WE3A – Improving Access to Value Chains for Women Entrepreneurs

Deliverable: Activity 1.1 Ecosystem and Stakeholder Mapping-Costa Rica

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Executive Summary

WE·3A Aspire Activate Accelerate

Strengthening Women Entrepreneurs in Value Chains

The WE3A Project objective is to build a stronger and more resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem for women-owned/led small and medium-size enterprises (WSMEs).

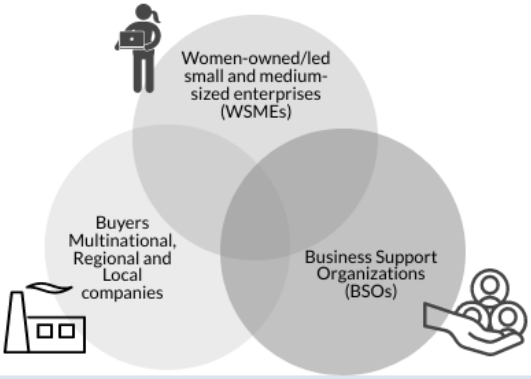
This research provides an analysis from the "ecosystem" perspective in Costa Rica, in which economic factors and conditions of key actors are explored.

The data from this report will provide the WE3A partners with insightful information for the execution of Project activities to support WSMEs.

Costa Rica

Population: 5,213,362 (2022) with 44% in age group 25-54
Area: 51,100 sq km (19,730 sq miles)
Major languages: Spanish (official), English
Government: Presidential republic
Currency: Costa Rica Colon ₡
GDP per capita $12,508 (2021)
Inflation: 3.50% (Jan. 2022)
Foreign Direct Investment Inflow: $2.1B (2020)
Unemployment: 13.7% (Dec. 2021)
Key economic sectors: industry manufacturing (high-tech), services (tourism), agriculture

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem



COVID-19 Impact on WSMEs

- 58% of the WSMEs stated that the pandemic negatively impacted them; 27% stated that COVID-19 positively impacted them; and 15% state that the pandemic had no impact.
- The top 3 COVID-19 related challenges were: decreased demand for products and services, productivity decreased due to restrictions, and increased cost of production.
- The top 3 COVID-19 related opportunities were: increased digital presence, identified and cut unnecessary expenses, and created a new business line to respond to local and global needs.
- WSMEs indicated that the most needed support in post COVID-19 recovery phase is finding new clients and networking with the entrepreneurial ecosystem to identify new markets.

Key Findings from WSMEs

- Top 3 industry/sector representation: manufacturing, services, wholesale and retail trade.
- 89% WSMEs are micro-business (less than 4 employees).
- Customer/Client base composition: 31% businesses, 40% final consumer, 6% government entities, and 23% other.
- Online presence: 96% Facebook, 75% WhatsApp, 75% Instagram, and 36% company website.
- 45% WSMEs are developing stage and 4% mature stage.
- 31% of the WSMEs surveyed have not formally registered their business and only 13% have a women-owned business certification.
- Only 16% of WSMEs surveyed are part of global supply chains and only 15% export.
- Main operational challenges are access to formal financial products, like savings account and loans, and bureaucratic red tape to operate their businesses.

Key Findings from Buyers

- 40% of the buyers surveyed were local companies, 40% multinationals, and 20% regional corporations.
- Top industry/sector representation: wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, agriculture, and accommodations and food service activities.
- Top local spending: profesional services, sales & marketing, facilities and logistics.
- The criteria to evaluate potential suppliers is based on quality, price, and production/service capacity.
- 67% buyers have supplier diversity and inclusion policies and practices.

Key Finding from BSOs

- Robust network of BSOs with capacity building and business development programs.

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Purpose of the deliverable

The immediate objective of this research is to provide a better understanding of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Costa Rica as it relates to women-owned and/or women-led small and medium enterprises (WSMEs) to guide the activities of the "Women Entrepreneurs Aspire, Activate and Accelerate (WE3A)" project (the Project). The objective of the Project is to build a stronger and more resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem for WSMEs. The Project is implemented by Thunderbird School of Global Management in collaboration with WEConnect International and the *Alianza Empresarial para el Desarrollo* (AED), a local entity that executes key activities in Costa Rica. The Project is supported by the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB Lab).

This research assesses the state of the Costa Rican market and identifies the challenges and opportunities for WSMEs, especially related to local value chains and their connection to the global economy. The research provides an analysis from an "ecosystem" perspective, in which economic factors and variables like size, maturity, and capacity of the WSMEs, and the impact of the global pandemic COVID-19 are explored. Thus, the analysis of the WSMEs ecosystem includes areas such as sector representation, size of the business, maturity of the business, market access, and support systems. This data will provide the WE3A partners with insightful information for the execution of activities related to the Project to support women-owned businesses.

This report begins by providing a general profile of Costa Rica, followed by a snapshot of the Costa Rican economy and women's participation. The report goes on to describe each of the ecosystem areas, starting with the profile of WSMEs, descriptions of buyers in the ecosystem, and the status and existing initiatives, challenges, and opportunities through the perspective of business support organizations (BSOs). The next section includes a summary of the effects of COVID-19 on the Costa Rican market, as well as the effects on the WSMEs ecosystem.

To finalize the report, a Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis provides a compilation of recommendations to be considered, implemented, and/or further researched to address the most pressing challenges Costa Rican women business owners and female entrepreneurs currently face.

The research was conducted by utilizing existing primary and secondary data sources to analyze the business ecosystem of Costa Rica as it relates to women-owned businesses. The methodology of the data collection is outlined in Appendix I.

Profile of Costa Rica

Costa Rica is in Central America bordered by Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south. With an area of 19,730 sq miles and both a Pacific Ocean and Caribbean coastline, Costa Rica is relatively small geographically. Nevertheless, it is a political leader and one of the most prosperous countries in the region.

The current population of Costa Rica is 5,213,362 inhabitants with roughly half of the population residing in urban areas. The capital, San José, is the largest city with approximately one-fifth of Costa Rica's total population (INEC, 2022).

The country is well known for its political stability, high standard of living, highly educated population, and strong environmental culture (BID Economics Esencial - Costa Rica, 2022). Costa Rica is one of the few countries in the world without a permanent standing army. The country's social spending is high and provides universal access to education, healthcare, clean water, sanitation, and electricity. As well, Costa Rica's poverty level is lower than most Latin American countries. It ranked 62 among 189 countries in the 2019 Human Development Index, falling within the very high human development group of countries (HDI - Costa Rica, 2020).

Costa Rican Economy at a Glance

Costa Rica's economy is stable and welcoming to international trade and investment. According to World Bank data, in 2021 the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Costa Rica was US$64.28B (WB Data GDP Costa Rica, 2021). The main sectoral contribution to the GDP comes from services (68.48%), industry (19.74%), and agriculture (4.67%) (O'Neill, 2022). The GDP per capita in 2021 was US$12,508 (WB Data GDP per capita Costa Rica, 2021).

In 2020, the net inflows of foreign direct investment were US$2.1B, a significant decrease from previous years in 2019 US$2.72B, and in 2018 US$3.01 (WB Data Foreign Direct Investment Costa Rica, 2020).

Costa Rica ranks as the 55th freest economy among 184 countries (Index - Costa Rica, 2022). Costa Rica's economy depends crucially on tourism, high-tech manufacturing, and agriculture. In 2020, Costa Rica exported a total of US$14B and imported US$13.8B in goods, giving it a positive trade balance (OEC CIR, 2022).

Tourism is the most important source of foreign exchange in the country, with direct and indirect contributions estimated at 8.2% of the gross domestic product (GDP) (ICT, 2022). In 2016, the sector generated 211,000 direct jobs, representing 8.8% of the country's workforce (OECDiLibrary, 2022). Accommodation, food and beverage services, road

transportation, and medical services are the activities with the highest participation in the tourism sector.

According to the *Instituto Costarricense de Turismo*, Costa Rica's Tourism Agency, the tourism sector is the engine of the Costa Rican economy. However, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had a disastrous impact on the country's tourism sector. In 2019, pre-pandemic, just over three million tourists visited Costa Rica, compared to only 1,011,912 tourist visits in 2020. Likewise, the contribution of the tourism sector to the country's GDP declined from 11.5% in 2019 to 5.3% in 2020 due to the pandemic (Statista Travel, Tourism & Hospitality, 2020).

Another key economic sector is agriculture. The country has a year-round offering of fresh products, harvested under the highest international standards and with a high commitment to environmentally sustainable production (PROCOMER Agricola, 2022). According to data from PROCOMER, the Costa Rican national export development agency, the agricultural sector represents 7% of the GDP. Noteworthy exports of agricultural products include bananas (US$1.28B) and other tropical fruits (US$1.03B). In 2021, the sector employed 266,311 people, representing 13.4% of the workforce in Costa Rica.

High-tech manufacturing of electronics and medical devices is a well-developed and active sector that accounts for a significant portion of exports from Costa Rica. For example, in 2020 the top exports from Costa Rica were medical instruments (US$3.27B), integrated circuits (US$1.02B), and orthopedic appliances (US$850M), exported primarily to the United States. This industry generates approximately 22,400 direct jobs in the country and its average annual growth over the last five years has been 11%.

Female Participation in the Economy at a Glance

In terms of women's economic empowerment, indicators show that in 2021 the female labor force participation rate was 50%, compared to a national male rate of 73.4% (ILOSTAT, 2021). The participation share by gender differs widely by sector, for example, the share of agriculture labor is 10.2% female and 21.2% male; the share of industry labor is 9.1% female and 22% male, and the share of service labor is 80% female and 56.2% male.

Another economic empowerment indicator is engagement in the monetary economy. The latest data available, from 2017, indicates that 60.9% of women age 15+ hold a bank account at a financial institution, compared to 75.5% of the men age 15+, representing a 14.6% gap (WB Gender Data, 2022). Furthermore, in Costa Rica, women spend 2.6 more time than men on unpaid domestic and care work, that represents that women spent 22.1% of their day in unpaid work compared to men spent 8.4% of their day (WB Gender Data, 2022).

There is no official/government sex-disaggregated data for business ownership. However, a case study from the International Labour Organization, using data sets from 2016-2020, indicates that women´s business ownership accounts for 22.3% of total ownership, compared to 77.7% for men (Women in Business and Management, 2019). A 2010 data set from the World Bank shows that the proportion of firms with female participation in ownership is 43.5% (WB Gender Data, 2022).

WSMEs Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Women-owned/led small and medium-sized enterprises (WSMEs) were targeted in the ecosystem mapping conducted for this research. The criteria for including enterprises were based on ownership, control, and size, as demonstrated in the methodology.

Mix-method research using both secondary data sources, as well as primary research, targeting WSMEs, buyers, and business support organizations (BSOs), was used in the development of this section.

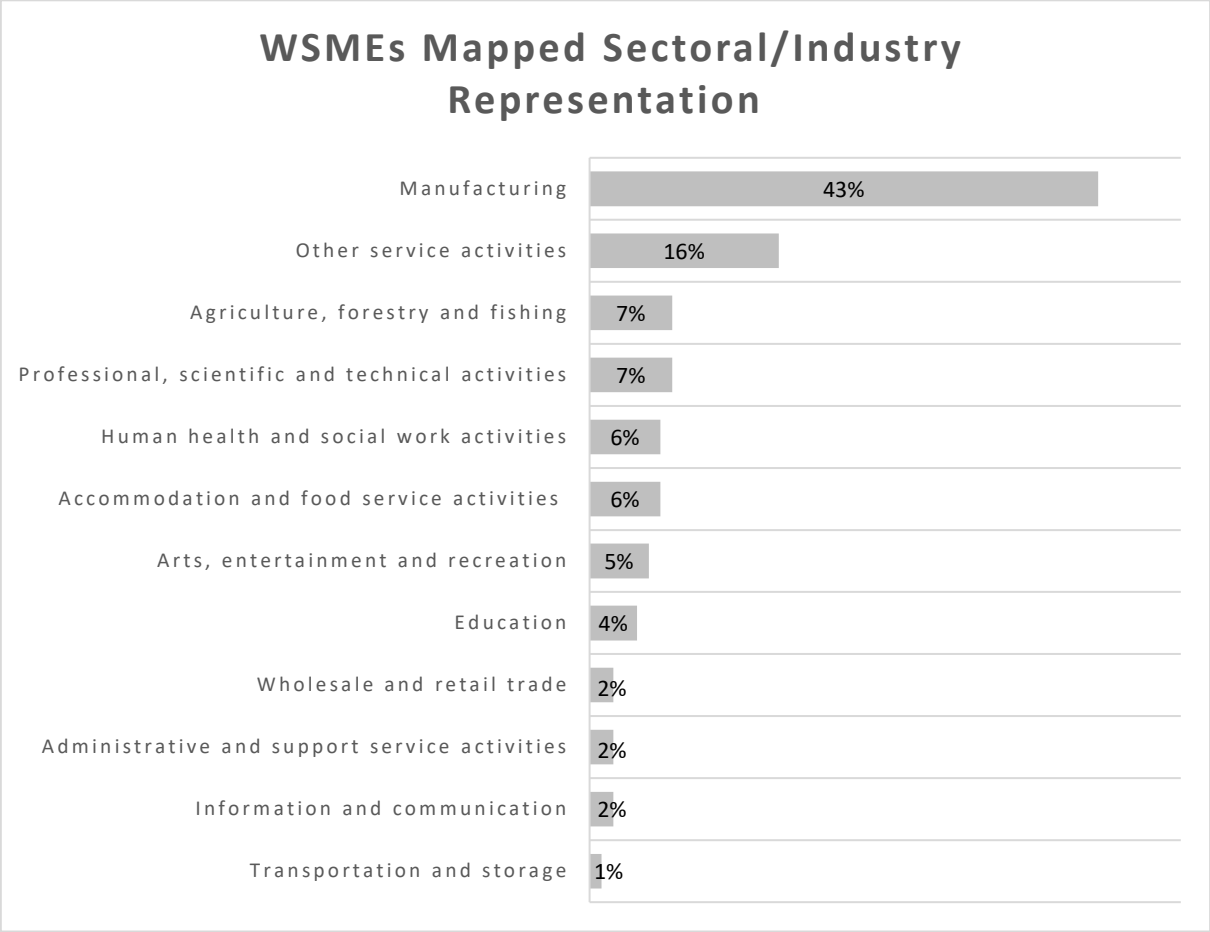
At the initial stage of the research, secondary data (databases, market analysis, and studies) was used to map the stakeholders. At the consultation stage, the stakeholders were consulted using an online survey as detailed in the methodology of the research. In the following section, the distinction between “mapped” and “surveyed” is clearly stated in the data presented.

WSMEs Profile[1]

Based on the WSMEs sampled, the mapping of the WSMEs shows that the overwhelming majority (by the number of companies) are involved in the manufacturing sector (43%), followed by “other service activities” (16%), professional, scientific, and technical activities (7%), agriculture (7%), and accommodation and food service activities (6%), as outlined in Figure 1. It is understood, based on secondary research, that the bulk of WSMEs participating in the manufacturing sector produces clothing and artisanal products for the local and tourist economy. WSMEs’ participation in the high-tech manufacturing sector is low. This is a gap that may be addressed through further education, upskilling, training, and funding.

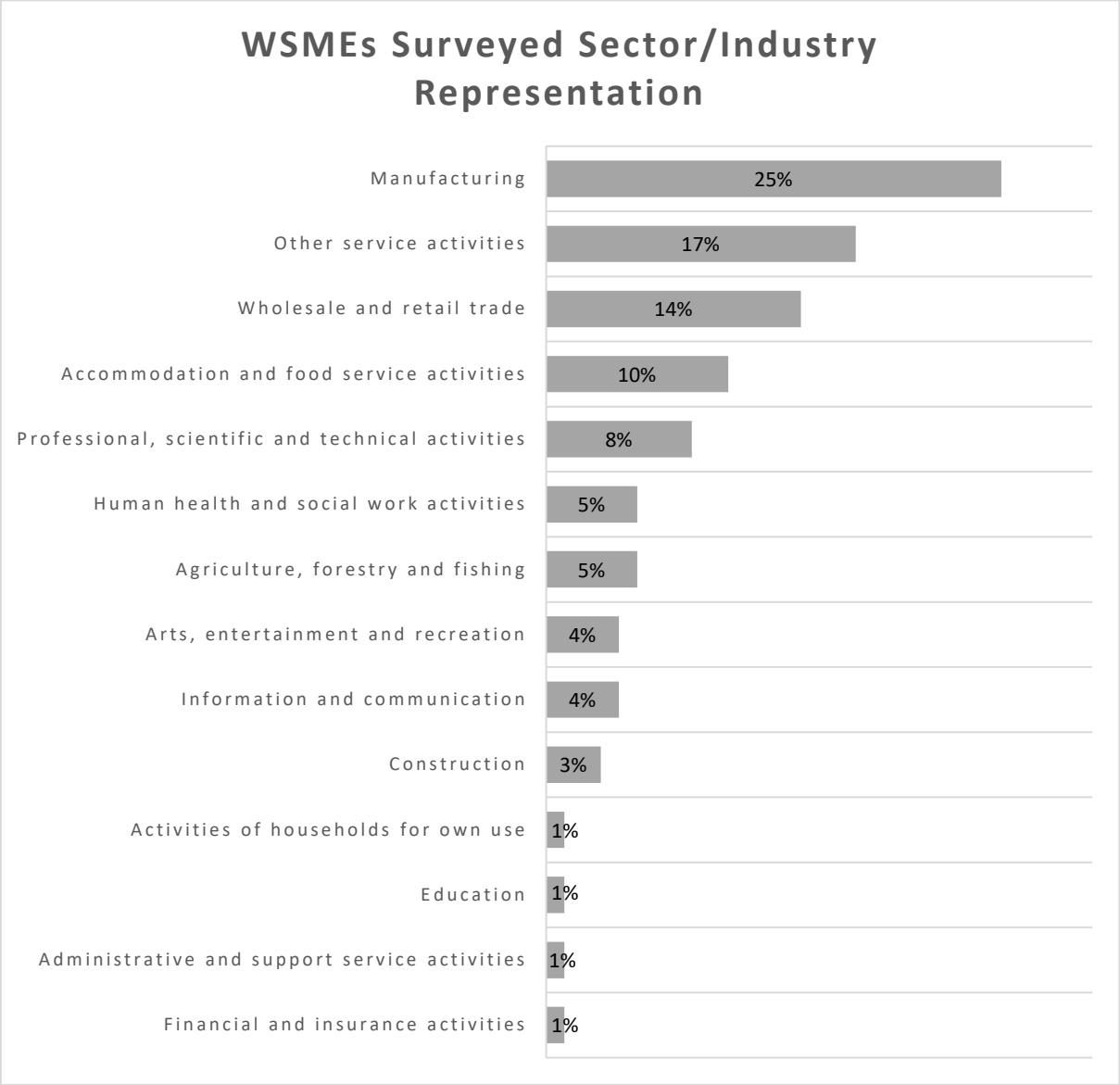
[1] For this section 299 WSMEs were mapped and 91 WSMEs responded to the survey.

Figure 1. WSMEs mapped by sector/industry



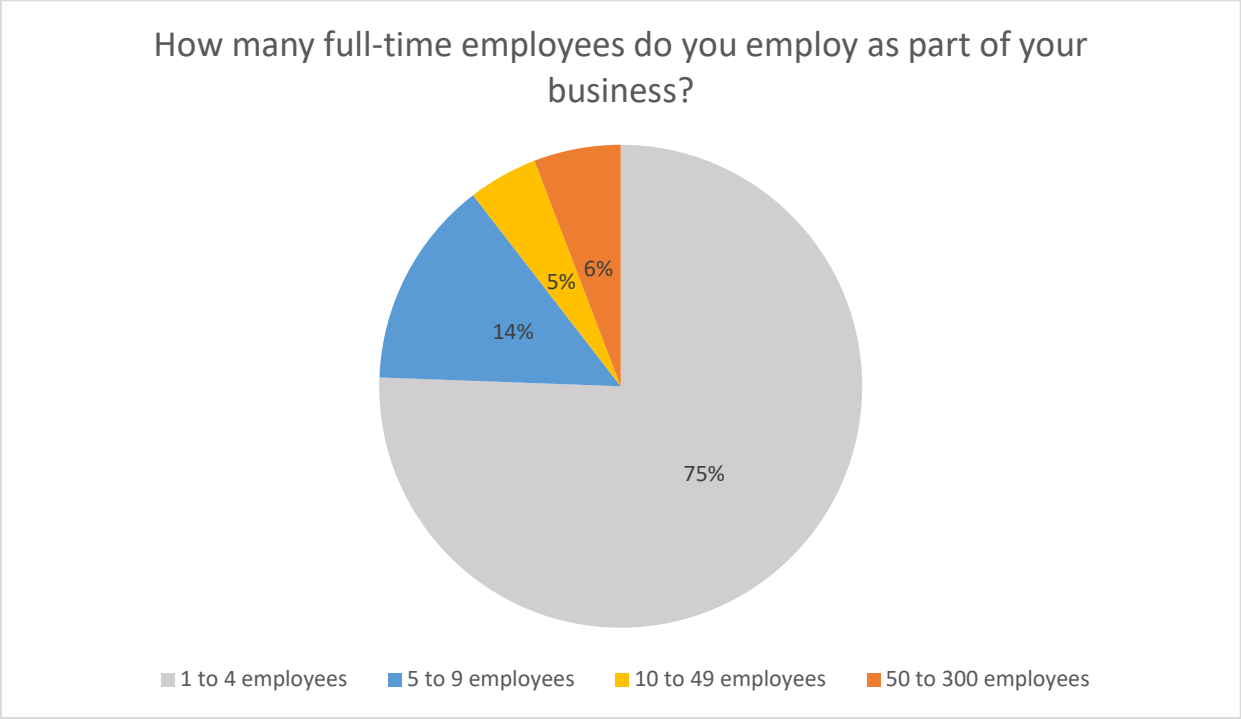
The WSMEs that participated in the survey are engaged in manufacturing (25%), other service activities (17%), wholesale and retail trade (14%), and accommodation and food services (10%) as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. WSMEs surveyed by sector/industry



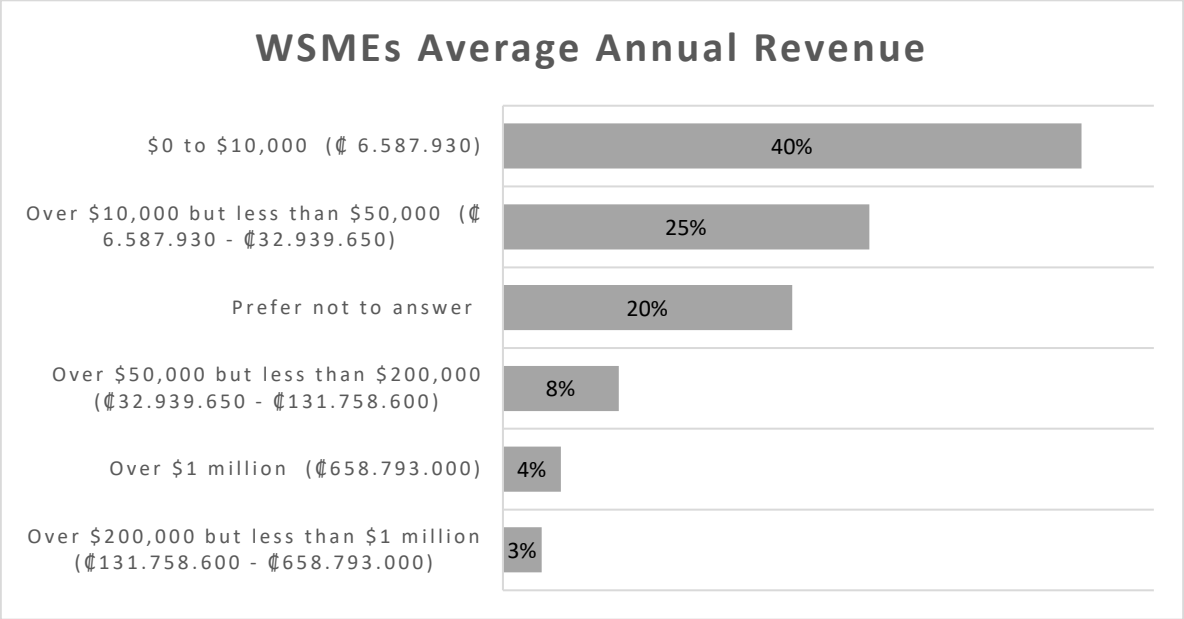
Most of the WSMEs that participated in the survey are micro businesses with less than 10 employees and less than US$10,000 in annual revenues. Nonetheless, their workforce is, on average, 71% female. As a result, their role in women's inclusion and economic empowerment is significant. Figure 3 illustrates the number of full-time employees employed in women-run businesses.

