



TECHNICAL NOTE N° IDB-TN-2732

Exporting beyond forecast:

24 experiences of women leading
companies and cooperatives in Latin
America and the Caribbean

Mora Jozami
Carolina Mora
Lizette Aguirre Negrete
Huilén Amigo
María Florencia Merino
July Emperatriz Jimenez Orjuela

Inter-American Development Bank
Institute of the Integration of Latin America and the
Caribbean

October 2023



Exporting beyond forecast:

24 experiences of women leading companies and cooperatives
in Latin America and the Caribbean

Mora Jozami Carolina Mora
Lizette Aguirre Negrete Huilén Amigo
María Florencia Merino
July Emperatriz Jimenez Orjuela

**Cataloging-in-Publication data provided by the
Inter-American Development Bank
Felipe Herrera Library**

Exporting beyond forecast: 24 experiences of women leading companies and cooperatives in Latin America and the Caribbean / Mora Jozami, Carolina Mora, Lizette Aguirre Negrete, Huilén Amigo, María Florencia Merino.
p. cm. — (IDB Technical Note ; 2732)

Incluye referencias bibliográficas.

1. Businesswomen-Latin America. 2. Businesswomen-Caribbean Area. 3. International trade-Social aspects. 4. International economic integration-Social aspects. 5. Exports-Latin America. 6. Gender mainstreaming-Latin America. 7. Gender mainstreaming-Caribbean Area. I. Jozami, Mora. II. Mora, Carolina. III. Aguirre Negrete, Lizeth. IV. Amigo, Huilén. V. Merino, María Florencia. VI. Inter-American Development Bank. Institute for the Integration of Latin America and the Caribbean. VII. Series.
IDB-TN-2732

JEL Codes: D20, J01, J16, J78, L22.

Keywords: Women, export, labor force, gender mainstream, small business, international trade, economy, pandemics, Integration, Latin America.

<http://www.iadb.org>

Copyright © 2023. Inter-American Development Bank ("IDB"). This work is subject to a Creative Commons license CC BY 3.0 IGO (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/igo/legalcode>). The terms and conditions indicated in the URL link must be met and the respective recognition must be granted to the IDB.

Further to section 8 of the above license, any mediation relating to disputes arising under such license shall be conducted in accordance with the WIPO Mediation Rules. Any dispute related to the use of the works of the IDB that cannot be settled amicably shall be submitted to arbitration pursuant to the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) rules. The use of the IDB's name for any purpose other than for attribution, and the use of IDB's logo shall be subject to a separate written license agreement between the IDB and the user and is not authorized as part of this license.

Note that the URL link includes terms and conditions that are an integral part of this license.

The opinions expressed in this work are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Inter-American Development Bank, its Board of Directors, or the countries they represent.



EXPORTING BEYOND FORECAST

24 Experiences of Women
Leading Companies
and Cooperatives in
Latin America and
the Caribbean

Authors:

Mora Jozami

Carolina Mora

Lizette Aguirre Negrete

Huilen Amigo

María Florencia Merino

July Emperatriz Jimenez Orjuela

OCTOBER 2023



INTAL



CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Key findings
3. Work methodology
4. Results
5. Conclusion
6. Bibliography
7. Annex



1. INTRODUCTION

The literature shows that the connections between international trade and women's economic autonomy can take various forms, with their relationships and impact on trade evolution being specific to each country. These connections are also associated with both the political and social context, the country's economic specialization, and the way in which its production integrates into global and regional value chains (Barafani et al, 2020; Barral Verna et al, 2020). Yet, empirical evidence indicates that women have lower participation than men in business structures, whether as decision-makers in companies or as employees.

Women leading companies have significant opportunities, but they also face challenges. On one hand, women-owned businesses are poised to transform economies: an estimated 274 million women worldwide are involved in entrepreneurship, and 139 million women own or manage established businesses (Elam, 2021). Moreover, there is a growing number of trade agreements that explicitly address gender-related issues (BID INTAL, 2022). However, women continue to face numerous challenges when setting up and growing their businesses, including limited access to finance, new technologies, and skills development.

Gender equality in patterns of trade specialization is a key component of economic development. Various studies confirm that increased inclusion of women in the economy can lead to multiple benefits, including significant reductions in poverty, enhancement of human capital, and job creation. Evidence also shows positive impacts on productivity, competitiveness, and economic growth (BID INTAL, 2022; WTO, 2017; McKinsey, 2018).

In collaboration with *Fundación Foro del Sur (South Forum Foundation)*, BID INTAL has carried out a research project focused on women entrepreneurs and cooperative leaders. This initiative was made possible thanks to the connections established through the ConnectAmericas and Women ConnectAmericas platforms. The research is based on the analysis of 24 study cases in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)— 20 correspond to women that lead exporting companies, while the remaining 4 involve women leading exporting cooperatives. The purpose of this study was threefold: (i) to identify the success factors that enabled these organizations to internationalize, as well as the obstacles they had to overcome; (ii) to understand the role of women in their companies and cooperatives; and (iii) to examine the policies with a gender perspective implemented to contribute to reducing gender gaps within the firm/cooperative, among other areas of interest.

2. KEY FINDINGS

The analysis of interviews with female leaders of exporting companies and cooperatives leads to the conclusion that they are aware of the benefits of selling to international markets. The key elements identified include improved positioning of their company/organization, enhanced performance, the need for better organization of the process, and gaining insights into different idiosyncrasies and cultures. This, in turn, opens doors to new opportunities. Many insights emerged from the interviews. On one hand, challenges faced by women during the internationalization of their businesses were discussed. On the other hand, initiatives that foster their personal growth and enhance their roles as leaders within the company or institution were emphasized.



First impressions count.

When initiating negotiations and establishing contact with potential clients, being a woman could present an initial barrier to overcome during the early conversations.



Export agenda: the challenge of balancing personal life and international business.

Exporting often involves business trips or engaging with foreign clients located in different time zones than where interviewees reside. This demands an additional effort from them to balance this work with their personal lives and the organization of household work.



Financial inclusion, a pending debt with women.

In numerous cases, women have encountered challenges in accessing financial resources to boost production, innovation, and market positioning. Government support is crucial to enhance the opportunities for women in these areas.



Uneven distribution in strategic areas.

Although there has been a recent cultural shift enabling the gradual integration of more female profiles into the workforce, male participation continues to dominate in industries with greater export activity. Factors that penalize women include a lack of accumulated experience, youth, and being a minority in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields.

The testimonies provided by the interviewed women suggest that despite the challenges and barriers, there are common factors and initiatives that enable them to grow and enhance both their leadership and their businesses:



Remote work brings new possibilities.

In some cases, the pandemic introduced remote work arrangements, enabling numerous female workers to achieve a better balance between their work and care responsibilities.



Incentives for growth.

Women tend to make more effective use of professional development programs for employees. This indicates not only their interest but also the necessity of utilizing available tools to foster their growth.



Cooperation networks, a valuable female asset.

Collaborative networks connecting women leaders and/or professionals, along with strategic alliances with suppliers, are highly valued and provide significant contributions to businesses. These ecosystems enable women to stay current, acquire skills, find solutions, and tackle challenges associated with internationalization, particularly in smaller-scale organizations.



3. WORK METHODOLOGY

This study, supported by ConnectAmericas, explores the narratives of 24 women leaders from exporting companies and cooperatives across various countries in Latin America and the Caribbean through in-depth interviews. The identification of these women was facilitated by ConnectAmericas, the business networking platform established by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to facilitate access to international markets. This platform includes a dedicated community for women. ConnectAmericas was created to strengthen the participation of business leaders from LAC in foreign trade and global value chains. ConnectAmericas and Women ConnectAmericas are invaluable platforms with extensive user networks, offering access to business opportunities, networking, financial resources, and programs aimed at boosting firms' export growth. They also provide events, online courses, webinars, and articles covering a wide range of topics, including sector-specific insights and international market information, among other initiatives.

