Women’s Economic Empowerment and Networking

The Center for Women’s Economic Empowerment (CWEE) at CIPE advances gender equality in emerging markets to build more inclusive, thriving economies and democracies that deliver for all citizens. This two-page briefer outlines how CIPE approaches women’s economic empowerment (WEE) using networking. This briefer lists some examples of CIPE programming and presents areas of interest for future research, project, and policy exploration.

Networking to Advance Business

Networking involves developing relationships and exchanging information with individuals, groups, and organizations to cultivate professional and personal connections for mutual benefit. Networking is often considered the most essential part of entering the business world, helping individuals secure job offers and opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach. These networks encourage the exchange of knowledge and ideas, allowing for stronger and more creative projects from all parties involved. Moreover, networking can generate long-term relationships that open doors to new opportunities and benefits for both parties. These relationships can help people stay updated on business trends and provide them with access to necessary resources. Some examples of networking include meeting people for informal chats, volunteering, attending events on shared interests, or joining professional organizations, among others.

Networking can be instrumental in the growth of small businesses, helping them gain recognition and establish a positive reputation in their community. Networking also helps entrepreneurs establish and grow a customer base, find employees, develop business partnerships, and locate investors and suppliers. This business growth, in turn, supports local citizens by creating job opportunities. Networking is also commonly used to generate a benchmark against other businesses, helping owners and managers understand how they compare to those in the same industry. This communication between multiple players in the same industry - through collective action - can ease the process of finding solutions to common business problems, strengthening the industry overall.

Why Networking Matters for Women’s Economic Empowerment

Through networking, businesswomen can validate and share their experiences, successes, and challenges, providing much-needed support and resources. Women-led networks help women make their voice heard, promote entrepreneurial culture and drive positive changes for business. Studies found that women who attended a business conference for women more than doubled their chances at receiving a promotion, and 71% of attendees reported “feeling more connected to others.” Networking, however, must also occur between men and women to provide the most benefit to women in business. Given that men still occupy most senior-level positions, networking with men can provide the connections necessary for women to access other networks, higher-ranking jobs and investment opportunities. Networking with men opens doors for senior-level positions, and networking in women-led spaces can provide women entrepreneurs with the confidence and resources to pursue these opportunities and succeed.

One challenge for women entrepreneurs in growing a business is building up enough social capital to make themselves known and established in the community they serve. Networking can provide opportunities for women to overcome obstacles in growing their business and help them establish themselves as leaders.
Regional Network for Businesswomen’s Organizations (RNBWO)

The South Asia Regional Network for Businesswomen’s Organizations (RNBWO), established in 2012, connects women’s business organizations from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Cambodia, and Afghanistan. With a specific focus on women in the private sector, the Network has improved the overall capacity of its members. In addition, the associations involved have reported an increase in membership and policy wins that improved financing and security for women entrepreneurs in their regions. As membership in these associations grows, their advocacy campaigns receive more support and increase the potential for change. In five years of work, multiple organizations in RNBWO have received recognition from their governments and become leaders in the movement for women’s economic empowerment in their countries.

Central America Women's Business Network (CAWBN)

The Central America Women’s Business Network (CAWBN), established in June 2021, connects women’s business associations in Central America to amplify the voices of women in the private sector, similar to RNBWO. Building on past organizational experiences, the Network seeks regional expansion and integration to encourage engagement in local, democratic processes.

CIPE’s Approach to Networking for Women’s Economic Empowerment

CIPE uses networking to build partnerships and facilitate knowledge transfer, allowing partner organizations and their leaders to benefit from global approaches and experiences to drive positive change. CIPE encourages business owners to engage in networking that fosters long-term connections and the creation of a shared base of knowledge. Specifically, CIPE supports the creation and development of networks that connect businesswomen, women entrepreneurs and women’s business associations. Networks can help strengthen women’s associations’ ability to engage in collective action and participate politically to advocate for policies that reduce the barriers to entry for businesswomen. By building strong connections, network members can collectively advocate for the reforms that benefit large groups of women and underserved communities. The personal and professional relationships developed through these networks are mutually beneficial, creating an opportunity for both parties to exchange best practices and help each other in the longer term.

CIPE emphasizes the need for networking to include a diverse set of voices to advocate for women’s economic empowerment. CIPE promotes the participation of women’s business associations and women leaders in international forums to ensure that their voices are heard on a global platform. These efforts have led to the creation and expansion of numerous established networks around the world.

2 https://www.topresume.com/career-advice/importance-of-networking-for-career-success
3 https://smallbusinessbc.ca/article/five-benefits-networking/
5 https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/advantages-business-networking
6 https://www.ellevatenetwork.com/articles/9144-nine-ways-successful-group-networking-empowers-women-entrepreneurs
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9 https://blogs.worldbank.org/nasikiliza/networking-the-key-to-growth-for-women-entrepreneurs