoring is for women who are ready to enhance and strengthen their business.

Despite delivering WEAVE during the global pandemic, early pivoting to bring all programme activities online enabled us to continue delivery during lockdown and meet our targets across all phases.

Our partnerships have been essential to making WEAVE a success. Combined funding from USAID and Qualcomm® Wireless Reach™, in a public-private partnership, enabled us to leverage the networks and unique experience that both funding partners bring. Additionally, our local delivery partners played a central role in delivery. These contributions were a large part of our ability to pivot during COVID-19 and receive the Third Sector Award for Digital Innovation of the Year for HerVenture in 2021.

“Women entrepreneurs have too many strings holding us back. It's time we untied them!”

Quynh, a WEAVE participant from Vietnam

What's the Background?

WEAVE's purposes and aims,
what happened and when



Despite the many existing and potential women entrepreneurs and favourable entrepreneurial ecosystem in Indonesia and Vietnam, there are limited tailored support and training opportunities for them.

WEAVE aimed to address these gaps by increasing the availability of relevant and flexible training and services for women to develop the business skills and confidence needed to grow successful MSMEs. The programme was delivered through a three-phased learning journey over 19 months, beginning with a three-month market assessment to understand the ecosystem as well as the profile and needs of women entrepreneurs in Indonesia and Vietnam.

Between August 2020 to August 2021, 3,900 women entrepreneurs in Indonesia and 8,320 women entrepreneurs in Vietnam began their learning journey by downloading the HerVenture mobile learning app. The self-paced app teaches business skills such as managing business records and accessing new markets in bite-sized chunks. In response to COVID-19's challenges, we added new content on e-commerce and digital marketing.

177 women in Vietnam and 89 women in Indonesia then progressed to Road to Growth (December 2020 to August 2021), based on participation in HerVenture and business aspirations. Road to Growth was initially designed as a blended learning programme but was made fully online to ensure continuity during the pandemic. In-class components were run online through Zoom and combined with our online learning curriculum to develop business management and investment readiness skills. Training was supplemented with weekly chat sessions with trainers, webinars and networking events.

Mentoring Women in Business took place from May to November 2021, with 60 women in Indonesia and 45 women in Vietnam participating as mentees. We planned for this to be exclusively available to Road to Growth participants, identified by their potential and commitment to scaling their business. However, we found less demand than anticipated and extended the invitation to women entrepreneurs outside of WEAVE too. Mentees were paired with a business mentor, meeting online regularly for six months, plus access to additional learning resources.

We also developed new leadership and influencing training, offered as a bolt on to Road to Growth, to strengthen women entrepreneurs' leadership, influencing and communication skills, which are critical for them to tackle systematic and cultural barriers within their ecosystems. This training was taken by 67 women in Vietnam and 45 women in Indonesia.

All in all, WEAVE empowered over 12,000 women to transform their small businesses into thriving enterprises, enabled them to identify barriers they face in business and how to address them, and supported them to economically empower themselves and their families.

“

The [Road to Growth] trainers were able to provide practical insights and support, most importantly for women participants to survive and strive in the midst of the pandemic.”

Kinara, Indonesia

How Did It Work?

The learning journey and its successes



WEAVE was our first project to bring together all three of our flagship programmes into a fully combined learning journey.

We envisioned the women entrepreneurs would build their foundational business skills knowledge through HerVenture before progressing onto Road to Growth for a more intensive training to prepare participants for financial investment. In the final stage of Mentoring, participants would identify specific areas of their business to develop and work with their mentor 1:1. However, in practice, every woman entrepreneur has a different journey with varying training needs at different points.

Some women who joined Road to Growth already had foundational business skills, so did not find HerVenture as useful a step in their journey as others. Secondly, WEAVE's three stages are appropriate for businesses of different levels and delivering them in sequence does not leave time for participants to apply what they have learned and prepare for the next stage. Early feedback from Road to Growth participants who progressed onto Mentoring also suggested that the trainings are too intensive to follow on from each other. Participants could have benefited from a gap of around six months after finishing Road to Growth and before starting Mentoring.

Our regular monitoring and data collection enabled us to gather lessons and insights throughout implementation. We reviewed results from our surveys which were issued at the start and end of each phase of WEAVE on a quarterly basis.

Additionally, Road to Growth and Mentoring had additional surveys during the delivery so we could understand how participants were progressing through the training.

