

Stronger Together? Female Export Consortia

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Abstract

Exporting offers high private and public returns, yet in most countries, only a few large, male-managed firms engage in exporting. We incentivize small, female-managed firms to form a consortium, a corporate group, to test whether they can collectively overcome the fixed export costs. We randomize 176 firms into four sectoral consortia or a control group and study the consortium's effect on firm performance. After two years, treated firms are 16pp (+63%) more likely to export and doubled their sales. The results are driven by consortia members expanding and using their business networks more, gaining entrepreneurial confidence, and improving management practices. Yet, cooperation is also costly. Only half of the invited firms ultimately join the consortium and conflicts arise during cooperation, suggesting careful selection and conflict resolution mechanisms would improve the intervention. Incentivizing horizontal integration of small firms offers a cost-effective, scalable way to share investment costs for export or technology adoption, with the potential to foster broader economic development.

Keywords: Female Entrepreneurs, Export, Firms, Networks

JEL Codes: D04, D22, F14, L52, O12, O14, O25

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1 Introduction

Export is considered key for contemporary success stories of economic growth and development.¹ Export provides firms in low-income countries with access to larger markets (Goldberg and Reed, 2023) and richer clients (Verhoogen, 2023), enabling improvements in productivity, quality, and management practices (Atkin et al., 2017; Alfaro-Ureña et al., 2022; Bloom et al., 2021).

The private and public returns from exporting are well-documented, but the literature offers less insights into how firms *become* exporters and whether (industrial) policies contributed to export success. Theory predicts those firms capable of covering the fixed export market entry costs engage in exporting (Melitz, 2003). The fixed export costs are an upfront sunk-cost investment, e.g., into searching for clients, understanding regulations and international logistics. Empirical data shows it is mostly a few large firms that manage to export (World Bank, 2020; Freund and Pierola, 2015; Zavala, 2023).²

Female entrepreneurs incur a double burden: they tend to manage small, unproductive firms (Fang et al., 2022; Allison et al., 2021), and encounter additional export barriers (Ubfal, 2023; Ackah et al., 2020). For example, few women worldwide are entrepreneurs and exporters, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, resulting in a lack of role models (World Bank and World Trade Organization, 2020; Alibhai et al., 2019). Persistent preconceptions - entrepreneurship as a male domain and care-work as a female domain - mean female entrepreneurs face baseless doubts of their entrepreneurial abilities, lowering their confidence, and limiting essential business activities, such as networking and traveling (see Section 2 for evidence from focus groups). It is unclear how to alleviate and address multiple barriers - networks, confidence, market access - simultaneously (Ubfal, 2023; McKenzie et al., 2023).

How can small firms, which constitute the vast majority of firms in low-income countries, benefit from export and globalisation opportunities? And how to address the additional barriers that female entrepreneurs face?

In this paper, we test one specific solution to the above questions and ask if small firms can overcome the fixed costs of export if they share them? To answer the question, we test and show in a randomized controlled trial in Tunisia that small female-managed firms manage to export and grow by sharing costs, human, and social capital if collectively organised in a consortium. Two novel ideas are key. The first novelty is to help small firms export by incentivizing and coordinating them in creating a larger corporate group, a consortium. The firms jointly market their products under the consortium, sharing the costs of searching for clients. Second, this is the first paper to show that business associations, such as the consortium, provide female entrepreneurs with new family-disconnected business networks, resulting in firm growth and increases in human capital and entrepreneurial confidence.

The results imply small firms in low-and middle-income countries can be incentivized to and benefit from sharing the fixed costs of export. The mechanism might apply to other forms of organizing collective action, e.g., contracts or cooperatives, and to other fixed costs, e.g., for technology adoption. It suggests, more broadly, that structural change could be fueled in another way than letting small firms "die" under competition from larger domestic or multinational firms.

¹Export-led growth or industrialization captures the idea that (East Asian) countries' growth and industrialization were driven by exports. For excellent reviews see Krueger (1984) or Harrison and Rodríguez-Clare (2010).

²Export firm concentration is stark: Firms that both import-and-export account on average for 15% of all trading firms, but capture 80% of total trade (World Bank, 2020). Freund and Pierola (2015) find the top five "export superstars" account for nearly 50% of countries' exports to GDP ratio. Zavala (2023), for example, shows that in half of 157 export crops in Ecuador, one single exporter controls 90% of the market share.

We incentivize 87 among 176 female-managed firms to form a consortium - a corporate group - and investigate the effect on firms' performance in a randomized controlled trial with the Tunisian Export Promotion Agency. The firms are sampled in a nationwide communication campaign in 2021. The firms are formally registered, either managed or owned by a women, have a median of seven employees and operate in one of four sectors: agro-food, handicrafts and cosmetics, digital services and consulting. They are located across the whole country and have no prior relationship. Three of out five firms have no export experience.³

The eligible firms are allocated via stratified randomization into a treatment group and a pure control group in 2022, leading to a balanced sample. In the treatment group, we create four consortia, each regrouping firms from one of the four sectors. The groups then receive i) the offer to join the sectoral female export consortium, which provides firms with access to the network and membership in the corporate group, ii) access to a series of consortium-level consulting on export and business management, designed to create trust and a group spirit between the firms and to provide the knowledge necessary for export (year 1), and iii) a consortium-level subsidy (year 2), which is only announced after the firms have legally joined the consortium to reduce moral hazard and which is restricted to specific expenditure to kickstart the consortium (e.g., design brand, rent office, hire accountant), cover coordination costs (e.g., hire coordinator) and part of the fixed export costs (e.g., build webpage, travel to trade fairs). About two-thirds of the invited firms join the consortium when it is legally created after the first year of group-consulting workshops. At endline, 45% remain in the consortium, which is close to the 50% that we anticipated. We explore the reasons for drop-out in Sections 3.3 and 6.5.

The treatment simultaneously tackles three constraints - networks, skills, and market access. Once the consortium is created, the individual firms offer their products jointly under the consortium brand (e.g., Digital Services Consortia Tunisia) and promote each other's products as consortium representatives in trade fairs and via digital marketing. The firms thereby collectively achieve a wider scale in marketing and share the costs of searching for clients, business and export opportunities.⁴ Moreover, female entrepreneurs foster new professional networks via the consortium. Regular interaction with professional peers and consultants facilitates knowledge transfer regarding management practices and boosts entrepreneurial confidence.

