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**WE Act
2020
in review**

2020

background

Women Entrepreneurs Act (WE Act) is a five-year project funded by USAID that works to **empower young women entrepreneurs and youth to access their socio-economic rights.**

We support young women as business owners, managers and civic actors, helping them to build their confidence, professionalism and ability to engage with institutional decision-makers, including government representatives, to discuss priority issues and their potential solutions.



At WE Act, we recognize that there is not one standard experience for all entrepreneurs, but rather that each individual entrepreneur's journey is unique. **Our program activities are designed to meet the needs of entrepreneurs with diverse backgrounds** including young women who are street vendors, those starting new tech businesses, those with micro and small businesses that are ready to scale, and many others.

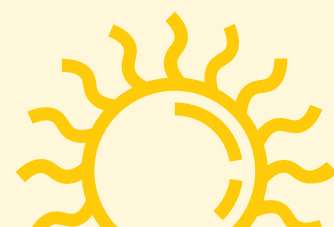
WE Act works at a systems level to support and strengthen the efforts of organizations and institutions that are already supporting young women entrepreneurs and youth leaders.

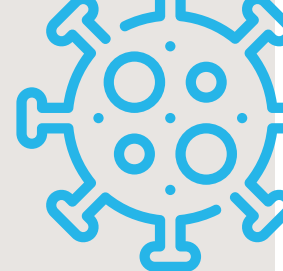
In 2020, we partnered with 18 organizations and companies with the aims of strengthening business networks, increasing opportunities for business skill development, strengthening youth leadership, and enabling young women to be civically engaged around the issues that matter most to them.



PARTNERSHIPS

This report provides a snapshot of WE Act's key areas of intervention in the last year, our second year of implementation, and summarizes some of the results and insights we have experienced through our work. It also provides a peek at the big plans our project has for the year ahead, with the continued **goal of empowering young women entrepreneurs and youth to access their socio-economic rights and to live the lives they choose!**





ADAPTING TO THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19



Since the early months of 2020, the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Cambodia has been profoundly impacted by the Covid-19 global pandemic, and **young women entrepreneurs with micro and small businesses have been some of the people most directly affected by the prolonged shock that the virus has caused.**

In a survey of entrepreneurs conducted by WE Act earlier in the year, more than 80% of respondents had experienced reductions in business revenue and more than 60% said they were experiencing negative mental health affects as a result of the pandemic. What was quickly apparent was that **our project and the ecosystem as a whole had to adapt** so that we could continue to support entrepreneurs to sustain their businesses and show resiliency in the face of the unexpected challenges they were facing.

WE Act and our implementing partners have done just that, adapting our content and the way we deliver our programming, to ensure **we could safely continue to meet the needs of young women entrepreneurs and youth leaders throughout the year.** We moved many skills building and networking opportunities to online platforms, and held numerous trainings and events that directly helped women to respond to the particular challenges of Covid-19.

In 2021, WE Act will continue to support the entrepreneurship ecosystem and young women entrepreneurs so that they can navigate the difficult challenges that this pandemic has presented. Our planned initiatives include providing emergency relief business financing, skills building on adapting to e-commerce, and soft skills development that helps women manage added stress and raise relevant issues with decision-makers. These initiatives contribute to a stronger enabling environment for young women entrepreneurs to thrive.



Together with many other Cambodian organizations and institutions, **WE Act remains committed to supporting young women in responsible and safe ways**, even in these hardest of times.



In 2020, **the project achieved significant results at multiple levels, including strengthening Cambodia's entrepreneurship ecosystem and the economic and civic empowerment of young women entrepreneurs and youth.**

Working in close partnership with 18 organizations and companies, **WE Act directly benefited more than 25,000 young women** and supported the strengthening of platforms and processes that enable meaningful dialogue between young women and institutional decision-makers.

key annual r



WE Act directly benefited more than **25,000** youth, including young women entrepreneurs

2020 RESULTS



Convened 3 ecosystem-level meetings and forums

, bringing together more than 90 organizations and institutions to strengthen a supportive ecosystem focused on meeting the needs of young women entrepreneurs.



