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Eswatini

SHETRADES OUTLOOK | 2024





Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION 04

THE RESULTS 07

Trade Policy **8**

Legal & Regulatory Framework **12**

Business Environment **16**

Access to Skills **22**

Access to Finance **26**

Work & Society **30**

CONCLUSION 32

ABOUT THE ESWATINI: PROMOTING GROWTH THROUGH COMPETITIVE ALLIANCES PROGRAMME

The Eswatini: Promoting Growth through Competitive Alliances Programme is funded by the European Union. It seeks to generate a private sector-led export drive, with implementation relying on the “Alliance for Action” approach. It aims to build up alliances that bind value chain actors in collectively upgrading Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), value-chains and support services in an environmentally and socially responsible manner, including value addition, public private dialogue and strong anchoring in markets. It is designed to achieve two key outcomes:

- The adoption and implementation of business-friendly, inclusive, and responsible national policies and legal frameworks.
- The strengthening of productive capabilities, processing, promotion, marketing capabilities, and value chains.

The SheTrades Initiative is collaborating with Alliances for Action to mainstream gender in programme activities. At the macro-level, the programme works with policymakers to create a more conducive environment for women in business and trade. The policy-related activities build on the results from SheTrades Outlook, which was rolled out by the SheTrades Initiative, with support from the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.



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INTRODUCTION

SHETRADES OUTLOOK

SheTrades Outlook: Creating Trade Opportunities for Women in Eswatini

In 2019, the International Trade Centre (ITC) rolled out SheTrades Outlook in Eswatini. It conducted institutional surveys with 21 organizations – 18 national institutions and three private sector organizations. This policy brief builds on interview data and the latest available secondary data to present an analysis and recommendations for Eswatini to unlock women's participation in trade by improving the policy ecosystem.



WHY DOES WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT MATTER?

Eswatini is a lower-middle income country, with over half the population living under the poverty line. This is primarily attributed to widespread unemployment. In 2023, 24% of women were unemployed, compared with 20% of men. More opportunities need to be created for women to participate in the economy through entrepreneurship and trade. Tailored support and incentives to encourage women's economic empowerment can increase women's capacity to generate income, create jobs and participate in trade.

Eswatini's main trading partner is the Southern African Customs Union, particularly South Africa, with exports to that country accounting for 65% of Eswatini's total export value. Economic shifts and challenges in the South African market can have significant negative impacts on Eswatini's exports and subsequently on its domestic growth. Eswatini can harness trade agreements to boost trade and diversify into other international markets. Trade agreements include the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), the European Union–Southern African Development Community (SADC) Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the Southern African Customs Union–Mozambique–United Kingdom EPA. These economic partnerships can also be leveraged to increase women's participation in trade.

Policy is important in facilitating women's participation in entrepreneurship and trade. For example, the government's National Gender Policy (NGP) 2023 sets out the country's vision for an inclusive economy, where men and women have equal access to resources. Eswatini's AfCFTA National Implementation Strategy 2024–2028 aims to increase intra-Africa trade and support women, youth and other marginalized persons in trade. The National Policy for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises 2023 aims to create a conducive business environment that mainstreams gender and provides equal business opportunities to men and women. Additionally, the country's [National Development Plan 2023/24–2027/28](#) aims to accelerate social and human capital development and create more sustainable livelihoods by empowering youth, women, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