The empirical analysis is primarily based on survey data, soon to be combined with administrative data, and an ANCOVA regression specification. The firms were surveyed online and via telephone when they applied (baseline, 100% response rate, 2021), when they decided whether to join the consortium after one year (midline, 82% response rate, 2022), and when the consortium operated for one year (endline, 72% response rate, 2023). In addition, we collected qualitative evidence in focus groups, qualitative interviews as well as by accompanying the consortia to international trade fairs. Our main regression specification uses an ANVOCA specification (McKenzie, 2012), and compares treated with control firms at the endline or midline, controlling for the initial baseline value of the outcome and randomization strata.

³The four sectors were selected as there were sufficiently large numbers of applicants to construct treatment and control groups, but applications from any sector were eligible in principle.

⁴The practical process is very similar to the search process described theoretically in Hausmann and Rodrik (2003).

First, what is the consortia's effect on firms' export and business performance?

We estimate firms in the treatment group were 16.5 percentage points more likely to have exported in 2023, corresponding to a 63% increase relative to a control mean of 0.26 ($p < 0.05$). These effects are large. In comparison, subsidized trade fare participation increased Japanese firms' export likelihood by 9 percentage points, and market intelligence increased Danish firms' export likelihood by 8-9 percentage points - about a third of the consortia's effect (Makioka, 2021; Munch and Schaur, 2018). Consulting or information provision alone did not firms' export likelihood in Colombia and Vietnam (Kim et al., 2018; Iacovone et al., 2023). On the intensive margin, consortia members export to half an additional foreign market - a 48.5% increase relative to the control mean of 1.03 ($p < 0.05$). Heterogeneity analysis reveals that it is in particular firms that already had realised one export operation at baseline that managed to export to one additional market.

The consortia increased treated firms' sales by 146% on average in 2023, the second year of the intervention. While there are firms that experience strong positive and negative growth at the lower and upper tail of the distribution in both groups, it is the firms between the 25th and 75th percentile in the treatment group that experience much stronger sales growth. For example, the median firm in the treatment group has increased its total sales by 100% relative to the baseline, while the median control firm has grown by 40%. On aggregate, treated firms report an additional 5 million Tunisian dinars (€ 1.5 million), resulting in roughly 1 million Tunisian dinars (€ 300,000) in additional tax revenue from value-added tax, implying the program paid for itself within two years. The expansion in sales is driven by domestic and export sales.

The effect on sales, however, is not matched with an equivalent effect on profits, employment or innovation. The results for profit are noisy, suggesting a significant increase at the midline (1 year after treatment start) but no effect at the endline (1 year after the consortium started operating). The noisy results on profit may have several reasons. One potential reason is that several firms in the treatment group reported negative profits in year 2, explaining that they invested in implementing themselves in new markets, increasing variance, reducing power and suggesting investment may result in future profits.

In the following, we investigate *how* the consortium may have helped female entrepreneurs expand their exports and sales. Recall the consortium provided firms with three inputs - a new network via consortium membership, consulting on management and export, and joint product marketing via subsidized trade fare participation and a webpage. We focus on four key intermediary outcomes: networks, self-confidence, knowledge transfer via peers and consultants, and export readiness.

First, joining a consortium has transformed female entrepreneurs' business networks and how they leverage these networks for business growth. Regarding *network size*, consortia members regularly discuss business with five additional contacts ($p < 0.05$), mainly other female entrepreneurs. A 64% increase relative to a control group average of 8 contacts. The magnitude of the effect is immense: in fact, 80% of the female entrepreneurs they regularly discuss business with have been encountered via the consortium. Consortia members have dramatically changed and intensified their *network use* for business: they are roughly 39, 36, and 47 percentage points more likely to share management practices, export experience or product ideas, and 32 and 46 percentage points more likely to have cooperated in a joint contract bid or to have received emotional support and confidence vis-à-vis risks and uncertainty of exporting. If these interfirm linkages persist in the future, they are likely to permanently transform

these firms' and female entrepreneurs' business performance.

Second, the consortia strengthened female entrepreneurs' belief in their ability. Consortia members have 0.42 standard deviations higher levels of self-perceived entrepreneurial efficacy (ability) ($p < 0.05$). This corresponds to four times the median in the control group or moving from the 25th to 50th or 50th to 75th percentile of entrepreneurial efficacy. Qualitative interviews and documentation of consortia meetings suggest that female entrepreneurs felt empowered and encouraged to exchange with peers who faced similar challenges, underlining the importance of a female-only consortium. Interestingly, the same does not hold for entrepreneurs' locus of control over their entrepreneurial environment, including, for example, their sense of control over reconciling personal and professional life, e.g., in terms of gender roles and care responsibilities. It is important to emphasize the relevance of these results given existing approaches (McKenzie and Puerto, 2021; Bulte et al., 2017), e.g. adding a gender component to entrepreneurship training, have not yielded similar results and given group-level delivery and exchange in safe spaces could be relatively easily scaled and adopted in other programs.

Third, the consortia enabled knowledge transfer via peers and consultants, resulting in improved management practices. The consortium increased management practices by 0.08 standard deviations ($p < 0.05$). This corresponds to three and a half times the median in the control group. The increase is driven by improvements in accounting, e.g. separating business and personal accounts, and production management. Female entrepreneurs are significantly more likely to have learned about these management practices from consultants, as in Iacovone et al. (2021), and significantly less likely to have relied on family and friends. Yet, learning about management practices from other entrepreneurs is not more common than in the control group. This may be related to initially low levels of formal management knowledge among the firms and underscores the need to combine network creation with external expert knowledge inputs for target groups with low initial capabilities.

Fourth, the consortia improved firms' export readiness, particularly regarding subsidised activities and exports to other African countries, an objective of the program. While consortia members do not perform significantly differently on an index of general export readiness measures (e.g., having an international quality certificate or a sales structure abroad), they are 50 percentage points more likely to have participated in an international trade fare, and 34 and 26 percentage points more likely to have a potential client and commercial partner in another African country, and roughly 40 percentage points more likely to know Tunisia's trade agreements with other African countries.

