

# Marginalisation and Gender: Tracking the Experiences of Caribbean Women Entrepreneurs (2015 to 2018)

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Prepared for the Inter-American Development  
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Previous research has found marked differences in the characteristics of women-led or women-owned enterprises as compared to those led or owned by men, including the size of the enterprises, level of productivity, sectors, likelihood of demanding or accessing credit and technical assistance, and perceptions of obstacles to their enterprises (Gui-Diby et al., 2017; Kelley et al., 2017; Balachandra et al., 2017; Bardasi et al., 2011). This situation appears to hold true for the region (Moore, Presbitero, and Rabellotti, 2017; Lashley and Smith, 2015).

Although specific constraints to these enterprises have been identified and their relative severity noted, there are still gaps in the knowledge of why women-owned enterprises in the Caribbean region face such challenges and whether the constraints change with time as the enterprises develop. To address these gaps, this research paper aims to: (i) investigate whether the constraints facing women-owned enterprises in the Caribbean vary according to their stage of development; (ii) determine how these constraints change over time; (iii) develop an understanding of the causes of these constraints, and (iv) provide recommendations for future programmatic and policy interventions to support women-owned enterprises in the region.

The research utilizes a sample of women entrepreneurs who graduated from the Women Innovators Network in the Caribbean Acceleration Program (WINC AP), an infoDev/World Bank program.<sup>1</sup> Utilising existing datasets as a base, new quantitative and qualitative data were collected, which allowed the women entrepreneurs' enterprise development and their key constraints to be tracked over a 28- to 30-month period.

This paper is structured as follows. Initially, a review is presented of previous research on the alleged under-performance of women-owned and women-led businesses, both internationally and in the Caribbean region. This section also presents the conceptual framework utilised in this research, which is based, at a broad level, on a model of social exclusion. The research objectives and the general analytical framework are then presented, followed by an outline of the methodological approach which includes the utilisation of quantitative and qualitative methods. The general results are then presented, followed by an analysis of the results of a tracer survey and in-depth interviews with women business owners. The paper concludes with a summary of the main thematic findings and a discussion of the recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> Women Innovators Network in the Caribbean (WINC) was a component of the Entrepreneurship Program for Innovation in the Caribbean (EPIC), a seven-year program launched in 2011 (funded by the Government of Canada with CAD 20 million) and implemented by infoDev, a multi-donor program in the World Bank Group's Trade and Competitiveness Global Practice. As one of WINC's core activities, the Acceleration Program (AP) provided enterprise development support with a self-development focus over a nine-month period to growth-oriented women entrepreneurs selected from across the region so that they could grow their businesses with confidence and, at the same time, build their professional networks.





Extant research has suggested that women are under-represented in self-employment in the Caribbean (Lashley and Smith 2015), and when they do form businesses, international and regional evidence suggests that the businesses underperform relative to businesses owned by men (Bardasi, Sabarwal, and Terrell, 2011; Moore, Presbitero, and Rabelotti, 2017). In a quantitative assessment of World Bank Enterprise Survey (WBES) data in three developing regions (Eastern Europe and Central Asia; Latin America; and Sub-Saharan Africa) Bardasi, Sabarwal, and Terrell (2011) note that women-owned firms are smaller, are less profitable, and have lower survival rates. Moore, Presbitero, and Rabelotti (2017) find that, in the Caribbean, women-led firms are smaller and less productive, and in keeping with Bardasi, Sabarwal, and Terrell (2011), they find that the owners were less likely to seek credit from formal sources; Nicholson and Lashley (2016) note that in the Caribbean, women were more likely to self-exclude from seeking credit. While Bardasi, Sabarwal, and Terrell (2011) note that women business owners' loans were smaller than men's, Nicholson and Lashley (2016) find a similar situation for the Caribbean, and they present evidence that women were required to provide proportionally more collateral than men.

In general, in contrast to enterprises owned by men, women-owned enterprises are seen as smaller; more likely to operate in sectors with other small enterprises; mostly operating in the service sector; operating in low technology/low knowledge intensive sectors; lower in profitability; with lower survival rates; and more risk-averse (Bardasi, Sabarwal, and Terrell, 2011). This is the generalised view of women-owned enterprises. Barriteau (2002) presents a Caribbean context that is similar. Based on interviews with officials, Barriteau indicates that the general view of women-owned enterprises is that they are in "female-type" sectors (p.228), and that they are risk-averse and growth-averse, with the home playing a significant role in relation to employment of family and other women, and conflicts are seen between the home and the enterprise. Lashley and Dhaliwal (2018), explore some of these extant findings; from a review of existing data, they indicate that, on average, women-owned enterprises were smaller, had lower levels of productivity, and employed more women. However, while profits were lower, especially as they were generally smaller, normalising the data by number of employees revealed that women-owned enterprises demonstrated levels of profits per employee similar to that in enterprises owned by men.

The finding that women were less likely to seek formal credit is of interest for the current research as the interpretation of this result can be multifaceted. One interpretation could be that women are not growth-oriented and therefore do not seek finance. Another interpretation is that women could be self-excluding from the formal financial sector due to previous poor personal experience or the experience of peers. Indeed, Lashley (2017) found that, *ceteris paribus*, women entrepreneurs in the region experience stricter conditions in accessing finance. This concurs with previous research, which has shown gender as a causative factor in restricting access to finance (Nicholson and Lashley, 2016). It is this issue of exclusion that forms the premise for the current research. Given that finance is one of the most-researched areas in enterprise development research, and access to finance is one of the most severe barriers to growth for smaller enterprises (Nicholson and Lashley, 2016), if self-exclusion is evident in this area, it may be evident in other areas in which entrepreneurs seek resources to survive or grow.



From an examination of pre-existing data on enterprises in the region<sup>2</sup>, it does appear that there are different levels of access to required resources. In relation to actual constraints, enterprises that were majority women-owned experienced similar constraints to enterprise growth and development as male-owned enterprises—particularly, they faced the constraints of (i) access and cost of finance, and (ii) an inadequately educated workforce. However, these women-owned enterprises perceived these constraints as more severe. On the other hand, the women-owned enterprises do not appear to experience lack of access to business support services as a constraint to any greater degree than their male counterparts; instead, the general lack of awareness of support programs, the very low uptake, and the overall poor quality of these services appear to be systemic constraints to enterprise development in the region regardless of whether the owners identified as men or women.

A deeper understanding of the overall situation experienced by women entrepreneurs emerged from an analysis of the infoDev/World Bank WINC Acceleration Program (AP) data which was utilised as the baseline data for this research paper. That analysis reviewed a broader range of business constraints as well as personal/sociocultural constraints facing growth-oriented women entrepreneurs in the Caribbean. Importantly, the two following constraints were explored: access to growth financing and access to business networks (including membership in business support organisations). Contrasting the participating entrepreneurs' top constraints on entry in 2015 to the WINC AP and at exit from the program in 2016, some significant changes over the course of the program were noted in the constraints the participants identified. Whereas a number of business constraints decreased in prominence, several of the personal / sociocultural constraints increased (e.g., family responsibilities and lack of equal treatment of women entrepreneurs by financial institutions). From the variables tested, there were indications that the entrepreneurs in the WINC AP understood that gender did play a role in conducting business in the Caribbean; and this included the effect of marginalisation on the type of enterprise and sector, including the misperceptions thereof.

These findings suggest that addressing the issue of exclusion of women-owned enterprises needs to be undertaken in a wider societal context, where the issue of gender is central. Barriteau's (2002, 222) definition of gender as a "system of social relations through which women and men are constituted and through which they gain differential access and are unequally allocated status, power and material resources within a society" is especially useful here as it speaks directly to the issues being investigated, especially as it relates to differential access to status and resources, and how this may lead to exclusion (Barriteau, 2002, 222). Drawing on the previous work of Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vrooman (2004), Popay et al. (2010, 7) define social exclusion as follows:

[A] dynamic, multi-dimensional process driven by unequal power relationships...exclusionary processes operate along and interact across four main dimensions—economic, political, social and cultural—and at different levels including individual, household, group, community, country and global regional levels. These exclusionary processes create a continuum of inclusion/exclusion characterised by an unjust distribution of resources and unequal access.

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<sup>2</sup> Data for this analysis was drawn from a 2014 survey conducted by Compete Caribbean among nearly 2000 enterprises from across the Caribbean region. For details see: <https://www.competecaribbean.org/proteqin/>



Lashley (2017) advances this further by presenting a framework of entrepreneurial exclusion, which adds a layer to the concept of social exclusion. Thus, Lashley's model includes the basic components of the social exclusion concept presented by Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vrooman (2004) but adapted to reflect the potential application to entrepreneurship and enterprise development. In recognition of this continuum of inclusion/exclusion, the term "enterprise marginalisation" is utilised rather than "exclusion" as these enterprises owned and operated by women (and other vulnerable groups, such as the youth) do participate in the formal sector but are marginalised rather than excluded.<sup>3</sup> The framework for enterprise marginalization has two main elements, each with two subcomponents, as follows:

- **Sociocultural enterprise marginalisation**

- *Lack of access to entrepreneurial networks*
- *Lack of demonstration of externally defined entrepreneurial "norms"*

- **Economic/structural enterprise marginalisation**

- *Lack of access to the factors of production (land, labour, capital, technology)*
- *Lack of access to external enterprise development support*

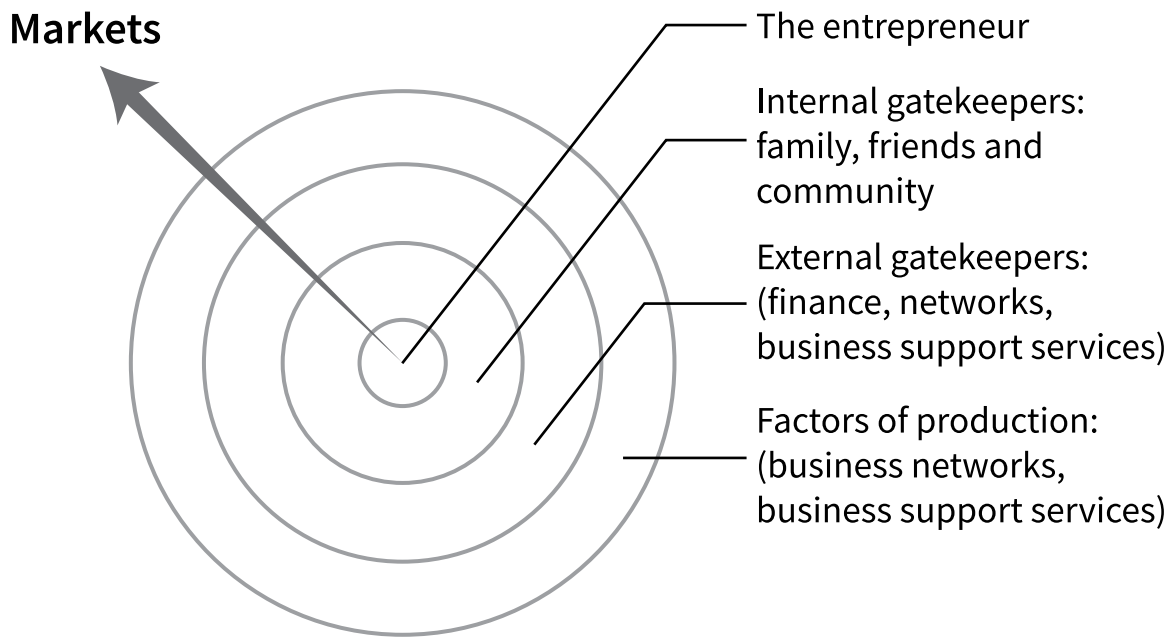
In essence, the framework speaks to the sources of marginalisation that may cause an enterprise to operate on the periphery and hence be growth-constrained. As illustrated in Figure 1, the entrepreneur is placed at the centre and is impacted by other processes initially driven by their individual nature and the overt presentation of characteristics to those controlling access (termed "gatekeepers" in the analytical framework). At every level of attempting to access markets, the entrepreneur is required to satisfy a series of gatekeepers, both internal (family, friends, and community) and external (finance providers, providers of labour, business support professionals, network facilitators) in order to access resources (finance, networks, and business support services such as technical assistance and training). The individual's nature is also important in this process as the issue of human agency cannot be ignored in this instance; an individual's self-efficacy/self-confidence and personal drive can assist or hinder the potential for overcoming barriers.

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<sup>3</sup> As such, the conceptual framework does not simply apply to women, but can be utilised to understand the situation of other marginalised groups.



Figure 1. Representation of Obstacles to Overcome to Access Resources and Markets



Source: Authors' elaboration.

The various sources of marginalisation are not separate and distinct, but rather they interact and permit or prohibit access. For example, if an entrepreneur, or indeed their enterprise, does not demonstrate the required attributes to be considered entrepreneurial, this may preclude their access to finance, networks, or enterprise development support. Similarly, lack of access to business support services, such as technical assistance or training, may preclude access to finance as the individual may lack the skills necessary to navigate the loan application process.