Started meaningful engagement with 1.5 million individuals

through online platforms, enabling women entrepreneurs and youth to learn, stay connected, make linkages, and access relevant information more easily.

results



Increased the capacity of more than

600



women entrepreneurs

through deep engagements in networking and skills building, supporting them to become more successful business managers.

Supported young women entrepreneurs and youth to raise

64 shared issues

with decision-makers, opening up pathways to solutions.



Enabled dialogue between young women entrepreneurs, their representatives and youth at local and national levels with government decision-makers, bringing more attention and action to benefit young women entrepreneurs.

Opened new offices and launched activities in Battambang and Kampong Cham, bringing WE Act services and activities beyond our ongoing work in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh.

ecosystem st

WE Act takes an ecosystem strengthening approach, where **we support existing organizations, networks, or institutions** so that they can better serve and support young women entrepreneurs and youth leaders in Cambodia's urban centers. We support the ecosystem through financial support, technical assistance, and convening leadership.

Our ecosystem strengthening initiatives from 2020 included the following events that promoted sharing and collective action:



A Forum, in partnership with the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE), that brought together more than 50 organizations to **share best practices, insights and opportunities about how to jointly strengthen the Cambodian entrepreneurship ecosystem**. The event generated interest and commitment from many different actors to continue with joint dialogue and collective action to address key issues that are impacting the ecosystem.



The first roundtable discussion among Cambodia's leading development partners to discuss strategies to better enable support for women entrepreneurs. The discussion focused on opportunities for collaboration between development agencies and their respective projects, as well as **developing a stronger collective voice to bring key issues to decision-makers without duplication or overlap**.



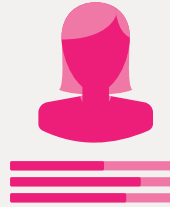
A forum in Siem Reap for more than 30 organizations on the theme of "Building Blocks for Young Women Entrepreneurs' Resilience to Covid-19". After opening our Siem Reap office in late 2019, **WE Act has played a leading role in energizing the entrepreneurship ecosystem in the city**. This event was the culmination of a year of supporting increased networking and skills building for young entrepreneurs and leaders in the area, despite the immense negative impact Covid-19 has had on the local economy.

Strengthening

WE Act uses the Babson Entrepreneurship Ecosystem framework that recognizes a healthy ecosystem must deliver support across six key pillars:



MARKETS



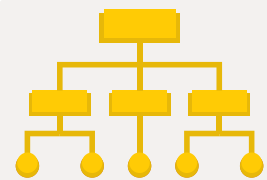
HUMAN CAPITAL



POLICY AND LEADERSHIP



ACCESS TO FINANCE



SUPPORT STRUCTURES



ENTREPRENEURIAL CULTURE



In 2020, WE Act balanced our programming to ensure we were providing strategic support across the entire entrepreneurship ecosystem.

The following pages highlight our key results and activities under each pillar.

human cap



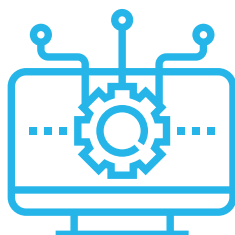
WE Act works to develop the ‘hard’ business skills, as well as the ‘soft’ life skills, that young women entrepreneurs and youth require to take full control of their life choices.

Through partnerships with 10 organizations, we provided demand-driven support, including training, coaching, and mentoring, to more than 750 young women in 2020. **Our skills-building activities over the last year have been as diverse as the many different types of women entrepreneurs that we support! Here are a few highlights:**



SHE Investments graduated 49 young women entrepreneurs from their skills-building programs, including programs on **business incubation, training of trainers, and masters coaching.**

The Asia Foundation’s Women in Tek network helped 23 young women to develop their technology-based startups, placing them among the **most innovative entrepreneurs in Cambodia!**



The Lady Saving Group held 30 ‘Coffee Chat’ sessions that provide members with **business consultations** in small groups.