Figure 3. WSMEs number of full-time employees



As shown in Figure 4 below, the bulk of participating WSMEs (40%) have average annual revenues of less than US$10,000, a smaller, but still significant proportion of respondents have annual sales of between US$10,000 and US$1M (36%), and a very small portion of the WSMEs (4%) reported revenues of over one million US$ There is a group of respondents (20%) who opted out of answering this question, which is aligned within the normal response rate in terms of revenue questions.

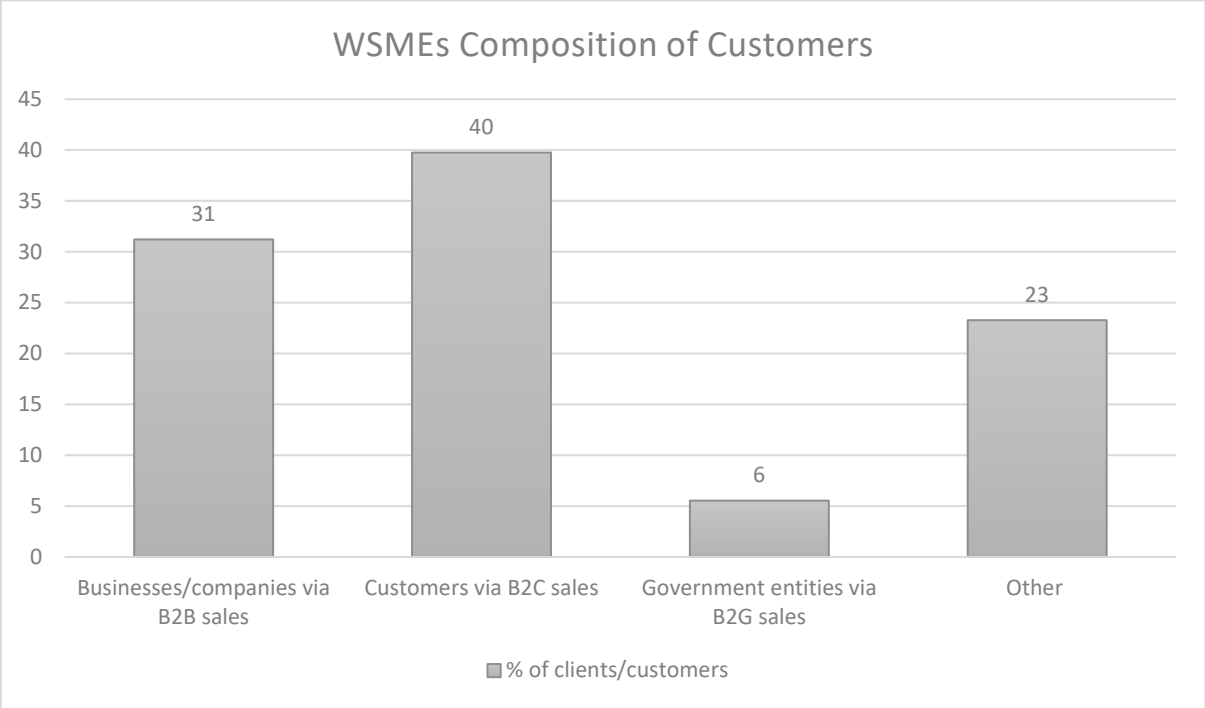
Figure 4. WSMEs average annual revenue



Survey respondents were asked to indicate the composition of their client base. WSMEs had the option to indicate the percentage per group based on business to business (B2B), business to consumer (B2C), and business to government (B2G) transactions. Figure 5 below indicates the average percentage of customers/clients based on all responses received from the WSMEs.

The main source of clients for the participating WSMEs is final consumers through B2C sales (40%), followed by corporate clients through B2B sales (31%), a smaller portion of government clients through B2G sales (6%), and other (23%) as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. WSMEs composition of customers/client base



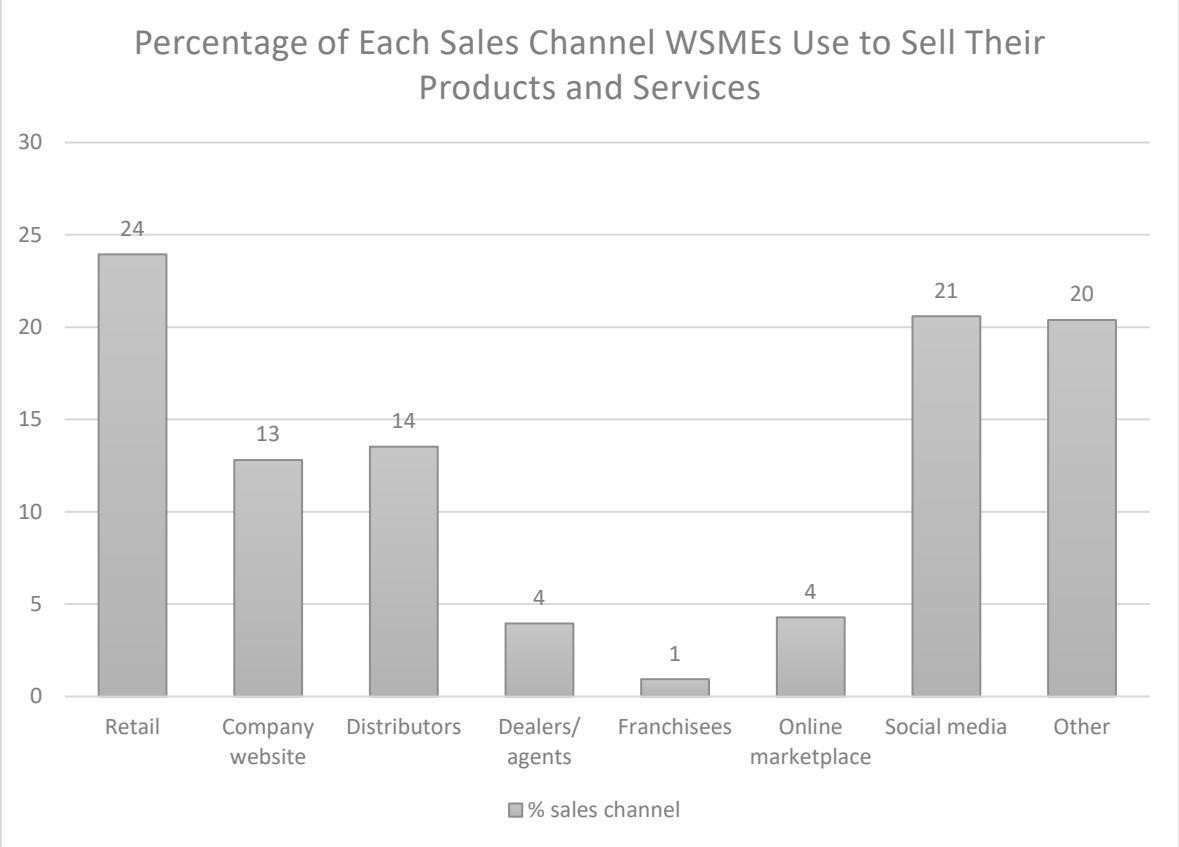
The data indicates that WSMEs have incorporated government as part of their client base, which is a favorable sign that selling to government entities is being utilized to some extent, but at a very small scale (6%). Furthermore, the small scale of sales to government could be through retail sales channels and not necessarily through a formal public procurement tendering process, which is a complex undertaking for many WSMEs.

Government procurement is an opportunistic sales channel, traditionally untapped by WSMEs due to its complexity. WSMEs can take advantage of Costa Rica's public procurement through the regulatory framework that promotes the participation of SMEs and vulnerable groups in procurement opportunities. The special conditions are set by law and include favorable payment terms, special financial tools as collaterals, and an evaluation grid that factors in the condition of being an SME and/or part of a vulnerable group (Ley General de Contratación Pública, 2021). Additionally, Costa Rica implemented an electronic public procurement system called *Sistema Integrado de Compras Públicas* "SICOP" to facilitate the procurement process (OECD Economic Surveys-Costa Rica, 2020). While its use has been mandatory since 2016, its uptake is still very limited, suggesting that training in this area could be of benefit to suppliers. Among potential suppliers, WSMEs are those that need to understand how public procurement works and how to make competitive bids to fully benefit from the preferential framework that Costa Rica offers.

WSMEs were also asked to identify to what extent they use different sales channels. Figure 6 below shows that in-person retail is the main sales channel used (24%), followed by an

online channel, primarily through social media (21%).[2] Under "Other" (20%), WSMEs stated direct wholesale, and one WSME indicated tendering government procurement opportunities. Given only one respondent indicated that her firm prepares proposals to bid on government procurement opportunities, this shows that the formal tendering process for attaining public procurement opportunities is an under-utilized sales channel in Costa Rica.

Figure 6. WSMEs sales channel

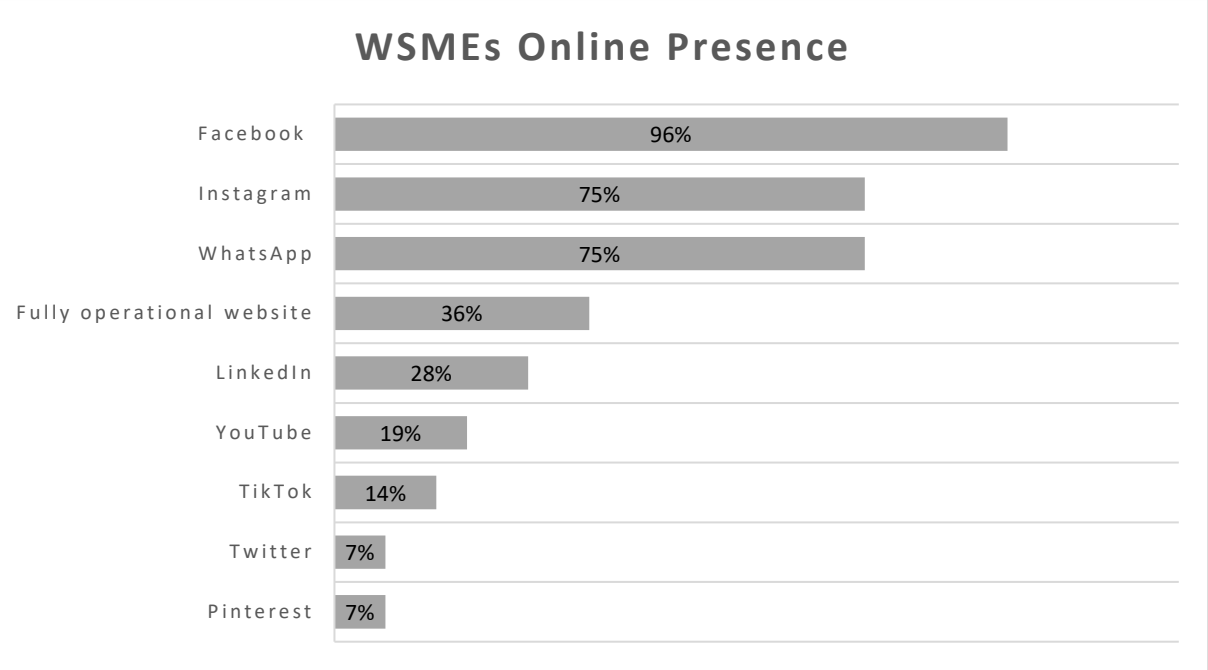


WSMEs were asked to stipulate the extent of their online presence. The overwhelming majority use Facebook (96%), followed by WhatsApp (75%) and Instagram (75%), and only a third use a fully operating business website (36%). Having a fully operating website requires skills and capital that most micro businesses do not possess. Most of the WSMEs in Costa Rica are micro businesses that will require support to enhance their digital presence. Having a fully operational website can enable sustainable growth by increasing

[2] Social media platforms have integrated commerce directly into their platforms, making easier for business to offer their products and for customers to buy products they discover in the platforms, without leaving the platforms.

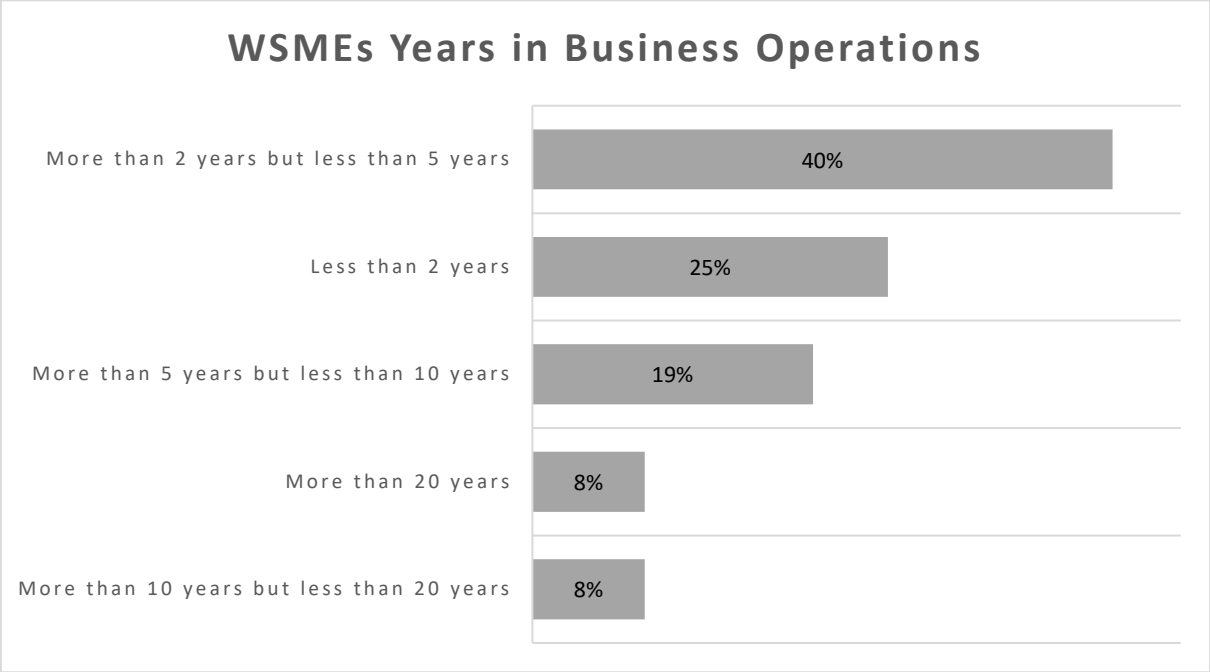
business credibility and creating an avenue for new customers to find WSMEs, getting to know their products and services, and to be able to utilize purchase options. Inputs into activities that enhance the digital presence of the WSMEs will be positive for the ecosystem in Costa Rica, especially for those enterprises that want to export their goods and services or wish to become part of global value chains.

Figure 7. WSMEs online presence



The data also shows that participating WSMEs are relatively new enterprises and at very early stage of business development. Most of the respondents recorded less than 5 years in operation (40%) as shown in Figure 8.

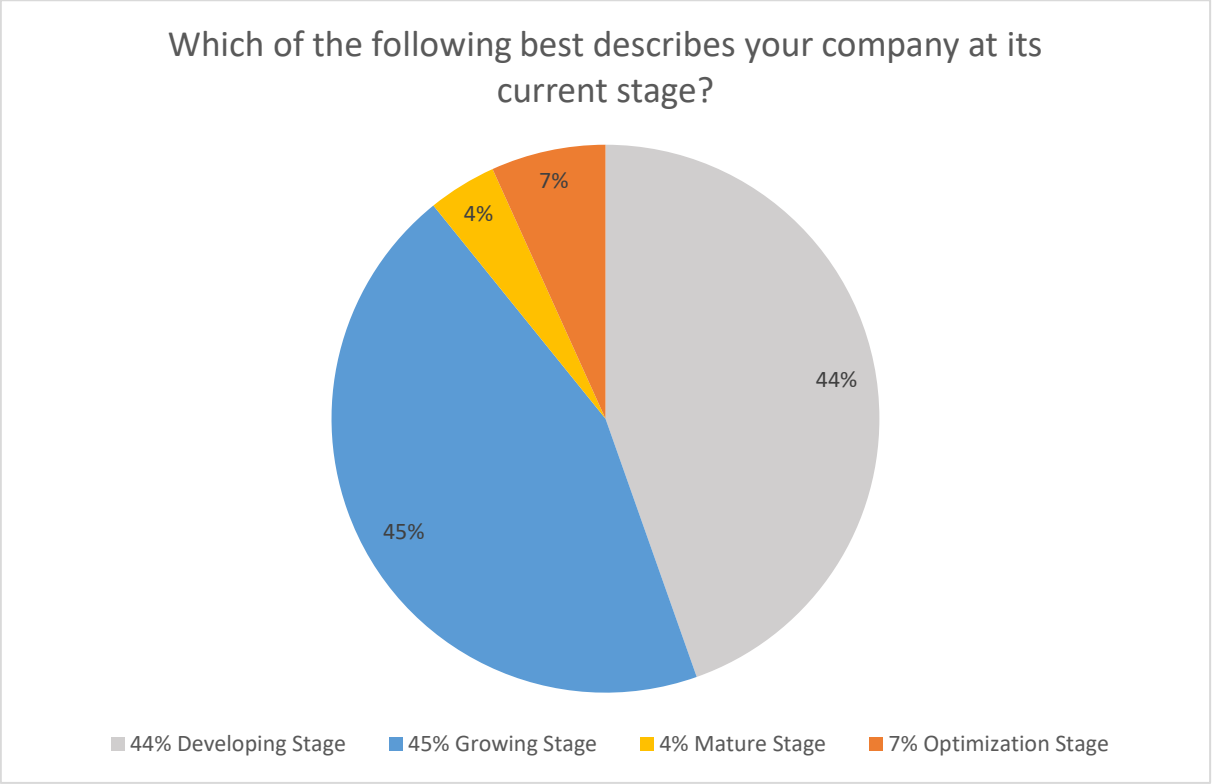
Figure 8. WSMEs years in business operations



The WSMEs in very early stages of development show limited knowledge of production processes, have basic technologies, and provide employees with limited training (44%). While others are in the growing stage with some documented processes and with more trained staff (45%), as shown in Figure 9.[3]

[3] **Developing Stage**: Limited operational and production processes, basic technology, limited employee training available, WSMEs are in their early days.
Growing Stage: Started to document processes, some technology in place to support the business, a few employees are formally trained in their role.
Mature Stage: Most processes are documented, relevant technology in place to support the organization and implementing training for all employees.
Optimizing Stage: fully documented processes, WSMEs have the right technology platforms for our business, employees have been trained and they continue to work on opportunities for improvement.

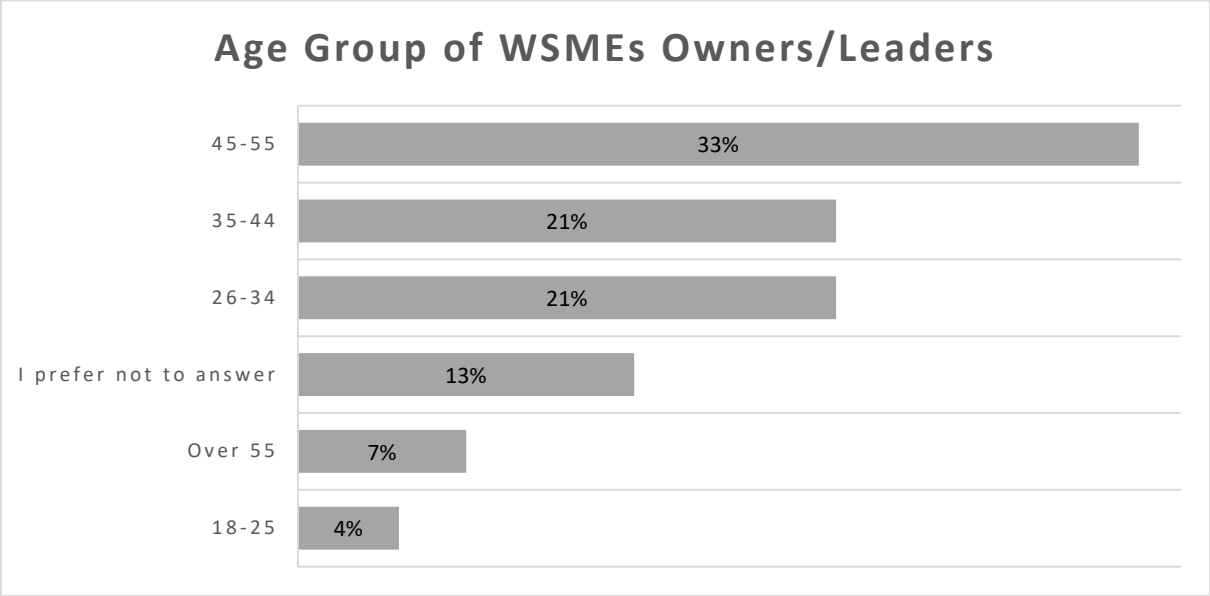
Figure 9. WSMEs stage of development



The fact that most of the WSMEs reported being in these early stages of development indicates that basic entrepreneurial and product development training could be valuable for the management staff. The Project could investigate these areas for proposed future training. As shown in Figure 8, a quarter of the WSMEs surveyed began operating within the last 2 years (25%), that is, within the COVID-19 pandemic timeframe. This is consistent with data from the 2021 Costa Rica national survey of household microenterprises, which recorded a 23.6% increase of Micro-SMEs. Some WSMEs surveyed stated that they started their business out of necessity in the middle of the pandemic, responding to a need during that time, and showcasing the moderate level of entrepreneurship in Costa Rica (Acs, 2006) (more detail is outlined in COVID-19 section).

Likewise, when asked to identify themselves within an age group, most respondents indicated that they are young or middle-aged (see Figure 10). At this stage in life in general, women are juggling the multiple responsibilities of running a business, being mothers, taking care of aging parents and other household responsibilities. It is of vital importance that Project activities factor in this reality and strike a balance when suggesting capacity building activities. It is important to reiterate that in Costa Rica women spend 22.1% of their day undertaking unpaid domestic and care work (WB Gender Data, 2022).

Figure 10. WSMEs age group of women owners/leaders



In terms of registered businesses, 69% of the WSMEs reported that their businesses are formally registered. Of the formally registered businesses, more than half are sole proprietorship, one third are in a partnership, and very few under limited partnership and corporations (see Figures 11 and 12). The 31% of the WSMEs that stated their businesses are not formally registered, identified the cost associated with registration, along with the lack of knowledge on how to undertake the registration process as being the main factors (see Figure 13).

The lack of formal business structures may be hindering WSMEs access to, among other things, financial services, credit, global supply chains, government procurement, and the possibility to attain a women-owned certification. All these factors require a level of competency in accounting, record keeping, and financial reporting, which informal businesses may not have access to, or which may not be worthwhile to pursue for those micro-businesses that do not have a growth strategy.

