

August 2026

Authors : Marame CISSE, Laure Tall, Cheikh Faye, Ndéye Fatou Cissé, Isac Mingou.

Transforming Senegalese Women's Entrepreneurial Potential into Evidence-Informed Policies

1. Summary and Objectives

Women entrepreneurs are a major but under-recognized driver of Senegal's economy. In agriculture alone, women generate around 27% of the sector's value added while controlling only 15.3% of farms. This paradox illustrates what Fall and Sarr (2021)¹ describe as the strong entrepreneurial dynamism of Senegalese women combined with persistent structural constraints that limit the full realization of their potential.

Women entrepreneurs continue to face systemic barriers, including limited access to productive resources, financing, markets and professional networks, as well as restrictive social norms. These constraints are compounded by a persistent gap in reliable and up-to-date data on women's entrepreneurship, which limits the ability of policymakers to design effective support mechanisms.



¹ Ndéye Faty Sarr and Marie Fall (2021). *Promoting women's empowerment and female entrepreneurship among women excluded from social and economic policies in Senegal*. Organisations & Territories, Volume 30, Number 2.



At a time when Senegal is revising key economic and social policy frameworks, strengthening the availability and use of gender-sensitive evidence has become increasingly important. This project responds to that need by synthesizing existing data, generating new evidence and creating spaces for dialogue between researchers, policymakers and actors of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The objective of the project is not only to document gender gaps in entrepreneurship, but also to strengthen the use of evidence in policymaking. Through a participatory research process and joint interpretation of the findings with public institutions, the initiative seeks to transform statistical information into actionable insights that can inform policies supporting women's and youth entrepreneurship.

2. The Challenge and Context

Although Senegal has established institutional frameworks aimed at promoting women's economic empowerment, these efforts have not yet translated into sustained systemic transformation within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The National Forum on Women's Entrepreneurship and Empowerment, held in February 2023, marked an important milestone in recognizing the policy relevance of this issue. The forum sought to assess the state of women's entrepreneurship and the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms. It highlighted the persistence of systemic barriers limiting women's access to entrepreneurial opportunities and emphasized the urgency of rethinking public policies based on stronger evidence and objective analysis. A major challenge remains the limited availability of updated analytical data on women's entrepreneurship. The General Census of Enterprises conducted in 2016 provided useful baseline information but has become outdated for current policy needs. At the institutional level, Senegal is currently experiencing an important transition in its economic and social policy frameworks. Public authorities increasingly recognize that access to robust evidence and its effective use are essential for improving the quality and impact of public policies.

Within this context, several actors are called upon to play complementary roles. Public institutions require reliable and updated evidence to guide strategic decisions. Research and statistical institutions are expected to produce more detailed analyses on gender inequalities. At the same time, actors within the entrepreneurial ecosystem including women entrepreneurs themselves must have their experiences and needs more systematically integrated into policy discussions.

Without stronger evidence and coordination, the risks include the persistence of gender inequalities and the continued underutilization of women's entrepreneurial potential. This project contributes to addressing these challenges by filling critical data gaps and by strengthening the link between gender, entrepreneurship and national development priorities, thereby supporting evidence-informed policymaking for women's economic empowerment.

3. Strategy

3.1 Research Approach

This research adopted a mixed, participatory and iterative approach. This methodological choice reflects the complexity of gender inequalities in entrepreneurship, which are shaped simultaneously by economic, social and institutional factors that cannot be fully understood through either quantitative or qualitative data alone.

Beyond strengthening the robustness of the evidence produced, this approach was also designed to facilitate the practical use of the data by policy actors. By involving key stakeholders throughout the research process, the project sought to ensure that the evidence generated would directly respond to policy needs and decision-making contexts.





The research therefore combined three complementary components: analysis of existing statistical databases, complementary qualitative data collection, and continuous engagement with key stakeholders. This engagement took the form of bilateral workshops aimed at co-constructing the research design and anchoring the production and interpretation of evidence within the priorities of public institutions.

- The first stage consisted of mapping existing data and identifying major information gaps. This process helped identify relevant sources and allowed the research team to co-develop the methodological framework with key institutions such as the Ministry of Family Affairs, the Agricultural Statistics Directorate (DAPSA) and the National Agency of Statistics and Demography (ANSD).
- The second stage focused on collecting and triangulating data in order to produce consolidated indicators on women's participation in entrepreneurship. Data quality was strengthened through the triangulation of sources and through collective validation of the tools and findings.