The proposition here is that the role of externally defined entrepreneurial norms is central to inclusion and access to resources. The role of conforming to or presenting entrepreneurial characteristics is critical, and the masculine conception of the entrepreneur, in the region, is aptly demonstrated by Barriteau (2002,147):

*The approaches used to generate information and formulate policies about women in business start with a cognitive map polluted with notions of the perfect entrepreneur. The study of Barbadian women and entrepreneurship discloses that the approaches are not informed by seeking to discover what women are doing and why. Instead, they are guided by trying to match women's activities to a pre-determined concept of desirable entrepreneurial behaviour.... Good entrepreneurs display "male" entrepreneurial traits.*

As such, it is these pre-determined conceptions which make accessing resources more difficult for women than men. The manner in which the main issues to emerge from the framework are analysed at the empirical level is detailed in the following section.



In response to knowledge gaps regarding productivity of women-owned enterprises in the Caribbean, this research sought to identify and analyse the specific constraints to women-owned enterprises in the region. Integral to this objective is identifying how these constraints change with growth.

The theoretical underpinning for examining how constraints impact enterprises' productivity is provided by an enterprise marginalisation framework, developed by Lashley (2017) and expanded upon here. This describes the process by which the characteristics of the enterprise and the characteristics of the entrepreneur (the internal environment) interplay with factors in the external environment of the enterprise to afford an enterprise's access to markets and so its growth and development. External gatekeepers are critical as they control the enterprise's access to factors of production (assets: finance, land, labour, and technology), networks (social capital), and support services (abilities/human capital). In addition, self-exclusion can occur if the entrepreneur lacks skills, knowledge, and/or self-confidence, or if their internal gatekeepers (family, including spouses) are averse to their participation in self-employment; it is noted that family can also have a positive effect in an entrepreneur's support, both moral and actual. Given this general framework, the methods to investigate the issues are described below.

This research employed a mixed method approach, using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including surveys and in-depth interviews. The results of the survey element of the research were utilised to inform the structure and content of the interviews to allow for a deeper understanding of the causal relationships between gender, constraints experienced, and the development stage of the enterprise.

The research activities focus on women entrepreneurs who graduated from the WINC Acceleration Program. A profile of this group was created at the outset of this investigation using previously collected quantitative data on the entrepreneurs from a baseline survey (on their entry to the program, in 2015) and an exit survey (at the program's conclusion, in 2016).<sup>4</sup> These two data points are complemented by a third, in April/May 2018, when data was collected through an online tracer survey.

The next stage of the research, in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of respondents to the tracer survey, sought to understand the underlying causes of the constraints identified. In order to provide contrasts, enterprises were bifurcated into two groups: (i) those that experienced growth over the period; and (ii) those that experienced no growth (they either contracted or experienced no change). The main variables utilised to assess growth were employment growth and/or market reach.<sup>5</sup> The rationale for this choice was that these indicate deliberate actions, demonstrating the entrepreneur's growth orientation; in contrast, sales growth may be the result of other factors, such as generally conducive economic conditions. In total, 25 women entrepreneurs who completed the tracer survey participated in the in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted and transcriptions completed in June 2018. A thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was subsequently undertaken to address the objectives of the research.

<sup>4</sup> Permission was secured from infoDev/World Bank to use the data on 104 women entrepreneurs who graduated from the WINC AP as required for this research project and to present such data at an aggregate level. The research team for this paper was also involved in the design and implementation of the WINC AP.

<sup>5</sup> Market reach refers to whether the main market of the enterprises was local (immediate community, village, or town), national, or international. Change in market reach refers to a movement between these markets, with market expansion referring to a movement from local to national, national to international, or local to international. Market contraction refers to the reverse.



The interviews also yielded various programmatic/policy recommendations to support the growth of women-owned enterprises at different stages of development, and these are discussed subsequently. The main results to emerge are discussed in the following sections.

## Quantitative Results and Analysis

**Summary Profile of Tracer Survey Respondents and WINC AP Participants** - The original WINC AP database contained information on 104 participants, all of whom were invited to complete the tracer survey online. The invitation resulted in 61 responses, a 59 percent response rate. Responses were received from 11 countries.<sup>6</sup>

Among the 61 responses, the age of enterprises ranged from 3 years to 76 years, with a median of 9 years. Respondent enterprises mostly provided both services and products (54 percent); 23 percent provided only services; and 23 percent provided only products. The main sectors of operation for tracer survey respondents were manufacturing (26 percent); arts, entertainment, and recreation (10 percent); wholesale/retail trade (8 percent); food service activities (8 percent); and information and communication technology (ICT) (8 percent). With respect to the main markets of the respondents, the markets indicated were mostly national (64 percent), followed by local (the immediate vicinity of the enterprise; 26 percent), and international (10 percent).

**Growth Characteristics of Enterprises of Respondents Interviewed** - In responses to the tracer survey, the enterprises can be grouped as follows<sup>7</sup>: Growth group: 29 enterprises experienced a change in employment ranging from +0.5 to +22 full-time equivalent employees (FTE<sup>7</sup>), with 18 experiencing market expansion, 10 experiencing no change, and 1 experiencing market contraction.

Non-growth group (showing decline or stasis): 32 enterprises experienced change in employment ranging from -24 FTE to no change in employment, with 13 experiencing market expansion, 14 experiencing no change, and 5 experiencing market contraction.

Table 1 provides a summary of the employment profile of two main groups for analysis. Overall, median employment was 3.0 FTE, with enterprises in the growth category being larger (at 5.0 FTE) as opposed to 1.5 FTE for the decline/stasis group.

<sup>6</sup> The 11 countries are Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

<sup>7</sup> FTE refers to Full-time Equivalent employees where part-time employees are considered as equivalent to 0.5 a full-time employee.



**Table 1: Employment Statistics for Tracer Survey Respondents by Growth Category**

Growth category for enterprise	Statistic	Current FTE employees	Change in employment	Percentage change in employment (%)
Growth	Mean	10.6	3.3	90.0
	Median	5.0	2.0	62.1
	N	29	29	28
Non-growth (Decline/stasis)	Mean	3.2	-2.3	-35.5
	Median	1.5	-1.0	-28.7
	N	32	31	28
Total	Mean	6.7	0.4	27.3
	Median	3.0	0.0	5.6
	N	61	60	56

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Table 2 presents data from those participants who were interviewed (25 interviewees). As the table indicates there were 13 enterprises in the growth group and 12 in the non-growth (decline/stasis) group. With respect to size, the growth group had a median of 6 employees as opposed to 1.8 for the decline/stasis group. Change in employment ranged from +0.5 to +13.0 with a median of +2.0 for the growth group, and 0.0 to -7.5 for the decline/stasis group with a median of -2.3. The median percentage change for the growth group was +52 percent, and -50 percent for the decline/stasis group.

**Table 2: Employment Statistics for Interviewees by Growth Group**

Growth category for enterprise	Statistic	Current FTE employees	Change in employment	Percentage change in employment (%)
Growth	Mean	9.8	3.4	77.5
	Median	6.0	2.0	52.0
	N	13	13	12
Non-growth (Stasis/decline)	Mean	4.5	-3.1	-45.1
	Median	1.8	-2.3	-50.0
	N	12	12	11
Total	Mean	7.3	0.3	18.9
	Median	3.5	0.5	12.9
	N	25	25	23

Source: Authors' elaboration.



**Changes in Employment and Market Reach** - As previously indicated, the research looked at the growth of the enterprises both in terms of the changes in employment and market reach. An analysis of the tracer survey results shows an association between change in employees and change in market reach, as shown in Table 3. For those enterprises where the number of employees had decreased over the previous year, 59 percent either had their market reach contract or remain the same; a similar result is seen for those enterprises that had no change in employment, where 60 percent either had their market reach contract or remain the same. A quite different case is seen for enterprises that had an expansion in employment, with 74 percent of these enterprises also expanding their market reach.

**Table 3: Change in Employees by Change in Market Reach in Previous Year**

Change in employees (% respondents)	Change in market reach (% respondents)			Total	Respondents
	Contracted	Remained the Same	Expanded		
Decreased	23.5	35.3	41.2	100.0	17
Remained the same	8.0	52.0	40.0	100.0	25
Increased	0.0	26.3	73.7	100.0	19
Total	9.8	39.3	50.8	100.0	61

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Given these findings, the following subsections review the main constraints these enterprises faced at commencement of the WINC AP in 2015 (baseline), at exit in 2016, and with the tracer surveys, in 2018.

**Most Prominent Constraints to Enterprise Development** - When asked what were the top five constraints to developing their enterprises (in Table 4), survey respondents consistently over all three surveys cited access to growth financing (over 60 percent) and lack of skilled staff (36 percent). In terms of other common responses, baseline (2015) and tracer (2018) surveys point to support services and access to markets as constraints, and the exit (2016) survey showed more variation in responses, including space, customs/trade regulation, and lack of equal treatment by financial institutions.





**Table 4: Top 5 Constraints to Enterprise Development from Baseline, Exit, and Tracer Surveys**

<b>Top 5 Constraints</b> (reported by % of respondents)		
<b>Baseline (2015)</b>	<b>Exit (2016)</b>	<b>Tracer (2018)</b>
Lack of access to growth financing (66%)	Lack of access to growth financing (63%)	Lack of access to growth financing (62%)
Lack of suitable/affordable support services (44%)	Lack of skilled staff (36%)	Lack of skilled staff (36%)
Lack of skilled staff (36%)	Lack of suitable space (29%)	Lack of suitable/affordable support services (36%)
Lack of access to markets (36%)	Customs and trade regulations (27%)	Lack of access to markets (31%)
Lack of networking for business opportunities (30%)	Lack of equal treatment by financial institutions (27%)	Lack of access to technology or equipment (25%)

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The manner in which constraints varied for enterprises with different growth profiles are examined in the following subsections.

**Changes in Constraints with Enterprises' Stage of Development** - As well as the research interest in establishing the main constraints faced by these enterprises and how they change over time, the research was also interested in how these constraints change for enterprises at different stages of development and growth. The following analysis relates main constraints and changes in constraints to whether enterprises experienced declines, stasis, or increases in employment in the last 12 months.

As shown in Table 4, and regardless of growth category, the most prominent constraint for all enterprises was lack of access to growth financing, but the response rate ranged from 71 percent (for enterprises with decreased employment), to 67 percent (for enterprises experiencing no change) and to 50 percent (for enterprises that experienced employment growth).

Not being able to access skilled staff is also a consistent constraint across all enterprises regardless of growth profile, but again there was variation—from 41 percent to 33 percent. The main differences among constraints are seen in relation to lack of suitable/affordable business support services, which was a top constraint for enterprise experiencing no growth or decreases, but not a noted constraint for growing enterprises. While enterprises with no growth mirror some of the constraints for the other two groups, lack of suitable space and tax rates are only significant challenges for enterprises with declining employment, while lack of networking opportunities is a top constraint only for enterprises with increasing employment.



**Table 5: Top 5 Constraints by Enterprises' Change in Employment in Last Year**

<b>Top 5 constraints</b> (reported by % of respondents)		
<b>Enterprises with decreased employment</b>	<b>Enterprises with no change in employment</b>	<b>Enterprises with increased employment</b>
Lack of access to growth financing (71%)	Lack of access to growth financing (67%)	Lack of access to growth financing (50%)
Lack of suitable/affordable business support services (53%)	Lack of suitable/affordable business support services (38%)	Lack of networking opportunities (33%)
Lack of skilled staff (41%)	Lack of skilled staff (33%)	Lack of access to technology or equipment (33%)
Lack of suitable space (35%)	Lack of access to markets (33%)	Lack of access to markets (33%)
Tax rates (30%)	Lack of access to technology or equipment (21%)	Lack of skilled staff (33%)

Source: Authors' elaboration.

In analysing “switching” behaviour, where respondents selected different constraints as their top five between exiting the AP and the tracer survey, a number of notable changes emerged among enterprises (see Table 6). With respect to responses that were selected more frequently, lack of suitable/affordable business support services was the most prominent change for both enterprises experiencing employment declines and those indicating no change; interestingly, there was a decrease for enterprises with increased employment. With respect to lack of skilled staff, there was also a prominent increase for enterprises with decreased employment growth, but for enterprises with no change in employment, this fell in prominence. Of interest, for growing enterprises, access to growth finance was noted less frequently at the tracer survey than at exit. This finding is conceptually acceptable, considering that financial institutions will be more likely to view well-performing enterprises, in this case growing enterprises, in a more favourable light than those that are shrinking or demonstrating stasis.

**Table 6: Notable Changes in Top 5 Constraints by Enterprises' Change in Employment in Last Year**

<b>Notable changes in Top 5 constraints by change in employment in last year (%)</b>		
<b>Decreased employment</b>	<b>No change in employment</b>	<b>Increased employment</b>
Increases in frequency		
Lack of suitable/affordable business support service (+24%)	Lack of suitable/affordable business support service (+25%)	Lack of access to markets (+17%)
Lack of skilled staff (+24%)	Lack of self-confidence (+13%)	Lack of access to technology/equipment (+11%)
		Lack of effective internal processes/systems (+11%)
		Corruption (+11%)
Decreases in Frequency		
Lack of equal treatment by financial institutions (-24%)	Lack of information on markets (-17%)	Lack of access to growth financing (-11%)
	Lack of skilled staff (-13%)	Lack of suitable/affordable business support services (-11%)
		Lack of equal treatment by financial institutions (-11%)
		Tax rates (-11%)

Source: Authors' elaboration.