Agile Development provided critical support to **60 young women with disabilities** on topics of digital literacy and marketing, helping to strengthen their business opportunities.



igital

WE Act partnered with **Facebook** to qualify 11 Cambodian trainers to deliver high-quality digital marketing training to 1,700 young women entrepreneurs by 2023. By the end of 2020, more than 600 women entrepreneurs benefited from online and offline digital marketing training to boost their business. The one-day training provides insight in basic online marketing, creating a business Facebook Page, and good content and practices, supporting them with know-how to start and grow their businesses through the use of online platforms, which have a lot of business-growth potential.

WE Act will continue to offer digital marketing training in partnership with Facebook throughout 2021.

Nil Borey, 23, a young woman entrepreneur who received the training in Siem Reap province said, *“Before the training, I posted pictures and captions without thinking about the content or meaning of it. Now I make my post’s caption short but meaningful as I apply what I learned from the training into practice and my business.”*





WE Act works at multiple levels to enable meaningful engagement between young women and key decision-makers in government, with the aim of raising and addressing priority issues that impact the business environment and which will strengthen the enabling environment at local and national levels for young women entrepreneurs to thrive.

In 2020, WE Act helped to identify and raise 64 shared issues of women entrepreneurs and youth to institutional decision-makers from the government at local and national levels.



At the national level, WE Act worked to open up positive dialogue between young women entrepreneurs, ecosystem actors, and key government ministries through policy-focused roundtable discussions and forums on topics such as support for start-ups, support for women in tech, business registration, social security and others.

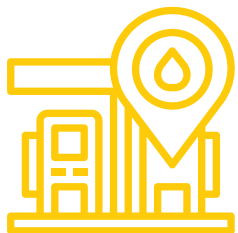
At the local level, WE Act worked with multiple partners, including the PDP-Center in Siem Reap and the Advocacy and Policy Institute in Phnom Penh, to facilitate constructive engagement between youth and young entrepreneurs and their Sangkat/Khan government representatives about issues impacting young women entrepreneurs and youth in their communities.



Recognizing the particular challenges street vendors are facing in the midst of Covid-19, WE Act organized a **civil society dialogue** in Siem Reap on “Social Protection Response during Covid-19”, to learn, share and discuss key issues around social protection.



policy and leadership



WE Act partnered with the **Advocacy and Policy Institute** and **The Independent Democratic Association of Informal Economy** to empower Phnom Penh street vendors to engage with the local government about issues they face, especially since the onset of Covid-19. Due to dialogue with the Deputy Khan Governor, street vendors secured commitments from the local government to establish and improve safe and affordable spaces for the vendors to operate in the near future.

Support str

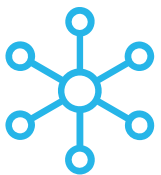


WE Act partners with and strengthens existing formal and informal networks that provide critical support to young women entrepreneurs as they build their personal connections, access important information, have their voices heard and represented through network forums, and ultimately grow their businesses.

Over the course of 2020, we supported eight different associations and networks, who in turn provided trainings, peer support events and ongoing coaching and mentorship to more than 1,500 young women entrepreneurs. **With our partners, our aim is to increase the inclusiveness and ability for networks to respond to the specific needs and interests of their diverse memberships.** Here are a few key results from 2020 that are helping to get us there.



The two leading entrepreneur associations in Cambodia, Cambodian Women Entrepreneur Association and Young Entrepreneur Association Cambodia, each established new membership programs that **allow emerging entrepreneurs without registered businesses to join their networks.**



The Women Entrepreneur's HUB, established by Community Translation Organization in Siem Reap, brought together 265 young women entrepreneurs and youth to **pivot their businesses and knowledge in light of the impacts of Covid-19.**



The Women in Tek network helped 25 young women **establish and grow their tech-based businesses.**