Figure 11. WSMEs registration

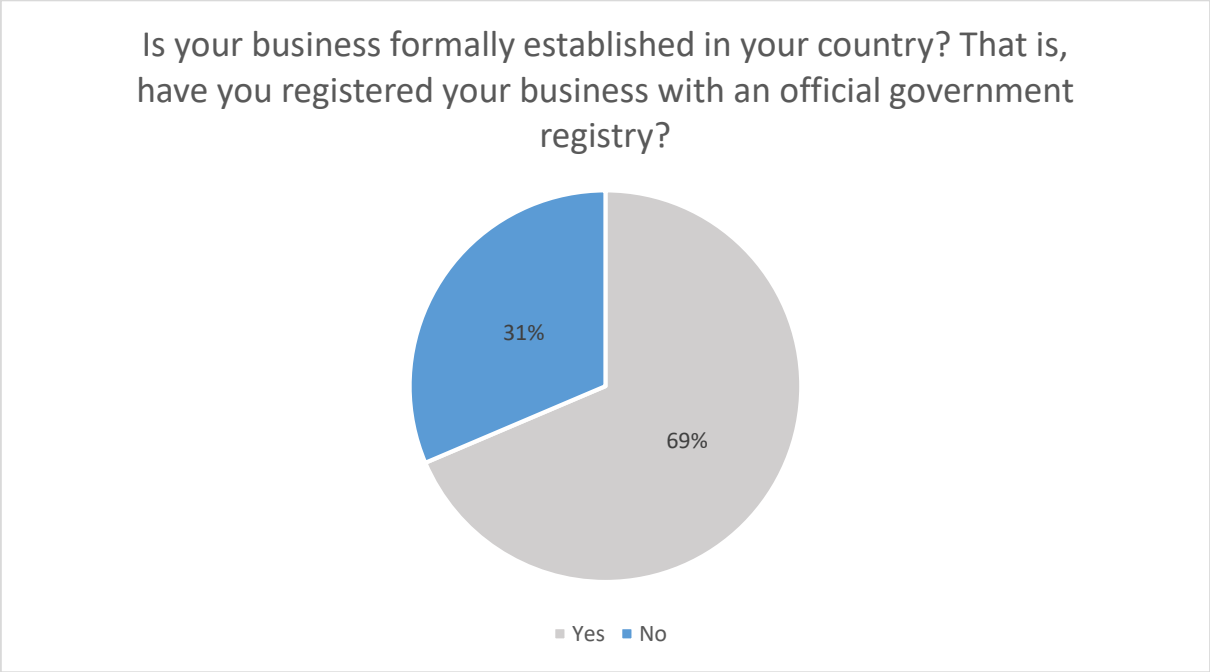


Figure 12. WSMEs registration type

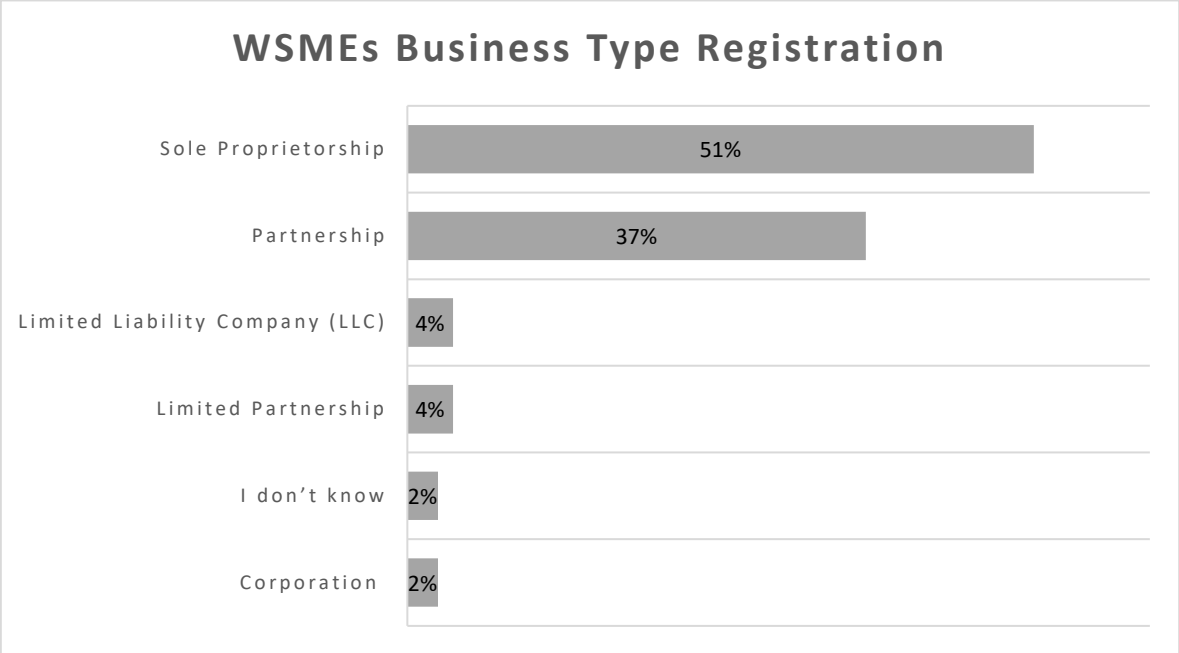
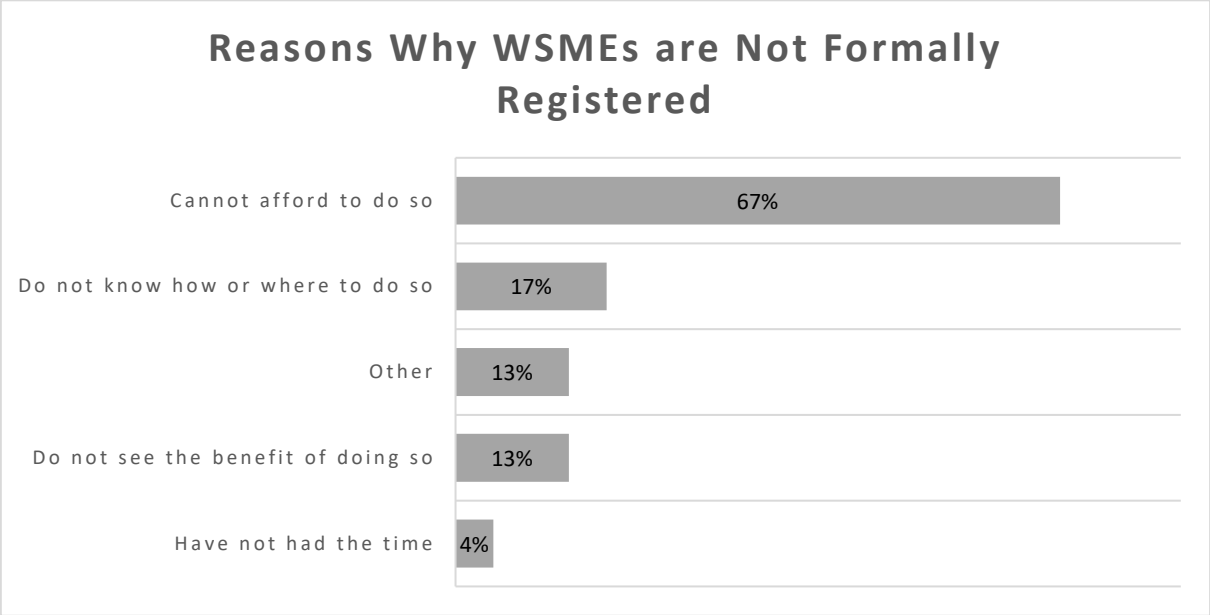


Figure 13. WSMEs not formally registered



In Costa Rica, the registration of a business can be complex and onerous. Registration entails 10 steps, beginning with checking the availability of a company name and ending with obtaining a business license. It takes 23 days for processing, not including the time that the business owner spends gathering necessary information, costing as much as US$1,200 (Costa Rica Doing Business, 2020),[4] twice the minimum wage in Costa Rica (MTSS, Lista de salarios mínimos del sector privado, 2022).[5] This cost does not include any professional fees paid to lawyers, who assist with obtaining the name reservation; drafting, and filing of the articles of incorporation, partnership documents, or any related documents; and assisting in obtaining fiscal and labor risk insurance, and other permits.

In short, the registration process can be arduous for WSMEs. Furthermore, some respondents stated that they do not see the benefit of registering their business. It may, therefore, be inferred that there is not only a lack of knowledge on *how* to formalize a business, but also on the opportunities that a formal registration could have on enterprises, some of which are detailed above. Formalization of WSMEs could be part of a sustainable growth strategy. This is an area the Project can work on within a business development training program.

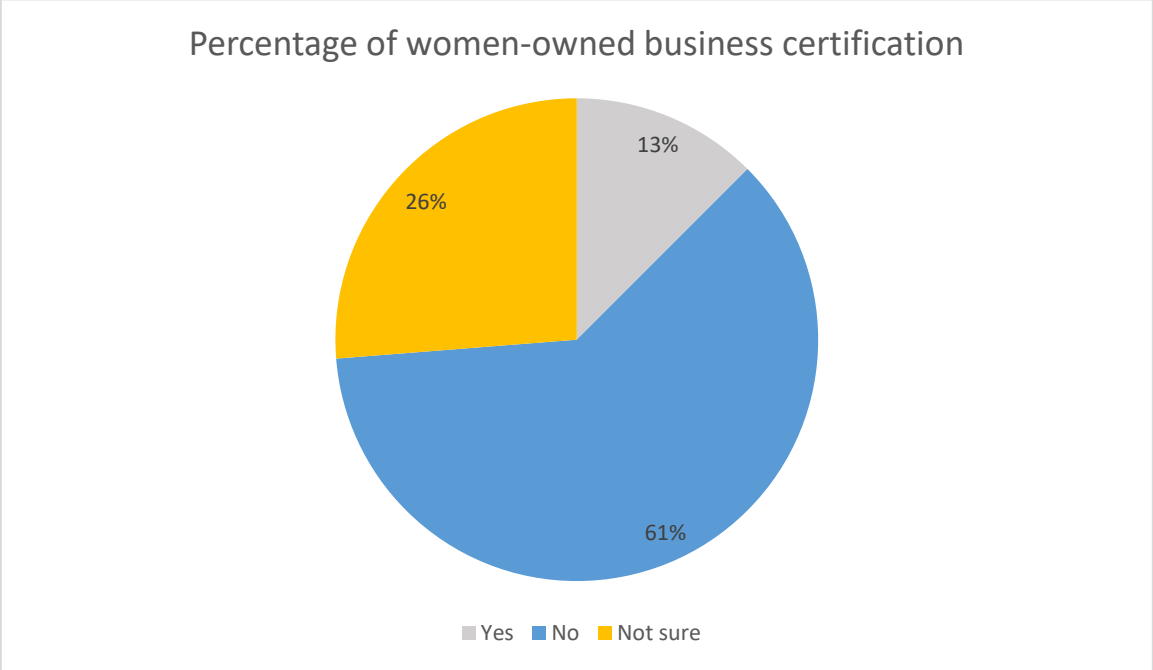
[4] The last edition to the World Bank Group Doing Business 2020 measured the complexity of the procedure, time and, cost of started a business. The Doing Business has been discontinued as of September 9, 2021. Data and methodology to assess starting a business in Costa Rica still acceptable to use as a reference for procedure, cost and time. The Costa Rica Doing Business 2020 outlines the registration process and cost.
[5] The official minimum wage in Costa Rica for the year 2022 goes from US$600 to US$1,300 per month.

WSMEs were asked if they are a women-owned certified business. The majority are not, as shown in Figure 14. Being a women-owned certified business can bring benefits to WSMEs. For example, women-owned certified businesses have access to:

- global buyers through inclusive sourcing programs,
- supplier diversity events and programs,
- International Financial Institution (IFI) donor programs, training, and procurement opportunities, and
- networks of women-owned businesses.

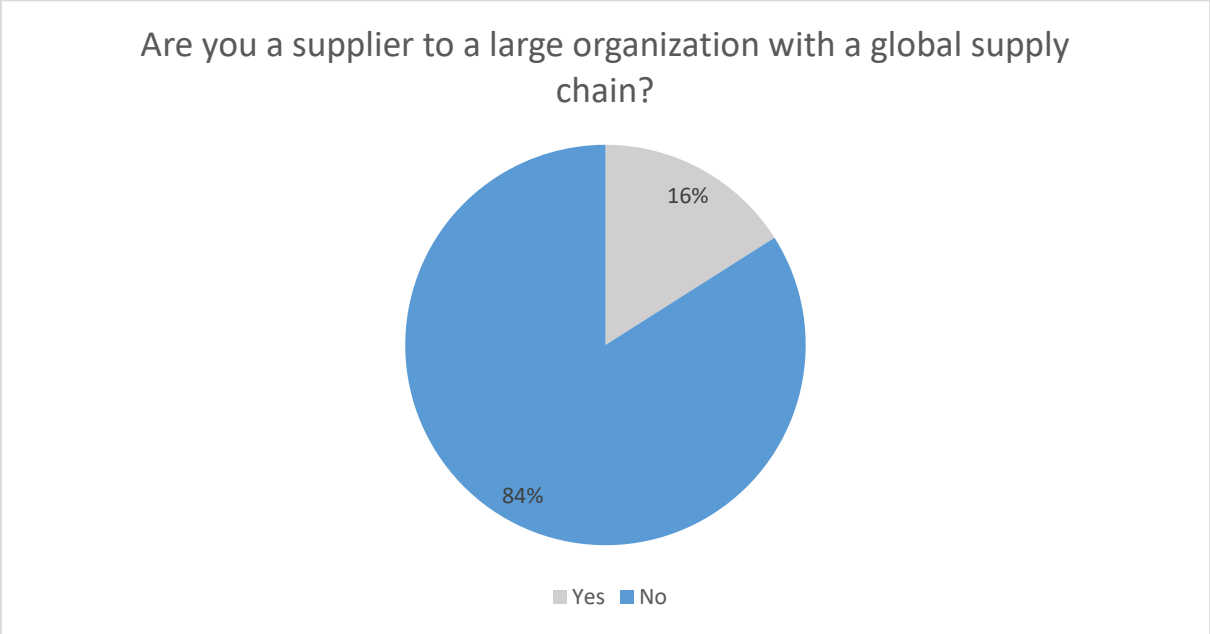
This is an area where the certification partners can play an important role by communicating to Costa Rica's WSMEs the benefits of being formally certified as women-owned business.

Figure 14. WSMEs women-owned certification



WSMEs were also asked if they were part of global supply chains and if they export their products and services. The overwhelming majority are *not* as is illustrated in Figures 15 and 16.

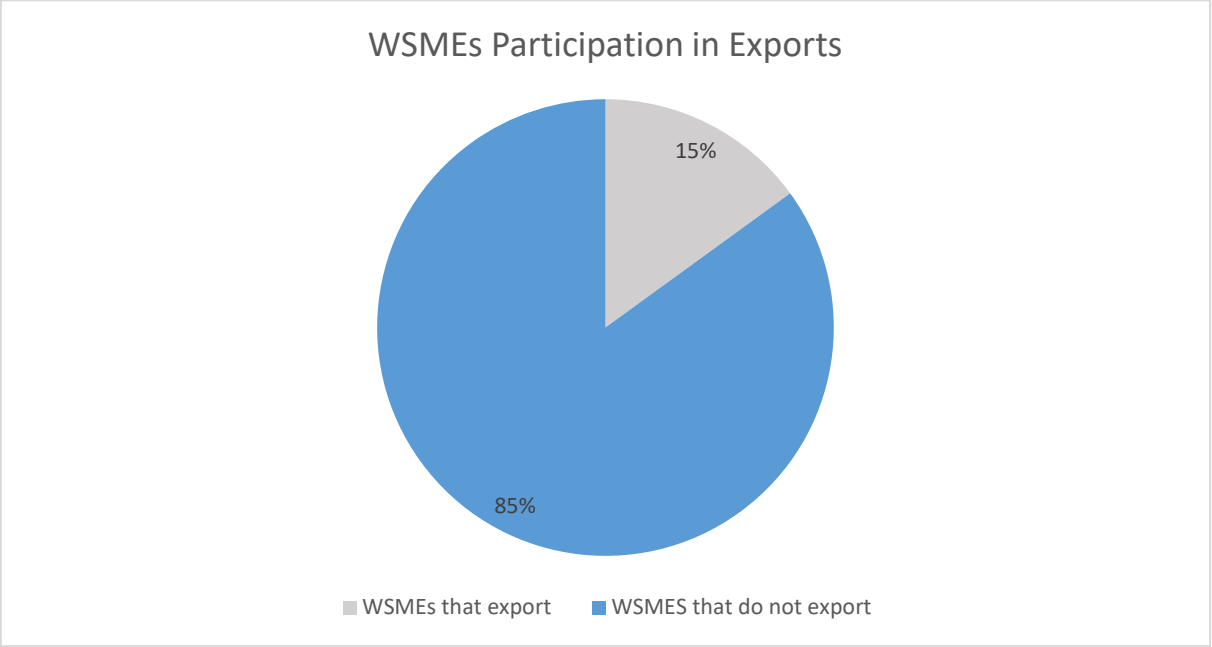
Figure 15. WSMEs participation in global supply chains



The reason for low participation in exporting, as well as global value chains could be attributed to the fact that the majority of the WSMEs in the survey sample are new businesses, not formalized and in early stages of development. As well, most are micro businesses with limited production capacity.

Undertaking international business development to export or sell to global value chains is complex, but often yields benefits for companies, from establishing new revenue streams, gaining competitive advantages, to accessing specific government incentives for global companies. Specialized business development training and participation in export promotion events, such as trade fairs and missions under a cluster approach, could be incorporated into the Activate and Accelerate stages of the Project. The cluster approach can leverage the co-location or proximity of participating WSMEs. Inputs into export promotion activities can be planned around facilitating the networking and cooperation among the WE3A participants. As a result, expected outcomes can include building bridges across the different ecosystems, enabling innovation, access to global value chains, and increased exports.

Figure 16. WSMEs participation in export



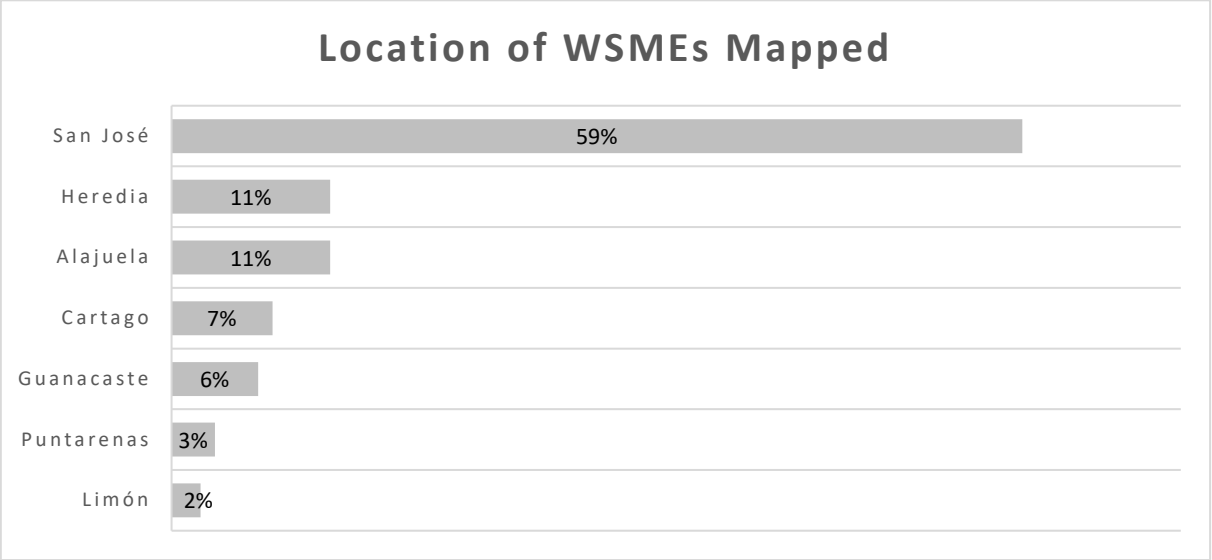
Those WSMEs that do export their goods and services reported that their markets are focused on Central America, followed by South America, and a smaller share of exports in Europe and North America.

In conclusion, increase in exports and participation in global supply chains are key objectives of the Project and the WE3A activities will be developed to achieve those objectives.

Location of WSMEs

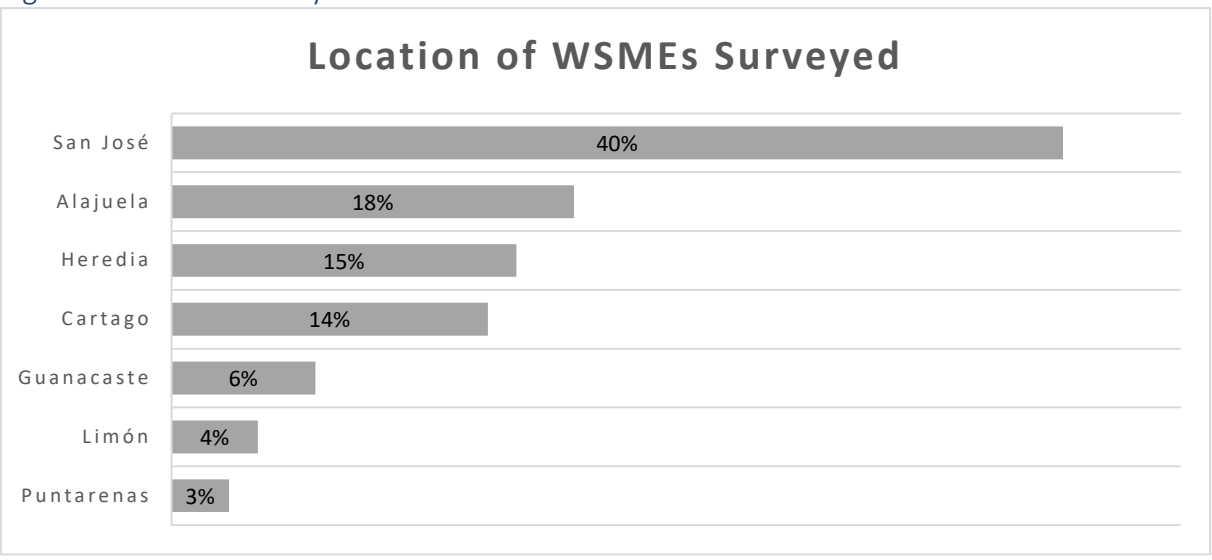
Most of the population in Costa Rica is concentrated in urban areas and correspondingly, the sample shows that the level of women entrepreneurship is higher in urban regions. The correlation can be explained not only as a function of population density, but also the fact that there is greater access to capital, education, and other services, including business support organizations, concentrated in urban areas (see Figure 17).

Figure 17. WSMEs mapped location



Likewise, participation in the consultation was higher in urban areas. The highest proportion of WSMEs that completed the survey was in San José (40%), as shown in Figure 18. While the size of the sample was bigger in San José, correlating with the national population distribution, it is important to highlight that internet usage varies by almost 10% in urban compared to rural areas. The latest data from the International Telecommunication Union shows that the percentage of Internet users in the urban areas of Costa Rica is at 83.1% of the population compared to rural areas, where it sits at 73.7% (Statistics, Gender ICT Statistics , 2020). This difference could have had an impact on the participation outside San José and highlight a gap that may be important when planning online training.