What is clear from the results is that enterprises at different growth stages are experiencing different constraints. However, while some of the underlying causal factors are conceptually understood (for example, access to finance being less of an issue for growing enterprises), other results are unclear. One example of the latter is lack of skilled staff increased as a constraint for enterprises that have decreased employment. It is clear here that there is a link between the decreasing employment in the enterprise and lack of skilled staff; however the direction and nature of the causation is unclear; has lack of skilled staff led to poor performance and as a consequence the enterprise needed to reduce its labour force, or has staff leaving the enterprise forced the enterprise to seek skills on the labour market which are scarce? Despite the inability to clearly answer this question, what is clear is that lack of skilled staff in the labour market was an abiding concern; although it increased for enterprises with decreased employment, it decreased for enterprises with stasis in employment, and remained constant for growing enterprises.

While the analysis of the results of the tracer survey in comparison with the exit survey has enabled the identification of several trends in changes in constraints over time and with different growth trajectories, the reasons for these changes are unclear. In essence, this identification problem is that it is not possible to determine from the survey whether the top constraints change because what was once a constraint is no longer a constraint, or whether it is still a constraint but, due to circumstances, other issues emerge as greater constraints. Given these issues, and the need to enhance the understanding of the difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs, several in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs were conducted. The main emerging themes and supporting evidence is highlighted in the sections that follow.

## Core and Contingent Constraints: A Thematic Analysis

The objective of conducting the in-depth interviews was to firstly explore the underlying nature of the constraints currently experienced and to identify potential causes. As a result of the initial review of the transcripts of the interviews, the framework for the thematic analysis emerged. This initial review suggested that there was a level of interplay between constraints related to the components of the enterprise marginalisation framework that were causing the alleged under-performance of women-owned enterprises. To facilitate an understanding of this interplay, the research had to take into account that some constraints may have had direct effects on an enterprise, while other constraints may be indirect. The thematic analysis revealed that there appear to be different levels of enterprise needs and constraints: (i) core needs and constraints, which relate to what an enterprise directly needs to conduct its business and access markets, and the direct constraints causing the inability to satisfy these needs; (ii) contingent constraints, which are those constraints that are indirectly preventing access to core needs, and which may or may not manifest themselves hence the use of the term contingent; and (iii) cross-cutting constraints, which are constraints that were seen in both (i) and (ii). The core constraints related to: labour; production space and equipment; entrepreneurship; and access to markets. Contingent constraints related to: access to finance and financial services; business support services; and family responsibilities. During the thematic analysis of the interviews, there were two cross-cutting contingent constraints that were identified, gender issues and network issues. These issues are examined in the subsections that follow.<sup>8</sup>

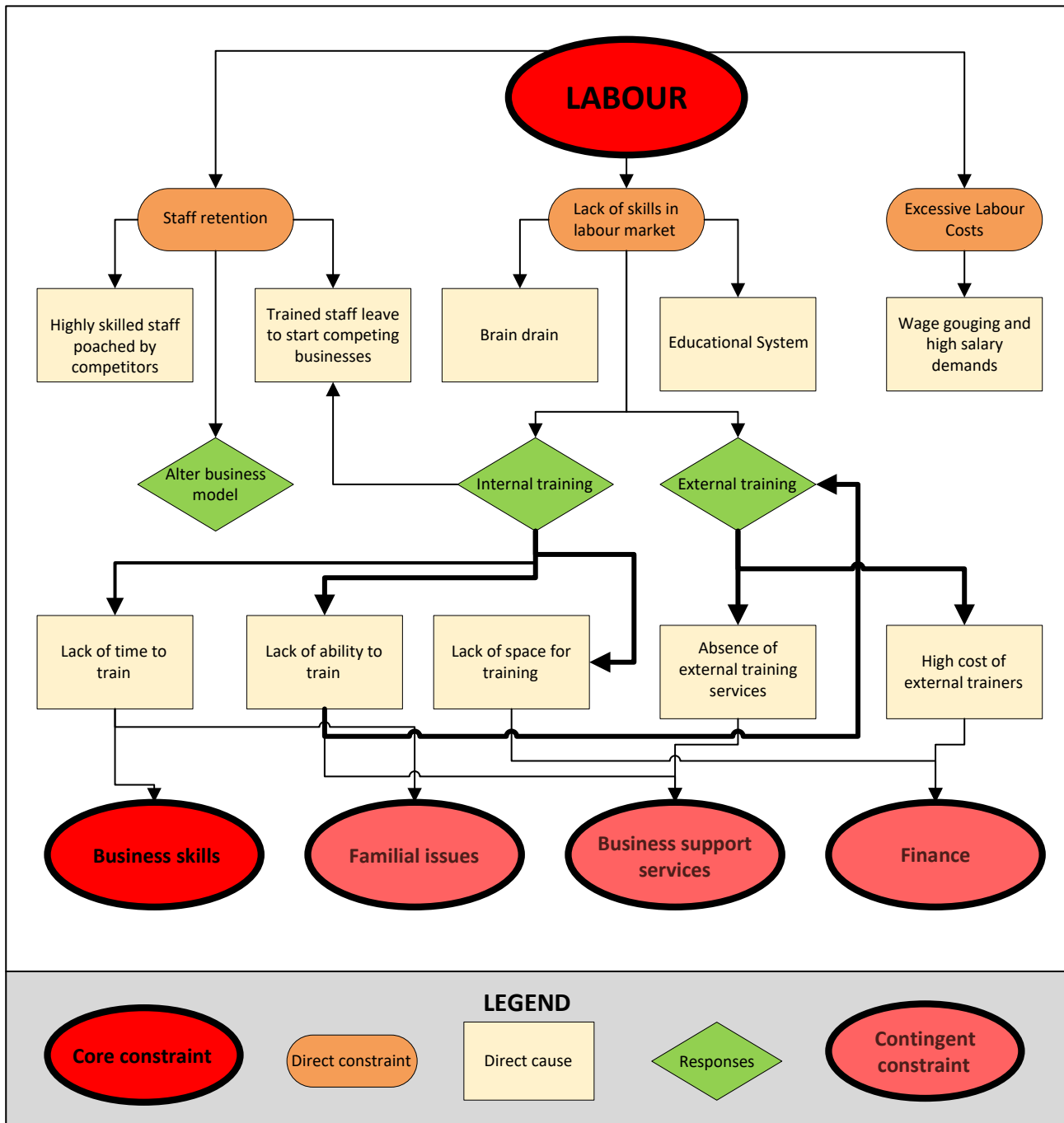
<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that in the discussion that follows, pseudonyms were used, with a first name followed by a two- or three- letter abbreviation; the first letter indicates whether the enterprise was growing (G) or not growing (N), while the other letters indicate whether the interviewee was from a lesser developed small country (LS), a lesser developed large country (LL), or a more developed country (M).



**Core Needs and Key Constraints** - Given that the focus of the research is to understand the gender issues affecting these enterprises, these issues are given prominence. However, issues that are generic in effect are also included and summarised in the figures representing the interactions between constraints, causes, and responses.

**Labour** - As highlighted in Figure 2, several labour issues were noted as constraints. However, only difficulties in staff retention appeared to have a gender context. In several cases, difficulties in staff retention, which is mostly staff leaving to become competitors, is due to the sectors in which these women-owned enterprises are operating. Where barriers to entry are low in a sector, once staff have requisite skills, they can leave and easily establish their own enterprises.

**Figure 2: Labour as Core Constraint: Related Constraints, Causes, and Responses**



Source: Authors' elaboration.



Overall, many of the labour issues identified from the interviews as issues that can affect growth can be considered generic; that is, they are issues that would be faced by all enterprises regardless of the gender of owner(s). However, there were three main issues that emerged that appear to relate to the gender of the owner(s): the manner in which staff treat the owner(s); an apparent bond between the owner(s) and staff; and the gendered nature of the majority of sectors in which these enterprises operate, what Barriteau (2002, 228) terms “female-type” sectors.

The issue of differential treatment because the owner is a woman was seen in several of the interviews and across a range of topics. Of interest here was the negative aspect of this differential treatment from staff, and on occasion, women staff. As Indianna NM, a specialty food producer, relates:

*[I]t is a disadvantage [being a woman entrepreneur]. I have found that I have had a couple of instances of women, female employees, becoming, being extremely hostile to me. And honestly, I don't think if I was a man in this position they would do it....So I've had very, very, very serious things done to me because I'm a woman. I don't think if it was a man it would've occur[ed]. [T]hat's the disadvantage....They perceive me as weak.”*

Another emerging theme from some of the interviews was the caring instinct that interviewees had for their staff. There was generally a feeling by the entrepreneur that they had a responsibility not just to their staff, but to their families and wider community. This was demonstrated by Violet GLS when she explained:

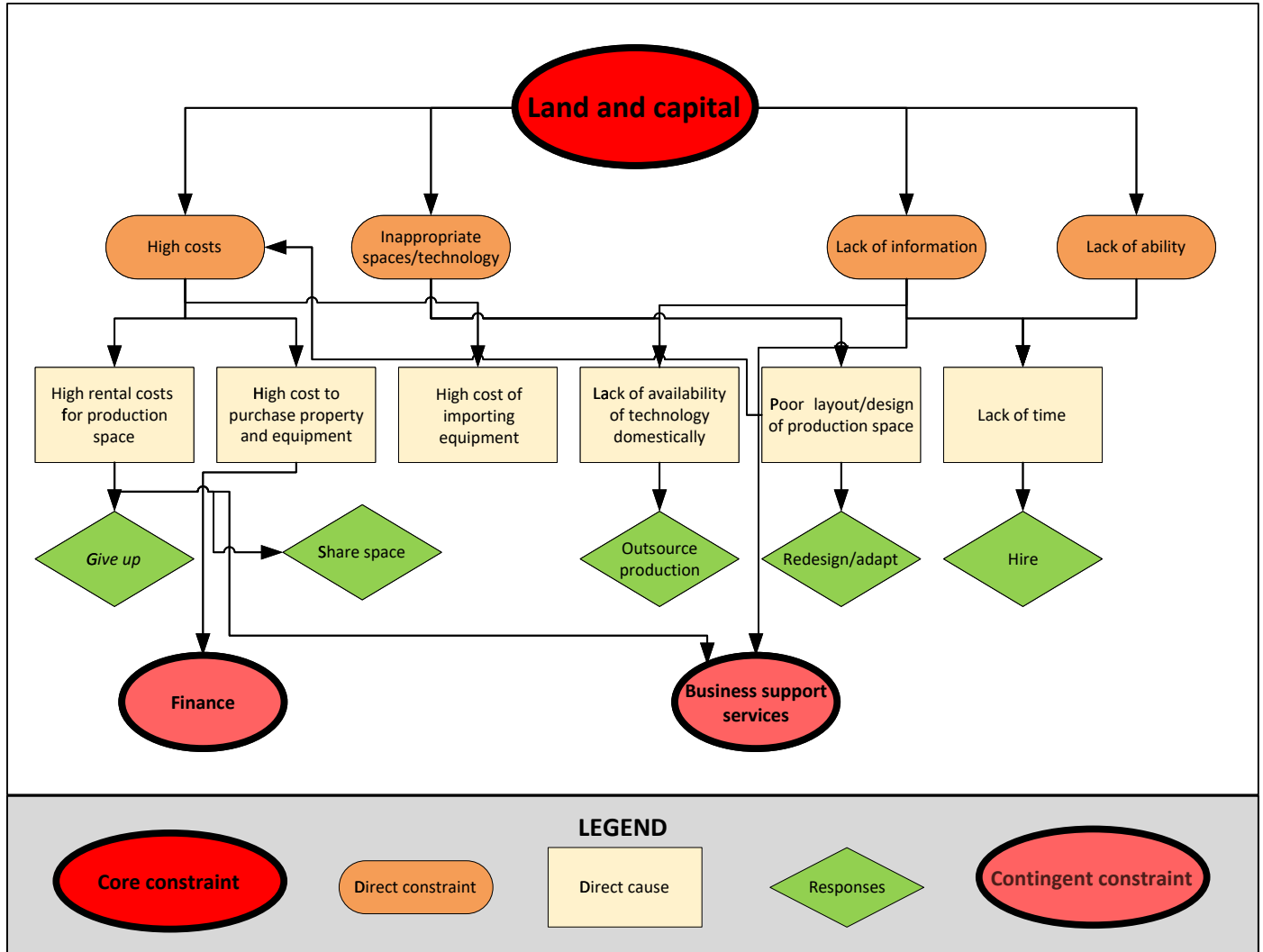
*I'm a small business with only 17 staff, but I touch the lives of more than 17 persons on any given day...a lot of people that I employ have more than 2 kids, so this extends beyond where the more professional associations like the banks or whatever; most of their staff have 1 or 2 kids, mine have 5 or 6.*

In this case, Violet GLS feels responsible for over 80 persons, a heavy burden to bear when making decisions that may risk their livelihoods. Whilst this reflects a form of social conscience, it may also lead to a growth constraint in relation to an aversion to taking risk for fear of having a negative effect on staff, their families, and the wider community in the event of the enterprise failing. It, however, appears that Violet GLS has been able to overcome this barrier to some degree as her enterprise is growing. The other “gendered” issue to emerge relates to the sectors in which these women entrepreneurs are operating. The majority of enterprises were in highly competitive sectors which are generally associated with women, namely fashion, beauty, and other personal services, and food processing and related services; these sectors comprised approximately 70 percent of the interviewees. While these enterprises are competing with other small enterprises for customers, they are also competing for scarce trained labour; this has led to difficulties in securing appropriate staff as well as retaining them in the enterprise, leading to the additional constraints in relation to difficulties in the provision of training, such as an aversion to providing training for fear that the trained member of staff leaves the enterprise to join a competitor or start a competing enterprise.