As illustrated in **Figure 1**, these co-construction workshops brought together researchers and technical staff from key ministries to jointly define the research approach and identify priority data gaps (march 2025).

3.2 Evidence-Use and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

The evidence generated through this research was designed primarily to support policy decision-making. The project produced indicators that allow policymakers to better assess women's economic empowerment in entrepreneurship across agriculture and other sectors, and to translate these indicators into actionable policy insights.

To promote the effective use and ownership of the evidence produced, the project relied on a strategy of continuous stakeholder engagement. The initiative builds on an ongoing collaboration between IPAR and the Ministry of Family Affairs around strengthening women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship.

Several workshops were organized throughout the research process, including during data analysis. These workshops created spaces where policymakers, technical staff from ministries, women's organizations and development partners could jointly interpret the results and discuss their policy implications.

This collaborative approach proved particularly effective in strengthening the ownership and use of the evidence produced. It allowed the data to directly inform policy discussions taking place within existing dialogue platforms, including the National Entrepreneurship Day organized by the Delegation for Rapid Entrepreneurship (DER), where IPAR co-facilitated discussions on entrepreneurship policies.

The findings were also presented during technical workshops related to the preparation of the Law on Women's Economic Empowerment. Through these exchanges, the evidence generated by the project contributed to informing discussions around the design of this national policy framework.

4. Impact

Strengthening the Evidence Base on Women's Entrepreneurship

The research generated updated evidence that helps better understand the structural features of women's entrepreneurship in Senegal. The analysis highlights several persistent patterns.

First, entrepreneurship remains strongly embedded within social and family structures. Most entrepreneurs are married (79.8% of women compared to 78.8% of men), with marriage often serving as a framework that legitimizes entrepreneurial activity, particularly for women.

Second, women entrepreneurs rely more heavily on family and community networks to compensate for lower levels of formal education. The data indicate that 46.1% of women entrepreneurs have no formal education compared to 21.2% of men. Men, by contrast, are more likely to mobilize educational resources and individual professional trajectories.

The analysis also reveals strong gender segmentation across economic sectors. Men dominate sectors characterized by higher technical specialization and value added, such as construction (98.2% men) and most industrial activities (over 85% men on average), while women are concentrated in commerce (39.4%), hospitality services (72.8%), and personal services.

In agriculture, women play a particularly significant economic role despite limited access to productive resources. At the national level, women represent only 15.3% of farm heads in 2024. The agricultural entrepreneurial index (defined as the ratio of female to male plot managers) remains low at the national level (0.2), although it is higher in certain regions such as Sédhiou (0.6) and Ziguinchor (0.3).

Despite these constraints, women make substantial contributions to agricultural production and household food security. In 2022, women's entrepreneurship within the informal agricultural sector generated 458.4 billion FCFA, representing approximately 27% of the sector's total value added (ANSD, UN Women)².

Beyond updating existing statistics, the research contributed to reframing the policy debate by highlighting the structural gap between women's economic contributions and their limited access to productive resources, decision-making spaces and higher value-added sectors.

Creating Dialogue Between Researchers and Policymakers

The project also created new spaces for dialogue between researchers, policymakers and ecosystem actors. Through the co-analysis workshops, stakeholders jointly interpreted the data and discussed their implications for policy design.

These exchanges helped translate statistical results into policy-relevant insights and strengthened the ownership of the evidence produced by the institutions involved. One important lesson emerging from this process is that evidence becomes more actionable when policymakers are involved not only as users of research but also as participants in the interpretation of the findings.

² ANSD and UN Women (2022). *Study on the contribution of women's entrepreneurship and leadership to the value added of the Senegalese economy: a gender-disaggregated approach*.



Informing Policy Processes and Institutional Partnerships

This approach facilitated the integration of the evidence produced into ongoing policy discussions. The results contributed to the diagnostic analysis informing the draft Law on Women's Economic Empowerment, particularly regarding women's access to productive resources, land and business formalization.

In addition, IPAR signed a partnership agreement with the State Secretariat for SMEs and SMIs to support the implementation of Senegal's national SME development strategy. This collaboration focuses on strengthening evidence-informed policies related to women's and youth entrepreneurship, identified as priority areas within the government's SME development agenda.