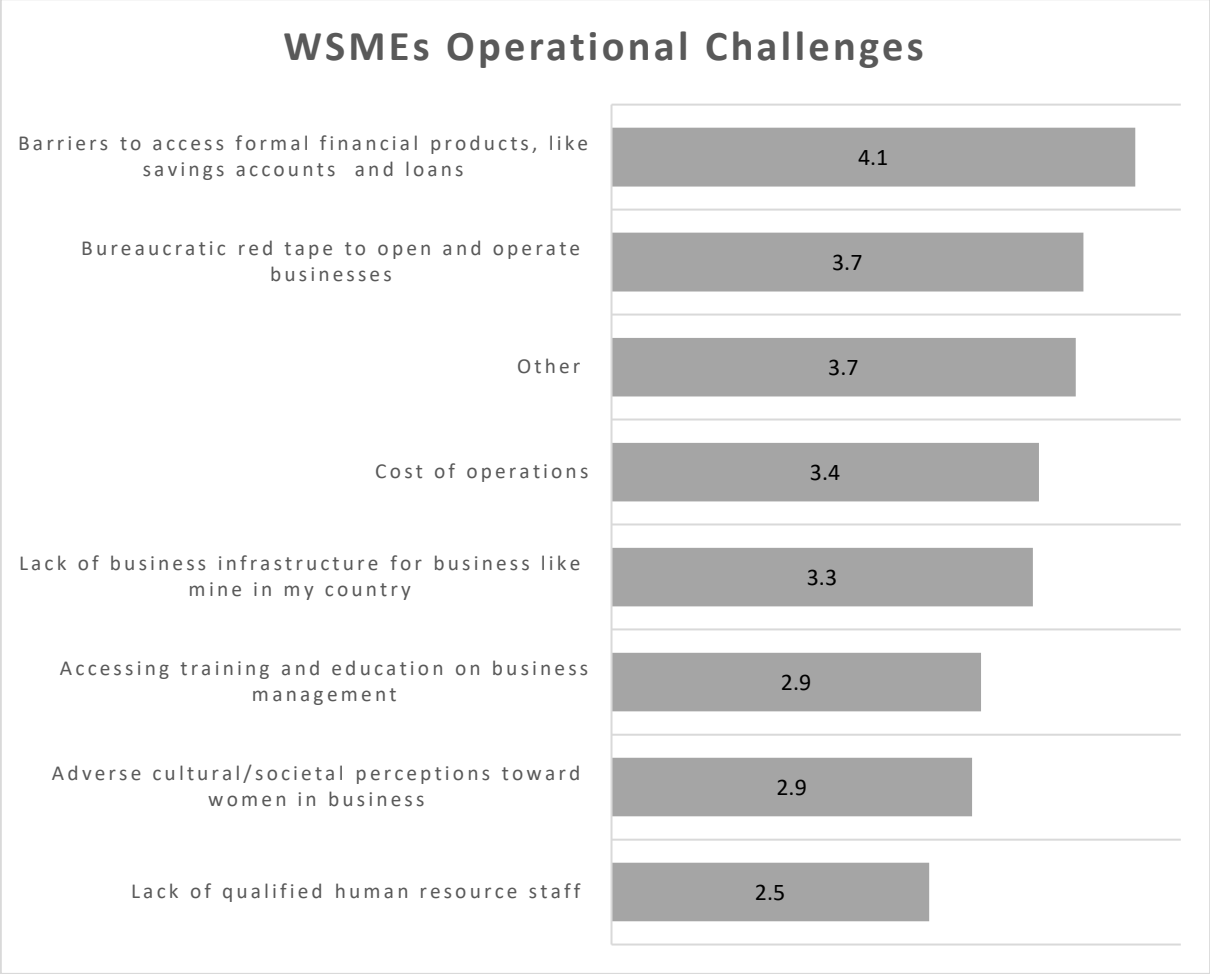
Figure 18. WSMEs surveyed location



WSMEs Business Challenges

To assess the difficulties that women entrepreneurs encounter in Costa Rica, WSMEs were asked to rate their operational challenges on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest impact of the challenge. The results are set out in Figure 19 below:

Figure 19. WSMEs operational challenges

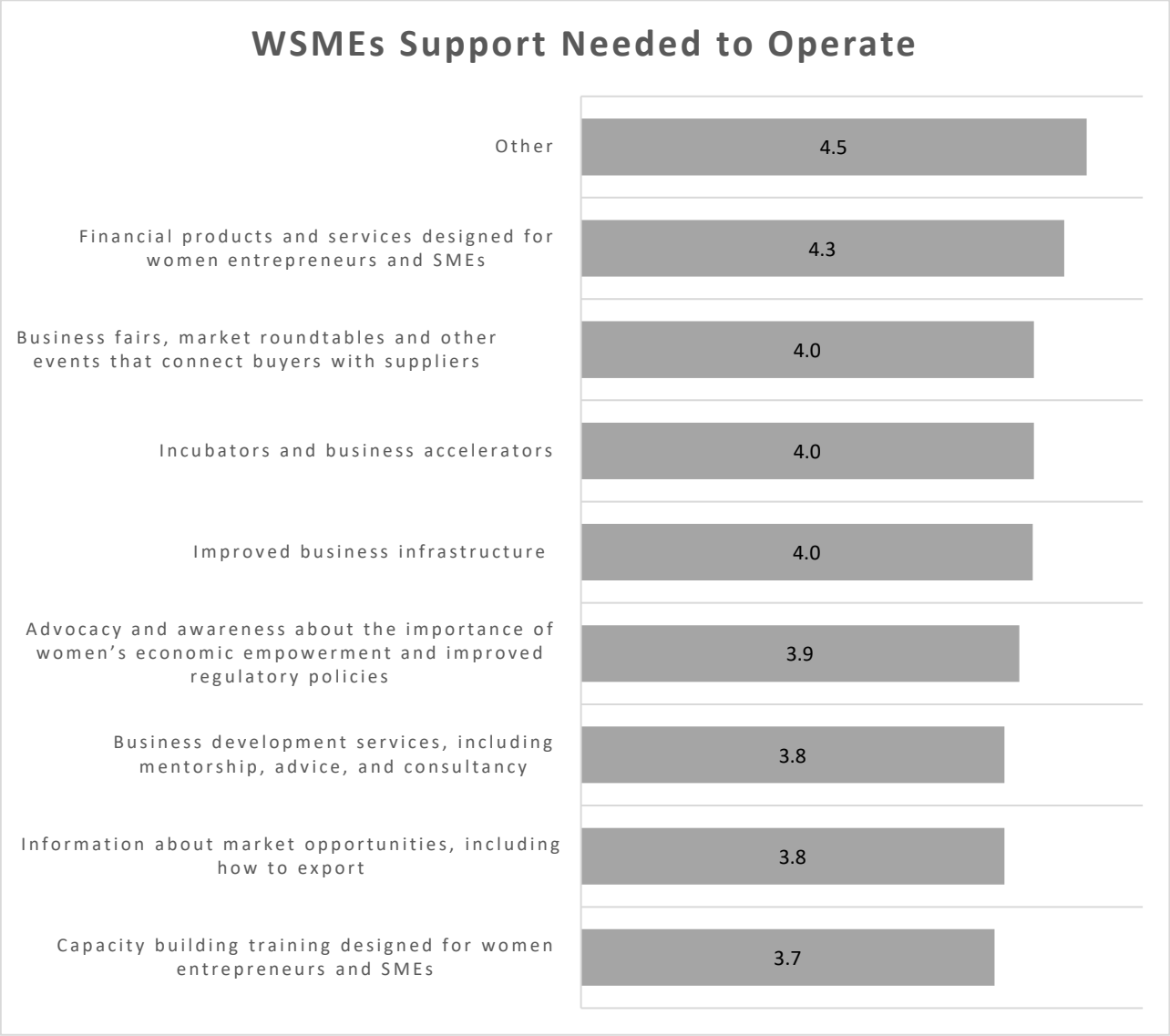


As Figure 19 shows, the greatest reported challenge is lack of access to financing. This is a challenge experienced by women-owned enterprises around the globe. Most studies in this area agree that the challenge to access financing can be associated with the WSMEs operating in highly competitive and low-growth sectors, as well as gender biased credit scoring (Entrepreneurship at a Glance, 2016). In some countries, women have less access to basic financial services, such as a checking and/or savings accounts, which has an impact on their credit/banking history. For example, data from the World Bank Gender Data Portal shows that in Costa Rica only 60.9% of women aged 15 and over have an account at a bank or other financial institution (WB Gender Data, 2022).

Bureaucratic red tape to open and operate a business is the second most challenging barrier. Under “Other”, WSMEs stated challenges primarily related to access to financial products, difficulties to find business contacts, difficulties getting digital knowledge required to marketing business online, excessive taxes and lack of raw material for production (some of these barriers will be analyzed in the COVID section).

WSMEs were asked the kind of support they needed to successfully operate their business. They provided a rating from 1-5, with 5 needing the greatest support. Of the various offerings of support listed in the survey, “Other” came out as the top ranked. When asked what kind of support WSMEs need to operate their business under “Other”, most of the entries reflect the need of financial products to secure capital to carry on their business, which is ranked second in terms of needed support as outlined in Figure 20 below. All the other types of support are equally weighted.

Figure 20. WSMEs support needed to operate



It is important to highlight that at the time of the consultation (April–May 2022) WSMEs were still coping with the struggles of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In the section related to the effect of COVID-19 on the ecosystem this will be further explained.

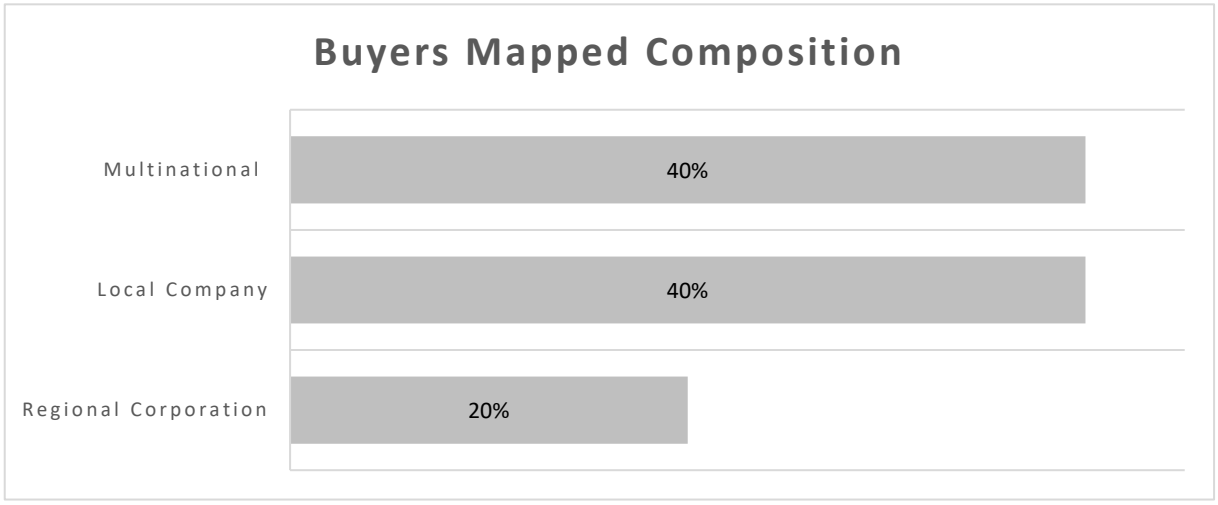
Buyers Profile in the Ecosystem for WSMEs[6]

A sample of companies with local presence was researched as potential buyers of the services and products offered by WSMEs. These are companies that have significant purchasing power in Costa Rica.

[6] For this section 70 buyers were mapped and 34 buyers responded to the survey.

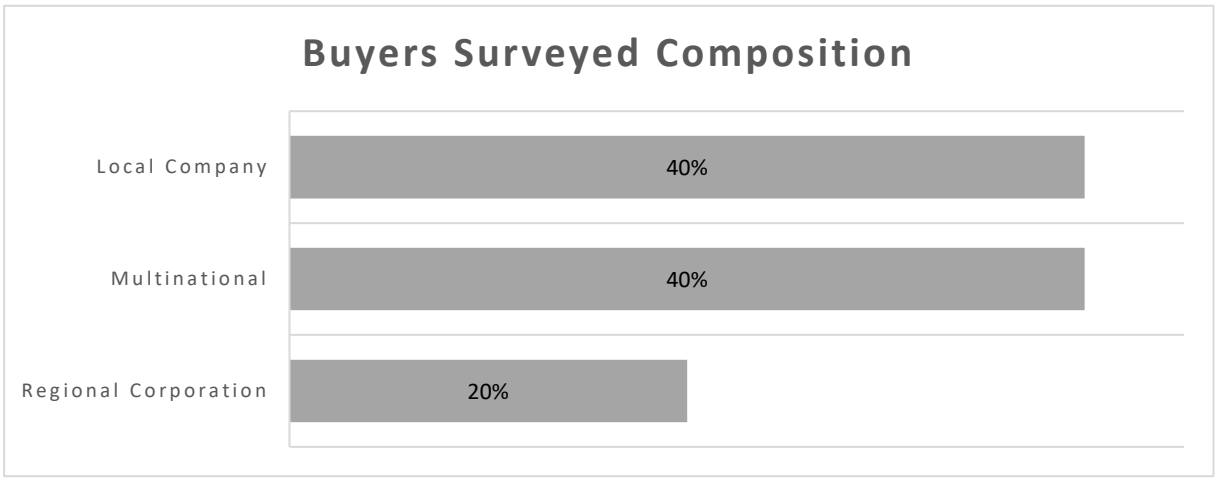
The buyers' mapping sample was composed of multinational corporations, regional corporations, as well as local companies, as shown in Figure 21. Having the ability to target international companies that are established in Costa Rica, in addition to local companies, will be of value to the Project activities in terms of further building and expanding a resilient ecosystem for WSMEs. This will result in an ecosystem that is less volatile to global recessions, such as the financial effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For the buyers, adding local WSMEs to their supply chain brings the benefit of a more resilient and diversified supplier base with new talent and perspectives for services, as well as opportunities for economic in-market growth, and potentially reduced transportation costs. For WSMEs, being able to sell to key companies in the market could enable their sustainable growth.

Figure 21. Buyers mapped



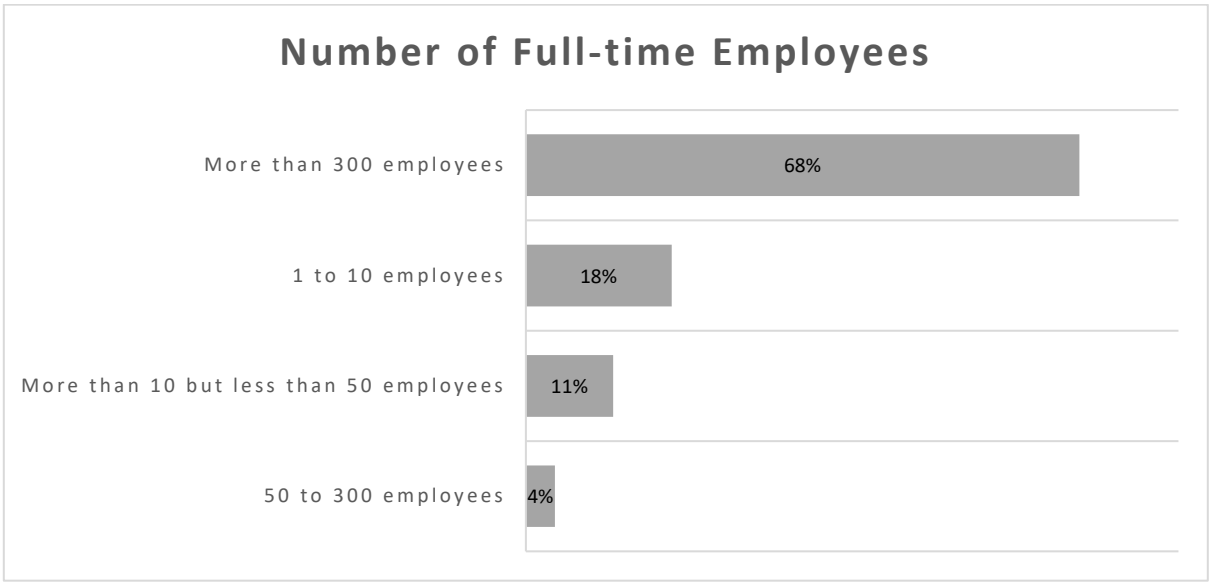
The representation of the buyers that participated in the survey is shown in Figure 22.

Figure 22. Buyers surveyed



Most of the buyers that were consulted are large organizations with over 300 full-time employees, with an average female participation of 49.57%, as shown in Figure 23. The remainder are small- and medium-sized organizations that do not qualify as SMEs because of the revenue threshold of over US$2.5M set out in the mapped criteria in the methodology (see Appendix I).[7]

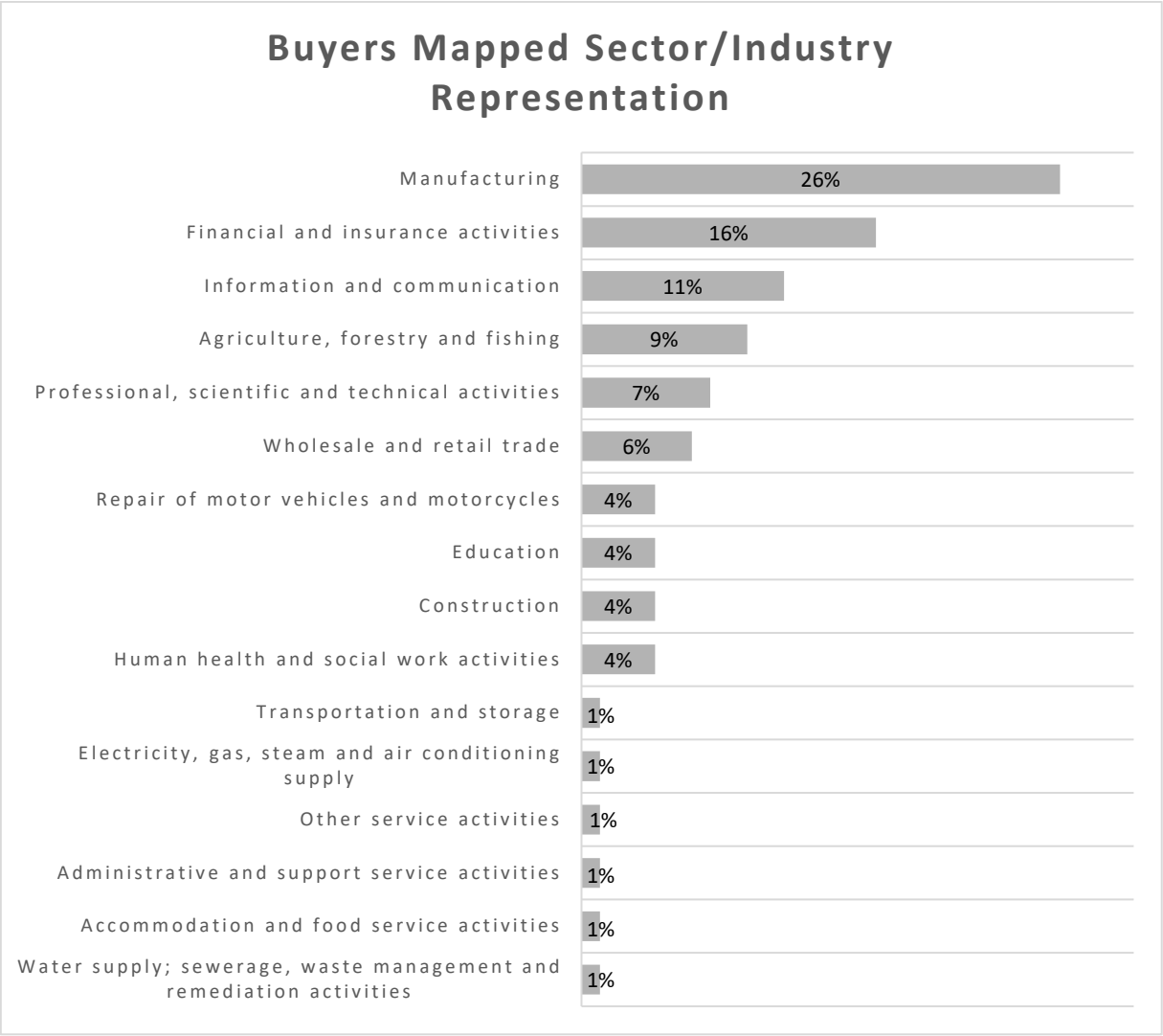
Figure 23. Buyers number of full-time employees



[7] As per the research methodology the definition of SME used is "To qualify as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) the business can have up to 300 employees and a total gross revenue up to US$2.5M."

The sector/industry representation of the mapping sampled is outlined in Figure 24 below. The largest proportion of buyers are in the following sectors: manufacturing (26%), financial and insurance activities (16%) and information and communication (11%).

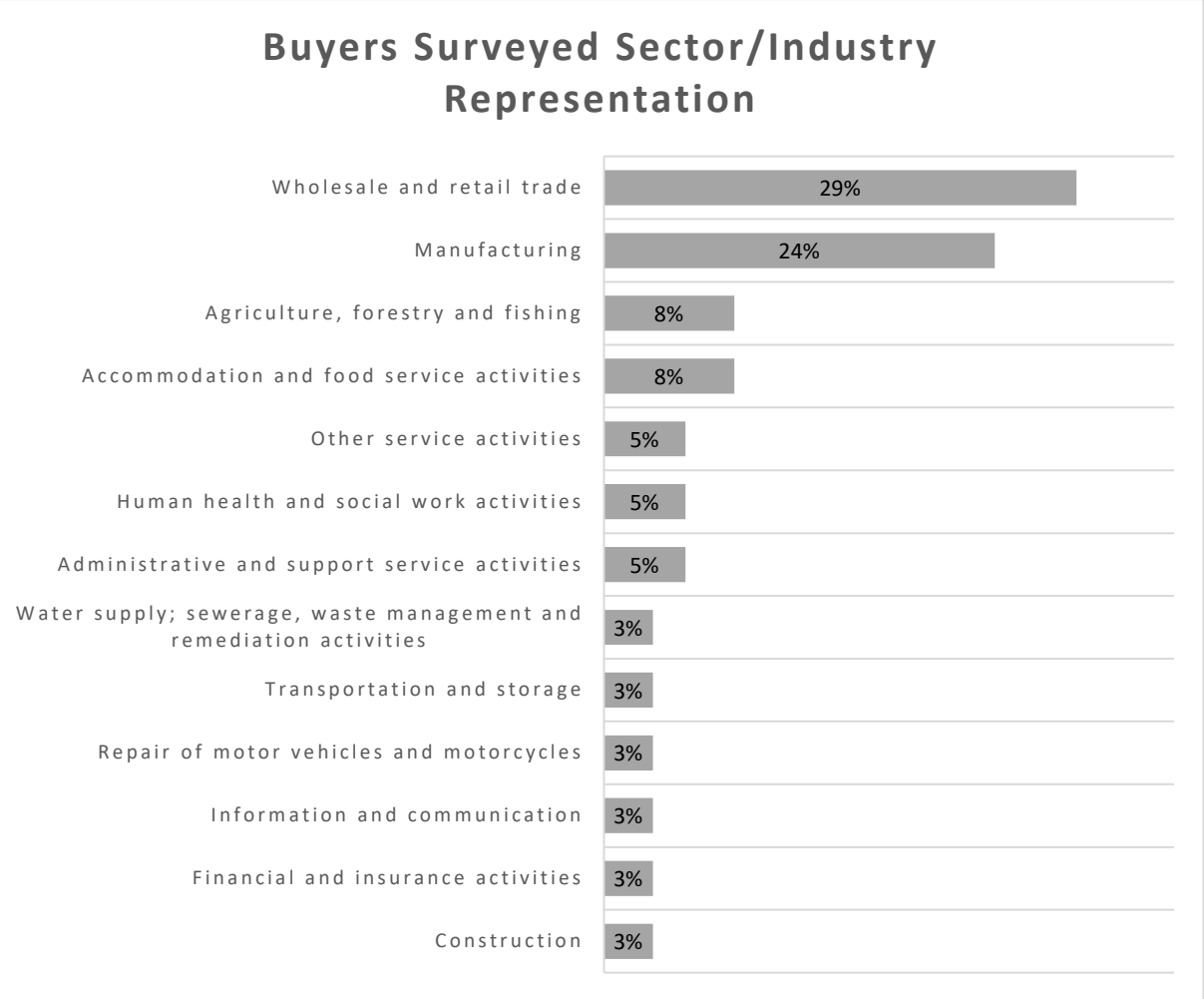
Figure 24. Buyers mapped by sector/industry



The sector representation of the buyers that participated in the survey is shown in Figure 25 and does not fully correlate with the mapping from the secondary research. According to the secondary research, the representation is greater in wholesale and retail at 29%, followed by manufacturing at 24%, and agriculture, forestry, and fishing, as well as accommodation and food services at 8%. Nonetheless, compared with the sector representation of the WSMEs, in both the desk research mapping and survey, the buyers' sectors correlate with those in which women-owned business are more active (see Figures 1 and 2 in comparison to Figures 24 and 25).