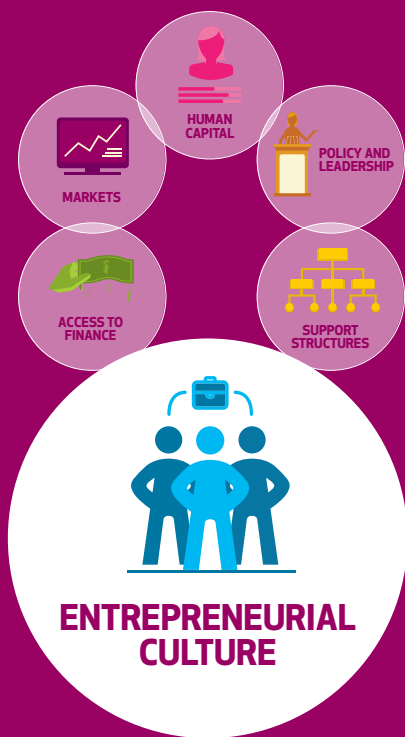
Structures

SHE Investments supported the first-ever group of **10 women** to be **certified business coaches** in Cambodia. These women are now prepared to coach other young women entrepreneurs to overcome critical challenges and grow their businesses.



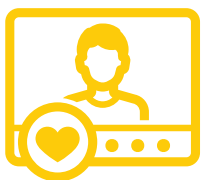
“Actually, I did some coaching before with my team, but it was not proper coaching, and I was struggling most of the time that I did the coaching session. After learning about coaching models and frameworks from the training, I felt more confident to conduct the next coaching session with my team.” Ms. Chen Sopheap, one of the master coaches.





From the beginning of the project, we recognized that young Cambodian women are living, working and pursuing their dreams in a society where widely held norms and expectations restrict their ability to choose certain paths in their lives. Over the past year, **we have worked to break down some of those cultural barriers by promoting positive role models for young women entrepreneurs and all Cambodians.**

Through the dissemination of more than 20 strategic communications last year, including music video, women in tech video series, gender equality live video talk show, and gender-based violence expert video interview, **we have worked to show that cultural and gender norms in Cambodia are changing and young women face a future that is full of exciting possibilities!**



WE Act produced nine **role model videos that reached more than 27,000 people**, building their knowledge to become better business leaders and strengthening their confidence to engage in policy matters and to voice their issues with decision-makers.



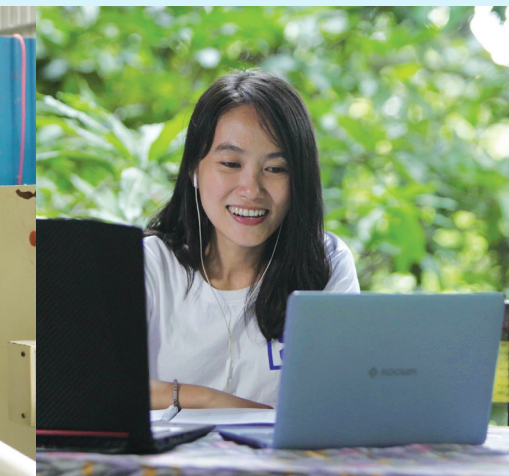
We worked with multiple organizations, including CWEA, Lady Savings Group, SHE Investments, and the PDP-Center, to promote **activities and events that addressed how family support for young women entrepreneurs is critical for their success.**



entrepreneurial culture

Through its partnership with Wapatoa, WE Act published a series of 10 entrepreneurship videos 'Roksi' to address myths and deconstruct misconceptions that people have related to youth, and especially young women, starting their own business. With speakers from diverse backgrounds, the videos highlight issues such as family and community pressure, the meaning of failure and more. These videos serve to empower young aspiring women entrepreneurs to overcome cultural barriers.

Watch the videos at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/243895053202491/330086338157323!>



access to fi



Financial capital is critical for business success, but only if it is the right kind of capital and is accessed and managed in responsible and strategic ways.

In 2020, our focus was on conducting research and engaging in dialogue about the real challenges that young women entrepreneurs face when it comes to accessing finance, and in designing practical tools that they can use to assist them in managing their financial decisions. **This groundwork has prepared WE Act to deliver key financial products and tools in the year ahead.**



Throughout 2020, WE Act provided more than 80 trainings, talks, and programs to support young entrepreneurs **make better decisions around accessing and managing finances for their businesses** and other aspects of their lives, including navigating the financial impacts of Covid-19.

Working with SHE Investments, we developed a tool that helps entrepreneurs and their coaches **analyze their respective 'journeys' to access the right financing** for them, and to identify resources that can help them on this journey.



