



VITAL VOICES

COVID-19 REPORT

AUGUST 2020 // INFORMATION FROM ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP TEAM,
CREATED BY KATRINA FREI-HERRMANN



VITAL VOICES
GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP

Impact of COVID-19 on WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Economic Empowerment & Entrepreneurship team at Vital Voices launched a two-phase survey to capture the impact of the pandemic on women-owned businesses that Vital Voices serves throughout the world. Overall, the second survey, used in this report, had 128 respondents from 63 countries, including participants from all four of its programs: the Fortune - U.S. Dept. of State Global Women's Mentoring Partnership, the Global Ambassadors Program, the VV GROW Fellowship, and the WE Empower UN SDG Challenge. From these collected responses, the team identified the critical decisions women entrepreneurs faced during this time and the data has informed programmatic and departmental changes since March 2020.

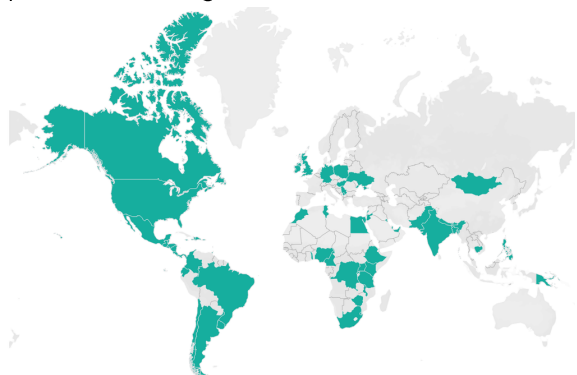


Figure 1: Global map highlighting locations of survey respondents

The survey asked participants to reflect on changes to their business operations and plans and describe anticipated actions in the near future. On a macroeconomic level, consumer expenditures are expected to decrease by one-third in 2020 and the global GDP is anticipated to decline by 6% according to the [OECD](#). Women-owned businesses have faced significant setbacks during the pandemic, including large reductions in sales. Overall, 92% of respondents reported a decline in sales since January: 29% of businesses experienced a 76-100% decline, 24% of business experienced a 51-75% decrease, 20% of businesses experienced a 25-50% decrease, and 10% of businesses experienced a 1-25% decrease, as seen in Figure 2. These declines in sales can be attributed to multiple factors including reductions in consumer spending, safety issues, lockdown orders, and supply chain issues.

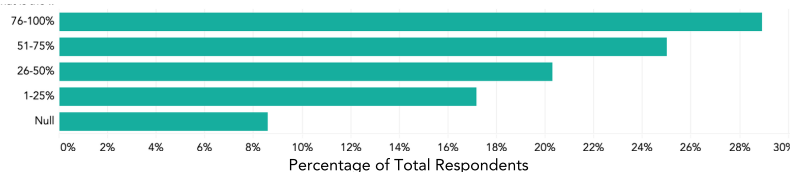


Figure 2: Severity of decline in sales for women-owned businesses

Due to a drastic decline in sales for nearly all respondents, many faced hard decisions to keep their businesses afloat. 63% reduced business expenses. In addition, 33% laid off staff, 35% reduced operation hours, and 39% reduced staffing hours, demonstrated in Figure 3. Figure 3 also highlights the percentage of respondents that took action within each subset of changes. Respondents experienced and selected multiple changes at once.