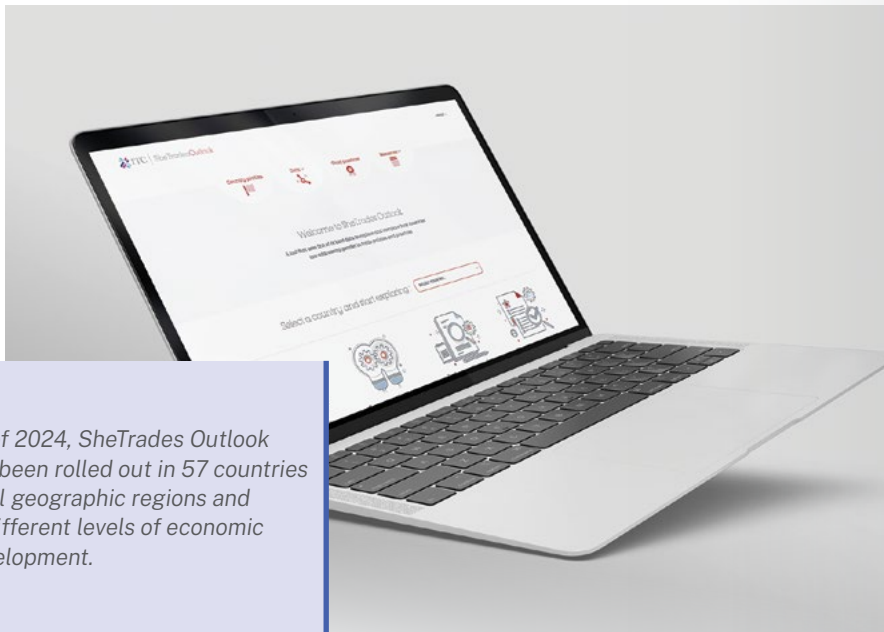
Women's potential to contribute to Eswatini's economic growth is not maximized. The only way to realize women's economic potential is by supporting them to participate in the labour market, entrepreneurship and trade through gender-responsive policies. SheTrades Outlook can provide critical data to help policymakers prioritize areas for improvement and identify opportunities to improve women's economic empowerment and accelerate progress towards achieving Eswatini's development goals.

WHAT IS SHETRADES OUTLOOK?

SheTrades Outlook is an innovative, evidence-based policy tool designed by ITC. It identifies policies, laws or programmes that contribute to or prevent women's participation in the economy and trade. This first-of-its-kind tool is based on 55 indicators. These are grouped under six interlinked pillars – Trade Policy, Business Environment, Legal and Regulatory Framework, Access to Skills, Access to Finance and Work and Society.

SheTrades Outlook is based on data collected by national consultants from an average of 20 national institutions and organizations per country. Data are collected through interviews based on semi-structured questionnaires. Examples of institutions surveyed include ministries of trade, education, finance, technology and women's affairs; public procurement authorities; Customs authorities; central banks; national statistics offices; business associations; chambers of commerce; and other trade support institutions.

SheTrades Outlook also makes use of reliable, publicly available and recently updated databases from the Inter-Parliamentary Union; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the United Nations Statistics Division; the World Bank and the World Economic Forum. Additionally, national experts identify an average of three good practices per country.



As of 2024, SheTrades Outlook has been rolled out in 57 countries in all geographic regions and at different levels of economic development.

SheTrades Outlook – results

In 2019, ITC conducted institutional surveys with 21 organizations – 18 national institutions and three private sector organizations. This policy brief builds on the interview data, complemented with the latest available secondary data, to assess Eswatini’s progress in promoting women’s participation in business and trade.

The SheTrades Outlook indicator scores range from zero to one. Eswatini performed the highest in Access to Skills, followed by Access to Finance, Trade Policy and Business Environment. It performed the lowest in Legal and Regulatory Framework and Work and Society.

Detailed information on the scores under each pillar is presented below. This includes strengths, bottlenecks and gaps identified in the data.



FIGURE 1: SHETRADES OUTLOOK INDICATOR SCORES

TRADE POLICY



Consultation process	
Initiatives or mechanisms are in place to include women's associations/organizations in consultation processes	
Women's associations/organizations participate in consultation processes	
Trade and gender-related concerns are included in policies and agreements	
Policy or action plan on gender equality and women's empowerment includes trade-related concerns	
Trade agreements or regional economic integration agreements include gender provisions	
Assessment, monitoring and evaluation	
Ex-ante and ex-post gender impact assessments of trade agreements are carried out	
Trade policy uses gender indicators	
Gender-disaggregated data	
Law or regulation mandates the collection of gender-disaggregated data	
Gender-disaggregated data is collected on companies	
Women's participation in strategic roles	
Women are represented in ministerial and parliamentary positions	
Capacity building on gender issues	
Trade Ministry staff receive training on gender issues	
A gender focal point focusing on trade and gender issues has been established	



The Trade Policy pillar focuses on the inclusiveness of trade policies, agreements and practices. It also covers the adoption of gender-responsive practices in trade and trade-related institutions.

