



Empowering *Women*
Entrepreneurs

Policy Recommendations Report *2026*



Report By: Change Mechanics Pvt. Ltd.

List of Acronyms

BCPs	Bad Case Practices
ESDFs	Environmental and Social Development Foundations
EU	European Union
FBR	Federal Board of Revenue
GCPs	Good Case Practices
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KADO	Karakoram Area Development Organization
NAVTTTC	National Vocational and Technical Training Commission
NBMFCs	Non-Bank Microfinance Companies
NICs	National Incubation Centers
PASHA	Pakistan Software Houses Association
RSPNs	Rural Support Program Networks
SBP	State Bank of Pakistan
SECP	Securities and Exchange Commission Pakistan
SMaRT	Sustainable Methods and Resilient Technologies
SMEDA	Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority
SMEs	Small-to-Medium Enterprises
TOC	Theory of Change
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WCCI	Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry
WECON	Women Entrepreneurship Conference

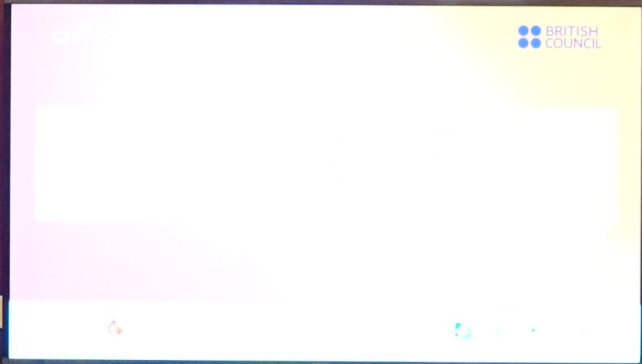


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Founder's Message

There is a popular saying: *"If you can dream it, you can do it."* Yet, the reality we face is that many of the most transformative dreams remain unfulfilled, silenced by a lack of clarity or stalled by invisible barriers. **Change Mechanics** was born from a singular vision: to ensure that those with the courage to dream also have the coordinates to succeed.

Our **mission** has always been to empower the changemakers and enablers among us with the right knowledge, tools, and networks. Today, we stand at a crossroads. Our world brims with untapped opportunity, yet it is often weighed down by the tragedy of wasted potential. We believe that when we arm innovators and creators with the power of technology and the clarity of imagination, we can solve humanity's most *"wicked"* problems.

However, a voyage is only as successful as its charts. For an ecosystem to thrive, we must do more than just act; we must reflect. True progress is built on the lessons learned in the field—the insights that bridge the gap between where we are and where we aspire to be.

This report is more than a collection of findings; it is a shared compass. By documenting these journeys and analyzing the patterns of success and struggle, we unlock new vistas of achievement for individuals and organizations alike. We invite you to engage with these insights, for it is through our collective understanding that we transform potential into value and dreams into reality.

— **Sayyed Ahmad Masud**
Founder, Change Mechanics Pvt. Ltd.



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“Why Do Pakistan’s Policies for **Women Entrepreneurs** Stop at the Doorstep?”

Last year, the WECON Movement asked a defining question: Where are Pakistan’s missing women entrepreneurs?

In our 2025 report, we identified a stark reality: despite comprising nearly half the population, only **1% of women entrepreneurs**, compared to **21% of men**.

To capture the full economic dividend of our youth bulge, we set a collective “North Star” for the ecosystem: bridging this gap by increasing women’s participation to

10% by 2030.

History shows that even well-intentioned policies often fail to deliver their intended impact.

The Masawaat (Equity) Lens

WECON Masawaat 2025, held on November 26, 2025, established Masawaat (equity) as the central lens for understanding women’s economic participation in Pakistan. While the State Bank (SBP) and SECP have introduced progressive reforms, our 2030 targets remain at risk due to a deep structural asymmetry.

Where Equality offers the same resources to everyone, Masawaat requires the intentional designing of systems—financial, regulatory, and institutional—to account for nuanced constraints. This report highlights that gender-neutral interventions often reinforce exclusion; without deliberate design, women remain unable to navigate the very bureaucratic and digital systems meant to aid them. The 2026 recommendations focus on bridging this “Implementation Gap” to ensure policy reaches the woman on the ground.



Gender gaps in mobile use for business vary by country but are widest in Ethiopia (36%), Pakistan (28%) and Uganda (18%). (GSMA, 2025)

The 2025 report shows that 8 million women came online in 2024, with the surge led by rural women. This represents a massive untapped “Home-based Entrepreneur” workforce. (GSMA, 2025)



The Scope of this Report

Building on the Integrated Women's Entrepreneurship Development Framework established in our previous cycle, this report represents a shift from

Step 01

(Assessment)



Step 02

(Gauging Impact)

It consolidates insights from high-level regulatory roundtables to offer a technical audit of the current policy landscape. It argues that inclusion cannot be achieved through symbolic initiatives but requires integrated, end-to-end support—combining digital, financial, and legal literacy with affordable infrastructure and market access.

