

PART 3: Key Findings

○ Findings from the Bridge Women

The following findings are based on interviews with 27 bridge women, not quantitative analysis. We have compiled comments that may inspire other women seeking to start business that will build bridges between Japan and Asia-Pacific countries. We have identified eight challenges (policy and system, fundraising, culture and customs, support programs, human resources, networking, expanding the market, and work-life balance) that women entrepreneurs face especially when they expand their business abroad and possible methods of overcoming them, and selected common opinions out of the ones collected through the interviews.

1. Policy and system

The main challenges include legal systems that are complicated and frequently changed, complex procedures, and certification systems and regulations that vary by country. Among the possibly effective methods to overcome the challenges are collecting necessary information from the women's own networks, recruiting personnel with expertise, and obtaining support from professionals.

【Concrete examples】

- Because relevant laws and regulations were changed so often, it was difficult to collect reliable information. Senior Japanese entrepreneurs helped me access the necessary information. (Asuka Hatta/No.1)
- It was so difficult to understand legal terms and accounting systems. To address such challenges, I learned the terms little by little and hired a staff member well-versed in accounting. (Miyuki Shimada/No.18)

2. Fundraising

Fundraising for starting business is one of the common challenges. The effective means to address the issue include financial support from family and friends, obtaining a loan on favorable terms, and crowd-funding as a new form of fundraising.

【Concrete examples】

- I managed to raise funds on favorable terms by using a loan program for women entrepreneurs. (Eriko Kikuchi/No.2)
- When I started business, because of the lack of credit guarantee, it was difficult to find financial institutions that would provide a loan. By establishing and presenting a concrete business model for empowering women, several institutions got interested in lending. (Hanna Keraf/No.13)

3. Culture and customs

Because of a value system that tends not to question the predominance of men over women, gender-biased stereotypes, and cultural differences, women entrepreneurs tend to face difficulties in winning trust from their clients or find it hard to gain understanding and cooperation from family members. Many women entrepreneurs succeed in gaining trust and understanding from others by working persistently to convince them of the merit of their business.

【Concrete examples】

- As my family members did not agree with my plan to start business, I had to prepare it without any support from them. (Norimah HJ. Ahmad/No.5)
- Although it was difficult to have my clients regard me as an equal business partner, I tried to prove that I was capable of being a partner by showing outstanding performance, and eventually gained their trust. (Geraldine S. Batoon/No.19)

4. Support programs

Support programs for women entrepreneurs exist. However, information on relevant programs, especially when business is just started, is hard to obtain. Although programs for expanding business are limited, programs such as the Acceleration Program in Tokyo for Women (APT) provide women entrepreneurs with a foothold for expanding their business abroad.

【Concrete examples】

- As I did not have enough skills on marketing, I participated in a support program implemented by an organization for entrepreneurs. (Jung Hwa Lee/No.11)
- I obtained useful information at a business matching event organized by a chamber of commerce. I also tried to participate in several support programs provided by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, as well as local governments. (Maki Yamada/No.26)

5. Human resources

One of the major challenges in both starting and expanding business is recruiting appropriate human resources. To address this issue, useful measures include referrals by acquaintances, scouting, clearly specifying the mission of the company, and recruitment of foreigners.

【Concrete examples】

- It is difficult to recruit competent local human resources. (Ayane Shiraki/No.8)
- I decided to recruit a staff member in order to enhance communication with clients and expand business in markets abroad. (Lyn Lee/No.14)

6. Networking

While women entrepreneurs tend to face difficulties in finding networks and mentors that meet their needs, some of them make good use of support programs by business associations and entrepreneurs' networks.

【Concrete examples】

- I was involved in establishing a network of Japanese entrepreneurs who are expanding business abroad, and have helped entrepreneurs who will start business in Malaysia to build a local network. (Akiko Nishio/No.6)
- Through the mentorship program of the Asian Women Social Entrepreneurs Network (AWSEN), I received useful advice from senior women entrepreneurs all over the world. (Passawee Tapasanan Kodaka/No.17)

7. Expanding the market

To expand business while confronting multiple challenges, it is necessary to take the right measures at the right time.