Eswatini exhibits medium performance in this pillar. This is due to:

- The inclusion of women's business associations or organizations in consultation processes
- The establishment of a trade and gender focal point
- The inclusion of trade concerns in the NGP 2023
- Mainstreaming of gender in trade agreements
- The existence of a law mandating the collection of gender-disaggregated data and the collection of companies' gender-disaggregated data.

However, improvements can be made in assessing the gender impact of trade agreements by using gender indicators to assess trade policy and by providing training on gender issues to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade (MCIT) staff, among others.

WHAT WORKS?

MCIT invites the Eswatini chapter of the Federation of Associations of Women in Business in Eastern and Southern Africa to join consultation processes.

Following the Statistics Act of 1967, which mandates the collection of gender-disaggregated data, the Central Statistics Office also collects and publishes gender-disaggregated employment data from private and public sector companies through the Integrated Labour Force Survey of 2023. The Registrar of the MCIT Department of Companies, Department of Commerce and Department of Cooperatives or the Central Statistics Office can also collect gender-disaggregated data on company ownership, business registration and exporting firms.

The NGP 2023 includes provisions on women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. It also states the government's commitment to enhance women's participation in intra-African and global trade. Moreover, as a signatory to the AfCFTA, Eswatini has adopted the AfCFTA National Implementation Strategy 2024–2028, which includes the strategic objective of promoting gender equality in trade.

In SheTrades Outlook, the levels of gender responsiveness in trade agreements are rated as 'limited', 'evolving' or 'advanced'. Eswatini is party to seven free trade agreements, of which three have an evolving level of gender responsiveness. These are the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the European Union-SADC EPA and AfCFTA. Eswatini signed the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which came into force in 2013, and the Agreement amending the Protocol. Eswatini is also part of the phase 3 negotiations on the AfCFTA, which include the Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade.

Two focal officers in the MCIT International Trade Department coordinate activities related to the women and youth policies in the AfCFTA and COMESA. However, the focal persons are yet to be trained on trade and gender policy and programme design, implementation and monitoring.

WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

Eswatini does not have a formal definition of a women-owned or women-led business. It should consider adopting an internationally recognized definition of a women-led or women-owned business as prescribed by the International Organization for Standardization [International Workshop Agreement 34: Women's entrepreneurship – Key definitions and general criteria](#).¹² This can facilitate the implementation of the NGP 2023 and the development of a law or amendment of existing commerce and trade laws to facilitate gender equality by improving participant selection for women's economic empowerment programmes, the collection of comparable data on women's entrepreneurship worldwide, and monitoring of the impacts of programmes and policies on women-led businesses.

To better monitor and evaluate the impact of trade policies on women, MCIT can use gender indicators to track the outcomes of trade policies and programmes. Awareness can be raised on the importance of conducting gender impact assessments before and after signing a trade agreement to ensure that the positive impacts are being maximized while minimizing the negative impacts of trade agreements for women.

MCIT can also provide training to its staff on trade and gender issues.

1. Women-owned business – a business that is over 50% owned by one or more women, whose management and control lie with one or more women, where a woman is authorized to sign the legal documents and financial accounts of a business, and which is operated independently from businesses that are not owned by women.

2. Women-led business – a business that is 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 authorized to sign the legal documents and financial accounts of a business, and which is operated independently from businesses that are neither led nor owned by women.



LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK



<p>Signing, ratification and enforcement of key international conventions</p>	
<p>Country has ratified the CEDAW and CEDAW optional protocol</p>	
<p>Country has ratified and enforced ILO Conventions 100, 111, and 183</p>	
<p>Gender-responsive budgeting approach</p>	
<p>Government uses gender-responsive budgeting approach</p>	
<p>Laws that facilitate access to productive resources</p>	
<p>Law provides women and men with equal rights to property and access to financial services</p>	
<p>Laws that facilitate access to the labour market</p>	
<p>Law mandates non-discrimination in employment based on gender, protection from sexual harassment and equal remuneration for work of equal value</p>	
<p>Paid parental leave policies</p>	
<p>Maternity leave benefit is mandated</p>	
<p>Paternity leave benefit is mandated</p>	
<p>Childcare and education support and facilities</p>	
<p>Parents receive childcare and education support</p>	



This pillar assesses a country's laws and regulations protecting and promoting women's rights. It also covers laws and policies that encourage women's entry into, and continuation and advancement in, the labour market, such as laws supporting women to combine work with childcare responsibilities. Over 50% of the data for this pillar was sourced from World Bank Women, Business and the Law; the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Information System on International Labour Standards.