The recommendations that follow outline how we can close the gap between policy intent and lived experience, moving closer to our vision of an inclusive, economically vibrant Pakistan.

Empowering Women Entrepreneurs: **WECON Theory of Change**

(Continued)

The WECON Movement's advocacy is grounded in a structured, multi-year **"Integrated Women's Entrepreneurship Development Framework"**. This Theory of Change (TOC) ensures that our interventions are not isolated events, but interconnected stages in a long-term roadmap toward achieving our **2030 targets**.

While the **WECON Policy Recommendations Report 2025** established the foundational baselines, the 2026 Report marks a definitive transition from **Step 1 (Assessment) to Steps 2 and 3 (Gauging Impact & Action Planning)**.

2.1 Recap of Step 1: Assessing Ground Realities

In the previous cycle, through the WECON "Mumkin Hai" conference (Nov 2024) and WECON Stakeholders Conclave (Feb 2025), stakeholders focused on Step 1: Assess Ground Realities. The resulting 2025 report successfully:

- » Categorized systemic bottlenecks into **pillars**: *Structural, Financial, Educational, Socio-Cultural, and Executional*.
- » Established the **2030 Vision**: Increasing women entrepreneurs to **10%** of the female population.

2.2 Current Status: Step 2 – Gauging Results & Policy Efficacy

The **Policy Roundtable**; an integral part of **WECON 2025** convened regulators and ecosystem leaders to execute **Step 2: Gauging Results from Interventions**. Rather than simply identifying new problems, this dialogue gauged the impact of policies introduced or refined over the last 12 months (and some more), including the State Bank of Pakistan's Banking on Equality policy and the SECP's regulatory frameworks.

2.3 Moving toward Step 3: Coordinated Action The insights from this report directly inform

3.0 Step 3: Action Plan & Stakeholder Engagement

The **2026** recommendations focus on “how” to fix the delivery mechanisms of existing policies. This culminates in the primary strategic recommendation of this cycle: the operationalization of the *Centralized Women’s Entrepreneurship Portal (WE-PORTAL)* as the essential vehicle for ecosystem coordination and Partnerships between public and private sector.



Collection of Data & Insights

The Conversations from **WECON-Mumkin Hai 2024** and **WECON Stakeholders Conclave 2025** culminated into 'Empowering Women Entrepreneurs, Policy Recommendations Report 2025'; that









outlined Institutional, Financial, Educational and and Implementational Bottlenecks faced by women when starting and scaling their business and offered actionable recommendations in the spheres of **Policies** and **Practices** that can empower women entrepreneurs in the country.

The 'Empowering Women Entrepreneurs, Policy Recommendations Report 2025' informed the next step for Panel Discussions and Policy Roundtables at **WECON 2025**. The primary insights (coupled with secondary research) for this report have come from:

- » Panel Discussion: **Equity for Equality - philosophy to tangible action.**
 - » Policy Roundtable: **Gauging intended impact: Gender Lens on policy design & implementation.**
- *Two specific policies were primarily discussed: Banking on Equality Policy by the **State Bank of Pakistan (SBP)**, and **Women Equality in Finance Policy Framework (WEFP) for Non-Bank Microfinance Companies (NBMFCs)** by the **Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP)**.*



The outline followed for panel discussion and policy roundtable; is as follows:

<p>POINT 01</p> <p>Difference between equity and equality in the context of women's entrepreneurship, and the crucial nature of Equity for leveling the playing field.</p> 	<p>POINT 02</p> <p>Contribution of mentorship and support networks in creating equity for women entrepreneurs, especially in underserved communities.</p> 
<p>POINT 03</p> <p>Broader socioeconomic equality and driving sustainable development through focus on equity for women entrepreneurs.</p> 	<p>POINT 04</p> <p>Gaps between on-ground realities and policy design, and how do those gaps appear in the final framework.</p> 
<p>POINT 05</p> <p>Best way for cross-sector coordination (across public and private sector partners, and academia) to measure, track, and analyze policy impact in order to ensure maximum equity.</p> 	<p>POINT 06</p> <p>Tailoring existing policies from a gender lens to provide equitable access to entrepreneurial opportunities.</p> 

Industry leaders, policymakers, regulatory authorities, and other ecosystem builders from both public and private sectors who formed our insight circle and contributed to the conversation are mentioned in Appendix.

The findings of this report are framed as strategic and directional, acknowledging the noted limitations of the sample composition, with the intent of contributing to policy dialogues, organizational practices, and subsequent research.