The research, which is based on qualitative case analysis, has a twofold aim: to increase visibility and inspire women facing comparable challenges, and to deepen our knowledge of the relationship between international trade and gender¹. The interviews were conducted between September and December 2022.

Regarding the selection of interviewed women, we aimed for diversity in terms of their personal and professional backgrounds, organization size, roles, sector, and activities. We conducted a semi-structured questionnaire divided into various thematic blocks. This allowed for a dynamic approach in terms of the order and depth of the interview tailored to each of the women participating in the study. The interviews, ranging from 45 minutes to an hour in duration, followed an initial guideline structured into different topics; these were adjusted to each specific case during the fieldwork and the course of the conversation. The thematic blocks covered the following areas: personal and professional trajectory; characteristics of the company or cooperative; the gender perspective from both a personal and organizational standpoint; the export ecosystem; access to credit and subsidies; access to and provision of training; participation in employment programs; and involvement in cooperative spaces and networks (see Annex).

In total, we conducted 24 interviews. Women interviewed live in Argentina (5), Brazil (1), Chile (2), Colombia (1), Costa Rica (1), Ecuador (1), El Salvador (1), Guatemala (2), Honduras (2), Mexico (1), Panama (2), Paraguay (2), Peru (1), the Dominican Republic (1), and Uruguay (1). In terms of the selection of participants, the most important observation is that interviews do not constitute a homogenous group. As mentioned earlier, the interviewees represent both companies and cooperatives, a feature that underscores the primary aspect of diversity. Women belong to organizations of varying sizes, with the majority being small businesses. However, larger structures were also included, encompassing a range from sole proprietorships to holdings. Furthermore, while all the interviewees occupy decision-making positions, some are founders of their own businesses, others are employed executives with diverse responsibilities, and there are also women involved in second-generation family businesses.

¹ It is important to clarify that this research, based on a qualitative methodology, does not intend to produce universally applicable or representative data—in this case, concerning women leading exporting companies and cooperatives in Latin America and the Caribbean. Instead, its objective is to understand the topics of interest for this study from interviewees' perspective..

3.1. CHARACTERIZATION OF COMPANIES

The 24 women interviewed work in export-oriented entities. From this total:

- **Around 80% are companies, while the remaining 20% are cooperatives.**

The companies (20) are located in the following countries:

- Argentina (2),
- Brazil (1),
- Chile (2),
- Colombia (1),
- Costa Rica (1),
- Ecuador (1),
- El Salvador (1),
- Guatemala (2),
- Mexico (1),
- Panama (2),
- Paraguay (2),
- Peru (2),
- Dominican Republic (1),
- Uruguay (1).

The cooperatives (4) are located in:

- Argentina (3),
- Honduras (1).

- **Approximately 60% of the institutions belong to service sectors, and 40% to goods sectors.**

- 4 companies linked to the logistics and transportation sector,
- 5 companies linked to the professional services sector,
- 3 companies and one cooperative in the technology sector (software development, web development, data science),
- 3 companies and one cooperative in the cosmetics sector,
- 2 companies in the agro-industrial sector,
- 2 companies in the textile sector,
- 2 cooperatives in the agricultural sector,
- 1 company in the automotive equipment sector,
- 1 company in the audiovisual services sector,
- 1 company in the renewable energy sector.

Half of the companies have a board of directors (with women participating in 90% of them). Meanwhile, in the cooperatives, women participate in the Boards of Administration—in the case of Argentina—or Board of Directors—in the case of Honduras.

From a gender and infrastructure standpoint, about 30% of the surveyed companies feature separate restrooms, while only one boasts a lactation room (at its Peru branch, as required by law). Of the four cooperatives, one provides a dedicated space for childcare and women, complete with a playroom, a study area with internet access, and other amenities. Moreover, another cooperative offers recreational facilities where children can spend time with their mothers or fathers on Saturdays.

In terms of external financing, 50% of interviewees indicated that the companies in which they participate have secured credit. For cooperatives, this share stands at 25%.

- Regarding international trade, about 8 out of 10 companies reported that they regularly export to countries in the region. Nearly 70% of respondents said they sell products or services to the United States, while about 50% export to Europe and less than 10% to Asia.²

It is important to keep in mind that cooperatives and companies constitute different structures and business processes. Cooperatives are usually governed by a set of values and principles that promote equality among their members, which to some extent makes them more receptive to incorporating a gender perspective into their vision. This openness often translates into tangible initiatives, such as training sessions, workshops, and other activities.

3.2 CHARACTERIZATION OF WOMEN INTERVIEWED

The information on the women interviewed is as follows:

- The average age of the women interviewed is 40 years; half are mothers, 70% participate in business networks and/or associations, and 80% have a tertiary or university degree. Within this educated group, 50% have studies related to social sciences, 30% in STEM fields, and 25% in economics and management. For those without academic degrees, notable areas include incomplete or informal studies in social sciences, economics, and computing.
- Most businesswomen are founders and owners of their firms, involved in strategy and leading daily business decisions.



² · The categories are not exclusive, given that some companies export to several of these regions.

The collected data provided insights into the professional life stories of women in the export goods and services sectors, exploring how they balance this with their personal lives. It also aimed to understand the extent to which women advocate for increasing female participation in the export sector and in decision-making roles, both within their organizations and through collaborative spaces or women's networks. The study further examined the potential barriers or opportunities that international trade may offer to women in their professional journeys, and the differences they experience compared to advancing in activities focused on the local market, i.e., non-exporting sectors.

2. RESULTS

Beyond trade conditions and the overall economic environment, factors that contribute to a firm's international competitiveness and export success include the accumulation of knowledge about technical specifications and the idiosyncrasy of foreign markets, general management skills, and the international sales acumen of the organization's leading decision-maker. The firm's size or scale, longevity, and commitment to innovation and technology integration are also tied to a greater propensity to export. Within this context, women, frequently at the helm of smaller and newer enterprises and bearing diverse professional experiences that often overlap with care work, may be at a disadvantage in export performance compared to their male counterparts (Cabezón et al., 2021).

Based on the interviews, women in export activities enjoy numerous benefits, such as economic gains, enhanced product positioning, and organizational and cultural improvements. In general, engaging in global markets leads to increased profits, though they may also have to navigate through macroeconomic volatility in their home countries, prompting cost adjustments and local market-specific pricing strategies. Hence, while selling abroad poses challenges due to complex situations that require a more advanced level of professional development, it also offers the opportunity to continuously improve organizational processes, which in turn enables higher performance.

*“When **selling abroad**, we achieve higher yields and also generate greater income for the producers we work with. **We become more competitive** because we enter those markets with certificates that allow us to access extra profit”.*

Interview with a woman in the agricultural sector from Honduras.

*“**Exporting** reshapes us; we are a **company with ISO 9001**, and selling to foreign markets was a **driving force for obtaining it**”.*

Interview with a woman in the automotive equipment sector from Argentina..

*“Since the beginning, the company **has been exporting**, and the main advantage exporting offered us is higher income. However, finding **new clients** and continuing to grow internationally can **sometimes be very difficult**.”*

Interview with a woman in the audiovisual services sector from Brazil.