The data on the sector representation creates two scenarios: first, WSMEs and the largest corporations are competing in the same market and therefore WSMEs need to work on a unique competitive advantage to stay in business. Second, these WSMEs are selling their products and services to larger companies and are already fitting into the existing supply chain. Data from the survey shows that, in fact, WSMEs are using both sales channels, B2C and B2B (refer to Figure 5).

Figure 25. Buyers surveyed by sector/industry

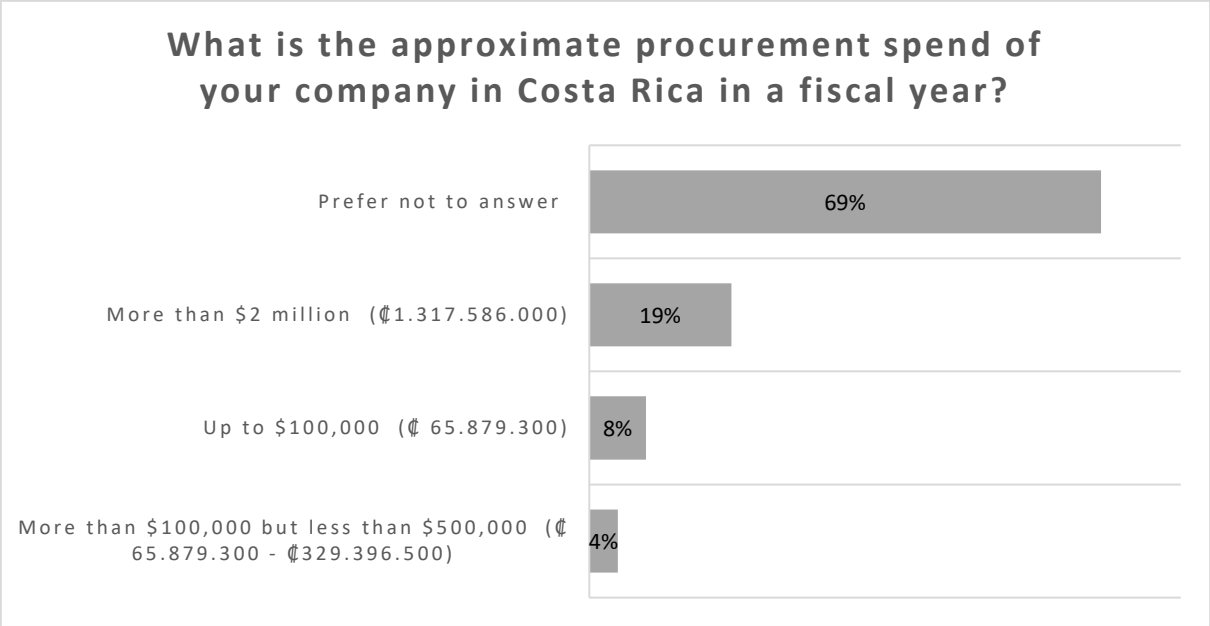


Buyers Purchase Patterns

To understand the opportunities that exist for the WSMEs, buyers were asked several questions related to their procurement spending and practices. The following Figures 26 through 29 outline the answers.

Based on the findings it can be inferred that most of the buyers in Costa Rica prefer not to disclose how much they spend in procurement.

Figure 26. Buyers´ spending in procurement



The representation of local suppliers is low to moderate with most of the buyers having in the range of 20 to 100. The low to moderate participation of local suppliers could be an opportunity for WSMEs in Costa Rica to position themselves to these buyers.

Figure 27. Buyers´ number of local suppliers

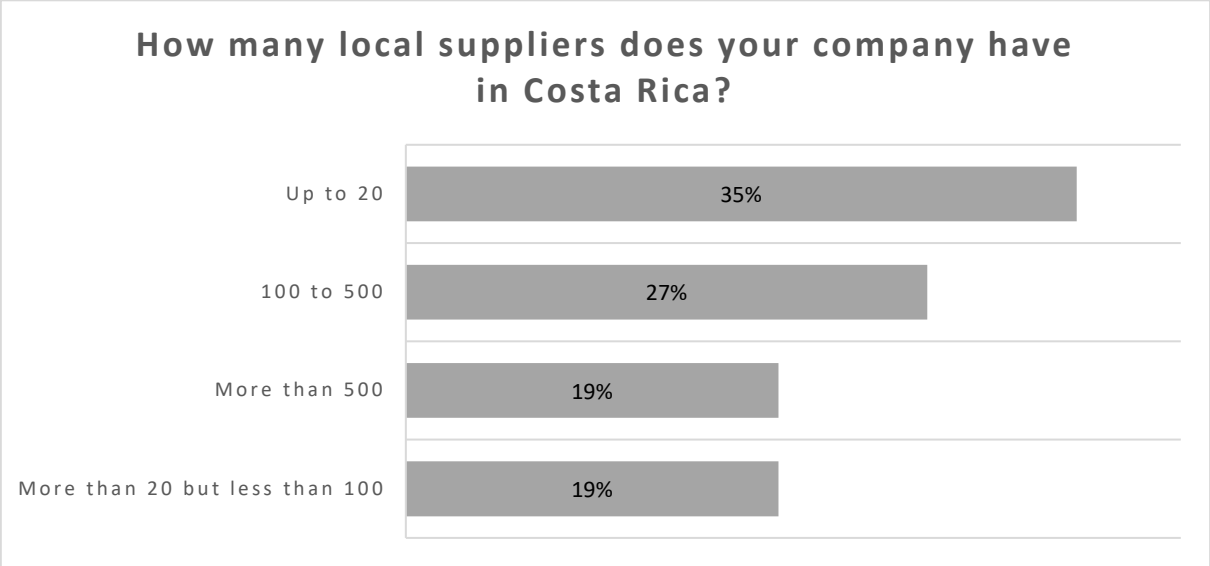


Figure 28. Buyers´ most frequent purchases by product/services

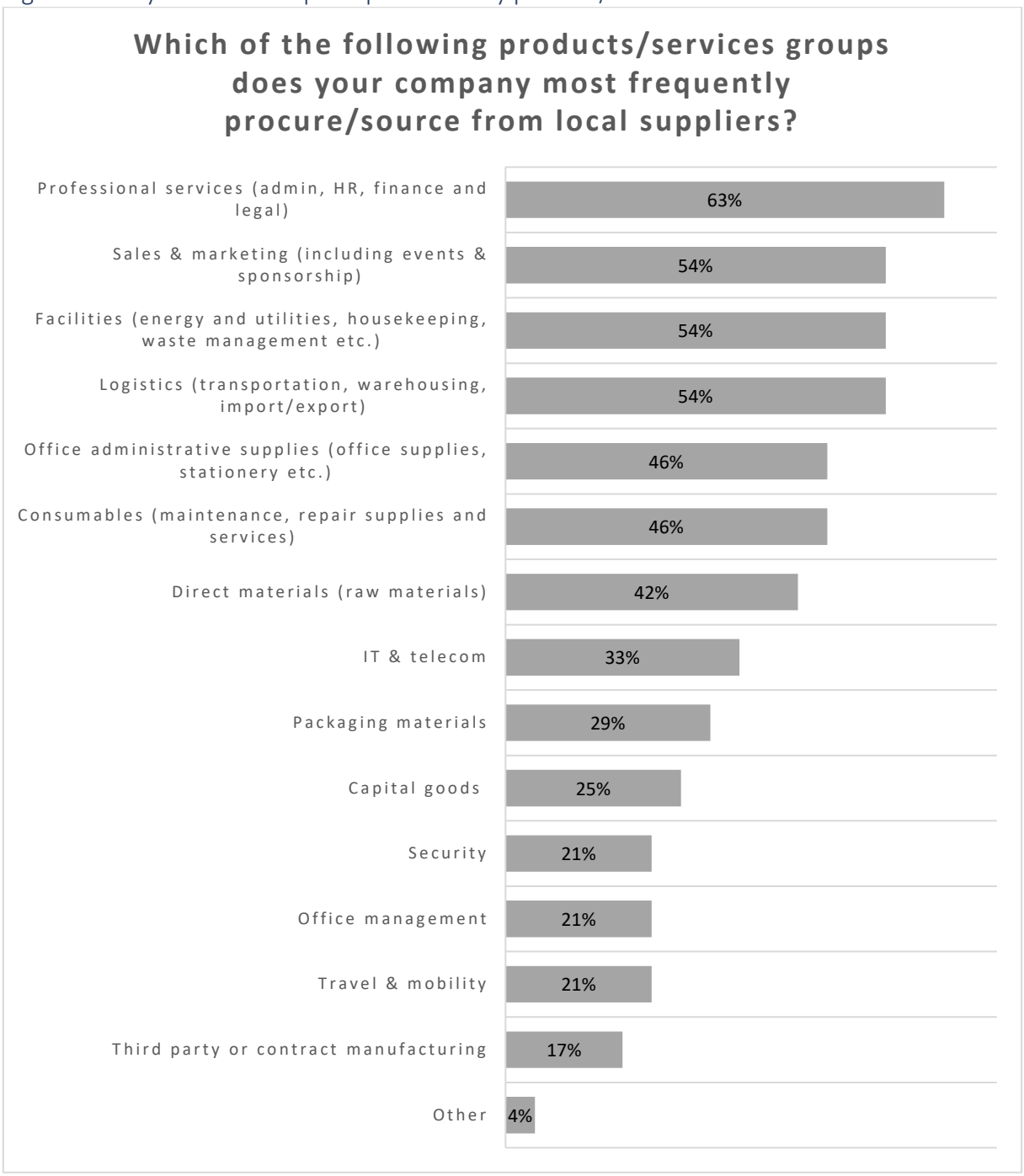
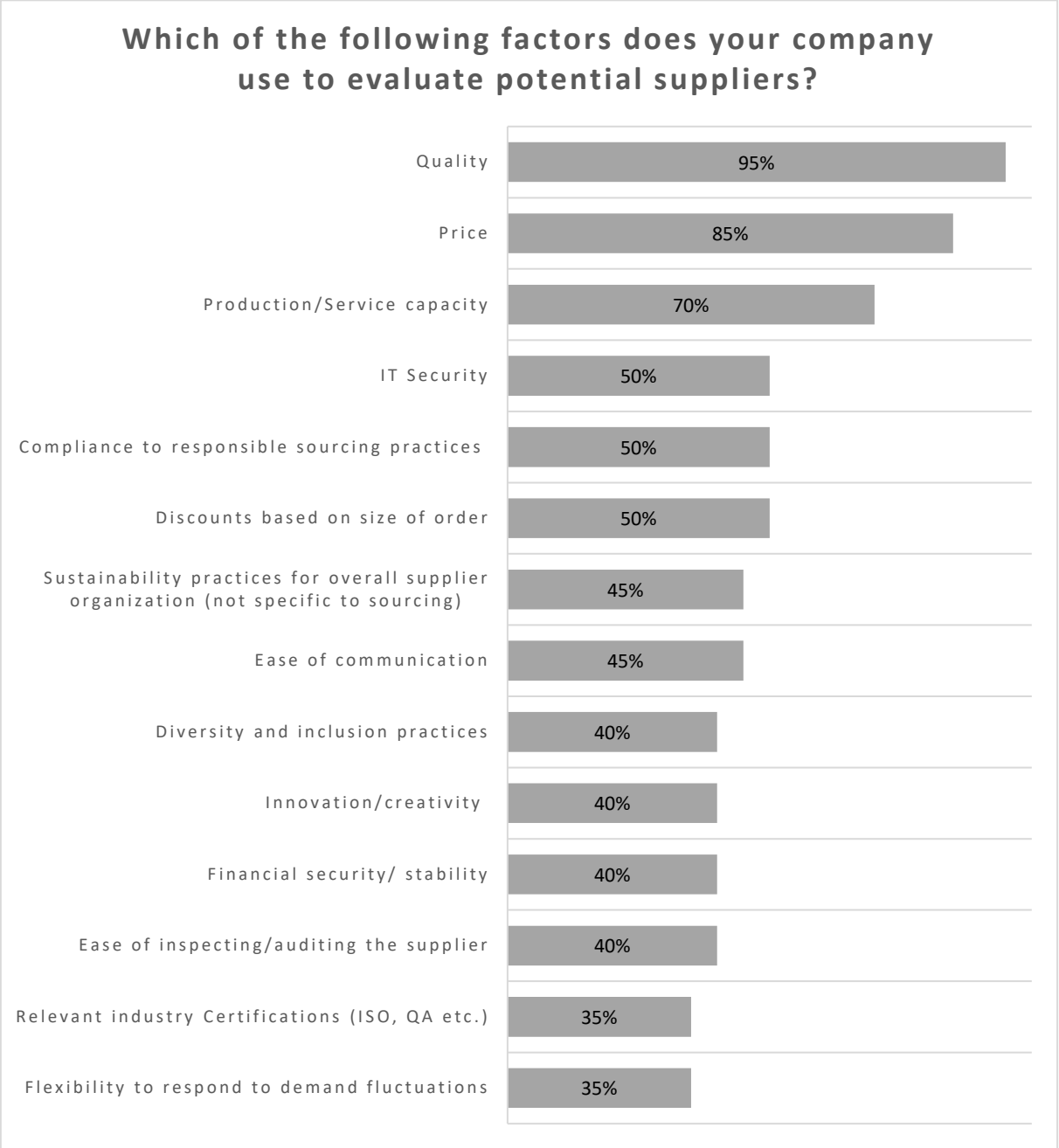


Figure 29. Buyers' criteria to evaluate potential suppliers



Understanding the buyers' criteria for evaluating suppliers (see Figure 29; the top criteria include quality, price, and production capacity) along with the product and services they most often purchased from local suppliers (see Figure 28; the product/services most often purchased includes professional services, sales and marketing and utilizing local facilities) is a benefit to the Project. This information is valuable not only to develop specific training for

WSMEs, but also, to identify those WSMEs that are ready to participate in B2B events with potential buyers, based on the products and services they offer.

Gender-Inclusive Sourcing

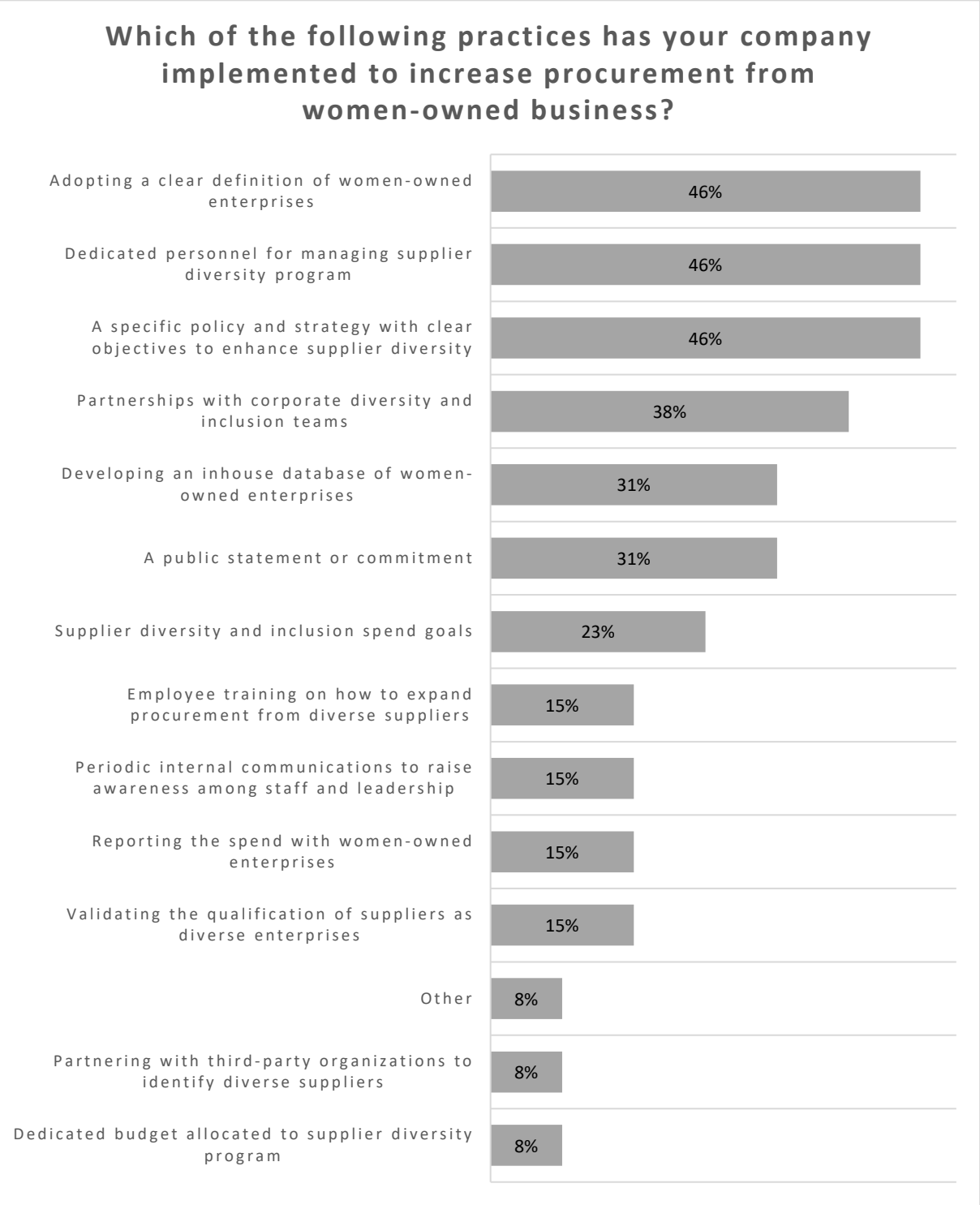
Not all the buyers surveyed answered the questions related to diversity and inclusion policies.

For example, only 70% of the surveyed buyers completed the question about supplier diversity programs. Of those that responded, the majority said "yes" (67%) and one third said "no" (33%), as shown in Figure 30.

Figure 30. Buyers' participation in supplier diversity policies and/or practices

Of those that responded yes, a supplemental question was asked regarding specific practices implemented by buyers. The sample was too small to draw general inferences about procurement practices, although it provides insights of what a very small portion of companies in Costa Rica are undertaking to enhance participation of women-owned businesses in their procurement practices, as shown in Figure 31. It also demonstrates that there is a need to develop and facilitate gender-inclusive sourcing training for buyers in Costa Rica.

Figure 31. Buyers´ practices to procure from women-owned businesses



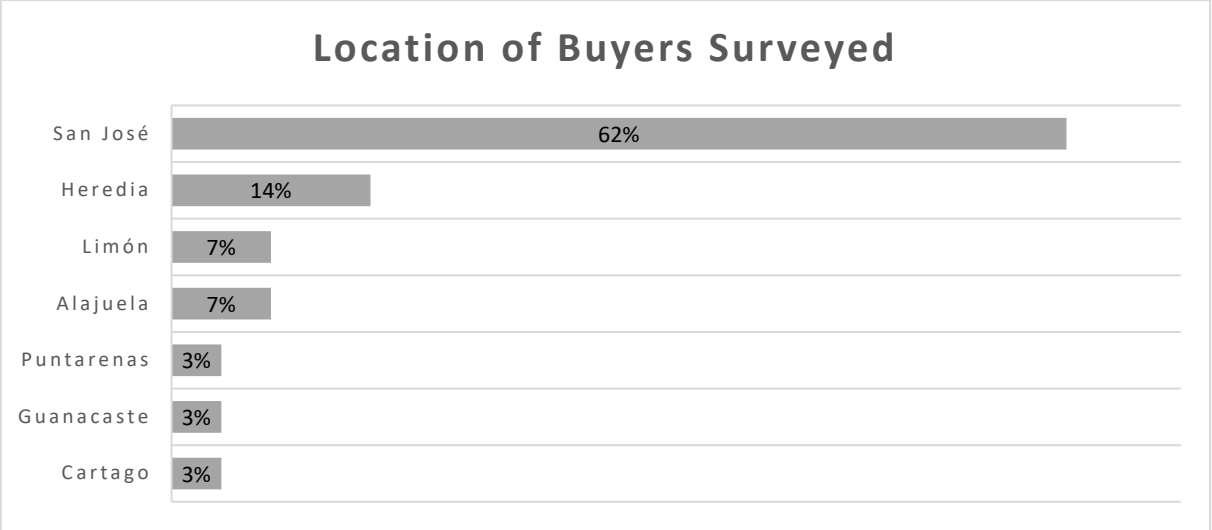
Buyers were also asked if they were associated and/or used the services of business support organizations (BSOs) as this can enlighten the WE3A project in terms of how to approach

the buyers. Only half of the surveyed buyers responded to this question. In all, 37% stated "yes" and 63% said "no", highlighting the need to develop an institutional image of the WE3A project. The image should include local BSOs, but not necessarily rely on them to enlist the participation of buyers in the Project.

Location of the Buyers

In terms of location of those potential buyers, the sample where the bulk of the buyers were located was San José, with a smaller proportion in the Heredia, Alajuela and Limón regions (see Figure 32). The location of buyers correlates with the population distribution in the country, as well as levels of women entrepreneurship by region. This could be useful data when planning WE3A activities to enable B2B matchmaking and interactions between SMEs and buyers.

Figure 32. Buyers' location



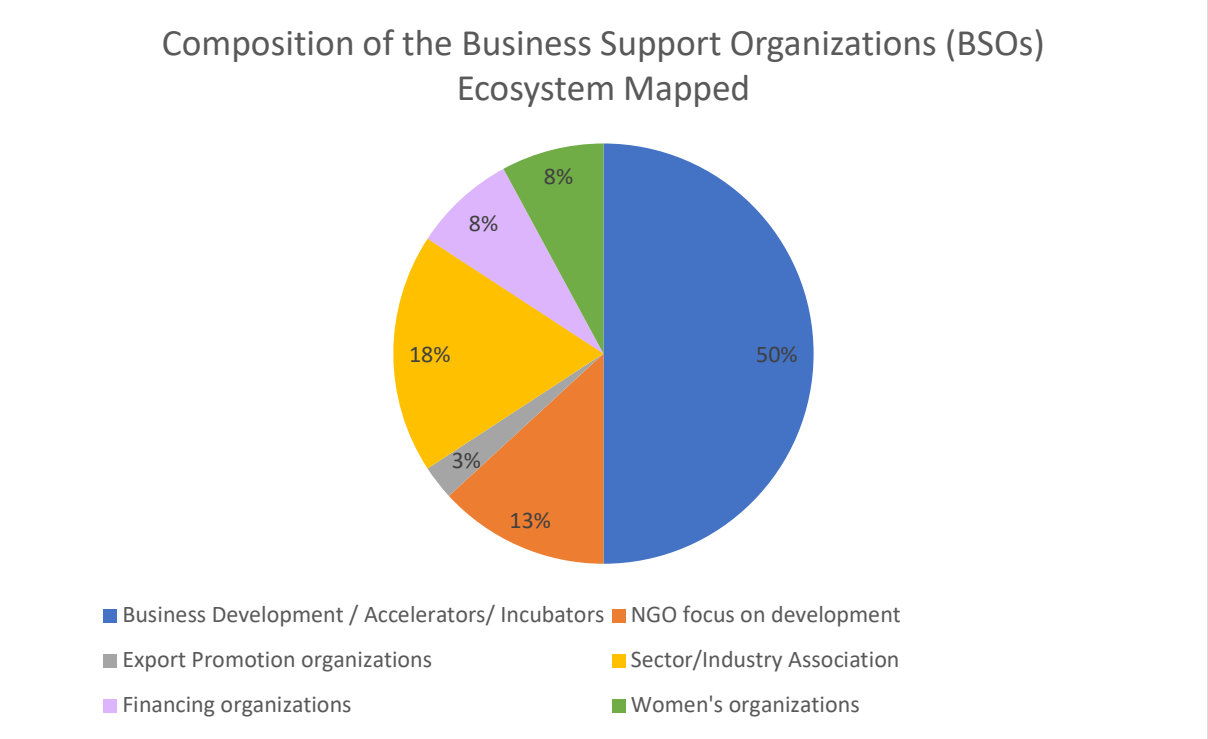
Business Support Organizations in the Ecosystem[8]

Business support organizations (BSOs) are non-profit, public, private, and for-profit resource organizations, trade, and industry associations, etc. that serve local businesses and support their growth and success. These include, for example: chambers of commerce, trade and industry associations, coalitions, government agencies, women's associations, incubators, and sectoral organizations. BSOs play a critical role in supporting local economic development in general and they can be a great channel for supporting women entrepreneurship.