Our lessons learned from WEAVE will shape how we design future programmes for women entrepreneurs:

- While market assessments provide valuable insight to women entrepreneurs' training needs and interests as well as the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem, piloting the training gives us the best feedback on what works well.
- Leveraging our partners networks with other women's economic empowerment organisations to deliver our trainings enables us to not only reach more women, but also operate in different geographical areas across the country – offering better value for money and a more efficient programme.
- There is significant demand for soft skills training on topics such as leadership, influencing and communication to complement business skills training courses such as Road to Growth.

“I was amazed at how easy it is to gain knowledge with just the touch of a finger on my cellphone. I had so many positive results from this training!”

Shinta, a WEAVE participant from Indonesia

Case Studies



Susilawati, restauranteur, Indonesia

“The woman is a leader for her children and can support the family economically – especially if we have skills in business. I think this is very important for women entrepreneurs.”

Susi founded a restaurant in Jakarta in November 2020, providing halal Japanese food. Living in Japan for many years, Susi wanted to share her passion and “introduce Japanese culture to Indonesian people”. She spotted a market gap for authentic, “home-style” Japanese food, as most Japanese restaurants in Indonesia serve “restaurant-style” food.

As an entrepreneur, one of Susi’s biggest challenges was striking the right work-family balance, as well as facing gender stereotypes, and a lack of access to finance.

She joined WEAVE, finding HerVenture’s guidance “very handy”, particularly in decision-making which she says “changed my business in a good way”. Road to Growth meanwhile “helped me design my vision and mission in doing business” and supported Susi to build a network. She found the trainer excellent, and the whole programme “very helpful” and solutions-oriented.

Finally, Susi was paired with a mentor from Australia, meeting every Friday. She enjoyed her experience, finding it “very beneficial” to her business development to be able to discuss her troubles and ideas, and gain input, support and solutions from her “sharing partner”.

Susi’s confidence increased thanks to her stronger business knowledge and vision. WEAVE supported her to build her networks, improve her products, develop her customer marketing, and ultimately to save money and increase her sales (even during the pandemic). She can support other people better now by providing jobs, and the economic welfare of her family has grown.

Viet Ha, tea brand founder, Vietnam

“I am not afraid that I might take the wrong road. I have had a lodestar that shows me the clear journey for me to follow.”

Viet Ha is a founding partner of a specialist tea brand. She started the company with big aspirations to bring this traditional Vietnamese agricultural product to both the domestic and international market, drawing on her background in marketing.

The company grew slowly but surely, but she encountered two big challenges: capital circulation and mobilisation, due to her long product cycle, and marketing, as this was a very little-known product.

When she joined WEAVE, Viet Ha sped through HerVenture and quickly started applying its learnings to her business. The app gave her great guidance and supported her and her staff to “work more professionally”. She progressed into Road to Growth, which prompted her to review her business’ goals, strategy, roadmap, and plans, and set her on “a clear road”. She developed her financial literacy and general business clarity, and expanded her business, opening a brand showroom in Hanoi.

Viet Ha’s mentor, from India, was very understanding and helped build her confidence as a mentee. Together, they worked on a bold new business plan and implementation strategy.

Viet Ha found WEAVE greatly strengthened her knowledge, and its online nature was extremely useful in allowing her to manage her time. The pandemic hit her country and industry hard, but her business kept going thanks to the knowledge, support and “big picture” she gained through WEAVE. Viet Ha has big plans for the future, including opening tea shops all over Vietnam and bringing her products to the international market!

WEAVE's Impact



In October 2022, we conducted an evaluation to understand whether WEAVE resulted in long-term changes in participants' behaviour or business performance.

This came nearly a year after the project's end to allow sufficient time for participants to make business changes and generate changes in performance such as increased or decreased sales, staff numbers or production levels, as well as participants' personal senses of agency. The evaluation also sought to identify good practices, lessons learnt and areas to improve and strengthen programme design.

Our evaluator utilised key informant interviews (KII) with participants who completed HerVenture and Road to Growth, as well as those who registered for, but did not complete, Road to Growth. They used focus group discussions (FGDs) with participants who completed the Mentoring programme, of whom at least half also completed Road to Growth. The Foundation also shared a follow-up survey with participants to gather quantitative information.

Awareness, knowledge and capabilities

All women interviewed in Indonesia told us HerVenture had changed their approach to business, and all but one stated that it had improved their knowledge.