Eswatini has a low performance in this pillar. The country has signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and ILO Conventions 100 and 111. A law in the country prohibits gender-based discrimination in employment. However, Eswatini could make improvements by introducing laws that address sexual harassment in the workplace and guarantee equal remuneration for work of equal value, adopting a gender-responsive budgeting approach, and extending maternity leave from 12 to 14 weeks with full pay as well as providing paternity leave.

WHAT WORKS?

Internationally, Eswatini has demonstrated its commitment to gender equality by ratifying CEDAW and ILO Conventions 100 (equal remuneration) and 111 (non-discrimination in employment and occupation).

Domestically, the government has legislated for women and men to have equal ownership rights. It has also established a law that prohibits gender-based discrimination in employment.

WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

Eswatini could ratify ILO Convention 183 on maternity protection. Currently, the [Employment Act 1980](#) provides women employed in the public sector with 12 weeks of maternity leave with full pay. Private sector companies often follow these provisions in the Employment Act 1980. Based on ILO Convention 183, Eswatini should extend maternity leave from 12 to 14 weeks with full pay, both in the public and private sector. Eswatini should also consider mandating paternity leave.

Eswatini could establish laws that guarantee equal inheritance rights for sons and daughters and prevent discrimination in access to credit between men and women. In addition, the government could establish laws that address sexual harassment in the workplace and provide equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value.

There is an opportunity for the government to adopt a gender-responsive budgeting approach. This involves including women in budget consultations, planning and allocating funds for women's economic empowerment programmes, and monitoring and evaluating the achievements of budgetary allocations on programmes that target women. This approach could increase women's participation in the budgeting process, help track the allocation of public funds for women's economic empowerment programmes and promote transparency and accountability in government budgeting.



BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT



Representation of women business associations	
Women's business associations are represented at the national level	
Women-led businesses participate in activities conducted by chambers of commerce	
Business start-ups	
Support services are available when establishing a company	
National institutions implement incubator/accelerator programmes	
Access to trade and customs information	
Help and information desks are available at government offices to assist companies in complying with national regulations and export/import requirements	
Information on changes in customs procedures and trade regulations are announced in a timely manner	
Public procurement	
Information on public procurement process, vendors and transactions are available	
Preferential scheme on public procurement for women-led businesses is implemented	
Reporting and monitoring unfair practices in trade	
Means exist for women and men to report complaints on wrongdoing on trade regulations or procedures	
Trade facilitation and gender-responsive framework in customs	
Single-window electronic interface is available	
Gender-sensitive guidelines by the World Customs Organization or other national monitoring framework is implemented	
Border-level customs agents and officials receive training on gender-sensitive practices	



A business ecosystem conducive to resilient growth is essential throughout the business cycle. This pillar focuses on the inclusiveness of the business ecosystem and covers industry bodies that support women's entrepreneurship. It also includes the ease and cost of establishing and running a business, trading across borders, and accessing information and public procurement markets.

Eswatini has a medium score in this pillar. This is due to the existence of women's business associations in the country; the availability of business support services, incubators and accelerator programmes; and the establishment of help desks and grievance mechanisms. However, opportunities for improvement exist, such as the timely dissemination of changes in Customs procedures and trade rules. In addition, Eswatini could:

- Collect gender-disaggregated data on suppliers in public procurement
- Adopt a preferential scheme for women-owned businesses in public procurement
- Adopt gender-sensitive Customs practices
- Fully implement the single window electronic interface
- Provide training on gender issues to Customs officials.



WHAT WORKS?

At the national level, the Eswatini chapter of the Federation of Associations of Women in Business in Eastern and Southern Africa represents women in business in Eswatini.