Changes Made to Business

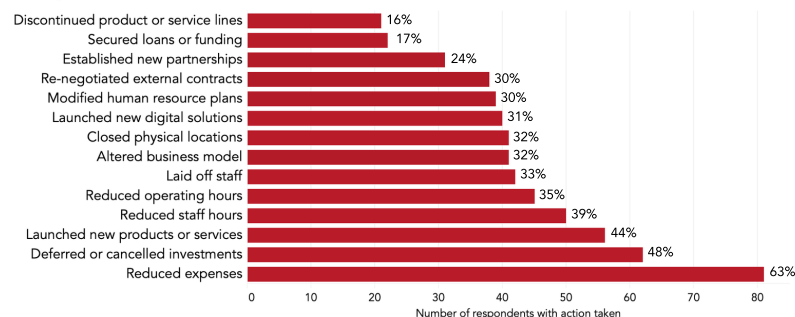


Figure 3: Changes made to women-owned businesses from January to June 2020

Showcasing innovative leadership across sectors, Vital Voices Economic Empowerment & Entrepreneurship (Econ) program alumnae demonstrated rapid problem-solving skills and action in response to the economic fallout from the pandemic. Nearly 44% launched new products or services. Responding to a rapid growth in online consumer demand, 33% of respondents launched new digital solutions. While most respondents suffered negatively from the global economic shutdown, they worked to pivot their businesses to respond to the global scenario. Simultaneously while they innovated in their businesses, the Economic Empowerment & Entrepreneurship team collected data to determine the needs of the women entrepreneurs. In response to those needs, the entire Economic Empowerment & Entrepreneurship department and all of its programs shifted its work to meet the demands centered on business survival.



SUPPORTING WOMEN THROUGH INNOVATION

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The Economic Empowerment & Entrepreneurship team developed resources that support women entrepreneurs during the crisis. A robust plan was implemented with clear learning objectives that aligned with the survey responses and trends.



Visibility

55% of survey respondents indicated they wanted Vital Voices to provide opportunities for visibility through amplifying their stories on podcasts, social media, partnering platforms, and newsletters. Introduced in early April, the weekly "Econ Network Newsletter" highlights opportunities as well as the efforts and needs of alumnae. Additionally, Econ alumnae and their products and services have been featured in the VV Network Newsletter, which goes out biweekly to over 15,000 network members. Over 23 Econ alumnae's businesses were featured in the network newsletter from April to August.



Virtual Mentorship & Coaching



One-on-one mentorship and business coaching supports women entrepreneurs by providing individualized guidance. Over 45% of the alumnae indicated that they wanted these one-on-one opportunities and in response, 105 mentorship pairings were made in the initial stage of the pandemic, with an additional 83 pairings made at the end of July. Over and above our network of former Global Ambassador mentors, 1 out of every 3 alumnae offered to become a mentor for other women in the network, keeping the community strong and leveraging the substantial subject matter expertise of the network to benefit others.



Econ alumnae participated in a Vital Voices opportunities from April to June



Virtual Network Engagement



In May, the Economic Empowerment & Entrepreneurship team set up a series of Mastermind Calls, providing facilitated conversations in groups of up to 9 alumnae from around the world to problem solve current business challenges together. 11 groups have been connecting every 2-3 weeks for these conversations directed by a Vital Voices Econ staff member. Encouraged to form connections, many women have continued these relationships outside of the calls. An estimated 45 Mastermind Calls were held between the months of May and July, serving 76 alumnae, and have helped to provide a valuable sense of community through the pandemic. In addition, VV GROW has been hosting additional Sister Circle network calls and the Fortune and Global Ambassadors Programs set up recurring calls with a number of cohorts where alumnae share personal challenges, collectively brainstorm, and offer advice to others

Adapted Educational Content



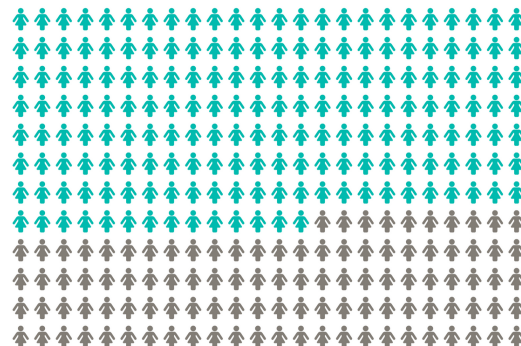
Vital Voices has supported women entrepreneurs for over 20 years, but this crisis has brought unprecedented challenges to the global environment. Fortune, the Global Ambassadors Program, the VV GROW Fellowship, and WE Empower have engaged new trainers and are consistently revamping program content to fit current needs. In place of the annual "in-person" gathering, in October, the VV GROW Fellowship will hold an online gathering for its 42 fellows, to further explore opportunities to expand their leadership, strengthen their businesses and continue to build relationships amongst their cohort.