[8] For this section 38 BSOs were mapped and 43 BSOs responded the survey. Additional outreach to stakeholders that meet the definitions of the mapping was completed using social media and direct mailing, which drove the participation of BSOs beyond the mapped sampled.

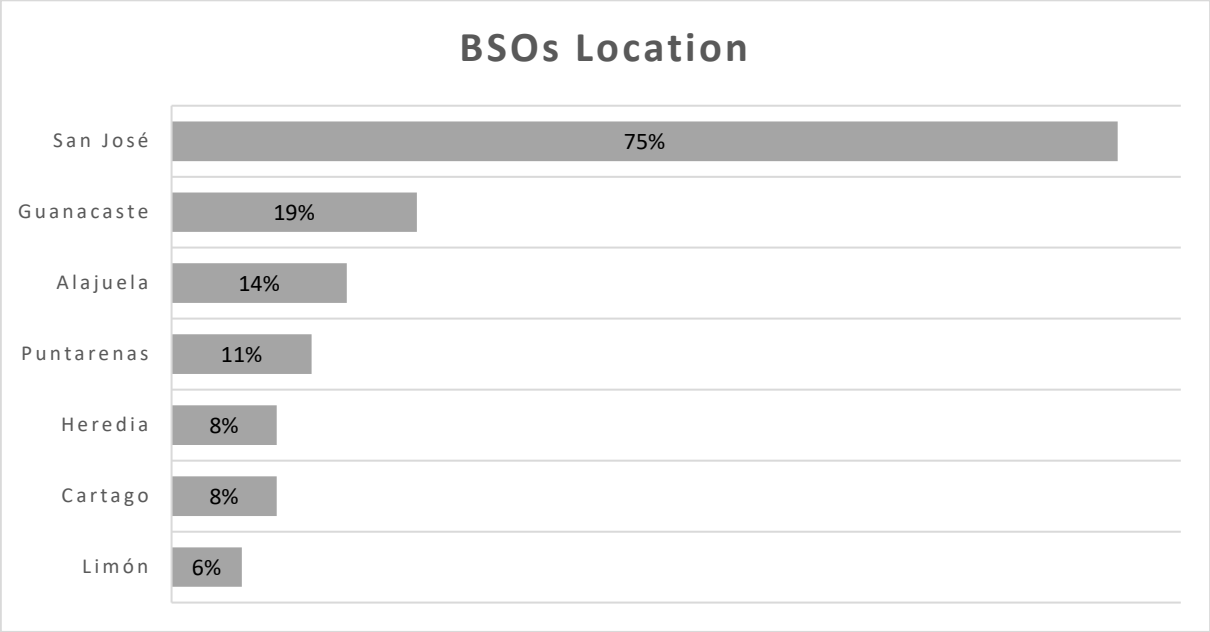
The mapping research identified a sample of BSOs that represent the local ecosystem in Costa Rica. Appendix II provides a summary of those BSOs that are most relevant to the WSME ecosystem and reportedly used by the WSMEs surveyed. Figure 33 below outlines the composition per type of the BSOs mapped.

Figure 33. BSOs mapped by type



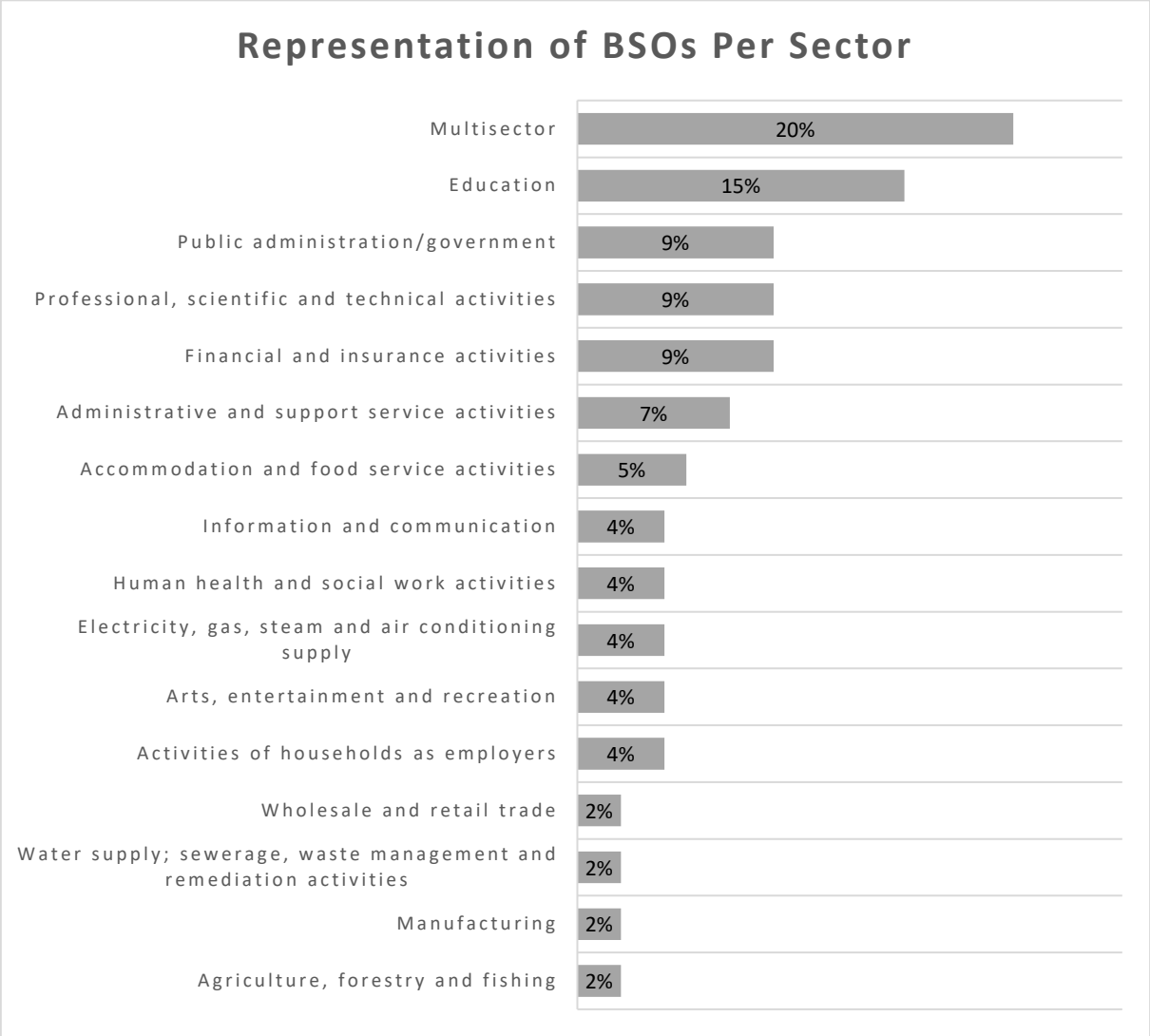
When BSOs were asked to indicate their geographical location within the country, they had the option to indicate more than one. Throughout Costa Rica there is a solid network of BSOs. However, the vast majority are based in San José, with their services being provided to the entire country (for a further breakdown see Figure 34).

Figure 34. BSOs representation by location



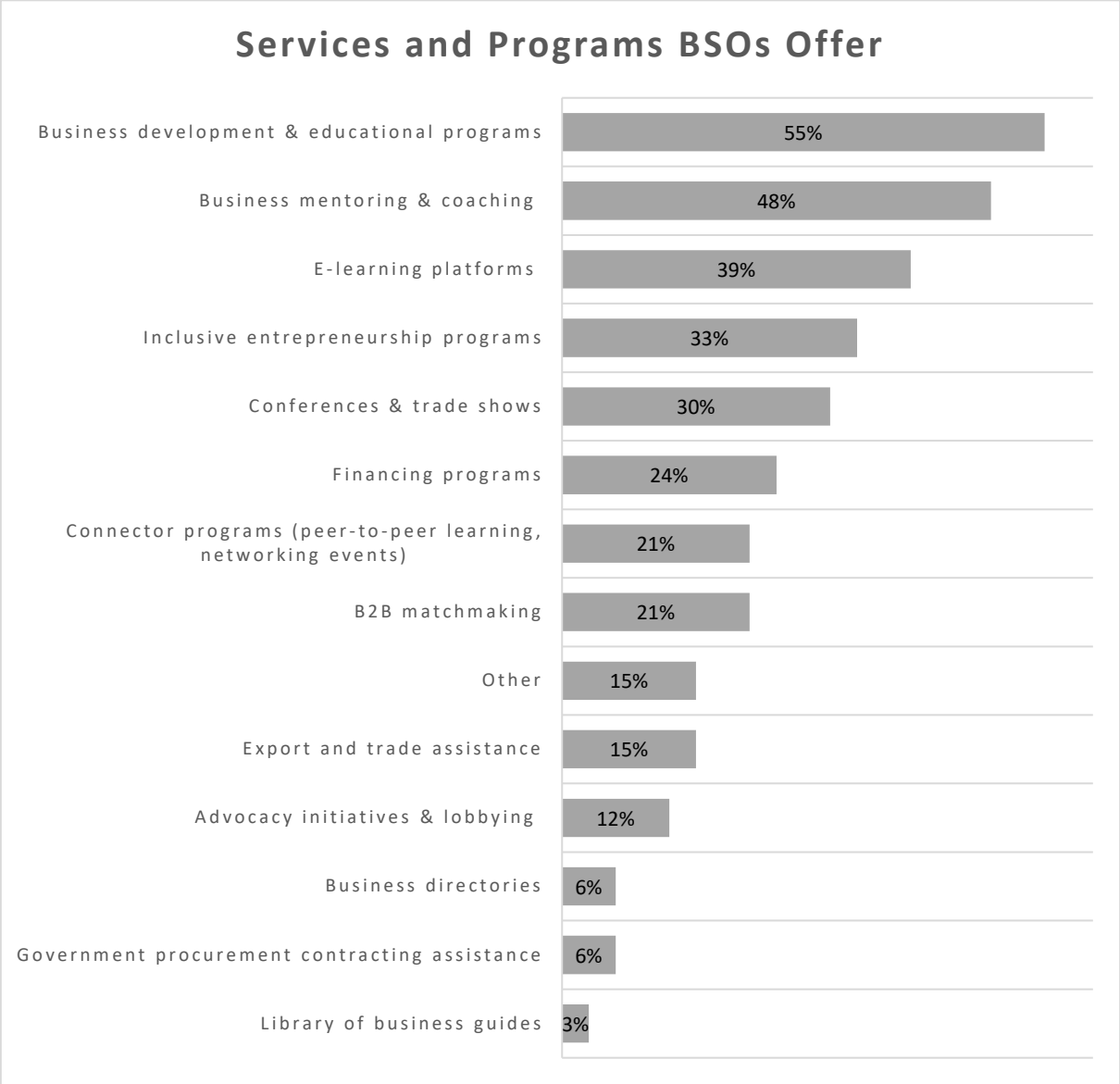
Regarding the sectors that the BSOs serve, the majority serve clients in multi sectors at 20% and education at 15%, followed by public administration/government, professional, scientific and technical, and finance and insurance, each at 9%. The breakdown is available in Figure 35.

Figure 35. BSOs representation by sector



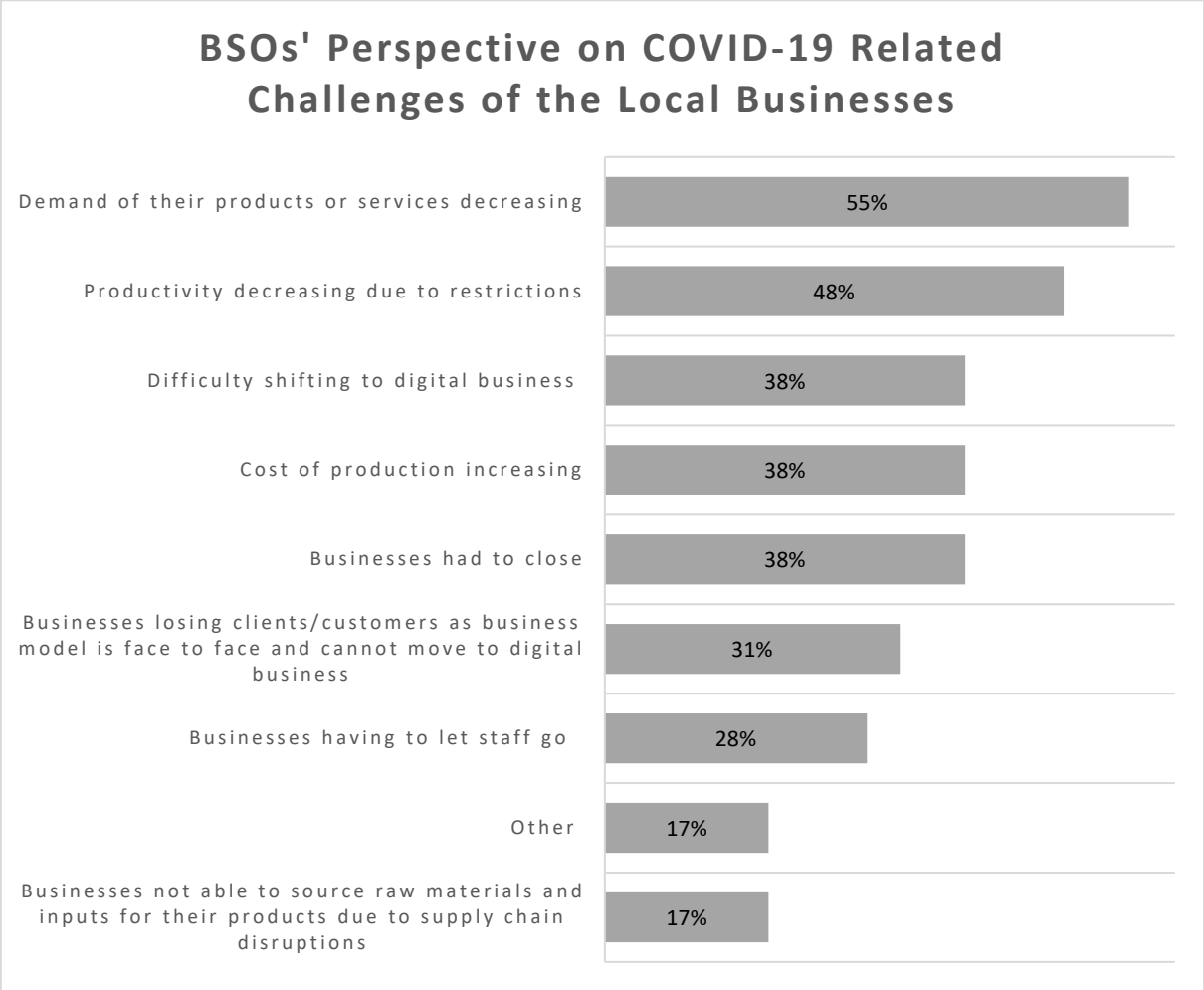
BSOs were asked to indicate the services and programs they currently offer. Figure 36 below reveals that business development and educational programs is the main offering of the local BSOs, followed by business mentoring and coaching. Furthermore, 70% of the BSOs indicated that they offer tailored services and programs to women entrepreneurs. The percentages of members that are women varies across the BSOs, in a range from 20% to 100%. Similarly, the programing of some organizations is devoted entirely to women entrepreneurship, while others tailor a mere 5% of their programming to women.

Figure 36. BSOs´ services and program offerings



As key actors in any entrepreneurial ecosystem, BSOs were asked about the impact of the Global COVID-19 pandemic in the business community. When asked what business challenges related to the pandemic their members faced, BSOs indicated that the decreasing demand for their product and services and production were the main challenges. In addition, many businesses had to close, their cost of production increased, and businesses faced difficulties pivoting to a digital environment (see Figure 37).

Figure 37. BSOs´ perspective on COVID-19 related challenges of the local businesses

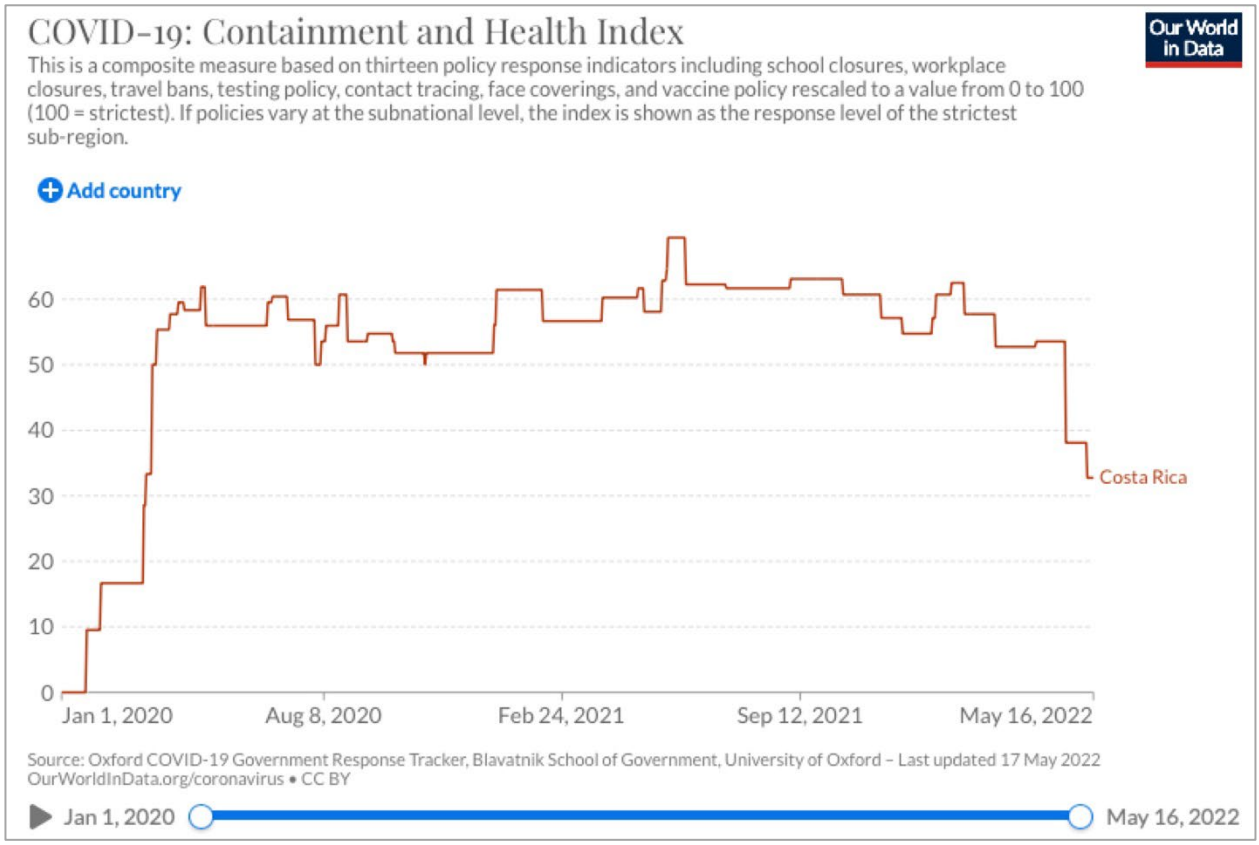


The next section of the report focuses on the impact of COVID-19 in Costa Rica's business ecosystem, with particular emphasis on the impact on WSMEs.

The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

As of April 25, 2022, there were 8,383 deaths attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic in Costa Rica (Hannah Ritchie, 2022). On March 6, 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Costa Rica, at that point, the government's response to the crisis was rapidly implemented. According to the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGT), which produces a composite measure based on thirteen policy response indicators, where a value of 100 is the strictest; the Containment and Health Index in Costa Rica has fluctuated through-out the pandemic from a high of 69 to 32, as shown in the Figure 38 below:[9]

Figure 38. COVID-19 Containment and Health Index



[9] The Oxford Coronavirus Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) project calculates a Containment and Health Index that builds on the Stringency Index, a composite measure calculated on the basis of the following thirteen metrics: school closures, workplace closures, cancellation of public events, restrictions on public gatherings, closures of public transport, stay-at-home requirements, public information campaigns, restrictions on internal movements, international travel controls, testing policy, extent of contact tracing, face coverings, and vaccine policy. The index on any given day is calculated as the mean score of the metrics, each taking a value between 0 and 100. A higher score indicates a stricter response (i.e. 100 = strictest response): https://ourworldindata.org/covid-stringency-index.

This index shows the strictness of government policies but does not necessarily measure or imply the appropriateness or effectiveness of the response. However, it can be inferred that Costa Rica's response has been appropriate to the waves of the pandemic. Nonetheless, the containment measures that were put in place to mitigate the transmission rate of COVID-19, put a toll on the local economy. As a small open economy that relies on trade and tourism, Costa Rica was highly exposed to the global economic slowdown. Data from the World Bank shows Costa Rica's GDP growth rate for the year 2020 was -4.1% (World Bank Data GDP growth Costa Rica, 2022). Demand for goods and services in general decreased during the pandemic with devastating consequences for many businesses.

In 2020, the national statistical office of Costa Rica consulted with 8,000 small to large private sector companies across different sectors. Many respondents (94%) stated that COVID-19 had negative consequences for their business, including decreased sales and productivity (INEC empresas impactadas por efectos del COVID-19, 2021). The overall impact is greater as the size of the company decreases. In the case of women-owned businesses, they tend to be micro and small businesses in traditionally low-value-added sectors, and the barriers that typically affect their growth, including limited access to credit, business networks and channels, and technology, also limited their ability to survive the COVID-19 crisis.

The government of Costa Rica put in place emergency and recovery policies to alleviate the economic toll of the pandemic. Relevant to the recovery of the WSMEs ecosystem are (COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021):

- In April 2020, "Alivio", an inter-institutional effort by PROCOMER, the Development Banking System (SBD), and the National Learning Institute (INA), announced an initiative to mitigate the impact of the crisis due to the pandemic. In its implementation, 191 SMEs were selected to be supported through three stages: stabilization, reconversion, and acceleration. In all, 41% of the 191 beneficiary firms are small, 32% micro and 27% medium-sized enterprises. Beneficiary firms have reported a growth rate of 17% in the number of people employed full time, 26% in average monthly sales and 12% in exports (Programa Alivio, 2022).

- Fund for the Promotion of Productive Activities and Organization of Women (FOMUJERES), administered by the National Institute for Women, INAMU, is an organization that promotes women's economic autonomy during the pandemic. The initiative promotes the economic recovery of the country's women through non-reimbursable funds and strategic support. As of June 21, 2021, a total of 980 million colones (US$1,479,759) have been made available to benefit women and women's organizations that are not subject to credit in the Costa Rican financial sector. The initiative finances productive projects and defense of female rights (INAMU, 2022).