*“**Exporting allows for growth**, but it is a challenging process that requires work and preparation. Firstly, a **work plan**, objectives, and **goals to be achieved** must be planned; secondly, the **market must be studied** to understand who the customers are and what their preferences are, keeping in mind that they may differ from those of the domestic market; and thirdly, **training** or having an **advisor on export matters** is necessary to handle the legal and customs procedures.”*

Interview with a woman in the renewable energy sector from Colombia.

Entering the global market offers the opportunity to expand the business but also presents a set of challenges, as noted by several respondents. Exporting introduces subtle but tangible hurdles. Key issues include gender stereotypes that can hinder women’s initial business negotiations with potential clients; the need for flexibility and availability to manage time zone differences and attend business trips; challenges in securing financing to scale up projects and internationalize; and the underrepresentation of women in strategic and decision-making spheres.

These challenges are linked to the unequal distribution of time devoted to productive and reproductive life, which sees the care economy as predominantly female. This imbalance shapes the distinct labor market experiences of men and women. Domestic and care work, typically unpaid as they fall outside market transactions, create substantial time restrictions that impact women’s labor market participation and career trajectories. To grasp the magnitude of domestic and care work within the total economy—and to underscore the significance of time devoted to socially valuable tasks without market value—several countries in the region have assessed the economic value of unpaid labor relative to GDP. Such estimates reveal that unpaid work accounts for 15.9% to 27.6% of the economy, frequently exceeding the output of other productive sectors. Notably, women contribute on average 74% of this unpaid labor (ECLAC, 2022b), with some reports indicating an even greater participation (90%, according to UN Women).

Several strategies and tools prove effective in boosting women’s leadership within institutions, their contributions as employees in companies and cooperatives, and the expansion of business into international markets. Prominent among these are remote working arrangements, professional development and training programs, and diverse networking opportunities that facilitate exchanges and insights from the experiences of fellow women in business.

4.1. GENDER STEREOTYPES AND BIASES IN THE PRODUCTIVE AND EXPORT SECTORS

In discussions about the internationalization process and women’s involvement, it emerges that stereotypes affect the way women are integrated into production and international trade. Based on testimonies from the interviewees, simply being a woman may represent an initial barrier to be overcome during initial discussions with potential clients.

*“When you **start a dialogue** with new clients, whether you are a woman or a man matters only initially. Once you introduce yourself, it becomes easier, **you earn your own respect**, or your **own lineage** from what you leave behind”.*

Interview with a woman in the professional services sector from Honduras.

*“There are very marked **stereotypes**. I have attended meetings with other entrepreneurs where some **men claimed that women could never carry out large international business deals** because they are **managed in male-dominated environments**”.*

Interview with a woman in the agri-food sector from Ecuador.

Stereotypes are ideas, qualities, and expectations attributed to women and men, dictating the roles each should play in society, at work, within the family, and in public spaces. In this context, and for this reason, women encounter a variety of biases, especially cultural ones, which hinder their access to job opportunities (D’Alessandro, 2016; CIPPEC, 2020).

Simultaneously, several interviewees recognized that age impacts professional imprinting. Being labeled as a “young woman” often carries a negative stereotype, leading to discredit in numerous interactions. In this sense, according to stereotypes, being young implies having fewer acquired skills, networks of contacts, and access to credit. The counterpoint between young men and young women becomes apparent in the level of accumulated experience and specialization.

*“It’s not just about the **field of exports**. When women access **leadership** positions, biases operate not only because of being a woman but also because of age. When they see you are young, the implicit question is **‘what can you know, what experience do you have’**”.*

Interview with a woman in the logistics and transportation sector from Panama.

*“When we **started the business**, in addition to being a woman, I was young. There were times when I felt that my experience or knowledge **was not validated** because of how I was seen”.*

Interview with a woman in the services sector from Costa Rica.

4.2. LIMITED SCHEDULE FLEXIBILITY: THE CHALLENGE OF ENGAGING WITH FOREIGN MARKETS

In several cases, the interviewees mentioned that the internationalization process involves engaging with external markets that demand a flexible schedule to ensure successful communication. This often demands an effort to balance their personal lives and the organization of household work in order to adapt to the time difference between their home country where they produce goods or provide services and their clients' countries. For instance, some interviewees highlighted the challenge of communicating with clients in different time zones. In some services activities, such as the information technology sector, there are often extra time demands beyond regular working hours.

*“Sometimes you have to **organize your schedules** because, although we set our working hours in our contracts so that the client knows our availability, **it's not always respected**”.*

Interview with a woman in the Information Technology and Communication (ITC) sector from Argentina..

Another challenge that emerged in the interviews was the need to travel abroad frequently to acquire new clients. Initially, exporting involves less personal face-to-face interaction and relies heavily on digital tools, which is not always positive. Further, while direct contact—like attending trade fairs—can facilitate expansion into new markets, it also requires travel. This, in turn, presents difficulties and requires adjustments to work schedules, often spanning different time zones.

*“**Selling to a company is difficult.** To do this, we often need to participate in trade fairs. This requires us to find **financing** to attend in person. Otherwise, since everything is **digitalized**, the communication through this channel is not advantageous when initiating conversations, **presenting our products, and starting negotiations**”.*

Interview with a woman in the agricultural sector from Paraguay.

*“Women have less time than men because they continue to bear the burden of domestic responsibilities. This creates a **base of responsibilities** that adds to the **workload** of the business”.*

Interview with a woman in the textile sector from Guatemala.

4.3. RESTRICTED ACCESS TO CREDIT

In terms of access to financing, the testimonies gathered from companies and cooperatives reveal the existence of historic barriers for women regarding financial inclusion. These manifest as requirements that exceed the possibilities of the businesses and organizations they lead. The interviewees describe the difficulties they face in exporting, such as organizational issues, bureaucratic burdens, and structural factors essential for a company or cooperative to establish itself in the global market. These structural factors include the need for increased liquidity and financial knowledge to effectively navigate the export process.

However, as the interviewees emphasized, the availability of financial tools and resources is not a sufficient condition for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to have effective access to credit. Beyond the typical barriers, such as stringent formal criteria or requirements, companies of specialized personnel especially hired to handle the bureaucratic complexities associated with financial support. This is particularly noteworthy considering that organizations led by women are characterized by their small scale. The same applies to cooperatives, which also find additional difficulties in the credit market related to access to information—a pervasive issue that amplifies in low top middle-income nations.



*“We do not have the time needed to delve into the available financial instruments. When applying for credit, we’re faced with extensive forms, often 25 to 30 pages of **technical language**, which requires us to designate specific human resources to manage the process”.*

Interview with a woman in the logistics and transportation sector from Chile.

*“There is **financial discrimination** towards cooperatives; we have less access to credit. The availability of credits, incentives, and subsidies **provided by the state is very important**”.*

Interview with a woman in the ITC sector from Argentina.

Despite their fundamental role in the regional³, economy, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and cooperatives encounter great challenges in securing bank financing—a situation worsened during financial and economic downturns, such as the current one precipitated by the global Covid-19 crisis. Access to financing is essential; it not only fuels innovation and productivity but also enhances market access and sustains international market presence.

Women’s participation in the financial system is directly linked to their role in the productive system—a role that has been traditionally confined to lower productivity sectors, small-scale businesses, and informal work. This is further compounded by the disproportionate amount of unpaid work shoulder by women, impeding their economic growth and autonomy (UN Women, 2021). In LAC, the gender gap in financial service utilization is significant. The World Bank reports that only 49% of women own a bank account, with only 11% saving and 10% having access to credit. Additionally, in some LAC countries, women exhibit lower levels of financial literacy and behavior than men, leading to gender gaps in financial acumen (Azar et al., 2018). Gender bias also plays a role in loan applications and approvals, affecting women’s ability to finance their business or startups. According to the MSME Finance Gap survey (CFI, 2019), approximately one-third of women-owned businesses reported having financial limitations, compared to 25% of those owned by men. Women-led businesses access fewer credits and are characterized by a higher rejection rate than those led by men: in LAC, this percentage is 7.4% for firms led by women, while the figure drops to 2.9% for men.

³ · Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises make up 99.5% of the businesses in Latin America and the Caribbean, employ 60% of the working population, and contribute around 25% of the GDP (Herrera, 2020). Meanwhile, there is a consensus that cooperatives are significant drivers of economic, social, and cultural momentum, as well as human development. They can play a special role in addressing the unique challenges of developing countries, as was observed during the pandemic.

4.4. WORK ASSIMETRY IN STRATEGIC AREAS, DISCIPLINES AND SECTORS

The interviewees noted that, from their perspective, there's a lack of equality between women and men in decision-making spaces and strategic production sectors. Fields with high levels of technology, innovation, and productivity, which correlate with significant export activity and leadership roles, are predominantly male dominated. This pattern, as observed by the interviewees, is slowly evolving due to a fresh gender perspective that strives to bring more women into leadership or as key labor force participants in export sectors.

*“I notice that there is still much greater **male participation**. In our sector. However, I believe that **women** are slowly gaining more ground, although this requires **twice the effort** to prove ourselves and secure these positions”.*

Interview with a woman in the textile sector from Guatemala.

Research corroborates these insights. BID INTAL (2021) reports that female presence in boardrooms across the region is minimal (15%), with women holding a mere 11% of managerial roles. The distribution varies between sectors, with services seeing a higher female ratio than manufacturing. This situation is often attributed to gender-based sector segregation, which contributes to wage gaps and other forms of inequality. Rojo et al. (2022) highlight distinct economic activities that delimit male and female domains across the occupational and economic landscape. Women tend to be concentrated in services sectors related to the care economy, particularly in education and healthcare, while men dominate in the manufacturing industry and business services.

Moreover, ITC (2015) notes that while global trade has opened up more job prospects for women in export-driven sectors and value chains, their presence is typically confined to certain areas. Echoing this, Micehelena et al. (BID INTAL 2022) reports that in global value chains, male participation in export-related employment outpaces that of women, who are predominantly found in

non-tradable sectors. On one hand, as mentioned, assuming caregiving responsibilities from an early age relegates women to the realm of care and unpaid work, generating fewer opportunities to enter the labor market and accumulate experience, due to limited time for professional development in productive fields. On the other hand, specialization is also curtailed, as women have less access to careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics - STEM (Basco and Lavena, BID INTAL 2019).

In this context, some of the interviewed women shared their efforts to maintain a broad inclusionary approach in their enterprises, counteracting the gender disparities that are deeply entrenched in most of the region's export and productive sectors. Their actions go beyond merely acknowledging these imbalances; these businesswomen also recognize the importance of engaging groups often overlooked in strategic projects that reach international markets.

*"In my company, we are inclusive. Beyond employing women, we've also hired **Afro-descendant people and LGBT community members**".*

Interview with a woman in the audiovisual services sector from Brazil.

*"We're aware that the **gaps between men and women** are significant, but they're even wider with **indigenous women**; for this reason, valuing their work skills, we choose to work with women from **local communities**".*

Interview with a woman in the agrifood sector from Mexico.

4.5. HEALTHY POLICIES DURING THE PANDEMIC: REMOTE WORK AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR SMES

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, most countries in the region implemented targeted support for SMEs and cooperatives, acknowledging their crucial role in the local economies (ECLAC, 2021).

The interviewed women identified two measures that significantly influenced their personal and professional growth:

- Firstly, they reported diverse experiences regarding the public policies implemented, especially in terms of ease of access and the role of loans and subsidies. In some cases, the pandemic constituted the sole opportunity they had to access financial aid, as there are few initiatives that support women exporters' projects consistently. In Argentina, for example, policies were adopted to assist SMEs with salary payments, among other programs that helped sustain businesses during the pandemic. While cooperatives could not benefit from such measures due to their constitutive nature of not paying salaries but rather distributing profits as member withdrawals, there are non-repayable contribution programs (ANR) regulated by the country's cooperative and mutual institute (INAES). Meanwhile, according to one interviewee from Chile, loans were granted primarily during the pandemic with repayment terms of up to 90 days, which helped maintain the firms' operational structure, although the interest rate increase impacted the companies' profitability. In El Salvador, one interviewee mentioned using available funds with Bandesal (Development Bank of El Salvador) for payroll subsidies and accessed a government loan to increase their working capital. In Paraguay, as per one woman's testimony, due to the health crisis, banks—in conjunction with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce—opened a credit line for MSMEs. These resources did not exist before, and while they remain available, they are currently difficult to access.

*“In 2018, I was granted a **seed fund** that allowed me to purchase the molds and supplies to scale up production. During the pandemic, subsidized rate loans and other resources helped me **sustain my business** through tough times”.*

Interview to woman in the cosmetics industry from Argentina.

- Secondly, considering the adoption of a gender perspective and its internal impact within organizations, those interviewed pointed to different private initiatives and strategies that helped enhance women's performance and experiences within organizations. One such measure was the adoption of remote work due to the pandemic. This allowed women to be closer to their children, thereby enabling them to balance their paid work with the care tasks they usually perform. While this presented a challenging scenario, where they had to juggle both productive and care work within the same physical space, it was a scheme that was well-received and valued by the workers.

As noted earlier, the productive structure in the LAC region is not immune to gender inequality. Integrating a gender perspective to transform this structure is a duty that calls for dedication and requires the commitment of all stakeholders, both public and private. While women's labor market participation in LAC rose from 44.5% to 52.6% between 1995 and 2015—thanks to advancements in education and health, and an increase in childcare facilities through public subsidies (Busso & Fonseca, 2015)—the gender gap remains apparent in women's socio-labor vulnerabilities, affecting unemployment, salaries, participation in leadership roles (ILO, 2016). Luckily, Latin American society is becoming more conscious of such inequalities. As per Latinobarómetro, 66% of the region's citizens acknowledge recognize that there are “strong” or “very strong” tensions or conflicts between men and women. This recognition grew by 10 percentage points from 2010 to 2017, from 46% to 56% (Basco, 2017). Addressing gender inequality also aligns with economic advancement by harnessing everyone's contributions, especially by valuing women's work. Although women account for about 50% of the active workforce in Latin America (ECLAC-ILO, 2019), their role as entrepreneurs is still less than 20%, despite a rise in entrepreneurial activity in recent years (GEM, 2022/2023).

Enhancing the development of women leaders is key to encourage the female population to become one of the drivers of social change and to raise awareness of their importance in the economy. This is not just about fostering a more inclusive society but is also a sound economic approach. The IDB's report “Closing Gender Gaps in the Southern Cone: An Untapped Growth Potential,” suggests that eliminating the gender gap could yield considerable aggregate output gains in Southern Cone countries, ranging from 4% to more than 15%.

4.6. THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING PROGRAMS

For the women interviewed, training activities represent not only opportunities for education and access to specific content but also effective means of connecting with other businesswomen in the region to exchange experiences. The majority highlighted the **ConnectAmericas Women's network by the IDB** as a platform that enables women leaders to access valuable tools for further professional development, empowerment of their leadership, and enhancement of their internationalization process. Simultaneously, this network fosters connections between women that lead to personal growth and new business ventures.

Another highlighted experience was the in-house professional development programs offered during working hours. While these programs are intended for all employees, women have been the primary beneficiaries. This uptake is a testament not only to their keen interest but also to their recognition of the need for such tools to enhance their professional paths, without the extra burden of juggling these opportunities with care work.

