



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND SPORT
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MANAGEMENT
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

THE CONSTRAINTS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS TO SCALE-UP BUSINESS
IN FOOD SECTOR IN PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA

SEM SREYTOUCH

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for
The Degree of Master

SPECIALIZATION IN
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Phnom Penh
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Supervised by:

Associate Professor. Dr. Sok Seang

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2024

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at any university. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.



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National University of Management

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

2024

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in the food sector in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, focusing on the factors that hinder their business growth and sustainability. Women-led Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are essential to Cambodia's economy, yet they encounter significant Constraints, particularly in accessing financial resources, gaining business expertise, and overcoming cultural barriers. The food sector, encompassing agriculture, processing, distribution, and retail, is characterised by financial constraints, skill issues, and inadequate market access, all which limit expansion.

The study applies a qualitative methodology, collected data through in-dept interviews with 21 women entrepreneurs from various age demographics. Content analysis was employed to explain the specific constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in Cambodia's food sector. The results indicate that financial constraints, insufficient technical expertise, and socio-cultural biases are significant impediments. Young entrepreneurs encounter difficulties in obtaining financial resources, whereas older women grapple with the difficulty of reconciling family obligations with their entrepreneurial endeavors. Furthermore, women demonstrate resilience by pursuing financial assistance, enhancing their abilities via training, and leveraging digital platforms to broaden their market access. Cultural norms and restricted networking options continue to serve as significant obstacles.

The results also highlight the importance of improved supportive atmosphere encompassing tailored financial services, company management education, and gender-sensitive regulations. To mitigate these constraints, ideas encompass augmenting financial knowledge, refining technical abilities, and fostering a more equitable company environment. The research advocates for enhanced institutional support and cooperative initiatives across stakeholders to empower female entrepreneurs. Additional study is required to investigate gender-specific obstacles, the influence of digital platforms in mitigating constraints, and comparative analyses within the area. This research provides significant insights into how women entrepreneurs in Cambodia's food sector could overcome constraints to promote sustainable business growth.

Keywords: Women entrepreneur, business scale up, constraints, food sector.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	I
ABSTRACT.....	II
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 BACKGROUND.....	1
1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM	2
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION	4
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	6
2.1 DEFINITIONS	6
2.2 TYPE OF ENTERPRISES IN FOOD SECTOR	6
2.3 CONSTRAINTS FACED BY ENTREPRENEURS IN FOOD SECTOR	10
2.3.1 <i>Capacity, Skill, and Knowledge gap</i>	10
2.3.2 <i>Capital</i>	10
2.3.3 <i>Policy and Regulation</i>	11
2.3.4 <i>Culture Constraint</i>	12
2.3.5 <i>Family Constraint</i>	13
2.4 CONTEXT OF SMEs IN CAMBODIA	13
2.5 CONTEXT OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS’ CONSTRAINTS IN CAMBODIA	15
2.5.1 <i>Unskilled employees and high payment</i>	15
2.5.2 <i>Difficulties in accessing loan from the bank for micro-businesses</i>	16
2.6 CONTEXT OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN FOOD SECTOR IN CAMBODIA	17
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	21
3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	21
3.2 RESEARCH METHOD.....	22
3.3 SAMPLING METHODS	23
3.4 INSTRUMENTS USED.....	24
3.5 DATA COLLECTION	25
3.6 DATA ANALYSIS TOOL.....	27
3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION.....	30
CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	31
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	31
4.2 RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS	31

4.3 FINDINGS RQ1: CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN FOOD SECTOR.....	35
4.4 FINDINGS RQ2: CONSTRAINTS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS TO SCALE UP THEIR BUSINESS IN FOOD SECTOR.....	35
4.4.1 <i>Financial Constraints</i>	39
4.4.2 <i>Lack of Skill in Business Management</i>	40
4.4.3 <i>Lack of Technical and Operational Skills</i>	40
4.4.4 <i>Lack of Ability of Access to Market</i>	41
4.4.5 <i>Lack of Resources</i>	42
4.4.6 <i>Poor Pricing Strategies for a Product</i>	43
4.4.7 <i>Lack of Modern Equipment and Machinery</i>	45
4.4.8 <i>Institutional and Policy Constraints</i>	46
4.4.9 <i>Limited Supply Chain Management</i>	47
4.4.10 <i>Social and Cultural Constraints</i>	48
4.5 FINDINGS RQ3: EXISTING SOLUTIONS TO CONSTRAINTS	49
4.6 DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS	52
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION	55
5.1 CONCLUSION.....	55
5.2 RECOMMENDATION.....	56
5.3 REQUEST FOR SKILLS/TRAINING FROM WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: IDENTIFY THE KEY SKILLS OR AREAS OF KNOWLEDGE THAT RESPONDENTS CONSIDER AS CONSTRAINTS OR BARRIERS TO SCALING THEIR BUSINESSES, AS LISTED BELOW:	63
5.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	64
REFERENCES	66
APPENDIX.....	70
FINDINGS RQ3: EXISTING SOLUTIONS TO CONSTRAINTS	93

List Of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Organization
MSMEs	Micro small and medium-sized enterprises
R	Respondent
RQ	Research Question
SMEs	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise

List of Figures

Figure 1. Global food import and export	7
Figure 2. Food supply chain framework related to enterprise establishment	7
Figure 3. Definition of SMEs in Cambodia	14
Figure 4. A glance of women-owned SMEs in Cambodia	19
Figure 5. Qualitative Research approach	23
Figure 6. Financial constraints	39
Figure 7. Constraint in lack of technical and operational skills.....	41
Figure 8. Constraint in lack of ability of access market	42
Figure 9. Constraint in lack of resources	43
Figure 10. Constrain in poor pricing strategies for a product	45
Figure 11. Constrain in lack of modern equipment and machinery	46
Figure 12. Constraint in lack of awareness on institutional and policy	47
Figure 13. Constraint in social and culture	48

List of Tables

Table 1. Respondents' Characteristics of Women Entrepreneurs in Food Sector	33
Table 2. Summary the constraints of women entrepreneurs in food sectors from qualitative interviews.....	36
Table 3. Constraint in lack of skill in business management.....	40
Table 4. Constraint in limited supply chain	48
Table 5. Summary the existing solutions to the main constraints of women entrepreneurs in food sector in Phnom Penh	49

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) constitute the predominant segment of business entities globally. In developing nations, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) play a significant role in economic operations. (UNDESA, 2020). Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are seen as essential catalysts for economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction globally (Islam, 2020; World Bank, 2017). According to ILO (2015) Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) accounts of two-thirds of global employment; consequently, they have become a focal point for intervention by international organizations, including the United Nations, as well as governments worldwide. This is explicitly articulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). (UNDESA, 2021). According to IFC (2010a) MSMEs contributed 45 percent of employment and approximately 33 percent of GDP in developing countries. The contribution to economic development is even more significant because informal MSMEs, which are firms not properly registered, are excluded from global statistics. Notwithstanding their substantial contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals, micro, small, and medium enterprises have been disproportionately affected by the adverse socioeconomic repercussions of the COVID-19 epidemic and other global difficulties (UNDESA).

Cambodia has drastically developed within the last two decades and experienced a fast-growing economy in the World (ADB, 2021). Cambodia successfully transformed from a low-income country to a lower-middle-income country in 2015 and aspires to attain upper middle-income status by 2030 (World Bank, 2022). Cambodia had a sustained impressive average GDP growth rate of 7.47 percent between 2000-2019. Due to Covid-19 crisis, Cambodia faced a negative growth rate of about -3.10 percent for the first time during the last decade; however,

in 2021 the GDP went back to a positive track of about 3.03 percent. Cambodia's economic growth can be associated with robust growth in garment exports, higher foreign direct investment inflows, tourism activities, and domestic demand (ADB, 2022). Despite strong economic growth, Cambodia still has suffered from low productivity, vulnerability to drought and flooding, inadequate infrastructure, and declining soil fertility (Nong, 2021).

According to UNDESA (2020) MSME is the key element of the Cambodian rural livelihoods, this has significantly changed in the past 30 years, and these changes often raise issues for the sustainability of the food systems and poverty alleviation. MSMEs provided about 70% of total employment and contributed to 58% of national GDP growth. MSMEs also comprise about 99.8% of all business entities of the country. Thy (2021) from the National Bank of Cambodia reported that in 2019, the number of SMEs is reported to be about 520,000 SMEs in the kingdom, according to the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology, and Innovation, previously known as the Ministry of Industry and Handicrafts. SMEs is like the backbone of economic development in Cambodia, and their role contributes significantly to gross domestic products (GDP) and creates local jobs.

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) acknowledges the significance of MSMEs to the national economy and has prioritized their growth in its policy agenda. The modernization of MSMEs has been a fundamental component of Cambodia's Industrial Development Policy (IDP 2015-2025). Similarly, MSMEs have become essential for enhancing the industrial foundation and sustaining economic growth in the kingdom during the era of Industry 4.0. A range of policy incentives have been implemented to promote the growth of MSMEs, with the objectives of enhancing entrepreneurship, encouraging innovation, and broadening MSMEs' access to markets and financial resources. The Ministry of Industry and Handicraft (MIH) is the principal governmental body in Cambodia tasked with fostering the development of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) (UNESCAP, 2022).

1.2 Statement of Problem

In fact, more than 90 percent of businesses in Cambodia are known as small and medium enterprises. In 2019, the number of SMEs is reported to be about

520,000 SMEs in the kingdom, according to the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology, and Innovation, previously known as the Ministry of Industry and Handicrafts (Khmer Times, 2019). SMEs is like the backbone of economic development in Cambodia, and their role contributes significantly to gross domestic products (GDP) and creates local jobs. Furthermore, it is a main contributor not only to enhancing living standards but also to alleviating poverty in the country (Thy, 2021).

Despite of, MSMEs in Cambodia faces a funding shortage to the tune of \$3.7 billion. Cambodia has lot of opportunities in eco-tourism, sustainable farming and food processing. The MSMEs in Cambodia are not sufficiently linked to the national strategy (Khmer Times, 2022). One of the main constraints is only 5 percent of the Kingdom's MSMEs have been properly registered, according to Ministry of Industry and Handicraft of Cambodia (MISTI). However, there are lots of recent studies that indicate that MSMEs confront numerous constraints that prevent them from scaling up their business. Besides the existing constraints, many MSMEs around the globe have been suffering additional impacts for over a year due to the COVID-19. There is no exemption for businesses in Cambodia. The impact of the pandemic COVID-19 has caused many constraints for MSMEs. It is reported that some MSMEs have suspended some parts of their operations, whereas some end up in bankruptcy, especially those in the tourism sector.

In addition, the women entrepreneurs are more likely the vulnerable group from the economic recession, especially those who have working in food sector. According to IFC (2019) women own the majority of businesses in Cambodia (61 percent). As a result, their contribution to the private sector development can hardly be overlooked. Women are motivated and capable to establish and lead businesses. In the long term, this will help them become independent and fulfill their aspirations. While most MSMEs, particularly those owned by women, are heavily reliant on informal sources and personal savings to expand their businesses, banks seem to be missing out on an opportunity that women-owned MSMEs represent. Currently, only 3 percent of women entrepreneurs are well served in Cambodia as compared to 21 percent in Vietnam and 18 percent in the Philippines. Also, compared to men, women seem to be more sensitive in terms of collateral availability and cost of funding. Nevertheless, women find very difficult to expand their business. Given the

above, it is a common problem, so this study assessed specific constraints of expanding the business of women entrepreneurs of micro, small and medium enterprises in the food sector in Cambodia to seek better interventions and investment opportunities.

1.3 Research Question

The research questions of this study are as follows.

- 1) What are the characteristics of women entrepreneurs in food sector?
- 2) What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?
- 3) What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this research is the following:

1. To explore the characteristics of women entrepreneurs in food sector at Phnom Penh, Cambodia
2. To identify the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh
3. To explore the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focusses only women-owned enterprise in food sector only because it is the common informal sector in Cambodia. Most of the MSMEs in food sectors were not registered, so the official statistic data is very limited. Therefore, this study covered only the perspectives from women entrepreneurs either they are working full time or part-time in their business.

This study also focused only on the food sectors in Phnom Penh city as it can cover the different types of food sectors with different level. The women-owned entrepreneurs in the city have affected numbers of constraints, so it is critical to reflect the big picture of constraints that limit women entrepreneurs from scaling up

their business in food sector.

This study used qualitative approach by conducting in-dept interviewed with female entrepreneurs to capture the respondent's perspective and overall issues of business in food sector for women. The qualitative data could explain the constraints, specific insights and experiences of women entrepreneurs, allowing for an understanding of the various social, cultural, and institutional aspects that affect their constraints in the food sector.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study enables to understand the key constraints faced by women owned MSMEs in order to reduce the risks when scaling up their business. This study will serve dialogues for multi-stakeholder to come up with proper solutions to enhance market of women-owned MSMEs with low-risk business opportunity and resilient to constraints.

This study also provides the alternative for solutions to help women-owned MSMEs to scale up their business in food sector with high investment opportunities either from national agencies, private investors, or international finance institutions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definitions

Constraint: According to Cambridge Dictionary, something that controls what you do by keeping you within particular limits. In business aspect, 'constraint' refers to any factor that restricts or limits the decision-making and operational capabilities of an organization. Examples include financial limitations, limited skilled workforce, and market competition (Spector, 2011).

Entrepreneur: Entrepreneurs are individuals who participate in entrepreneurship. The entrepreneur is responsible for identifying opportunities, gathering resources, establishing the organization, and overseeing its success. Someone is considered an entrepreneur if they exhibit entrepreneurial behaviors. Entrepreneurship begins with the formation of a new venture and ends when the business is self-sustaining (Ratten, 2023).

2.2 Type of Enterprises in Food Sector

The food sector is a diverse and dynamic industry encompassing many different stages from production to consumption, comprising a wide array of enterprises (Corigliano & Algieri, 2024). These enterprises are crucial in guaranteeing availability, accessibility, and quality of food for customers globally. The global food market is substantial and growing. In 2021, the worldwide food import value was USD 1,755 billion, with fruits and vegetables making up 18.4%, and cereals accounting for 14.6%. Meat, fish, and oils each surpassed 10%. A 13% rise in food import value is expected for 2023, reaching around USD 2,000 billion, driven by sharp increases in sugar, cereals, oilseeds, and dairy. The Europe and Asia are the largest importers, with over USD 570 billion combined. The Americas import less than half of that, while Africa and Oceania have lower values at USD 94.4 billion and USD 20.4 billion, respectively (Corigliano & Algieri, 2024).

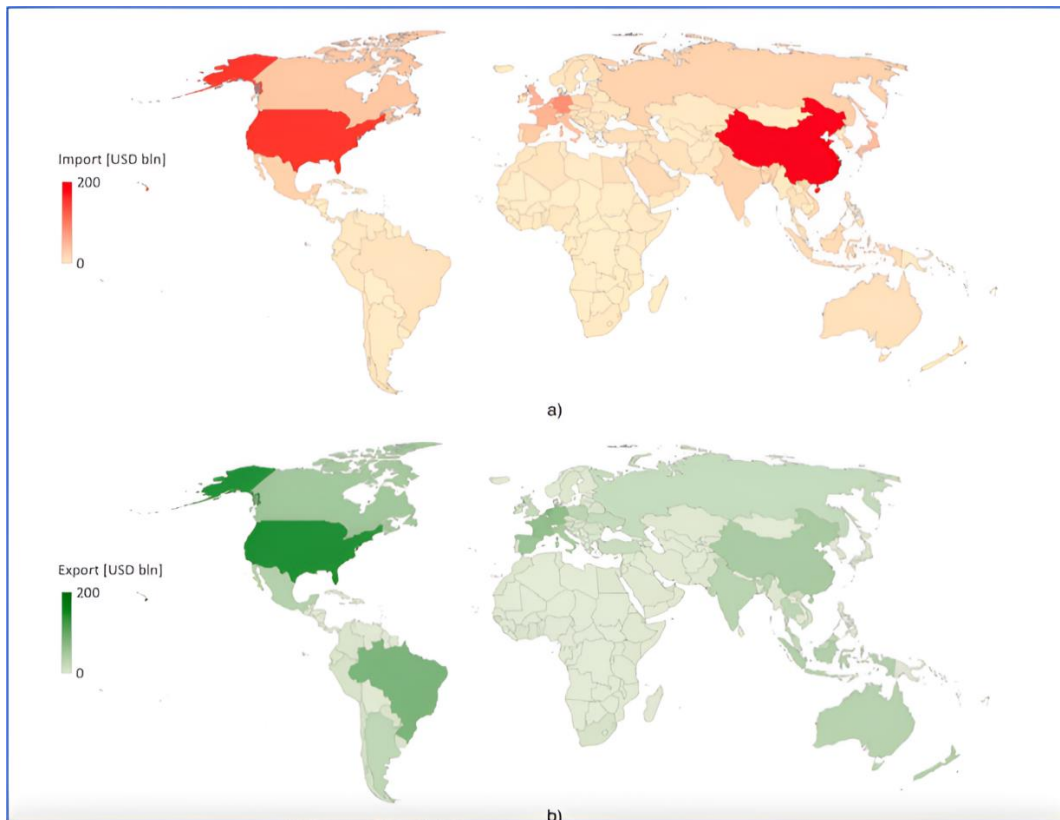


Figure 1. Global food import and export

The industry is characterized by substantial interdependencies, encompassing the initial production of crops and livestock, followed by processing, distribution, retail, and final delivery of food services (FAO, 2014).