This study contributes to two strands of literature. Firstly, it contributes to literature on the role of firms for economic development (McKenzie et al., 2023), and more specifically, to the strands about the promotion of female entrepreneurs (Jayachandran, 2021; McKenzie et al., 2023; Ashraf et al., 2019) and cooperation between firms to foster firm growth (Cai and Szeidl, 2018; Fafchamps and Quinn, 2016; Brooks et al., 2018; Hardy and McCasland, 2021). Campos et al. (2019); World Bank and World Trade Organization (2020) suggested studying interventions to expand female entrepreneurs' networks as "causal evidence is not available on the business performance of women-led businesses" (Ubfal, 2023). To the best of our knowledge, this paper in the first together with Asiedu et al. (2023) to provide evidence on the role of business linkages and entrepreneurial networks for female entrepreneurs. In particular, it is the first rigorous intervention that finds evidence that group, rather than individual interventions, might be particularly helpful in empowering female entrepreneurs. Moreover, this work distinguishes itself from the existing literature by focusing on creating long-term, permanent coop-

eration between entrepreneurs instead of temporary networking or mentoring (Cai and Szeidl, 2018; Asiedu et al., 2023; Brooks et al., 2018; Fafchamps and Quinn, 2016).

Secondly, this study contributes to the literature on export promotion and, in particular, market access. To our knowledge, it is one of the first RCTs in export promotion and the first to study export consortia. Atkin et al. (2017) show that selling to international buyers can improve quality and productivity. However, the study does not examine how to help firms get in contact with international clients in the first place. First RCTs of export promotion measures found null effects (Kim et al., 2018; Breinlich et al., 2017; Iacovone et al., 2023) and quasi-experimental studies mixed results (Makioka, 2019). Munch and Schaur (2018) illustrate that more actionable information, like market intelligence, can promote exporting, especially for firms with fewer than 25 employees, and Makioka (2021) that subsidized visits to geographically distanced trade fairs can help firms enter new export markets. Export consortia have been primarily assessed by qualitative case studies (Forte and Oliveira, 2019) except for two early studies in Chile that find positive and significant effects on firms' probability of exporting but say little about mechanisms (Alvarez, 2004; Alvarez and Crespi T., 2000)

In the following, section 2 provides information about female entrepreneurship in Tunisia and the sample of female entrepreneurs in this study, section 3 outlines the research design, section 4 details the regression specifications and the main outcomes. Section 5 lays out results and mechanisms.

2 Context and Sample

Section 2.1 describes the challenges in doing business and export for female entrepreneurs in Tunisia based on focus group interviews with treatment group firms. Section 2.2 describes the characteristics of the firms and the female entrepreneurs in the sample. It also provides a deep dive into the companies in each of the four consortia.

2.1 Context: Female Entrepreneurs in Tunisia

Women in the Middle East and North Africa have the lowest rates of female entrepreneurship among global regions, with only around 10 percent of all firms being managed by women (Figure 5) (Campos et al., 2019). In Tunisia, 19 percent of formal businesses are headed by women and only 5.3 percent of corporate board members are women (Ben Mohamed et al., 2022). Women's labor force participation rate in Tunisia is roughly 27 percent, 42 percent among women in lower-income households, even though two-thirds of university graduates are women (Hattab, 2012).

Based on focus group interviews, we provide further details about and show that the situation of female entrepreneurs in Tunisia resonates with the international evidence (Jayachandran, 2021). The first recurrent thread documented in the interviews and existing literature is the tension between the role of an entrepreneur and the traditional role of women as mothers and wives, caretakers of the household, and family members. Despite their enterprise, many female entrepreneurs maintain responsibility over private household matters, in particular child care. Female entrepreneurs describe in several ways how such traditional role models act as an additional barrier or tax on their business and exporting.

Self-confidence and discrimination Many female entrepreneurs encounter opposition to their decision to become an entrepreneur, which lowers their confidence, is emotionally draining, including even divorcing partners, and limits their ability to operate their business (e.g., one entrepreneur kept

her entrepreneurship a secret from family members). Several female entrepreneurs describe cases of discrimination in business conduct, such as access to funding, dealing with public authorities, and interactions with clients, competitors, and employees.⁵ For example, several female entrepreneurs express difficulty in accessing bank loans. This is partly due to unequal inheritance laws that cause women to hold smaller capital, both fluid and physical, e.g., home ownership titles that could act as a mortgage (Hattab, 2012). At the same time, female entrepreneurs feel lower regard and trust of male bank employers in their capability to develop a profitable business, mirroring experimental evidence from Turkey (Alibhai et al., 2019). In a similar realm, female entrepreneurs describe how some civil servants or clients doubt their competence (while granting it to less competent male entrepreneurs without doubt), causing them a disadvantage in winning contracts and receiving licenses.

Networks Female entrepreneurs report difficulty to network after work due to their sole responsibility for household work. After-work networking in Tunisia takes place primarily in coffee shops (cafés) and restaurants, which are regularly either male-dominated or gender-separated, making it difficult to enter male business circles. As a result, female entrepreneurs are less informed, e.g., about public support programs or business opportunities (Drine and Grach, 2012). The female entrepreneurs in our sample have more male than female business contacts, and more business contacts outside their family than within their family. While many have sizeable networks, a substantial share has no or very few contacts with other (female) entrepreneurs.

Management practices Several female entrepreneurs think they lack business management skills. This is corroborated in the baseline survey and in existing research. For example, Drine and Grach (2012) find female entrepreneurs in Tunisia, particularly at the early stage of business development, are less likely to have benefited from formal management training (Drine and Grach, 2012).

Exporting (Some) Female entrepreneurs explain they are hesitant to travel abroad to identify business partners for export as they feel obligated to look after their children and are concerned about their personal security, which resonates with evidence from female entrepreneurs in Ghana (Ackah et al., 2020). International travel requires women to find childcare, often only provided by family members, as professional childcare services are not yet strongly established in Tunisia. Finally, some female entrepreneurs also express that the uncertainty and risk related to exporting discourage them.

We asked focus group participants to rate the relative importance of each barrier for operating their business on a scale from one, not so important, to seven, very important (Table 11). The lack of access to funds is the most important barrier. The second most important perceived barrier is the risk, such as high costs, uncertainty, and competition, related to operating a business and exporting. Overall, the large heterogeneity reflects that the relative salience of each barrier depends on the individual entrepreneur.

