



International  
Trade  
Centre

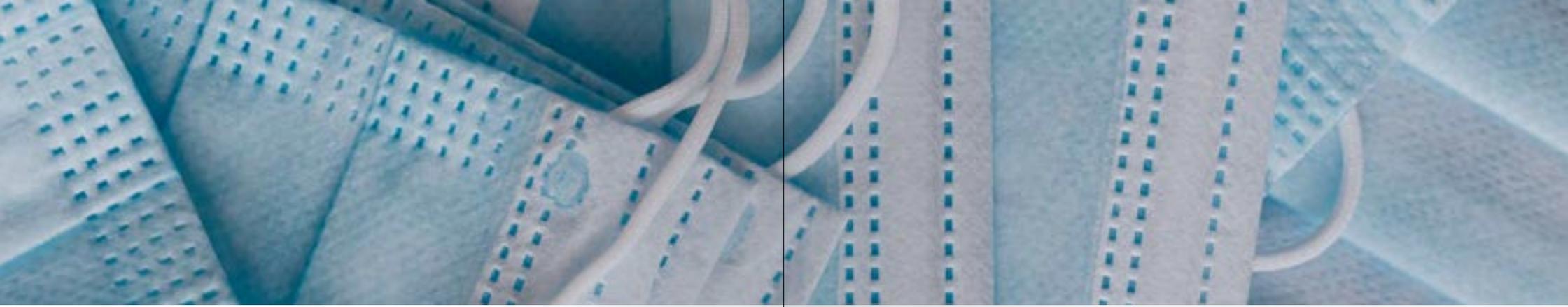
| SheTrades

# COVID-19 6-Monthly Update

SHETRADES COMMONWEALTH

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### ABOUT ITC

The International Trade Centre (ITC) is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. ITC assists small and medium-sized enterprises in developing and least developed countries to become more competitive in global markets, thereby contributing to sustainable economic development.

### ABOUT SHETRADES

SheTrades is a flagship initiative of the International Trade Centre (ITC) that provides women entrepreneurs around the world with a unique network and platform to connect to international markets. The initiative aims to connect

### 3 MILLION WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS TO MARKET BY 2021

Under the framework of the SheTrades Initiative, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, & Development Office funded the SheTrades Commonwealth project, which aims to increase economic growth and job creation in Commonwealth countries by promoting the participation of women-owned businesses in international trade.

The programme adopts a multi-stakeholder approach and works across the business ecosystem by engaging private sector partners and business-support organizations, delivering capacity-building workshops, and supporting women to attend international trade fairs.

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Women's economic empowerment is not a matter for government policy, the private sector, or social change alone. All have critical roles to play.

This is why the International Trade Centre (ITC) has launched the SheTrades initiative, which seeks to connect three million women to market by 2021.

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## BACKGROUND

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# 01

In this booklet, the SheTrades Commonwealth project presents findings from an online survey and qualitative interviews conducted by our field staff in August and September 2020.\*

\* Respondents to the survey represent one-third of the beneficiaries registered under the SheTrades Commonwealth project. The sample is assessed to be fairly representative of our network of women-owned businesses across Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria.



As a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, micro, small- and medium-enterprises everywhere have been hit hard by nation-wide lockdowns and disruptions to global supply chains.

Women, compared to men, are hit disproportionately harder by the socio-economic fallout of the pandemic: they tend to earn less, have fewer savings and less social protection, largely work in the informal sector, and are more likely burdened with unpaid care and domestic work.



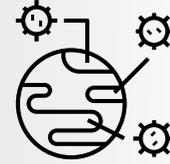
**WITH MORE THAN SIX MONTHS BEHIND US, HOW THEN ARE WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES COPING?**

**WHAT STRATEGIES DID THEY EMPLOY TO RESPOND TO THE CRISIS?**



# 02

## COVID-19 and its impact on women-owned businesses (WOBs)



**4% OF WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES SURVEYED HAVE FOLDED WHILE 18% ARE AT RISK OF SHUTTING DOWN IN THE UPCOMING MONTHS.**

### RISK OF CLOSURE DURING COVID-19

**18%**

**OF WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES REPORTED SOME RISK OF CLOSURE DUE TO THE PANDEMIC.**

### OUT OF THE THOSE REPORTING SOME RISK OF CLOSURE

**7%** FEAR CLOSURE IN < 1 MONTH

**31%** FEAR CLOSURE IN 3 MONTHS

**62%** FEAR CLOSURE IN > 6 MONTHS



GENDERED IMPACT

# 03

## The gendered impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

### HOW COVID-19 DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED WOMEN



While 78% of WOBs reported no risk of closure, many **women-owned businesses are still being adversely impacted by the pandemic.**

**62%**

Suffer lower B2C sales

**54%**

Suffer lower B2B sales

**43%**

Face higher operating costs

**36%**

Have not been paid by clients

**30%**

Have difficulties accessing supplies domestically

**24%**

Have difficulties importing supplies

**23%**

Laid off staff, with 66% of these being women



**48%**

Women-owned businesses struggled with their roles as business owners and primary caregivers in their households. Consequently, **36% devoted less time to running their businesses.**

**28%**

Entrepreneurs reported that, as women, they faced greater difficulties accessing financing for their businesses.