【Concrete example】

- After starting business, to obtain market information on the target customers, I communicated directly with them and identified their needs so that I could develop products that would meet the needs. (Megumi Florence/No.15)

8. Work-life balance

Most of the women entrepreneurs take various measures to strike a proper balance between their work and private lives. Some of them have introduced flexible working arrangements to ensure the work-life balance of their personnel.

【Concrete example】

- I am aware of my work-life balance and always try to practice it properly. (Lee Meiling/No.16)

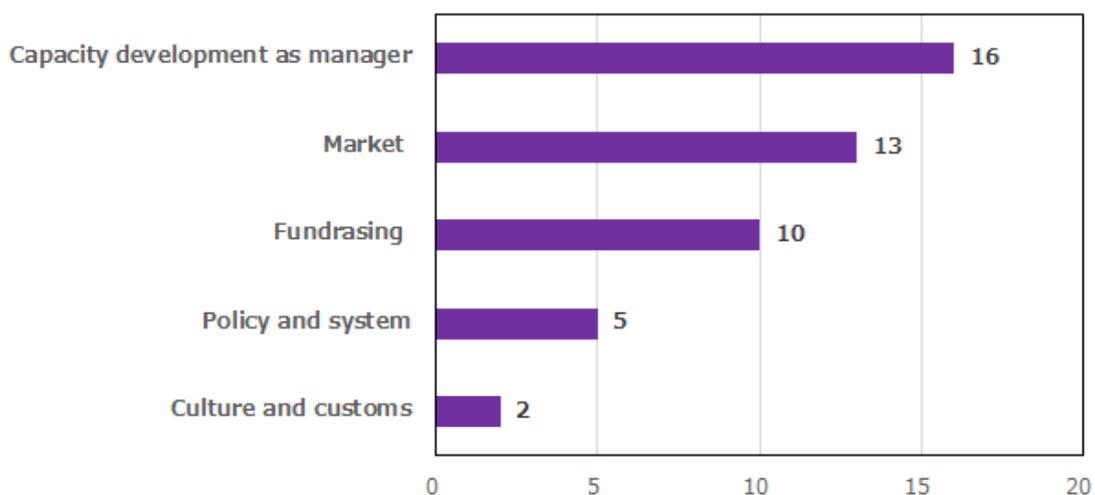
○ Findings from the Business Associations

Based on interviews with 18 support organizations for women entrepreneurs in 9 countries, this section analyzes support activities and programs to address challenges that women entrepreneurs face. We have compiled the activities and programs of the organizations in response to challenges such as policy and institution, fundraising, culture and customs, human resources, and market.

The chart below shows classification of support activities and programs of the 18 organizations according to the above-mentioned five items as well as support for other areas such as networking, overseas expansion, and issues unique to women.

According to the chart, most organizations support general capacity development for business management and marketing. Although more than 55% of them support fundraising, fewer organizations support the areas of policy and institution, and culture and customs.

As support for issues unique to women, in addition to support for specific needs such as market development for women entrepreneurs who wish to have a home business, many organizations are trying to promote female entrepreneurship or advocate a better business environment for women entrepreneurs by such means as a workshop for raising women's awareness and sending policy recommendations to government on strengthening women's management capacity. A few organizations specialize in women entrepreneurship support at the establishment phase, but most provide support covering the establishment, growth, and expansion phases. Although almost all organizations recognize the need for networking among organizations in a country and overseas and are taking measures such as forming business alliances, such undertakings are still limited.



1. Policy and system

A number of organizations are working on policy recommendations and advocacy concerning women and business to create a better business environment for women. Support organizations play a role in establishing cooperative relationships with government, universities, and the private sector, and advocating the most desirable policies and institutions for women.

