



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Moving Money into Women-Led Businesses in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia's women-led economy is large, underfinanced, and investable today. Across 38.8M women-led businesses (WLBs)¹, two undercapitalized segments stand out:

2,300+ VC-backed or VC-backable "Growth Engines"² in large, scalable markets.

12.8M "Cash Generators"³ with steady revenues and repayment capacity.

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Capital concentration is widening financing gaps, creating a timely opportunity for fundamentals-focused investors to back strong women-led businesses and achieve competitive returns.



Reframing the Investability of Women-Led Businesses

Capital is under-allocated, not unavailable. WLBs in Southeast Asia receive disproportionately less funding even when performance is strong.

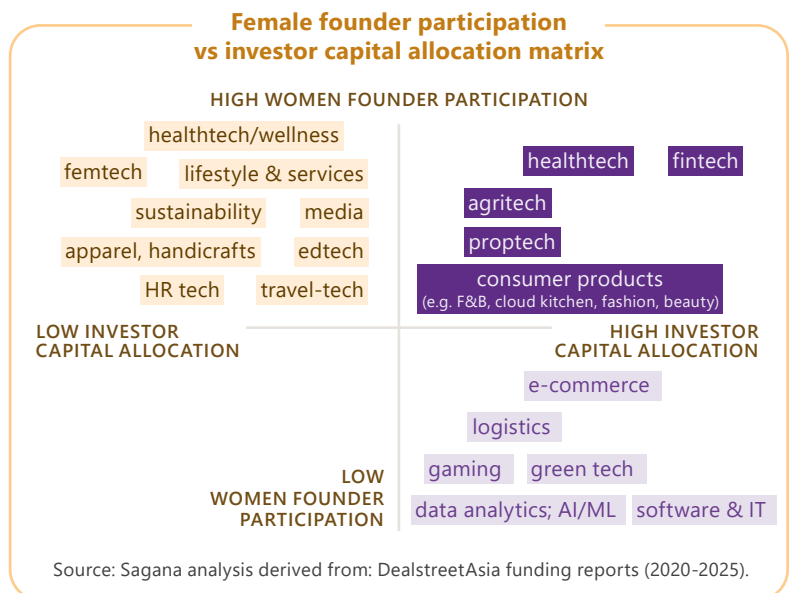
Many women-led businesses demonstrate capital-efficient execution, predictable unit economics, and strong paths to cash generation.⁵

WLBs often operate in stable, cash-flow-generative sectors with predictable demand and long-term innovation potential, but have steady rather than hyper growth profiles.

The real constraint is capital fit. Many WLBs fall between traditional boxes; too grounded for venture-style growth assumptions, yet underserved by collateral-heavy bank debt.

Returns come from matching instrument to trajectory. Equity can back scalable Growth Engines, while cash-flow-aligned debt can finance resilient Cash Generators.

WLBs in Southeast Asia are under-capitalized relative to their performance leading to a missed opportunity for smart investors.



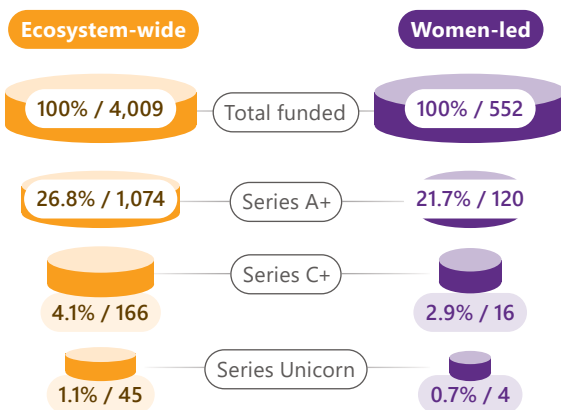
The gender financing gap is a critical capital misallocation driven by model mismatch, not weak fundamentals.

Unlocking Equity for Women-Led Growth Engines

Women-led growth engines in Southeast Asia are delivering capital-efficient growth in underinvested sectors as equity capital tightens.

Comparison WLBs graduating across financing stages⁶

Funding funnel (%) / # of companies



Source: Tracxn. Women Founders in SEA Tech – 2024 (2024).

