

Mendoza Peña, Paul John; Bayudan-Dacuycuy, Connie

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COVID-19 MSMEs policy responses in the Philippines: How goes the gendered quest?

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Paul John Mendoza Peña and Connie Bayudan-Dacuycuy



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CONTACT US:

RESEARCH INFORMATION DEPARTMENT
Philippine Institute for Development Studies

18th Floor, Three Cyberpod Centris - North Tower
EDSA corner Quezon Avenue, Quezon City, Philippines

publications@pids.gov.ph
(+632) 8877-4000

<https://www.pids.gov.ph>

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Paul John Mendoza Peña
Connie Bayudan-Dacuycuy

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Abstract

Drawing on the experiences of entrepreneurs during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we explore the gendered impacts of policy responses designed primarily to provide relief and support for business continuity while the economy was on hold. The paper examines the themes of their lived experiences and how policy responses catered to their immediate needs as entrepreneurs and assess how and whether its impacts are gendered while considering the process of policy design, implementation, and monitoring during an emergency. As needs at the onset of the pandemic were universal and under pressure to deliver relief efforts in an emergency, policies did not explicitly bear a gender lens from design to implementation. The effects of the pandemic on businesses were not gendered, although the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs reveal areas where more gendered support is needed. The paper also explores the lack of consensus among players in the entrepreneurial ecosystem on how women's entrepreneurship is defined and investigates how this affects the monitoring and evaluation of policy responses for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises. The paper also looks into tech startups and provides recommendations moving forward.

Keywords: MSME, COVID-19 policy responses, women

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COVID-19 MSMEs Policy Responses in the Philippines: How Goes the Gendered Quest?

Paul John Mendoza Peña and Connie Bayudan-Dacuycuy¹

1. Introduction

Enshrined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals is the almost universally recognized ambition to achieve gender equality geared towards empowering women and girls as part of a 17-piece puzzle to be solved by 2030. With about ten years left to determine the extent of success of the 2030 Agenda, COVID-19 makes a dramatic entrance introducing a significant disruption not only to plans that have been underway to drive the Agenda but also to how economies and its basic unit, the household, worked.

As countries aimed to prevent the spread of the virus, lockdowns or community quarantines were implemented, constraining consumer mobility and limiting, if not halting, the operations of businesses of every size. In the brief period of adjusting to what was touted as the “New Normal,” households shifted to remote modes of production via a work-from-home arrangement and emergency online distance learning. For households in which remote work was possible, time, space, and roles collapsed. Parents took on more hours for care work as children stayed at home and took on modular learning through digital or printed materials from their schools. At the same time, they continued working, whether as employees or entrepreneurs, effectively collapsing the separation between hours and places of work and the rearing of children.

However, not all activities could move to remote arrangements as access to technology remained a barrier. This is especially true in the case of most micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that face various challenges in the adoption of digital solutions. Some contact-intensive businesses had to close temporarily, and some left the market unable to keep their enterprises operational while the economy remained on hold. Others found novel ways to survive by turning to e-commerce and social platforms. For others, the shift to remote work was infeasible. Sectors like personal care services, quick-service restaurants, and retail selling, among others that are not office-based work, require face-to-face interactions to provide the goods or services. Targeted lockdown policies, including limiting the operating capacity of specific businesses, created real financial pressure on entrepreneurs who make up most of the economy, and their profits were determined by the extent to which they could operate. Furthermore, the uncertainty of when and how policies shift according to the effectiveness of containment policies required many businesses to stop operations temporarily and re-open when epidemiological numbers improve.

MSMEs, defined in the Republic Act 9501 or the Magna Carta for MSMEs, are classified according to their asset size (Table 1). At the same time, they are monitored by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) by their employment size. However, the SME Development Council (SMEDC), the unit responsible for carrying out the SME development agenda, uses asset size to categorize enterprises. The significance of MSMEs in the Philippine economy cannot be overemphasized. Based on the 2020 List of Establishments (PSA 2021), MSMEs account for

¹ Professional lecturer at the School of Economics, De La Salle University, and senior research fellow at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, respectively. The authors gratefully acknowledge the able assistance of Ms. Lora Kryz Baje, Ms. Lucita Melendez, and Mr. Jerk Joshua Meire Layos in the qualitative data collection.

99.5% of total business establishments, over 60% of the country’s total employment, and around 40% of the country’s gross domestic product. Microenterprises make up the most substantial portion (88.8%), followed by small enterprises (10.25%) and medium enterprises (0.49%). In terms of employment, micro-enterprises contribute the most significant share (29.43%), closely followed by small (25.34%) and medium enterprises at 6.83%.

Nearly half of the country’s MSMEs are primarily engaged in wholesale and retail trade, constituting 46.7% of total establishments. The accommodation and food service sector (14.1%) comes second, closely trailed by manufacturing (11.6%). Other service activities, financial and insurance activities, and other sectors make up 38.9% of the industry. As of 2020, MSMEs generated 62.66% of the country’s total employment, or a total of 5,380,815 jobs. Considering value-added, MSMEs contributed 35.7% of the total value-added, with the most coming from manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, and financial intermediation. They also account for 25% of the country’s total exports revenue, with 60% of exporters being MSMEs.

Table 1: Business classification according to RA 9501 and PSA

Classification	By asset size (RA 9501)	By employment size (PSA)
Micro	Up to P3,000,000	1 to 9 employees
Small	P3,000,001 to P15,000,000	10-99 employees
Medium	P15,000,001 to P100,000,000	100-199 employees
Large	P100,000,001 and above	200 and above

Source: Department of Trade and Industry (2020).

In the context of the pandemic, Shinozaki and Rao (2021) reveal that 73.1% of MSMEs were forced to close their businesses, particularly small firms and those engaged in services. Because of lockdown measures, medium-sized enterprises and agriculture businesses report a lack of access to markets and disrupted supply chains critical to producing goods and providing services. Furthermore, MSMEs report a sharp drop in domestic demand, particularly for small enterprises and manufacturing sectors. Shinozaki and Rao (2021) report that some groups experienced a better business environment during the pandemic, particularly those in microenterprises and agriculture, attributable to the increase in demand for essential goods, services, and healthcare.

Another study by International Trade Centre (2020) explores the determinants of SME competitiveness amid the pandemic. The study revealed that the capacity to compete despite mobility constraints and falling demand reduces exposure to shocks, mainly influenced by the management’s ability to create entrepreneurial solutions. However, the study finds that many small firms suffered from late payments as other firms restructured their financial priorities to stay afloat during lockdowns. The study notes that many firms could match the skills required to continue while on hold according to their specific needs, allowing them to adapt more flexibly to the unfolding economic and health crisis, citing the country’s robust innovation ecosystem and sustained entrepreneurial activity even during the downturn caused by the pandemic. Sustained innovation across the country allowed firms to access new markets, mainly because of digital technologies and the improving adoption of platforms-based transactions. Some firms also sharpen their focus on a critical few business activities, enhancing their operating efficiency.

Cognizant of the substantial contribution of the MSMEs to the economy, the government has been quick to craft policy responses for MSMEs to help them stay afloat during the pandemic. However, it is not yet established whether and how these policies are responsive to the

differentiated impact of COVID-19 on men and women entrepreneurs. Care economy, for example, is primarily a woman's responsibility, which is greatly magnified given the shift to children's online learning. Given the different realities that men and women face, implementing a gendered approach could help achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals on women empowerment and gender equality. This study aims to 1) look into the MSMEs policy responses in 2020 in the Philippines and analyze whether and how women-led/owned enterprises have benefitted from these measures; 2) look into the issues/barriers/challenges encountered by women-led/owned enterprises and compare this with the experiences of men entrepreneurs; and, 3) propose recommendations that strengthen gender-responsive MSMEs policies.

Thus, this paper assesses the government's response to support MSMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic concerning its impact on women and men entrepreneurs. It investigates whether and how gender was integrated into the design and implementation process of policy responses and to which extent the government and its intended beneficiaries perceive the gender lens as necessary. Accordingly, the study explores the following questions:

- What are the design principles of the policy responses to COVID-19? Were there efforts to introduce gender-related considerations in the design of policy responses? Is there consensus among policymakers and the private sector on gender inclusion and gender responsiveness in terms of policy response design and delivery?
- How do policymakers and intended beneficiaries perceive the need for gender responsiveness in the design of policy responses? In an emergency, in the first place, do the needs of women entrepreneurs differ from men entrepreneurs?
- What are the opportunities to integrate a gender lens in both the design and implementation of policy responses? How can these amendments add value to the experiences of men and women entrepreneurs?
- What gendered interventions would help men and women entrepreneurs cope with economic shocks as extensive and persistent as COVID-19?