2.2 Sample characteristics

The firms had to fulfil four eligibility criteria. First, they had to be either female-managed or female-owned. This was verified based on the firms' registration, the second criterion, and legal ownership or employment structure. The implementation partner conducted in-depth case-by-case decisions for

⁵Several female entrepreneurs also emphasize the supportiveness of their (male) family members, civil servants, or other entrepreneurs, reflecting Tunisia's diverse society. A few female entrepreneurs call into question whether gender matters in running a business or put the blame on female entrepreneurs' lack of confidence, risk-taking, assertiveness etc.

conflictual cases, e.g. if companies were co-owned with men. Third, they had to confirm their interest/intention in starting to export within the next 24 months or be exporting already. Fourth, they had to be in one of the four sectors where at least 30 firms applied - to be able to form groups of at least 15 firms in treatment and 15 in control. The four sectors that had sufficient number of female-managed or owned firms interested in the consortia program were: agro-food, handicrafts and cosmetics, consulting and digital services.

Among the 176 companies in the sample, 25.6 percent (45 firms) operate in the agro-food sector, 30.7 percent (54 firms) are handicraft producers, 23.3 percent (41 firms) provide consulting services and 20.5 percent (36 firms) digital services. The median company has five employees and 80 percent have 10 or fewer employees, implying that only 35 firms have more than 10 employees. Overall, the companies tend to be quite "young", as half of the companies in the sample did not exist for more than four years. Interestingly, a majority, or 60.6 percent of the female CEOs, have one family member who has a company. Half of the firms in the sample regularly discuss business ideas or challenges with seven or fewer other people and 90 percent with 25 or fewer. In contrast to our expectation based on the existing literature, women discuss business ideas or challenges only with three family members but 10 outsiders on average. Hence, many entrepreneurs in the sample seem to have a relatively small network, while some also dispose of very extended networks, mostly made up of business contacts outside rather than within families.

The business performance of the sample firms is quite heterogeneous. The median company has total sales of around 74,000 Tunisian dinars (roughly equivalent to 24,666€). The heterogeneity in revenue in the sample is high, even after removing one strong outlier: the standard deviation in total sales is 1,077,435 Tunisian dinars and the baseline mean (434,854 Tunisian dinars) is approximately 5 times as large as the median.⁶ At baseline, companies have relatively poor formal management practices as defined in previous research (Bloom et al., 2013, 2020). The average company has around 7.4, and the median company has 8 points on a 25-point management practices indicator based on five questions, each providing up to 5 points. The companies perform worst on average in examining the firm's financial performance and monitoring employees' performance via indicators. Finally, 108 firms, or 61.4 percent of the sample, did not yet export. Among the 68 firms that realized revenue from export, firms exported to 2.5 (2) other countries on average (median), and the top 25 percent exported to three and up to 15 countries.

Overall randomization led to two balanced groups. Table 13 provides a balance table summarizing the mean and standard deviation in the treatment and control group, and p-values for t-tests of statistically significant differences between the two groups as well as F-Tests for joint independence between treatment status and all major outcome variables. While there are no statistically significant differences, modest sample size and high heterogeneity between the firms, lead to insignificant but notable differences, in particular, in variables with a high variance, such as sales. As a result, we cannot reject the null hypothesis of joint insignificance of all outcome variables from treatment status for the untransformed variables. However, Table 14 in the appendix shows that after correction for outliers via winsorization and inverse hyperbolic sine transformation of accounting variables, treatment status is entirely independent of all outcome variables. It is also noteworthy that the insignificant but notable differences are sporadic in the sense that they do not consistently favor either the treatment or the con-

⁶Without removing the outlier, the baseline mean is 625,031 and the standard deviation is 2,668,589 Tunisian Dinar.

Table 1: Balance and Summary Statistics: *Entrepreneur-level* Characteristics

| | (1) Control | (2) Treatment | T-test (P-value) |
|-----------------------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| Variable | Mean [SD] | Mean [SD] | (1)-(2) |
| Management practices points | 5.25 [1.22] | 5.47 [1.14] | 0.23 |
| Network size | 12.33 [16.02] | 13.21 [17.72] | 0.73 |
| Perceived network quality | 7.11 [2.61] | 7.33 [2.69] | 0.60 |
| Pos. view CEO interaction | 2.15 [0.78] | 2.14 [0.74] | 0.95 |
| Neg. view CEO interaction | 0.73 [0.64] | 0.73 [0.60] | 0.98 |
| Entrepreneurial efficacy | 12.03 [2.34] | 11.74 [2.16] | 0.40 |
| Entrepreneurial control | 16.05 [2.83] | 16.15 [2.83] | 0.83 |
| N | 89 | 86 | |

Notes: The values displayed for t-tests are p-values. Standard deviations are robust and reported in squared brackets. All missing values in balance variables are treated as zero. ***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5, and 10 percent critical levels.

trol group. In contrast, the differences are driven by significant outliers in either group that affect the average.

Table 2: Baseline Balance and Summary Statistics: *Firm-level* Characteristics

| | (1) Control | (2) Treatment | T-test (P-value) |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Variable | Mean [SD] | Mean [SD] | (1)-(2) |
| Age | 7.13 [9.85] | 6.38 [7.97] | 0.58 |
| Sales | 379,164.93 [856,094.54] | 255,363.41 [499,282.35] | 0.24 |
| Costs | 341,052.58 [828,216.34] | 216,103.97 [422,304.77] | 0.21 |
| Profit | 30,128.14 [106,663.40] | 39,115.32 [96,394.04] | 0.56 |
| Employees | 7.94 [10.44] | 11.37 [37.64] | 0.42 |
| Export readiness points | 3.42 [2.03] | 3.61 [1.97] | 0.55 |
| Perceived export costs | 5.74 [2.60] | 5.49 [2.79] | 0.54 |
| Investment in export | 10,528.15 [22,584.96] | 24,916.93 [97,659.24] | 0.18 |
| <i>Export sales</i> > 0 | 0.37 [0.49] | 0.41 [0.49] | 0.63 |
| Export sales | 96,287.29 [465,104.02] | 128,541.19 [421,321.92] | 0.63 |
| Export countries | 1.14 [2.12] | 1.43 [2.73] | 0.43 |
| N | 89 | 86 | |

Notes: All accounting variables (sales, profit, investment) are in Tunisian Dinar. The values displayed for t-tests are p-values. Standard deviations are robust and reported in squared brackets. All missing values in balance variables are treated as zero. ***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5, and 10 percent critical levels.