Limited growth capital is narrowing the pipeline of women-led companies entering venture pathways. However, a credible pipeline of businesses in resilient sectors — healthcare, education, consumer goods — offers compelling return potential.⁷

Smaller rounds and longer gaps reflect constrained capital access and capital discipline — not weaker performance. Many women-led growth engines generate more revenue per dollar invested, than their counterparts.⁸

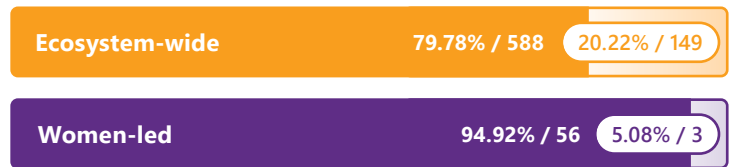
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The issue isn't a lack of opportunity — it's misallocated capital. Correcting for model mismatch reveals an opportunity to back investable, high-quality businesses.

Number of Exits in Southeast Asia by Type

○ IPOs ● Acquisitions

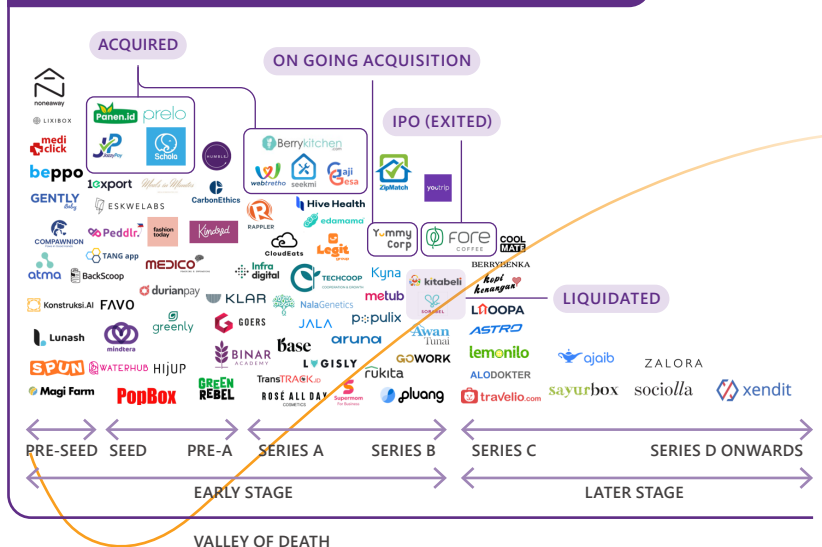


Source: Sagana analysis of Tracxn 2024 gender-tagged exit dataset; Tracxn. Women Founders in SEA Tech – 2024.

⌚ **These dynamics can create valuation discounts for investors,** but evidence suggests gaps can close as performance is demonstrated—creating a time-bound entry opportunity for investors.⁹

✦ **Exit options in Southeast Asia are limited for all businesses;** with WLBs more likely to exit earlier and through acquisitions.¹⁰ In markets with limited exit optionality, the earlier liquidity of WLBs can be an advantage.