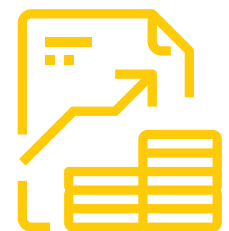
We have been working with financial institutions to **develop a loan facility designed to meet the needs of young women entrepreneurs** with beneficial terms. We expect to launch these financial products in early 2021!



Finance

WE Act and its partners have offered many trainings and forms of support to entrepreneurs so they can better access and manage financial resources. In late 2020, the Junior Chamber International conducted a **training on Access to Finance and Accounting Skills for Business Owners.**

Ms. Lychheng said, *“After joining the training, I learned a lot about business management related to accounting. It’s so important to have good financial management when requesting for financial support from banks or microfinance institutions.”* Young women entrepreneurs learned about various financial resources, financial statements, the usage of working capital and cash flow management to raise funds or capital for business expansion.





A critical aspect of any entrepreneurship ecosystem is whether **entrepreneurs have the opportunities and abilities to access appropriate markets** to sell their products or services.

For WE Act, we recognize that the work of developing markets will often require deep levels of expertise in specialized industries and sectors that are outside the scope of our project, and for that reason we have not focused our activities on market development.

We have however worked extensively in the past year to support women entrepreneurs to understand and manage the changes that are taking place in business markets due to Covid-19, and how they can adapt to ensure that their businesses are not left behind.



Through networking events and skills-building programs such as Facebook Digital Marketing, we have helped more than 1,600 women entrepreneurs better understand how they can **shift their businesses to digital (e-commerce) markets**.



WE Act provided opportunities for more than 250 young women entrepreneurs to **establish new business linkages** with other businesses and customers through fairs, workshops, conferences and forums.



access to markets



looking ahead

As we look ahead to 2021, we know that young women entrepreneurs will continue to face significant economic and social challenges due to Covid-19, along with other barriers they must overcome to access their rights and pursue their dreams. And yet, **we find ourselves full of hope and excitement for the opportunities that lie ahead of us!**



At WE Act, we have planned an active year ahead that will see us **expand our support for the entrepreneurship ecosystems in the urban areas of Kampot, Kep, and Sihanoukville**, as well as continuing our work in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Battambang, and Kampong Cham.



We will **expand the number and depth of our partnerships and collaborations with civil society organizations, private companies and government representatives.**



We will deepen our work to **constructively engage with decision-makers so that we can jointly develop solutions to key policy and systemic issues** that young women entrepreneurs face.



Lead

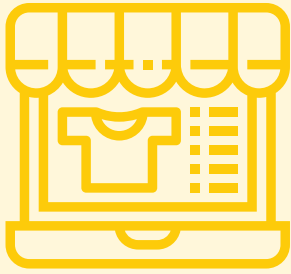
We look forward to a challenging and rewarding year in 2021, and we look forward to working closely with a wide range of stakeholders, including many of you that are reading this report right now!



WE Act in 2021

On the following pages are a few of the key initiatives you can expect to see from WE Act in 2021.

Expand our **work in collaboration with private sector companies** that aim to support Young Women Entrepreneurs and youth as part of their ongoing business activities.



Deepen awareness about how **access to socio-economic rights leads to stronger families, communities and businesses.**

Promote **collaboration and coordination among different types of stakeholders working to strengthen the ecosystem** so it better enables Young Women Entrepreneurs and youth to achieve their goals.

Support **online platforms** that make information about business regulations and laws more accessible to entrepreneurs.

Establish new partnerships with financial institutions that make **accessing finance more accessible** and feasible for young women entrepreneurs.



Act 2021

Scale up programs that help entrepreneurs develop their **digital marketing skills** and enable them to shift their businesses to e-commerce platforms.



Convene the leading organizations in the entrepreneurship ecosystem to **discuss pressing issues** such as access to finance for young entrepreneurs.

Support constructive **advocacy and engagement with key government offices** to address priority policy issues for young entrepreneurs and youth.

Support **business and entrepreneur networks** to continue **expanding their activities** outside of Phnom Penh.

Create new initiatives focused on **civic entrepreneurs**, those who have the mindsets of entrepreneurs but who use their skills and passions to address civic issues!





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