Bottlenecks & Challenges

This section outlines both recurring bottlenecks from our 2025 report and newly identified friction points. Until these intersecting barriers are dismantled, the path from 'intention to action' will remain inaccessible for the vast majority of Pakistani women.

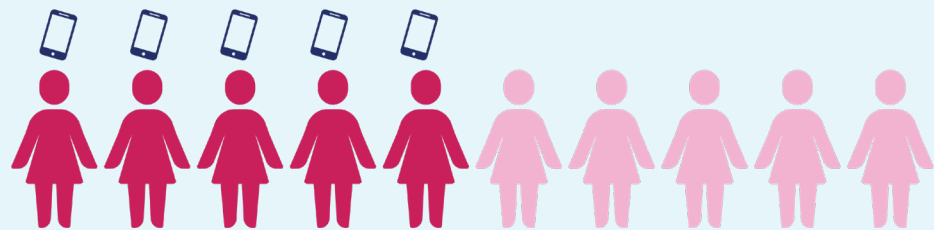
1. Institutional Fragmentation & Policy Gap

- **Systemic Fragmentation & Institutional Silos:** The entrepreneurship ecosystem remains critically disjointed, with institutions operating in isolation. This lack of coordination drives resource duplication and inconsistent messaging, while the absence of clear accountability pathways results in weak follow-up and diluted impact.
- **The Gap Between Formulation and Grassroots Connection:** While robust policy frameworks exist, they often remain theoretical constructs due to a critical lack of actionable execution plans capable of bridging the disconnect between high-level regulation and the grassroots masses.
- **Communication as a Pillar of Policy Efficacy:** The success of any regulatory framework is contingent upon its visibility; without effective, widespread communication strategies, policies remain theoretical concepts rather than accessible tools for their intended beneficiaries.
- **The Visibility Deficit:** Pakistan does not suffer from a lack of policy instruments, but from a lack of accessibility. Key frameworks, such as the *SBP's National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2024-28)*, often fail to reach the community level, leaving women in low-income or remote regions unable to navigate incentives that exist only on paper.

2. Infrastructure & Digital Realities

- **The Connectivity Divide as a Primary Barrier:** In remote regions such as Gilgit-Baltistan, inconsistent network connectivity remains a critical bottleneck. This digital exclusion prevents women entrepreneurs from accessing essential fintech services, e-commerce platforms, and knowledge resources, effectively neutralizing the benefits of digital policy reforms.

- **Infrastructure as the Prerequisite for Policy Success:** Advanced policy frameworks remain theoretical without the foundation of basic infrastructure. The absence of reliable connectivity and physical mobility support renders even the most progressive regulations unimplementable for the communities that need them most.
- **The Illusion of Digital Inclusion:** While **49-50%** of women reportedly possess mobile phones (*GSMA, 2022*), this figure disguises a fragile reality where poor service reliability and intermittent accessibility frequently render these devices ineffective as tools for sustained economic activity.



- **The Digital Affordability Crisis:** Rising telecom and internet costs have emerged as a crisis-level barrier, effectively pricing low-income women out of the digital economy. This inflation undermines the promise of digital finance and e-commerce, disproportionately affecting rural women who rely on digital channels to bypass physical mobility constraints.

3. Structural, Social & Regulatory Barriers

- **The Care Economy and Mobility as Economic Prerequisites:** Women's entrepreneurship cannot be decoupled from their social reality; the unaddressed burdens of the care economy and mobility constraints act as hard ceilings on growth, rendering financial and technical interventions ineffective until these structural barriers are resolved.
- **Reducing Regulatory Friction Through Inclusive Design:** Complex compliance procedures serve as a primary deterrent for first-generation entrepreneurs, effectively functioning as an exclusionary barrier. Dismantling these obstacles requires a fundamental redesign of digital interfaces (such as *SECP* and *FBR*) centered on low digital literacy, coupled with the provision of comprehensive registration and compliance guidance in *Urdu* and regional languages.

→ **Absence of Structured Market Pathways:** Women entrepreneurs consistently struggle to find structured pathways into markets, often relying on intermediaries that erode their earnings. Without government-supported onboarding for digital storefronts or direct supply chain linkages, this lack of market access remains a critical structural barrier to scaling.

Policy Designs & Their intended impact

Latest Developments in Policy atmosphere

Major Wins

» The Banking on Equality Policy implemented by the State Bank of Pakistan has reduced the national gender gap in financial inclusion by **9% (from 39% to 30%)** since its launch in **2021**; it has catalyzed Pakistan's journey toward becoming gender-intentional in financial approaches.