**Land and Capital** - The main constraints to accessing land and capital related to accessing suitable production space and equipment, and utilising technology. The direct constraints in this regard were high costs, inappropriate production spaces, and technology. The specific technology constraints were lack of information on available technology and a lack of ability to search for and utilise what was externally available. Figure 3 highlights the main issues, which are mostly generic rather than gendered.

**Figure 3: Land and Capital as Core Constraint: Related Constraints, Causes, and Responses**

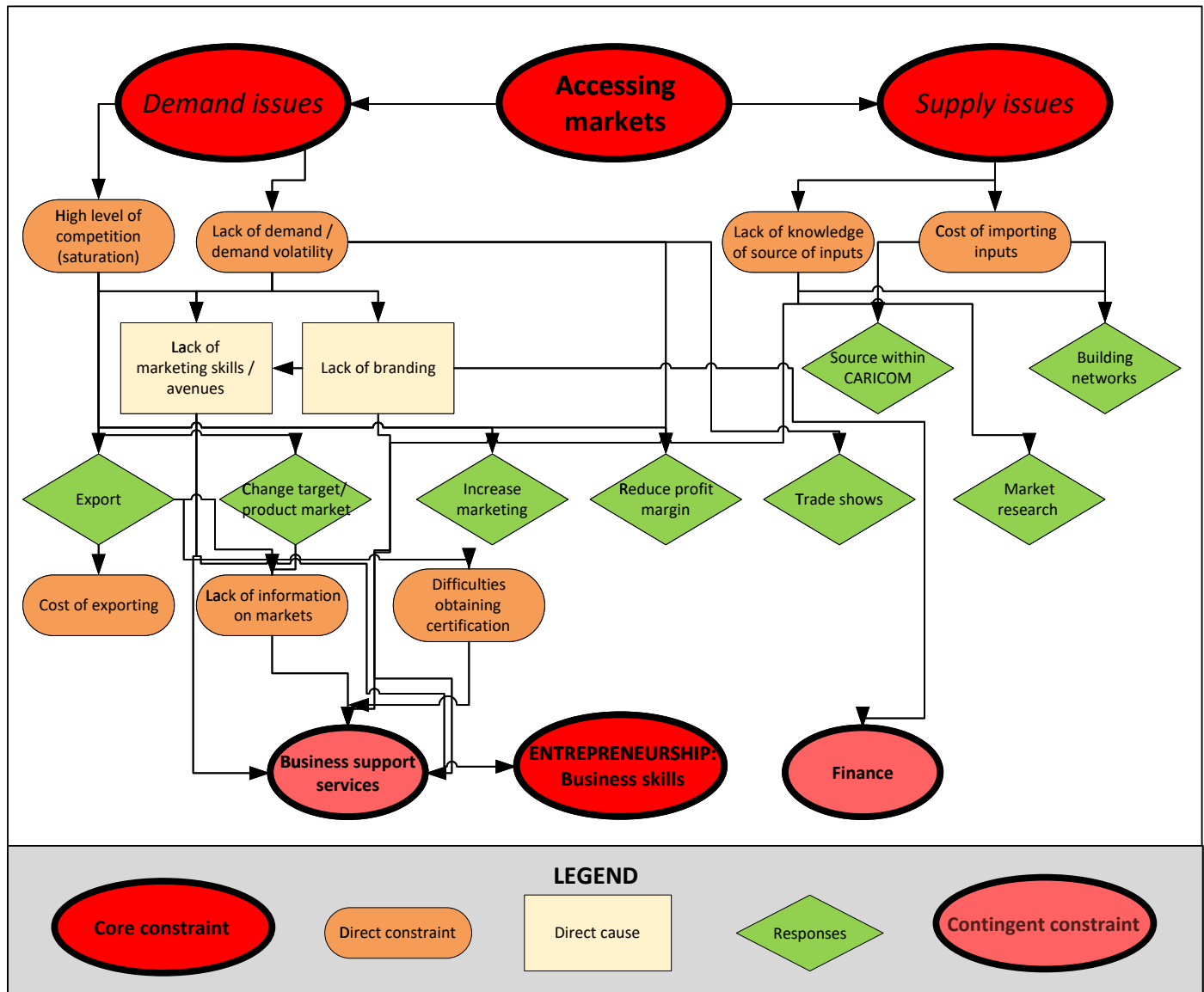


Source: Authors' elaboration.

**Accessing Markets** - Figure 4 highlights the main interactions between direct constraints, underlying causes, and responses to the issues faced with respect to accessing markets, both on the demand side and supply side. Although there are many factors at play and several levels of interactions, the main issues and of particular interest appear to be lack of information on markets and suppliers, and lack of appropriate skills with respect to marketing and exporting. These are areas that business support providers, especially government-funded or regionally funded agencies, should seek to address. While such services do exist at both these levels, it does not appear that they are being utilised to a significant degree by these enterprises, and where they have been utilised, they were not considered suitable to the needs of these women entrepreneurs.



Figure 4: Market Access as Core Constraint: Related Constraints, Causes, and Responses



Source: Authors' elaboration.

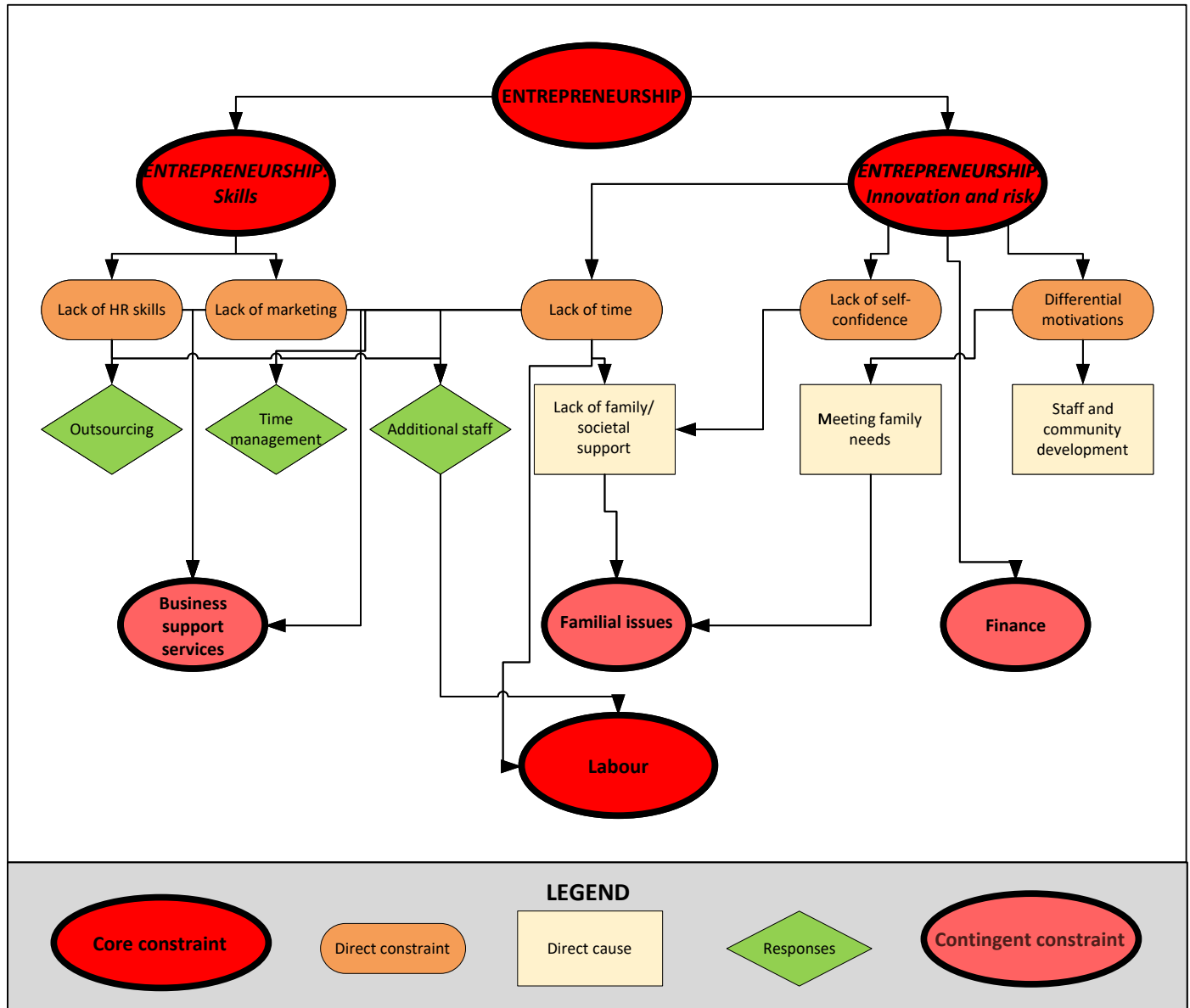
Thus, the two main issues affecting access to markets for interviewees can be categorised as supply issues and demand issues, with the latter dominating. The only gender-related issue to emerge here again related to the sectors in which these women entrepreneurs were operating. They are in sectors with low barriers to entry, including many other women entrepreneurs, and therefore experiencing high levels of competition in sectors already saturated. The entrepreneurs' inability to cope with this level of competition was revealed as mainly due to a lack of marketing skills and being unable to differentiate their product.

**Entrepreneurship** - Without the actions of the entrepreneur, land, labour, and capital will lie dormant, and markets remain unserved. The entrepreneur's abilities and their entrepreneurial actions are the integral links between the latent factors of production and the satisfaction of demand. While several direct constraints exist in relation to optimal maximization of labour, land, and capital generally for all enterprises, this research paper shifts the focus to the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in relation to the practice of entrepreneurship. This is maximization



as comprising of two components: (i) entrepreneurial behaviour, that is, innovation and risk-taking to exploit market opportunities and grow; and (ii) entrepreneurial skills, that is, basic business skills including management skills, as well as leadership and problem-solving skills. The constraints here are considered to exist at two levels, the individual level and the external level. The main issues arising from the interviews in relation to the constraints to the practice of entrepreneurship, and the linkages emerging, are highlighted in Figure 5. These core constraints are discussed in the subsections that follow.

Figure 5: Entrepreneurship as Core Constraint: Related Constraints, Causes, and Responses



Source: Authors' elaboration.





**Constraints to Entrepreneurial Behaviour: Innovation and Risk** - Abstract conceptualisations of the entrepreneur give primacy to the profit maximization goal, which is achieved through innovation and risk-taking to gain an advantage over competitors (Benz, 2009). While all interviewees implicitly sought profitability, this was not the primary goal for all, as they also sought to achieve staff and community development, and to meet their family's needs. What is apparent among the interviewees is an element of a social conscience which firstly restricts embarking on overly risky ventures for fear of loss of livelihoods (not only for the entrepreneurs themselves, but also for family and staff) and secondly constrains the time available to explore growth opportunities as there are other goals for the enterprise to achieve. Terri-Ann NM, an agroprocessor, exemplifies this trend:

*I need to invest more in building my female staff that come from a very low-income level, that come from very underprivileged background[s], that have families, to somehow get their values and dreams realise[d].... [Y]ou want all your workers to move to the next level, you want them to be conscious and you want them to do well and to dream big. So that is a constraint in a way, and you need to invest in them.*

For Terri-Ann NM, the “ideal thing” would be “to have a closed community, with my workers living around the area, and you have a homework facility.... [Y]ou get a teacher to monitor that, and they are fed a meal, and everybody is happy.”

Such sentiments are echoed across the region where many of the interviewees spoke of assisting their staff, even after they have left the enterprise, and building out non-business networks to help others.

With respect to family, interviewees spoke of the need to support their family as a main motivation, and in order to maintain this support, they could not afford to lose the enterprise and therefore, again, they avoided taking too many risks. This also related to when they received financial support from family; given the need to repay family loans, some interviewees were reluctant to undertake any new ventures that may leave them unable to repay family loans that would make other family members suffer.

Another obstacle to growing the enterprise was a lack of self-confidence. Barbara GLS notes that she is very confident in running the enterprise internally, but lacks the confidence to push the enterprise externally, even though the enterprise is currently experiencing growth. She notes this as her weakness and understands the effect it can have on the growth of the company: “you could have the same product and two different personalities presenting it and [a] confident person would [do] pretty well, would sell it.” While this is an individual issue, a lack of familial or societal support for women entrepreneurs can also cause this negative view of self. Desiree GLL had suffered from this in the past, but after five years in business, and demonstrating her commitment to the enterprise, she now believes that family members have “made peace” with her decision to choose entrepreneurship, and now they are more morally supportive, and she has had the space to grow. In this case it can be seen that the views of family can constrain entrepreneurial action but also foster it.

While family can assist through moral support, the practical support with respect to assisting with childcare, and the absence of suitable childcare facilities, have imposed a significant time constraint on these women entrepreneurs in operating and growing their enterprises. This time constraint is a recurring issue throughout the interviews in relation to many of the core constraints seen; and at a practical level of everyday operations and strategic planning, it is a significant constraint. This lack of time is mainly due to two issues: (i) the individual nature of the women entrepreneurs who seek to take on all the duties required to run the enterprise; and (ii) family issues which relate to a lack of familial support, and difficulties in managing the family-work balance.