- Government support was available through the Rural Development Institute (INDER). For example: the Association of Producers of La Fortuna de San Carlos (ASOPROFORT), made up of 18 farming families, of which 7 are led by women, received specialized equipment that will allow them to strengthen their agricultural economic activity and offer quality products to hotels and local businesses, as well as in the northern Huetar Region of the country (INDER, 2021).

- PROCOMER developed new training sessions for exporters to assist them in being better prepared to face the economic crisis (Programas, 2022).

- In May 2020, a group of national banks (Banco Nacional, Banco de Costa Rica, Banco Popular) set up credits for small businesses. Those credits can be used for seed capital, inputs and salaries (BCR, COVID-19, 2022).

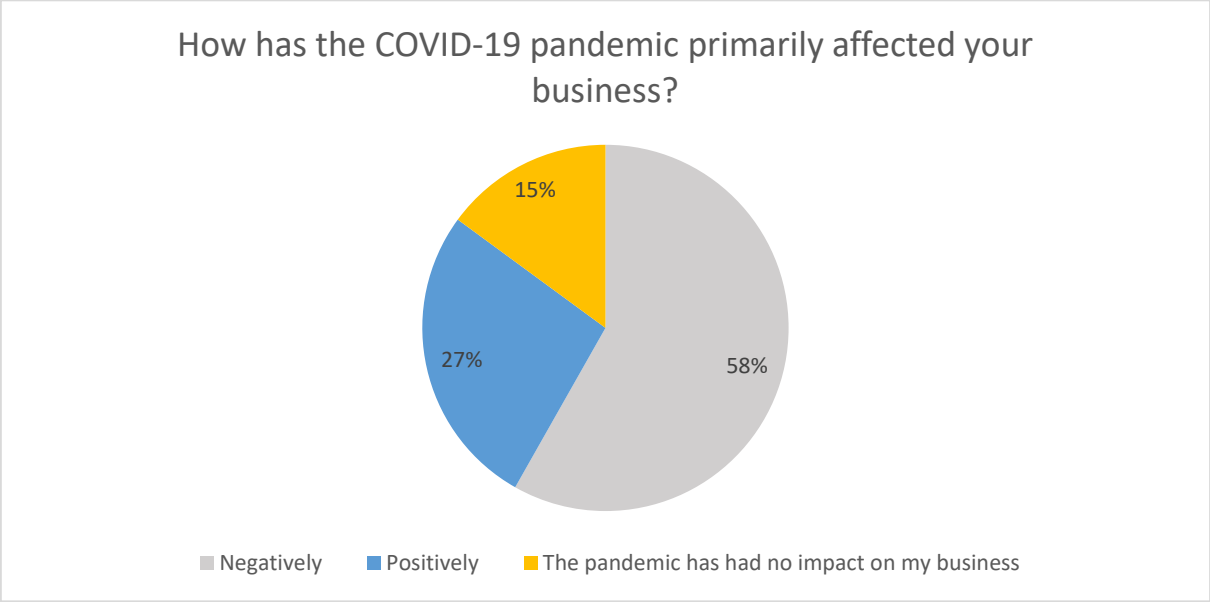
Notwithstanding the challenges that COVID-19 brought to the entrepreneurial ecosystem, signs of resilience are apparent. For example: data from the 2021 national survey of household microenterprises recorded 454,650 household microenterprises, which is equivalent to 23.6% increase from 2020 when 367,922 were recorded (INEC empresas impactadas por efectos del COVID-19, 2021). Data from previous years (2017-2018) showed a decrease of household microenterprises. This can be interpreted as a new wave of entrepreneurship that was driven by the need to generate an income during this trying time. Another constructive outcome was the fact that the pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of SMEs in the ecosystem.

A study commissioned by Microsoft found that 96% of local SMEs reported that the pandemic accelerated their digital transformation process (Edelman, 2022).

COVID-19 Impact on WSMEs

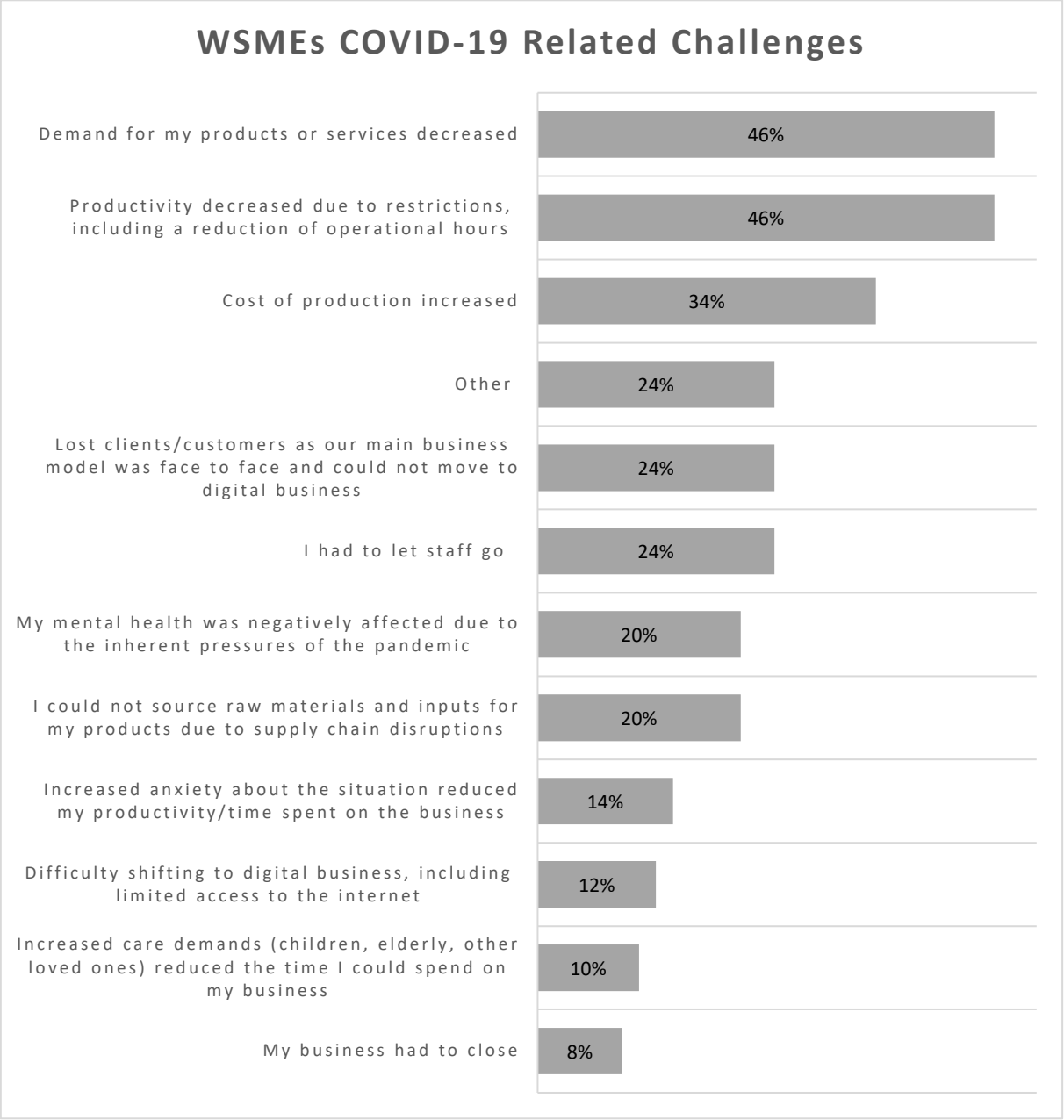
More than half of the WSMEs surveyed (58%) stated that they were negatively affected by the pandemic, with only 15% reporting that it had no impact on their business (see Figure 39).

Figure 39. WSMEs COVID-19 impact



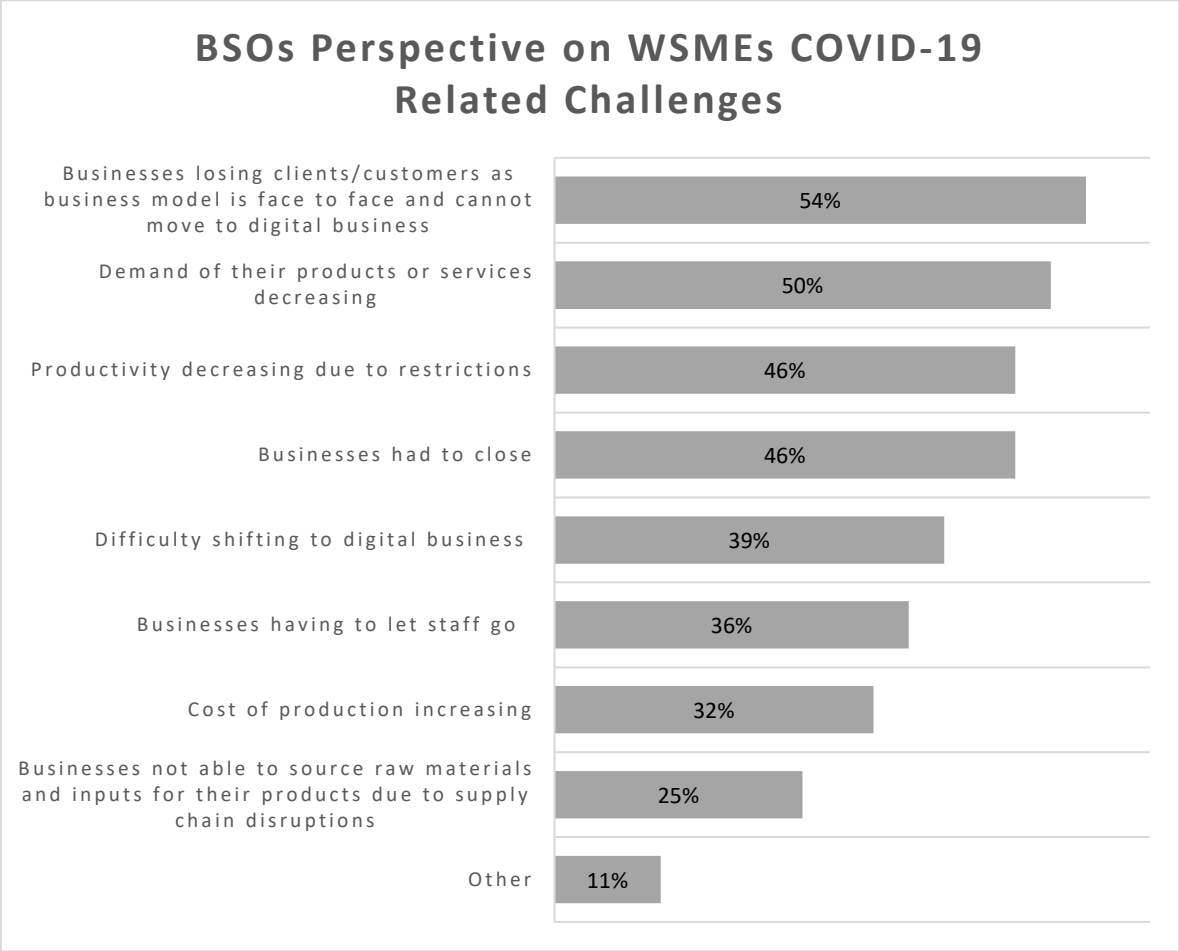
When asked what business challenges WSMEs faced due to COVID-19, most participants reported productivity decrease, as a result of health-related restrictions (46% of respondents), and the decreased demand for their products and services (46% of respondents), followed by increased cost of production (24% of respondents). Other reported challenges included lost clients, letting staff go, difficulty sourcing raw materials and the struggles shifting to a digital business. As well, 20% of the respondents indicated that their mental health was negatively affected due to the inherent pressures of the pandemic (see Figure 40).

Figure 40. WSMEs COVID-19 related challenges



Likewise, BSOs were asked to indicate the challenges related to COVID-19 that WSMEs faced. Figure 41 shows that a majority stipulated the difficulty to shift the business model from face-to-face to a digital business, as the top challenge, followed by the decreased demand for products and services, and business closures. BSOs reported that before the pandemic the top challenges that WSMEs experienced was the difficulty to sell their products and services, the high cost of production, and low production capacity.

Figure 41. BSOs perspective on WSMEs COVID-19 related challenges



To understand the extent of the impact of the pandemic, WSMEs were asked how their sales were impacted in the first and second year of the pandemic. Figures 42 and 43 below show that sales were severely impacted, however some signs of relief were realized from the first to the second year of the pandemic.

Figure 42. WSMEs sales impact 2020-2021

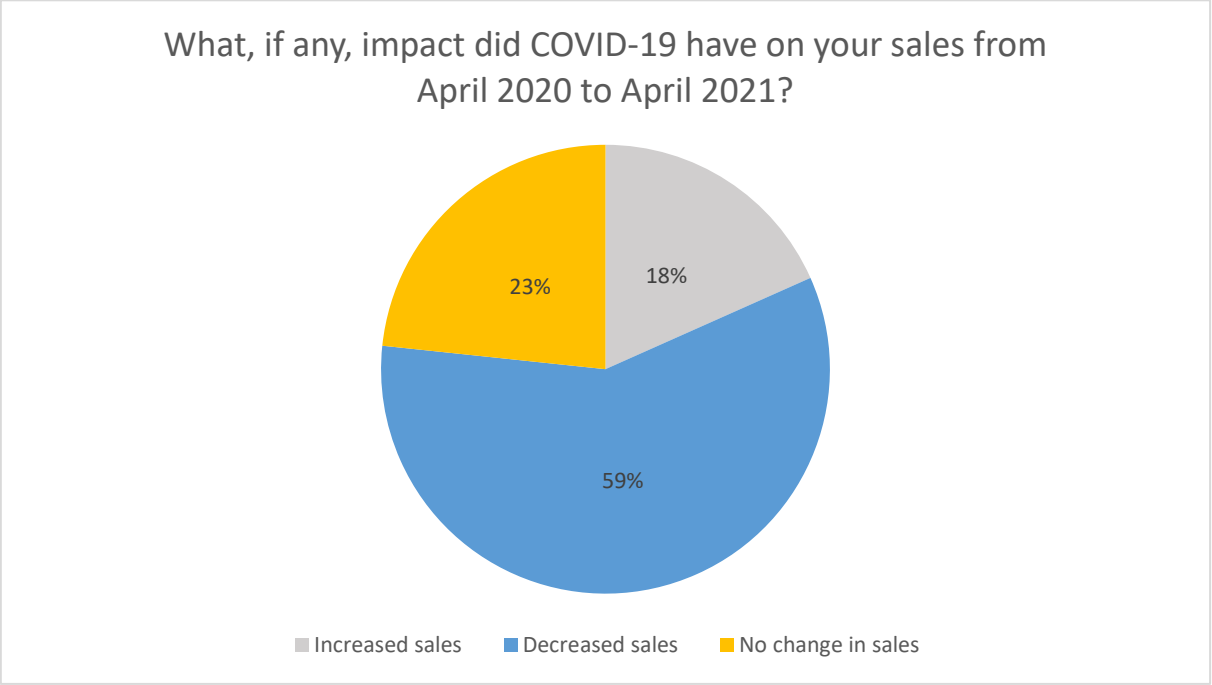
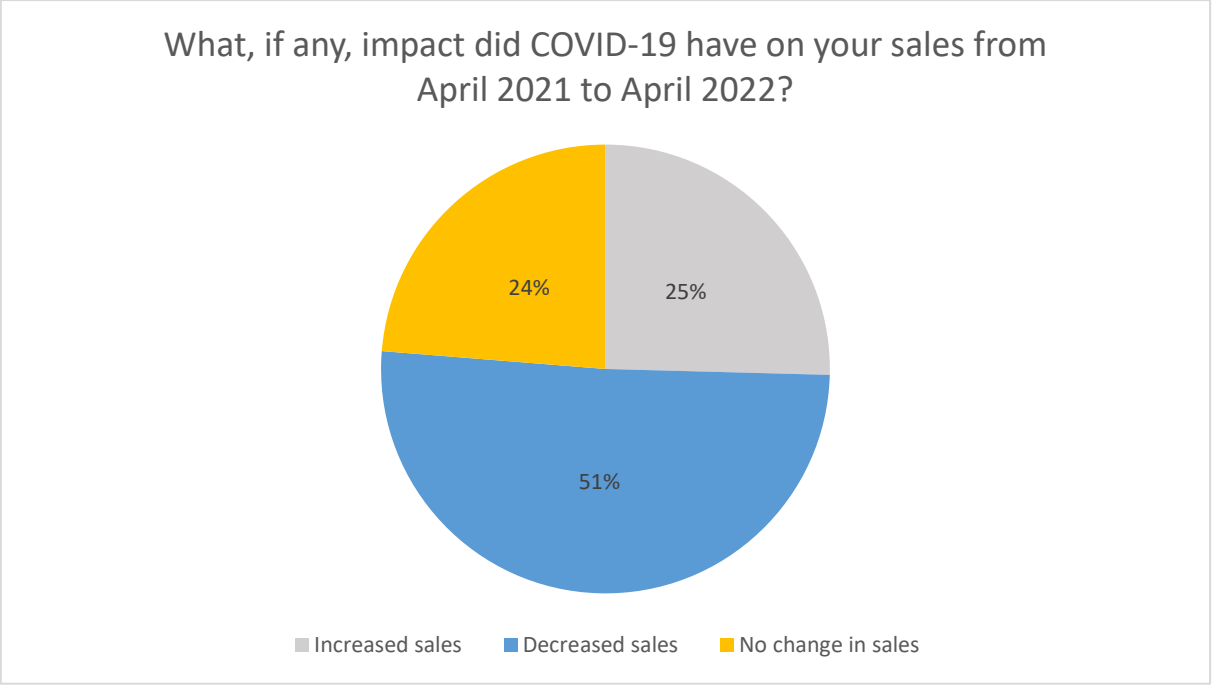


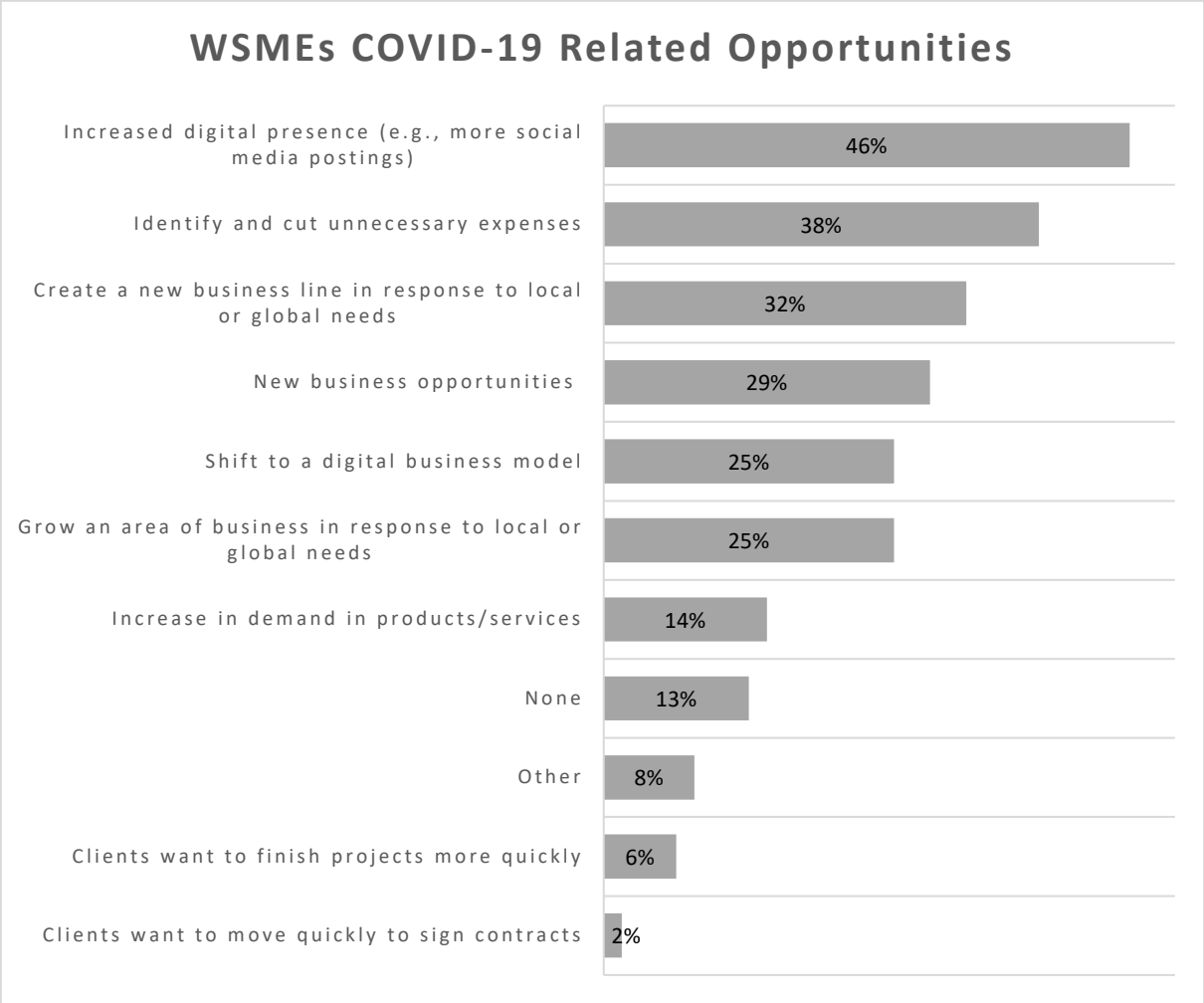
Figure 43. WSMEs sales impact 2021-2022



Additionally, WSMEs were asked if the pandemic brought any related opportunities. The top three opportunities reported were the increase in digital presence, the identification

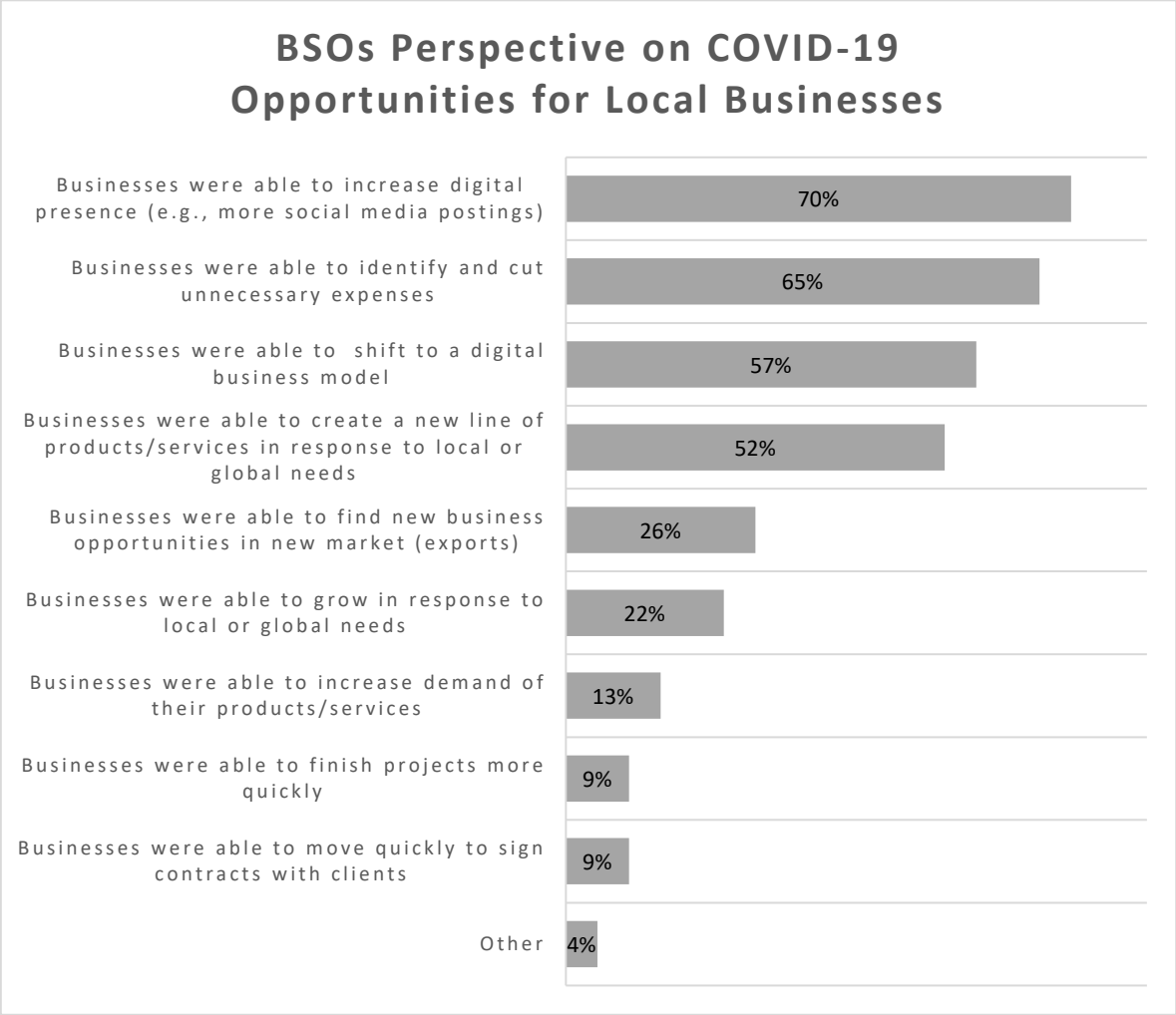
and cut of unnecessary expenses, and the creation of a new business line in response to local and global needs.