All Vietnamese respondents for Road to Growth stated that the training had improved their business knowledge and capability.

“Business planning [in Road to Growth] is so great, easy and brief to understand.”

A Vietnamese participant

In both countries, most respondents highlighted the value of Road to Growth's networking offer, with some having identified suppliers and buyers through their new network. Participants also reported benefitting from hearing about challenges their peers faced and how they overcame them.

Agency and empowerment

Most participants in both Indonesia (86%) and Vietnam (91%) gained in self-confidence. The women also reported WEAVE's positive impacts on their personal lives:

“Many changes happened in my mindset ... Sometimes I feel like giving up because there are obstacles, but it turns out that many of my [R2G cohort] friends also experience ups and downs in their businesses.”

An Indonesian participant

“[Mentoring] has boosted my self-confidence. Before the programme, I ran the business after my main duties as a wife and a mother [were taken care of]. Business was my side job. The programme made me realize that I have to be professional as a businessperson. I have to be able to manage time and it cannot be just a side job.”

An Indonesian participant

Achievements

In Indonesia, the same 86% of KII respondents who cited improvements in agency also reported that their businesses grew since WEAVE. Among the FGD participants, 40% had experienced growth or improvements in business performance.

85% of Indonesian survey respondents said their business revenue had increased thanks to WEAVE. Similarly, 78% increased business profits and 81% increased customers.

WEAVE's Impact (continued)



In Vietnam, the majority of KII respondents (73%) and a minority of FGD participants (29%) stated that what they learned contributed to business growth.

"The number of employees of the company has increased, the revenue is also higher, and by the end of 2021 the number of customers had increased. I think my participation in the programme contributed to the development of the company."
A Vietnamese participant

62% of Vietnamese survey respondents indicated their business revenue had increased thanks to WEAVE. Similarly, 59% increased business profits and 51% increased customers.

In both countries, those who did not report improved business performance cited the ongoing impact of COVID-19 as the reason.

Challenges and lessons learned

Although WEAVE has been successful, the evaluation identified several challenges that participants faced. These include:

- Finding time to complete self-paced course work: Both Road to Growth and Mentoring are intense, particularly when delivered consecutively. We have since adapted the project design to build in a greater gap when these programmes are delivered together.
- Poor internet connection and, as a result, preference for more in-person activities: HerVenture and Road to Growth were initially designed to blend in-person and online delivery. However, due to the pandemic, these were entirely virtual. This feedback has reaffirmed the importance of flexible, blended learning programmes.

- Cultural and language barriers: Mentoring was delivered in English and paired mentees with English-speaking mentors across ASEAN. Although we specified English as a core requirement, some participants still preferred to conduct their relationship in Vietnamese or Bahasa. However, others saw this as an opportunity to practice their English. For future iterations, we will ensure participants' clarity on the programme's expectations from the outset.

Despite these challenges, overall participants felt WEAVE was effective in supporting business growth. Some also highlighted the multi-phased learning journey – from HerVenture to Road to Growth to Mentoring – as particularly valuable.

These lessons, combined with the evaluation findings, have shaped our programme strategies as well as design of new programmes.

Positive outcomes and change for the future

The evaluation shows WEAVE benefitted participants and resulted in increased knowledge, improved business practices, and higher levels of self-confidence and assertiveness. Additionally, the majority of respondents expressed high levels of satisfaction, willingness to participate in future programmes, and a high rate of recommending the programme to peers. All in all, we are confident that WEAVE has enabled us to identify 'what works' in our programmes so that they can be replicated to support more women entrepreneurs in the future.

WEAVE: A Public-Private Partnership

Collaborating for Sustainable Development and Growth

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) leverage different resources and capabilities from the public and private sectors to generate growth in emerging markets and enhance sustainability of development initiatives.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which were launched in 2016, identify multi-stakeholder partnerships as a core component to achieving sustainable development by 2030, highlighting the importance of collaborations such as PPPs (UN SDG 17).

Scaling for Success

The Cherie Blair Foundation for Women's WEAVE programme was made possible by bringing together resource and expertise through an impactful public-private partnership amongst USAID, Qualcomm® Wireless Reach™ and the ExxonMobil Foundation – the two latter being long-standing corporate partners of the Foundation.

The sustainability of our partnerships with Qualcomm® Wireless Reach™ and ExxonMobil Foundation has been evidenced through this new collaboration with USAID. As both HerVenture and Mentoring have been delivered in Indonesia and Vietnam previously, this partnership enabled us to expand and build on our successes to date – reaching more women than ever before.