The underlying cause of this apparent independent nature of these women entrepreneurs is difficult to establish, but it appears that difficulties related to securing the right support—whether this is labour or technical assistance from business support agencies—appears to contribute to this willingness to “go it alone” if no one else is willing to help. Another factor appears to be fear of losing control, and hence threats to family livelihoods. Whatever the source of such “fierce” independence, it is clear that it curtails the effective operation of the enterprise, especially due to exhaustion. Jan GLL spoke of sometimes working seven days a week, and some months only having one day off, which is spent “entirely in bed.” While she is considering outsourcing some production to overcome this time constraint, she has not yet taken any action in this area. The exhaustion experienced does not only affect the individual, as noted by Kyra GLS:

*I am just pushing myself on the farm and getting exhausted. Right now, even my husband is sick, and I'm going in and out of the doctor[’s office] with him....[S]ince [hurricane] Maria, my husband is on [blood] pressure tabs, and he's just 47.*

In addition to this independent nature, another cause of the time constraint faced by these women entrepreneurs appears to be lack of family support in childcare and difficulties in managing the family–work balance. This was related by some of the interviewees as follows:

- [H]aving to look after my children myself, it takes a lot of energy away from you.” (Nikita GLL)
- [T]he 7 year old, before I could just open a [computer] program and she could just do her thing, but now she's coming with more homework....I mean grandma is always there physically, but my daughter is demanding more of my physical time.” (Violet GLS)
- The family–work balance, men are pretty much absolved from having to make those decisions really [choosing between work and family].” (Violet GLS)

It is interesting here that, despite these burden-of-care issues, these women are still able to grow their enterprises.

Maria NLS, a business support provider herself, speaks to these same constraints as well as the lack of support and the co-mingling of enterprise and family goals:

*I don't always think that people in society regard the fact that we [women entrepreneurs] may need time...and it's really strange, there isn't that much support, I don't think that there's...that many...schemes or measure[s] put in place to assist or aid women who are really trying to get an angle on life, you know, taking care of family, raising a child, and also starting a business, there just isn't that much support at all....I think of ways how to help people and also think of ways how to generate income that would allow me the flexibility to be who I need to be for my children and for my husband and my family.*

In attempting to deal with the issue of time, she herself reached a point where she had to take specific measures to manage her time for the enterprise: “I had to say ‘OK, you're going to have to dedicate specific time to what you're doing and let everybody know that within this time you're not to be bothered.’”

While there are several internal issues that have an effect on innovation and risk-taking for these women entrepreneurs, with underlying linkages to contingent constraints such as missing or inadequate business support services and the social constructions of gender, there are also linkages to the core constraint of labour, and all of the related constraints therein, as discussed in an earlier section.



**Deficits and Barriers to Entrepreneurial Skill Development** - As with constraints to entrepreneurial behaviour, lack of time also influenced the application or attainment of entrepreneurial skills. While there were skill gaps noted in relation to human resource management and marketing, lack of time to apply any skills already possessed was the most significant issue. Barbara GLS specifically states that her “lack of push in that direction [into social media] was more related to my time [rather than lack of ability].”

The group of interviewees, for the most part, did not lack “business” skills, even previous to joining the WINC AP. Whilst the WINC AP did boost the skills of the participants, and in a sense reminded them of the manner in which to apply them, many of the other constraints they faced hampered their application of these skills.

In seeking to address these issues, interviewees undertook three main responses: (i) outsourcing of production, (ii) implementing time-management strategies, and (iii) either employing or promoting staff to undertake part of the workload. However, while some of these strategies were effective, they again encountered contingent constraints, namely a lack of appropriate external enterprise or business support services (to assist in efforts such as HRM or marketing), and issues related to labour as a core constraint to enterprise development (as discussed earlier).

**Constraints to Entrepreneurship: Summary** - While several of the constraints to the practice of entrepreneurship by these women entrepreneurs manifest themselves as internal constraints—such as lack of self-confidence, time, and necessary skills—it appears the underlying cause is external, whether familial issues or lack of business support services. With respect to finance, this is an abiding constraint in relation to when there is sufficient motivation and time to exploit growth opportunities, and labour is a perennial constraint to enterprise development, as discussed above.

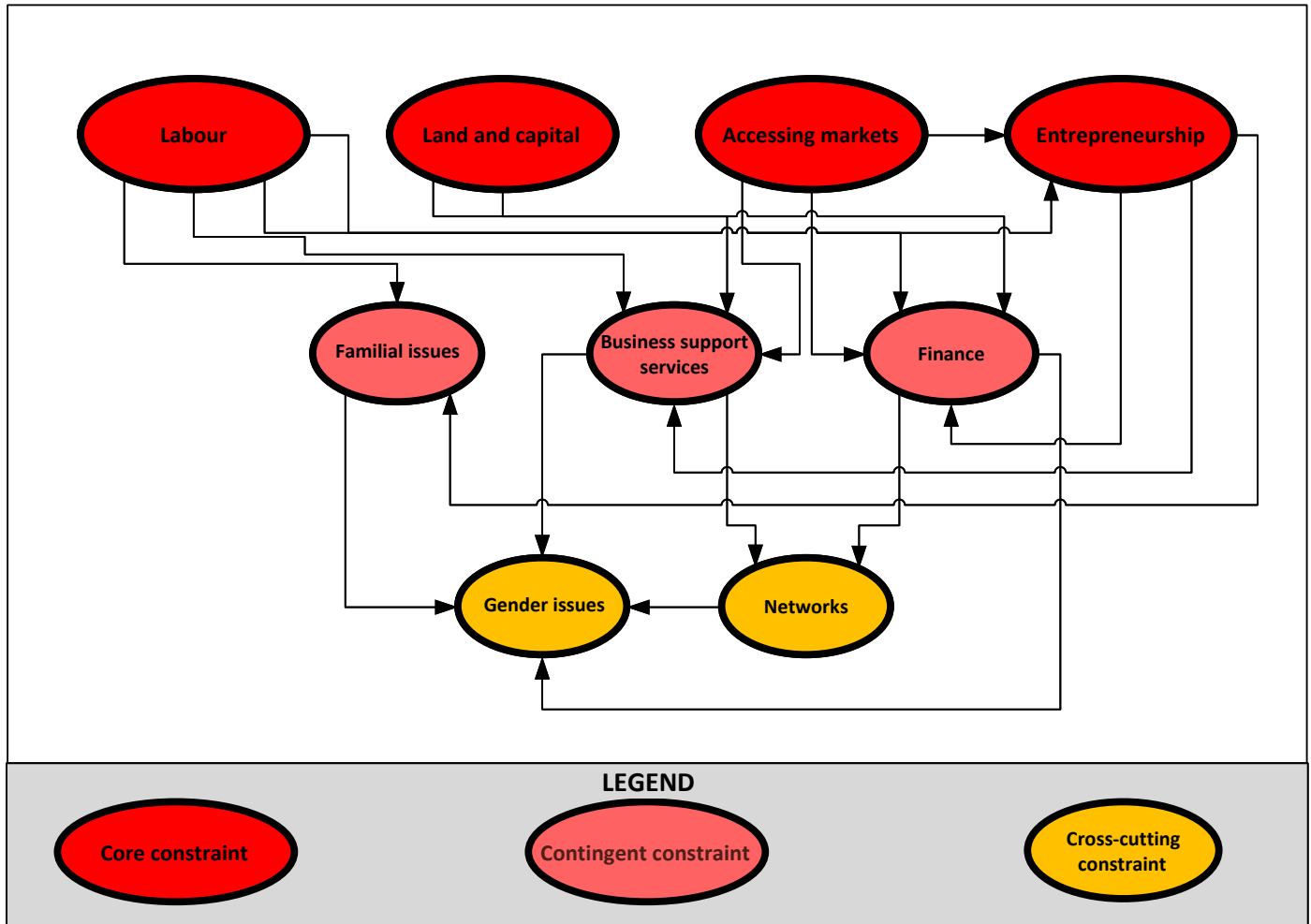
The main internal constraint to the practice of entrepreneurship in its pure masculine form (according to social norms, as noted earlier) appears to be the differential motivations of the women entrepreneurs, where profit is but one aim, accompanied by meeting family needs, and staff and community development. This is one of the main points that will need to be understood in the discussion of women in entrepreneurship and the implementation of any interventions to enhance the growth of these enterprises. The discussion becomes not about changing these motivations, but about how these motivations can be accommodated by finance and business support providers to provide for more equitable and sustainable growth paths. While the public face of many of these enterprises would not lead them to be classified as “social enterprises,” many of them are grounded in the same principles, and as such require support beyond that applied to the traditional profit-driven enterprise. Indeed, such recognition is in keeping with new thought on entrepreneurship in general, where the nonpecuniary benefits of being an entrepreneur are considered more attractive than material benefits (Benz 2009).

**Contingent Constraints** - As indicated in the analysis of the underlying causes and responses to the core constraints on enterprise development for women-owned enterprises, a number of contingent constraints emerged. The constraints are considered contingent as they only manifest themselves under certain conditions. For example, issues in accessing external finance would only emerge if the enterprise was seeking to invest in a growth opportunity and had insufficient internal funds. In other words, the experience of the constraint is contingent on whether the entrepreneur is seeking finance or not.



Figure 6 outlines the linkages between the core and contingent constraints discussed in the preceding sections. The following subsections discuss the nature of the constraints faced in finance and business support services as they emerged from the thematic analysis of the interviews. Familial issues are represented in Figure 6 but are not addressed in the following subsections as the substantive time and support issues that emerged have already been discussed.

**Figure 6: Linkages Identified Between Core, Contingent, and Cross-Cutting Constraints**



Source: Authors' elaboration.

**Finance and Financial Services** - Overall, the issues to emerge with respect to finance as a constraint to enterprise growth related to:

**1. Financial Institutional Issues:**

- A. The high cost of finance (both with respect to interest rates and expenses to prepare documentation for applications) and high collateral requirements
- B. Bureaucracy with respect to application procedures and a lack of provision of feedback
- C. Lack of appropriate financial products and use of technology



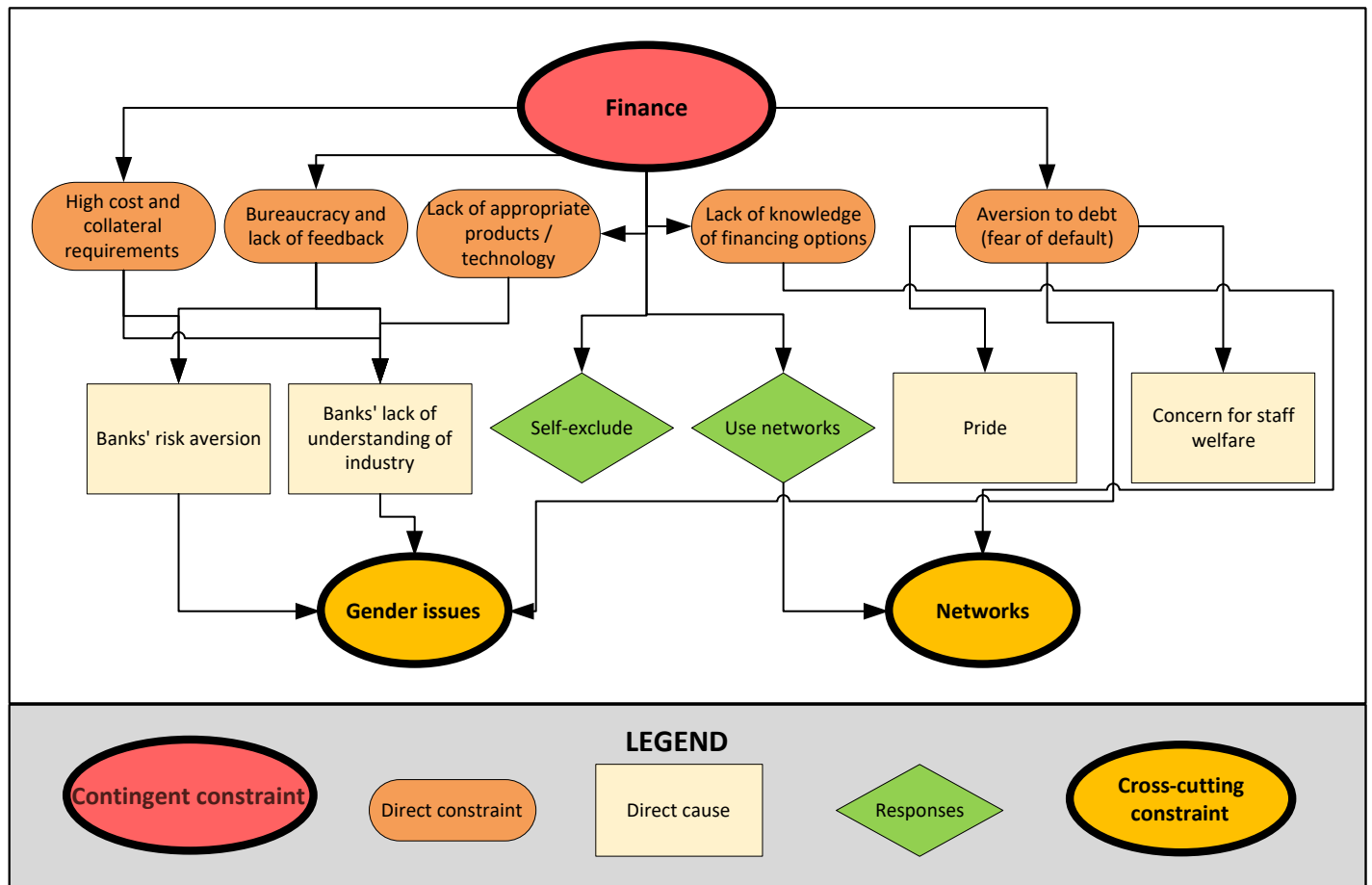
## 2. Individual Issues:

A. Lack of knowledge of financing options

B. Aversion to debt

As shown in Figure 7, the issue of lack of access to finance has several underlying causes, based primarily at the institutional level. However, there were some personal issues that have also been identified. As noted with the direct constraints discussed earlier, the interrelationships and linkages between the issues are complex, with gender becoming apparent in several instances. While several issues are raised, the ensuing analysis focuses primarily on the gender issues emerging.