*“The **professional development** program is available for both men and women. Yet, it's interesting to note that women are the ones who benefit the most from it. **Women** make up 80% of the program participants”.*

Interview with a woman from the services sector in El Salvador.



Some interviewees point to professional experience as a significant asset for those within a company or in business decision-making roles. Overcoming challenges like gender role expectations and unpaid work imbalances is crucial for women to build and maintain leadership roles over time. Businesswomen have stressed the importance of having access to extensive training that enhances women's career development by providing necessary knowledge and skills.

*“One area that needs more attention is **invisible biases**. Many will argue that the scarcity of women in the company isn't about gender but rather that **more men submit their CVs** when seeking partners”.*

Interview with a woman from the ITC sector in Argentina.

*“We've had workshops on **resolving gender conflicts**. They were beneficial, but many times they don't suit horizontal organizations and are designed for traditional company structures, where **one person leads the others**”.*

Interview with a woman from the ITC sector in Argentina.

A noteworthy mention is a cooperative where training has been provided on the importance of including women and transgender workers into the organization. This is an example of a course with a gender perspective aimed at expanding diversity in staffing, beyond sector dynamics or the export process. This case is pivotal as it showcases how including diverse groups, often underrepresented in certain industries or the export sector, can challenge stereotypes and the division of labor that excludes them from paid work. Additionally, evidence suggests that women in leadership roles contribute to greater gender equality within the firm (Barafani et al, 2021).

*“We engaged in ‘Hire Trans’ training sessions. We were in search of developers and decided **to target women and gender nonconforming people**. For this purpose, we completed a course required for making hires via that platform”.*

Interview with a woman from the ITC sector in Argentina.

4.7 COOPERATION NETWORKS AND BUSINESS ROUNDTABLES, KEY TO EMPOWERING WOMEN

The networks that the interviewed women are involved in, whether based on business associations, sectors, professions, forums, business roundtables or female organizations, amplify their individual and professional capabilities. These networks also create an ecosystem that generates synergies across various dimensions. They are especially vital because they empower women and help them overcome the barriers presented by “sticky floors”⁴ (UN Women, 2017). According to the testimonies, these spaces for dialogue and support networks are crucial for encouraging women’s participation in decision-making within export companies.

*“I’m a **mentor for startups**, several accelerators, and women’s communities. I’m also a judge for an **Innovation award**. We’re part of an ecosystem, and the community often seeks us out”.*

Interview with a woman from the logistics and transportation sector in Chile.

In Argentina, the Argentine Federation of Work Cooperatives in Technology, Innovation, and Knowledge (FACCTIC) unites the country’s tech cooperatives and implements gender-focused initiatives in partnership with relevant government sectors. The Federation and its cooperatives provide technology and knowledge with a gender perspective.

Engaging in networks does more than just create areas for interaction and collaboration among diverse stakeholders; it also produces significant effects within the organizations themselves.

⁴ Sticky floors refer to women with low socio-economic and educational levels, who are scarcely incorporated into the workforce, showcasing a vast disparity compared to men. These women are often mired in precarious conditions and commonly lack any job security (UN Women, 2017).

*“Engaging in these forums has provided us with **fresh insights** and made certain challenges more visible. I sense a growing recognition of the importance of **increasing female participation in our cooperative**”.*

Interview with a woman from the ITC sector in Argentina.

As conduits for information exchange and networking, these networks also enable women to become key players in shaping solutions, drawing on the experiences of their peers.

*“**Local networks** or associations not only keep us abreast of developments but also empower us to participate, to express our opinions, and to **be part of the solution** for issues prevalent in our industries. **International networks** are a key component of the **marketing area**, enabling us to present our clients with options that satisfy their global requirements. Thus, the ability to voice our perspectives or to engage in enacting change, to improve our country’s value proposition, I think that’s a huge advantage”.*

Interview with a woman in the logistics and transportation sectors from Panama.

Most of the women interviewed belong to small or medium-sized organizations, and they often stress the importance of partnering with strategic allies to sustain their business ventures. Smaller-scale structures typically can’t afford to employ a comprehensive staff across all stages of the production chain since these are not vertically integrated enterprises. Hence, many firms outsource segments of their processes to other companies, which are frequently woman-led.

Additionally, a standout strategy was participation in business roundtables, a feature available through IDB’s ConnectAmericas Women’s network. Business contacts are crucial for market access and can be an invaluable asset in addressing challenges and seizing opportunities. Building and upholding a robust business network can yield essential insights into new prospects, market trends, and the potential for collaborations and strategic partnerships. These forums allow entrepreneurs to exchange knowledge, experiences, and resources, potentially sparking innovative ideas and business growth. Business roundtables, whether virtual or face-to-face, have been instrumental in enhancing women entrepreneurs’ engagement, offering equitable opportunities and dismantling geographic and financial barriers⁵.

⁵ · One of the women preferred to remain unnamed.

*"I have participated in **business rounds**. It is useful to meet with other businesspeople. I've gained contacts for the business and learned from **other internationalization experiences**".*

Interview with a woman in the agrifood sector in Ecuador.

4.8. CASE STUDIES

In this section, we present four detailed cases from the collection of 20 interviews to showcase concrete experiences that illustrate how women from the region, with diverse backgrounds, succeeded in exporting. These are the stories of Guillermina Esmoris from Yumba and Julia Argnani from Maleza, both from Argentina; Fátima Elizabeth Morinigo Martínez from Speak Academy, Paraguay; Jennifer Medina from Cintora Textiles, Guatemala; and Yael Richardi from Devecoop, Argentina. These organizations stood out for their various strategies used to internationalize their production.

Particularly, Yumba - Maleza exemplifies how the association between a sole proprietorship and a women-founded cooperative can empower both entities. Speak Academy shows how the COVID-19 crisis context became an opportunity to globalize educational services. Cintora Textiles highlights the virtuous circle of how strategic association with Walmart enabled them to make a leap into exporting. Meanwhile, Devecoop illustrates how a gender perspective is embedded in the organization's values and translated into concrete actions.

Other interviewees featured include Ana Lúcia Motta from All Dub Estúdio, Brazil; Carla Novoa from Amati Foods, Ecuador; Lorena Carreño from Mezcal Carreño, Mexico; Sandra Tobo from Tobo y Compañía, Colombia; Claudia Masaya from Mayas Fashion GT, Guatemala; Jennyfer Salvo from Softpower Connections Consultants, Chile; Maia Numerosky from Eryx, Argentina; Andrea Pessot from PESSOT S.R.L., Argentina; Rebeca Bolaños Cubillo from Amistad Abroad, Costa Rica; Laura Aristizábal from Aurora Asia Pacífico, Panama; Sandra Marleny Soriano Ortega from COAGRICSAL, Honduras; Arcelis Asprilla from Infinity Logistics Agency Corp, Panama; Katherine Salinas from Grupo ICPSA, Honduras; Sandra López from INPROCSA S.A., El Salvador; Camila Pereira from Commit Studio, Uruguay; Margarita Duarte from PY Teas SRL, Paraguay; Claudia Rosales from Women E Work, Peru; and Yamile Rodríguez from Arahuaco RD, Dominican Republic.

4.8.1 YUMBA – MALEZA A CASE OF COLLABORATION

Yumba is a sole proprietorship owned by Guillermina Esmoris, located in Bahía Blanca, Buenos Aires Province (Argentina). Established in 2018, Yumba has been crafting and exporting artisanal resins for musical instruments such as violins, cellos, and double basses. The year 2019 saw a surge in demand for Yumba’s resins, leading Guillermina to consider expanding her team. Yet, as the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded a year later, the demand sharply declined, putting the expansion plans on hold.