- Since implementation, banks have inducted over **14,600** women, improving women's ratio from **13% to 17%**.
- **17.6 million** new women-owned accounts have been added, showing an **85% growth** in women's active account ownership.
- Women microfinance borrowers have increased to **3 million** from **912,000** showing **210%** growth.
- The policy has catalyzed Pakistan's journey toward becoming gender-intentional in financial approaches.
- Other regulators like **SECP, SMEDA, and PTA** have developed their own gender strategies following State Bank's lead.

» The **Companies Act 2017** has been updated by Securities & Exchange Commission of Pakistan; eliminating the redundant requirement to mention fathers/husbands name for a woman to register their businesses.

SECP's dedicated Framework for Gender Diversity and Women's Financial Inclusion represent a coordinated regulatory approach with a target of **adding 70 percent new female users to into financial economy in the next 5 years through :**

- **Product & Research Mandate:** SECP now requires microfinance institutions (MFIs) to design women-specific financial products and services, grounded in targeted research.
- **Board Representation:** A mandate is in place for MFIs to appoint at least one female independent director to their boards.
- **Gender-Disaggregated Data:** MFIs must report gender-disaggregated data, including tracking whether loans are for a woman's own business or a family member's.

- **Compulsory Training:** Gender sensitization training is mandatory for all staff, employees, and board members of MFIs.
- **We-Fi Code Encouragement:** Institutions are encouraged to sign the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) Code to enhance access to finance and capital.
- **Women Lead Sandbox:** The Women Lead Sandbox, managed by the SECP Innovation Office, provides mentoring and a one-year testing environment for women-led business ideas without regulatory restrictions.
- **Gender-specific products and services** will be developed over the next three years by *SECP* rooted in data collected directly from the women entrepreneurs and their unique needs.
- **Consumer protection guidelines** specific to female clients have been established.

» The **State Bank of Pakistan (SBP)** officially joined the *Women Entrepreneurs Finance Code (WE Finance Code)* in July 2025 in collaboration with the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** and under the leadership of the **World Bank**. (The WE Finance Code, coordinated under the global initiative known as Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi), was launched by the World Bank in 2023 to increase financing to women-led micro, small and medium enterprises (WSMEs)) The ADB partnered the initiative with a substantial **\$500 million** financing programme to Pakistan.

» **Kashf Foundation** issued the first ever Gender Bond in Pakistan, also the first in South Asia. With **Infra Zamin Pakistan (IZP)** providing the guarantee and with the support of **Arif Habib Limited**, the Gender Bond closed in December 2023 with **40 local** private sector investors. Over the next three years the proceeds from the **PKR 2.5 billion** bond aims to finance women led micro businesses amongst other development projects. (*Kashf Foundation, 2025*).

» Pakistan is preparing to launch its first-ever **National Women Entrepreneurship Policy**, a landmark initiative that will place women entrepreneurs at the center of economic planning.

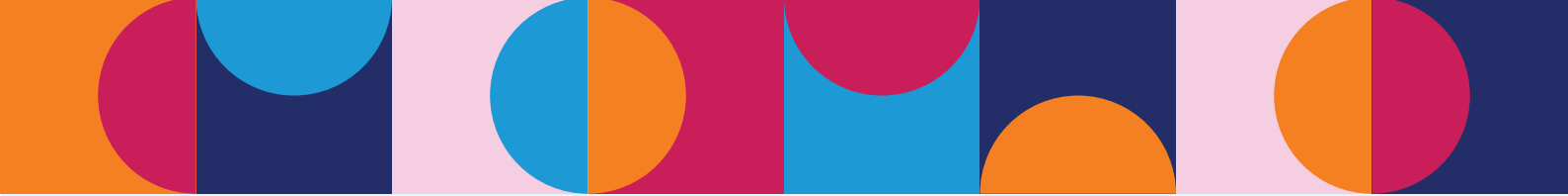
- **Policy Target:** The government has committed to a target of **USD 40 billion** in economic facilitation for SMEs in 2025–26, with a specific **“Export Facilitation Policy”** to help women reach **25** new international markets.
(*Ministry of Industries & Production [MoIP], 2025*).

- In Pakistan, mobile internet adoption among women has been increasing for several years, but 2024 was a year of significant progress. For the first time since 2021, the **mobile internet gender gap narrowed**, from

38% to 25%

(GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report 2025)

** All stats shared in this section have been collected through secondary research and referenced and/or shared by Official Representatives of State Bank of Pakistan and Securities & Exchange Commission of Pakistan during the policy roundtable.*



Strategic Analysis: **Comments on Emerging Developments & Policy Recommendations**

To bridge the *“Implementation Gap”* identified in the audit, the following recommendations are structured into **four strategic pillars**. These interventions are proposed to shift the ecosystem from *equality of access to Equity of opportunity*.



Pillar 1: Governance & Coordination

Target: Eliminate ecosystem fragmentation and enforce accountability.