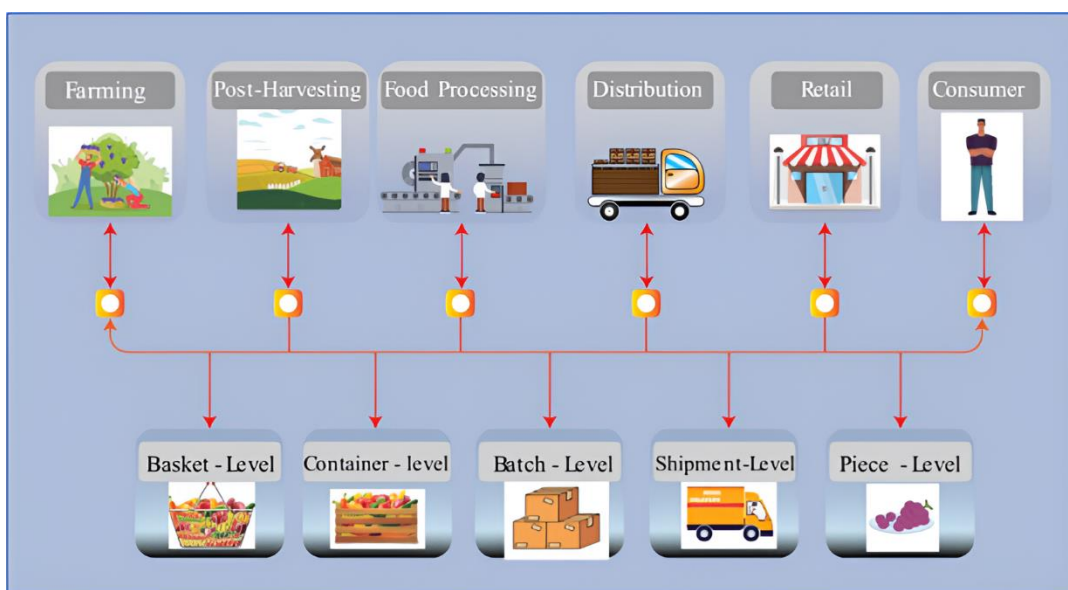


Figure 2. Food supply chain framework related to enterprise establishment

Source: Sathiya et al. (2024)

Below is the figure from Sathiya et al. (2024) illustrates the whole food supply chains that enterprise can be created to generate economic revenues.

- **Farming and production:** It refers to raw food materials that farmers growing crops, raising livestock and aquaculture, and collection non-timber forest products (FAO, 2021b).
- **Post-harvest:** It relates to storage, transportation, and packaging to reduce food loss and main quality of raw food materials (World Bank, 2020).
- **Food processing:** It refers to enterprises who take raw materials for further processing it into products that are ready for consumption or further distribution (Sathiya et al., 2024).
- **Distribution:** It refers to logistics that moved a final product to markets and consumers. This enterprise often operates warehouses and manage transportation ensuring food reaches its market in good condition (World Bank, 2020).
- **Food retail enterprise:** It refers to market, grocery stores, and even online market that allow consumers to shop for food (World Bank, 2020).
- **Food service enterprises:** It refers to enterprises that make ready to eat to consumers. They can be restaurants, cafes, catering stores, fast food outlets, and food trucks or food vendors.

Recent technological improvements and changes in consumer behavior have broadened the types of firms involved, generating new opportunities and problems. Below are the various types of food enterprises around the world.

1) Micro-enterprise in the food sector is the small-scale business typically operated by informal structure, limited capital and resources, and fewer employees. Even though the scale is small, micro-enterprises play a significant role in local economies for job creation, poverty reduction, and food security (Sharma et al., 2012; Valdez et al., 2012). There are three common three types of micro-enterprise in food sectors such as:

- **Street food vendors:** sell cooked food, snacks, or beverage outside markets or along busy streets
- **Home-based food production:** producing cooked food, baked

goods, and other items that are sold to local markets or neighbors.

- ***Small scale food processing***: producing preservation fruits, fish and meat processing, etc. These enterprises are always seen in rural areas.

2) Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are more formalized than micro-enterprises. They can employ workers between 10 to 250 people depending on the country's classification regulation (ILO, 2020). SMEs are mostly operated by family-owned businesses and partnerships but remain smaller in scale compared to large enterprise. SMEs in some countries are required to registered into local regulations, pay taxes and may have access to finance institutions (Baregheh et al., 2012). However, SMEs in the food sector can be involved in various enterprises such as:

- ***Farming and agribusiness*** (*medium scale farming and post-harvest*)
- ***Food processing and packaging*** (*processing raw agricultural products into market-ready goods*)
- ***Food retail*** (*restaurants, café, and food stores*)

3) Cooperative in the food sector are member-owned enterprises where individuals come together to achieve common goals, typically in production, processing, or distribution. They operate based on principles of democratic governance, equality, and shared economic benefits. Women entrepreneurs, particularly in rural and agricultural contexts, have increasingly turned to cooperatives as a model for improving livelihoods, gaining access to markets, and achieving economic empowerment (Lee & Van Cayseele, 2022).

4) Industrial enterprises in the food sector refer to large-scale operations involved in the mass production, processing, and distribution of food products. These enterprises often include food manufacturing plants, large-scale food processing facilities, and companies involved in the production of packaged and processed foods. Industrial enterprises operate on a large scale with mass production capabilities with advanced technology and machinery. It also engages with high capital investment that compliance with national and international regulation systems (FAO, 2021a; Tukhtabaev et al., 2022).

2.3 Constraints Faced by Entrepreneurs in Food Sector

As Le Tran, (2002) mentioned in his journal according to some researchers and practitioners, there are certain constraints individually and collectively effect on the performance of employees in a positive or negative way, including:

2.3.1 Capacity, Skill, and Knowledge gap

Skill and knowledge gaps refer to the deficiencies in technical expertise, business acumen, and managerial capabilities that can hinder women entrepreneurs from successfully starting and scaling their enterprises, particularly in the food sector. These gaps can be attributed to several factors, including lack of access to education, limited training opportunities, and systemic constraints that affect women's participation in skill-building programs. There are at least four technical skills and knowledge for entrepreneurs to obtain as follows:

- **Business management skills:** Many entrepreneurs lack of essential business development and management skill including business plan, financial literacy, digital literacy, marketing strategies, and sell strategies.
- **Technical expertise:** One of the most common mistakes is entrepreneurs do not have any proper technical skills for their business. Entrepreneurs lack of proper training either vocational or formal training on food processing techniques, quality control, supply management, machinery and technology of food sector.
- **Market trend:** Entrepreneurs lack of necessary skill to conduct market research effectively without understanding the consumer need, market trends, and competitive to scaling up their business.

2.3.2 Capital

Lack of capital is one of the most significant constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in the food sector. Access to financial resources is crucial for starting, sustaining, and scaling businesses, and this constraint manifests in various forms. One of the most critical problems is limited access to financial institutions as most of the banks require collateral. Also, the interest rates and unfavorable terms is also lead difficulties to entrepreneurs, especially for women. At the meantime, many of entrepreneurs have inadequate financial literacy which can hinder their ability to

create viable business plans, manage financial report, and lack of understanding of reserve fund for investment and attract the investors (IFC, 2010b).

2.3.3 Policy and Regulation

Policy and regulatory constraints play a critical role in shaping the business environment for women entrepreneurs in the food sector. These constraints often affect their ability to start, manage, and scale businesses due to restrictive legal frameworks, complex bureaucratic procedures, and gender biases embedded in regulations. There are some of the key policies and regulatory constraints facing by entrepreneurs as follows:

1) Complicated procedure and high costs for registration and licensing process: Entrepreneurs always face bureaucratic process in registration their business, particularly in the food sector which required many licenses of food safety, hygiene, and distribution. The complexity of getting those licenses can discourage entrepreneurs from starting up their business and especially scaling up their business level. Another issue is the high costs of registration and getting those licenses from in-line ministries. This problem always hurts the entrepreneurs who has less access to capital and financial resources.

2) Limited inclusion in public financing policies: Public financing policies, which include government grants, subsidies, and credit schemes, are often designed to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and spur economic growth. However, many of these initiatives fail to adequately include or benefit women entrepreneurs, particularly in sectors like food production, processing, and distribution. The limited inclusion of entrepreneurs in public financing policies can be attributed to several systemic constraints, biases, and policy design issues that prevent equitable access to financial resources (IFC, 2010b).

3) Inconsistent enforcement of regulations: It is the constraint limited entrepreneurs, particularly in the food sector, which is often subject to stringent health, safety, and environmental standards. While regulations are necessary for ensuring public health and safety, inconsistent application or enforcement of these regulations can create uncertainty and constraints for entrepreneurs. This inconsistency can manifest in several ways, including unequal treatment by

regulatory authorities, corruption, and the lack of clear guidelines, all of which disproportionately affect food sector businesses. There are related problems regarding inconsistent enforcement of regulations such as disparities in treatment by regulatory authorities, corruption, complicated interpretation of regulation, high requirement on regulation in the informal sector, and legal insecurity and business uncertainty.

4) Lack of supportive young entrepreneurs or start up: Young entrepreneurs, especially those launching startups in the food sector, face numerous constraints in building and scaling their businesses. These constraints often stem from a lack of support in terms of financial assistance, access to markets, mentorship, and an enabling policy environment. Without adequate support, many young entrepreneurs struggle to sustain their startups or scale up their businesses to become competitive in the market. This lack of support and networking can stifle innovation, job creation, and economic growth, particularly in sectors like food production and processing, which require specific skills, networks, and resources to succeed.

5) Trade and export restrictions: It is a significant constraint for entrepreneurs in the food sector, especially for those seeking to expand into international markets. These restrictions can include tariffs, quotas, export bans, licensing requirements, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and other regulatory controls imposed by governments to protect domestic industries, ensure food security, or meet health and safety standards. While these measures are often implemented with good intentions, they can create substantial constraints for food businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and startups, limiting their ability to compete globally (ILO & ADB, 2013).

2.3.4 Culture Constraint

Cultural constraints in the food sector, such as traditional food preferences, religious dietary laws, and local customs, can limit entrepreneurs' ability to introduce new products or expand into new markets. Resistance to unfamiliar foods, adherence to religious or ethical dietary practices, and preferences for local or organic produce can hinder market acceptance. Entrepreneurs should also navigate regional

differences in taste, gender roles in food preparation, and consumer trust in food safety. These constraints often require businesses to adapt their products, marketing, and operations to align with cultural norms, failure of which can result in poor market penetration, reduced consumer trust, and limited growth opportunities (ILO & ADB, 2013).

2.3.5 Family Constraint

Family constraints in the food sector arise from deeply rooted cultural and social dynamics that influence household food consumption, preparation, and decision-making. In many cultures, food is central to family life, with specific roles often assigned based on gender or age. For example, in some societies, women are traditionally responsible for cooking and purchasing food, while men may have a more significant say in food-related financial decisions. This can limit entrepreneurial opportunities for businesses targeting individual consumers or attempting to introduce modern convenience foods that conflict with traditional family values or cooking practices. Additionally, family gatherings and social events may dictate the types of food consumed, favoring traditional, home-cooked meals over commercially prepared products. Entrepreneurs should consider these family structures and preferences when marketing their products, as failure to align with familial expectations and cultural norms can lead to rejection or slow adoption, especially for new or innovative food offerings.

2.4 Context of SMEs in Cambodia

As the backbone of Cambodia's economy, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play a vital role in the economic development of the country. In Cambodia, the economic growth rate is recorded to retain an average of 7.7 percent annually between 1998 and 2019, which is known as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. In fact, more than 90 percent of businesses in Cambodia are known as small and medium enterprises. In 2019, the number of SMEs is reported to be about 520,000 SMEs in the kingdom, according to the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology, and Innovation, previously known as the Ministry of Industry and Handicrafts (Thy, 2021).

According to council of ministers of Cambodia, the definition of SMEs has been defined and classified for the agriculture, industrial, and services and

commerce sectors (Khmer Times, 2021), as seen in Figure below.

1) Agriculture: small enterprise status shall be conferred on organisations employing between five and 49 staff with annual revenues ranging from \$62,500 to \$250,000. The asset range for small enterprises has been set as \$50,000 to \$250,000. Medium enterprises will be defined as those employing between 50 and 199 staff with annual revenues of \$250,001 to \$1 million. The asset range for medium enterprises has been set as \$250,001 to \$500,000.

2) Industrial SMEs: small enterprise status shall be conferred on organisations employing between five and 49 staff with annual revenues ranging from \$62,500 to \$400,000. The asset range for small enterprises has been set as \$50,000 to \$500,000. Medium enterprises will be defined as those employing between 50 and 199 staff with annual revenues of \$400,001 to \$2 million. The asset range for medium enterprises has been set as \$500,001 to \$1 million.

3) Service and commerce: small enterprise status shall be conferred on organisations employing between five and 49 staff with annual revenues ranging from \$62,500 to \$250,000. The asset range for small enterprises has been set as \$50,000 to \$250,000. Medium enterprises will be defined as those employing between 50 and 99 staff with annual revenues of \$250,001 to \$1.5 million. The asset range for medium enterprises has been set as \$250,001 to \$500,00.

Industry	Number of employees		Turnover (\$)		Asset (\$)	
	Small	Medium	Small	Medium	Small	Medium
Agriculture	5 - 49	50 - 199	62 250 – 250 000	250 001 – 1 000 000	50 000 – 250 000	250 001 – 500 000
Industry	5 - 49	50 - 199	62 500 – 400 000	400 001 – 2 000 000	50 000 – 500 000	500 001 – 1 000 000
Service and Commerce	5 - 49	50 - 99	62 500 – 250 000	250 001 – 1 500 000	50 000 – 250 000	250 001 – 500 000

Figure 3. Definition of SMEs in Cambodia

Source: Office of the Council of Ministers (2021)

According to Chhim and Lay (2021) During this hard time, SMEs have been considered as a driving force for global economic growth, especially emerging and developing countries. SMEs are given significant opportunities in maintaining the supply chain such as providing food, transportation or services. Furthermore, SMEs also contribute to society by creating more jobs, reducing poverty and maintaining economic development. Just like other countries, there are several issues that SMEs in Cambodia are currently facing, especially during the outbreak of COVID-19 such as the difficulties in accessing finance, competing through international and regional market expansion.

The number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in food and beverage processing had a significant surge, utilizing agricultural raw materials to produce finished goods. The Ministry of Plan reports that there are 700,000 SMEs in the country, although only 10% are registered with governmental ministries. Cambodian SMEs are essential for socio-economic advancement; therefore, they should adopt sustainability and inclusion. Due to strong demand for food and beverages, Heng Sokkung, Secretary of State for the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology, and Innovation, observes that new SMEs are mostly registering in food processing. The registration of new SMEs is rising, especially in food and beverage processing, due to the country's abundant agricultural raw materials and the high demand within the F&B sector. The growing number of SMEs and their comparative competitiveness are hindered by limited access to funding, insufficient management expertise, and outdated production processes (Khmer Times, 2023).

2.5 Context of Women Entrepreneurs' constraints in Cambodia

2.5.1 Unskilled employees and high payment

One of the most significant constraints for female entrepreneurs in MSMEs is a lack of trained staff/employees, particularly in remote places like Banteay Meanchey, Mondulhiri, and Stung Treng provinces. During road forum talks, various entrepreneurs acknowledged their difficulty in hiring excellent staff/employees for their businesses. They added that most people with a strong education in their towns prefer not to stay and work for micro and small firms that pay poorly. They prefer to work in private enterprises, banks, microfinance institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or in major cities like Siem

Reap and Phnom Penh. Because there was a Labor crisis in minor regions, they had to hire people with less education or no skills to work for their company. As a result, these individuals were unable to assist their company in achieving the anticipated revenues. Furthermore, many entrepreneurs emphasized that even if their employees did not generate adequate outcomes for their businesses, they needed to offer a higher salary to keep them from departing for other employment, particularly in garment factories (CWEA, 2022). The findings highlight the need for a more supportive ecosystem that includes personalized financial services, company management training, and gender-sensitive regulations. To alleviate these obstacles, recommendations include increasing financial literacy, boosting technical skills, and fostering a more inclusive business climate. The report also advocates for improved institutional assistance and stakeholder collaboration to empower female entrepreneurs. Additional research is required to investigate gender-specific hurdles, the role of digital platforms in overcoming obstacles, and comparative studies across the area. This study provides vital insights into how women entrepreneurs in Cambodia's food sector can overcome obstacles and support long-term business growth (CWEA, 2022).

2.5.2 Difficulties in accessing loans from the bank for micro-businesses

Most women entrepreneurs who operate micro-businesses expressed their constraints in operating and growing their enterprises. Their most significant difficulty is a lack of capital investment. They stated that they started their businesses from scratch with their own finances, whilst others had to obtain loans from microfinance organizations (MFIs) or banks. They have always struggled to obtain loans from banks and MFIs because they conducted micro and informal companies. Many stated that they had difficulty meeting the banks' collateral requirements and complicated loan procedures. Some indicated that their applications were denied by nine banks owing to a lack of collateral, while others claimed they did not comprehend the complexities of the loan application processes. They also stated that they did not have proper financial records or business strategies, which prevented them from obtaining bank financing (CWEA, 2022).

2.5.3 The effects of COVID-19 pandemic on businesses

Cambodia, like many other countries, was badly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which halted most of the country's economic activity. The epidemic had an enormous effect on women-owned MSMEs. Female entrepreneurs expressed worries about the impact on their enterprises. Some have suggested the idea of temporarily halting their firms due to concerns about COVID-19 infections in the workplace. Others claimed a decrease in revenue, resulting in a financial catastrophe. Furthermore, many micro and small business owners stated that they were unable to repay bank loans because of a lack of income during the pandemic. The survey findings below show how COVID-19 has affected CWEA members' businesses. According to the survey, 75% of women entrepreneurs said the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on their operations. The pandemic forced 31% of them to close their firms, while 44% had financial difficulty and stated that they might have to close their enterprises if the epidemic's consequences intensified. According to the survey results, the pandemic had a detrimental impact on the company operations of women entrepreneurs. More than half of the respondents (58.4%) reported a decline in sales, 44.2% lowered their spending, and 26% claimed their supply chains had been impacted. CWEA found that most women-owned businesses saw a considerable decline in revenue during the pandemic. The majority of respondents (more than 50%) reported a loss in sales, with over 30% experiencing a drop of 20% to 50%. This loss in sales reduced revenue, making it unable to pay employee salaries. According to the poll, more over half of the female entrepreneurs had to lay off between one and five employees, while 12 respondents (15.6%) laid off between five and ten (CWEA, 2022).