In total, the 87 firms in the treatment group came from four sectors, two of which are manufacturing sectors (agro-food (23) and handicrafts (26)), and the two others are service sectors (consulting services (20) and digital services (18)). The 14 firms that decided to become part of the agro-food consortium are either agricultural producers (e.g., olive oil, orange, almonds), produce processed food products (e.g., digestive crackers or jam/spread), or offer agro-food services (e.g., plant nursery, catering, import-export/trade logistics specifically for food products). The companies employ on average seven and up to 25 employees in various locations across Tunisia. 12 among the 14 firms (85 percent) have not exported in 2020, the lowest share of exporters among all three consortia. The 17 firms in the handicraft consortium offer a range of lifestyle products, such as cosmetics (e.g., various natural oils,

beauty, and baby care products), leather and textile products (e.g., leather belts, bags, or bracelets), and furniture (e.g., tables, tableware, and decorations). Seven among the 17 firms in the handicraft consortium have already exported. Almost all export to France, one to Libya, and one to Algeria. Regarding their characteristics, the firms in the handicraft consortium are very similar to those in the agro-food consortium.

The other two consortia consist of firms that offer services. The smaller one comprises consulting firms that provide consulting, training, coaching, audits, management certification, or environmental feasibility studies. The larger one comprises 14 firms offering Digital services, including website development and digital marketing, online education, data analytics, cloud storage, 3D printing, and digital strategy consulting. The firms from both service consortia are more concentrated in the metropolitan area of Tunis than the firms in the other two consortia. 60 percent, 10 out of the 14 companies in the digital services consortia, are in the larger Tunis area. The same applies to 40 percent of the firms in the consulting service consortia. The rest of the firms are in different regions of Tunisia. Half of the digital service consortium firms have already exported, the highest value among all consortia, and 40 percent in the consulting service consortium. The firms' main export destinations are European countries, such as Germany, France, Italy or Belgium. A few firms also export to neighbouring countries, such as Libya, and francophone African countries, such as Senegal or Benin.

3 Experimental Design

In the following, Section 3.1 summarizes the treatment and Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 describe it in detail. Section 3.2 documents the sampling and randomization of female-managed firms into a treatment group, divided into four consortia, and a pure control group.

3.1 Treatment

The treatment is a bundle of i) membership in an exogenously created, new and permanent business network and organization, the consortium, ii) consortium-level consulting, and iii) a consortium-level subsidy whose use is restricted to specific expenditure to kickstart the consortium and find clients in foreign markets.

The treatment is implemented in two phases, *Consortia Creation* and *Export Promotion*, each taking one year. The first phase, *Consortia Creation* (Section 3.1.1), is dedicated to establishing the consortium as a legal entity and fostering cooperation between the firms. This is done via a series of group-level consulting workshops focusing on creating *trust* and strengthening export and management *skills*, given the entrepreneurs do not know each other beforehand and half have no export experience. At the end of the first period, the firms decide whether to join the consortium and sign a legal agreement that entails the consortium starts to exist as a corporate legal entity.

The second phase, *Export Promotion* (Section 3.1.2) focuses on making the consortia operational and helping each consortium develop its export. For this purpose, each consortium receives a group-level *subsidy* of €75,000. The subsidy can only be spent on the following activities, meant to kickstart the consortium, cover the coordination and fixed export costs: Creating professional websites and social media profiles for the consortium, hiring an accountant and coordinator for each consortium, renting office space, and funding travel to international trade fairs and B2B missions.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the research design and treatment implementation, described in detail in the following two paragraphs. The intervention was co-designed and implemented with the German Development Agency, GIZ, and Tunisia’s export promotion office (CEPEX) with the various challenges in mind female entrepreneurs face in Tunisia presented in the previous section (section 2). The GIZ and CEPEX had already created three (majority-male) export consortia during the prior cooperation period (2018-2020). In addition, we jointly interviewed entrepreneurs and consultants who participated in this first phase and female entrepreneurs, consultants, and representatives of the National Federation of Female Entrepreneurs to inform the intervention.