- **Operationalize a Unified Information Sharing Platform:** A centralized, joint platform must be established to synchronize stakeholder efforts. This will map “*who is doing what,*” directly preventing the systemic duplication of resources and ensuring that support mechanisms are visible to all actors.
- **Establish High-Level Legislative Oversight:** To ensure long-term political will and promote transparency, annual public progress reviews should be institutionalized and a dedicated Senate or Assembly Standing Committee on Women’s Entrepreneurship should be formed to provide top-level oversight and continuity beyond political cycles.
- **Standardize Gender-Disaggregated Data:** Data silos between regulators must be broken. **SBP, SECP, PASHA, and SMEDA** must standardize their gender-disaggregated reporting protocols to ensure a coherent national picture of women’s economic participation.
- **UX/UI Mandates:** **FBR** and **SECP** digital interfaces to be redesigned based on low-literacy user experience principles (simplified language, regional language options).
- **Systematic analysis of Good Case and Bad Case practices:** A database of good and bad case practices (*GCPs and BCPs*) of women-founded startups that have gone through incubation, acceleration, and/or independent operations outside of **NICS** could be compiled to help identify the reasons businesses either close or thrive.
- **Enforce Third-Party Audits:** To prevent political capture and ensure fairness, mandatory third-party audits should be instituted for all public programs tailored for women entrepreneurs.
- **Develop Anonymized Data-Sharing Protocols:** To bridge the digital divide with precision, anonymized data-sharing protocols between telecom operators and government bodies must be established. This data intelligence will allow policymakers to move beyond broad assumptions and target interventions specifically toward regions and demographics with the highest connectivity gaps.
- **Expand Coordination to the Grassroots:** Beyond federal regulators, coordination must extend to the local level. Mapping “*who is doing what*” through formal partnerships with local governments, Rural Support Program Networks (**RSPNs**), and community-based organizations is essential to eliminate duplication and ensure policy communication actually reaches the intended beneficiaries.



Best Case Practices

Improving women's consultative participation in policy/program development at the grassroots level.

The UNDP study *Improving Active Participation of Women in Local Governments – Uva Province* examined the structural barriers limiting women's involvement in local decision-making in Sri Lanka's Badulla and Monaragala districts, finding low participation in leadership roles, gender mainstreaming, and inclusive grievance processes in local councils. It identified obstacles to women's political engagement and proposed actionable strategies to strengthen gender responsiveness, including targeted capacity building for elected women representatives, gender action planning, and enhanced institutional support for women's leadership in local governance. Through training, community empowerment, and gender-sensitive planning, the initiative aimed to increase women's influence in policy and budgeting processes, improve gender equality within local governments, and create more inclusive governance structures at the grassroots.

(UNDP Sri Lanka, 2024)

- **Institutionalize Academia as a Policy Stakeholder:** Academic institutions must be formally integrated into the governance framework as **"Policy Amplifiers."** Beyond just teaching, direct channels must be institutionalized for students to interact with policymakers and industry leaders. This ensures that the next generation of entrepreneurs understands the regulatory landscape before they enter the market, effectively bridging the gap between theory and practice.
- **Establishment of Rigorous Performance Metrics:** Strict Key Performance Indicators (**KPIs**) and Key Risk Indicators (**KRIs**) must be mandated to ensure the objective, annual measurement of policy efficacy and risk exposure.



Pillar 2: Inclusive Infrastructure (The Social Enablers)

Target: Resolve the mobility, care, and communication barriers that prevent entry.

Policy makers must invest more in contextualised policies and programmes that acknowledge the diversity of women entrepreneurs. It is clear that “one size does not fit all. Passive encouragement such as adding ‘women are encouraged to apply’ to a flyer is ineffective. True Masawaat (Equity) requires a shift from passive invitation to active delivery, bringing opportunities directly to the doorsteps of the women we aim to support.

- **Socialize Policy through Proactive Outreach:** Move beyond digital-only announcements. Policy incentives must be “de-coded” and delivered through community-based physical networks (e.g., Lady Health Workers, RSPNs, or local post offices) to reach women who face mobility or digital literacy constraints.
- **Institutionalize “One-Window” Facilitation Centers:** Moving beyond virtual support, physical “One-Window” facilitation centers should be mandated to serve as safe spaces for women to access financial and registration services, supported by gender-sensitized frontline staff.
- **Integrate Childcare into Economic Infrastructure:** Recognizing care as an economic variable, on-site childcare facilities must be mandated within incubators and enterprise centers. Furthermore, loan and grant programs should integrate “**childcare credits**” to cover care responsibilities as a legitimate operational cost.
- **Scale Safe Transport Solutions:** Public-private partnerships must be leveraged to scale safe transport solutions, addressing the mobility constraints that restrict women’s access to markets and training centers.
- **Deploy Mobile Business Clinics:** To reach underserved communities, “**Mobile Business Clinics**” should be deployed to remote districts, bringing registration and digital onboarding services directly to women who cannot travel to urban centers.
- **Launch a Nationwide Multilingual Communication Campaign:** A nationwide campaign using short, accessible digital content in Urdu and regional languages is essential to demystify existing policies and explain available support mechanisms to the grassroots population.
- **Bottom up Approach for addressing socio-cultural challenges:** To address issues faced by the women in capacity building, starting and scaling their business, open their bank accounts and/or becoming a part of the formal economy; especially in remote areas, it is important to have a bottom up approach where realities from ground are brought up to design or refine policies.