2.6 Context of Women Entrepreneurs in Food Sector in Cambodia

Women own most businesses in Cambodia (61 percent). As a result, their contribution to the private sector development can hardly be overlooked. IFC shows that 90 percent of the SMEs managed by women were profitable last year. Most of them expect growth or at least stable development (84 percent) in the future, affirming that women are motivated and capable to establish and lead businesses. In the long-term, this will help them become independent and fulfill their aspirations (IFC, 2019).

Women food entrepreneurs in Cambodia confront many constraints to developing and sustaining their companies. Women are crucial to agriculture and food production, but systemic issues like lack of cash, business expertise, and cultural constraints continue. Cambodian patriarchy limits women's decision-making power, notably in financial matters, making it difficult for them to obtain loans or other capital for business expansion.

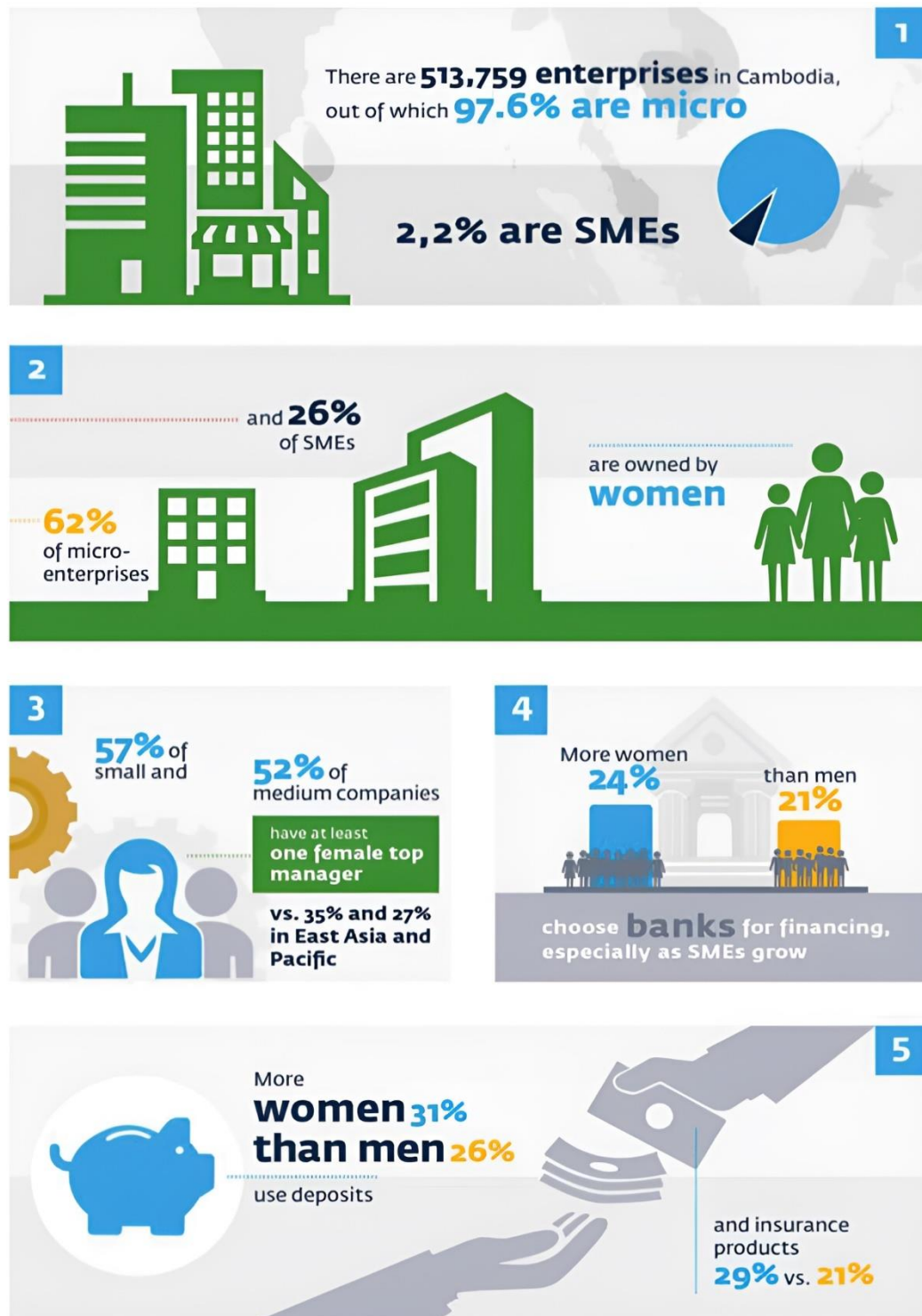


Figure 4. A glance of women-owned SMEs in Cambodia

Women entrepreneurs also lack formal education and business skills, which makes it harder for them to negotiate complicated market dynamics, manage supply chains, and compete in domestic and international marketplaces. Traditional gender norms require women to juggle domestic duties with their entrepreneurial pursuits,

further limiting their time and ability to build their businesses. These limits are most noticeable in the Labor -intensive food industry, which should follow food safety rules. Bureaucratic processes and social norms that restrict women from participating in official economic initiatives make government support programs difficult for women to access.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study applied a qualitative methodology because it offers unparalleled versatility, enabling us to directly collect rich and nuanced information from participants (J. A. Smith, 2024). This methodological approach allows for a deeper exploration of individual experiences and perceptions by providing insights that quantitative methods may overlook (Creswell. J.W. & Poth, 2023). Qualitative approach is crucial to capture the complexity of attitude, experiences, constraints, and detailed insights into the underlying motivation and subjective norms of addressing the constraints for scaling up business of women entrepreneurs (Jamali, 2009).

Moreover, qualitative methods afford flexibility in adapting to shifts in participants' perspectives and allowing for in-depth exploration of evolving attitudes towards content repurposing strategies (Guest et al., 2013). Through techniques such as interviews, we can gather detailed insights into the constraints, motivations, and perceptions of SMEs regarding content repurposing (Patton, 2015). The qualitative method enables a thorough examination of real-life experiences and perceptions, enhancing our comprehension of the effects of content of constraints on women entrepreneurs in Cambodia (Creswell. J.W. & Poth, 2023).

The research undertaken is interpretive in nature, capitalizing on in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs to explore their interpretations and perceptions of female entrepreneurship in Phnom Penh. Interpretive research is qualitative seeking to unearth collective frames of reference, or construed realities that guide the attribution of meaning and help account for how women create, enact or interpret the reality they inhabit (Patton, 2002, 2015). Ultimately, the qualitative method empowers us to conduct a comprehensive study of real-life experiences and understandings to enrich our understanding of the impact of content repurposing strategies on women entrepreneurs in Cambodia.

The qualitative method enhances our research's adaptability to individual opinion changes and allows for in-depth interviews with the many perspectives and growing attitudes of women entrepreneurs concerning their business constraints. This study performed an in-depth analysis of the real-life experiences and views of

small and medium-sized enterprises regarding the restrictions to business expansion, owing to the peculiarities of the qualitative technique. We formulated the questions for in-depth interviews with subject matter experts from several sectors of the food industry. This study chose to collect data using this technique because of its effectiveness in producing thorough information and attaining the desired outcomes for this research.

3.2 Research Method

Choosing the right research approach is a critical aspect of research to ensure that the results of the study are accurate, reliable, and coherent. The research design of this study is a qualitative approach, which we believe to be the most suitable method for this study to understand the complexity and perspectives deriving from women entrepreneurs.

This study applies the ‘Deductive Approach’ by finding reasoning from the particular to the general. If a causal relationship or link seems to be implied by a particular theory or case example, it might be true in many cases (Pellissier, 2008). A deductive approach is used to check if the relationship or link was obtained on more general circumstance. In other words, deductive approach is concerned with deducting conclusions from premises or propositions (Wilson, 2010). Deductive research investigates an established theory or phenomenon and assesses its relevance in particular contexts. The deductive approach closely follows logical progression, starting with a theoretical premise and leading to the formulation of a new hypothesis. This theory is subsequently examined through empirical observation, which will either validate or reject it (Snieder & Lerner, 2009).

According to Patton (2002) Patton, qualitative inquiry typically focuses in-depth on relatively small samples, selected purposefully (whereas quantitative methods focus on larger samples selected randomly). “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information rich cases to study in depth; Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (Patton, 2002).

This study carried out in-dept interviews with women entrepreneurs in the food sector to have a more thorough of their experiences. In-dept interviewed facilitated profound, personal connections, cultivating trust and promoting a

comprehensive comprehension of the local context. By using this qualitative approach, the study can obtain varied views, hence providing more comprehensive data and enhanced reliability of insights regarding the constraints and existing solutions encountered by women-led firms in the food industry.

Furthermore, this study conducted in-depth interviews with another 21 women entrepreneurs to capture their perspectives on the complicated restrictions in the food business, as well as their existing solutions to deal with such constraints.

3.3 Sampling Methods

A purposeful sample comprising ten women entrepreneurs was used for this research. According to Patton (2015), qualitative inquiry typically focuses in-depth on relatively small samples, selected purposefully (whereas quantitative methods focus on larger samples selected randomly). “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information rich cases to study in depth; Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (Patton, 2002).

While there are various approaches to sampling, factors including limited time, resources, and ease of access can play a pivotal role in shaping the decision. Generally, it is recommended to include **10-50 participants** in the research, depending on the nature of the study and its objectives. Nonetheless, there are no strict guidelines regarding the appropriate sample size, as it ultimately depends on the research question and the study’s specific context and requirements (Creswell, J.W. & Poth, 2023).

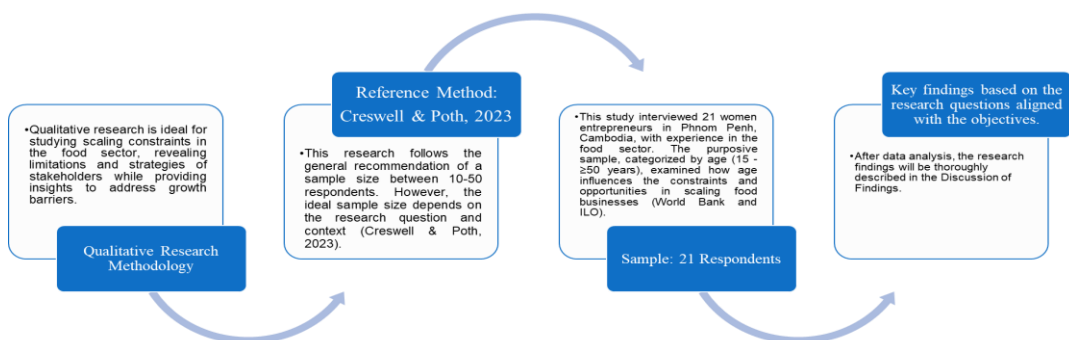


Figure 5. Qualitative Research approach

Source: (Business Research Methodology)

In the frame of this logic, this research selectively **included 21 women entrepreneurs** with relevant entrepreneurship experience in food sector in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The sampling was purposeful in the sense that only women entrepreneurs who had initiated new ventures and accumulated relevant experience with start-up businesses, accelerating business, and mature business were approached. In this qualitative interview study, we interviewed 21 women entrepreneurs, with participants categorized into age groups: 15-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, and ≥ 50 years old. These age ranges are critical for understanding how different stages of life influence the constraints and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs in scaling their businesses in the food sector. Previous research, including studies from the World Bank and the International Labour Organization (ILO), highlights that age significantly impacts entrepreneurial experiences.

As per Patton (2002) indicated that qualitative findings are judged by their substantive significance, which is determined in turn by how solid, coherent and consistent the evidence is, and how the findings increase or deepen our understanding of the phenomenon in question, and to what extent the findings are consistent with other knowledge. This study analyzed case study content and outlined through a systematic comparative process areas of substantive significance in relation to the main categories outlined as seen in Appendix. The findings are fleshed out in the next section in the aggregate, with the identities of the women entrepreneurs concealed for confidentiality reasons.

3.4 Instruments Used

To gather data for research questionnaires, qualitative data was collected through an in-depth interview with 21 women entrepreneurs' representatives in food sector in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The interview duration lasts from 30 to 60 minutes for each interviewee.

For this study, data collection was taken from September to October 2024. The interview was conducted through physical interviews and online conferences (Zoom and Google Meets) with the interviewees. The interviews were recorded by phone and laptop, and the recordings were then thoroughly transcribed verbatim. The interviews were conducted in Khmer and English due to some language constraints among the women entrepreneurs' representatives in food sector in

Phnom Penh, Cambodia. We reached out to the target interviewees by sending a request via social media, email, LinkedIn, and through the connection provided by the interviewees themselves. We also equip the message of invitation with our objectives for the study and research questionnaires to help them understand better about the purpose of the study.

In-dept interviews are a qualitative research method that combines elements of both structured and unstructured interviews. In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has a set of predetermined questions or topics to cover, but they also have the flexibility to explore additional avenues of inquiry as the conversation unfolds. This approach allows for a degree of standardization while still permitting the exploration of new or unexpected insights (Smith, 2018).

3.5 Data Collection

To gather empirical evidence and gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, our research employs a qualitative methodology, consisting of both primary and secondary research methods:

Primary Data Collection

- Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with women entrepreneurs in related to food sector in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. These interviews were designed to elicit in-depth information about their content repurposing strategies, experiences, constraints, and existing solutions towards their business. The interview guide was crafted to explore various aspects of content repurpose, including objectives, processes, outcomes, and the impact of external factors to their food sector business.
- Observations: This study conducted direct observation of business activities undertaken by women entrepreneurs, such as business operation, product distribution, and customer engagement efforts, which were provide real-time insights into the practical implementation of content constraints in food sector business. This approach allows for the observation of behaviors and practices in their business context of the food sector in Phnom Penh.

Secondary Data Collection

- Literature Review: We conducted research based on an extensive literature

review of academic literature and a substantial number of reports focusing on constraints in business for women, particularly within the context of food sector in Phnom Penh or similar environments in regional contexts. Furthermore, we also review the messages from social media metrics like Facebook, Telegram Channel, Website, YouTube, and Instagram, where Cambodian SMEs are active, for audience engagement data. Moreover, we also reviewed at the official business report and existing case studies relevant to our topic in the context of food sector and constraints for women entrepreneurs in Cambodia. We also reviewed the reports from industry associations, government reports, and research organizations in relevance to our study. With the abundance of reliable sources, we are assured that our data helps in identifying patterns, themes, and gaps in the existing body of knowledge.

- **Reviewed document**

According to literature review, this study examined the framework for scaling up businesses, including training, motivation, leadership, organizational culture, and working environment, to elucidate the narrative and identify the genuine constraints faced by women-led enterprises in Cambodia. However, the study is not confined to the aspects inside this framework; we permitted respondents to narrate their experiences in detail to comprehend the genuine constraints faced by women-led enterprises in the food sector, particularly in Cambodia.

While searching for research relevance for this study, we discovered that preliminary queries were made using the keywords **‘constraints’, ‘women’ entrepreneurs’, ‘SME’, ‘Food Sector’, ‘Cambodia’**. The initial aim was to explore only the theories that were relevant to the study. Upon in-depth examination and analysis, the relevance of four theories, namely resource-based views theory, technology acceptance theory, social learning theory, and innovation diffusion theory, was established.

Following an approximate number of **30 academic papers**, we identify four main theories in related to constraints facing women entrepreneurs in foods sector. The constraints from literature are mostly related to:

- Capacity, skill and knowledge gap in the food sector

- Lack of Financial literacy and capital investment
- Lack of awareness of policy and regulation
- Facing cultural constraint
- Facing family constraints

Although we focused on these limits, this study remains receptive to any responses from participants, as we conducted the in-depth interviews in a more open and detailed manner.

3.6 Data Analysis Tool

This research used Qualitative Content Analysis as the method for data analysis. Qualitative Content Analysis is a research methodology employed to examine and interpret non-numerical data in order to find patterns, themes, or concepts. The objective is to understand the profound meaning and context of the information received from in-dept interviews (Schreier, M. 2012).

Steps in Conducting Qualitative Content Analysis:

- **Formulate the Research Question**

The Research Question was structured in two sections. The first section consisted of closed-ended questions aimed at gathering personal information from the respondents (women entrepreneurs). The second section included open-ended questions, focusing on identifying the constraints faced and potential solutions, without providing guiding questions to minimize bias. *(The Research Question will be provided in the appendix.)*

- **Select the Sample**

A total of 21 women entrepreneurs were randomly selected from a pool of 257 women entrepreneurs who operate businesses in the food sector in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Sampling Table

Entrepreneurs under WE Act Project (Including Business Associations across 7 Geographic Areas: PNP, SR, BTB, KP, KEP, SHV, & KPC)	➔	Entrepreneurs in PNP	➔	Women Entrepreneurs in PNP	➔	Women Entrepreneurs in PNP in Food Sector	➔	Women Entrepreneurs in PNP in Food Sector randomly selected
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3277		2704		2648		257		21
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- **Familiarize with the Data**

The 21 women entrepreneurs were interviewed using a variety of methods, including face-to-face interviews, virtual Zoom sessions, Telegram communication, and any other effective and efficient means to collect data.

- **Coding the Data**

Identify key terms to categorize the types of businesses, their size, and specific sectors within the food industry, as well as the various types of constraints and solutions.

- **Interpret the Data:**

After coding, analyze the data to uncover meanings, relationships, and contexts. Present the results visually using diagrams and charts.

- **Report on the Findings:**

Present the findings in a manner that directly addresses the research question, using the results to highlight key themes and interpretations.

Regarding qualitative data from in-depth interviews with **21 entrepreneurs**, we recorded all the common restrictions and grouped them into a table. Following that, we evaluated the proportions of each constraint in relation to the overall answer from those 21 entrepreneurs to determine which were the most important constraints.

In qualitative analysis, researchers meticulously scrutinize raw data, often derived from sources like interviews or observations, to discern recurring patterns, themes, and underlying significance. This undertaking involves organizing the raw data into distinct categories or themes to capture its essence effectively. It relies on thorough inference and interpretation to ensure the credibility, accuracy, and validity of the findings. Employing a deductive approach in this content analysis study necessitates a structured or predetermined method. Therefore, this study established categories before delving into data analysis. Subsequently, we synthesis information

by show connections between the data and these predefined categories to authenticate and refine their theoretical foundations (Rev, 2024).