Additionally, it enabled us to bring our proven Road to Growth programme to Indonesia and Vietnam.

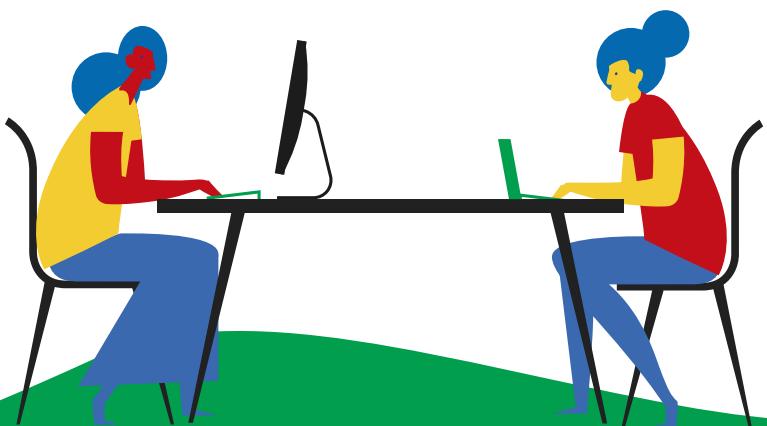
How Did It Work?

We combined our experience delivering HerVenture, Road to Growth and Mentoring in numerous countries, with the expertise from the USAID, Qualcomm® Wireless Reach™ and ExxonMobil Foundation teams who were consulted throughout to design the WEAVE programme. It was through this close collaboration, combined with the insight from our local delivery partners, that we identified the value that a comprehensive training offer like WEAVE could offer in Indonesia and Vietnam where we identified a high demand for tailored business skills programmes for women-owned small and medium enterprises.

Innovation and Strengthened Delivery

The collaboration amongst USAID, Qualcomm® Wireless Reach™ and the ExxonMobil Foundation enabled us to innovate and test our learning journey for women entrepreneurs. Through our lessons learned from WEAVE, we have identified opportunities to further tailor and strengthen our offer to provide the most impactful and relevant business skills training for women entrepreneurs not only in Indonesia and Vietnam, but also in the other countries where we deliver our programmes, such as Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria.

1. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/goal-17/>



WEAVE: Collaborating With Local Partners



Essential Localisation

The Cherie Blair Foundation for Women brings a wealth of experience in entrepreneurship and women's economic empowerment across numerous countries and uses our lessons learned to shape each iteration of our programme delivery. Our local partners are central to our work and play a crucial role in ensuring we provide a training programme that is tailored to the local context and addresses women entrepreneurs needs.

In the international development sector, in-country partners are essential to the successful delivery of programmes. Their nuanced understanding of the context, target programme participants' needs, insight into the wider international development ecosystem, and extensive networks are central to building and delivering relevant programmes.

Expert Partners on a Shared Mission

The Foundation was eager to identify local partners to lead our in-country programmatic activities. We were particularly interested in identifying partners with a strong track record implementing entrepreneurship and women's economic empowerment programmes across Indonesia and Vietnam. Additionally, we wanted to work with partners that shared our organisational values and passion for women's economic empowerment.

Through WEAVE, we collaborated with early-stage venture capital organisation Kinara Indonesia in Indonesia, and women's entrepreneurship non-profit organisation WISE in Vietnam. Both have extensive experience building women entrepreneurs' business knowledge and skills.

Close Collaboration

We fostered a culture of regular lesson sharing, learning and reflection together with Kinara Indonesia and WISE throughout WEAVE conducting cross-programme lesson sharing sessions during key programme activities. While some lessons were specific to the Indonesian and Vietnamese contexts, many insights on what aspects could be enhanced were applied across both countries. This enabled quick pivoting where required. We tweaked the way we delivered our training and the complementary support to women entrepreneurs based on feedback we received from entrepreneurs who participated in WEAVE early on.

Thousands of Women Supported

Our strong partnerships with Kinara Indonesia and WISE enabled us to support and empower over 12,000 women entrepreneurs on the WEAVE programme, despite operating during the pandemic. Kinara Indonesia and WISE's close relationships with the women entrepreneurs supported through WEAVE, and their understanding of the wider context, have been instrumental in shaping our thinking on how we can strengthen our delivery in future iterations of WEAVE.