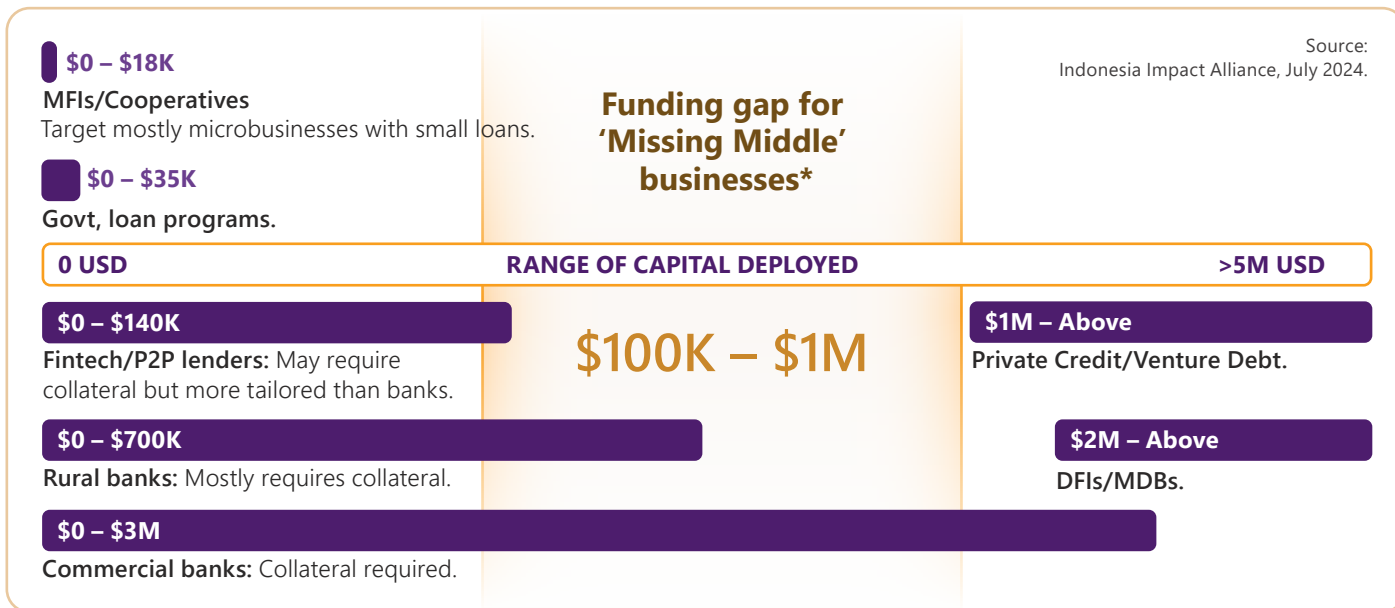
Capital is not aligned with where WLBs are progressing. This is an opportunity for investors.



Source: Tracxn 'Women Founders in SEA Tech – 2024' & Tracxn SEA Tech Annual Funding Report – 2024 (2024). Based on primary research. Data gathered from Tech in Asia, Crunchbase, Preqin, and independent research efforts. Based on Preqin VC database 2016-2025, filtered by exits and target company country: Indonesia, Philippines, and Vietnam.

Improved Access to Debt Financing for Women-Led Cash Generators

Women-led Cash Generators represent a large, commercially attractive credit opportunity that remains structurally underserved.



✔ **A large but underserved credit market:** An estimated **12.8M WLBs**¹¹ generate steady revenues and require **USD 100k–1M**¹² in growth capital, yet remain stuck in the region’s “missing middle.”

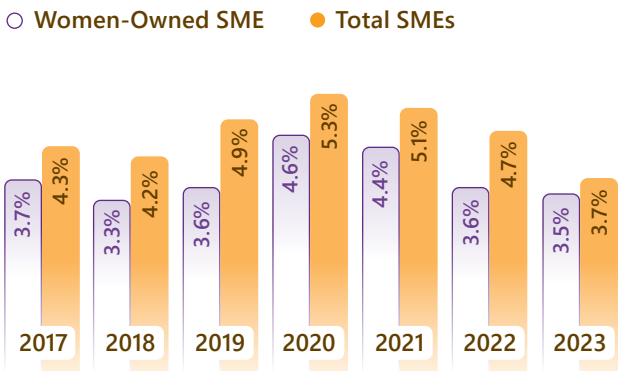
✔ **WLBs often outperform on credit performance.** Across markets, they show lower NPLs and loss rates, including up to **4.5x lower loan-loss**¹³ probability in Vietnam, yet remain underserved by fit-for-purpose debt markets.

✔ **The debt gap reflects product misalignment—not weak credit quality.** Many WLBs are viable, cash-flow-positive borrowers, but are excluded by collateral-heavy lending models that do not fit asset-light sectors.¹⁴

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For lenders, women-led Cash Generators represent a scalable, risk-disciplined opportunity. Cash-flow underwriting, tailored repayment structures, repeat-borrower facilities, and selective risk-sharing can unlock significant volume in this underpenetrated segment.