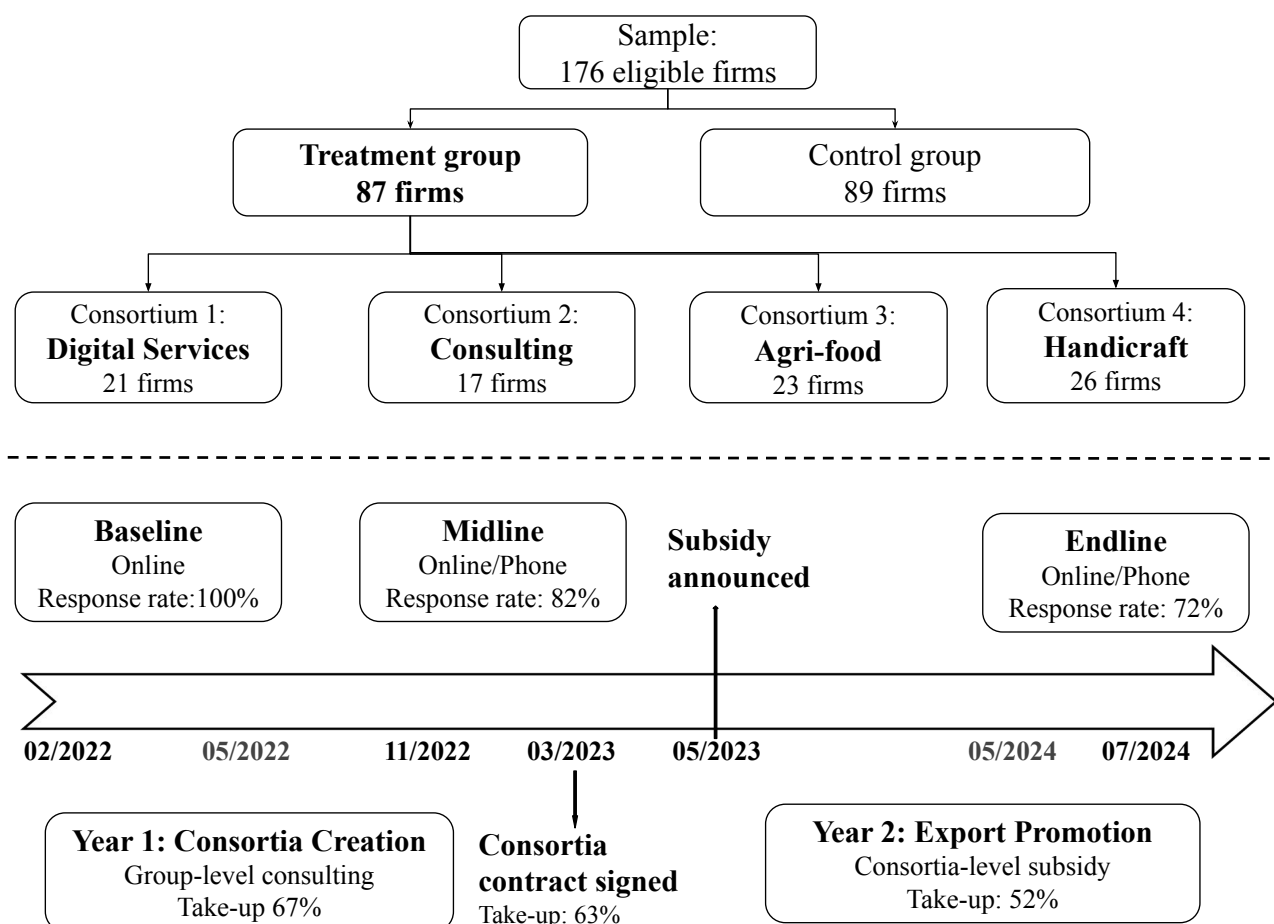


Figure 1: Treatment allocation and timeline

3.1.1 Treatment phase-1: Consortia Creation

The first period, *Consortia Creation*, focuses on establishing the consortium. In addition, it aims to provide the firms with the *skills* necessary to export and to strengthen female entrepreneurs’ *self-confidence* and *networks*.

To establish a consortium, it is crucial for entrepreneurs who do not have a prior relationship to get to know and trust each other. The fact that the program exclusively targeted female entrepreneurs and consistently emphasized empowerment and mutual gains via female business cooperation in its communication helped motivate entrepreneurs to sign up for the program. For example, 98% stated being part of a female business network as a reason for signing up for the program at baseline. At the start, few firms were familiar with the consortium concept. Accordingly, part of the group-level

consulting sessions described in the following paragraph focused on interfirm communication, mutual gains from cooperation and explaining different models of firm cooperation.

The female entrepreneurs receive a bundle of group-level consulting, personal coaching, and group-level networking events that aim to foster a group spirit (network) and provide the firms with the knowledge necessary for export. Treated firms were invited to a series of 8 virtual and in-person full-day group workshops with business and export consultants, inspirational talks from successful local female entrepreneurs (role models), and networking events from the export promotion agency (see Table 3). The core part is a series of three two-day long workshops mixing knowledge inputs, e.g., regarding general and export-specific business management, export and business opportunities in other African countries, gender awareness and communication training, and team building. There is an emphasis on intra-African export markets as the program, as the funds were provided by a program focusing on promoting intra-African trade. The workshops are all conducted by local female consultants, except one male consultant. Again, the reason to rely on female consultants mostly is to create a safe space in a context where business networking is complicated for female entrepreneurs (see Section 2) and to promote a spirit of female solidarity and mutual empowerment. The meetings occur in a neutral location in Tunis or at the Tunisian export promotion office headquarters. Participants are offered accommodation (but no mobility support). In line with [Iacovone et al. \(2021\)](#), we use consultants to avoid firms having to incur coordination costs, to moderate the exchange and to guide participants through the consortia establishment process. In principle, firms could self-organize or follow a rotation schedule of organised meetings at each other's premises as in [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#); historically, consortia have been created independently by small firms, e.g., in Spain or Italy, suggesting government intervention is not mandatory ([UNIDO, 2005](#)). However, coordination costs and the lack of knowledge about potential business partners justify government intervention. Moreover, 60% of the firms do not have export experience at baseline, and given the ambitious goal to turn them into exporters within two years, external knowledge input was deemed important.

Table 3: Group-level Consulting: Workshop Topics

| Session No. | Workshop Topic |
|-------------|--|
| 1 | Launch event |
| 2 | Export opportunities & African markets (prospecting, target markets, planning) |
| 3 | Export & business development (marketing, logistics) |
| 4 | Export transactions (payment, contract, insurance) |
| 5 | Gender and female entrepreneurship |
| 6 | Networking events |
| 7 | Inspirational talk from successful female entrepreneurs |
| 8 | Options, functioning, & choice of legal format for business co-operation |

The workshops are complemented by up to five personal coaching sessions, two networking events with entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan countries, and a Slack channel via which the women can exchange and receive the inputs used for the workshops. In Table 34 and Figure 17, we categorized and analyzed the topics that female entrepreneurs discussed during their coaching based on administrative project documents. The majority of issues, 52 percent, were related to core business management fields, such

as marketing (17 percent), business development (16 percent), and product/service development (15 percent). The second most prevalent category was accounting and financial management, including price setting and balance sheet accounting. Two other frequent issues, reflecting the analysis of the context in section 2, were access to funding sources (8 percent) and access to government support programs (6 percent), in particular, Tunisia's start-up label. Moreover, 6 percent of the issues were related to personal development, such as a lack of self-confidence.

During the last group workshop, the entrepreneurs decided whether to establish a permanent form of cooperation. They decided on the format (e.g., joint ventures, co-contracting, informal and formal business associations, consortia), whether they wanted to join the export consortium, and elected a future consortium president to advance the consortia creation process. All four groups decided to create an export consortium. The implementation partners then followed up with the consortium president and the members and guided them through the legal process of formally registering the consortium and signing the legal agreement establishing the consortium, which took several months.⁷ The signature of the legal agreements was celebrated at a public event at the national export promotion agency, establishing a consortium as a legal entity with its own organizational structure, such as a consortium president and joint decision-making processes.

The first phase was moderately costly. Not counting the labour costs of the implementing agency, the consultancy, and the event organization, including rents for rooms and accommodation for firm representatives, the cost was around €2000 per company. This paid for an equivalent of roughly 70 face-to-face hours between consultants and firms. This is much lower than Iacovone et al. (2021) regarding treatment intensity or absolute face-to-face hours (70h vs. 408h) but comparable in costs per face-to-face hour.

3.1.2 Treatment phase-2: Export Promotion

The second period, *consortia export promotion*, focused on making the consortia operational and finding clients in foreign markets. For this purpose, each consortium received a subsidy worth €75,000. The subsidy was only announced upon the formal signature creating the consortium as a legal corporate entity to reduce moral hazard. Moreover, the subsidy is not allocated on the individual firm level but at the consortium level and earmarked toward specific activities meant to kickstart the consortium and to cover members' coordination costs and part of the fixed costs of export.