Following our research methodology, we employed thematic content analysis. This method is particularly suited for qualitative studies as it allows for the systematic organization, analysis, and interpretation of data. The process involves several key steps:

- ❖ **Transcription and Coding:** Initially, all interview recordings and observational notes were transcribed. The transcribed data was coded, with codes representing key concepts or ideas related to content repurposing strategies. In qualitative research, code plays a vital role in categorizing and structuring textual data. These codes, often keywords or phrases, act as a linguistic tool to classify and denote ideas, concepts, and occurrences found within interview transcripts. They served to organize the data systematically, aiding researchers in their analysis, interpretation, and validation of the information gathered (Sarantakos, 1998).

- ❖ **Theme Identification:** Once themes are formed, they will undergo further scrutiny to ensure coherence and relevance to the research objectives. This iterative process involves examining the relationships between themes and refining their definitions to accurately reflect the underlying data. Additionally, triangulation techniques may be employed, incorporating multiple data sources or perspectives to enhance the robustness of the identified themes (K. Smith, 2019).

- ❖ **Analysis and Interpretation:** The interpretation stage entailed recognizing patterns, themes, and both commonalities and discrepancies within the gathered data. Subsequently, the researcher scrutinized the transcribed interviews and codes to ensure the correctness and reliability of the hypotheses and results. This facilitated an assessment of the robustness of the research methodology and the validation of the research outcomes (Sarantakos, 1998). For our research, each theme were analyzed to extract meaningful insights into the content repurposing constraints of women entrappers within the food sector in Phnom Penh context. This phase involves a critical examination of the themes in relation to the research question and objectives.

❖ Documentation: Throughout the analysis process, we maintained detailed documentation of our methodological decisions, coding process, and interpretation of findings. This approach ensures transparency and methodological rigor.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

According to Creswell, J.W. (2012) “as the researchers’ anticipate data collectors, they need to respect the participants and sites for the research’’. According to (Bryman, 2007) the following ten points represent the most important principles related to ethical considerations in dissertations:

1. Research participants should not be subjected to harm in any ways whatsoever.
2. Respect for the dignity of research participants should be prioritized.
3. Full consent should be obtained from the participants prior to the study.
4. The protection of the privacy of research participants should be ensured.
5. Adequate level of confidentiality of the research data should be ensured.
6. The anonymity of individuals and organizations participating in the research should be ensured.
7. Any deception or exaggeration about the aims and objectives of the research should be avoided.
8. Affiliations in any form, sources of funding, as well as any possible conflicts of interest should be declared.
9. Any type of communication in relation to the research should be done with honesty and transparency.
10. Any type of misleading information, as well as representation of primary data findings in a biased way, should be avoided.

In the study the researcher-maintained objectivity, courtesy and high professional standards through scientific process and no falsification, alteration or misrepresentation of data for biased or other purposes. The study was conducted by considering ethical responsibility. This includes providing information to the respondents about the purpose of the study and the use of the information as well. The information obtained was held in strict confidentiality by the researcher. Respondents’ anonymity was kept so that participants would feel free and safe to express their ideas.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings about the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in the food sector in Phnom Penh. The findings are structured to respond to the research questions concerning women-led enterprises in the food sector, their contributions to business expansion, and the constraints that they encounter. The analysis is based on 21 interviews with female entrepreneurs, surveys from diverse stakeholders, and case studies of successful women-owned food enterprises. The results are organized to provide an overview of the status of women entrepreneurs in micro, small, and medium enterprises in Cambodia. This study highlighted the constraints faced by women in micro, small, and medium firms within the food sector, notably in Phnom Penh. Ultimately, we examine the current solutions addressing the issues faced by women entrepreneurs about business expansion.

4.2 Respondent Characteristics

This chapter delves into the characteristics of the 21 women entrepreneurs who participated in the study, all of whom are actively engaged in the food sector in Phnom Penh. These participants were selected from two key organizations— the Pact Cambodia and the Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Association— both of which play a crucial role in supporting women’s entrepreneurship across Cambodia. The selection process aimed to ensure diversity within the sample, encompassing entrepreneurs who operate small, family-run businesses as well as those who manage larger, more established food enterprises. This varied group offers a rich perspective on the different constraints and opportunities women entrepreneurs encounter as they attempt to scale their businesses in the food sector.

The study was designed to address three central research questions:

- (1) What are the characteristics of women entrepreneurs in food sectors?**
- (2) What are the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in scaling up their businesses in the food sector in Phnom Penh?**
- (3) What are the existing solutions to these constraints?**

To gather comprehensive insights into these issues, a qualitative research approach was used, with semi-structured interviews serving as the primary data collection

method. This interview format provided flexibility, allowing the researchers to explore the personal and professional experiences of each participant in depth. The interviews aimed to uncover the specific constraints that women face when trying to scale their food businesses, and to identify the solutions or support mechanisms that help them navigate these constraints.

Throughout the interviews, a wide range of issues were explored, including the difficulties related to access to finance, market competition, gender-based discrimination, and limited business networks or mentorship opportunities. These conversations also examined the support mechanisms available to women entrepreneurs, such as microfinance options, government policies, business training programs, and mentorship initiatives. By gathering detailed insights into how women entrepreneurs in the food sector overcome these constraints, the study aimed to provide a clearer picture of both the constraints they face and the solutions that can facilitate their business growth.

In addition to the interviews, the research also incorporated secondary data from reports, surveys, and case studies of successful women-owned food businesses in Phnom Penh. These case studies provided concrete examples of women who have successfully scaled their businesses despite the constraints. By examining these examples, the research offered practical insights into strategies that have worked for other women entrepreneurs and could potentially serve as models for others in the sector.

The 21 women entrepreneurs who took part in this study represent a diverse cross-section of Phnom Penh's food sector, each with their own set of experiences and viewpoints. However, all respondents have the same goal: to expand and scale their firms in a difficult business environment. The group's diversity allowed the study to capture a variety of techniques and solutions used to overcome scaling constraints. Through a combination of interviews and case studies, the research gives a detailed knowledge of the limits that women entrepreneurs confront in the food sector, as well as the effective solutions that are assisting them in addressing these issues.

In this qualitative interview study, we interviewed 21 women entrepreneurs, with participants categorized into age groups: 15-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, and ≥ 50 years old. These age ranges are critical for understanding how different stages of life

influence the constraints and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs in scaling their businesses in the food sector. Previous research, including studies from the World Bank and the International Labour Organization (ILO), highlights that age significantly impacts entrepreneurial experiences. Younger women (15-19, 20-29) may face constraints such as limited access to capital, lack of experience, and societal expectations, while women in their 30s and 40s often contend with balancing family responsibilities and business growth. Older entrepreneurs (≥ 50) may experience difficulties related to technological access, health issues, or age-related biases. By grouping participants into these distinct age categories, the study aims to better identify specific constraints faced at different life stages, offering more targeted insights and recommendations for supporting women entrepreneurs in the food sector. This approach enables a more comprehensive knowledge of how age intersects with gender and business constraints, resulting in more effective solutions for overcoming constraints to scale up business.

Table 1. Respondents' Characteristics of Women Entrepreneurs in Food Sector

No.	Gender	Age	Education	SMEs Size	SMEs Food Industry	SMEs Business Types
R1	F	30-39	Master's degree	Small-size enterprise	Bakery	Retails
R2	F	30-39	Master's degree	Small-size enterprise	Rice Miller	Wholesale
R3	F	30-39	High School	Small-size enterprise	Food Supplements	Retails
R4	F	40-49	Bachelor's degree	Medium-size enterprise	Manufacturing	Wholesale
R5	F	40-49	Bachelor's degree	Small-size enterprise	Grocery Store	Retails
R6	F	40-49	Bachelor's degree	Micro-size enterprise	Grocery Online Store	Retails

R7	F	40-49	Master's degree	Small-size enterprise	Grocery Store	Wholesale
R8	F	40-49	Bachelor's degree	Small-size enterprise	Manufacturing	Retails & Wholesale
R9	F	40-49	Bachelor's degree	Micro-size enterprise	Grocery Online Store	Retails
R10	F	30-39	Master's degree	Small-size enterprise	Cafes and Coffee Shops	Retails
R11	F	30-39	Bachelor's degree	Micro-size enterprise	Cafes and Coffee Shops	Retails
R12	F	40-49	High School	Small-size enterprise	Restaurant	Retails
R13	F	40-49	Bachelor's degree	Small-size enterprise	Drinking Water Machine Supply	Retails & Wholesale
R14	F	40-49	Bachelor's degree	Medium-size enterprise	Gas and Stove Supply	Retails & Wholesale
R15	F	30-39	Master's degree	Small-size enterprise	Cafes and Coffee Shops	Retails
R16	F	>50	Primary School	Micro-size enterprise	Restaurant	Retails
R17	F	20-29	Bachelor's degree	Small-size enterprise	Bakery	Retails
R18	F	30-39	Master's degree	Small-size enterprise	Restaurant	Retails
R19	F	30-39	Bachelor's degree	Micro-size enterprise	Bakery	Retails
R20	F	40-49	Bachelor's degree	Small-size enterprise	Manufacturing	Retails & Wholesale
R21	F	30-39	Master's degree	Medium-size enterprise	Grocery Store	Retails & Wholesale

4.3 Findings RQ1: Characteristics of Women Entrepreneurs in Food Sector

Through the respondent characteristics demonstrated in (Table 1) which answer the interview questions (question 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) of the 21 interviews questions for women entrepreneurs were stated in (Appendix I). The finding allowed researchers able to have a better understanding of each women entrepreneur as the following:

The key finding from interviews with 21 women entrepreneurs in Phnom Penh's food sector indicated a varied array of experiences and business methods. Among the participants, 14 out of 21 were aged between 30 and 49, indicating a significant concentration of entrepreneurs in mid-life stages. Educational attainment was significantly elevated, with numerous individuals possessing at least a bachelor's degree and some holding master's degrees. The majority of these women were running small enterprises, but a minority were overseeing micro and medium-sized enterprises.

A substantial number of entrepreneurs engaged in retail, with cafes, bakeries, and grocery stores being the predominant business categories. Others were involved in wholesale and industrial activities. Numerous entrepreneurs have diversified into online retail and wholesale distribution, indicating a tendency towards digital expansion alongside conventional brick-and-mortar enterprises.

The food sector in Phnom Penh, primarily led by women entrepreneurs, is marked by a robust entrepreneurial ethos, a variety of business models, and an emphasis on small-scale, localized enterprises. This analysis of the diverse landscape of food enterprises highlights how women in the food sector are utilizing their education and expertise to excel in several areas, ranging from physical cafés to the growing field of online food retail and wholesale distribution.

4.4 Findings RQ2: Constraints of Women Entrepreneurs to Scale Up Their Business in Food Sector

Question:

What are the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in scaling up their businesses in the food sector in Phnom Penh?

Answer Finding:

The Constraints of Women Entrepreneurs in Food Sector in Phnom Penh represent as bellow:

The qualitative interviews with 21 entrepreneurs reveal a range of constraints that hinder their business growth and sustainability. **Financial constraints** are particularly prominent, with **11 respondents** citing a lack of capital, and **10** mentioning high interest rates as significant constraints. Many entrepreneurs also face limitations in **business management skills** (7 respondents) and **technical expertise**, particularly in the food sector, with 7 entrepreneurs noting gaps in food safety and quality standards. **Market access** issues were highlighted by **12 respondents**, who struggle to reach wider markets, and **11** who lack competitive strategies. Related resources constraints are also common, with **11 entrepreneurs** reporting difficulty in attracting skilled staff and **12** identifying a lack of capital investment. Pricing constraints were also prevalent, with **10 respondents** struggling with market research and **9** underpricing their products. Additionally, **9 entrepreneurs** highlighted difficulties in accessing modern equipment and reliable suppliers, and **9** reported issues with supply chain management. Institutional constraints, including a lack of awareness of government support, were mentioned by **9 respondents**, while social and cultural factors such as **gender bias** and **limited networking** opportunities further compounded constraints for some. Addressing these multifaceted issues will require targeted solutions, such as improved access to capital, enhanced training, and better market linkages.

Table 2. Summary the constraints of women entrepreneurs in food sectors from qualitative interviews

No.	Constraints	Sub-Constraints	N	%
1	Financial constraints	A. Lack of capital	11	52%
		B. Limited financial knowledge	3	14%
		C. Limited knowledge to manage cash flow	2	10%
		D. Limited access to credit	4	19%
		E. Cannot afford the high interest rates	10	48%

		F. Lack of awareness of loan information	3	14%
		G. Fear and limited to take loan	11	52%
2	Lack of skill in business management	Lack of skill in business management	7	33%
3	Lack of technical and operational skills	A. Limited technical skills in the food sector	7	33%
		B. Inadequate infrastructure (location and equipment)	7	33%
		C. Less understanding of food safety and quality standards	6	29%
		D. Limited access to technology in the food sector	8	38%
		E. Lack of product innovative and development skill	7	33%
4	Lack of ability to access market	A. Limited market knowledge	9	43%
		B. Difficult in reaching wider markets	12	57%
		C. Lack of skill of branding and marketing promotion	8	38%
		D. Lack of strategies for dealing with competitors	11	52%
5	Lack of resources	A. Lack of staff	7	33%
		B. Lack of skilled employee	11	52%
		C. Limited resource management knowledge	9	43%
		D. Limited capacity to recruit	7	33%
		E. Lack of capital investment	12	57%
6	Poor pricing strategies for product	A. Lack of skill in market research	10	48%
		B. Costing mismanagement	5	24%

		C. Undervaluation of products (pricing below market value and lack of value addition)	9	43%
		D. Overpricing due to inefficiencies (high operation costs and low economies of scale)	6	29%
		E. Not able to adapt with the price instability (seasonal fluctuations and lack of price regulation)	10	48%
		F. Limited pricing strategies	9	43%
7	Lack of modern equipment and machinery	A. Limited access to information of the finding place or trusted machinery seller	9	43%
		B. Limited access to connect with abroad supplier	9	43%
		C. Limited to get suppliers in local	8	38%
8	Institutional and policy constraints	A. Not aware of regulatory constraints	7	33%
		B. Limited access to government schemes (government trend, policy, how to get support from government)	9	43%
9	Limited supply chain management	Limited supply chain management	9	43%
10	Social and cultural constraints	A. Gender bias	7	33%
		B. Limited networking opportunities	4	19%
		C. Lack of family support	7	33%

4.4.1 Financial Constraints

Female entrepreneurs in Phnom Penh's food industry encounter many financial limitations that significantly hinder their capacity to expand their enterprises. A primary constraint is the deficiency of capital, with more than half of the respondents (11 entrepreneurs, or 52%) identifying it as a substantial obstacle. The absence of cash hinders their ability to manage daily operations, much less allocating resources for expansion, including equipment, personnel, or marketing initiatives. Alongside cash deficiencies, numerous entrepreneurs encounter constraints due to insufficient financial acumen, especially in domains such as budgeting and financial forecasting. Three respondents (14%) indicated their deficiency in financial management skills, which may result in ineffective resource allocation and suboptimal long-term planning. Furthermore, inadequate cash flow management (2 respondents, or 10%) intensifies these constraints, frequently resulting in interruptions to business operations, especially when funds are required for critical expenses such as supplier payments or payroll.

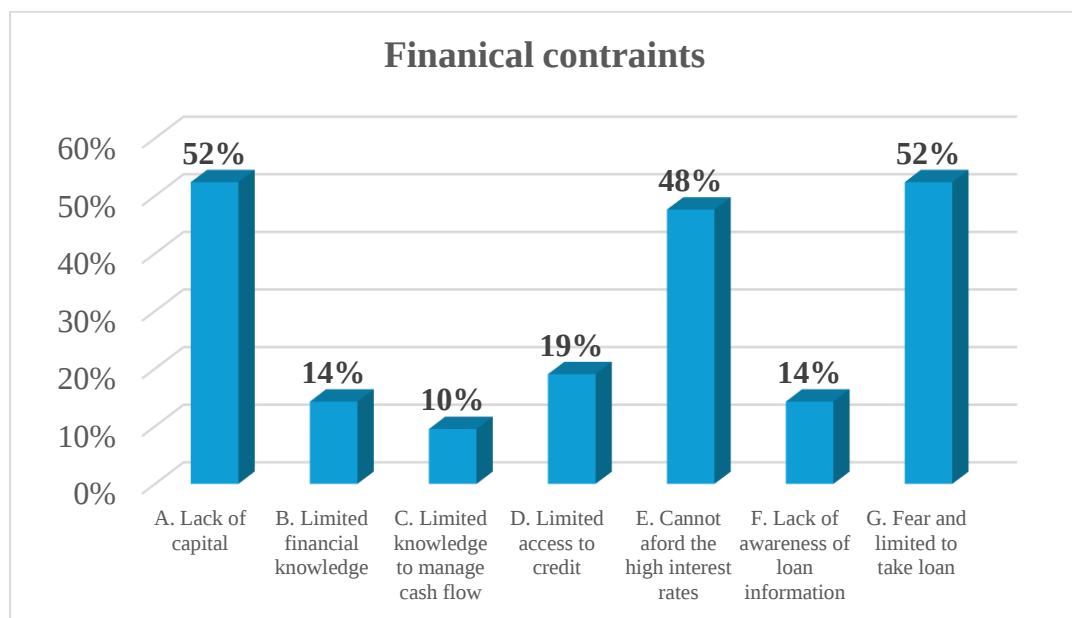


Figure 6. Financial constraints

Access to credit constitutes a substantial constraint. Four entrepreneurs (19%) indicated constraints in obtaining loans, whilst 10 respondents (48%) identified elevated interest rates as a further impediment, rendering loans unappealing or financially unfeasible. A subset of businesses remains uninformed

about the credit possibilities accessible to them (3 respondents, or 14%), while others harbor a phobia of incurring debt (11 respondents, or 52%), prompting them to eschew external financing entirely. Financial constraints, including insufficient money, inadequate financial.