In 2022, with the economy on the rebound, Yumba saw a resurgence in orders for its artisanal resins. Seizing this uptick, Guillermina chose to partner with the Maleza cooperative for production—a group she had learned about from a radio interview. Compelled by the social impact of their work, she promptly made contact. What began as a joint venture to develop a new line of instrument cleaning products soon evolved into the cooperative undertaking resin production.

Founded in 2017, Maleza operates in the natural cosmetics industry, part of the popular economy sector. Located in Villa 20 of Villa Lugano in Buenos Aires City, Argentina, the cooperative employs 46 workers, predominantly women. The organization’s board and operations coordination is dominated by women. Further, various departments are led by women, including administration, communication, production, sales, and quality assurance. Maleza started as a project led by women that knew each other from community initiatives (such as soup kitchen) and had sought a united approach to their challenging socio-economic circumstances. In 2021, Maleza was formally recognized as a cooperative by INAES, solidifying its operational and legal standing.

The partnership between Yumba and Maleza was centered on developing initiatives to establish a productive partnership. Although the cooperative’s staff were trained in chemistry and had relevant experience from a technical school in Buenos Aires, they had yet to engage in actual production. Lacking in laboratory best practices, production organization, and specific resin manufacturing expertise, Maleza needed guidance. To address this, Guillermina spent ten days in Villa Lugano, training the Maleza team in the detailed processes of resin formulation and production.

Now, Yumba’s resins are distributed to over 20 countries—a milestone made possible by supportive public initiatives like “Export Challenge” (“Desafío Exportador”) and “Women to the World” (“Mujeres al Mundo”) which have been instrumental in boosting sales.

4.8.2. SPEAK ACADEMY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BEGIN EXPORTING

Fátima Elizabeth Morinigo Martínez, a 26-year-old from Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, is an English language teacher with degrees in Tourism and International Relations. In 2018, Fátima launched Speak Academy, an institution offering a range of English courses, both in-person and online. In early 2021, Fátima, alongside her parents and young sister, established a formal company to manage the academy. Beyond her family, the academy's team includes eight dedicated instructors responsible for teaching the English courses.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Speak Academy launched its educational online platform, granting global access to its English courses. This strategic move extended their reach to students in Ecuador, Brazil, and Mexico, in addition to those in Paraguay, with service exports comprising 60% of the academy's total sales. The selection of these target markets was informed by an internal analysis utilizing various Google tools, which helped identify countries with heightened interest in traveling to the United States. To gain visibility and draw in students, Speak Academy rolled out targeted social media campaigns across these nations, yielding positive outcomes. Additionally, they organized interactive events such as "English Week" and "Fluency Week," providing an opportunity for worldwide users to explore the platform and benefit from complimentary classes.

While the resurgence of face-to-face learning markedly decreased the demand for online courses, thus affecting Speak Academy's exports, sales to foreign clients continue to represent 10% of total sales. Fátima remarks, "After the pandemic, we shifted our focus back to in-person sessions. Being a small enterprise, we reduced our activity on the online platform. One of our goals is to reactivate our exports moving forward. We've built the infrastructure and invested substantially in the platform's structure. We're prepared; all we need now is that extra momentum and visibility to connect with a broader audience."

One of the challenges Fátima faces in exporting is the bureaucratic red tape and the challenges with processing payments from Paraguay. Possessing Brazilian identification enables her to access a bank account in Brazil and receive payments there. "Though I export my services from Paraguay, I receive my payments in Brazil, thanks to my Brazilian ID, which grants me the ability to hold a bank account, manage a PayPal account, and use a payment gateway," she explains.

Fátima is active in numerous networks, predominantly comprising women entrepreneurs, which facilitate the creation of valuable networking opportunities. She also acknowledges that having various mentors at the onset of her professional development was instrumental in accelerating the consolidation of her business by drawing on their prior experiences.

4.8.3. CINTORA TEXTILES THE OPPORTUNITY TO POSITIVELY IMPACT FEMALE WORKERS AND THEIR COMMUNITY

Jennifer Medina was born in Guatemala, where she studied Business Administration and is a mother to two children. Together with her husband, she founded Cintora Textiles in 2009. Initially an importer of garments for resale, the company shifted to manufacturing based on client demand. Jennifer and her husband opened a factory and acquired machinery. Their product range includes clothing—with a line of work uniforms—and home textile goods. During the pandemic, they successfully adapted and developed a complete line of biosecurity items (overalls, shoe covers, face masks).

The factory employs around 20 staff for cutting and packaging, outsourcing sewing to indirectly employ 100 more, with women comprising 75% of the total workforce.

By 2012, Cintora Textiles ventured into exporting, thanks to an approach by a U.S. company, to whom they sold for three years. This company manufactured coffins and needed textiles for finishing their products. “We bought the machinery and took on the challenge; we realized we could develop any textile product,” Jennifer remarks. However, the company made a significant leap when it became a supplier for Walmart Central America, exporting their original designs to El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. The company’s next goal is to renew connections with the United States and to expand into South America, continuously researching materials and new trends. For Jennifer, exporting is a means to increase sales and job opportunities. However, based on her experience, it also poses the challenge of maintaining a strong and steady demand.

Cintora Textiles was selected for Walmart and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Value Chain program. This initiative trains a selection of Walmart suppliers to enhance their business practices. Furthermore, the company was recently awarded the “white seal” by the Guatemalan government. Only 70 companies boast this seal, which endorses product quality

and better positions them for export. her company. The Covid-19 pandemic introduced the option for employees to carry out their sewing from home. Jennifer views this arrangement as beneficial not only for strengthening the mother-child relationship by providing more shared time but also for positively influencing the children's upbringing. According to Jennifer, this work arrangement creates a virtuous cycle where the chance for women to have better and more flexible jobs discourages families from emigrating to the United States.

While Cintora Textiles currently has a loan from a private bank, Jennifer acknowledges that accessing financing is complicated due to the extensive requirements involved. In her perspective, loans play a crucial role in a company's growth and export potential.



4.8.4.

DEVECOOP

PRESENCE IN THE FEDERATION, BOOSTING THE ENTRY OF DEVELOPERS INTO THE COOPERATIVE

Yael Richardi, 39, has been a partner at Devecoop since 2019, a cooperative specializing in software services. With a strong background in programming languages, she serves as the cooperative treasurer, overseeing the administrative and financial departments, and is also a Project Manager. Currently, the cooperative consists of nine partners, seven of whom are male and two are female. Beyond her role in Devecoop's Business Council, Yael is also part of the Council of FACTTIC (Argentinian Federation of Workers' Cooperatives in Technology, Innovation, and Knowledge), where she is the only woman among seven members.

Yael observes that the field of computer services is predominantly male, both in Argentina and abroad. However, she notes a shift towards a culture of female leadership. Devecoop's partners are dedicated to balancing the number of women and gender nonconforming individuals. Thus, the cooperative plans to prioritize female profiles for upcoming developer vacancies. Devecoop has also engaged in training programs like "Hire Trans," spearheaded by Impacto Digital, a non-profit civil association aimed at improving job insertion opportunities for trans individuals.

Devecoop exports approximately 80% of its services to markets such as Mexico, England, Ireland, and Uruguay. The cooperative has been exporting almost since its inception, with services sold directly or indirectly; sometimes a local intermediary seeks out software development companies to undertake a project for another country. There are three main channels for reaching new markets and clients abroad: (1) referrals; (2) projects obtained through FACTTIC, which provides a platform for sharing business opportunities; and (3) advertising on social networks.