**20%**

Women entrepreneurs reported that, compared to men, they had a smaller network from which they could seek support.

**12%**

Reported that, as women, it was more challenging leaving home for work or securing a permit to do so.

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JOB LOSSES

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# 04

## Job losses among women-owned businesses

AMONG COMMONWEALTH BENEFICIARIES, 1,314 EMPLOYEES LOST THEIR JOBS AS A RESULT OF COVID-19.

61% OF THOSE LAID OFF WERE WOMEN

JOB LOSSES PER SECTOR

			
AGRIBUSINESS	TEXTILE & APPAREL	TOURISM	IT&BPO
35%	36%	6%	23%

### WHY JOB LOSSES IN THE T&A SECTOR?

Majority of job losses come from the manufacturing sector instead of finished end products.

At the height of COVID-19, all international production was stopped and even as countries reopened, majority of orders were either put on hold or fully cancelled.

For finished goods businesses that reported job losses, there was a heavy reliance on the wholesale market (bulk orders) and when buyers cancelled orders, many were slow or resistant to pivot to digital and the direct-to-consumer model.

# 05

## COVID-19 support through SheTrades Commonwealth



WITH THE ONSET OF COVID-19, THE COMMONWEALTH PROJECT RECONFIGURED ITS ACTIVITIES TO DELIVER SHORT TERM SUPPORT AND EMBED LONG TERM RESILIENCE IN BUSINESSES.

Ms. Pamela Coke-Hamilton, Executive Director of ITC, launched the publication "Women Entrepreneurs - An Action Plan to 'Build Back Better'" in October 2020.

[Click here](#) to read the report.

### RESULTS OF CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT BY SHETRADES COMMONWEALTH

<p>Capacity building is aimed at helping businesses manage uncertainty, plan for continuity, and adapt to a new global business environment.</p> <p>71% of women-owned businesses attended at least one capacity building activity organised by the programme.</p>	<p><b>67%</b></p> <p>Reported improvements made to their online presence through e-Commerce, digital marketing, and other digital technologies.</p>
	<p><b>48%</b></p> <p>Diversified their product line, while remaining in the same sector.</p>
	<p><b>15%</b></p> <p>Diversified their product line, and entered a new sector.</p>
<p><b>35%</b></p> <p>Developed a business continuity plan to navigate COVID-19 related challenges.</p>	
<p><b>26%</b></p> <p>Increased online sales.</p>	
<p><b>26%</b></p> <p>Pivoted to the local market temporarily.</p>	

# 06

## The impact of SheTrades Commonwealth's COVID-19 support

636 WOBS REPORTED HAVING MADE CHANGES TO THEIR BUSINESS PRACTICES WITH THE SPECIFIC AIM OF RESPONDING TO COVID-19

27%

Women-owned businesses reported sales amounting to \$7,188,974.

72% of sales came from the avocado sub-sector.

CASE STUDY | 01



### CASE STUDY: AVOCADO SUB-SECTOR IN KENYA

Owing to its status as a super food, avocados saw a significant increase in demand during the pandemic.

According to data from Horticultural Crops Directorate, **sales from the first half of 2020 sales almost topped the total quantity sold last year**, with more than 58,400 tons sold to 42 countries - 78% of these were exported to the EU.



**3%** WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES INCREASED THEIR STAFF

CASE STUDY | 02



**CASE STUDY:  
IT&BPO SECTOR IN BANGLADESH**

Compared to sectors, such as tourism, which have been hit hard by COVID-19, the IT&BPO sector saw opportunities arising from e-Commerce, HealthTech, EduTech, and Automation apps.

For instance, one STC women-owned business added 17 call centre jobs from a contact made at Japan IT Week 2019.

**28%**

Retained staff with same conditions as before COVID-19.

**14%**

Retained staff with temporarily reduced salaries.

**35%**

Average decrease in salaries.

**38%**

7,892 employees kept their jobs, of which 38% were women.