Government-owned business support organizations – such as the Small Enterprises Development Company (SEDCO), the Royal Science and Technology Park (RSTP), the Eswatini Co-operative Development College (ECODEC) and the National Agricultural Marketing Board (NAMBOARD) – provide assistance with company registration and training on entrepreneurship and export opportunities for entrepreneurs. The Ministry of Agriculture also provides support services for setting up a business. The majority of their clients are women. Not-for-profit organizations also build women's capacity to formalize businesses and enhance product quality and business systems to meet exporting standards. These include:

- Coalition of Informal Economy Associations Swaziland
- Business Eswatini
- COMESA Federation of Women in Business
- Woman Farmer Foundation
- Gone Rural
- COSPE Eswatini
- Women in Trade and Development.



The National Policy for MSMEs 2023 also aims to improve the business environment for MSMEs by including measures to reduce red tape and the cost of doing business. The Policy also prioritizes providing business support services such as accreditation, development of business consultants and mentors, and incubators.

[SEDCO](#) houses an incubator that seeks to accelerate the creation and growth of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) by providing them with resources and business support services for three years. Similarly, the Ministry of Information, Communications and Technology also manages an incubator through [RSTP](#). This incubator fosters innovation in information and communications technology (ICT), biotechnology, agriculture, food, climate and environmental solutions, waste management and indigenous knowledge systems.

The Eswatini Investment Promotion Agency (EIPA) provides trade data via its online portal, which is only available in English. It has been noted that very few women seek import and export assistance from national institutions in person.

The Eswatini Revenue Service (ERS) operates physical service centres at border posts and in towns, such as Mbabane, Ezulwini and Matsapha. These centres provide traders with information on tariff classification, general import and export rules, Customs tariffs, Customs procedure codes, bonded warehouses or rebate stores, free trade and preferential agreements, excise duties, Customs clearing agents, authorized economic operators, and certificates of origin for exports. The National Policy for MSMEs 2023 wants to expand the access of entrepreneurs to export markets.

The ERS is working with the World Bank to fully implement a national [single window](#) by:

- Mapping the business processes required by trade regulatory agencies
- Developing the functional specifications for the National Single Window (NSW)
- Carrying out the ICT assessment for implementation of the NSW
- Carrying out a legal review of the legislation for implementing the NSW
- Developing the NSW blueprint/road map.

In the meantime, ERS has rolled out the [Automated System for Customs Data](#). It is a computerized Customs management system that covers most foreign trade procedures. It handles manifests and Customs declarations, along with accounting, transit and suspense procedures. It lets traders declare their goods online with less paperwork and has reduced queues at the borders. It has also improved revenue collection and trade statistics.

Traders can report complaints about trade malpractices to the Head of Internal Affairs of ERS via a hotline.



WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

Changes in Customs procedures and trade regulations are published [on the ERS website](#). However, informal cross-border traders often do not have access to online information. Moreover, most information on changes in trade rules is published in English, which makes it difficult for smaller traders to access. There is an opportunity to ensure that changes in Customs procedures and trade rules are made visible at borders, published online, and notified to exporters/importers in English as well as local languages.

South Africa and Mozambique are the main trading partners of Eswatini. Therefore, it is important that changes in trade rules and Customs procedures in South Africa and Mozambique are also communicated in a timely manner to traders in Eswatini. ERS could improve coordination with the South African Revenue Services and the Mozambican Customs Authority. This can help traders prepare in advance for changes in Customs procedures in the two countries.

ERS also has an opportunity to train border Customs officials on gender issues and gender-sensitive practices to prevent gender discrimination, especially against informal cross-border traders. Eswatini could also adopt the gender-sensitive Customs practices of the World Customs Organization.

The Eswatini Public Procurement Regulatory Agency (ESPPRA) publishes public tenders [online](#) and in newspapers. However, since the information is published in English, it is often difficult for smaller businesses to access. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often need to contact the Ministry of Finance for information on public tenders. Tenders below the threshold value of SZL 200,000, managed by government-owned enterprises and government ministries, are not published online or in print media. Women-led businesses, which tend to be small, are unable to access these smaller but relevant contracts. ESPPRA could consolidate and publish information in one single platform and make it available in local languages.

In addition, ESPPRA could collect gender-disaggregated data on vendors in public procurement. This can help map women's participation in government procurement. It can also help identify women-led businesses to be notified regarding smaller public tenders.