More broadly, the project helped strengthen institutional collaboration around the use of gender-sensitive data and contributed to reinforcing partnerships between research institutions and public authorities working on entrepreneurship policies.

However, given the long timeframes associated with institutional reform processes, the full policy impact of these contributions will likely unfold over the longer term.

Figure 2. Signing of the partnership agreement between IPAR and the State Secretariat for SMEs and SMIs to support the implementation of Senegal's SME development strategy. The collaboration aims to strengthen evidence-informed policies for women's and youth entrepreneurship. From left to right: Ibrahima Thiam, State Secretary for SMEs and SMIs Serigne Gueye Diop, Minister of Industry and Trade and Laure Tall, Executive Director of IPAR (February 2026).



5. Pathways Forward

The findings point to three priorities for strengthening the policy environment supporting women's entrepreneurship in Senegal.

Improving women's access to productive resources

One important recommendation concerns improving women's access to productive resources. A policy mechanism facilitating women's access to agricultural resources could be introduced within the implementing decrees of the forthcoming Law on Women's Economic Empowerment. Such a measure would require coordination between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Family Affairs, in collaboration with women's organizations and agricultural sector stakeholders.

Strengthening the continuum of entrepreneurial support

The research also shows that current public interventions supporting entrepreneurship often operate in isolation rather than as part of a coordinated support system.

A continuum of entrepreneurial support refers to a coordinated sequence of services ranging from information and training to financing and market integration that enables entrepreneurs to progressively move from project identification to business development and consolidation.

In Senegal, this continuum remains fragmented. For example, there is currently no unified database of individuals seeking entrepreneurial support, and coordination between institutions responsible for information, training and financing remains limited.

Strengthening coordination between existing public institutions could help address this gap. For instance, the National Agency for Youth Employment (ANPEJ), which identifies and trains young project holders, could facilitate a more structured transition toward the Delegation for Rapid Entrepreneurship (DER/FJ), which provides financial support to entrepreneurs once their projects are ready for investment.

Supporting women's organizations in policy monitoring

Women's organizations and agricultural sector actors particularly the women's college of the National Council for Rural Consultation and Cooperation (CNCR) can play an important role in ensuring that the evidence generated by this research is mobilized for advocacy and policy monitoring. Their engagement will be essential for supporting the effective adoption and implementation of policy measures promoting women's entrepreneurship, particularly in agriculture.



6. Looking Ahead

In the long term, strengthening gender-sensitive data systems will be essential for ensuring that policies supporting women's entrepreneurship address structural inequalities and fully recognize women's economic contributions.

Upcoming initiatives offer important opportunities to consolidate these efforts. The forthcoming update of the General Census of Enterprises (RGE) by the National Agency of Statistics and Demography (ANSD), combined with the ANSD–DAPSA–IPAR partnership within the AgriData platform, could help institutionalize the regular production of gender-disaggregated data relevant to entrepreneurship and agricultural development.

These efforts are also connected to broader research and policy engagement initiatives led by IPAR through the LEEPS programme, supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) as well as the Hewlett and Bosch Foundations.

Within this framework, IPAR and the Ministry of Family Affairs recently co-organized the Third Annual Forum on Dialogue between Producers and Users of Gender-Disaggregated Statistics. This platform aims to strengthen the systematic use of gender-sensitive evidence in the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies.

In the long run, strengthening the production, accessibility and use of gender-sensitive data will be critical for ensuring that policies supporting women's entrepreneurship are not only well informed but also capable of addressing structural inequalities and unlocking the full potential of women's economic participation.





At IPAR, the theme Youth, Women, Entrepreneurial Strategies and Mobility is organized, across its various projects, around a common question: how do institutional frameworks, support mechanisms, and socio-economic and migratory dynamics shape the entrepreneurial strategies and empowerment of young people and women, and to what extent do ongoing transformations (agroecological and technological transition, reconfiguration of food systems) create — or fail to create — spaces for action?

Through this theme, the gender perspective adopted goes beyond a simple analysis of issues specific to women. It becomes an analytical framework for understanding social, economic, environmental, digital, and political dynamics and transformations, as well as the power relations among women, young people, vulnerable groups, and men.



Dakar Office

Immeuble Kër Jacques Faye
Lot 445 Ngor , Dakar-Sénégal

CONTACT

Tel. : +221 33 869 00 79

Mail : ipar@ipar.sn

WEBSITE: <https://ipar.sn>