

WEAVE: COVID-19's Impacts and Where Tech Can Support

An Unprecedented Crisis

Only months into the pandemic, the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women saw that women entrepreneurs globally were already being significantly impacted. We surveyed the women in our programmes and over 90% reported their businesses had already been affected. Our partners too were already reporting that many women were facing challenges within their business due to the pandemic.

WEAVE was delivered amidst the COVID-19 global pandemic. In Indonesia, our programme participants were in a lockdown period for much of the program, while in Vietnam there were localized lockdowns periodically.

A Swift Response

When setting up WEAVE in May 2020, all programme stakeholders agreed to adapt our programme delivery plans to bring them all entirely online to ensure the health and safety of our programme participants and trainers. Additionally, a fully remote approach would facilitate programme continuity despite any restrictions on in-person gatherings during delivery.

We credit our ability to swiftly adapt our approach to all our programmes using an element of tech – whether through mobile phones, computers, or tablets. Being able to reach women entrepreneurs throughout the pandemic also meant that we could offer them support to navigate the impact of COVID-19 on the businesses, and offer additional training on e-commerce and digital marketing which were skills that many businesses required throughout this period.

Adapting for Tech

Although our programme participants were tech-literate and had access to mobile phones and desktop computers, most had previously never participated in a fully online training programme. They initially found it difficult to retain motivation in fully remote training, and unable to engage in-person with their peers and trainers. To help this, we held group activities and ran our training workshops on Zoom – always encouraging participants to use videos where possible. Additionally, our trainers were regularly available to support participants 1:1.

Overcoming the Challenges

Despite the challenges we faced delivering WEAVE during COVID-19, we learned to work in a different, innovative way. These experiences and the lessons we learned will shape our approach for future programmes and partnerships. We also found that the tech-based nature of our training enabled us to reach more women outside the cities we initially planned to focus on, and to run our training with more partner organisations with a wider geographic spread.