The government can promote women's participation in public procurement through inclusive policies and practices. It could also raise awareness on gender-responsive public procurement among ESPPRA and procuring entities. ESPPRA could reform its practices and procedures to encourage women's participation in the procurement market and adopt targeted measures, such as subcontracting plans, quotas or preferences for women-led businesses. The ITC policy guide [Making Public Procurement Work for Women](#) presents more information on the steps and options to make public procurement more inclusive.

ACCESS TO SKILLS



Education and literacy	
Law mandates compulsory education	
Gender disaggregated data on adult literacy	
Skills programmes for workers and entrepreneurs	
Enrolment rate in technical and vocational programmes (female/male ratio)	
Skills training programmes for workers are conducted	
Business skills training for MSME owners are conducted	
Training to facilitate access to markets are conducted	
Targeted support and capacity building programmes for women	
National institutions provide targeted support and capacity building programmes for women	
Access to ICT and business innovation support	
Policies and programmes are in place to support women's business innovation	
Access to internet	



Improved access to education is essential to build necessary skills and increase equal opportunities for men and women. It is also vital to break the vicious cycle of poverty. This pillar focuses on measures designed to enhance women's abilities and business-related skills. One objective is to close the education gap. Another is to equip women with the capacity to compete and succeed in

international markets and occupations traditionally dominated by men.

Eswatini has the highest score in this pillar due to the provision of skills training to workers and entrepreneurs; training on trade procedures, regulations and public procurement; and targeted support and capacity building for women.

WHAT WORKS?

Through public institutions such as the Sebenta National Institute and the Emlalati Development Centre, Eswatini offers non-formal adult education and lifelong learning to men and women who dropped out of or never enrolled in the formal education system. The University of Eswatini and the Institute of Development Management provide workers with distance learning programmes (for degree, diploma or certificate) to close knowledge gaps. The public and private sectors offer employees a training budget and study leave to enrol in upskilling programmes, closing capacity gaps. The Gwamile Vocational and Commercial Training Institute and Eswatini College of Technology offer upskilling courses in programmable logic controls, industrial automation, air conditioning, refrigeration, automotive mechanics, automotive electronics, automotive electrics, Microsoft Office, programming, cybersecurity, and building and construction.

The National Policy for MSMEs 2023 prioritises improving access to skills and capabilities of entrepreneurs to start, grow, and manage their business.

There are also training opportunities for entrepreneurs in Eswatini. SEDCO conducts training for MSMEs in marketing, branding, communication, management and quality products for the market. Training usually lasts half a day. On average, 30%–50% of participants are women. In 2019, EIPA conducted free one-day packaging and branding workshops for associations. It provided transport to and from the workshops, and most participants were women.

EIPA, which is responsible for coordinating trade promotion, collaborates with international organizations and embassies to facilitate capacity building in exporting and export finance for MSMEs. EIPA also includes women-owned MSMEs in international



trade promotion events. Lastly, ESPPRA conducted national dialogues in 2018/19 on government procurement procedures and processes.

Several institutions provide targeted training and incentives to women. For instance, Women in Trade and Development trains unemployed and under-educated rural young women in digital skills as part of its vocational training programmes. In 2023/24, 40 women enrolled in the programme. The organization will train a minimum of 60 women in 2024/25. SEDCO also provides targeted incentives to support women's participation in its training activities. These include transport, food, accommodation when needed and childcare services for nursing mothers. The workshops start just before midday, ensuring women with household responsibilities can participate.

WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

In 2016, enrolment of women in technical and vocational education training (TVET) in the country was 34%. The National TVET Policy 2022–2027 acknowledges that skills development opportunities are limited for women and persons living with disabilities. Eswatini should consider encouraging women's participation in TVET programmes.

Eswatini has some business innovation policies that provide subsidies for the purchase and import of new machinery into RSTP. SEDCO also supports businesses with trademarks. However, there is an opportunity for Eswatini to adopt policies and initiatives that provide incentives for women to innovate and participate in entrepreneurship.

Finally, Eswatini could improve the collection of gender-disaggregated data on access to ICT and the internet in Eswatini. According to the latest survey in 2022, more women (41.9%) used mobile phones and the internet to pay bills than men (39.1%).