Figure 44. WSMEs COVID-19 related opportunities



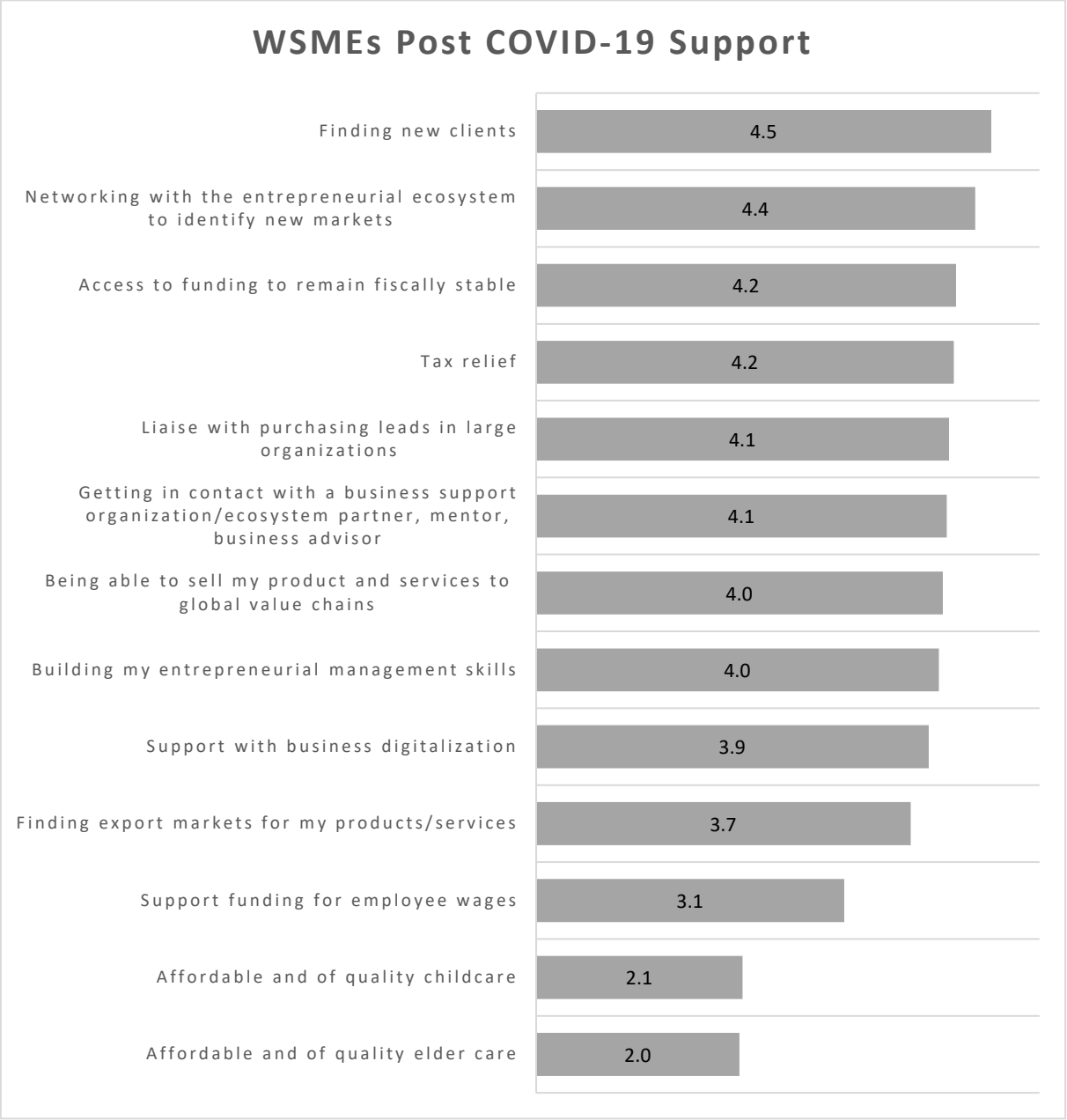
Likewise, BSOs were asked what, if any, opportunities COVID-19 brought to the local businesses that they supported. Figure 45 shows that increased digital presence was the top opportunity, followed by cutting unnecessary expenses, and business shifting to digital business models.

Figure 45. BSOs perspective on COVID-19 opportunities for local businesses



WSMEs were asked to weigh the areas of support they required the most for business recovery in post-COVID-19 times. Not surprisingly, the top type of support the WSMEs requested is assistance finding new clients, followed by networking opportunities and access to funding.

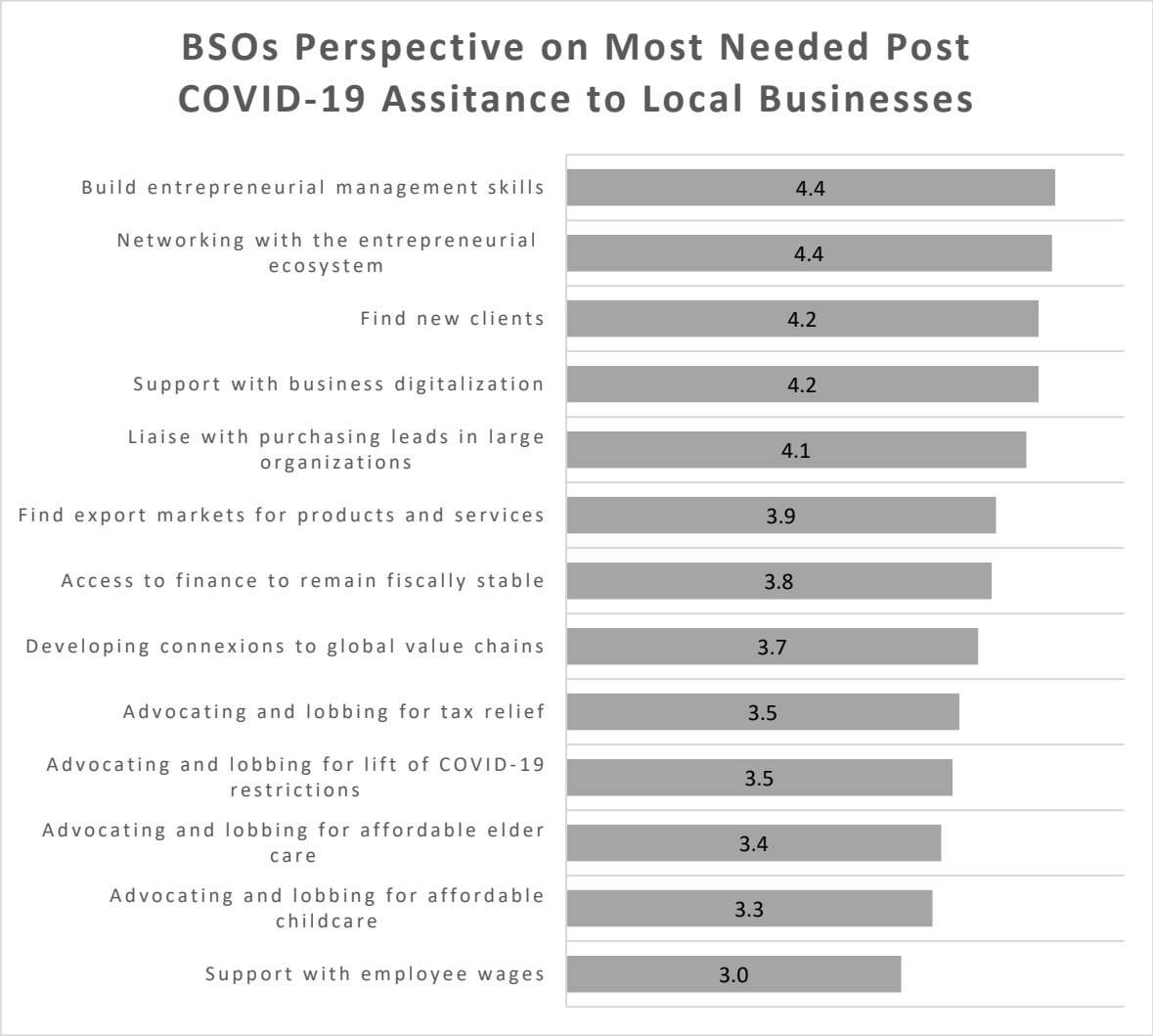
Figure 46. WSMEs post COVID-19 support



BSOs were also asked to weigh in on the types of support that local business requires the most in the post-COVID-19 recovery phase. As shown in Figure 47, BSOs indicated that support is needed for building entrepreneurial management skills, networking, support for business digitalization, help for businesses to find new clients, and liaising with purchase leads from large organizations. [10]

[10] Based on a scale from 1 (not needed) to 5 (most needed).

Figure 47. BSOs perspective on most needed post COVID-19 support for local businesses



With regards to purchase leads, the buyers that participated in the survey were asked how the pandemic affected their purchases in Costa Rica. Some buyers reported that purchases diminished because of reduced demand, while others stated that the demand for their products increased, and they faced difficulties at the beginning of the pandemic to map and secure suppliers. This highlights the need for assistance to introduce Buyers and WSMEs to discuss business opportunities.

SWOT Analysis on the Business Ecosystem in Costa Rica

This Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis investigates multiple factors that form part of the WSME ecosystem in Costa Rica. The weaknesses,

challenges and strengths documented, as a result of desk research and consultation with stakeholders, are evaluated to assess opportunities for the WE3A project to build a more resilient WSME ecosystem. Threats to the opportunities are evaluated as a proactive approach to mitigate risk in the overall 3-year implementation of the WE3A project.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Costa Rica's political stability, high standard of living, highly educated population. • Costa Rica's economy is stable and open to international trade and investment. • Costa Rica has a robust network of BSOs. A large segment of BSO programming targets women entrepreneurship endeavors. • Costa Rica has a large network of fast-growing women entrepreneur businesses.	• Female labor force participation is 50%; this is considerably lower than the equivalent national male rate of 73.4%, representing a gender gap of 23%. • In the population age 15 and older, 60.9% of women have bank accounts compared to 75.5% of men. This represents a gender gap of 14.6% of those who have an account at a financial institution. This impacts access to finance. • No sex-disaggregated data is available for business ownership, but a case study from the International Labour Organization, using data sets from 2016-2020, indicates that women business ownership accounts for 22.3%, a significantly lower representation compared to 77.7% for male business ownership. • Among WSMEs the level of business formalization is low. This hinders the growth of WSMEs. The level of women-owned/led certified business is low as well. • Buyers' pool of local suppliers is low to moderate. While a portion of buyers have practices and/or policies related to gender-inclusive sourcing, the sample is too small to account as a general local practice in the Costa Rican business ecosystem.

Opportunities	Threats
• Work with BSO and/or government agencies to help WSMEs to formalize their businesses as a way to increase their opportunities to access financing, training and assistance. • Provide training in government procurement for WSMEs to enhance their participation in this procurement channel. Diversifying their client base and supplying the government with products and services will better position WSMEs to sell to other large clients, which, in turn, is an introduction to global supply chains. • Create opportunities for WSMEs to meet buyers and train buyers on gender-inclusive sourcing. B2B events for WSMEs to meet buyers need to be carefully organized. WSMEs need to be prepared to effectively convey their value proposition and sales pitch. Likewise, buyers would benefit from a training or guidance on gender inclusive/responsive sourcing practices.	• Lack of formalization of WSMEs could hinder participation of WSMEs in global supply chains and in B2B events. • Time constraints may prevent WSMEs from participating in Project activities. Any form of capacity building programs and/or training should be developed and delivered in a way that they can attend and progress at their own pace. • Positioning government procurement as a sales channel will require specialized training and, ideally, participation from the procurement office of the country in roundtables and educational sessions. If the local procurement office is not on board, it will be challenging to implement. • Buyers may not see the value of implementing gender inclusive sourcing practices in their businesses. Project activities for the buyers must effectively convey the benefits of enhancing participation of WSMEs in the supply chain. • If B2Bs events fail to match WSMEs with potential buyers, the Project would not be able to integrate WSMEs in global supply chains.

Key Insights and Recommendations

The following highlights the key insights identified in the research, as well as suggested recommendations for the WE3A Project to explore for future initiatives in the Activate and Accelerate stages of the Project in Costa Rica.

- Insight: Only a small proportion of WSMEs' clients are government entities. The low uptake of procuring government sales is primarily due to the complexity of the process.
    - Recommendation: Provide better exposure and promotion of the procurement system by offering capacity building geared towards WSMEs. This could potentially increase the number of women-owned businesses using government procurement as a sales channel.

- Insight: Those WSMEs surveyed that stated that they are not registered could lose *opportunities* by not formally registering their business. Formalization of WSMEs could be part of a sustainable growth strategy.
    - Recommendation: The Project can assist the WSMEs through the establishment of a well-constructed business support program that outlines and supports the WSMEs in every step of the registration process.

- Insight: Very few WSMEs have their own company websites, which is another avenue for marketing their products and services.
    - Recommendation: Opportunity to provide guidance and resources to develop websites for extended business exposure.

- Insight: Many WSMEs reported being in early stages of business development.
    - Recommendation: There lies an opportunity to provide basic entrepreneurial and product development training to move these SMEs to the next stage of development.

- Insight: Given that most of the respondents indicated they are young or middle-aged, it suggests that they are usually juggling the multiple responsibilities of running a business, being mothers, taking care of aging parents and managing other household responsibilities.
    - Recommendation: It is of vital importance that Project activities factor in this reality and strike a balance when suggesting capacity building activities.

- Insight: WSMEs and the largest corporations are competing in the same market. And these WSMEs are selling their products and services to larger companies and are already feeding into the existing supply chain.
    - Recommendation: WSMEs need assistance to develop a strategy and work on a unique competitive advantage to compete and to stay in business.

- Insight: BSOs indicated that the decreasing demand for their products and services and production were the main challenges their members faced. In addition, many businesses had to close, their costs of production increased, and businesses faced difficulties pivoting to a digital environment.
    - Recommendation: Opportunity for BSOs to revise their offerings to their members to make them more relevant for the changing times post-pandemic.

- Insight: WSMEs faced many business challenges due to COVID-19, with most participants reporting a decrease in productivity due to health-related restrictions and a decreased demand for their products and services.
    - Recommendation: Opportunity to strengthen their workforce through training and development and enhanced marketing of their products and services through a business website and structured marketing campaigns.

Appendix I Research methodology

This research was conducted by utilizing existing secondary and primary data sources to analyze the business ecosystem of Costa Rica as it relates to women-owned businesses. Secondary data sources came from global indicators and benchmarks, studies and country reports, repository sources from international and local organizations, as well as government data.

Primary data was gathered by surveying a representative sample of the ecosystem stakeholders, that is, women-owned/led businesses, companies established in Costa Rica with substantial procurement, and local business support organizations (BSOs). The sample was created based on a target number of stakeholders that fit the following definitions:

Women-owned/led SMEs (WSMEs): businesses with at least 51% ownership, management, and/or control by women. In some cases, the ownership composition can be greater or equal to 20% if the business has a woman as CEO/COO and, if applicable, the business has a board of directors of which 30% of the board members are women. To qualify as **small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs),** the business has up to 300 employees and the total gross revenue is up to USD $2.5M.

Buyers: are companies that have significant purchasing power in the country/market in which they are located. For example, multinational or local companies are key to the local economy and are linked to purchasing goods and services within the key industrial sectors in the target country.

Business support organizations (BSOs): are non-profit, public, private, and for-profit resource organizations, trade, and industry associations, etc. that serve local businesses and support their growth and success. Examples are chambers of commerce, trade and industry associations, coalitions, government agencies, women's associations, incubators, and sectoral organizations.

Data sources to develop the stakeholder mapping list came from local firms, agencies, associations, and public entities. The mapping stakeholder list contained 299 WSMEs, 70 buyers, and 38 BSOs. An online survey was launched inviting the stakeholders to the list. Additional outreach to stakeholders that meet the definitions of the mapping was completed using LinkedIn and direct mailing. A total of 91 WSMEs, 34 buyers, and 43 BSOs responded to the survey.

The survey gathered quantitative and qualitative data including industry and sector, location, size of the business, level of women participation, and challenges, as well as the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic in the ecosystem as it relates to women-owned businesses.

In addition, an interview was conducted with the *Alianza Empresarial para el Desarrollo* (AED) to gain further qualitative data on the entrepreneurial conditions for women. An interview guide and initial questions were developed to guide the discussions.

Appendix II Key BSOs and Programs

Organization	Description
AED (*Alianza Empresarial para el Desarrollo)*	The Business Alliance for Development (AED) is a non-profit organization that seeks the sustainability and competitiveness of the country, through the promotion of responsible and sustainable business models in companies. AED guides the productive sector to consider sustainability principles as part of its management, reducing negative impacts and maximizing positive impacts on society, the environment, and the economy. AED leads the Women Entrepreneurs Fund, an initiative that seeks to accelerate and scale business opportunities for WSMEs through non-reimbursable funding.
Banca Mujer del Banco Nacional – BN Mujer	The National Bank (*Banco Nacional BN*) is the largest bank of Costa Rica. *BN Mujer* is a program from the National Bank that promotes the development of Costa Rican women. This program was established 10 years ago and has been a pioneer and forerunner of multiple social movements in favor of closing the gender gap and promoting the empowerment of women with financial products, education, and support services.
CELIEM (*Centro Latinoamericano de Innovación y Emprendimiento*)	Organization oriented to promote innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic development, through research, analysis, policy formulation, training and business support.
Costa Rican Chamber of Commerce (*Cámara de Comercio de Costa Rica*)	The Costa Rican Chamber of Commerce is a private and non-profit business association

	formed by a wide range of commercial companies (exporters, importers, distributors, and wholesalers) from the agriculture sector, food industry, specialized industries and services sector. The chambers champion the Women Entrepreneurs Program that began in 2010 as an initiative where women entrepreneurs can get training and develop their business and leadership skills. The objective of the program is to create a platform that actively promotes equality and generates opportunities for women.
CAMIT (*Cámara de Tecnologías de Información*)	The Chamber of Information and Communication Technologies (CAMTIC) seeks the development, promotion, and use of digital technologies. Since 1998, this private non-profit organization has formed a strategic bloc of more than 200 companies that works to strengthen and support the ecosystem of digital technologies under the slogan "Green and Smart Costa Rica." CAMIT's women chapter seeks to promote the integration of women into the digital technologies sector.
Incubadora Parque Tec	A seed accelerator based in Costa Rica - Central America, that invest through its seed capital fund in early-stage start-ups. Parque Tec seed fund takes an equity share of the start-ups and a royalty percentage of their gross sales. Parque Tec also fosters social responsibility impact investing, through the allocation of resources in SME and start-ups that are at the base of the pyramid. Programs included coaching, mentoring, business strategies, innovation,

	accelerator, incubator, finance, human develop, entrepreneur, corporate strategies, market fit, competencies, start-ups, SMEs, technologies, growth strategies, and investment.
Forum of Women Entrepreneurs of Costa Rica (*Foro de Mujeres Empresarias de Costa Rica*)	A non-governmental, non-profit organization that promotes the development of skills for women's entrepreneurship. Mentoring and linkage programs for WSMEs and buyers.
Fundación Mujer	Fundación Mujer is a non-profit organization that empowers women. This organization provides practical training programs for women.
FUNDECOOPERACIÓN para el Desarrollo Sostenible	This organization is a private foundation that works under a social and environmental approach to serve farmers or small businesses with limited access to financial resources by financing entrepreneurs and SMEs. The foundation has a Loan Program for MSMEs that is part of the Costa Rican Network of Microfinance Organizations.
Impact Hub San José	Impact Hub San José is a collaboration and social innovation lab. It works with some of the country's most impactful innovators. Impact Hub San José is implementing CONSTELAR, the first incubation program in Costa Rica focused exclusively on the generation of entrepreneurship led by women in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).
Ideas en Acción	This is a non-governmental organization that that identifies, executes, and disseminates collaborative innovation

	programs with high impact potential, replicability, and global relevance for sustainable development, through social entrepreneurship in Costa Rica. This organization has a women-oriented program called "*Conectadas*". The program aims at enabling access to technology to women by teaching them how to find and use online tools in a safe way. It offers coaching on how to build CVs and how to navigate the web safely.
INCAE Business School	As a prestigious business school in Costa Rica INCAE promotes female entrepreneurs through the Centro de *Liderazgo Colaborativo y de la Mujer* (CLCM). The Center promotes collaborative leadership between men and women in the workplace, creating value for organizations and society through a comprehensive approach made up of research, leadership development and impact activities.
INAMU (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres)	The INAMU is the governmental institution that promotes the rights and development of women. It provides training and financing to build the capacity of women and their economic autonomy. INAMU is managing and administering the Fund for the Promotion of Productive Activities and Organization of Women (FOMUJERES). A fund put forward by the government as COVID-19 recovery action. FOMUMERES focuses on 3 areas: 1. promoting WSMEs, 2. gender approach in entrepreneurship and 3. rural development.
Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica (TEC)	The Costa Rica Institute of Technology (TEC) is a university in Costa Rica

TEC EMPRENDE LAB	specializing in engineering and advanced science and research, modeled as an institute of technology. Promoting the entry of women in engineering careers and building the capacity of WSMEs are some of the initiatives that TEC undertakes to promote a gender inclusive ecosystem in Costa Rica. The university created TEC Emprende Lab, an incubator that provides business training and services to promote entrepreneurship with special emphasis on science and technology.
PROCOMER	PROCOMER is the government export promotion agency of Costa Rica. Its mission is to promote trade and foreign investment. PROCOMER has export programs that are targeted to WSMEs.
INA (Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje)	The National Training Institute (INA) is an autonomous government funded entity with the objective of promoting and developing professional training and education programs in all production sectors across all Costa Rica.
FIDEIMAS	FIDEIMAS is a government funded trust created to support microenterprise activities and initiatives that benefit women and families in conditions of poverty, to achieve labor and productive insertion and improve the quality of life of the beneficiaries. It provides financing and technical assistance to women. The trust and activities are managed by the IMAS (Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social).

https://www.inder.go.cr (Instituto de Desarrollo Rural)	INDER is a government institution in charge of leading the development of rural communities in Costa Rica, responsible for executing the State's rural development policies, whose purpose is to improve the living conditions of the population, through the articulation of efforts and resources of public and private actors, which takes into account the dimensions of social, economic, environmental, cultural and infrastructure development.

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