【Concrete examples】

Policy recommendations and advocacy

- Providing policy recommendations and dialogue with the government to develop a favorable business environment for women entrepreneurs (Indonesia/No.4, Singapore/No.6, South Korea/No.17)
- Meeting with Parliament members (Singapore/No. 6)

Research activities

- Conducting a gender gap index survey in business (India/No.12)
- Conducting policy research with government agencies (South Korea/No.16)

Dialogue and collaboration

- Building cooperative relations with the United Nations agencies and domestic and overseas universities (Indonesia/No.4, Singapore/No. 6)
- Holding women entrepreneurs' summits, forums, and conferences (Indonesia/No. 5 , China/No.14, South Korea/No.16, 17, 18)

2. Fundraising

Fundraising support for women, especially at the establishment phase of their business, is available. In addition, if direct financial support is not possible, support is provided for preparing necessary documents for raising funds and training for such skills as presentation skills. Financial management training is also available at the business establishment phase.

【Concrete example】

- Funding support for women's entrepreneurship and business expansion and procurement (Philippines/No.3, Indonesia/No.4, China/No.14)
- Support for the preparation of documents necessary for raising funds and training on presentation skills (South Korea/No.17, Malaysia/No.8)

3. Culture and customs

Although there are cases of prejudice against working women and women entrepreneurs due to the culture and customs of a country, difficulties in obtaining family's understanding, and disadvantages in business environment for women, some organizations are working to address those challenges.

【Concrete examples】

- Support for parenting and improving healthcare for women (Japan/No.1, India/No.12)
- Gender awareness training to male members of the Chamber of Commerce and business managers (Indonesia/No.5)

4. Capacity development as manager

Training of various types is conducted to strengthen the capacity of women entrepreneurs. Many organizations offer training on business skills such as management, leadership, and communication. Such training is frequently carried out at the establishment phase. In addition, to strengthen women entrepreneurs' capacity and give them confidence, many organizations implement contests for them and provide awards.

【Concrete examples】

Training

- Implementation of skills training for women (Indonesia/No.4, Singapore/No.6, Malaysia/No.9, India/No.13)
- Implementation of training to strengthen business skills such as management, leadership, communication, and presentation (Indonesia/No.4, Singapore/No.7, Malaysia/No.8, South Korea/No.17)
- IT capability training (Thailand/No.10)

Mentoring and coaching

- Establishment of individual consultation services (Japan/No.1, Indonesia/No.5, Malaysia/No.8, India/No.13, South Korea/No.17)
- Support for mentoring and coaching by senior female entrepreneurs (Singapore/No.6, Malaysia/No.9)
- Internship opportunities at companies, implementation of business incubation, start-up (Korea/No.17)

Entrepreneur Awards

- Hosting women entrepreneurs' awards and contests (Japan/No.1, Thailand/No.10, South Korea/No.16)

5. Market

As support for women entrepreneurs to expand their market, various organizations provide marketing training, support for participation in exhibitions and trade fairs, and market information. In regard to overseas expansion support, many organizations encourage women entrepreneurs to take part in exhibitions abroad.

【Concrete examples】

Training

- Implementation of digital marketing training by using social media (Indonesia/No.4, Singapore/No.6, Malaysia/No.9)
- Implementation of e-commerce training (South Korea/No.16)

Information sharing

- Provision of information on such matters as market, finance, and loans (China/No.14)
- Introduction of member companies' products through a website (South Korea/No.17)
- Holding meetings classified by industry, forming consortia (South Korea/No.17)

Exhibition

- Holding women's bazaars in local branches (Indonesia/No.4)
- Business matching support to promote domestic and overseas visits and participation in exhibitions and trade fairs (Indonesia/No.4, South Korea/No.16,17)

Overseas expansion

- Support for overseas visits and participation in exhibitions (Japan/No.1, Indonesia/No.4, Singapore/No.6, Malaysia/No.8, South Korea/No.16)
- Promotion of exchange with overseas economic organizations and companies and strengthening networks (Philippines/No.2, 3, India/No.12, China/No.14)

6. Support for other areas

Many organizations engage in social contribution activities such as support for single mothers or refugee women in addition to support to address women-specific issues.

【Concrete examples】

- Implementation of business launch training for refugee women (Singapore/No.6)
- Provision of offices and meeting rooms (Malaysia/No.8)
- Establishment of a women-only industrial park (India/No.12)
- Financial support for single mothers (South Korea/No.16)
- Establishment of a female managers' business center (South Korea/No.17)