2. Research Design and Methodology

Research approach, design, and conceptual framework

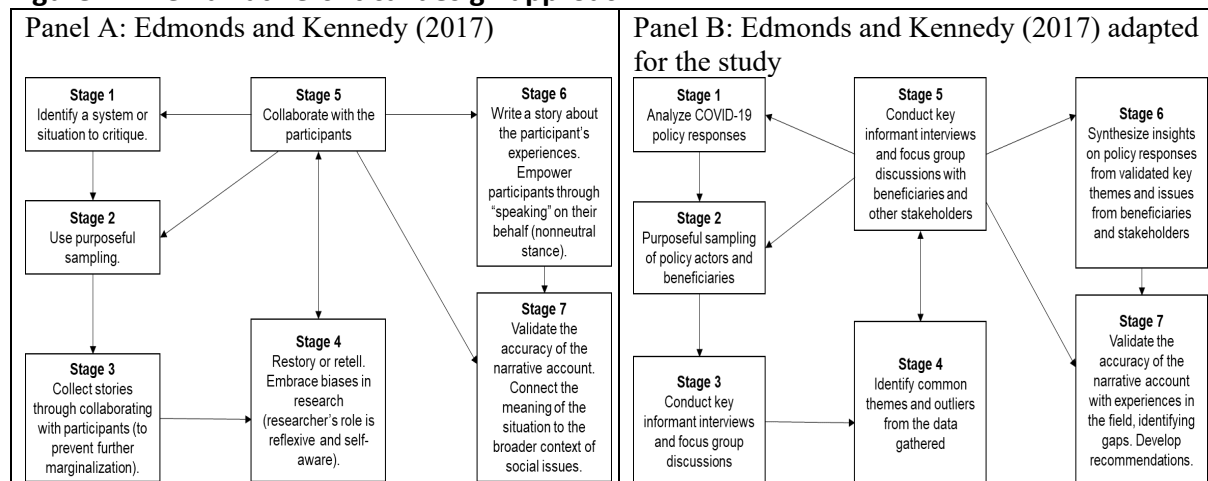
This study seeks to assess the impact of policies on men and women entrepreneurs. Thus, it adopts a narrative-critical design approach, following Edmonds and Kennedy (2017, Figure 1). In the policy ecosystem for MSME, stories taken as critical tales from different actors (e.g., government agencies, male and female entrepreneurs, business communities and industry organizations, and subject matter experts) are gathered and processed. Data generated through dialogic interviews are structured and processed using a critical framework to maintain the necessary level of scientific inquiry.

Policy responses to support MSMEs in 2020 are used as the baseline reference for analysis and dialogic interviews with respondents that represent the main actors and beneficiaries in the entrepreneurial ecosystem chosen via purposeful sampling. Throughout the interview process, common themes emerge and are subsequently verified in succeeding interviews, especially where commonalities or controversial points are raised, providing respondents with the opportunity to support or dispute based on their experience or expertise. Finally, insights and observations are synthesized for analysis and the development of policy recommendations.

Following Howlett (2014), the following policy processes are explored. The first three processes are collapsed under the broader theme of “policy design”:

1. **Agenda setting:** Who sets the agenda for the policy? How are the beneficiaries identified? How is gender considered in setting the agenda? What accounts for the priorities and types of SME policy responses?
2. **Policy formulation:** Who leads the design of the policy responses? What gender considerations are integrated with the design of policy responses, and to what extent? Whom do policymakers consult in the formulation of policy responses? What are the key performance indicators identified in designing policy responses?
3. **Decision-making:** Who decides on the implementation of proposed policy responses? What are the strategic considerations for deciding which policy responses to implement and how?
4. **Policy implementation:** Who leads the implementation of policy responses? How do government agencies, entrepreneurs, and business communities collaborate in implementing programs?
5. **Policy evaluation:** How are programs delivered? What are the feedback mechanisms from the ground? How does feedback inform or guide the agency’s future actions and amendments? What are the lessons learned and best practices so far?

Figure 1: The narrative-critical design approach



Source: Edmonds and Kennedy (2017)

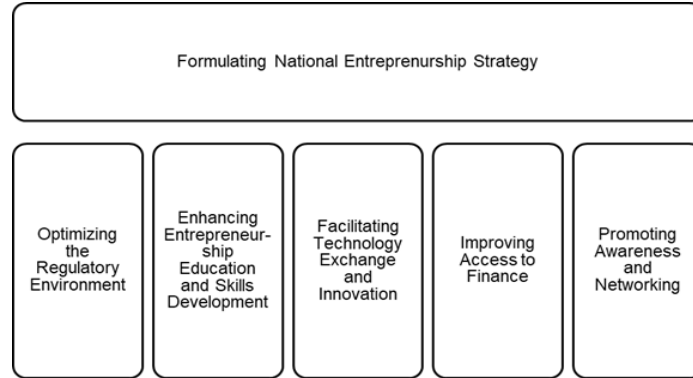
In addition, narratives about issues, challenges, and opportunities arising from the COVID-19 experience will be gathered to add more nuance and context to the assessment of policy responses:

1. What unique difficulties did entrepreneurs experience at the onset of the pandemic? Did these improve over time? How?
2. What opportunities, if any, did entrepreneurs capitalize on during the pandemic? What coping mechanisms did entrepreneurs employ to survive evolving challenges?
3. What are the entrepreneurs’ priorities in the “new normal” environment?

Insights and the policy infrastructure analysis are guided by the Entrepreneurship Policy Framework (UNCTAD, n.d., Figure 2) to assess whether SME policy responses to COVID-19 correspond to a common framework that promotes entrepreneurship and which components of the framework can be reinforced in future amendments and new programs. Each framework component suggests policy objectives, guide questions, and leading indicators to measure effectiveness. The framework can also establish primary actors in the entrepreneurship

ecosystem. For this study, particularly in assessing policy responses to COVID-19, the focus is on access to finance, entrepreneurship education and skills development, technology and innovation, and networking, particularly in how these areas were reinforced to benefit entrepreneurs in 2020.

Figure 2: Entrepreneurship Policy Framework



Source: UNCTAD (n.d.).

Data collection methods

This paper uses a qualitative approach such as Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to gather qualitative feedback and insights from respondents on whether and how women-led or owned SMEs (WSMEs) benefitted from policy responses to COVID-19. PIDS conducted virtual KII and FGD with key government agencies, banks, business communities, enterprises, and subject experts from July 5 to September 15, 2021 (see Table 2). Respondents shared their experiences, including challenges faced and opportunities taken advantage of during a pandemic. Recurring ideas and issues were explored in succeeding similar KII and FGD for validation.

The FGD focused on the challenges encountered by these enterprises, whether and how they were able to secure assistance from the measures rolled out by the government to help SMEs, and on the strategies and best practices that can be replicated and upscaled to help the SMEs recover from the pandemic and become resilient against any crises. Men-led/owned SMEs were also interviewed to analyze differences in access, practices/strategies, and challenges and compare and contrast these with the experiences of women entrepreneurs. The interview with representatives from government agencies responsible for the design and implementation of policy responses provided information on how policy decisions are arrived at and whether and how gender analyses are integrated into all the aspects of programs and initiatives. Business communities, industry organizations, and related interest groups provided insights on gender and development-related issues, policy responses, and their observations on the experience of men and women entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2: Summary of KII and FGD respondents

	KII	FGD (number of participants)
Government agencies	Bureau of SME Development	Small Business Corp. (4) PhilGuarantee Corporation (2) Philippine Commission on Women (3)
Banks		Land Bank of the Philippines (2) Development Bank of the Philippines (2)
Business Communities	WomenBizPH	Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (3)
Enterprises	Nurture Wellness Village Sophia Jewellery Inc. Happy Helpers Bebu Daycare	Callawan Farmers Multipurpose Cooperative (3) Marinduque Maagang Pagbubunga Coop (1) Langucupang Farmers (1) Cebu Organic Agri Coop (1)
Subject Matter Experts	Gobi Partners WeSolve PH	Kickstart Ventures (2)

3. Enabling environments and policy responses

Policy infrastructures for women's entrepreneurship

The gender policy framework of the Philippines is articulated in the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Plan 2019-2025, which is integrated into the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022 and the Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development 1995-2025. These roadmaps and plans represent the main framework for the agencies' Gender and Development (GAD) plans and budgets.