Bringing an internationally designed program to a local context required a lot of adaptation and customization, and we were happy to receive timely and valuable support from the Foundation's team to ensure that the WEAVE trainings are tailored to the Vietnamese context."

Diep Ngo, COO, WISE



WEAVE: COVID-19's Impacts and Where Tech Can Support



An Unprecedented Crisis

Only months into the pandemic, the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women saw that women entrepreneurs globally were already being significantly impacted. We surveyed the women in our programmes and over 90% reported their businesses had already been affected. Our partners too were already reporting that many women were facing challenges within their business due to the pandemic.

WEAVE was delivered amidst the COVID-19 global pandemic. In Indonesia, our programme participants were in a lockdown period for much of the program, while in Vietnam there were localized lockdowns periodically.

A Swift Response

When setting up WEAVE in May 2020, all programme stakeholders agreed to adapt our programme delivery plans to bring them all entirely online to ensure the health and safety of our programme participants and trainers. Additionally, a fully remote approach would facilitate programme continuity despite any restrictions on in-person gatherings during delivery.

We credit our ability to swiftly adapt our approach to all our programmes using an element of tech – whether through mobile phones, computers, or tablets. Being able to reach women entrepreneurs throughout the pandemic also meant that we could offer them support to navigate the impact of COVID-19 on the businesses, and offer additional training on e-commerce and digital marketing which were skills that many businesses required throughout this period.

Adapting for Tech

Although our programme participants were tech-literate and had access to mobile phones and desktop computers, most had previously never participated in a fully online training programme. They initially found it difficult to retain motivation in fully remote training, and unable to engage in-person with their peers and trainers. To help this, we held group activities and ran our training workshops on Zoom – always encouraging participants to use videos where possible. Additionally, our trainers were regularly available to support participants 1:1.

Overcoming the Challenges

Despite the challenges we faced delivering WEAVE during COVID-19, we learned to work in a different, innovative way. These experiences and the lessons we learned will shape our approach for future programmes and partnerships. We also found that the tech-based nature of our training enabled us to reach more women outside the cities we initially planned to focus on, and to run our training with more partner organisations with a wider geographic spread.



WEAVE: Supporting Women Entrepreneurs with Leadership and Influencing Skills

Women's Economic Rights in Indonesia and Vietnam
Despite their critical contributions to the economy, women entrepreneurs in Indonesia and Vietnam are challenged by limited access to finance, restrictions in accessing markets, heightened needs for unpaid care work and limited opportunities for skills development and training. Gender stereotypes and social norms undermine women's opportunities and resources in many areas, including entrepreneurship, as they shape socially accepted gender roles from early on and affect the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Addressing the Challenges

Through our successful Road to Growth training in Indonesia and Vietnam, the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women identified that many women entrepreneurs wanted to further strengthen their leadership and influencing skills, and to increase their confidence and self-awareness. Building the capacity of women to lead with confidence and influence the entrepreneurial ecosystem remains a critical step in addressing the challenges they face as entrepreneurs. This vital work can also lead to sustainable changes not only to the women themselves but for other women entrepreneurs in their communities.

Developing Structured Trainings

Through WEAVE, we piloted a popular leadership and influencing training for women entrepreneurs with our in-country partners Kinara (Indonesia) and WISE (Vietnam), as well as Indonesia Business Coalition for Women Empowerment. We covered issues such as boosting leadership skills and confidence, effective communications and presentation skills, and self-awareness, providing opportunities for women entrepreneurs to share with others and to hear from renowned guest speakers.

High Demand and Hope for Change

These trainings saw high demand and feedback was overwhelmingly positive. 93% of Indonesian participants rated the relevance of the topics for the training as excellent whilst 7% rated them as good. 86% of Vietnamese participants rated the training either as excellent or very good.

Both WEAVE's participants and local partners reiterated the need to continue this work and to create a more comprehensive leadership and influencing programme in future. Participants suggested that they'd like to learn more about public speaking, business presentation skills and effective communication and they requested more time for networking and learning and sharing with other women entrepreneurs. We hope to refine our trainings further and offer women entrepreneurs new opportunities to learn to lead and influence with confidence.

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Gender stereotypes still limit leadership and influencing power by women entrepreneurs in Vietnam. Advancing their capacity in this aspect and inspiring them to lead and influence will not only help empower women entrepreneurs themselves but also improve perceptions of the role of women in the society.”

Hien Tu, CEO, WISE