Figure 7: Finance as a Contingent Constraint: Related Constraints, Causes, and Responses



Source: Authors' elaboration.

It is clear from the analysis of the interviews that many of these issues are interrelated, and they are mainly due to finance providers' aversion to enterprise lending, their preference for consumer lending, and finance providers' lack of understanding of the entrepreneur's industry and its needs. The cross-cutting issue of gender is particularly relevant here.

Pat GM provides a typical example of the stories related during the interviews. While she notes that financing is a major issue for all enterprises in her country, she believes that this is made even more difficult because she is a woman entrepreneur, even though her enterprise is growing. She tells two interesting stories in relation to, firstly, banks' preference for consumer lending, and, secondly, the interplay of gender and access to credit.

*Let me give you a practical example. I went to the bank. They are willing to lend me money to buy a car, but they are not willing to lend me money to buy equipment for the business. As a matter of fact, they are getting the car people to bring the cars to me, but they won't lend me half or a quarter of that to buy equipment to make money, and the car is just going to devalue. I don't get it.*

The second story concerned her application for an increase in her credit card limit and which the bank would not approve.

*My husband, who happened to be at the bank unrelated to me being there, just turned up at the bank for his own business, and when they realised that I am married to him, all of a sudden they are giving me twice what I asked for...[i]f he signs the paper. He really is not involved in the day-to-day running of the business, but if he put his male name on the paper, I get twice what I asked for, more than I need, but if it's just my name, I cannot get it.*

This type of occurrence was not unusual, as illustrated by what Rebecca NM experienced when told that she should get married to her boyfriend, who was a prominent businessman in her country, so as to increase her chances of getting a credit card for her enterprise. While a generalisation to normal banking practices cannot be made here, it appears that gender issues are overriding the growth status of the enterprises in these cases.

Lack of knowledge of what was available with respect to financing options was also evident. For Terri-Ann NM, this lack of knowledge was also tied to lack of networks and gender issues; she stated that she did not know "who is the right person to speak to that can make the decision. Where are the occasions that you meet these people on a business level that they get to know you and then also, [I] think there are different criteria to assessing women's business to men."

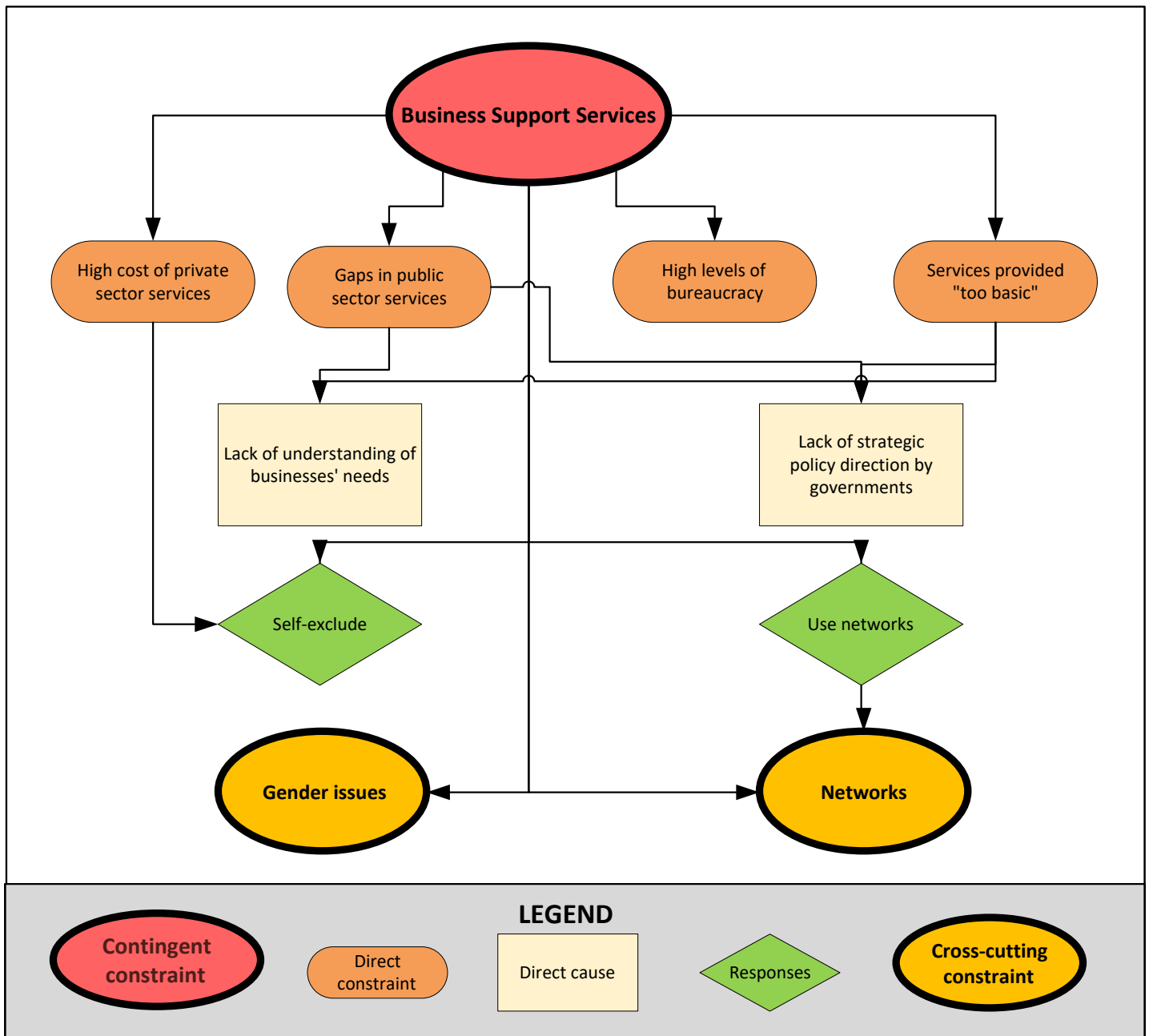
The other individual issue observed was an aversion to debt, mostly out of a fear of defaulting on loans and losing family assets as well as concern about the welfare of staff and their families, as alluded to earlier. However, it was clear in some cases that some were not averse to risk, but averse to debt. Barbara GLS noted that "debt was never a good thing," but she was not averse to taking risks with other forms of finance; after a product line diversification failed, she said: "sometimes that happens, you got to take risks."

Marion NLL notes gender as playing a role in the risk aversion of financial institutions, and consequently the high requirements to access credit: "[F]inancial institutions don't really trust, especially single mothers...if you don't have some kind of real large bank account or land or property you can put down as a collateral for them."

**Business Support Services** - Many of the issues to emerge in relation to finance were also seen in relation to business support services. The discussions mostly centred on state-provided business support services, those agencies providing training, information, and technical support. The primary issues were institutional and they related to the following factors: high cost of services provided; gaps in service provision; lack of appreciation of enterprises' needs and lack of business understanding by staff and hence services offered were generally basic in nature; and high levels of bureaucracy. Figure 8 highlights the main issues arising from the interviews in relation to the business support services as a constraint, and the linkages emerging.



Figure 8: Business Support Services as a Contingent Constraint: Related Constraints, Causes, and Responses



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Following an extensive examination of the interview transcripts, it became clear that the gender and network issues related to business support services were interwoven with wider gender and network issues. Therefore, they are highlighted in the following section. For completeness, these issues are included in the above figure. In general, the direct constraints related to business support services were generic to all enterprises.

### Cross-Cutting Constraints

**Specific Network Issues** - While networks present as a cross-cutting constraint with respect to accessing finance and sourcing business support services, with knock-on effects with respect to accessing the factors of production, there are

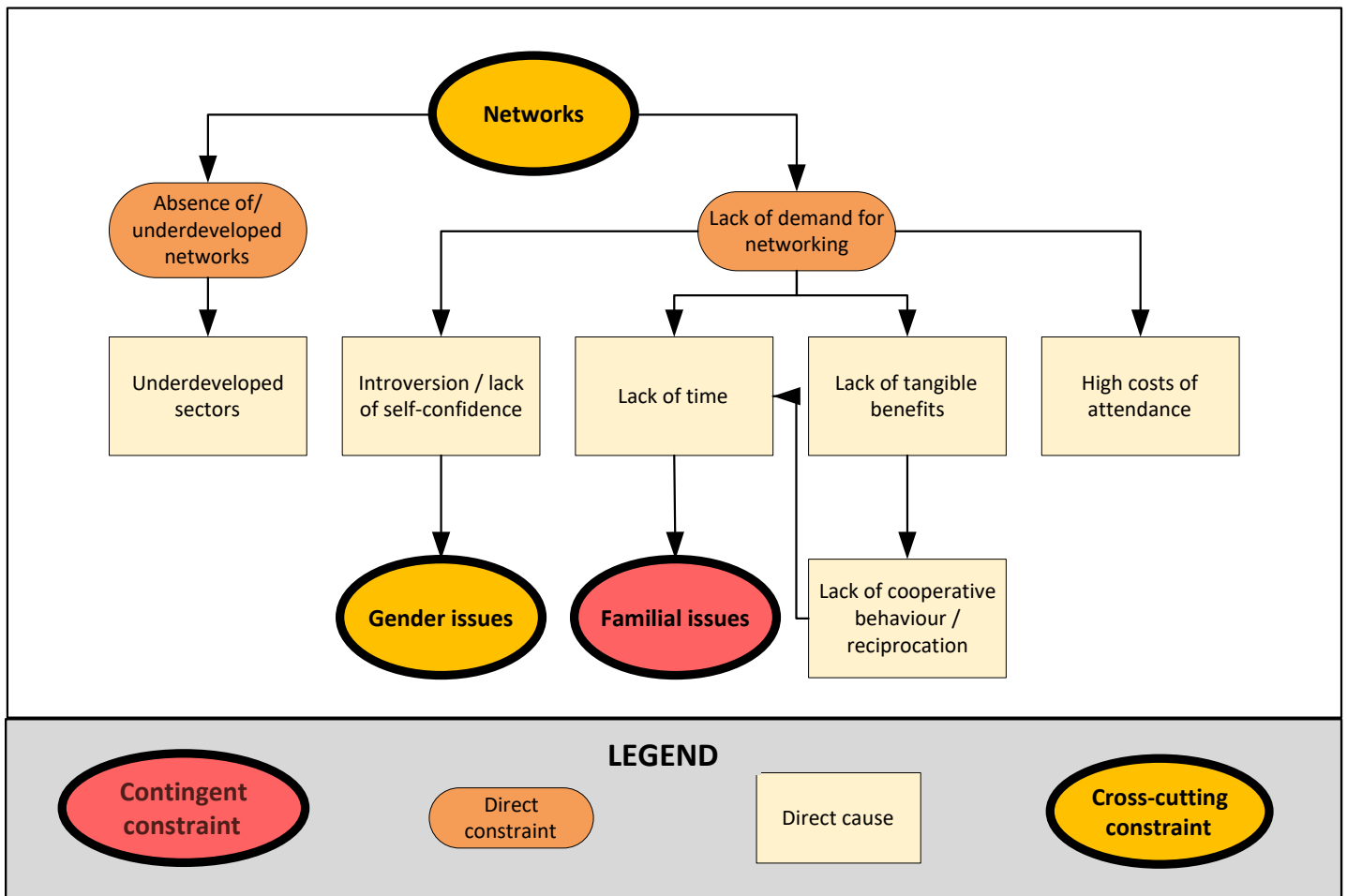


some specific issues with respect to the formation and functioning of networks, which need to be addressed. The main issues with respect to networks were:

- **Lack of supply: absence/underdevelopment of formal networks**
- **Demand constraints (issues affecting utilisation):**
  - *Lack of time due to business and familial constraints*
  - *Cost of participation in formal networking events (monetary and time costs)*
  - *Lack of cooperation/reciprocation constraining tangible benefits*
  - *Introversion/lack of self-confidence*

Figure 9 illustrates the general interaction between the issues identified in relation to networks.

**Figure 9: General Issues Related to Networks as a Cross-cutting Constraint: Related Constraints and Causes**



Source: Authors' elaboration.