Yael shares that during the pandemic, cooperatives did not receive government subsidies, as these were allocated for salaries and employer contributions. Instead, cooperative members make capital withdrawals. Some Devecoop partners managed to secure credits for small business owners. They can also access loans through Credicoop bank, itself a cooperative.

5. CONCLUSION

In this research, we interviewed female leaders from exporting companies and cooperatives to discern the dynamics and challenges in the internationalization of female-driven enterprises. Analyzing the international trade and gender spheres is crucial, as women in LAC have historically faced persistent gender disparities, and the productive and trade structure of the region's economies does not appear to have played a neutral role in these phenomena.

The interviews revealed that these women recognize the advantages of accessing international markets. They highlighted several advantages, such as improved positioning of the company or organization, increased performance, the need for better organization of processes, and learning about different idiosyncrasies and cultures, which in turn opens doors to new opportunities.

The global marketplace presents an opportunity for business growth but also introduces obstacles. Gender stereotypes prescribing women's roles in production and trade emerged as notable barriers. Other challenges include the need for flexible working hours to accommodate clients in different time zones or to undertake business travel. The difficulty in accessing financing, which hinders the expansion of international outreach, was also mentioned. Further, the women expressed a preference to avoid financing when possible. Additionally, they face imbalances when participating in strategic areas and decision-making sectors.

Despite these challenges, women at the helm of businesses can capitalize on opportunities for expansion, particularly through educational programs and networking, among other channels. These avenues have led to the creation of mechanisms and strategies that strengthen their leadership and women's roles within organizations. Training, professional development programs, and the option for remote work stand out as key facilitators in balancing professional and personal life. However, interviews show that economic barriers to access persist, especially in senior management, specialized services, or cooperative structures. The opportunity to connect with other women in similar situations through various networks—such as Mujeres ConnectAmericas or business chambers—was highlighted as valuable, enabling them to stay updated and engage in skill development and problem-solving. Mentorship programs also emerged as an effective strategy, promoting role models while offering practical guidance for professional growth.

Incorporating a gender perspective to transform the productive structure is thus a collective responsibility, demanding the commitment of all stakeholders—public, private, and civil society alike.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **Antonelli, C. (2003).** The economics of innovation, new technologies and structural change. Routledge.
- **Azar, K., Lara, E. y Mejía, D. (2018).** Inclusión financiera de las mujeres en América Latina. Situación actual y recomendaciones de política. Políticas públicas y transformación productiva. CAF.
- **Barafani, M., Barral Verna, A., Basco, A., Monje Silva, A., Oueda Cruz, S., & Sant Anna Torres, N. (2021).** Una olimpiada desigual: la equidad de género en las empresas latinoamericanas y del Caribe. Inter-American Development Bank.
- **Barafani, M., & Barral Verna, A. (2020).** Género y comercio: una relación a distintas velocidades. Inter-American Development Bank.
- **Barral Verna, A., Basco, A., & Garnero, P. (2020).** El Tetris del apoyo a la integración: piezas y huecos de la brecha de género. Inter-American Development Bank.
- **Basco, A. (2017).** La tecno-integración de América Latina. IDB, Inter-American Development Bank.
- **Basco, A., Lavena, C (2019).** Un potencial con barreras: la participación de las mujeres en el área de ciencia y tecnología en Argentina. Inter-American Development Bank.
- **Basco, A., Monje, A. et al - (2021).** Una olimpiada desigual: la equidad de género en las empresas latinoamericanas y del Caribe. Inter-American Development Bank.
- **Busso, M. y Fonseca, D. (2015).** Female Labor Force Participation in Latin America: Patterns and Explanations.
- **Cabezón, J., Pascuariello, G., y Trombetta, M. (2021).** El rol de las mujeres en la competitividad externa de las empresas industriales argentinas. Documentos de Trabajo del CEP XXI N° 4. Centro de Estudios para la Producción XXI, Ministerio de Desarrollo Productivo de la Nación.
- **ECLAC. (2021).** Panorama Social de América Latina 2020. ECLAC.
- **CIPPEC (2020).** Mujeres en STEM: cómo romper con el círculo vicioso. Documento de políticas públicas #224.
- **D'Alessandro Mercedes (2016).** Economía feminista: cómo construir una sociedad igualitaria (sin perder el glamour)

- **Da Silva Catela, E., & Tumini, L. (2017).** Factores asociados a las diferentes dimensiones de competitividad internacional de las empresas argentinas. En CEPAL (Ed.) La Encuesta Nacional de Dinámica de Empleo e Innovación (ENDEI) como herramienta de análisis: la innovación y el empleo en la industria manufacturera argentina (pp. 45-60). ECLAC
- **Dosi, G., Grazzi, M. & Moschella, D. (2015).** Technology and cost in international competitiveness: from countries and sectors to firms. *Research Policy*, vol. 44, pp. 1795-1814.
- **ECLAC. (2022).** Repercusiones en América Latina y el Caribe de la guerra en Ucrania: ¿cómo enfrentar esta nueva crisis? CEPAL.
- **ECLAC. (2022b).** La sociedad del cuidado: horizonte para una recuperación sostenible con igualdad de género. ECLAC.
- **ECLAC. (2022c).** Romper el silencio estadístico para alcanzar la igualdad de género en 2030: aplicación del eje sobre sistemas de información de la Estrategia de Montevideo para la implementación de la Agenda Regional de Género en el Marco del Desarrollo Sostenible hacia 2030. ECLAC.
- **ECLAC-ILO (2019).** Coyuntura Laboral en América Latina y el Caribe: evolución y perspectivas de la participación laboral femenina en América Latina.
- **Elam, Amanda B. (2021).** “Global Entrepreneurship Monitor .” *GEM - Women’s Entrepreneurship 2020/2021*.
- **Frisancho, V., Queijo, V. (2022).** Closing Gender Gaps in the Southern Cone: An Untapped Potential for Growth. Inter-American Development Bank.
- **GEM. (2022/23).** 2022/2023 Global Report: Adapting to a “New Normal”. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor.
- **Herrera, D. (2020).** Instrumentos de financiamiento para las micro, pequeñas y medianas empresas en América Latina y el Caribe durante el Covid-19. Inter-American Development Bank.
- **IDB. (2023).** Estimaciones de las tendencias comerciales América Latina y El Caribe. Inter-American Development Bank.
- **International Trade Center. (2015).** Abriendo mercados para mujeres comerciantes.
- **International Finance Corporation. (2019).** Annual report - 2019
- **Kvale, S. (1996).** *InterViews. An introduction to qualitative research interviewing.* Sage Publications.

- **McKinsey (2018).** Cerrar la brecha de género: una oportunidad perdida para los nuevos CEOs.
- **Michelena, G., Bentivegna, B., Cruz-Aguayo, Y., Barafani, M., Merino, M., & Basco, A. (2022).** Rumbo a América Latina 2026: la incidencia de las exportaciones en la equidad de género. Inter-American Development Bank.
- Organización Internacional del Trabajo (2016). Panorama Laboral 2016, América Latina y el Caribe.
- **Ozomek, S. (2007).** Intervenciones del Estado en el campo de las microfinanzas. Los casos de FOMICRO y REDES. En Las finanzas y la economía social: experiencias argentinas, pp-193-269. Editorial Altamira - UNGS.
- **Rinaudo, V. (2021).** La experiencia del acuerdo comercial Argentina-Chile como disparador para la incorporación de perspectiva de género en las negociaciones comerciales de la Argentina. UNCTAD.
- **Rojo, S., Benítez, N., Schteingart, D., & Laham, S. (2022).** MiPymes lideradas por mujeres. Serie Investigaciones en Red, documento N° 3. Centro de Estudios para la Producción XXI, Secretaría de la Pequeña y Mediana Empresa y los Emprendedores, Gabinete de Género- Ministerio de Desarrollo Productivo de la Nación.
- **UN Women (2017).** El progreso de las Mujeres en América Latina y el Caribe 2017: transformar las economías para realizar los derechos.
- **UN Women. (2021).** Finanzas para todas. Experiencias e iniciativas innovadoras para la inclusión financiera de las mujeres y una recuperación con lentes de género en América Latina. United Nations Organization.
- **World Bank & World Trade Organization. (2020).** Women and trade: the role of trade in promoting gender equality. World Bank.
- **World Bank. (2021).** The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women-Led Businesses.
- **World Economic Forum (2021).** “Insight Report -Global Gender Gap Report.” *Insight Report - Global Gender Gap Report. 03.*
- **World Trade Organization (2017).** Informe sobre el comercio mundial 2017: Comercio, tecnología y empleo.