RA 9710, or the Magna Carta for Women (MCW), provides the overall framework and basis of institutional support for gender and development while promoting women's human rights and empowerment for all. This law recognizes potential sources of gender inequality that could prevent or deter access to equal economic opportunities. The MCW fuels various gender-related laws and policies, ensuring equal rights and opportunities and mechanisms to empower women are institutionalized. This includes giving equal employment opportunities in social work services, government positions, and other industries, with the ultimate goal of achieving a fifty-fifty gender balance. The MCW also provides guidelines on responding to the differentiated needs of women, such as maternity leave privileges and other arrangements such as those who need to undergo surgery for gynecological disorders. National government agencies and local government units (LGU) implement GAD programs, allocating at least 5% of their total budget appropriation.

Moreover, MSMEs are one of the government's priorities, as reflected in numerous policy frameworks grounded in legislation through the mid-term growth-focused Philippine Development Plan (PDP 2017-2022), along with laws specific to MSMEs. The sector's long-term transformation is included in the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Inclusive Innovation Industrial Strategy and the long-term vision for development enshrined in NEDA Ambisyon 2040.

Policymakers have recognized the importance of MSMEs early on, and several laws were put in place. In fact, OECD (2017) identifies the Philippines as the only country in South East Asia

with a specific law that promotes women's entrepreneurship. These include the Magna Carta for MSME, which mandates agencies to submit to the MSMEs Development Council regular reports on gender responsiveness of MSME-oriented policies and programs. RA 7882 mandates support for women entrepreneurs in micro and small enterprises. Likewise, RA 106411 or the Go Negosyo Act stipulates that MSMEs support centers should encourage women's entrepreneurship by providing access to information, support, training, and credit facilities. The same law requires the inclusion of a representative of the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) in the MSMEs Development Council. Other MSMEs laws do not explicitly promote women's entrepreneurship. These include the Barangay Micro Business Enterprise Act of 2002.

Business associations

Working closely with government agencies like the DTI and the PCW, business communities specializing in women's entrepreneurship provide development and networking opportunities independently or with government agency initiatives. Business associations, like the Women's Business Council Philippines, Inc., (WomenBizPH), represent women entrepreneurs' interests in consulting with government agencies. They also work with international coordinating agencies to share experiences from the ground and the transfer of knowledge, e.g., best practices, to participating members. WomenBizPH is composed of women business leaders recognized for their success in commerce and industry responsible for representing women entrepreneurs in policy discussions with agencies. They are recognized as the primary private sector partner of the government, mainly through their partnership with the DTI and PCW. They also represent the Philippines in international coordinating agencies' events of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Among their regular initiatives are capacity-building workshops, participation in policy research fora, and networking activities for members and industry players.

On the other hand, women entrepreneurs in the Philippines can participate in the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI), a business organization with a diverse membership base of small, medium-sized, and large enterprises, local chambers of commerce, and interest groups, and other industry associations. PCCI is recognized as the premier representative of the private sector in the Philippines. Their initiatives include capacity-building workshops, policy discussions, policy research, and advocacy initiatives that promote competitiveness. They also provide training programs that develop local chambers of commerce that boost the support for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises to become globally competitive. Among their critical programs is the PCCI Innovation Center, which provides startup founders with a venue and platform to incubate innovations in the high-tech sector. The Innovation Center provides regular training and certification programs to support its innovation agenda.

COVID-19 policy responses

The Philippine government enacted two core legislations that served as the backbone of its policy response to COVID-19: Republic Act No. 11469, also known as the *Bayanihan* to Heal As One Act; and Republic Act No. 11494, also known as *Bayanihan* to Recover As One Act. Both *Bayanihan* laws enable government agencies to develop interventions that address the health and socio-economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Agency-level interventions concerning entrepreneurs include financial relief and support programs for employment and businesses (see Table 1A in the appendix).

4. Synthesis of KII and FGD

4.1 Learnings from agencies and business communities

Policy design

There is a general appreciation that COVID-19 is a disaster that affects all sectors. Thus, it requires quick policy responses that are inclusive and universal (e.g., gender-neutral).

Policy design mainly responds to the top-down agenda set by the government and laws passed on COVID-19, both of which did not identify priorities based on gender differences. All agencies and enterprises interviewed agree that the immediate effect of COVID-19 is universal and disruptive, which requires expedient solutions to support MSMEs to stay afloat amid community quarantines or lockdowns. Universal needs at the time of an emergency or disaster result in universal responses throughout the design and implementation process. While agencies recognize the provisions of GAD requiring inclusive approaches that cater to the needs of both men and women in every step of the design and implementation of policy responses, almost all believe that emergency policy responses need to be inclusive. This partly explains why gender considerations were not integrated into the COVID-19 policy response. All agencies report that gender was not a primary consideration in designing policies in response to COVID-19 due to the need to roll out support initiatives to keep businesses afloat quickly.

A development bank executive shares that their policy responses cater to “priority sectors that have been broken down into the mandated sectors like agri reform beneficiaries, small farmers and fishers, cooperatives...we [also] have loans supporting other government programs providing loans for communications, utilities, transport, education, healthcare and everything else that supports the various programs of the national government.” They also add that given their mandate, “SMEs policies in response to COVID-19 [are in place] as mandated by *Bayanihan* Act 1 and 2.”

Some agencies express the desirability of making programs more universal, especially in a disaster. One respondent describes that “as a result of the situation, it is not automatic that all agencies will come up with developing programs for which you need resources. Instead, [we had] to tweak [already] existing programs and projects with the appropriate resources. For women, that is not much of our focus. For us, we consider the universe. So if we are considering the universe of MSMEs, we have no bias on whatever sector [one belongs to], as long as [a business] is classified as MSME, it [gender] does not matter.” Another agency respondent shares that customer-centricity meant considering their most significant share of customers, which comprises women in developing financial solutions. Thus, a separate program for women was not deemed necessary.

Some agency representatives believe that policy designs are no longer gender-blind when women are already involved at all levels of agenda-setting, policy formulation, and decision-making.

Some agency respondents believe that a policy response must be gender-responsive if the designers and decision-makers are women. For example, asked whether the development of a particular policy response was gender-blind or whether differences between men and women were considered in the design of the policy, a bank executive describes the process to be

facilitated and led primarily by women. Accordingly, they report having an organizational perception that because women are involved in the design process, then it must be the case that policy responses are inherently gender-responsive. They note that the design process is not necessarily “gender-blind because our president is a woman, and she’s the one that penned the guidelines together with the inputs of all the departments under her.” The PCW, however, asserts that it does not make a policy more gender-responsive merely because of who is involved in policymaking. According to the PCW, their proposed framework has a way of putting where agencies and their policies are in terms of gender responsiveness and gender mainstreaming. Thus policy designs are not arbitrarily based on the gender of the persons involved.

A business community representative advocating for women’s entrepreneurship supports the notion that government agencies like the DTI are already “doing baby steps”, citing the agency’s undersecretaries and assistant secretaries being primarily women. A representative of another business community held a similar position stating examples of industry associations and sectors where women now occupy leadership roles. According to them, gender equality is an encouraging indicator in the Philippines’ business landscape while keeping programs open and accessible to all, regardless of gender.

Stakeholders have conflicting views on the application of a gender lens to MSMEs policy responses.

Some respondents believe that support mechanisms must cater to the development of MSMEs without gender priorities. Furthermore, as most beneficiaries are women entrepreneurs, some agencies believe that policies are already inherently gender-inclusive, given that their primary design principle is to cater to the needs of their predominantly women customers. Others believe that a gender lens exists in their programs and thus does not need to be explicitly amended for gender considerations.

Meanwhile, some bank executives, the PCW, and business communities agree that amendments can restore a gender lens to existing support programs for women entrepreneurs. Agencies whose mandate is to improve access to financing argue that access to credit for women entrepreneurs is vital to restoring a gender lens through amendments to existing programs or new ones. DBP’s Inclusive Lending for Aspiring Women Entrepreneurs (DBP-ILAW) program is one example of an attempt to improve an existing program to cater to the needs of women entrepreneurs. DBP executives cite that ILAW is under review precisely because it is intended to improve service delivery.