There were several interrelated factors that have led to interviewees not utilising networks, mainly due to a lack of time and all the attendant interrelationships of the causes of lack of time. These factors were indicated in relation to several of the other constraints discussed previously. The main demand constraints are highlighted below.

**Lack of time due to enterprise and familial constraints** - Nikita GLL indicated that she did not have “enough time at hand, and energy, so I don’t go to events. So, I don’t get the time to network with people, but I do see it as necessary.”

Barbara GLS notes that once running the business finishes for the day, her focus turns to family:

*I’m a single mom. So, when I leave here [the business place] I’m heading home, I’m thinking home, the children and cooking, and what happens then. I may not have many opportunities to go out there and socialise and network in that regard.*

The time constraint observed has also had an effect on the continuity of networking efforts. While there was a high intensity of interaction following the AP, this waned over time. Charli NLS proffers some reasons for this:

*I think we became too individualised, everybody on their own hustle....[E]verything we learnt just, kind of, went out the window with regards to our networking, our marketing....[H]ow are we going to make money [became the central concern]....We have our children to take care of, we have our bills to pay....We should meet. There’s the Facebook page;I read, [but] I have not commented, not one bit.*

**Lack of cooperation, reciprocation causing lack of tangible benefits** - Gail GM, while noting “everybody wants to network,” is averse to participating in networks as she does not see any tangible benefits. Preeya NM echoes this by indicating that with the women’s business association she is a member of, “even though they do a lot, I’m not feeling anything happening.”

An analysis of the interviews suggests that this is in part due to a lack of cooperative behaviour and reciprocation. Rebecca NM speaks to the time it takes to develop relationships, but an issue she has is that she does not think her effort is reciprocated by others often enough: “I do get it [her effort] reciprocated, but it’s more that I don’t.” This lack of cooperative behaviour has been attributed to a high level of competition, especially in the smaller countries of the region. Kyra GLS speaks to this in her interview: “I guess because the community is so small that there is that level of...I would say selfishness, but at the same time it may come to, a bit to being selfish, it just that everyone is trying to survive in a small area.” Again, the issue of operating in highly competitive “female-type” sectors arises as a constraint, this time related to network formation and utilisation.

**Introversion/lack of self-confidence** - An interesting point to emerge from the interviews was an aversion to networking due to an introverted nature and a lack of self-confidence. This is interesting as interviewees had proactively applied to the AP, which at its core is a networking initiative, and that there was a high level of self-confidence in their own ability, as revealed from the various surveys undertaken during and after their participation in the AP.

Barbara GLS speaks to a wider issue of gender in relation to men demonstrating more forthright behaviour:

*[W]herever [men are], they’re always networking and talking about their business, whereas women, we tend to shy away from that. We figure, “okay, it’s a social setting so let’s not...”; that’s something that I have to learn to not be uncomfortable or apologetic about.*



**General Gender Issues** - While several gender-related issues were raised during the course of the interviews when probing specific constraints, interviewees were also asked to reflect specifically on gender and the role it played in the general development of their enterprises and doing business overall. While several of these issues are linked to the other constraints discussed above, of interest is the prominence with which issues were mentioned when the discussion was specifically about gender.

When the subject was initially probed directly, several of the interviewees did not believe that they personally suffered from any differential treatment because of being a woman entrepreneur. Nikita GLL, however, did admit that this may not be the case for other women entrepreneurs, and attributed her not experiencing any discrimination to operating in a sector she was expected to be operating in: "...in my line of work, because I do makeup...I don't experience that [unequal treatment]....People expect a women to be in that line of work." Marion NLL, who also does not believe she is subject to unequal treatment believes similar; "I think if it was a different business, it would be a different scenario." While operating in an area considered as "women's work" was given as a reason for not experiencing unequal treatment, operating in sectors outside of what would traditionally be considered "women's work" was given as a reason for unequal treatment. Violet GLS, who operates a sports bar, attests to this:

*[A] woman can't run a sports bar kind of environment....[W]hen I just opened I had persons asking me to see the manager....I tell them I am the manager, and they say "I thought it was a man" and they would tell that right in our face....[T]hey don't take me seriously.*

Despite some interviewees not initially agreeing that gender was an issue for them in operating their enterprises, on probing it did emerge for the majority. Some of the underlying gender-related constraints to arise included the aforementioned sectoral issue—that is, operating in "women's sectors" was socially acceptable, but breaking away from these expectations was not. Other issues included:

• **Negative experiences:**

- *Lack of encouragement/support for women entrepreneurs*
- *Perceived "under-performance" and lack of access to resources*
- *Lack of respect and resistance from threatened men, as well as other women*

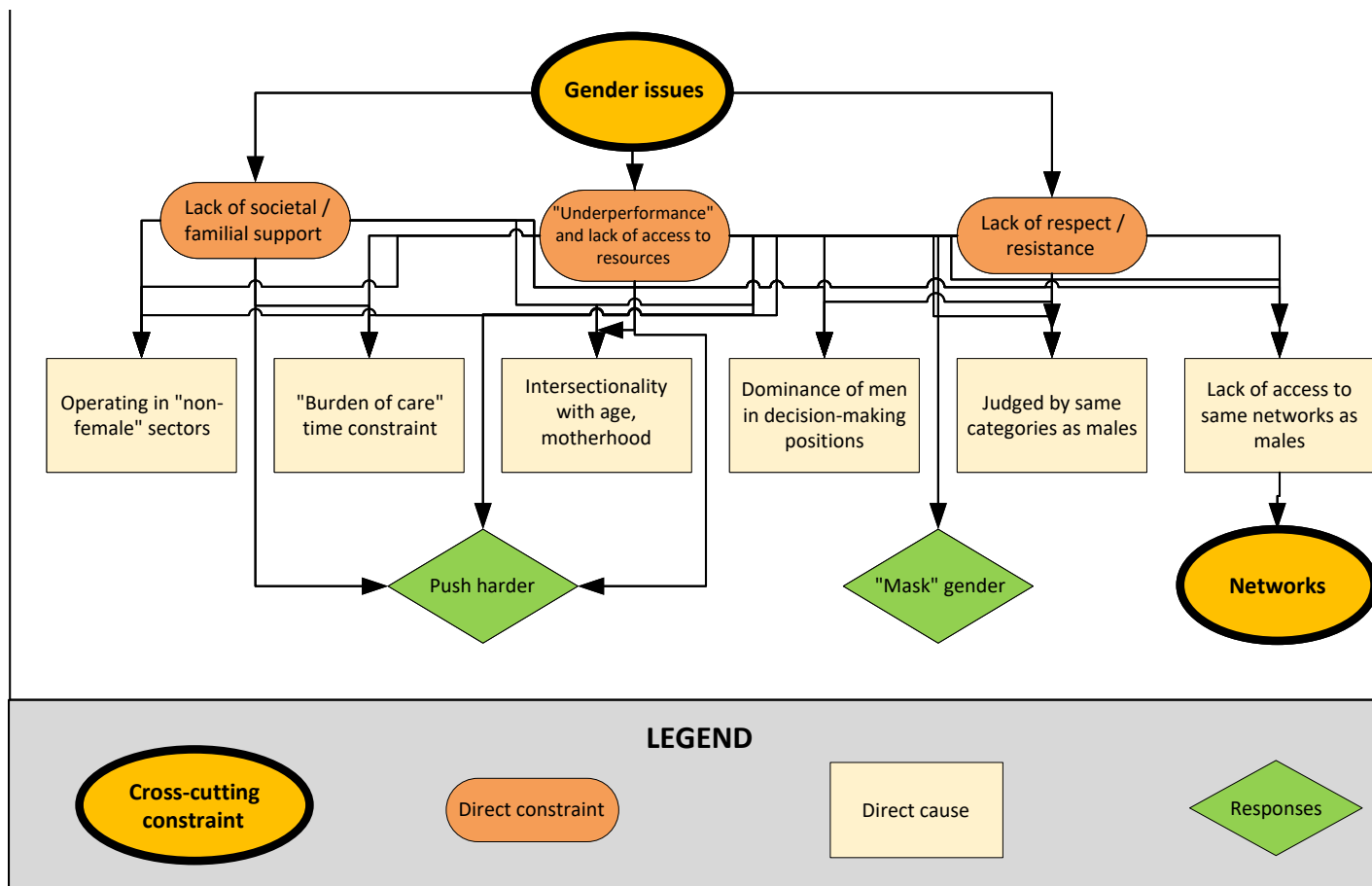
• **Causes:**

- *Women assigned certain societal roles*
- *Burden of care higher for women*
- *Intersectionalities of age, motherhood, and gender*
- *Dominance of men in decision-making positions*



Figure 10 highlights the intricate and complex interplay between the various issues that emerged in reviewing the main constraints experienced by the interviewees, the underlying causes related to gender, and the responses to some of these difficulties.

Figure 10: General Issues Related to Gender as a Cross-cutting Constraint: Related Constraints, Causes, and Responses



Source: Authors' elaboration.

What is clear is that women are allocated certain spaces in which to operate, both in the public and private sphere, while being expected to perform to a standard set by men, without regard for the higher “burden of care” experienced by women; that is, for women in business, they are expected to operate at the same level as men in business, despite society allocating them greater responsibility for the home and family. Shirl GLL suggests that women entrepreneurs are expected be able to balance all of their societally assigned duties:

*[Y]ou have to be a mom, [and] you have to be a wife at the same time. You have to rally with your business. You have to be able to balance your business. You have to be able to balance your family. You have to be able to balance your job at the same time.*



In relation to society's expectation of men, Violet GLS speaks to men not being expected to be involved in activities such as their children's school's parent-teacher associations or school meetings: "nobody expects that from them because they are working men, but for a woman somehow, we are expected to do all that. ...[T]hey expect us to do that balance." The result of this expectation is that, despite these extra responsibilities, women's enterprises are judged by the same criteria as men's enterprises. When women's enterprises do not perform to this standard, they are considered to be underperforming, with the cause attributed simply to the owners being women, rather than considered in light of the greater responsibilities allocated to women in the private sphere.

Such simple prejudgements of women not being able to "do business" as well as men has significant repercussions, such as the effect on the level of respect afforded to women entrepreneurs, the lack of encouragement and support provided to them, and the resistance experienced when they do not perform to expectations.

Nadia NLL notes the issue of a lack of respect: "I think[,] as a woman, people feel they can take advantage of you.... [T]hey say hurtful things to you...think because you are a woman and are an entrepreneur...that you don't have an education." She also believes that some of the negative behaviour that she has experienced is due to others feeling threatened by her creativity and independence; in other words, behaviours that go against their expectations.

When these prejudgements are held by those in decision-making positions, especially in financial institutions, the opportunities for growth are severely curtailed, especially when these positions are dominated by men. Davina GLS notes being asked by a male in a financial institution "What do you know about business?"—something she does not think she would be asked if she was a man. Terri-Ann NM sees accessing finance as "a closed club," alluding to the oft-mentioned "old boys' network," which make it easier for men to access large unsecured loans by simply picking up "a phone and say '...I need this money,'" while she was asked to get her husband to co-sign her loan application. Rebecca NM relates the story of her application for a credit card, which was refused, and being told that she was too high a risk and "you should probably get married."

However, the prejudgements held are not only held by men. Pat GM relates the story of a woman banker who told her that "it would be better if you were a stay-at-home wife and your husband [run] the business." Pat GM was shocked at this:

*She is telling me that. She is a woman and she is not even embarrassed to say it. She is telling me it would have been better for me to have done that, I would have been in a better position. I was shocked.*

Difficulties with other women were also seen in relation to networking, where Rebecca NM experienced difficulties as she believes women do not see other women as potential network partners, but rather as competitors; "women are very competitive with each other." This adversarial relationship with other women entrepreneurs was also seen by Eugene NLS:

*Even by the women you are discriminated against. Women in business are the main ones who discriminate against women...not taking you seriously because they have an image problem.*

It appears that the constant difficulties that women entrepreneurs face has led them to fight even against other women experiencing the same difficulties.



The responses to difficulties experienced because of gender were varied. Interviewees for the most part realised that they needed to “push harder” than males just to be considered equal (Shirl GLL), nullifying the effect of gender by having “the grit to go forward.... [Y]ou can actually make it with all these constraints that you may have as long as you are determined to succeed.” Desiree GLL indicates that she is cognisant of the injustice suffered, which she uses as a form of motivation: “I know I have to work twice as hard as a man.” However, she sometimes avoids facing up to the injustice by masking her role as owner, as a woman, in the company:

*[I]f I do a background check and I know that my client isn't fond of working with a woman...sometimes I have a [male] business colleague and I send him to the company and that is how I cover it up.... I just say “Hi, I'm Desiree ... and this is my colleague” or he introduces me as his colleague and he's approaching the client as if he is the manager and I am just working for him.*

A similar approach is taken by Gail GM, but in dealing with the opposite type of discrimination, where this comes from other women. She and her male business partner have a strategy that he deals with women clients because “when you identify yourself as a director, some women...they have a problem with that and they would prefer not to deal with you.”

While gender was not at the forefront of the minds of interviewees in their discussion of constraints, it is evident that it had an effect on their experiences of constraints, which they revealed on further probing during the interviews.