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**NEEDED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT**

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# 07

Further support needed by women-owned businesses

Women-owned businesses in the Commonwealth programme requested **additional support** in four key areas:



**01 COACHING TO SUPPORT KNOWLEDGE APPLICATION**

- Digital marketing and E commerce
- Financial planning
- Market intelligence
- Update on global markets/ post-COVID business trends
- Business strategy
- Sourcing to mitigate supply chain risks
- Employee training/ HR
- Certification processes
- Effective time management
- Intellectual property
- Market diversification
- Leadership

**02 ACCESS TO FINANCE**

- Links to grants and small loans with low interest
- Link to investors
- Financing needed for:
  - Business expansion
  - Working capital
  - Procuring equipment
  - Staff wages and allowances
  - Source and stock raw materials
  - Implement changes (e.g. create a website)

**03 MARKET ACCESS**

- (Virtual) trade fairs/ online exhibitions
- B2B matching
- Platforms to showcase products
- Links to reliable buyers
- Public procurement
- Connect with African buyers

**04 INTRA-COMMONWEALTH NETWORKING**

- Share and Learn - local stories of resilience - best practices
- Access to networks
- Do business with others
- Networking with other SheTradesCommonwealth beneficiaries

# 08

Testimonials  
from SheTrades  
Commonwealth  
women-owned  
businesses



“

**I am thrilled to say that even during the COVID-19 pandemic I managed to gain four new buyers and entered a new partnership with another women-owned business**

LILA·BARE

“Thanks to the SheTrades Commonwealth and its training and webinars, my business has grown exponentially in terms of sales, online visibility and engagement, and product development.

Prior to joining the programme, I did not know how to engage buyers confidently and faced many challenges expanding beyond the Kenyan border. Now, my products have reached the homes of both international and local clients.

I am thrilled to say that even during the COVID-19 pandemic I managed to gain four new buyers and entered a new partnership with another women-owned business that is adding value to both our brands and product lines. I also managed to launch my e-commerce retail platform and have since been approached by international trade shows to exhibit there.

I am eternally grateful to the SheTrades Commonwealth team and hope that we can have a long-lasting relationship!

My team and I would not be where we are today without SheTrades.”



**RIA ANA SEJPAL**  
**LILABARE**

**KENYA | TEXTILES & APPAREL**



“The COVID-19 pandemic was particularly devastating for my business. I am forever grateful to SheTrades Commonwealth for providing me and my business with timely support when I needed it the most.

I have learned so much through the webinars and they have really changed my outlook on running my business – I am gradually becoming a better version of myself!

It is through SheTrades that I understood how digitisation is disrupting businesses everywhere and it is no longer a “nice-to-have”, but a necessity.

A business either transforms or die – and I choose to transform mine.”

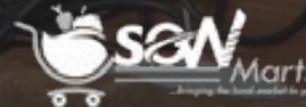


**DEBORAH APOCHI**  
**SHIELD OF WOMEN**

**NIGERIA | AGRIBUSINESS (SPICES)**



“  
It is through SheTrades  
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the importance of  
digitisation.  
A business either  
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“

**I learned how to position my business for the world stage and clientele**



“Through the SheTrades Commonwealth project I have been trained on technological trends such as Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, and Internet of Things.

The programme’s platform also made it easy for entrepreneurs like myself to learn from home and network with other women entrepreneurs – this has helped expand opportunities for collaboration, mutual support, and business growth.

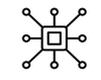
Having attended local and international trade fairs as part of the SheTrades delegation, I’ve gained a new perspective and learned how to position my business for the world stage and clientele.

SheTrades Commonwealth has certainly helped women-owned businesses like String Technology step up and stand out.”



**MS. NURUN FANCY**  
**STRING TECHNOLOGY LTD**

**BANGLADESH | IT&BPO**



Being part of the SheTrades Commonwealth project has taught me that even though Sunset African Tours is a small enterprise, we should have a well-planned and documented business model to prepare us for unforeseen shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the training and webinars I participated in, I learned to be agile and to continuously upgrade the skills of my staff, improve my communication with my team, and bring my staff on board my company's vision. This has helped my employees understand the very difficult decisions I had to make as the pandemic hit our business.

In recent times, I cannot emphasise how the knowledge I have gained from the programme's activities helped me leverage digital technologies to improve my business' online visibility and generate sales without breaking our bank.



**MS. NAA OYOE OFEI-ARYEH**  
**SUNSET AFRICAN TOURS GH. LTD**

GHANA | TOURISM



“  
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and to continuously  
upgrade the skills of  
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# #SheTrades

## **CONNECTING THREE MILLION WOMEN TO MARKET BY 2021**

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This is why the International Trade Centre (ITC) has launched the SheTrades initiative, which seeks to connect three million women to market by 2021.



| SheTrades