Information from the ground and other available data provided insights into the needs of entrepreneurs. This, more than gender priorities, plays a critical role in informing policy design.

A bank executive asserts that “given the urgency and timing, we were not able to interview with groups. We based [our programs] on the current data. Additionally, there were already data on the most affected industries, so we used those to develop our program guidelines. We had no the time to consult, but we based everything on needs, and we cater to all in need.” However, another bank executive cites ILO, having provided some studies that show that women-led enterprises have different financing needs that their bank recognizes.

Notably, all agencies did not have gender-specific programs or products before the pandemic regarding financial solutions. Likewise, there was none during the COVID-19 crisis. The DBP's Inclusive Lending for Aspiring Women Entrepreneurs Program (DBP-ILAW) is an exception and is currently under review for amendments.

Policy implementation

Gender and development considerations in its current implementation by agencies, within and beyond the context of COVID-19 policy response, are generally procedural in compliance with the provisions of GAD under the purview of PCW.

Most of the respondents attest to the general observation that agencies are merely submitting reports as part of an approval process that mandates 5% of an agency's annual budget. Asked if the agency had opportunities to consult with different groups among their customers whose agenda is to promote women's entrepreneurship as part of a process to ensure provisions are gender-responsive, one respondent says, "GAD, as it is right now, is just mere compliance with the requirements of the Department of Finance. There is no deliberate effort to push women-led initiatives; there have been no consultations to push that particular agenda, there is none [during the pandemic]."

While agencies have a general understanding of GAD provisions and the need to deliver results in specific areas specified in the law, some may lack the appreciation for the specific needs of women or, more importantly, the role that gender plays in economic development.

One interesting case is the DBP-ILAW, a loan program specially targeted at women entrepreneurs. DBP reports the program to be under review for amendments. However, specified for women, its product design was the same as the mainstream lending program for MSMEs. According to the agency, "the loan amount is the same as the regular loan from the bank. We can say there is no unique feature of this program that can set it differently from other programs of the bank." Although there seems to be a genuine interest in integrating gender considerations in policy design among most respondents, institutional understanding of gender and development, gender responsiveness, and mainstreaming, agencies have yet to develop specific solutions for women's needs. No agency in this study reports a specific program catering to the differential needs of women entrepreneurs.

On the other hand, some agencies believe that men and women do not have differentiated needs and play an essential role in economic development regardless of gender. Accordingly, the same agencies believe that the current policies have the same effects on both men and women, which can explain why the gender blind approach, combined with the directives set by the specifics of the law, is preferred by some agencies over developing policies on gender differences.

There is no agreement on gender-based differences between women and men entrepreneurs.

Although all respondents from financial institutions recognize that most of their customers, women, tend to have a healthier repayment behavior than their male counterparts, some agencies consider the differences trivial as how entrepreneurs are differentiated by gender. The Land Bank of the Philippines reports that "there are more males with payables past due date than females. Repayments for males are 97.1% while for women is 96.8%". However, they also recognize that the differences between repayment behavior could be due "to the nature of

the business as may be seen in how a food-related business was affected by the pandemic compared to other businesses which ultimately affects the repayment rate.” The Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) also notes that female entrepreneurs tend to “have a particular concern for developing the community along with their business instead of being led only by profitability.”

One business community observes that the differences between men and women entrepreneurs in terms of their financial needs at the onset of the pandemic were not covered in their discussions with government agencies. They note, however, that most loan applications tend to come from women entrepreneurs.

Moving forward, agencies and business groups agree on the opportunities to integrate gender considerations in improving existing policy responses as more information from the ground is generated and synthesized for subsequent amendments.

DBP shares that the review of ILAW is a testament to the recognition of the bank in using a gender lens in crafting SME policy responses. They refer to insights from ILO, with whom they are collaborating in developing lending programs that cater specifically to women entrepreneurs. They also use feedback from account officers in the field as insights in reconsidering how to amend ILAW.

Another financial institution says that they rely on feedback from the field to improve service delivery at the level of the lending center, including the impact of projects on both men and women entrepreneurs and their immediate communities. Additionally, they mention that financial literacy programs and capacity building on digital strategies would help improve gender outcomes as they can gain better access to financial products that are already in place but may be inaccessible due to the ongoing pandemic. Financial institutions agree that, with customer feedback, they can better integrate gender considerations in their existing policy responses that are now going through an amendment process in time for planning and budgeting for the succeeding fiscal year.

The largest network of entrepreneurs in the Philippines uses their consulting relationship with the DTI to provide insights. Some beneficiaries are said to have experienced some delays in service delivery. They also said that in advocating for consistent business continuity planning and learning from the pandemic, they recommend that their members and the DTI improve their preparedness for possible future shocks and provide opportunities for enterprises to foster innovation amid a downturn. In light of this, the same business community conducts workshops and financing initiatives for MSME, including many women entrepreneurs. In addition, WomenBizPH suggests that much improvement in policy responses would be achieved if the dialogue about the needs of women entrepreneurs happens not only during Women’s Month but as regularly as possible. In these dialogues, women entrepreneurs can provide feedback that could integrate gender considerations in policy responses.

The DTI recognizes the vital role of business communities, and it considers their participation essential in designing policies and reaching out to the government’s intended beneficiaries.

Respondents from business communities engage with the government regularly through consultations and direct participation in policy implementation. They provide timely feedback to the government on policies affecting their members or programs that can affect market dynamics in the country. In addition, these communities had a high degree of awareness of the

specific details of policy responses to COVID-19 as implemented by attached agencies like the DTI, Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Small Business Corporation, and Department of Finance, among others.

WomenBizPH reports that they represent the Philippines in APEC or ASEAN high-level meetings. Thus, the council can shape MSMEs-related policies, programs, and initiatives. However, the council does not have a seat in the MSMEs Development Council. They would consider it a welcome intervention to have a more direct role in forming even more inclusive or gender-responsive policies for MSMEs.

Business communities/associations add value to policy implementation through awareness amplification, network outreach, and specialized support for women entrepreneurs.

Business associations/communities have important roles to play in the MSMEs ecosystem. Throughout the pandemic, the communities interviewed helped the government generate awareness about the various COVID-19 policy responses for SMEs, mainly through social media and virtual events. A business association representative shares, “There is no integrated information dissemination between IATF and the LGUS, which hurt most of our members.” Thus, MSMEs members are unaware of state-led programs until their leaders have cascaded relevant information. Business associations/communities also help their members to access financing and markets. The communities interviewed launched numerous training and workshop opportunities for MSMEs throughout 2020, focusing on digitalization or digital transformation and adapting to the changing conditions in the environment due to the pandemic. They also feature subject matter experts who provide relevant information and engage with entrepreneurs privately or offline.

Business associations/communities agree that more support services that nurture women enterprises are needed. Ancillary support services for women entrepreneurs with young children, for example, are cited as an opportunity area for consideration. Other support services can include networking opportunities among women entrepreneurs and greater access to capacity building and training programs.

Policy monitoring and evaluation

Consensus on standard definitions of women’s entrepreneurship in the Philippines is missing.

Women’s businesses are defined in various policies, and the literature varies across countries, contexts, and purposes (International Trade Centre and Swedish Institute of Standards 2020). The ITC technical note on the definition of women’s businesses identifies variations in the construction and interpretation of what constitutes a woman-owned business. The absence of a consensus in the definition is evidenced by its varied use and interpretations in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (OECD 2017). In Vietnam, specific decrees direct support for women-owned enterprises, but no definitions of ownership were established (Decree No. 9/2001/ND-CP, Decree No. 56/2009/NP-CP, for example). Another example is the law on SME development in Laos, which identifies women as a priority in providing support to female entrepreneurs. However, it did not specify working definitions of ownership, management, control, or workforce composition (Lao PDR 2014).

However, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) establishes standards for women-owned and women-led businesses, cooperatives, and informal enterprises (ISO 2021).

It also sets the criteria for ownership, management, and control to define standard definitions for women's businesses. The IWA 34 establishes common definitions of women's entrepreneurship, clarifying the framework for identifying women-owned and women-led businesses. It also provides the working definitions of women's entrepreneurship in ownership, management, and control.