4.4.2 Lack of Skill in Business Management

Among 21 women entrepreneurs interviewed in Phnom Penh's food sector, only 7 respondents (33%) mentioned a lack of business management skills as their limitation. This research indicates a deficiency in knowledge regarding operations, strategic planning, and human resource management, which constrains growth potential.

Table 3. Constraint in lack of skill in business management

Constraints	N	%
Lack of skill in business management	7	33%

4.4.3 Lack of Technical and Operational Skills

Female entrepreneurs in Phnom Penh's food industry face substantial constraints that hinder their capacity to expand their enterprises. A significant constraint is the lack of technical knowledge in essential areas of the food sector, including food processing, safety, and compliance with quality requirements. The deficiency in experience, noted by 7 entrepreneurs (33%), adversely affects product quality and safety, jeopardizing customer trust and regulatory compliance. Moreover, insufficient infrastructure—characterized by poor site selection and antiquated equipment—impairs operational efficiency and capacity, a concern identified by 7 respondents (33%). Access to contemporary technology is a significant constraint for 8 entrepreneurs (38%), limiting their capacity to optimize manufacturing processes, augment distribution networks, or maintain competitiveness in a progressively technology-oriented market. Finally, numerous entrepreneurs indicate a deficiency in abilities related to product invention and development (7 mentions or 33%), which constrains their capacity to diversify offers

or respond to evolving consumer expectations, hence hindering business growth and market competitiveness. The interrelated technical and operational issues pose substantial constraints to corporate expansion.

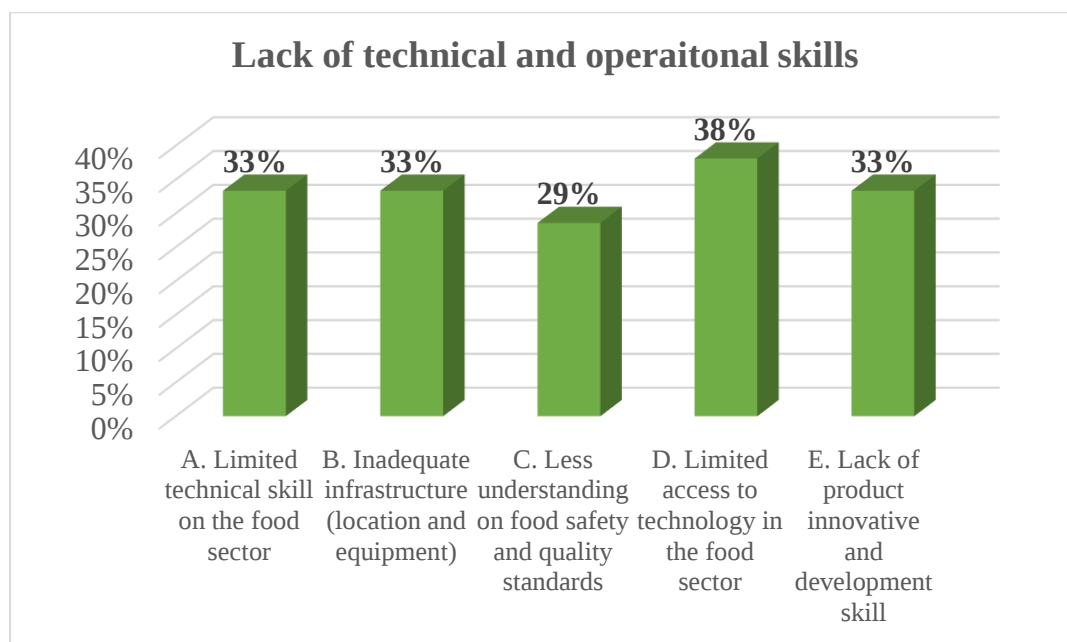


Figure 7. Constraint in lack of technical and operational skills

4.4.4 Lack of Ability of Access to Market

Women entrepreneurs in Phnom Penh's food sector encountered a substantial obstacle in reaching larger and more lucrative markets, as shown by interviews with 21 individuals, which hindered their business expansion. This constraint stemmed from multiple interrelated sources. A significant proportion of entrepreneurs (9 out of 21 respondents or 43%) exhibited insufficient market knowledge, encompassing a lack of comprehension regarding developing trends, customer preferences, and demand dynamics. This information of constraint hindered their ability to foresee market fluctuations, strategies for future expansion, or modify their products to align with evolving consumer demands. Secondly, more than half of the entrepreneurs (12 out of 21 or 57%) encountered difficulties in accessing broader markets beyond their local clientele, contending with logistical constraints and elevated distribution costs. The absence of infrastructure and resources for national or international expansion restricted numerous firms to their local towns. A substantial proportion (8 mentions or 38%) recognized the lack of branding and marketing competence, which impeded

their capacity to distinguish their products and promote them successfully to a broader audience. In the absence of definitive marketing strategy or a distinct brand identity, entrepreneurs struggled to differentiate in a competitive marketplace. Ultimately, 11 participants (52%) indicated an absence of competitive strategy, rendering them susceptible to competition. Devoid of resources for market research or the formulation of effective positioning strategies, these entrepreneurs faced constraints in establishing a sustained competitive advantage. The interplay of these factors—restricted market knowledge, logistical limitations, insufficient marketing expertise, and the lack of a competitive strategy—constituted a significant obstacle to growth. To address these issues, there is a distinct necessity for focused assistance in market research, marketing education, and strategic planning, which might empower small entrepreneurs to broaden their reach and efficiently develop their enterprises.

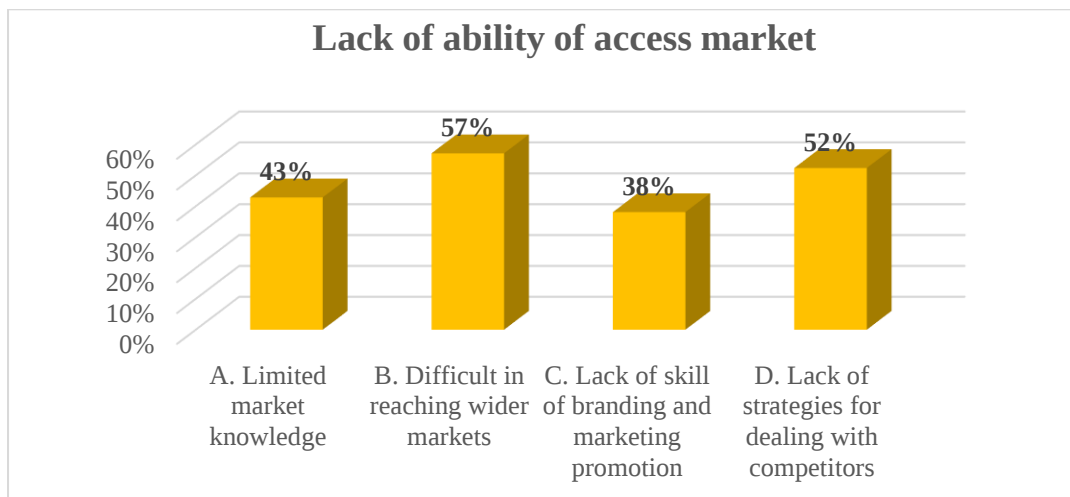


Figure 8. Constraint in lack of ability of access market

4.4.5 Lack of Resources

The lack of resources that hinders business scaling efforts. A recurrent theme is the shortage of skilled Labor, with 11 respondents (52%) highlighting the difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified employees. This shortage impedes operational efficiency and growth potential, as businesses are unable to meet the increasing demands of expansion. Additionally, 7 participants (33%) noted a general lack of staff, often exacerbated by financial limitations, which restricts the ability to increase workforce capacity. Beyond human resources, several entrepreneurs (9

mentions or 43%) expressed constraints related to poor resource management knowledge, underscoring the difficulty in effectively allocating capital, time, and Labor to maximize business potential. Furthermore, 7 women entrepreneurs (33%) reported struggles with the limited capacity to recruit, owing to both financial constraints and the absence of effective recruitment networks. Finally, the most prominent constraints, cited by 12 participants (57%), was the insufficient access to capital investment, which directly impedes their ability to upgrade infrastructure, invest in technology, or expand operations, ultimately stalling business growth and scalability. These findings collectively highlight a multifaceted resource gap that significantly constrains women entrepreneurs in their efforts to scale up businesses in the food sector.

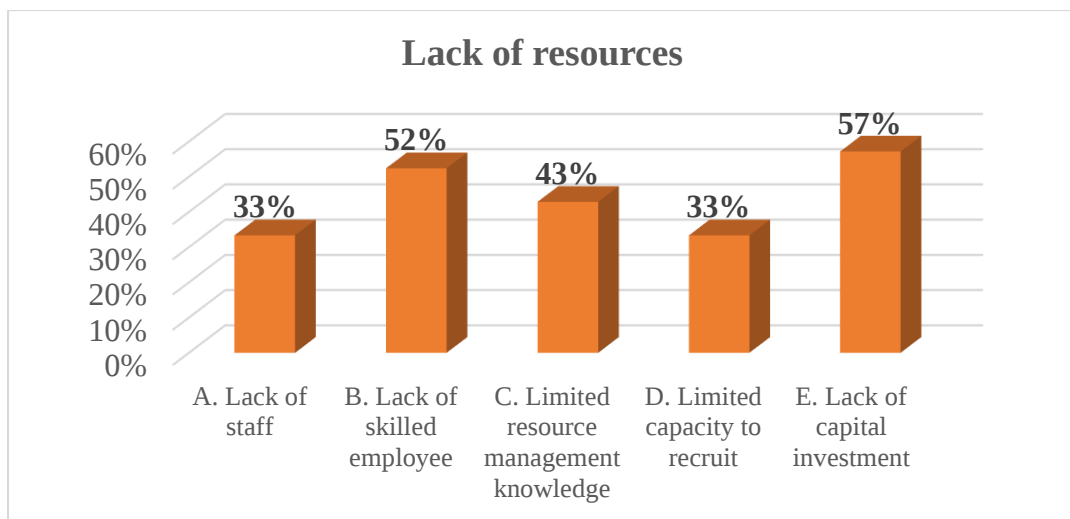


Figure 9. Constraint in lack of resources

4.4.6 Poor Pricing Strategies for a Product

Pricing strategies are crucial for the success and expansion of enterprises, particularly for female entrepreneurs in the food industry. An equitable pricing strategy guarantees profitability and financial viability by including expenses and producing income. It aids in strategically positioning a business inside the market, balancing the necessity of attracting customers while maintaining product value. Pricing influences customer perceptions of quality, and incorrect pricing can damage a brand's reputation. Furthermore, an appropriate pricing strategy facilitates demand management, sales optimization, and adaptation to market fluctuations, including

variable prices or seasonal demand. By comprehending manufacturing expenses and profit margins, entrepreneurs might employ pricing strategies such as bundling or discounting to enhance profitability. Ultimately, good pricing facilitates corporate growth and scalability by attracting additional customers while preserving financial stability.

Consequently, ineffective pricing strategies for products emerged as significant restrictions in the food sector, as revealed via qualitative interviews with 21 women entrepreneurs. A significant concern noted by 10 participants (48%) was the deficiency of market research abilities, resulting in suboptimal pricing decisions that fail to correspond with market demands or rival pricing. A significant number of entrepreneurs face constraints related to cost mismanagement, as reported by 5 participants (24%), leading to erroneous production cost calculations and unsustainable pricing strategies that diminish profitability.

Nine women entrepreneurs (43%) acknowledged undervaluing their items, frequently stemming from a misunderstanding of their product's actual worth or the pressure to entice clients, resulting in prices insufficient to cover costs or yield substantial profit. In contrast, 6 women entrepreneurs (29%) encountered the issue of overpricing, frequently resulting from operational inefficiencies or elevated expenses that compelled them to establish excessively high rates, so deterring prospective clients. A prevalent obstacle is the difficulty in adjusting to price volatility, as 10 women (48%) indicated that frequent price swings, especially owing to seasonal variations or market instability, hinder the maintenance of constant and competitive pricing. Nine participants (43%) reported having constrained pricing strategies, citing insufficient awareness of tactics such as discounting or bundling, which further limits their capacity to maximize revenue. These issues demonstrate that inadequately organized pricing methods, stemming from internal mismanagement and external market influences, severely restrict the scalability and profitability of women-led food enterprises in Phnom Penh.

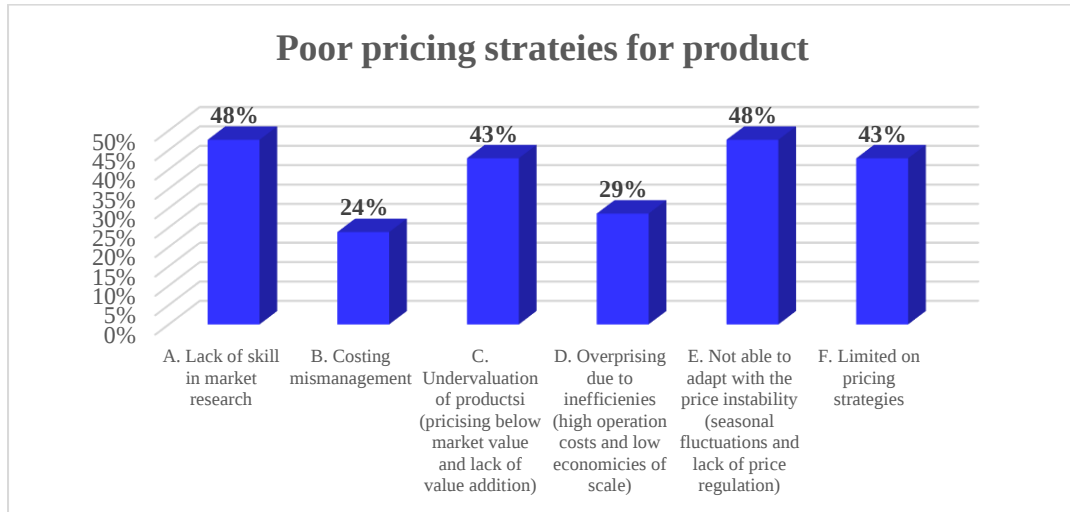


Figure 10. Constrain in poor pricing strategies for a product

4.4.7 Lack of Modern Equipment and Machinery

The absence of modern equipment and machinery constitutes a major obstacle to expanding their enterprises. A key difficulty, identified by 9 participants (43%), is restricted access to dependable machinery providers, as numerous entrepreneurs encounter difficulties in locating trusted suppliers or cost-effective equipment solutions. The deficiency of reliable suppliers obstructs their capacity to enhance or augment production capacities. Nine women (43%) also indicated constraints in establishing connections with overseas suppliers, so limiting them access to superior or more economical machinery, which is crucial for enhancing operational efficiency and product quality. Additionally, 8 participants (38%) noted the lack of local providers, which exacerbates the procurement of essential equipment and heightens dependence on inferior alternatives or expensive imports. The limitations on accessing contemporary, efficient machinery and technology not only restrict production capacity but also impede entrepreneurs' competitiveness, innovation, and effective business scaling.

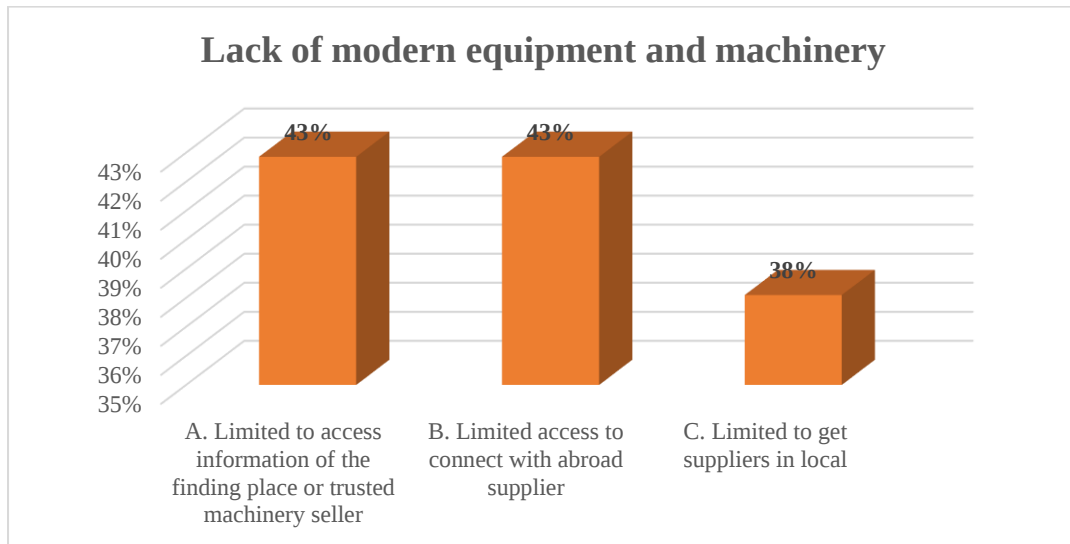


Figure 11. Constrain in lack of modern equipment and machinery

4.4.8 Institutional and Policy Constraints

Institutional and policy constraints pose significant constraint for entrepreneurs, especially women in the food sector, as they directly affect business growth and sustainability. Regulatory constraints, including intricate or ambiguous regulatory stipulations, can generate uncertainty and result in compliance risks, penalties, or operational delays. Moreover, restricted access to government support programs—stemming from unawareness, bureaucratic constraints, or inadequate communication—impedes entrepreneurs' capacity to obtain finance, training, and resources essential for fostering innovation and growth. These limits hinder businesses from fully exploiting opportunities, impeding growth and complicating the ability of entrepreneurs to scale effectively in a competitive market. In the absence of a robust institutional structure, enterprises may find it challenging to maneuver within the regulatory environment, impeding their sustained success.