**Summary of Main Themes Emerging** - In reviewing the direct constraints to doing business for interviewees in relation to all of the core and contingent constraints identified, there were a number of themes to emerge:

- *High costs of labour, technology, international trade (importing and exporting), finance, and business support services*
- *Lack of information/skills (sourcing inputs and export markets, obtaining certification, human resource management, marketing, branding, franchising, sourcing financing, and ability of staff)*
- *Inappropriateness of resources (financial, production space, technology) or available services (networking opportunities)*
- *High levels of bureaucracy in finance and business support services*
- *Difficulties based on external market and societal conditions (competition for labour and customers, and gender biases and discrimination)*
- *Personal and familial issues (differential motivations, lack of time, lack of self-confidence, aversion to debt, and lack of support)*

While many interviewees took an apathetic stance to the constraints faced, accepting that they could not do anything about the difficulties faced, others became more determined to persevere. Of concern, however, were some of the negative responses seen, where interviewees simply withdrew from seeking to grow and develop their enterprises because they could not access the needed resources. While this “giving up” has been noted as self-exclusion, the actual cause of the exclusion is not the “self,” but rather caused by the situation in the external environment that is sufficiently harsh to cause these women entrepreneurs to withdraw.



Another negative response specifically in relation to experiencing gender bias and discrimination was for the interviewees to simply mask the gender of the owners, using men as proxies to deal with bigoted clients, both men and women.

Despite the responses to many of the constraints faced, many of the core and contingent constraints remain.

## Policy Recommendations

Exposing some of the fundamental constraints affecting women entrepreneurs in the Caribbean points to a number of potential interventions to address them. While addressing market and societal conditions (including gender perceptions) is beyond the direct ability of development agencies—especially over the short-term—interventions that address the other difficulties noted may assist indirectly in alleviating such macro factors.

The main recommendations to emerge from the interviewees themselves related to finance, business support services, and network development. Many of the recommendations were generic in nature. In seeking to address the core concern here, the discussion that follows specifically relate to gendered constraints.

**Addressing Gender Biases and Discrimination in Financial Institutions** - In parallel to developing appropriate financial products and processes, attention must be focused on the issues of gender biases and discriminatory practices observed in financial institutions. The stories shared by interviewees—when they narrated their own experiences as well as what they had heard from others—indicate that such issues occur across the Caribbean.

As a first priority, it was recommended that the existence of such issues be acknowledged openly. Until there is admission of a problem, no steps can be taken to change the situation; the absence of a problem in the public view does not, unfortunately, mean that it does not exist; nor does it make it disappear.

The involvement of financial institutions in this initiative, through internal research of the characteristics and financial behaviour of clients by gender, may assist in either dispelling or confirming the myths surrounding women's financial behaviour. Only then can action be taken to either inform frontline staff of the falsity of their preconceptions, or assist in building the capacity of women to address any shortcomings in their entrepreneurship.

**Business Support: Network Development** - Overall, the main recommendations in relation to business support services centred around three factors: (i) access to ongoing mentorship and business advisory services; (ii) provision of information and technical assistance according to specific needs; and (iii) productive and supportive networks. Again, several of these issues are generic. However, central to many of the difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs related specifically to networks, and therefore the development of these are discussed specifically below.

There was widespread acknowledgment amongst the interviewees of the value of having strong and diverse professional networks, not only in their own countries but also across the region and further afield. The various functions and benefits associated with (or attributed to) such networks can be considered as “productive” or “support,” both equally important as they fulfill different business and personal needs.



For both types of network, interviewees did not automatically assume or advocate that these be women-only. Rather, they stressed the importance of building and maintaining relationships to meet the full spectrum of their needs—and these therefore included fellow (women and men) entrepreneurs as well as suppliers, purchasers, business service providers, and other professionals such as financiers and mentors. Indiana NM was emphatic about the need for her networks to include both genders. As she explained, “Men have connections, they have links, more links than women. Women are not that; they don’t have that fraternity that men have.”

Regardless of their particular focus, the interviewees stressed the importance of developing connections on “real tangible things”; to quote Gail GM, she advocated for “a group of really business-oriented people who could come together ... and to tap real resources ... get information, share what we do. It would be nice to have that [as a] real avenue.”

While there was a preference for productive networks with others regardless of gender, many of the interviewees expressed a strong desire to develop deep and meaningful connections with other women entrepreneurs, to feel emotional and psychological support as well as to provide others with the same. The interviewees highlighted the following as important functions and benefits of such support networks: peer learning and sharing of experiences; emotional support, especially in the absence of family/society support and for those operating in male-dominated sectors; and practical support for other women who are starting out in enterprises.

## Summary

It is noted that there are several obstacles to enterprise growth that are generic, that is, relevant regardless of the gender of the entrepreneur. Looking specifically at the constraints that are hampering the women entrepreneurs’ access to the factors of production and subsequently, their access to markets, the results indicate the following as most significant. Note that these constraints relate both to the women entrepreneurs themselves and the judgments of gatekeepers.

### Individual Level

**Character:** There was some lack of self-confidence due to previous negative experiences leading to “self-exclusion” or giving up; deviation from accepted principles of entrepreneurship, particularly having differential motivations (family and community welfare).

**Capacity:** Although there is a high level of education and experience, there are some limitations as it relates to particular business (entrepreneurial) skills, specifically human resource management and marketing skills; lack of skills in accessing finance and support to enable access to labour, capital, and land; lack of time due to familial burden of care; and aversion to networking. Intersectionalities also play a role in relation to gender, motherhood, and age. The dual concern of addressing the needs of family and community as well as running an enterprise also hamper access to resources given the external expectations of gatekeepers, where the concern is with how the enterprise operates (that is, the gatekeepers’ negative perception regarding the capacity of the woman entrepreneur when faced with the needs of family and community). Indeed, if an enterprise provides clear signals to a gatekeeper, such as employment growth, then access may be granted to some degree despite other factors that may prevent it.



## Enterprise Level

**Capacity:** Sector played a role in determining access to resources due to the link with small size and high levels of competition in “female-type” sectors. This caused issues with access to labour and finance. Sector also played a role in relation to being in “non-female” sectors as women suffered discrimination from clients and employees.

**Capital/collateral:** Lack of assets and low levels of turnover affected access to finance, in particular, as some enterprises lacked collateral to obtain finance and grow. The lack of assets in these cases is due in part to the service sector orientation (lack of physical assets) as well as operating in highly competitive sectors with low barriers to entry.

**Conditions:** General business conditions are not favourable as these are linked to sectors of operation with current and future prospects for growth being limited as the majority operate in highly competitive sectors. In addition, economic conditions due to the advent of natural disasters significantly hampered access to scarce resources in some countries.

It is also important to consider the obstacles presented to the entrepreneur at the level of internal gatekeepers (family, friends, and community). These were less apparent, and there did not appear to be a large amount of resistance to these women entrepreneurs running a business at this level. The main obstacle here was lack of practical support that could alleviate the burden of care and give these women entrepreneurs more time to dedicate to their enterprises.

The obstacles presented by external gatekeepers—bias and prejudgements against women entrepreneurs—included a largely negative view of women in business in general, as well as a negative view of women in sectors perceived as traditionally male. Additionally, there appeared to be a lack of networking opportunities due to lack of cooperative behaviour. Turning to the interrelationships identified in Figure 6 the main points can be summarised as follows:

The core requirements for exploiting market opportunities—that is, access to markets—are the factors of production (land, labour, and capital), catalysed by the presence of entrepreneurial intentions and actions, in tandem with entrepreneurial (business) skills. However, as evidenced from the interviews with women entrepreneurs, there are a number of constraints to exploiting markets opportunities, particularly difficulties in accessing suitable labour, as well as land and capital. The underlying causes of these difficulties, while partially due to some lack of entrepreneurial skills and differential entrepreneurial intentions, are in the main due to issues related to the family, the absence and lack of access to suitable business support services, difficulties related to access to finance and its costs, and an absence of suitable and productive business networks.

The issue of an absence of suitable networks was strongly related to the finance and business support services constraints seen. The other primary issue of concern to emerge, and which was cross-cutting, related to gender. This emergence is not unexpected as the overriding objective of the research was to identify the factors causing an observed under-performance of women-owned businesses in the region.

While the extant literature has attempted to treat gender as causal, that is, the business owner being a man or being a woman causes an enterprise’s performance, this attribution is based on the definition of gender utilised in this literature which is purely based on the sex of the individual as a binary variable. However, treating gender as a construct rather than a variable has revealed that gender does indeed have a role to play in causing differential performance among enterprises. This gender construct is in keeping with the definition provided by Barriteau (2002, 222):





*[A] system of social relations through which men and women are constituted and through which they gain differential access and are unequally allocated status, power and material resources within a society.*

This inequity has contributed to several constraints, specifically in relation to access to finance and business support services, with “female-type” enterprises being allocated lower status, and women entrepreneurs treated as a different type of businessperson to “true” entrepreneurs with its inherently masculine connotation.

## Conclusions

The aim of the research was fourfold: (i) to ascertain whether the constraints to business growth for women-owned enterprises in the region varied by stage of development (growing/not growing); (ii) to learn how these constraints varied over the period 2015 to 2018; (iii) to analyse the underlying reasons for the constraints experienced; and (iv) to provide recommendations to assist in resolving these issues.

Regarding the women entrepreneurs surveyed and their enterprises, in general, older enterprises were more likely to be growing in employment in the previous year and larger in employment terms. The enterprises that were growing in employment were also more likely to participate in exporting; over half of these enterprises exported, while less than one-quarter of non-growth enterprises exported.

Among enterprises that grew, as they grew, access to finance was less prevalent as a constraint, although half of the women entrepreneurs in the surveyed group still noted it as their most significant constraint. The next most-prominent constraint was lack of access to networking opportunities, a constraint that was not prominent for non-growing enterprises. Overall, for non-growing enterprises, approximately 70 percent noted access to finance as a constraint, with the adequacy of business support services and availability of skilled staff being the next most-prominent constraints noted.

The general trend in the results suggest that non-growing enterprises experienced greater difficulties with access to resources (finance, labour, and business support services) than growing enterprises. Although growing enterprises experienced some resource access issues (finance and labour), these constraints were less prominent.

Over the period 2015 to 2018 there were distinct changes in the nature of the constraints experienced by growing and non-growing enterprises. While access to support services increased in prominence for non-growing enterprises, this declined for growing enterprises. For growing enterprises, there were two main constraints that increased in prominence: external issues related to lack of access to markets and technology/equipment; and internal issues related to lack of internal processes/systems. Of interest was that lack of equal treatment by financial institutions declined for both groups (growing enterprises and non-growing enterprises), while lack of access to finance declined for growing enterprises, an unsurprising result given that their growth status would make enterprises more attractive to financial institutions. However, it is important to note that, while the relative prominence of access to finance fell for growing enterprises, overall, 50 percent of those entrepreneurs surveyed still noted it as a significant constraint to their enterprise.

While the survey data indicated a fairly even distribution among the top five constraints for growing enterprises, non-growing enterprises' distribution of constraints was heavily skewed toward access to finance and lack of affordable/



suitable business support services (training and technical assistance). In consideration of how these constraints have changed over time, growing enterprises appeared to have overcome some barriers to accessing finance and business support services, but those factors continue to constrain non-growing enterprises. The role of gatekeepers becomes important here; whereas growing enterprises appear to have crossed a hurdle and satisfied financial gatekeepers' expectations, thus had easier access to finance and support services, this may be due to their growth status, but this has not been determined concretely. Growing enterprises, however, experienced other access issues related to gatekeepers in networks and access to technology and markets.

The causes and consequences of these differential experiences is complex, with a number of issues emerging from the in-depth interviews. When speaking to the constraints faced, women entrepreneurs with growing enterprises, rarely singled out access to finance as an issue, but focused more on issues related to their time. The time issue appeared to have two dimensions: lack of time related to overload at work and a reluctance to outsource tasks, and lack of time due to the burden of homecare and a lack of familial support. While women entrepreneurs with non-growing enterprises expressed the same concerns about their time, the main obstacles appeared to relate to: discrimination from staff and financial institutions, and lack of knowledge or the complete absence of some sources of support.

Turning to the issue of discrimination, what was common among both groups was a belief that this was related to the sector in which they were operating; if they operated in sectors traditionally perceived as female, those sectors closely associated with the home and what is traditionally considered "women's work," the entrepreneurs do not believe discrimination is as acute as if they were in sectors traditionally perceived as "non-female." With this allocation to "female sectors," there is further complexity as women become concentrated in these sectors, which by their nature have low barriers to entry, and therefore experience high levels of competition, mostly from other women entrepreneurs. In such a situation, cooperative behaviour and the development of networks becomes difficult. This situation, and a lack of time due to multiple demands at work and home, perhaps provides some explanation for the lack of networking opportunities experienced by these women entrepreneurs.

In conclusion, while the specific recommendations noted above relating to addressing gender biases and discrimination in financial institutions and business support for network development, the underlying causes of the marginalisation of women entrepreneurs still need to be addressed at a societal level. While it was revealed that growth by a woman-owned enterprise had some effect in lowering the constraint of access to resources, both quantitatively and qualitatively, reducing the burden of care, increasing familial support, and increasing acceptance of women in non-traditional sectors still need to be addressed. Overall, although growth can act to reduce constraints and marginalisation to some degree, other societal factors are at play that allocate certain spaces to women, and these are constraining the growth and growth potential of women-owned enterprises in the region.



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