According to the standard which is entered into terminological databases, ISO and IEC Electropedia, women-owned businesses are those that are "50% owned by one or more women, whose management and control lie with one or more women, where a woman is a signatory, and which is operated independently from businesses that are not owned by women" (ISO 2021). Women-led businesses are those that are "at least 25% owned by one or more women, whose management and control lie with one or more women, which has at least one-third of the board of directors comprised of women, where a board exists, where a woman is a signatory of the businesses' legal documents and financial accounts, and which is operated independently from businesses that are neither led nor owned by women" (ISO 2021). On the other hand, women-led cooperatives are those "in which women hold more than 50% of the total number of votes, where the majority of the board of directors are women, and where the majority of leadership positions, if applicable, are held by women" (ISO 2021).

In the Philippines, there is no established definition of women-owned or women-led enterprises. In the absence of an official definition, the PCW uses the following criteria in choosing the beneficiaries of the GREAT Women Project: An enterprise is women-owned if 1) a woman owns the enterprise - the business is registered under her name, 2) for cooperative - women members are female; and 3) for partnerships or corporation - more than 50% of the capital share is owned by women. An enterprise is women-led if more than 50% of employees/workers are women.

Gendered impacts are difficult to monitor without a mutually agreed framework of technical definitions of women's entrepreneurship and outcomes for monitoring.

The lack of consensus on the definition of women-owned businesses can lead to challenges in identifying the beneficiaries of programs, gathering and processing sex-disaggregated data, and policymaking. One agency executive mentions the lack of internal and external consistency concerning definitions that agencies can use in planning, implementing, and monitoring initiatives for women entrepreneurs as beneficiaries. They assert that "no differences [could be observed] as far as we are concerned, and there are no differences because [we] cannot even define what women-owned or men-owned enterprises are."

The lack of definition also affects the ability of agencies to monitor the gendered impacts of policies and programs. Some agencies assert that while it is easy for a third party agency to advocate for monitoring of gendered impacts, the implementing agency will have difficulties in the monitoring something that is not clearly defined (e.g., What is being monitored in terms of gender aside from participation in a program?) and not supported with organizational resources to do so. In addition, they emphasize the operational difficulty imposed by the scale of what needs to be monitored (e.g., thousands of beneficiaries across regional offices) given that there is no support for their agencies to design, implement and optimize gendered impacts monitoring. They suggest that external support is needed if gendered impacts of policies are a priority for the government. In the absence of any formal gendered impacts monitoring, their agency relies only on studies provided to them by external parties. Currently, their agencies report sex-disaggregated data only on program participation, aside from those already reported

by PSA. Another agency reports that gendered outcomes are not currently being monitored as the ability to monitor by gender is operationally infeasible mainly because of time and resource constraints and the lack of clear guidelines on how gender can be tracked.

Despite the lack of consensus in a standard definition framework on women's entrepreneurship, some agencies have initiatives to monitor the gendered program uptake. Challenges remain, however.

On the finance front, tagging of gender in loan applications is typically based on the sex of the authorized representative who applied on behalf of the owner (in the case of non-sole proprietorship) or the name of the borrower or account holder. One financial institution reports categorizing an enterprise as “women-owned” if at least 20% of its officers are women as monitored when the bank assesses the applicant firm’s organizational structure. Accordingly, for cooperatives and other financial institutions, if officers comprise at least 10% of board positions, they are classified as “women-owned,” following the advice of international coordinating agencies, among them ILO, World Bank, and ADB. Further, they define women-owned enterprises following the criteria: not less than or equal to 50% owned by a woman or women or 20% owned by women or woman, and one woman as chief executive officer (CEO). If the latter, the firm is immediately classified as women-owned or women-led. This response demonstrates that even within the internal units of an agency, there are multiple ways by which women’s entrepreneurship is defined.

Monitoring gendered impacts is challenging, especially in programs with many beneficiaries. One agency describes their tracking of gender participation as ongoing as “[they] are yet to conduct extensive data analytics with a gender lens. The database still needs to be cleaned for the gender component to come out; it is something that we can do in the future. Although there are attempts to carry this out today, there remain many challenges on the ground, especially on the implementation of programs.” They also said that, although “they want to have as much data as [they] could, [their] priority was to streamline the process for the [customers].” For them, it is necessary to streamline internal processes before data generation and analytics requirements can be fulfilled.

Some agencies use LGU data to supplement PSA reports.

According to an agency respondent, the list of establishments that PSA monitors and updates are different from local government units (LGU) reporting on the number of enterprises. According to them, the PSA “is behind because the basis of what they track is employee size while we track based on asset size as required by the Magna Carta.” They explain that PSA reported less than one million enterprises listed while LGU report over two million enterprises. Furthermore, they believe that one source of the differences in reporting is the exclusion of other enterprises “like lawyers having their own law office, doctors with their own practice. Maybe they also do not count sari-sari stores (neighborhood stores).”

Similarly, an agency executive shares that content creators and advertising influencers, for example, are hardly microentrepreneurs but would fall under micro-enterprises. Most of them work alone and are self-employed but whose assets may be qualified to that of a small business.

A culture of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) can drive better outcomes of policy responses.

Aside from differences in MSMEs and women's entrepreneurship definitions, institutionalizing and building a culture of monitoring and evaluation can drive greater accountability and transparency, provide insights on improving service delivery of policy responses, and achieve better outcomes for beneficiaries. A National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) is currently in place, but its implementation is limited and fragmented, constrained by “weak technical capacity, lack of financial resources, and inadequate institutional capacity” (SEPO 2021).

Related studies on the impact evaluation of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) demonstrate the value of M&E in modifying the program for effectiveness and efficiency, ensuring that the government is “spending on the right things, obtaining the best value for money, and is living within its means” (ADB 2013; SEPO 2021).

Adopting a National Evaluation Policy (NEP) can strengthen evidence-based policymaking, provide a structure to a monitoring system, build capacity for leading and managing evaluations at every level of government, and provide a framework for continuous learning and optimization of government priorities, among many other benefits (SEPO 2021). As of this writing, there are four bills in the 18th Congress advancing the need for NEP, namely: Senate Bill No. 788, Senate Bill No. 1885, House Bill No. 3293, and House Bill No. 8025 (SEPO 2021).

Asked whether agencies monitor and evaluate outcomes of programs they joined before and during the pandemic, a woman entrepreneur and thought leader on entrepreneurship reports no efforts to provide participants with follow-through on their enterprise development. According to her, most participants who attend seminars, for example, are evaluated only in terms of what they present (e.g., a business plan) but not how they are growing the business after. Most agency executives support this observation as well and attribute the lack of a formal M&E of program effects to capacity, financial resources, and time constraints, which can explain why most program monitoring is reported mainly in terms of participation and not their short- or mid-term impact on participating enterprises and sectors.

4.2 Learnings from entrepreneurs

Women entrepreneurs are faced with care work responsibilities more than their men counterparts.

A woman entrepreneur agrees that “responsibilities remain the same” between male and female entrepreneurs who may have to manage priorities and juggle different roles and responsibilities. She concedes, however, that it seems that there are still prevalent gender roles at home where women, whether full-time wives or full-time entrepreneurs have the same responsibility of caring for the home as most men.

Some respondents note that the difference between men and women entrepreneurs could be justified when looking at the case of women entrepreneurs who are mothers. They say that although male and female entrepreneurs may have the exact needs, the same could not be said of women entrepreneurs who are mothers juggling multiple roles such as caring for their children and managing the home while running a business in a work-from-home arrangement.

One respondent states that “the perspective changes once you consider the need of a woman who is a mother and another who is not.”

One respondent notes the opportunity to provide women entrepreneurs access to services that can help them participate in the economy, particularly those with children. One such service that the respondent believes will add value to mothers who are entrepreneurs is free childcare, which according to her, would give the entrepreneur, for example, “two hours that she can use to focus solely on the business or herself.” They note that unpaid care work can be transformed into opportunities for women entrepreneurs to do business, as in the case where those who have access to it can do either a part-time job while also being a full-time mother.

Business associations/communities agree that more support services that nurture women enterprises are needed. Ancillary support services for women entrepreneurs with young children, for example, have been cited as an opportunity area for consideration. Other support services can include networking opportunities among women entrepreneurs and greater access to capacity building and training programs.

Women entrepreneurs are good at building communities.