ACCESS TO FINANCE



Access to financial services	
Digital financial services are available	
There is access to formal financial resources (female/male ratio)	
Financial inclusion strategies and programmes	
Financial inclusion strategy or programme is implemented	
Financial support for women-led businesses and women's business associations	
Women-led businesses receive financial support to participate in trade fairs	
Fiscal and trade finance schemes	
Financial institutions are mandated to report gender-disaggregated data	
Fiscal schemes are available to facilitate entrepreneurial opportunities	
Trade finance schemes are available in the country to facilitate trade	
Financial instruments and other financing opportunities	
Financial instruments are available to support entrepreneurial opportunities	
Venture capital financing opportunities are available to support women entrepreneurs	



This pillar focuses on women's access to formal financial services. It also covers whether governments – alone or in partnership with the private sector – have developed innovative solutions to promote financial inclusion for women. Examples include removing or modifying bank requirements for physical collateral or verifiable cash flow so that women can access finance more easily.

Eswatini shows high performance in this pillar. This is related to several factors, including the availability of digital financial services, the existence of a financial inclusion strategy, the provision of trade finance schemes and the availability of financial support for women-led businesses to participate in trade fairs.

WHAT WORKS?

Digital financial services, including mobile banking, online banking, issuing payments and sending/receiving money internationally, are available in Eswatini. Some services, such as transaction history and wire transfers, are still being developed and are offered by a few banks only. SEDCO is promoting mobile banking for MSMEs so they can easily access formal financial services. ERS has also initiated a project on mobile money banking, currently in its pilot stage. The project is directed towards individual customers to reduce cash handling, such as for cross-border traders.

The country has adopted the [Eswatini National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2023–2028](#), which prioritizes creating inclusive and innovative financial products and services for all. The Strategy will operationalize the Eswatini Gender Inclusive Finance Roadmap of 2021, which covers, among other areas:

- Gender-sensitive regulation for savings and credit cooperatives
- Agency banking
- Tiered Know Your Customer processes that help verify the identity of the financial sector client
- A simplified collateral regime
- Collection of disaggregated data
- Financial education and digital literacy
- Gender-sensitive products and services
- Leveraging digital financial services.

Women-led businesses also receive financial support to participate in trade fairs. Through SEDCO and EIPA, women-owned businesses get support to exhibit their handicrafts at local trade fairs. In 2019, for example, EIPA provided a marquee for small women-owned handicraft, sewing and agricultural businesses to display and sell their wares. Women-owned businesses were also sponsored to travel overseas to display and sell their products. Finally, the institutions pay for exhibition booths for some women-owned businesses. The National Policy for MSMEs aims to encourage women's equal participation in entrepreneurship related activities including their participation in trade shows.

Trade finance schemes are available in the country, including letters of credit, financing schemes and an export guarantee scheme targeting all sectors.

WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

Eswatini has prepared the National Financial Literacy Strategy (2023–2028), which aims to empower consumers to interact responsibly with the financial sector and make informed financial decisions. Its priorities include providing financial education in the workplace, for MSMEs, in schools and tertiary institutions, in rural areas, and through financial education programmes for women.

Financial instruments supporting entrepreneurial activity are available in the country. These include guarantee funds (up to SZL 500,000), microloans (up to SZL 2,000) and special interest loans in all sectors. There are also subsidies for small-scale maize producers. There is an opportunity to provide financial instruments that specifically target women. The Industrial Development Company of Eswatini is also developing a framework for venture capital financing for women-owned businesses. The National Policy for MSMEs aims to encourage banks to have at least 20% of their financing targeted at women and youth-owned enterprises

The government should consider mandating financial institutions to report gender-disaggregated data. This can assist in developing financial inclusion strategies to encourage more women to access formal financial services.



WORK AND SOCIETY



Woman's opportunities in the labour market



Women are allowed to work in the same industries and perform the same tasks as men



Estimated annual earned income, US\$ PPP (female-male ratio)



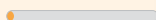
Labour force participation rate (female-male ratio)



Female share of employment in managerial positions (%)



Time spent on unpaid work



Time-use on unpaid domestic chores and care work (male-female ratio)





This pillar addresses the unconscious or conscious gender biases that prevent women from participating equally in the economy. This includes existing patterns of job segregation and the interventions set up by governments to address these biases. Eswatini scored the lowest in this pillar.

WHAT WORKS?

