Canada’s International Development Research Centre awarded a US$225,000 grant to WEConnect International in support of its project “Enhancing Growth of Women-Owned Businesses in Latin America and the Caribbean by Building on Private Sector Initiatives.” The project represents a unique opportunity to generate new knowledge about women’s economic empowerment and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and business owners in Latin America and the Caribbean.

With the support of IDRC, WEConnect International is collecting critical data on women-owned businesses certified and registered in the eNetwork to bridge knowledge gaps and lead to improved programs and policies to support women’s entrepreneurship. Data points included revenues for each company for each year as collected in assessments; number of employees; industry sectors for women-owned businesses in the WEConnect International network; legal incorporation status; access to lines of credit and most popular banks per country.

The findings show that there is potential in the region to support women entrepreneurs and business owners. Their businesses are growing but facing challenges to meet market requirements that delay their growth pace.

### The Findings

- **Women’s business enterprises are not all micro-enterprises.** WEConnect International certified businesses in Latin America employ 5,804 people in total and generate over $127,000,000 USD annually of aggregated value. The average revenues are $357,341 USD annually. In Brazil and Colombia 30%-40% of companies generate revenues between $250,000 and $2,000,000. In Colombia, Mexico and Costa Rica companies employ on average 20 employees. However, none of the companies generate more than $10 million.

- **Financial institutions have extended over $22,329,685 USD to women owned companies in Latin America and the Caribbean.** - The average loan amount is $95,835 USD, showing that a significant number companies are having access to finance. The results in this respect vary between countries. For example, out of the sample total in Costa Rica (33%), Peru (40%), and Brazil (25%) women-owned businesses have rather low access to credit; while in Chile (98%) Colombia (92%) and Mexico (95%) the opportunities to access to finance are better. Therefore, more in-depth understanding of the limitations in this respect is necessary.

- **The main challenges that corporate members encounter with women-owned businesses in the region include capacity; financial strength and ability to handle potential business/record keeping; access to capital other than microfinance; consistent and reliable production to required specifications; price, limited portfolios; lack of internal processes and policies; insurance coverage.**

- **Country remarks:**
  - Costa Rican companies generate less in revenue, but they employ more people than companies with more revenues in other countries
  - Chilean businesses tend to be smaller than other WEConnect International businesses, but Chile is cited as a good environment for women business owners (GEM, WEVenture Scope)
  - Brazil has the largest number of companies generating over $250,000 USD annually, but no companies are generating over $2 Million USD
  - Mexico boasts robust women-owned businesses. Mexican companies are poised for growth but there are still some challenges.
  - There are many Peruvian companies in manufacturing but it is on a small scale. 2 companies are generating over $2 Million USD
  - Colombian companies have the highest average number of employees, but no companies are generating over $2 Million USD
Enhancing the Growth of Women-Owned Businesses in Latin America and the Caribbean by Building on Private Sector Initiatives: How to Improve Data Collection to Transform Knowledge on Women-Owned Businesses into Impact

**WEConnect International Activity in Latin America and the Caribbean 2011 - 2016**

- 7,747 attendees to trainings and programs
- 164 educational and market access programs held
- 52 corporate members engaged
- 61 organizational partners in the region
- 1,959 self-registered women-owned businesses
- 202 certified women-owned businesses

**Women’s Business Enterprises are a significant economic force**

- Women’s business enterprises in LAC generate over US$127 million annually of aggregated value
- Women’s business enterprises in LAC are not all microenterprises. They employ 5,804 people total
- Financial institutions have extended over US$22 million to women owned companies in LAC. The average loan amount is US$95,835

**Certified Women’s Business Enterprises in Latin America and the Caribbean 2011 - 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CERTIFIED COMPANIES BY REVENUE (in U.S. dollars)</th>
<th>AVERAGE NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES PER COMPANY BY COUNTRY</th>
<th>AVERAGE CREDIT LOAN AMOUNT BY COUNTRY (in thousands of U.S. dollars)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$0 - $250,000</td>
<td>Brazil 6</td>
<td>Brazil $85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$250,001 - $2,000,000</td>
<td>Chile 8</td>
<td>Chile $125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2,000,001 - $10,000,000</td>
<td>Colombia 34</td>
<td>Colombia $162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000,001 -</td>
<td>Costa Rica 23</td>
<td>Costa Rica $36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mexico 23</td>
<td>Mexico $94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peru 13</td>
<td>Peru $70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Region avg. 16</td>
<td>Region avg. $95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Top Challenges that Corporate Members encounter with women’s business enterprises**

- Capacity
- Financial strength and ability to handle Potential business/record keeping
- Access to capital other than microfinance
- Business acumen for dealing with large companies/RFP responses
- Consistent and reliable production to required specifications (for manufactured products)
- Sustainability program
- Have a portfolio of at least two products (for manufactured products)
- Price
- Current supplier to my industry
- Insurance coverage
- Lack of internal processes and policies

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