On the other hand, a significant limitation noted by 7 individuals (33%) is the insufficient awareness of regulatory limits. Numerous entrepreneurs lack familiarity with the requisite legal frameworks and laws, resulting in compliance difficulties, penalties, or operational interruptions. The deficiency of regulatory understanding restricts their capacity to fully exploit prospects and expand their enterprises within legal confines. Nine women (43%) reported restricted access to government programs intended to assist small enterprises. Due to insufficient information, bureaucratic constraints, or ineffective outreach, numerous

entrepreneurs remain oblivious to existing government programs or encounter constraints in securing help. The absence of financial aid, training, or policy support further inhibits their capacity to expand, innovate, or invest in business enhancements. Collectively, these institutional and governmental impediments establish considerable constraints, depriving several women entrepreneurs of the resources or guidance necessary to navigate regulatory constraints and grow their enterprises.

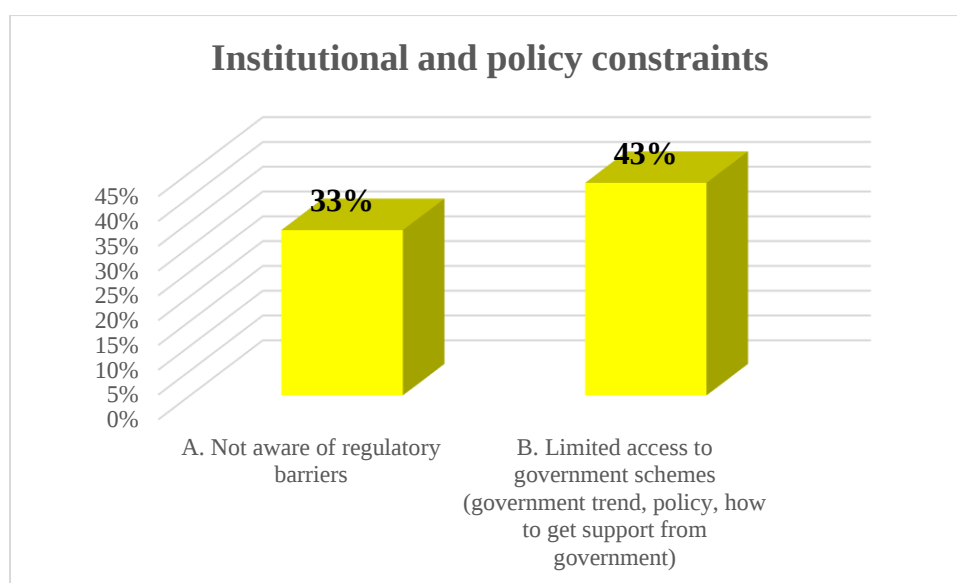


Figure 12. Constraint in lack of awareness on institutional and policy

4.4.9 Limited Supply Chain Management

The constrained supply chain management capabilities recognised by 9 women entrepreneurs (43%) in Phnom Penh's food sector constitute a substantial impediment to their business expansion. Factors like insufficient knowledge, unreliable suppliers, price volatility, logistical constraints, and poor technology support contributed to delays, inefficiencies, and elevated prices. These constraints hindered entrepreneurs from scaling companies, reliably meeting client demand, and sustaining profitability. Resolving these difficulties necessitates focused assistance in supply chain education, enhanced access to dependable suppliers, logistical strategies, and technology to facilitate superior administration of resources and operations. Improving supply chain efficiency would not only decrease costs but also enable these women entrepreneurs to expand their businesses with increased confidence and sustainability.

Table 4. Constraint in limited supply chain

Constraints	N	%
Limited supply chain management	9	43%

4.4.10 Social and Cultural Constraints

A significant constraint encountered by numerous women entrepreneurs in the food industry was gender bias, with 7 women (33%) indicating constraints in obtaining resources, financing, and market prospects as a result of entrenched gender roles. Furthermore, restricted networking opportunities were an obstacle for 4 women (19%), especially those from rural regions, who encountered difficulties in locating professional networks or mentorship to facilitate their development. A notable limitation was the absence of familial support, identified by 7 participants (33%), wherein inadequate emotional or financial assistance from family members hindered the maintenance or growth of their enterprises. The combined social and cultural aspects create a formidable environment for women entrepreneurs aiming to expand their food enterprises in Phnom Penh, limiting their access to vital resources and growth prospects.

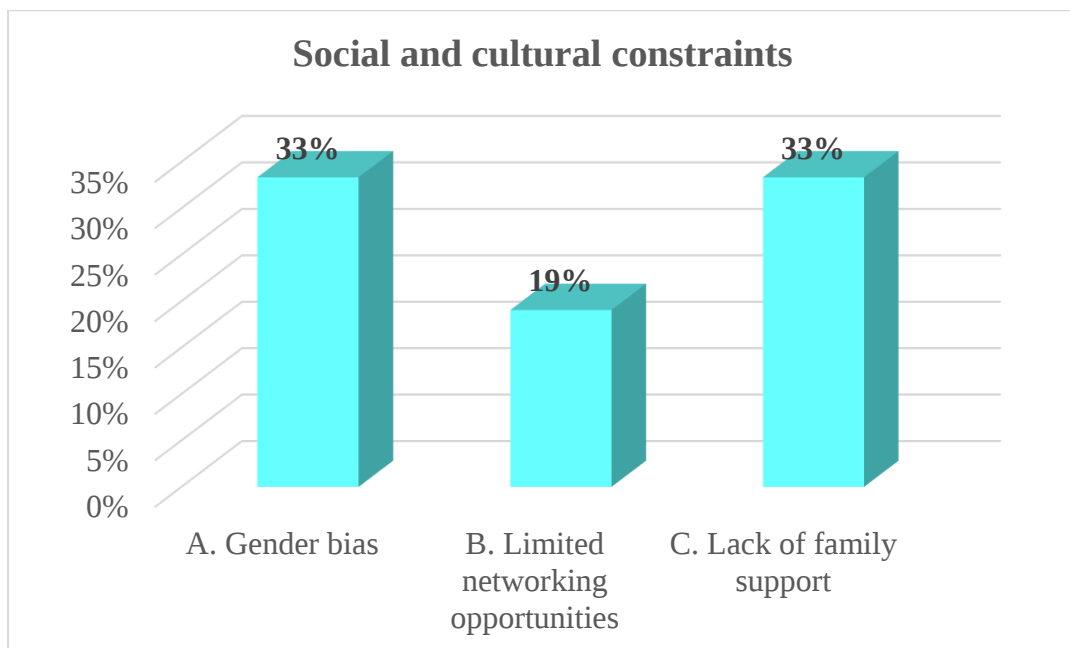


Figure 13. Constraint in social and culture

4.5 Findings RQ3: Existing Solutions to Constraints

Question:

What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?

Answer Finding:

To resolve the limits listed above (from #1 to #8), respondents used a variety of approaches, including obtaining grants and investors, seeking expert assistance, and developing thorough company growth plans to alleviate loan-related concerns. They also stressed the importance of financial training, such as cash flow and debt management, as well as regular financial reporting, in order to improve loan sourcing. Businesses also focused on negotiating better terms with suppliers, participating in management and technical training programs, and using the help of experienced entrepreneurs. New market entry methods include competitive analysis, product value enhancement, and the use of digital sales channels. They also prioritised client connections, evaluated cooperative sales alliances, and collaborated with business associations to broaden their networks and resources.

Respondents provided no answers to limitations #9 and #10. Aside from the highlighted solutions above, they provided other specific solutions that were quite fascinating. "When I met the problems, I tried to figure out to understand about the issues, and then I tried solve problems by my own again and again until I knew the way to do it.

Table 5. Summary the existing solutions to the main constraints of women entrepreneurs in food sector in Phnom Penh

No.	Constraints	Solutions
1	Financial constraints	▪ Looked for the source of grant and investor ▪ Seeking expertise to advise ▪ Prepared clear plans of business scaling before taking loan to reduce the fears ▪ Tried to save more money and tried to sale more to scale up the business

		▪ Joined training in cash flow management and debt management ▪ Loaned from the bank and accessible sources of funds such as borrowing from family and friends ▪ Tried to do regularly financial report for sourcing of loan credit ▪ Studies MFIs/Banks carefully and compare MFIs/Banks to another MFIs/Banks to search for the best conditions of loans ▪ Reduce experiences and put more KPI to staff ▪ Negotiated existing suppliers to supply more raw materials with long-term payment
2	Lack of skill in business management	▪ Joined training on Business Management Course ▪ Asked for advice from other entrepreneurs for their experiences ▪ Learned more on soft skills
3	Lack of technical and operational skills	▪ Tried to learn by failing experiences ▪ Joined specific training such as Packing design, Food safety food training, and Inventory control...etc. ▪ Tried to have self-learning by trying to create new recipes or product development to get more revenues ▪ Joined program supports entrepreneurs such as Mekong Institute program or TVET
4	Lack of ability to access market	▪ Sought support from other entrepreneurs who have had

		experiences to share their best practices ▪ Looking for source of grant and when got it recruited outsource service to do marketing ▪ Studied about the competitor (Price, taste, quality, raw materials), after studying and changed and adding value and adjust on the price and more focus on own value added ▪ Learned more effective ways to sell products through online and digital, and social medias
5	Lack of resources	▪ Using outsources of accounting & payroll service ▪ Having skilled people, rather than recruiting staff, she trained her family members to be skilled people to support her business ▪ Looked for cooperated business partners that played a role as an agency to sale her products in that agencies' channels
6	Poor pricing strategies for product	▪ Tried to keep good at customer relationships to seek their support and their advice on reasonable price to fit with markets ▪ Tried to put pricing as same as competitors
7	Lack of modern equipment and machinery	▪ Learned more how to connect and order from abroad suppliers
8	Institutional and policy constraints	▪ Tried to join business association to learn, to get connection, to link to relevant influencers or relevant stakeholders to access what we were shortage or missed conducted

9	Limited supply chain management	▪ NA
10	Social and cultural constraints	▪ NA

4.6 Discussions of the Findings

The qualitative interviews with 21 women entrepreneurs in the food sector in Phnom Penh revealed several key constraints that hinder their business growth. These constraints spanned across financial, managerial, technical, operational, and cultural areas. Here is a summary of the constraints, solutions proposed by the entrepreneurs, and the overarching recommendations for overcoming them:

4.6.1 Solution on Financial Constraints:

Constraints: Many women entrepreneurs struggle with insufficient capital, high interest rates, and lack of access to credit. Poor financial literacy (budgeting, cash flow management) and a fear of debt further restrict their ability to scale.

Solutions: Entrepreneurs pursued grants and investors, formulated explicit business expansion strategies, engaged in financial management training, and sought improved lending conditions. Engaging with fellow businesses for counsel and consistently generating financial reports were further techniques for mitigating these constraints.

4.6.2 Solution to Lack of Business Management Skills:

Constraints: Limited knowledge in areas like operations, strategic planning, and human resource management hindered business growth.

Solutions: Entrepreneurs attended business management courses, sought mentorship from other entrepreneurs, and focused on improving soft skills.

4.6.3 Solution to Lack of Technical and Operational Skills:

Constraints: Entrepreneurs faced gaps in technical knowledge related to food safety, quality standards, and product innovation. Inadequate infrastructure and outdated equipment further impacted their ability to scale.

Solutions: They engaged in technical training programs (e.g., food safety, packaging design), learned from trial and error, and sought support from programs like Mekong Institute or TVET to gain specific operational skills.

4.6.4 Solution to Lack of Market Access:

Constraints: Limited knowledge of market trends, customer preferences, and competition, as well as logistical constraints, made it hard to reach broader markets. Many lack effective marketing strategies.

Solutions: Entrepreneurs studied competitors, enhanced their product value, and focused on digital marketing through online platforms and social media. Some also sought grants to outsource marketing efforts and gain insights from more experienced entrepreneurs.

4.6.5 Solution to Lack of Resources:

Constraints: Difficulty in attracting skilled Labor, inadequate staffing, and insufficient access to capital for expansion were significant constraints.

Solutions: Entrepreneurs trained family members or outsourced services (e.g., accounting and payroll). They also sought business partnerships to help distribute their products and access resources.

4.6.6 Solution to Poor Pricing Strategies:

Constraints: Inadequate pricing strategies were caused by poor market research, mismanagement of production costs, and a tendency to undervalue products to attract customers.

Solutions: Entrepreneurs solicited customer feedback on pricing, coordinated their prices with competition, and enhanced customer connections to alter prices accordingly.

4.6.7 Solution to Lack of Modern Equipment and Machinery:

Constraints: Limited access to reliable machinery suppliers hindered production capacity and operational efficiency.

Solutions: Entrepreneurs researched international suppliers, explored ways to import machinery, and worked on finding affordable options.

4.6.8 Solution to Institutional and Policy Constraints:

Constraints: Many entrepreneurs faced constraints due to unclear regulatory frameworks, lack of access to government support, and difficulty navigating the bureaucratic landscape.

Solutions: Joining business associations, networking with stakeholders, and seeking guidance on navigating regulations were ways entrepreneurs addressed these issues.

4.6.9 Solution to Limited Supply Chain Management:

Constraints: Poor supply chain management, unreliable suppliers, and logistical issues made it difficult for businesses to scale efficiently.

Solutions: No specific solutions were provided in the interviews, highlighting the need for targeted support in improving supply chain education, reliability, and logistical management.

4.6.10 Solution to Social and Cultural Constraints:

Constraints: Gender bias, limited networking opportunities, and lack of family support were significant constraints, particularly for women in the food sector.

Solutions: No specific solutions were provided for these constraints, but these cultural and social factors clearly affected the business environment for women entrepreneurs in Phnom Penh.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study on the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in scaling their businesses in the food sector in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, has provided valuable insights into both the constraints and existing solutions. Women entrepreneurs, particularly in the food sector, face a unique set of constraints that limit their capacity for growth and business expansion. These constraints include financial limitations, lack of business management skills, insufficient technical and operational knowledge, limited market access, and the constraints posed by social and cultural biases.

Despite the significant contributions of women entrepreneurs to Cambodia's economy, especially within the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector, the research highlights several critical constraints. Financial constraints were particularly prominent, as many women entrepreneurs struggled to access capital and credit, partly due to financial literacy gaps and limited collateral availability. Similarly, the lack of technical skills related to food safety, production standards, and innovation further restricted the ability to scale. Additionally, issues such as poor infrastructure, inadequate resources, and limited market access made it difficult for women entrepreneurs to compete at larger scales.

The ideas suggested by the participants exhibit resilience and ingenuity. Female entrepreneurs proactively pursued funding, networking opportunities, and mentorship to tackle financial and operational constraint. They participated in training programs—encompassing company management and technical skills training—to address knowledge deficiencies. Numerous entrepreneurs have adopted digital marketing and internet platforms to broaden their market reach and consumer base. Notwithstanding these initiatives, the research suggests that additional assistance is required in domains such as institutional policies, supply chain management, and cultural impediments to gender equality. The study's findings suggest that while women entrepreneurs in Phnom Penh have made progress in overcoming some constraints, there are still substantial gaps in both institutional support and social perceptions. Addressing these constraints will require not only the availability of more tailored financial services and business

management training but also the creation of a more inclusive and supportive environment that recognizes and mitigates the specific constraints faced by women entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, this research underscores the need for a multifaceted approach to supporting women in business. Policymakers, financial institutions, and development organizations should work together to create an ecosystem that facilitates better access to finance, reduces gender-based discrimination, and provides more robust mentoring and networking opportunities. Additionally, targeted interventions such as more accessible government programs, improved supply chain management training, and stronger partnerships between entrepreneurs and industry stakeholders can significantly enhance the potential for growth in women-owned food enterprises in Cambodia.

Ultimately, while women entrepreneurs in Phnom Penh continue to face significant constraints in scaling their businesses, the solutions they have devised demonstrate their potential for growth and sustainability. With more targeted support and recognition of their needs, these entrepreneurs can contribute even more substantially to the economic development of Cambodia.

5.2 Recommendation

The recommendation is based on 1) Research thesis topic, Problem Statement, 2) Objectives, and 3) Key findings from survey results of 21 respondents.

These are recommendations below:

5.2.1 Recommendations for Demand-Side (Women Entrepreneurs)

A. Enhance Financial Literacy and Business Planning

Solution: Many women entrepreneurs face difficulties in managing finances, accessing capital, and understanding loan terms. Improving financial literacy is key to navigating these constraints.

Recommendation: Engage in financial literacy initiatives to comprehend budgeting, cash flow management, and investment tactics. Entrepreneurs should prioritize the development of explicit, executable business plans that delineate growth objectives, financial forecasts, and risk management

protocols. This will facilitate the attraction of investors and the acquisition of finance under more favorable conditions.

Actionable Steps: Women entrepreneurs should join local workshops or mentorship programs offering financial training. Collaboration with microfinance institutions could provide both financial products and business training tailored to women's needs.

B. Develop Business Management and Technical Skills

Solution: Entrepreneurs often struggle with scaling due to gaps in business management skills and technical knowledge.

Recommendation: Engage in formal training or mentorship programs that focus on business operations, human resource management, and food safety. Also, consider attending industry-specific workshops that teach food safety, quality control, and innovation techniques.

Actionable Steps: Seek mentorship from experienced business leaders in the food sector and enroll in relevant courses or online learning platforms. Programs like **Mekong Institute** and **TVET** can provide specialized training in technical aspects of the food business.

C. Leverage Networking and Market Access

Solution: Limited market access and networking opportunities hinder growth prospects.

Recommendation: Women entrepreneurs should invest time in attending networking events, food trade fairs, and market expos. Building relationships with other entrepreneurs, suppliers, and customers can unlock new market opportunities.

Actionable Steps: Actively engage with organizations such as **Pact Cambodia** or the **Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Association (CWEA)**. These associations can help create connections with industry leaders, potential clients, and peers.

D. Improve Marketing and Digital Presence

Solution: Marketing and market access are significant constraints, especially in reaching a broader audience.

Recommendation: Focus on developing digital marketing strategies, including social media marketing, online stores, and digital advertising. This can significantly expand customer reach, particularly in the local and regional markets.

Actionable Steps: Entrepreneurs should start by building an online presence through social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) and e-commerce platforms. Joining local or regional digital marketing workshops can also help in improving marketing strategies.

E. Seeking Partnerships and Collaboration

Solution: Limited resources, including capital, skilled labor, and distribution networks, are common constraints for scaling.