Global Non-Performing Loan (NPL) Ratios: Women-Owned vs Total SME Portfolios (2017-2023)



Source: IFC Banking on Women 'Lower Non-performing Loans (NPLs) for Women and Women-owned Businesses' December 2024.

80% of the credit market in Asia is dominated by traditional bank lending.¹⁵

\$139b financing gap for women-led SMEs in Southeast Asia.¹⁶



Key Takeaways

WLBs in Southeast Asia are a large, commercially viable segment spanning both high-growth ventures and cash-generating firms. Yet misalignment between business models, financial instruments, and investor expectations continues to hold back their full potential.



Investing in Cash Generators offers a disciplined credit strategy aligned with risk, returns, and market realities.



Investors can access a pipeline of capital-efficient, women-led Growth Engines across Southeast Asia.

ENDNOTES

1. Sagana analysis; data sourced from ADB dataset (2025), UNDP (2025), UN Women & UN ESCAP (2023), ASEAN, ESCAP (2022), and Lao National Enterprise Database, Ministry of Industry and Commerce Registration System (2025).
2. Women-led startup according to Tracxn is defined as startup with at least 1 woman (co-)founder. Tracxn. [Women Founders in SEA Tech – 2024](#).
3. Sagana analysis; data sourced from ADB dataset (2025), Schaper, Michael (2020), UNDP (2025), UN Women & UN ESCAP (2023), ASEAN & ESCAP (2022), and Lao National Enterprise Database, Ministry of Industry and Commerce Registration System (2025).
4. DealstreetAsia funding reports, 2020-2025.
5. DealstreetAsia [Women Founders in SE Asia: 2024 Funding Review](#) (2025); SEA and Global Average data taken from Insignia Business Review [How to Thrive with Southeast Asia's Long Funding Cycles](#) (July 2025).
6. Tracxn '[Women Founders in SEA Tech – 2024](#)' & Tracxn 'SEA Tech Annual Funding Report – 2024'. DealstreetAsia '[Women Founders in SE Asia: 2024 Funding Review](#)', 2025. Preqin exit VC database 2016-2025, filtered for Country: Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam.
7. Tracxn. [Women Founders in SEA Tech – 2024](#) (2024).
8. Sagana analysis of Tracxn 2024 gender-tagged exit dataset; Tracxn. [Women Founders in SEA Tech – 2024](#) (2024).
9. Zhang, Qian; Chen, Sirui; [International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research. Double standards in roadshows: the impact of investors' dynamic gender-based bias on the financing performance of women entrepreneurs](#) (2025).
10. Sagana analysis of Tracxn 2024 gender-tagged exit dataset; Sagana analysis of Preqin VC exit database 2016 – 2025 for Country: Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam.
11. Sagana analysis; data sourced from ADB dataset (2025), Schaper, Michael (2020), UNDP (2025), UN Women & UN ESCAP (2023), ASEAN & ESCAP (2022), and Lao National Enterprise Database, Ministry of Industry and Commerce Registration System (2025).
12. IIA. [Landscape Report](#). (July 2024).
13. USAID '[Women Owned Businesses in Indonesia: A Golden Opportunity for Local Financial Institutions](#)' (March 2016).
14. IFC Banking on Women '[Lower Non-performing Loans \(NPLs\) for Women and Women-owned Businesses](#)' (December 2024)¹³ ADB [Southeast Asia Working Paper Series 'Financial Access of Women-Owned Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises In Viet Nam'](#) (December 2022); IFC.
15. IQEQ, '[Private Debt in Asia](#)' June 2024.
16. SME Finance Forum, '[MSME Finance Gap](#)', 2025.

Ready to move from insight to implementation?

Check out the full opportunity brief or our tailored playbooks provide step-by-step guidance for family offices and fund managers to align capital structures, incentives, and deployment strategies with high-potential women-led businesses.

Moving Money into Women-Led Businesses in Southeast Asia maps the trends, challenges, and opportunities shaping growth-stage investment into women-founded businesses in the region. The brief specifically examines the structural dynamics influencing growth-stage financing — a critical but often under-analyzed segment of the funding landscape — and offers a new perspective on investing by highlighting near-term opportunities to address systemic gaps in growth capital as efforts to strengthen the broader financial ecosystem continue.

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