Pillar 3: Substantive Financial Equity (Masawaat)

Target: Move beyond “Pinkification” to products engineered for women’s reality.

- **Shift from “Pinkification” to Substantive Design:** True financial inclusion necessitates moving beyond the superficial ‘pinkification’ of products; the sector must develop substantive solutions that are structurally engineered to meet women’s specific economic needs (such as flexible repayment schedules that account for irregular cash flows), rather than merely rebranding standard instruments for a female demographic.
- **Support the Pre-Seed & Ideation Phase:** Regulatory support must shift upstream to assist women before formal registration. This includes creating pathways for pre-seed and ideation-stage funding to bridge the gap between informal home-based work and formal enterprise.
- **Integrate Climate Resilience into Financial Products:** For women in climate-vulnerable regions like GB and KP, financial packages must include mandatory climate insurance and risk management protocols to protect their livelihoods from environmental shocks.



Best Case Practices

The SMaRT Village project, developed by the Hashoo Foundation, embodies an integrated approach to sustainable rural development by converging economic, environmental, and social dimensions of sustainability for mountain communities in Gurunjor and Minapin, Gilgit-Baltistan. Guided by the Sustainable Methods and Resilient Technologies (SMaRT) philosophy, the initiative demonstrates how low-cost, low-carbon technologies and strategies can catalyze community transformation, bringing not only infrastructure improvements but also benefits in education, skills and entrepreneurship development, environmental stewardship, climate resilience, disaster risk reduction, and diversified livelihood opportunities. By anchoring development in accessible, resilient solutions that are contextually appropriate for remote settings, the project illustrates how design and technology can support holistic, community-led sustainable development beyond basic service delivery. (Hashoo Foundation, 2019)

- **Incentivize Corporate Procurement:** While a supply-side tax incentive already exists in the form of 25% tax rebate for women business owners (Tax Ordinance 2001 Amendment); to drive demand, tax incentives should be introduced for corporations that source a percentage of their supply chain from women-led enterprises, complementing existing supply-side tax rebates (Supplier Diversity).
- **Institutionalizing the Academia-Enterprise Nexus:** To bridge the critical gap between research and commercialization, a dedicated, not-for-profit Entrepreneurship Innovation Fund modeled on the UNFPA Population Innovation Fund; must be established to directly connect academic innovation with entrepreneurial capital.
- **Reengineer Business Development Service (BDSP) Models:** Evolve BDSP frameworks to move beyond generic support, adopting gender-responsive models that address the specific lifecycle and liquidity needs of Women SMEs (WSMEs).



Pillar 4: Digital Market Access & Safety

Target: Bypass intermediaries and ensure safe digital adoption.

- **Create Government-Backed Digital Storefront Pipelines:** Women entrepreneurs require end-to-end support rather than isolated interventions. To eliminate intermediaries who erode earnings, the government should launch facilitation programs that directly onboard women micro-entrepreneurs onto digital marketplaces, ensuring they retain the full value of their goods and offer documentation assistance, simplified enterprise identity systems, ease of registration, and centralized spaces where all these services can be accessed.
- **Adopt a Holistic “Ecosystem Marketplace” Model:** Digital market access cannot be limited to just a storefront. Online platforms must adopt a holistic ecosystem approach similar to successful private artisan marketplaces; integrating design knowledge, raw material sourcing, and financing directly into the platform. This “end-to-end” support is game-changing for local artisans, preventing them from failing due to supply chain or quality gaps even when demand exists.
- **Mandate Women’s Enterprise Data Packages:** To lower the cost of doing business which includes accessing digital platforms and government portals for business registration and compliance, telecom operators and the government should collaborate to introduce subsidized “Women’s Enterprise Data Packages” for registered entrepreneurs.