One entrepreneur shares that, in general, women want to uplift fellow women, and they constantly advise each other and share information that can help the community flourish. Another entrepreneur shares that her business has supported mothers through training and values formation, and these help female workers to develop confidence and a positive self-image. Given that the business is in a suburban area, the entrepreneur notes that changing the mindset about gender roles is essential. Thus, the business conducts monthly meetings to reinforce the idea that gender roles can be reversed (e.g., men take care of the children, women earn). A representative of the DBP shares that female entrepreneurs are more inclusive and demonstrate a genuine concern to develop the entire community.

Male entrepreneurs have varying observations about their female counterparts.

Among interviewed entrepreneurs in the study, male entrepreneurs based in urban centers agree that behavioral differences exist. Notably, they tend to agree about the diligence and detail-orientation of women entrepreneurs. Some but not all male entrepreneurs further away from urban centers, on the other hand, describe women’s behavior in terms of managing the business, including how finances are handled to be the same as men’s. Some argue that women are more entrepreneurial than fellow men entrepreneurs.

Women groups can be tapped to disseminate information.

One entrepreneur shares that the government can use women groups to disseminate information on policies, programs, and initiatives. Women entrepreneurs have a wider reach because of their presence on social media and e-commerce platforms. The representative of WomenBizPH validates this by noting that collaboration with partner organizations is key to facilitating information traffic. Another entrepreneur also notes that some LGUs work with women’s groups to reach out to MSMEs. However, for partnerships to work, MSMEs need to be part of the network.

Women entrepreneurs do not expect women-specific programs since they recognize that all entrepreneurs face the same financial and operating constraints.

All women entrepreneurs agree that the financial repercussions of lockdowns and temporary business closures, especially those in contact-intensive sectors, affect all entrepreneurs regardless of gender and, as such, require universal solutions. A woman entrepreneur explains that customer-focused policies would not require differentiating between men and women beneficiaries. Another respondent remarks that the differences in the conditions for men and women lie not so much in gender but the nature of the business. Male entrepreneurs also recognize that at the onset of the pandemic, entrepreneurs, regardless of gender, needed support to access financing and markets. An executive of a business community advocating women's entrepreneurship asserts that the problems faced by men and women entrepreneurs are the same, which may justify why policies are gender-neutral.

The PCW disagrees: "even with the ITC survey on COVID-19, it says that 62% of women-led small businesses have been strongly affected by the crisis compared to only more than half of men-led businesses." They further argued that "women are more vulnerable in the pandemic since the multiple burdens on women entrepreneurs in the past are more emphasized now. The pandemic disproportionately affects women as they take on these multiple roles now. We disagree that policies, especially in the time of a pandemic, should be gender-blind."

Entrepreneurs have demonstrated resilience against downturns.

Other than downsizing, some entrepreneurs increased the marketing and distribution channels while others turned to online selling (either on Facebook or their own website). They started to adopt digital payment solutions such as GCash and bank transfers, prompted by the lockdown measures and social distancing protocols. Entrepreneurs share that resilience against downturns requires careful planning of strategies and deliberate capacity building of the team. Another successful entrepreneur shares that creativity is essential. Currently, they are considering a move to critical industries and are exploring partnerships with other entrepreneurs.

Several key areas can still be improved to support women and men entrepreneurs. These include handholding initiatives based on the size of the business.

One such area is a more targeted mentoring initiative. An entrepreneur shares the need to understand issues and challenges better so that targeted solutions can be offered. Strengthening the structure in terms of policies and processes within the organization and strategies for the business to grow is vital. A successful entrepreneur, who opened additional branches during the pandemic, shares that strategies differ depending on the business's size. While there is a need for internal controls (e.g., avoid theft, manage inventories), microenterprises still need to be implemented, while small and medium businesses potentially need enhancements or upgrades.

Similarly, crafting plans to grow the business, including identifying critical positions that need to be filled, will help the business prepare for future resources needs. There were mentoring programs in the past that spanned a month, although the real mentoring took place for just two hours. The academic community can also help to improve the MSMEs ecosystem by getting practitioners as lecturers. Their rich background will provide more value to the knowledge of aspiring entrepreneurs.

4.3 Learning from startups

Startups, companies in the initial stages of commercialization (e.g., ideation, establishment, validation, and scaling), depending on their asset and employment size, can qualify as MSME. Republic Act No. 11337 or the Innovative Startup Act broadly defines startups as new enterprises and businesses that introduce new ideas that lead to the commercialization of new or improved products, processes, or services. In the Philippine Startup Survey 2020 (PWC 2020), over 400 startups were recorded in enterprise services, fintech, e-commerce, education, and transportation. Among the survey respondents, 78% are male founders, and 22% are female founders. Most startups are focused on digital or technology.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic provided a strong impetus and momentum for digitalization, the Philippines still suffers from a relatively small number of tech startups. The Philippines ranked 36th out of 100 emerging startup ecosystems globally (World Bank 2020). However, there is no evidence in the literature on the effects of SME policy responses on startups, much less on startups led or owned by women.

At the beginning of their lifecycle, startups can be considered enterprises (based on their size and assets). However, there is a stage that will differentiate them from any MSME.

A respondent from a venture capital firm shares that startups are companies designed to grow fast. Startups leverage innovation and create something that has never been done before. This means that the business model is not determined final since there can be changes as the product is being developed until it becomes scalable. The respondent further shares that at the beginning of startups' lifecycle, they are subsets of MSMEs and can avail of some of the programs for MSMEs. As they earn and attract investors, startups look to venture capitalists for funding instead of the government. At this point, they are growing exponentially and need a considerable amount of investments to sustain their momentum, which the government has no money for.

Awareness of policy responses to COVID-19 varies among startups. Like MSME, startups encounter setbacks due to the pandemic.

According to resource persons from venture capital firms, tech startups have varying levels of awareness of the SME policy responses of the government to COVID-19, as attested by the differences in the knowledge of which attached agencies are responsible for implementing the programs under the *Bayanihan* laws. For example, some are not aware of the Small Business Corporation. In contrast, others who know it reports that their programs may not apply to tech startups. However, there is a high degree of awareness among those interviewed about relevant startup and innovation laws such as the Innovative Startup Act and the Philippine Innovation Act, although many remain uncertain how these laws help, particularly in COVID-19. In addition, they note that many startup founders or executives, while faced with financial challenges during the pandemic, preferred to seek private sources of financial support to innovate or maintain operations during lockdowns. They note that most startup founders or executives see government as the final resort if all private sources are unavailable or if only they are required to do so.

Like MSME, startups have been affected by the pandemic, and their readiness to embrace digital platforms and integrate tools from the online world has played a big role in their

survival. Those who can shift into the development of digital payment solutions have done well, especially with that uptrend in online shopping.

Startups rely more on the private sector for financial support.

By the Magna Carta for MSME, some startups would qualify as MSMEs (by employment and asset size). Indeed, a respondent from a venture capital shares that there are no COVID-19 policy responses specific for startups, except those designed for MSME. However, startups operate differently relative to other enterprises. Given the nature of innovation required that faces high risks of failure and high upfront capitalization, startups generally have differential financing needs, which a risk-averse financing policy of most government policies would not typically cover. Private investors, however, provide financing for innovations even without an explicit guarantee of market success. Furthermore, as the needs of startups evolve according to their market entry, financing requirements also change, which private investors can readily provide.

While the Innovative Startup Act has facilitated the ease of doing business, there are other areas where the government's intervention is needed. These include providing environments that are conducive to innovation and collaboration.

Venture capital firms and consultants agree that the government plays a central role in creating an environment conducive to startups and investing. They also emphasize that the government can support startups by allowing greater flexibility in requiring enterprises to show proof of success, especially since not all startups will have these to show at the initial stages of their commercialization. They cite potential reforms already indicated in the Innovative Startup Act that could be used as a starting point in developing policy responses and institutional support for startups. Some mention the Singapore model in which the government matches private investments in startups.

While starting a business has been significantly easier, it is equally important to implement policies that make it easy to close down companies. Startups can fail as fast as they grow. A respondent from a venture capitalist shares that it is “important that we allow these very innovative founders and entrepreneurs to move somewhere and start something new”.

The government can also help by designating an agency that startups can go to for information, access, and network. A respondent from a venture capital firm shares that startup founders in the fintech front have no issue since the monetary authority in the country is on top of fintech and digitech developments. Non-fintech startup founders have asked which specific government agency can help them find investors, improve their network, and find their peers to enrich their bodies of knowledge. The respondent asks, “Do they go to the DOST? DICT? The academe?”.