PROGRAM TIMELINE



63% of women entrepreneurs forced to reduce business expenses during the pandemic



The quick reach out to us by VV ensured I knew I was not alone and I had the support I could tap into at anytime.

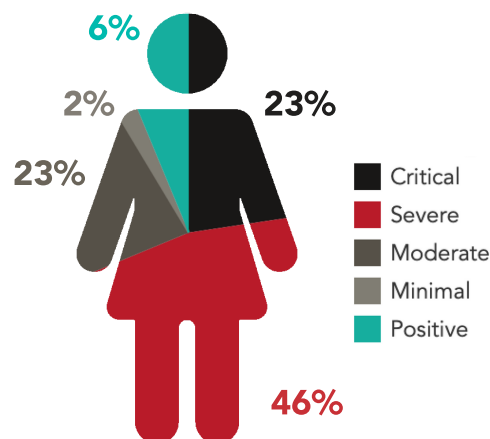
-Habiba Ali
GROW, GAP, WE Empower,
Global Leadership Alumna



18 Econ network alumnae were featured on Vital Voices' **Voices of Resilience** podcast



94% of women-owned businesses were negatively impacted by COVID-19*



*Represents the reported degree of impact to the business that was critical, severe, moderate, or minimal



FORWARD

As the Economic Empowerment & Entrepreneurship team prepares for the remainder of 2020, all programs are continuing to focus on innovation and redesign. For more information on each program, click the logo to be redirected to the program's website.



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The Fortune-U.S. Dept of State Global Women's Mentoring Partnership will hold an online program from September-December 2020, instead of its original in-person program in March and April. Mentees will participate in an online orientation program in September, a virtual mentorship with a woman executive from a prominent U.S. company, and her team, from October through November, and conclude with an online closing component in December. During this time, mentees and alumnae will also have a chance to participate in online trainings focused on building critical business and leadership skills and fostering community. The program will also launch a call for applications for small grants to encourage program alumnae to pay it forward and accelerate positive change in their communities through their businesses or organization. Approximately six grants in the amount of \$4,000 each will be awarded to former mentees this year.

The Global Ambassadors Program

A Vital Voices & Bank of America Partnership

To keep recent cohorts of alumnae connected, GAP has held regular touch base calls, giving past cohorts the opportunity to reconnect and build community in this new digital age. GAP alumnae have been featured in the Voices of Resilience podcasts and have become mentors for other women in the network.



The VV GROW Fellowship works with and supports women entrepreneurs who are driven to create prosperity, opportunity and positive impact in their communities and beyond. The devastating economic and personal impact of the global pandemic became pronounced when the 2020 fellows were about 25% of the way through the program. Suddenly, fellows that had been focused on identifying growth goals and completing a Strategic Plan were facing business closure and deeply uncertain future. In response to these challenges, Vital Voices rapidly redesigned the fellowship to support business survival, increase community support and nimbly respond to the evolving situation. a. The pace of webinar delivery more than doubled, and content transitioned to crisis planning, business survival and resiliency of the entrepreneurs. The response included bringing in additional expert trainers, including VV GROW alumnae, tapping into the vast expertise and experience of the network. The VV GROW Fellowship will continue to respond to the needs of fellows through a holistically redesigned program that will be delivered through the end of the fellowship to balance achieving program goals with the drastically altered business landscape fellows are operating within.