Karakoram Area Development Organization (KADO), established in 1996 in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, has implemented a series of targeted interventions to promote women's economic participation and entrepreneurship in geographically remote and underserved mountain communities. Beginning with a pilot initiative in the Hunza Valley, KADO focused on strengthening women's engagement in local value chains through skills development in handicrafts, gemstones and jewelry, and agri-based trading. Over time, these interventions evolved into structured programs—most notably the Women in Business initiative—designed to support enterprise development through entrepreneurship training, market linkages, and public-private partnerships. The program enabled women to produce and commercialize higher-value products, including embroidered textiles and cultural crafts, with access to national and international markets, increasingly supported through ICT-enabled platforms and e-commerce. Complementary measures such as institutional strengthening, business incubation, and access to micro-health insurance contributed to improved economic resilience and reduced vulnerability. Recent iterations of the program, including Women in Business: Building Linkages, Ensuring Growth, have placed renewed emphasis on capacity building and structured sales platforms, reflecting KADO's sustained commitment to gender-inclusive economic development in a region characterized by isolation, limited infrastructure, and constrained livelihood opportunities.

(Devex, n.d.)

- **Strengthening digital financial literacy programs:** particularly through community-based delivery, and enabling simplified digital enterprise identities will allow nano-entrepreneurs to formalize their businesses more easily.
- **Standardize Digital Safeguarding in curricula:** Digital inclusion cannot come at the cost of safety. All digital literacy curricula must include mandatory modules on cybersecurity and protection against digital harassment.
- **Inclusive Design in Emerging Technology (AI) Governance:** Policies governing new technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), must prioritize inclusivity from their inception to prevent the replication of existing biases in future economic systems.



Cashless economy good case practice:

Malaysia has rapidly transitioned toward a near-cashless society through its integrated digital payment ecosystem, exemplified by Bank Negara Malaysia's DuitNow platform launched in 2018, which standardized real-time transfers via QR codes, phone numbers, and national IDs across banks and e-wallets like Touch 'n Go and Boost. By 2025, 96% of Malaysians are using e-wallets for daily transactions supported by 97% 4G and 47% 5G coverage, and PayNet processing RM5.2 trillion in 4.4 billion transactions, enabling 370,000 SMEs to accept seamless payments. This success stems from regulatory push (e.g., new digital bank licenses), high smartphone penetration (132%), and e-commerce GMV growth to \$18 billion, reducing cash reliance to under 10% for retail while boosting financial inclusion for underserved groups through low-cost, interoperable tools.

(Market Research Malaysia, 2025; Mastercard, 2025).

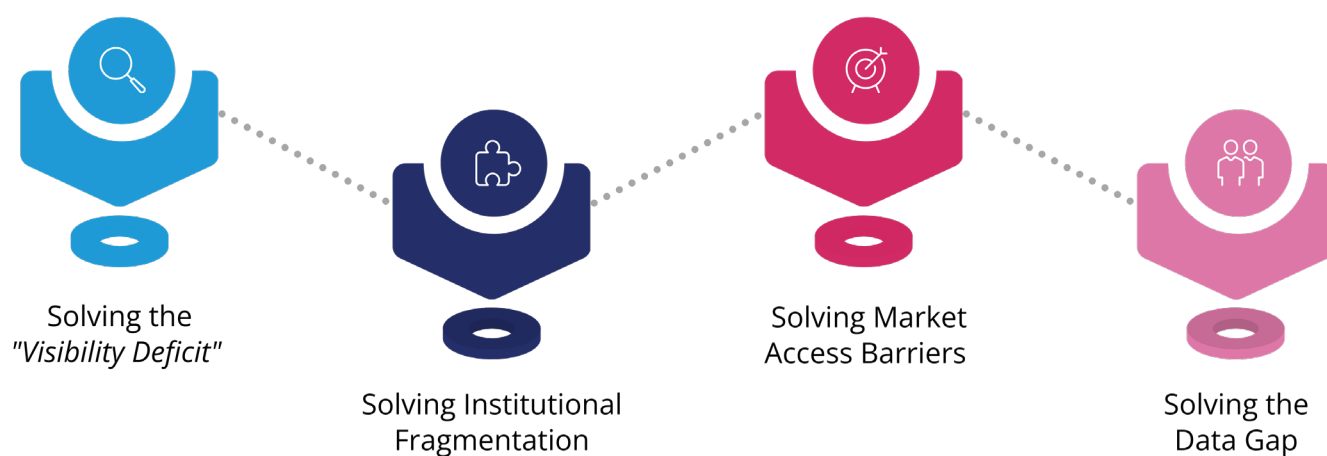
This case was shared as an example of the importance of frictionless transactions and telecommunications infrastructure when it comes to increasing financial inclusion and equity.