Recommendation: Form partnerships with larger food distributors, other SMEs, or international businesses to help scale operations. Shared resources, joint marketing efforts, and distribution networks can reduce individual constraints.

Actionable Steps: Collaborate with local restaurants, grocery chains, or larger food businesses to distribute products. Join business networks that support collaboration between women entrepreneurs in Cambodia.

F. Advocate for Gender-Sensitive Policies and Support Networks

Solution: Gender bias, limited networking opportunities, and a lack of family support can undermine women's entrepreneurial efforts.

Recommendation: Women entrepreneurs should actively participate in advocacy for policies that address gender inequalities in the business environment. Joining women's business organizations can also provide mentorship and a support system.

Actionable Steps: Actively engage with groups like **CWEA** and international organizations that focus on women's entrepreneurship. These platforms can offer leadership development opportunities, policy advocacy, and gender-inclusive business networks.

5.2.2 Recommendations for Supply-Side (Governments, Donors, and Influencers)

A. Increase Access to Financing for Women Entrepreneurs

Solution: A major constraint for women entrepreneurs is the limited access to affordable finance, particularly for scaling their businesses.

Recommendation: Governments and donors should develop targeted financial products such as low-interest loans, grants, and venture capital specifically for women-owned businesses. They should also support programs that reduce collateral requirements for women entrepreneurs.

Actionable Steps: Partner with microfinance institutions and commercial banks to create financing products that are accessible to women in the food sector. Policies that encourage private investors to fund women-owned businesses should be promoted.

B. Provide Targeted Training and Capacity Building

Solution: Many women entrepreneurs face constraints due to lack of business management, technical, and operational skills.

Recommendation: Offer targeted training programs for women entrepreneurs in food-related technical skills (e.g., food safety, quality control) as well as business management (e.g., HR management, marketing, financial planning). These programs should be accessible and tailored to the unique needs of women entrepreneurs.

Actionable Steps: Governments and NGOs should invest in programs that provide free or subsidized training in both business and technical skills. Training institutions should be encouraged to offer flexible schedules and online training options to accommodate women with family obligations.

C. Creating Gender-Inclusive Business Policies and Regulations

Solution: Women entrepreneurs face constraints navigating regulatory environments, with many struggling to access government support.

Recommendation: Implement gender-sensitive business policies that encourage women's participation in the food sector, streamline the registration process, and provide incentives for women-owned businesses.

Actionable Steps: Simplify the registration and licensing processes for SMEs, ensuring that women entrepreneurs face fewer bureaucratic hurdles. Provide incentives such as tax breaks or grants for women-owned businesses.

D. Support Women-Led Business Networks and Mentorship Programs

Solution: Women entrepreneurs often lack access to networking opportunities and mentorship, which are vital for scaling up businesses.

Recommendation: Establish or strengthen networks and mentorship programs that specifically cater to women entrepreneurs in the food sector. These networks should connect women with experienced mentors, industry experts, and potential collaborators.

Actionable Steps: Promote the formation of women-focused business hubs, such as **CWEA**, and support mentorship programs that connect experienced female entrepreneurs with newcomers.

E. Promote Access to Modern Technology and Equipment

Solution: Limited access to modern machinery and technical tools hinders growth.

Recommendation: Governments and development partners should create policies that support subsidized access to modern machinery, food processing technologies, and innovation hubs for women entrepreneurs.

Actionable Steps: Facilitate access to affordable machinery by partnering with equipment suppliers or offering grants/subsidies for necessary tools.

Set up technology hubs or innovation centers where women entrepreneurs can access modern food production equipment.

F. Advocate for Improved Market Access

Solution: Limited access to larger markets and difficulties in logistics prevent business expansion.

Recommendation: Support the development of domestic and international markets for women-owned food businesses. Create platforms where women entrepreneurs can showcase their products and link them to both local and international distributors.

Actionable Steps: Governments and NGOs can organize trade fairs, food exhibitions, and online marketplaces that connect women entrepreneurs with buyers. Also, provide support for logistics and distribution networks to improve market access.

5.2.3 Building Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Approach

Foster collaboration with Local Stakeholders: Promote alliances across government entities, NGOs, and private sector organizations to establish a unified support framework for women entrepreneurs.

- 1- **Community-Based Initiatives:** Establish local initiatives that enhance the exposure of women-led enterprises, encompassing fairs, markets, and online channels to exhibit their products.
- 2- **Establish Eco-Entrepreneurship Networks:** Development partners, women's business associations, and relevant ministries that have been formulating and implementing support initiatives for women should collaborate to create a cohesive structure to assist women entrepreneurs.
- 3- **Enhance Human Capital:** Provide specialized training programs focused on modern production techniques, marketing tactics, and technical applications within the food business, notably through mentoring and coaching activities.

4- **Women Entrepreneurial Culture:** Advocating for accomplished women entrepreneurs, especially those who have distinguished themselves in the food industry as models.

5- **Access to Finance:**

- Conduct a focused survey of entrepreneurs in the MSME food sector to ascertain their financial access constraints and understand their financial constraints and scaling requirements.
- Develop tailored financing products specifically for female entrepreneurs, incorporating diminished collateral requirements and flexible repayment terms. In this term, the National Bank of Cambodia (NBC) or the government will commence bankruptcy aid or support for natural calamities.
- Establish government and NGO-sponsored grants to support women-owned enterprises, especially in the food industry.
- Financial Literacy Programs: Implement training initiatives to improve financial proficiency among women entrepreneurs, focusing on budgeting, cash flow management, and investment strategies.

6- **Facilitate market access** via personal branding, product branding awareness, effective packaging and design, adherence to national food quality and safety standards, and alignment of products with current market trends.

- Utilizing technology via digital transformation for women entrepreneurs and supplying resources for the adoption of e-commerce solutions to enhance their market reach.

7- **Support Structure and organization**

MSMEs should develop their teams, ensuring staff are more robust and knowledgeable to align with market trends.

8- **Policy and Leadership**

- Promote simplified and transparent rules that ease business

registration and compliance, thereby alleviating the bureaucratic load on women entrepreneurs.

- Formulate policies that promote competition and facilitate the expansion of MSMEs, include incentives for women-owned enterprises.

9- Eco-entrepreneurship Award

Establishing a peer support program (Cluster & Complement several sectors): Identify the pertinent programs that foster a culture of sustained support among female entrepreneurs. To alter their mindset to mutually support one another within the same cluster, so enhancing the cluster's power in quality, quantity, and standards recognition. If they are distinct clusters, they should discover ways to complement one another.

10- Promotion of Gender Equity

Implement initiatives to highlight the economic achievements of women entrepreneurs and promote gender equity in business support services. Advocate for policies that assist women in reconciling familial obligations with business activities, creating an environment that addresses the unique constraints encountered by women entrepreneurs in the food sector while fostering their comprehensive growth and contribution to Cambodia's economic advancement. Empowering women entrepreneurs is crucial for developing resilient communities and promoting sustained economic advancement.

5.3 Request for Skills/Training from Women Entrepreneurs: Identify the key skills or areas of knowledge that respondents consider as constraints or barriers to scaling their businesses, as listed below:

1. Sale and Marketing
2. Product innovation and development
3. Financial management and Accounting
4. Financial Readiness for Investment
5. Strategic business partnership Training
6. Supply Chain management and business management

7. Food Safety and Quality Standards
8. Cooperative management
9. Data Analysis
10. Communication
11. Negotiation
12. Leadership
13. Team Building
14. Motivation
15. Networking

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

These research topics could provide valuable insights and contribute to a deeper understanding of the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in the food enterprise in Cambodia.

Therefore, future research should focus on the elements that contribute to the success or failure of women-led enterprises at various scales, including micro, small, medium, and industrial.

1. Focus study both quantitative and qualitative content analysis methods
2. Gender-Specific Barriers in Accessing Financial Resources
3. Study the impact of financial literacy training specifically tailored to women entrepreneurs on their ability to access capital and credit. Probe the role of collateral requirements and how elective financing options (e.g., microfinance, peer-to-peer lending) could be developed to address these constraints.
4. Role of Digital Platforms and Technology Adoption
5. Conduct survey on the success of digital marketing and e-commerce platforms among women entrepreneurs in the food sector. Inspect how digital tools and online platforms can be better utilized to improve market access, enhance supply chain logistics, and promote brand awareness in the local and international markets.
6. Cultural and Social Norms Impacting Women's Entrepreneurship
7. Further study the influence of social and cultural biases on the decision-making and leadership roles of women entrepreneurs in Cambodia. Survey

the impact of gender-based perceptions on networking opportunities, mentorship, and business partnerships for women.

8. Institutional and Policy Gaps
9. Conduct a policy analysis to identify gaps in institutional support for women entrepreneurs, specifically regarding gender-sensitive policies, legal frameworks, and business regulations. Examine the role of government programs in addressing the unique Constraints faced by women in the food sector, including supply chain management and export capacity.
10. Networking, Mentorship, and Peer Support Systems
11. Investigate the effectiveness of existing mentorship and networking platforms, and examine the potential for creating more robust, gender-inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems. Assess the role of women-focused business networks and their influence on business growth, knowledge exchange, and access to resources.
12. Impact of Infrastructure Development on Food Businesses
13. Explore how improvements in infrastructure (e.g., transportation, technology access, and utility services) can reduce operational Constraints for women-owned food enterprises. Study the relationship between infrastructure development and market access, particularly in rural or underserved areas.
14. Supply Chain Management Constraints and Solutions
15. Conduct research on the specific supply chain management Constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in the food sector, such as procurement of raw materials, logistics, and product distribution. Study the potential of integrating women-owned businesses into larger, more efficient supply chains through partnerships and collaboration with industry stakeholders.
16. Comparative Studies with Other Countries in Southeast Asia
17. Conduct comparative studies with other Southeast Asian countries that have similar socio-economic environments to assess how policies and support systems for women entrepreneurs differ and what can be learned from those countries' experiences.

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APPENDIX

Dear respondent,

My name is Sem Sreytouch. I'm an IMBA student at the National University of Management. Currently, I am conducting research on the restrictions that women entrepreneurs face when scaling up their businesses in the food sector in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

You are one of the respondents chosen to take part in this survey. Please assist me in providing accurate and thorough information in order to offer a representative finding on the current status of the variables posing constraints in scaling up businesses in the food sector.

Your participation is voluntary, and the questionnaire remains completely anonymous.

Finally, I confirm that any information you share with me will be kept confidential and used exclusively for academic purposes. No individual comments will be identifiable as such, and the identities of those responding will not be published or disclosed to anyone. The information will only be used for academic purposes only.

Thank you in advance for your kind cooperation and dedication of time.

Sincerely yours,

Sem Sreytouch

APPENDIX

Appendix I: Interview questionnaires to support research questions

QUESTIONNAIRE

* Indicates required question

I. Personal Info:

Please fill in your personal info below:

1.1 Gender: *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Others

1.2 Ages: *

- ☐ 15-19 Years Old
- ☐ 20-29 Years Old
- ☐ 30-39 Years Old
- ☐ 40-49 Years Old
- ☐ $\geq$ 50 Years Old

1.3 Married Status

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Widow

1.4 Education: *

- ☐ No formal Education
- ☐ Primary School (1-6)
- ☐ Secondary School (7-9)
- ☐ High School (10-12)
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ PhD
- ☐ Other

II. Business Info:

2.1 Occupation:

- ☐ Business Owner only
- ☐ Business Owner & Student
- ☐ Business Owner & Employee of Other
- ☐ Business Owner & Housewife
- ☐ Others

2.2 In which business sector do you primarily operate?

- ☐ Retail
- ☐ Wholesale
- ☐ Agriculture (Supply Raw Materials)
- ☐ Manufacturing
- ☐ Cafes and Coffee Shops
- ☐ Restaurant
- ☐ Food Delivery Service
- ☐ Organic Food Store
- ☐ Others

If you choose others, please note here:

.....

2.3 In which ministry that your business register with? (Register/Un-Register)

- ☐ MOC
- ☐ MISTI
- ☐ MAFF
- ☐ MOF
- ☐ MOI
- ☐ MLVT
- ☐ MOE
- ☐ MOH
- ☐ Other

Note: (if your business has not registered, please choose Other, in case, you have registered with another ministry, please write below)

.....

2.4 What is the legal form of your business?

- ☐ Sole Proprietorship
- ☐ Partnership
- ☐ Corporation

2.5 Number of Staff: *

▪ Full Time:

- ☐ Less than 11(Part time)
- ☐ 11-50 Staff
- ☐ 51-100 Staff
- ☐ > 100 Staff
- ☐ Others

▪ Part Time:

- ☐ Less than 11(Part time)
- ☐ 11-50 Staff
- ☐ 51-100 Staff
- ☐ > 100 Staff
- ☐ Others

III. Business Constraints:

3.1 In business operations, **what constraints do you encounter to scale up** your business?

Please describe your constraints.

IV. Business Constraints:

4.1 In business operations, **what solutions do you use** when faced with these constraints?

Please describe the solutions.

V. Requests:

5.1 In case you wish to have skills or training to solve your constraints or skills that you think to make your business scalable, please list down below:

Appendix II

Findings RQ2: Constraints of Women Entrepreneurs to Scale Up Their Business in Food Sector

Question	Entrepreneurs	Answer
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R1	My business faces major issues, including not having enough money and limited access to funding. I considered taking a loan but couldn't proceed due to poor credit. I haven't registered for my business yet and don't have collateral for the bank. The loans they offered had high interest rates, which I couldn't afford. I wanted a loan to buy machinery but struggled to find reliable suppliers due to limited information and connections. Scaling the business is tough because I lack technical skills in the food industry, don't fully understand food safety, and have trouble accessing technology. Managing the supply chain and finding skilled workers is also a constraints. Reaching markets is difficult, too, with problems in branding, handling competition, and pricing products. I didn't do enough market research before starting the business or launching new products. Lastly, I have little time to focus on

		the business because of family responsibilities, which has caused me to fall behind on trends and miss out on helpful government programs.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R2	My business faces many constraints that make it hard to grow. I planned to open a second branch, but the rental fees were too high. I struggle with managing money and cash flow, and I can't afford loans with high interest rates. I'm also hesitant to take on debt because of the risk. I lack the skills to manage the business well, which makes it hard to run and expand. Product development and innovation are difficult, so I can't offer new products. I also don't know much about the market or how to reach a bigger audience. I lack experience in branding and marketing, and I don't have a plan to handle competitors. Pricing has been tough, too. I didn't do enough market research and ended up underpricing my products. I also struggle with price changes, especially seasonal ones, which makes it hard to stay profitable. I don't have access to modern machinery or reliable suppliers, which limit production. Supply chain management is another issue because I

		don't have the resources or knowledge to scale up. Social and cultural factors are also a problem, as I don't have enough networking connections. Lastly, I don't have full support from my family, which makes balancing work and family life harder.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R3	My business faces several constraints. I don't have enough money and am afraid to take out loans. I lack expertise in the food industry and have outdated machinery in a poor location. I don't fully understand food safety and quality standards, and I lack access to the latest technology. Reaching a larger market is hard, and I don't have clear strategies to compete. I also struggle to recruit skilled employees. Limited capital hampers growth, and poor cost management makes pricing products difficult, leading to undervaluing or overpricing them. Seasonal price fluctuations add to the issue. I lack modern equipment and reliable suppliers, and I'm unaware of the regulations and government programs that could help. Supply chain management is another area where I lack expertise.

What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R4	My business faces numerous constraints, particularly in terms of funds and resources. I do not have the capital to invest in the firm, and the exorbitant interest rates connected with loans are beyond my budget. This complicates obtaining the essential investment for my expansion. Furthermore, I struggle to find reliable sources for modern equipment and gear. My access to credible information on finding trustworthy suppliers, both locally and worldwide, is limited, making it difficult to improve my equipment and maximize operations.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R5	My business has many constraints in growing. I don't have enough capital and struggle with managing finances. Accessing credit is hard, and high loan interest rates make me fearful of taking out loans. I also lack the skills to run the business effectively, and my food sector knowledge is limited. My location and equipment are not ideal, and I can't access the latest food tech to improve production. I also struggle to reach the market. I don't know the market well and can't connect with a wider audience. I lack skills in branding, marketing, and competition strategies.

		My business lacks resources, including skilled staff. Recruiting the right people is hard, and without capital, I can't grow or improve the business. Pricing is also a problem. I don't know how to do proper market research, leading to poor pricing decisions. I often undervalue or overprice products because of inefficiencies. Price changes due to seasons are hard to manage, and my pricing strategies are weak. I lack modern equipment and reliable suppliers, which limits my ability to upgrade. I also don't fully understand regulations and have limited access to government support. Finally, my supply chain management needs improvement, but I lack the knowledge and resources to optimize it.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R6	I lack the capital to invest in the business and can't afford high loan interest rates. I'm also afraid of financial instability, so I hesitate to take out loans. I have limited knowledge of food safety, quality standards, and the latest food technology. I also lack skills in product development, making it hard to improve or expand my range. Reaching the market is tough. I don't have clear strategies to compete, making it hard to grow my customer

		base. I also lack resources, like staff and skilled employees. Without capital, I can't hire the right people or invest in tools for growth. Pricing is a problem. I can't conduct proper market research, leading to poor pricing decisions. I often undervalue or overprice products due to inefficiencies. Seasonal price changes are hard to manage, and my pricing strategies are limited. My business also lacks modern equipment. I don't know where to find trusted suppliers, limiting my ability to upgrade. Lastly, I face social and cultural barriers, including gender bias, which impacts my growth potential.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R7	I have trouble with financial statements and keeping track of cash flow. I also don't have a lot of credit choices and don't fully understand my loan options, which makes it hard for me to get the money I need. I also don't like taking out loans because I'm afraid of getting into debt. When setting prices, I have made bad choices because I don't know how to do good market research. I've had the most trouble running my business because my family doesn't back it. This makes it

		harder to focus on the business and grow it properly.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R8	Scaling up my business is difficult due to many constraints, especially financial ones. I don't have enough capital and limited access to credit. I'm also afraid of financial instability, so I avoid loans. I have limited skills in the food sector, and my location and equipment aren't ideal. I don't fully understand food safety or quality standards and lack access to new technology and product development skills. Reaching the market is hard, and I don't have the resources to compete. My business lacks skilled employees, and I don't manage resources well. Without capital, I can't hire or grow. I struggle with price instability, like seasonal changes, and my pricing strategies are limited. I also lack modern equipment and don't know where to find trusted suppliers, which slows down production. I'm not fully aware of regulations affecting my business and have limited access to government support. My supply chain management is weak, affecting efficiency.