A Global Challenge for
Women Entrepreneurs
powering UN Sustainable
Development Goals

The 2020 WE Empower UN SDG Challenge honors six women social entrepreneurs from around the world whose businesses are advancing the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. Due to travel restrictions, WE Empower could not be held in person this year. Instead, the WE Empower Awardees will participate in a series of virtual gatherings and trainings as well as events corresponding to the 75th UN General Assembly and 25th anniversary of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Awardees will also participate in a virtual pitch competition hosted by fashion designer, activist and Vital Voices Board Member Diane von Furstenberg, for the chance to receive a \$20,000 grant.

STEPPING UP IN TIMES OF CRISIS

The Economic Empowerment & Entrepreneurship team has quickly responded to the changing crisis between March and August 2020. After releasing and collecting the results from the first two COVID impact surveys, the team designed their response in accordance to the needs of program participants and network alumnae. A series of mentorship and coaching pairings, online webinars, and facilitated Mastermind Calls immediately formed a powerful sense of network during a very isolating time. Overall, 78% of respondents in the survey were either satisfied or very satisfied by Vital Voices' response and action, seen in Figure 4. While numerous adaptations were taken between March and July, the team is dedicated to continued flexibility and innovation as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue.

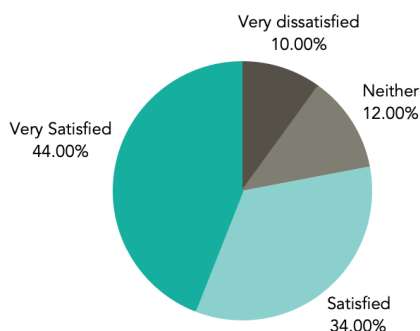


Figure 4: Satisfaction levels of alumnae in VV's response to the pandemic

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS:

These programs would not be possible without the generous support of our partners:

Andalou Naturals, Argidius Foundation, Arizona State University, Bank of America, Diane Von Furstenberg, FedEx, Fortune Most Powerful Women, G5 Collective, GrowyourBiz.com, Hawaii Tropical Botanical Garden, Mary Kay, Procter & Gamble, Salesforce, United Nations Foundation, United States Department of State, University of Oxford Saïd Business School, and World Bank Group.

A final thank you to all of the Econ trainers who constantly go above and beyond to give their time and resources to Vital Voices and the network of women leaders. These trainers include: David Gomez, Kathleen Holland, Aaron Kisner, Carol Mwazi, Yaneek Page, Val Quinn, and Allison Shapira.

Finally yet importantly, we would like to thank all of the Econ alumnae that stepped up to mentor and coach, and deliver timely and much needed webinars. These incredible alumnae include: Adriana Caballero, Naomi Garrick, Takia Ross, and Amber Swenor.

The pandemic proved to be devastating for almost all of women's businesses surveyed, but Econ alumnae stepped up to provide tools to others. Through the Econ newsletter, women shared their services to others in the network free of charge and many pivoted to producing PPE. It is important to highlight these resourceful innovators, as they created positive change in both their local community and the Vital Voices community.



Norm Bunnak GAP Charlotte 2017

Norm pivoted her business, Village Works, into a mask making company in Cambodia. Named People's Mask, it "is an initiative to demonstrate what Fair Trade [is], creating opportunities for economically disadvantaged producers while protecting the welfare of consumers through Fair Pricing." For each mask bought, one is donated. Learn more [here](#).



Danielle Sharaf Fortune 2017 & WE Empower 2020

Danielle runs Switch, a mobile solutions company that produces content rich SMS in Pakistan. As the only woman CEO in the VAS industry, Danielle transitioned her SMS services to delivering crucial COVID-19 updates to rural communities throughout Pakistan. Learn more [here](#).



Wendy Leong VV GROW 2018

Wendy developed a GPS-based contract tracing app for Malaysia and the Philippines. The app links to the cloud and updates health advisors and the community about high risk COVID-19 areas. Individuals self-identify their COVID-19 symptoms. Learn more [here](#).