Differences between men and women startup founders exist though mainly insignificant.

Although most respondents feel there are no significant differences between men and women founders, they noted the ability of women leaders in startups to be more aware of their enterprise's environment than their male counterparts. There are some reports of women-led startups having more flexibility in managing change, as may be required when addressing market challenges. According to one resource person, there seem to be more women-led startups that were either open to pivot (e.g., change in the line of business) or led a pivot during

the pandemic. However, there is no empirical evidence offered in the literature to support this observation.

5. Recommendations

5.1 MSMEs

A whole-of-society approach to rejuvenate and reinforce a gender lens in all policy aspects could address gender and development goals engendered by UN SDG, the Magna Carta for Women, and Ambisyon 2040. In the short run, efforts could help contribute insights into how existing programs could be amended for even greater inclusion with more mindful awareness of the differentiated needs of women entrepreneurs who comprise most of the MSMEs sector today. In the mid- and long-term, policies are more cohesive in terms of gender and development goals underpinned by an institutional understanding of gender mainstreaming and its relevance in policymaking, implementation, and monitoring could be achieved, ultimately aligned not only with local policies but also with internationally recognized frameworks on gender equality, diversity, and inclusion for all.

Policy design

Nurture a culture of gender responsiveness in all dimensions. A whole-of-society approach is recommended in reidentifying the role that gender plays in economic development. Although agencies, business communities, and enterprises appreciate a better awareness of women's issues, there is still a need to cultivate a gender-responsive culture beyond compliance.

Integrating the Magna Carta for Women in all efforts by agencies through a “woman by design” approach will inspire a more conscious effort for agencies to consider gender needs in every policy rather than leave gender considerations in postmortem or treated as an afterthought. Moreover, if policies are “woman by design,” then agencies are more likely to adopt a design approach that considers how policy features to address the pain points of both male and female beneficiaries. Strategic questions about how the policy is responsive to both genders' needs would be asked from inception, considering how and whether implementation needs to be nuanced by gender.

This design approach also encourages agencies and policymakers to decide accordingly which programs are required to be sex-agnostic and which ones need to be specific to men or women. Given that women own most MSMEs, gender-based programs are likely to encourage even greater economic participation while ensuring that the needs of men are not marginalized. Overall, institutionalizing a design approach to policymaking will help restore a gender lens and reinforce a more gender-aware culture in an economy already led and driven by women on top.

Harmonize gender and development framework with definitions on women's entrepreneurship established and accepted by the government, private sector, and supported by the academe. Revitalizing a clear agenda on women requires a common working framework supported by definitions that all players in the entrepreneurial ecosystem agree to use in the design of policies. Mandates on promoting the agenda for women empowerment, diversity, inclusion, and gender equality, among others, will help create a cohesive policy ecosystem that enables men and women entrepreneurs to thrive.

A harmonized gender and development framework identifies the primary beneficiaries of a policy and how they are intended to benefit from it, recognizing that differences in behavior could affect access, participation, and program outcomes. Moreover, clarifying a gender and development framework for entrepreneurs would harmonize data points, methodologies, and design principles that fuel the policymaking process. Ultimately, internal and external consistency in using and interpreting gender responsiveness could be achieved with a harmonized framework and standard definitions of women's entrepreneurship.

Initiate a tripartite dialogue on gender and development to achieve consensus and alignment. A dialogue co-chaired by the PCW and DTI in consultation with business communities and agricultural cooperatives designed to align all parties and achieve a consensus on technical definitions of women's entrepreneurship and how these definitions are used in policy design, implementation and evaluation is a compelling step towards restoring a gender lens in the MSMEs.

Consider adopting the IWA 34 standard on women's entrepreneurship across all dimensions of policy design. The ISO standard on women's entrepreneurship provides an internationally recognized basis for defining women's entrepreneurship. One benefit is that the entrepreneurial ecosystem would be aligned on who should benefit from gender-responsive and inclusive policies. Furthermore, adopting the IWA 34 allows policymakers to design policies that address gender and development goals based on standard definitions used in women's entrepreneurship to be integrated more strategically than ad hoc as might be done in analyzing a program midstream or post-mortem.

Institutionalize sustained advocacy for women, gender, and development goals beyond Women's Month. Whereas the agenda for women, gender, and development are currently perceived as procedural, creating a sustained momentum for gender and development, particularly in business, would promote a better understanding of the differentiated needs of women, which could inspire careful consideration of nuances in designing policies that are gender-responsive and inclusive for all. Differences between men and women entrepreneurs would be recognized as potential sources of potential growth, perhaps more than they are currently understood in the procedural approach. Consequently, a more nuanced view of gender and development could help agencies craft more customer-centric products and services at the design stage, which could be a step forward from the current repackaging of mainstream products that remain the same at the core but are targeted via marketing to the women entrepreneurs.

Policy implementation

Introduce a gender lens in all laws specifying exactly how laws address the specific needs of women beneficiaries, especially in disasters or other similar extraordinary situations where some sectors stand to be underrepresented in favor of a perceived general welfare agenda. Providing a mandate on women from the top of the government will allow agencies to align their implementation agendas that are responsive to gender-differentiated needs, promoting even better cohesion within and across agencies. As agencies generally act in response to legislation, it must be the case that gender mandates clearly stated in legal artifacts would send clear signals on execution priorities down the line better than when the same is absent. Furthermore, introducing a gender lens in developing, for example, implementing rules and

regulations (IRR) due to enacted laws would elevate the current procedural approach to internalizing gender responsiveness across the planning and implementation continuum.

Empower business communities to augment gaps in the experience of women entrepreneurs and to address their care work responsibilities. Business communities add value to the entrepreneurship ecosystem through ancillary support, community outreach, and specialized capacity building tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs. As agencies focus on inclusive growth for both men and women for which universal programs are adopted, business communities can capture the nuances of women’s entrepreneurship and provide them with access to a support system by and for women. Some women entrepreneurs will benefit from thought leadership by sharing daily challenges, effectively giving them a more personal emotional support system that may not always be a priority for government agencies.

Although many women entrepreneurs see the complementarity of their roles as entrepreneurs and mothers, providing ancillary support services that allow them to allocate their time for business and home life without facing penalizing trade-offs (i.e., one needs time away from care work to take care of the business, and vice-versa, or multitask at the expense of other considerations like mental health or quality) could encourage even greater women participation in entrepreneurship. Innovations in support systems for childcare, especially during the pandemic in which children study from home, pave the way for more effective involvement in productive work without diminishing their roles as caregivers. Women entrepreneurs would have more choices available to them that they could take without feeling guilty for letting their care work slide to the sidelines in favor of working on their business.

Business communities also provide government agencies with access to their network, which may help extend the reach of policy responses and address the amplification and marketing needs of government programs. Furthermore, a closer interaction between business communities and government agencies will help build capacity-building efforts closer to MSMEs beneficiaries, including agricultural cooperatives with varying perceptions of the availability and accessibility of government programs, especially during emergencies.

Continue and expand an integrated digital and financial literacy program for MSMEs. Agencies and business communities should also consider consolidating and extending their digital and financial literacy, as part of priority capacity-building efforts, ensuring that MSMEs are equipped with the requisite knowledge about a quickly digitalizing economy. Furthermore, digital transformation and innovation capacity-building efforts will help MSMEs regain competitiveness and improve sector resilience amid an ongoing pandemic.

Policy monitoring and evaluation

Support the enactment of a national evaluation program to monitor and evaluate gendered impacts, among others, of policies, programs, and other initiatives of all agencies. Greater transparency, accountability, and continuous learning for even better service delivery could be achieved by promoting an institutionalized, nationwide, and whole-of-government monitoring and evaluation culture. Gendered impacts, supported by a harmonized gender and development framework with standard definitions of women’s entrepreneurship, would be monitored beyond participation and application rates. Short-, mid- and long-term impacts of policies for both men and women entrepreneurs would be part of a strategic effort to improve outcomes, hold resource allocation accountable concerning their actual results, and continuously improve

future programs. Enacting the substitute laws on monitoring and evaluation would also provide agencies with the capacity and institutional support.