		Socially, I face gender bias and limited networking opportunities. I also lack family support, and my business partners don't have enough knowledge to help the business grow.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R9	I lack the management skills needed to run my business well. I don't know much about the food industry, and my location and equipment aren't ideal. I also don't understand food safety, quality standards, or the latest technology. I struggle with product development, making it hard to improve my offerings. I find it hard to reach more people because I don't know the market well. I also don't understand branding or marketing and don't have a clear plan to compete with others. I struggle with managing resources and don't have enough capital to grow. I can't set prices properly because I lack market research, so my pricing is weak. I also face constraints with rules and policies, and I can't get government help. My supply chain management is poor, slowing my progress. Culturally, I face gender bias and limited networking. My family doesn't help, and I don't have time or money for

		training or digital marketing, which makes growth harder.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R10	My business struggles with accessing the market due to limited knowledge about the market and difficulty reaching a wider audience. I also lack the skills needed for effective branding and marketing, which makes it harder to promote my products. Additionally, I don't have clear strategies for dealing with competitors, which makes it harder to grow and stay competitive. It's hard for me to get the tools I need. I don't have enough workers, and the ones I do have don't have the right skills. Additionally, I have trouble efficiently handling my resources, and I'm not able to hire more people. Not having enough money to spend makes it even harder for me to grow and improve business. I also have to deal with social and cultural limits in my daily life. It's hard for me to fully focus on building the business because my family doesn't help me enough and my time is often split between work and family duties.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R11	My business has many problems that make it hard to grow. The biggest issue is cost. I don't have enough money to

		improve, and high loan interest rates make me afraid to take out loans. I lack knowledge in the food industry, which makes it difficult to run operations smoothly. My location and equipment are also a problem, making it hard to operate efficiently. Getting into the market is another constraints. I don't know much about the market, which makes it hard to find opportunities and attract customers. I also struggle with branding, marketing, and competing with others. I don't have enough skilled workers or good resource management, and without enough money, it's hard to grow. I also struggle with pricing. Without proper market research, I often undervalue or overpriced products. Seasonal price changes make it harder to manage. My equipment is old, and I can't find reliable suppliers, which makes upgrades difficult. I don't fully understand the laws affecting my business or have access to helpful government programs. Finally, my supply chain management is weak, and social issues like gender bias, limited networking, and a lack of
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		family support make growth even harder.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R12	My biggest constraint is accessing to market. It's been hard for me to reach more people because I don't know much about the market. I also don't know how to use branding and marketing to promote my goods well, and I don't have any plans for how to compete with other businesses. I also have problems with money because I don't have enough cash, and I can't pay the high interest rates on loans. I also don't like taking out loans because I don't want to get into debt. Technically, I don't know much about the food industry, and my business isn't in the best place for growth. Also, my tools aren't up to par for what the business needs. It's hard for me to get the tools I need. My business doesn't have enough workers, and the ones it does have aren't very skilled. Not only that, but I have trouble managing my resources, and I can't hire more people. Lack of capital input makes it even harder for me to grow and get better. Setting prices for my goods has also been a big problem. Because I don't know how to do good market research, I've been unable to control costs and keep my products' prices too low. I

		sometimes charge too much for my goods because my business isn't running as smoothly as it could. I have trouble adapting to changes in prices that come with the seasons, and I don't have many pricing options, which makes it hard for me to make money. Another problem is the lack of up-to-date tools and machines. Unfortunately, I can't find trustworthy information about where to find machinery dealers, either in my own country or abroad. This keeps me from upgrading my tools. There are also problems with institutions and policies. I don't fully understand the rules and regulations that affect my business, and I can't get much help or plans from the government that could help me grow. Supply chain management is also not very good, which makes it harder to find and send products quickly. Unfortunately, my family doesn't help me run this business, which makes it harder for me to concentrate on it and handle my personal and work obligations.
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What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R13	My company has some constraints such as capital, which makes my business difficult to grow and invest in necessary improvements. I also have trouble accessing the market due to limited market knowledge and a lack of strategies for competing with other businesses. In terms of resources, I face issues such as not having enough staff, and the employees I do have are not highly skilled. I also lack knowledge in resource management and have limited capacity to recruit new staff. Without sufficient capital investment, it's hard to improve or expand. Additionally, I limited info access to government policy, which could help me to align with government's trend.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R14	My business mainly faces financial constraints, which is the biggest issue, especially as I plan to establish a few more branches. I have inadequate infrastructure, including a poor location and insufficient equipment, which limits the efficiency of the business. I also struggle to access the market and find it difficult to reach a wider audience. Without enough capital investment, it's even harder to grow the business and improve its resources.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs	R15	I face two main problems: limited access to credit and a lack of capital.

to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?		This makes it hard to spend and grow. I can't afford high loan interest rates and don't know much about my loan options, so I hesitate to take on debt. I also lack the business management skills needed for a coffee shop, making it harder to run the business. My business lacks technical and operational skills, with insufficient tools and limited access to industry technology. I also struggle with product ideas, making it tough to stay competitive. Reaching the market is another constraints. I don't have enough money to hire skilled workers, and without enough staff, it's hard to grow. I struggle with pricing because I don't know how to do proper market research. This leads to goods being undervalued or overpriced, making it hard to stay competitive. My equipment is outdated, and I can't find reliable suppliers, which limits my production. I also don't fully understand the regulations and can't access government support. Lastly, I face social issues like gender bias, limited networking, and a lack of family support, which make it hard to move the business forward.
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What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R16	My only constraint is capital, which makes it difficult to invest in improvements, expand, and take on new opportunities. This lack of funding is holding back the growth of my business.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R17	I don't have any major constraints now, as I have already addressed them one by one as they arose.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R18	There are some resource limitations that my business has to deal with. First, I don't have enough skilled workers and I don't have a good way to hire people, like a well-written job offering. I also don't know much about how to successfully manage resources. In terms of institutions, I don't fully understand the rules and regulations that could affect my business, and I don't have easy access to government programs or help that could help me grow. But my supply chain management isn't very good, which makes it hard to make sure everything runs smoothly and that things get delivered on time.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom	R19	I'm looking for funding to expand, but the high interest rates make me hesitant to take on debt. I'm unsure about other financing options. My business

Penh?		infrastructure is weak, and the technology is outdated. I have limited access to modern food tech and struggle with product innovation, which holds me back from improving or expanding my offerings. Entering the market is challenging because I don't understand it well, making it hard to reach a wider audience. I lack branding and marketing skills and don't have a clear plan to compete. I also lack resource management knowledge, which makes it difficult to improve processes. My pricing plans struggle with seasonal fluctuations, and the lack of price regulation makes it worse. I don't have modern tools or equipment. I'm finding it hard to find reliable suppliers for upgrades. My supply chain management is also weak, which affects business performance.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R20	I have trouble with financial management and am afraid to take out loans, which makes it hard for me to grow or invest in my business. It's also hard for me to run the day-to-day operations of the business smoothly because I don't have the right business management skills.

		My company doesn't have a lot of experience in the food industry, which makes it harder for us to come up with new goods and make them better. In addition, it's hard for me to get new machinery and equipment. I don't know much about reliable machinery providers, and it's hard to get in touch with suppliers both in and outside of my country. This makes it take longer for the business to grow and work more efficiently. Some of the things that limit my work are also social and cultural. Some possibilities are closed off to me because of my gender, and my family's lack of support makes it harder to make decisions. It's hard to get my mum to accept new ideas because she likes doing things in the old-fashioned way. She has a lot of control over my business. Things move even more slowly because my sister has a different plan for the business. One more thing that stops us from reaching more people is that we don't know enough about digital marketing.
What are the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R21	My business struggles to grow due to a lack of money. I can't afford high-interest loans and worry about taking on debt. I also lack business management

		skills, which makes it hard to run things smoothly. My technical and organizational skills are weak, and the business infrastructure isn't great. The location is wrong, and we use old tools, so we can't operate efficiently. I don't know enough about food safety and quality standards, and I lack access to new food industry technology. We also don't have enough skilled people for innovation, making it hard to improve our products. Reaching the market is another constraints. I don't understand the market well and struggle to connect with more people. I also lack branding and marketing skills, which makes it hard to attract buyers. I don't have a clear plan to compete, so we're weaker. I have trouble with staffing and resource management. There aren't enough skilled workers, and I don't manage resources well. Pricing is also a problem because I don't know how to conduct proper market research, leading to products being priced too low or too high. Seasonal price changes and the lack of price controls make it harder to adjust.
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Appendix III

Findings RQ3: Existing Solutions to Constraints

Question	Entrepreneurs	Answer
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R1	I've tried several solutions to deal with my business problems. To manage better, I take time off from my full-time job during busy periods. Since I don't have enough money, I sometimes borrow from family and women's groups with lower interest rates. But I know I need to save more and increase sales to grow sustainably. I also want to learn more about handling money, loans, and cash flow to make future borrowing easier. I'm studying food safety, quality standards, and scaling processes to improve my knowledge. I'm working on building my confidence. To reach more customers, I'm exploring partnerships with stores, though I'm unsure how to make them work. I've been teaching family members to help with baking when I'm not around, to solve the staff shortage. I've kept prices stable despite rising material costs to keep my loyal customers, though it's cost me more. I'm also looking for more suppliers, including international ones, to widen

		my options. While I still face constraints, I aim to overcome them by learning, using support networks, and improving my business step by step.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R2	My solutions: - Learn about the problems that arise after finding each point that is missing to fill in myself - All problems in my business to solve directly
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R3	Because my business can't grow because of a lack of money, I've chosen to rely on the bank I use to meet my capital needs as I grow. Even though I'm hesitant to take on debt, I know that the bank can provide the money we need to cover the high costs of growth, such as investing in new equipment and improving the infrastructure. If I work with the bank, I can investigate loan or line of credit choices that are easier for me to handle and that would help me ease some of the pressure on my capital. With this method, you can get money without having to worry about taking out too many loans with high interest rates. But this answer fits in with my bigger plan to make my business better in both technical and operational ways. I'm going to use the

		money to buy new tools, make sure the food is safer, and train my employees.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R4	I decided to with a few solutions to manage cash flow, keep costs down, and cut costs. I can make sure I have enough cash to pay for necessary costs without taking out high-interest loans by carefully monitoring and controlling my cash flow. This plan will help me escape the financial stress that comes with having too much debt while still giving me some freedom in running my day-to-day business. Keeping costs under control is also important for keeping your finances stable. By looking closely at all my business costs and cutting back on spending that isn't necessary, I can get more money to make smart investments like improving my tools and infrastructure. Cutting costs will also help me spend less and make better use of the resources I have.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R5	My solutions: - Get loan from the bank and borrow from family, friend ...etc. - I will learn more of those skills I have less to support my business. One more thing, I will find someone who knows well about those skills so they can help me to run my business.

What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R6	I addressed the capital issue by taking a loan even though I worry about the interest rates and financial instability. By testing new items and developing new packaging, I hope to improve my offers and make them more appealing to customers, potentially increasing sales and helping with pricing limitations. I'm focusing on social media marketing to enhance brand recognition and attract a broader client base, making up for a lack of traditional marketing techniques. This includes posting more regularly, developing new videos and photographs, and using free promotional tools. In terms of technological limits, I am aware that my understanding of food safety and quality standards is restricted. To solve this, I can use online resources, workshops, or even consult professional networks for guidance on enhancing safety standards and maintaining product quality. Furthermore, while I lack expertise in product creation and development, testing new products and investigating packaging alternatives are steps that could open new avenues for innovation without requiring major technological investments. By reducing product offerings and identifying cost-effective
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		ways to increase quality, I may work around the personnel deficit by making better use of current resources.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R7	To get around my problems, I'm going to get better at managing money and running my business. Even though I have limited access to credit and don't like taking on debt, I will focus on learning more about money so I can better manage my cash flow and make smart choices. I want to make more money to put back into the business by increasing sales and improving how I set prices. I also know that I need to get better at market study so that I can make better decisions about prices. Improving my management skills will help me keep an eye on things more closely and help staff grow, which is essential for business growth. To make the best use of my limited resources and set up a more organized plan for long-term success, I will also rank the problems by how important they are and deal with them first.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale	R8	To handle my business constraints, I want to cut costs and increase worker capacity, even with a smaller team. By eliminating superfluous expenses, I

up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?		may free up funds for critical areas such as equipment upgrades and operational enhancements. This will allow me to invest in employee development, enabling my current team to take on more duties and operate more efficiently. Training allows me to fill knowledge gaps in the food business while also improving abilities in areas such as food safety and resource management. This lean approach will help address immediate restrictions and create a more efficient, sustainable firm that can scale despite limited resources.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R9	I focus on learning and improving my processes to solve my business problems. I plan to use video posts and Facebook to connect with more people, show my products, and make my business more visible. To improve resource management and stay updated on industry standards, I'll attend training and track stock information. I also want to learn more about food safety and product development through training and online tools like YouTube. Joining a business group will help me understand government policies and market trends. These steps will improve my pricing, marketing, and supply chain management, boosting my

		business's competitiveness and efficiency.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R10	To overcome my company's market access limits, I want to focus on improving my marketing strategies in order to reach more targeted customers. By focusing on low-cost and successful marketing techniques like social media campaigns and digital outreach, I can overcome my poor industry expertise and reach a larger audience. While I lack knowledge in branding and marketing, I intend to spend time learning from online resources and industry insights in order to enhance my skills and develop a more engaging promotional approach. This technique allows me to work within my resource restrictions, without the need for more staff or capital expenditure, by leveraging existing tools to increase visibility and sales.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R11	Since my current funds are limited, I will gradually save up for my business plan. By setting aside funds, I can steer clear of loans that come with steep interest rates and reduce the likelihood of falling into debt. This allows me to allocate resources towards infrastructure, equipment, and expanding my business. Accumulating funds will provide me with the

		opportunity to develop my team, enhance my resource management skills, and discover optimal pricing strategies. This strategy will enable me to expand my business gradually, enhance my technical and practical expertise, and improve my access to suppliers and government assistance.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R12	I will focus on improving staff skills through training in communication and task management, and work on market access and efficiency. I'll also invest in learning digital skills for better branding and online marketing. Even with a limited budget, I'll improve resource management and reduce inefficiencies by developing my current team. This will help with pricing, competitiveness, and reduce reliance on loans. I plan to save money for my business to avoid debt and high-interest loans. This will help me invest in equipment, infrastructure, and expansion. Saving will also improve resource management, staff training, and pricing strategies, helping my business grow and access more support over time.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale	R13	I am working on building my team by seeking business partners and recruiting skilled staff. To support this, my strategy involves taking the time to

up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?		engage with business associations, where I can develop my own skills and build relationships with potential partners. This will help me identify the right individuals who could join as business partners or investors.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R14	To address these constraints, I focus on saving capital for expansion while avoiding high-interest loans. I'll improve operational efficiency and use cost-effective marketing, like social media and local promotions, to reach a wider audience. I'll also prioritize small, incremental upgrades to equipment and location as funds allow, and explore partnerships or investors to secure additional capital for growth.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R15	I've worked on strengthening my skills, particularly in business management, by joining a business association where I can learn from other women entrepreneurs. I've also participated in training programs offered by the association to further develop my knowledge. When it comes to funding, I've sought financial support from relatives, borrowing quickly and repaying promptly.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale	R16	Because I don't have a lot of money, I'm going to save money during the busy months of November and December. By putting away the profits from these

up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?		months, I can cover the costs of running the business from January to October, keeping the books balanced all year. This plan helps make up for the lack of money by letting me handle day-to-day tasks and invest in improvements and growth possibilities as funds allow.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R17	I've proactively addressed any constraints that arose, so there are no major obstacles remaining for my business. By focusing on managing my expenses and revenue, I'm in a strong position to secure a loan if needed. Additionally, if I'm unable to recruit skilled staff, I'm prepared to work harder and longer to ensure everything runs smoothly.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R18	The constraints are significant: I lack skilled employees, a structured recruitment process, and effective resource management. I'm also unaware of key regulatory barriers, having limited access to government support, and facing weak supply chain management. Given these factors, I've decided to suspend the business.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R19	To grow your business, I focus on training, gathering information, and making strategic improvements. Start by joining business courses on financial management and loans to better understand financing and improve your

Penh?		financial skills. I take courses in business management (forecasting, HR, sales, and marketing) to improve my resource management and branding. Learn from successful entrepreneurs and join training on lean management (like 5S) to streamline operations. For better equipment and technology, I joined programs that connect you with suppliers and use resources like MISTI for support. To reach more customers, focus on improving your products, studying competitors, and building a stronger brand. Networking with other entrepreneurs will help you grow your market knowledge and improve your marketing. This approach will help solve your current constraints and set you up for long-term growth.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R20	To get around my constraints, I focus on getting hands-on training in food safety, inventory management, and packing standards. This will help me to make my products better and work more efficiently. I also got resources without taking out high-interest loans by getting advice from people with experience and getting outside funding or help from a third party. I improved my equipment and came up with new ideas by working with reliable machinery providers. To get around social and cultural barriers, I

		find people who can help me and work with my family to come up with a plan to adopt current ways of doing things. Learning digital marketing skills will also help me to reach more people and get around the marketing problems that I am facing now.
What are the existing solutions on the constraints of women entrepreneurs to scale up their business in food sector in Phnom Penh?	R21	My business is having trouble because of money problems, bad management, old tools, and trouble getting in touch with customers. I think closing the business might be the best way to stop more problems from happening. If you don't have enough money or know how to handle your debt, going on could make things worse. It is also hard for the business to compete because it is inefficient, has trouble setting prices, and doesn't come up with new ideas. When I close, I'll be able to take a step back, fix these problems, and look at new possibilities with a better idea of how I can make them better.