While the political partners led the consortia establishment process, the second treatment phase is driven by the consortia members themselves. As no official meetings or check-posts are scheduled by the political partners anymore - the process now depends on the consortia members' motivation to do business together. To be able to document this process, we hired research assistants - female postgraduate students from Tunisia - who conducted qualitative interviews, participated in general assemblies of each consortium, and accompanied the consortia representatives to two trade fairs in Dubai and Morocco.

To make the consortium operational, members could use the subsidy to rent office space and hire a consultant and an administrative coordinator. Proof of payment had to be provided to the implementation agency, making it difficult to use the subsidy for another purpose. The consortium members elect

⁷In Tunisia there exists a specific legal format to set-up a consortia, called "Groupement d'Intérêt Economique", which all four groups chose as their legal format for cooperation.

a president, a vice-president, and a treasury who form the Executive Office. The Executive Office takes key day-to-day business decisions and leads in setting up the consortia workflows. In general, there has been an organic process of group formation during the group workshops in the first treatment period that saw leaders and core groups emerge - a process that was expected and partly promoted by the implementation partners who deemed each consortium required a few core members that take the lead in the consortium. Strategic business decisions are taken in general assemblies of consortium members, e.g., which export markets to target. The frequency of general assemblies varies. It intensifies before joint trade fair visits or B2B missions and is less frequent in other periods. The meeting takes place in person or also online - given the consortia members are located in different parts of the country, many meetings are held via virtual communication technology. Moreover, the consortia members intensively communicate via telephone calls and text messages - already after the first workshop, most consortia created a private communication channel, off the Slack channel provided by the project, and communicate regularly.

The key collectivization or sharing of the fixed export costs occurred while searching for clients. Each consortium used the subsidy to send one or a few representatives to international trade fairs or B2B missions. Table 4 documents that each consortium participated in 4-6 trade fairs or B2B missions; while each member participated at least in one trade fair, some, mostly the executive office members elected to represent the consortium, went to up to five trade fairs. During the trade fairs/B2B missions, the representatives advertised all members' products rather than their own. Our research assistants documented how members introduced themselves as consortia representatives, introduced other members' (and their own) products, shared pictures of business cards of potential buyers via text and voice messages immediately with members, and sent information on innovative solutions from competitors, e.g. in terms of packaging, with the other consortia members. The representatives also conducted business meetings with potential clients or commercial partners in foreign countries jointly. Members thereby benefit from strategizing together, and those less apt in foreign languages or in constructing personal links with clients from more comfortable consortia members. In addition, some female entrepreneurs expressed they felt more comfortable travelling abroad as a group than alone and were encouraged by more confident members. In other words, the consortia members collectivized the opportunity or search costs of exploring potential business opportunities in a foreign market. This information would have been private if one individual firm participated and invested singlehandedly in exploring a new market. The decision for a target market and trade fair is based on an export plan developed for the consortium as a whole in cooperation with consultants; given the programs focus on promoting South-South and, in particular intra-African trade, the consortia focused on opportunities in African markets, but also selectively participated in trade fairs in Gulf countries and Europe.

Moreover, the consortia members market their products under one common brand, enabling them to gain visibility and diversify their product offerings. Financed by the subsidy, the consortia set up websites and social media profiles that list each member's company and its products in an online catalogue. The online marketing targeted both domestic and international customers. The consortia also enable firms to offer a wider variety of products. For example, the Digital Service consortium could offer website construction, app creation, digital marketing, and cloud services simultaneously rather than individually, making it more attractive to larger buyers who prefer to contract all services from the same provider rather than from separate ones (see Figure 2).

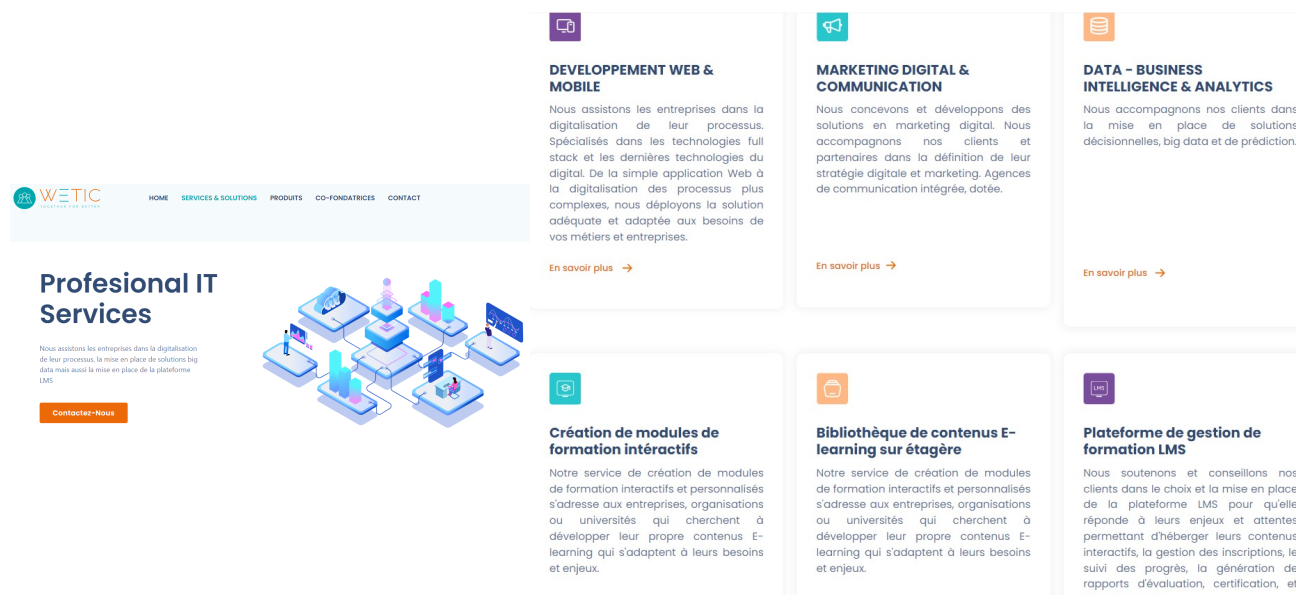


Figure 2: Excerpts from the Digital Services Consortium webpage illustrating the joint branding, online marketing, and gain in product variety. Each service listed in the boxes on the right is provided by one company.