Standardize key data points on gendered impacts at all levels of the government. Benefitting from a harmonized framework on gender and development and women's entrepreneurship would provide all agencies with interoperable data points, which may provide a sharper and more integrated analysis of gendered outcomes of policies. As all agencies capture, store, process, and interpret data for better policymaking, it is vital that agencies with the mandate to monitor gendered outcomes have the same data set with the requisite standard definitions. Consequently, analytical efficiencies and a more cohesive interpretation proceed from this effort to standardize data points.

Seek to update definitions of entrepreneurship for better interoperability of the data across agencies that capture, process, and interpret analytics for insights, reporting, and cyclical policy design. Agencies can achieve internal consistency through consensus on how entrepreneurship is defined. The law on MSMEs and some institutional practices on defining and classifying MSMEs currently vary, leading to some inconsistencies in the way data are evaluated or how these data are used in policy design. Furthermore, it could help clarify how to classify emergent forms of entrepreneurship in which the size of the workforce may no longer be reliable for use in policy design, monitoring, and evaluation. A harmonized framework on gender and development adds even greater clarity to monitoring and evaluating programs, complementing a consensus on how MSMEs are classified.

5.2 Startups

Improve awareness and engagement with startups to make emergency policy responses accessible to all qualified MSMEs. Most startups qualify as MSMEs, yet many are not aware of government initiatives that provide emergency relief. Actively participating in communities like Startup PH, a group with over 40,000 members on Facebook alone, can generate community-level awareness about government initiatives. Given the absence of a business association that consolidates startup players, community pages like Startup PH provide the government with a platform to supply answers to founders who otherwise may not receive information on available programs the same way other entrepreneurs would through their chambers of commerce or formally organized business communities. Designating an agency that would cater to the specific needs of startups would also ensure that information is disseminated to founders on time.

Explore private-public partnerships (PPP) with venture capital firms. Instead of formally organized business associations for startup founders, venture capital firms represent the commercial interests of founders. They could provide the government with some essential linkages with entrepreneurs not actively nor traditionally reached by policy responses or initiatives. Companies like Kickstart Ventures hold regular community events that bring founders and other players into the startup ecosystem, which can be an avenue for the government to make its programs accessible to potential beneficiaries. Furthermore, venture capital firms can provide the government with efficient collaboration opportunities for capacity building, policy development, regular consultation, and network outreach, to name a few benefits. Actively participating in startup community activities also allows startup founders to participate in a search and matching process with the government on some requirements that require innovative approaches, products, and services.

Revisit barriers to entry and exit that facilitate more unrestricted mobility for startups. As startups face high risks of failure while balancing these with commercial rewards, they need greater flexibility in opening and closing businesses. A more fluid environment responsive to the unique characteristics of innovation allows entrepreneurs to thrive in a highly volatile process of scaling new businesses up, with as minimal frictions as possible to enable them to start over and move on or create anew as needed.

Reintroduce the startup policy framework to the startup community. Given that the requisite policies to support startups are in place, and startups have varying levels of understanding or appreciation of government initiatives as required by related laws on innovative startups and the innovation ecosystem, it is worthwhile to reintroduce said policies to the startup community. Promoting the IRR of these laws would facilitate general interest in working with agencies involved in the innovation process and development of innovative startups. This idea could be pursued in conjunction with PPP and community-level engagements.

Consider benchmarking the Philippines' innovation ecosystem with the Singapore model. When articulating how the Philippines could elevate its support mechanisms for startups, venture capital firms and startup consultants often refer to the Singapore innovation model. Singapore's economic development model features an institutional framework anchored on a whole-of-government innovation policy that involves the entire spectrum of the innovation process: Research, Innovation and Enterprise Council (RIEC) for research and innovation excellence, the Ministry of Education for the academe, the Ministry of Trade and Industry for commerce, the Ministry of Communications and Information and other ministries for commercialization and collaboration opportunities, the Ministry of Law for intellectual property, among the many other players supporting the startup community. Public policies are designed to boost innovation capabilities, mainly through investments in strategic, economically relevant, science-based research capabilities in the life sciences, digital media, sustainable and Smart Cities, and fintech (Wong 2018).

Other whole-of-government and PPP initiatives in the Singapore model include support for prototyping and product development costs, the provision of innovation voucher schemes, and the promotion of agglomeration of startups in a community-style hub called "Launchpad@One-North". These initiatives reframe and share the risk of innovation by sharing a part of its costs with startups or providing startups with ways to achieve better cost efficiencies, especially at the initial stages of firm growth in which scale and speed are equally necessary to achieve commercial impact.

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APPENDIX

Table 1A: Financial relief and support programs of the government

Agency	Program	Description
Financial Relief		
Department of Agriculture	Recovery Package for Micro and Small Enterprises engaged in Agriculture and Fisheries Food Production, and Other Supply Chain Activities in Accordance with the Agripreneurship Development Fund/Program of the ACPC	Loan assistance at concessionary rates and capacity building shall be provided to micro and small enterprises engaged in agriculture and fisheries productions and other supply chain activities to ensure the availability of food supply and help them recover losses due to the ECQ.
Department of Science and Technology	Small Enterprise Technology Upgrading Program (SETUP)	As a form of assistance given the declaration of the state of national emergency crisis on COVID-19, the repayment system for SETUP beneficiaries for two months' deferment (March-April), without interest or penalties.
Department of Trade and Industry	Memorandum Circular No. 20-04: Prescribing the Implementation Guidelines for IATF Resolution No. 12 Issued by the Inter-agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases on Social Distancing and Business Operation	Waive rental and other fees for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises: Mall operators and commercial landlords were ordered to waive rents and additional fees for stores forced to shut down during the 30-day community quarantine in Metro Manila.
Department of Trade and Industry	Enterprise Rehabilitation Financing Facility under the Pondo sa Pagbabago at Pag-asenso (COVID19 P3-ERF) and COVID-19 Assistance to Restart Enterprises Program (CARES)	Eligible for micro and small enterprises with at least one year of continuous operation before March 2020 and whose businesses suffered a drastic reduction in sales during the epidemic. Loan conditions: (1) Updating of loan amortizations for vehicle loans or other fixed asset loans of affected business (2) Inventory replacement for damaged perishable stock (3) Working capital replacement to restart the business. Documentary requirements – a. Brgy. Clearance, b. LGU certification of business establishment for at least one year Loan amount of Php 10,000.00 up to Php 500,000.00 for small enterprises (Asset size not more than 10M); and a loan amount of Php 10K up to 200k for micro-enterprises. Discounted 0.5% monthly interest rate and prolonged grace period until the current crisis are abated.
Department of Trade and Industry	Small Business (SB) Corporation Moratorium on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Loans	The SB Corporation offers a one-month moratorium on loan payments covering March 16 to April 14, 2020, to its MSME borrowers and partner financial institutions (PFIs). Borrowers may also request to pay only the interest portion of their monthly payments for the subsequent six months and resume their regular monthly payments. Loan terms may also be extended depending on how the current situation develops.
Development Bank of the Philippines	DBP Response-MSMEs Recovery Program	Low interest and flexible term loan program for operating expenses available to businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly those in agri-fishery and non-essential firms, including but not limited to startups and cooperatives
Landbank of the Philippines	I-RESCUE Lending Program	In support of Republic Act No. 11469 or the "Bayanihan to Heal as One Act," LANDBANK, through the I-RESCUE Lending Program, shall provide interim measures for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Cooperatives (Coops), and Microfinance Institutions (MFIs)
Philippine Guarantee Corporation	Credit Guarantee Facility for MSME	Support via P120-Billion in working capital loans to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) facing economic difficulties as a result of the crisis
Employment support programs		
Department of Labor and Employment	Labor Advisory 12: Clarificatory Guidelines on COVID-19 Adjustment Measures Program (CAMP)	Labor Advisory 12: Clarificatory Guidelines on COVID-19 Adjustment Measures Program (CAMP)
Business support programs		
Department of Agriculture	COA-DBM Joint Circular No. 1, dated March 19, 2020	This issuance was released to ensure unhampered trade and delivery of agro-fishery produce (fruits, vegetables, rice, fish, poultry, and livestock and its related products) and agri-fishery inputs (fertilizers, feed, feed ingredients, etc.) to, from, and passing through NCR through "Foodlane Accreditation" and other operationalization of other food delivery mechanics.

Source: Adapted from Shinozaki and Rao (2021) and Philippine Commission on Women (n.d.)