Women are taking up managerial positions in Eswatini. In 2021, women occupied 41.2% of managerial positions.

WHERE IS MORE PROGRESS NEEDED?

Eswatini should consider introducing a law that enables women to work in the same industries as men. There is also an opportunity to legislate on equal remuneration of women and men for work of equal value. In 2023, the female-to-male gender wage gap ratio in Eswatini was 0.745.

Lastly, the government could collect gender-disaggregated data on unpaid domestic work to understand the difference between how women and men allocate their time on unpaid care and domestic work.

The way forward

Women's economic empowerment is essential to Eswatini's economic growth. This can be achieved by increasing women's participation in business and trade. Leveraging regional cooperation frameworks, such as the AfCFTA and the European Union-SADC EPA, can provide opportunities for Eswatini to diversify trade and boost women's participation. Inclusive trade can ultimately lead to better developmental results.

Eswatini has made progress in promoting women's economic empowerment, particularly by mainstreaming gender in trade policy and facilitating women's access to skills and finance. However, areas for improvement to increase women's participation in trade and business in Eswatini remain. For instance, policymakers can raise awareness on conducting gender-impact assessments of trade agreements to assess the benefits of trade on women. This can be complemented by the use of gender indicators when designing and evaluating trade policies. Moreover, the government should consider facilitating women's access to information on trade regulations and public tenders.

Based on the SheTrades Outlook results, the following section provides recommendations on priority areas for improvement to increase women's economic participation in Eswatini.



01

THE WAY FORWARD: MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN TRADE POLICY

Eswatini has an opportunity to use trade policy as an instrument to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Specifically, the government can:

- Raise awareness on the importance of conducting ex-ante and ex-post gender impact assessments of trade agreements and build capacity to undertake such assessments
- Use gender indicators in designing the action plans and the monitoring and evaluation frameworks for trade policies
- Raise awareness on the importance of adopting a standard definition of a women-owned or women-led business across different national institutions to target beneficiaries of women's economic empowerment programmes
- Adopt the internationally recognized definition of a women-owned or women-led business specified in the International Organization for Standardization International Workshop Agreement 34: Women's entrepreneurship–Key definitions and general criteria
- Provide training on gender issues to Customs officials and MCIT staff.

02

THE WAY FORWARD: INCLUSIVE FRAMEWORKS

It is important to ensure that policies, schemes and practices related to business and trade benefit both women and men. To do this, the government can:

- Consolidate and publish information on all Customs changes and public procurement processes through various channels, such as online, in newspapers and through notifications in English and local languages to promote access of women-led businesses to the relevant information
- Consider publishing information on smaller tenders and notifying women-led SMEs regarding relevant opportunities
- Raise awareness among ESPPRA, public procurement entities and women-led businesses on the importance of adopting inclusive practices and procedures in public procurement
- Consider adopting targeted measures such as quotas, subcontracting plans and preferences to ensure women's participation in public procurement.

03

THE WAY FORWARD: MONITORING MECHANISMS

To support the monitoring and evaluation of existing gender-responsive initiatives, the government can:

- Regularly collect gender-disaggregated national statistics on time use
- Collect gender-disaggregated data on:
 - exporting firms
 - complainants of trade malpractices
 - vendors in public procurement
 - internet and mobile usage
 - beneficiaries of financial services.

04

THE WAY FORWARD: TARGETED INITIATIVES

Initiatives targeted to women are crucial to ensure they benefit from access to skills and finance initiatives. Specifically, national institutions can:

- Offer incentives for women to participate in training on business and finance management skills and TVET programmes
- Provide venture capital financing opportunities, especially for women-led start-ups
- Provide financial schemes to encourage women's participation in business.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

More information about this Policy Brief and the SheTrades Outlook project can be found at: <https://outlook.shetrades.com/>.

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Contribution to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals:



#SheTrades

HER SUCCESS. OUR FUTURE.

The International Trade Centre's (ITC) SheTrades Initiative is a global platform that empowers women to engage in business, creating value for both them and their communities. The Initiative ensures that the right capacities and conditions are present to foster inclusive and sustainable trade.

SheTrades delivers activities and training that improve women traders' ability to do business successfully. At the same time, the Initiative works to remove inequalities that hinder women's participation in trade and foster a better trade environment for all.



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