7. ANNEX

INTERVIEWS - QUESTIONNAIRE

A · PRESENTATION

Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview. My name is xxx and I'm part of the research team for this project led by BID INTAL, in collaboration with IDB ConnectAmericas. We're conducting a study on companies and cooperatives in the region with a dual purpose. On one hand, we want to highlight certain cases of women leading companies or cooperatives. For this, we'll ask you later to please elaborate in a video on one or two points based on our discussion today. On the other hand, we aim to identify barriers and success factors that women encounter in their professional journeys. We would like to ask your permission to record this interview and let you know the discussion will be confidential and recorded solely to use the material anonymously in our final report.

B · PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. To begin, I would like you to introduce yourself: what is your age, where do you live, with whom, how is your family composed, what is your educational background, and what do you do for a living.
2. So, your role in the company is... (e.g., general manager or director, area manager or director, owner, etc.).
 - 2.1. How long have you been with the company/cooperative and how did you join?
 - 2.2. IN CASE THE EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND IS NOT TRADITIONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE CURRENT PROFESSIONAL DEDICATION. How is it that being... you perform as...? Is it common?

C · COMPANY / COOPERATIVE INFORMATION

3. Where is the company/cooperative legally based/incorporated (country, province, locality)?
4. What is the name of the company/what is its corporate name?
5. Sector of the company/cooperative.
6. Main activity of the company/cooperative.
7. How long has the company/cooperative been established?.⁶
8. Does it have share capital?

⁶ For cooperatives based in Argentina. ¿Is the cooperative registered in INAES?

- 8.1. How is this divided between women and men?
- 9. What is the gender composition of the board of directors?
- 10. What is the gender composition in leadership, managerial, and executive roles?
 - 10.1. FOR COOPERATIVES. What is the participation of women on the Board of Directors?
- 11. How many employees does your company / cooperative have?
 - 11.1. How many of them are women and how many are men?
- 12. Does the company have certifications for processes, products, services (such as ISO, HACCP, TS, BPM)
 - 12.1. Does this certification report any benefit? Which ones?

D · EXPORTS

- 13. Do you stay informed about international politics and the international market? How? Do you consult foreign media sources?
- 14. How long has the company/cooperative been exporting?
- 15. To which countries does it export?
- 16. How did you identify these markets, and what strategies do you employ in your market search?
- 17. What is the share of exports in total income/sales?
- 18. What advantages do you perceive in engaging in export activities?
- 19. And the disadvantages?
- 20. On a personal level, how do you deal with the exporting process (do you like it, is it a challenge)?
- 21. What is your view on women's experiences in the export sector? Are there unique challenges or barriers they face, such as travel availability, specific stigmas in male-dominated industries, soft and technical skills?
- 22. Did export activities affect your daily routine, including scheduling for calls, business trips, events, etc.?

E · CREDITS, SUBSIDIES, SUPPORT, PUBLIC/PRIVATE PROGRAMS

- 23. Has your company or cooperative ever received or currently benefits from any credits or subsidies? Have you ever applied for credits or subsidies?
 - 23.1. Which type of organization provided these credits / subsidies (public, private, international)
 - 23.2. How important is credit for your company/cooperative?
 - 23.3. What role does credit play in your ability to export?
 - 23.4. What obstacles and supports exist in accessing credit?
 - 23.5. How do you assess the available credit line options in the market today?
 - 23.6. Do you identify that there may be barriers to access for companies owned by women, or run by women?

24. Does the company/cooperative participate or has participated in third-party employment and training programs?
 - 24.1. Which organization provided these programs (government, third sector, international, etc.)?
 - 24.2. How important are these programs?
 - 24.3. How would you evaluate the range and quality of these programs?
 - 24.4. Do these programs have a gender perspective?
25. Has the company or cooperative participated in any programs designed to promote female employment and women's access to decision-making roles? If so, which programs?
 - 25.1. Which organization provided this program?
 - 25.2. What was the outcome?

F · COOPERATION NETWORKS

26. As a representative of the company/cooperative, do you participate in:
 - Business associations (Chamber, Federation, Confederation, Agency, Foundation / Civil Association, other).
 - Professional networks: related to the educational background or the business role.
 - Sector networks (fairs, local forums, others).
 - International promotion activities (trade missions organized by third parties, international and/or sector fairs, business roundtables, individual business trips).
 - Women's networks.
 - 26.1. Besides you, does anyone else from the company participate in these networks and activities?
 - 26.2. Who are the participants? (share of women/men)
 - 26.3. How did you find out about these initiatives? (invited, recommended, etc.)
 - 26.4. What impact do these participations have on the company's activity? What is the main benefit?
27. Generally, do you find it easier to connect with women or men from other companies?

G · GENDER PERSPECTIVE AT THE COMPANY

28. In leadership and management positions, do you perceive that there is equal participation in decision-making between women and men?
29. Does the company provide any training or capacity building for employees?
 - 29.1. Who are these directed at (by task, by hierarchy, other)?
 - 29.2. What participation do women have in these trainings (women/men)? Why?
 - 29.3. Does your company offer training sessions that address issues of inequality or gender-based violence?
30. Based on your experience, how would you describe the opportunities for professional development within the company? Are these opportunities equally accessible to both men and women?

31. Has the company or cooperative initiated any internal programs or measures to promote the employment of women and their access to decision-making roles?
 - 31.1. Which ones?
 - 31.2. What is the outcome?
32. Does the company have policies in place to support employees during maternity?
 - Extended maternity/paternity/adoption leave,
 - Flexible hours for children’s illness or medical check-ups,
 - Specific gender area,
 - Support program for fertility treatments.
33. The company/cooperative has:
 - Different restrooms for men and women,
 - Different changing rooms for men and women,
 - Lactation rooms,
 - Baby changing stations,
 - Team building for both genders (sports, retreats, etc.),
 - Childcare facilities and/or agreements with institutions that provide such service,
 - Other.

H · PROFESSIONAL CAREER / GENDER PERSPECTIVE

34. Have you encountered any gender-specific barriers in your professional advancement?
35. In your industry, have you observed any disparities in professional development opportunities between men and women?
36. Do these disparities extend to leadership positions?
37. FOR THOSE WITH CHILDREN, have you felt the need to make additional efforts to balance motherhood with your professional responsibilities?
38. Do you perceive any specific challenges for women in the export sector, and can you share any personal or observed experiences in this regard? Do exporting companies present unique challenges compared to others?
39. Can you identify a mentor or advocate who played a significant role in your professional journey? Was this person a man or a woman, and in what ways did they help you?
40. If you had to mention three key factors to promote women’s access to leadership positions in exporting companies, what would they be?

I · CLOSURE

41. Is there anything else you would like to add? Thank you very much for your participation.