Solution Spotlight: Operationalizing the WE-Portal

The Digital Backbone for Ecosystem Coordination

While the four pillars outline what needs to be done, the Women's Entrepreneurship Portal (WE-Portal) is the answer to how we aim to execute it. Identified by stakeholders in the 2025 consultation as a critical missing link, the **WE-Portal has been envisioned by Change Mechanics Pvt. Ltd. as the "Digital Backbone" of the ecosystem**, directly addressing the fragmentation and visibility deficits identified time and again by the stakeholders.

It is not just an online portal; it is the centralized implementation mechanism for the recommendations in this report:

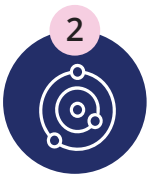


Advancing to Stage 3: CALL FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Cross-sectoral stakeholder coordination and sustained partnership is vital for the impact of this policy dialogue to be realized. In advancing the Women's Entrepreneurship Portal and related implementation mechanisms, WECON issues a call for partnerships across four critical areas of support:



1 Financial and institutional partners are invited to support the development and long-term sustainability of shared digital infrastructure that lowers entry barriers for women entrepreneurs.



2 Ecosystem actors, including regulators, financial institutions, chambers, and incubators, are encouraged to contribute to a shared knowledge base, ensuring that policy instruments, compliance processes, and support programs are clearly documented and accessible.



3 Partners with outreach capacity (in particular telecom operators, RSPNs, and local government bodies) can play a central role in expanding awareness and uptake at the grassroots level.



4 Government and the tech/telecom sector to collaborate actively. Improved access to anonymized, gender-disaggregated data repositories will be essential for monitoring impact, refining interventions, and preventing duplication across initiatives.

Through this collective approach, **WECON Movement** seeks to move from fragmented but well-intentioned efforts toward a coordinated ecosystem with clear-cut responsibilities, shared accountability, and open collaboration— an ecosystem where women entrepreneurs can access the support systems they need to develop clarity, purpose, and independence in their journey and become a part of the Pakistan's formal economy.

INSIGHTS' CIRCLE

1. Session Chair:

Sonia Saleem (Member, Board of Directors, (PASHA) Pakistan Software Houses Association)

2. Moderator:

Shafqaat Shah (Senior Director Commercial Operations, S&P Global)

3. Moderator:

Farrah Taufiq (Gender Specialist & Independent Consultant)

4. **Tehmin Sayyed** (Country Lead Education, Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL))

5. **Rabia Khan Khattak** (Head of Diversity & Inclusion, Jazz)

6. **Ayesha Khan** (Development Economist & SDG Professional, Hashoo Foundation (former affiliation) / World Bank (WB))

7. **Amara Saeed** (Project Manager, Agha Khan Development Foundation (AKDF))

8. **Dr. Adnan Akhtar** (Additional Joint Director, SECP)

9. **Dr. Farooq** (Chairperson, Fatima Jinnah Women's University (FJWU))

10. **Faiqa Naseem** (Financial Inclusion and Gender Expert, State Bank of Pakistan)

11. **Gul Sadia** (Assistant Country Director - Program, CARE Pakistan)

12. **Heman Kumar** (Senior Program & MEL Officer, British Asian Trust)

13. **Kiran Afzal** (Senior Private Sector Development Specialist, The World Bank)

14. **Maria Umer** (Team Lead, CARE Pakistan)

15. **Mehnaaz Parveen** (Public Policy Analyst, UN Women)

16. **Sana Wafa** (Communications Manager, LMKR)

17. **Alia Naseer** (Member- AI Committee, Pakistan Software Houses Association (PASHA))

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About *Change Mechanics*

Change Mechanics Pvt. Ltd. is a leading innovation and capacity-building firm, established in **2017** to strengthen **Pakistan's entrepreneurial landscape**. We specialize in designing and delivering high-impact programs in entrepreneurship, business training, policy research, and strategic consulting with a core focus on inclusion, innovation, and sustainable growth.

We work at the intersection of private enterprise, public policy, and ecosystem development to empower entrepreneurs, enable market access, and shape forward-looking dialogues across sectors. Through initiatives like **WECON- The Women Entrepreneurship Conference**, **Startup.pk**, and **RE-THINK** (focused on future-shaping themes like climate and education), we foster community engagement, build leadership pipelines, and influence inclusive policy design. Our projects span partnerships with donor agencies, corporates, and government bodies, ensuring relevance at both grassroots and policy levels.

Change Mechanics Pvt. Ltd. is the Managing Partner of **National Incubation Center Islamabad**, **National Incubation Center Faisalabad** and the leading partner of the **Founder Institute** in Pakistan.


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WECON Masawaat 2025 was held in Partnership with British Council.

The British Council is the UK's international culture and education organisation. Founded in 1934, are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body, operating at arm's length from government. They have been working in Pakistan since 1948. Every year they connect with thousands of students, educators, policymakers, academics, creatives and entrepreneurs in Pakistan.



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