Table 4: Number & destinations of trade fairs and B2B missions

| Consortium | N of Countries | Countries |
|------------------|----------------|--|
| Agro-Food | 4 | Dakar, Dubai, Egypt, Germany |
| Handicraft | 5 | Egypt, France, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, United Arab Emirates |
| Consulting | 5 | Egypt, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal |
| Digital services | 6 | Dubai, Egypt, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Maroc, Rwanda |

The second phase of the treatment costs about €3,450 per company or €75,000 per consortium. The funds are entirely attributed to the consortium-level subsidy used, as discussed above.

3.2 Sampling and Randomisation

The sample is based on a nationwide communication campaign. Female entrepreneurs across Tunisia were invited to sign up for the export consortia program. Several communication and marketing channels were used to attract companies, including an e-mailing campaign, face-to-face or hybrid promotion workshops in Tunis and Sfax, social media and conventional media, such as TV, radio, and press, and implementation partners' own communication channels as well as those of the Tunisian Federation of Female Entrepreneurs. Interested firms could register online via the Tunisian export promotion offices website.

These recruitment efforts led to 263 applications from female-owned or managed firms nationwide. Based on gender-coding data from the Tunisian National Registry of Industrial Firms, we estimate that this corresponds to up to 20% of the total population of female-managed firms with more than five employees. Among the 263 applications, 181 fulfilled the eligibility criteria: intending to export within the next 12 months, having an exportable product (self-reported) that fitted into one sector with

sufficient other firms interested in establishing a consortium. Project managers called up companies that did not provide sufficient information and excluded firms without registration and in financial distress.

The randomisation allocated the 176 firms that responded to the baseline survey to a treatment and a control pure control group. We conduct firm-level stratified randomization using STATA 15. We opt for stratified randomization to increase power (McKenzie, 2012). We stratify first by one of the four sectors, agro-food, handicraft and cosmetics, professional business and digital services. Within sectors, we rank firms and form sextuplets of firms with similar export sales, given export is the primary outcome. We opt for sextuplets to avoid losing observations if there are multiple firms in one strata that do not respond to the endline survey.

In addition, we put outlier firms with extremely high sales values into separate strata. As a result, we randomize 87 eligible companies to the treatment group and 89 companies to the control group (see Figure 7).⁸

3.3 Take-Up

We consider take-up along three dimensions: participation in the group-consulting workshops, joining the consortium at the end of the first treatment period, and remaining in the consortium until the endline. First, 27.5% did not show up at all to the group-consulting workshops, despite having registered and responded to the baseline survey. Of the 75.5% (63 companies) that showed up to the first workshop, we lost a further 10% percent or 8 companies during the following workshops.

Second, among the 55 companies (63%) that participated in most workshops, all decided to join the consortium after the first year. The take-up rate is close to the average in firm training programs (67%) (McKenzie et al., 2023) and in the group consulting (67.9%) in Iacovone et al. (2021). Having said this, improved targeting, intensified follow-up (e.g. via phone before workshops) and potentially other ways of facilitating participation, such as reimbursing transport costs, may improve take-up if scaling or replicating this study.

Third, all the 55 companies that joined the consortium participated in at least one international trade fair or B2B mission. However, 16 among the 55 gradually dropped out from the consortia. As a result, only 45% of the initially invited companies remained active in the consortium at endline - leaving all four consortia with a final group size of 8-12 firms. This corresponds roughly to the 50% take-up rate that we had anticipated at the beginning of the program, and due to this, we decided to invite twice as many companies as we expected to remain in the consortium. Note that the consortia can recruit new members if all existing members agree, providing an avenue for future group sustainability and growth. We examine the reasons and determinants for drop-outs in detail in Section 6.5.

3.4 Data Sources

We rely on four data sources: i) firm surveys, ii) administrative data from customs, social security and the tax authority, iii) qualitative interviews, focus groups, and participatory observations from assisting

⁸There is one specific case of a very large female-owned and managed company - the company's size made it such an influential outlier that it would inflate variance in either group it would be allocated. Given political partners had a strong preference for keeping the company in the program, we randomised it with all other companies. It ended up in the treatment group, attended most workshops in the first phase but decided not to join the consortium and did not respond to the endline survey.

consortia meetings and participating with consortia members in travel to international trade fairs, iv) administrative data from the implementation partners documentation on treatment take-up.

The first data source is firm surveys. We conduct a baseline, midline, and endline survey with a 100%, 82%, 72% response rate. The midline survey occurs after the first treatment period ("consortia creation") has been completed. The endline survey occurs at the end of the second treatment period ("consortia export promotion"). Surveys are conducted in cooperation with a Tunisian survey firm. Respondents can reply online or on the phone. Contact information stems from registration when we collected several contact details (telephone numbers and email addresses of two firm representatives). Firms are called up to 12 times or more until they are declared non-respondents. Surveys are conducted in the local language (Tunisian Arabic) and French. We train enumerators in cooperation with the survey institute for several days, including simulations and piloting. We conduct daily high-frequency checks and spot checks at the survey institute and use automatized logical checks for response consistency. If the respondent consented and responded on the phone, all audio recordings of flagged responses are reviewed, and if inconsistencies are not clarified, respondents are called again until clarification or categorization of refusal.

The second data source is administrative data from customs, social security, and the tax authority. The data comes from our political partners, the Tunisian Export Promotion Agency and the National Statistical Institute.⁹ The first data set is customs data. It provides information on firms' product-level export quantities, values, and destinations until October 2024. The only drawback of this data is that export of services is not recorded, while half of the sample are service firms. The second dataset is a firm-year panel that provides aggregated annual export sales values and quantities from customs and from the tax authority, which includes services firms. It also included information about firms' number of employees and wage bills, domestic sales and profits. The drawback of this dataset is that the latest currently available year is 2022 when the treatment started. Accordingly, the current draft does not include the analysis of this data yet.

The third data source is qualitative. First, we conduct long, qualitative interviews with the presidents of each consortium and some of its members starting in the second phase of the intervention when the consortia start operating independently. The interviews help us understand the group dynamics of the consortia and how the members use the consortium/network for their business, and inform the endline survey questionnaire. When conducting the interviews, no connection is made to the experiment, but interviews are requested to conduct research on barriers to female entrepreneurship in Tunisia. Second, we organized two focus groups with members from two consortia after one of the group-consulting workshops. A key interest was to understand the main barriers to female entrepreneurs in Tunisia for their export and to examine if they correspond to the barriers documented in the literature. The results are documented in Section 2. Third, a research assistant attended several meetings and travelled with the consortia representatives to two international trade fairs in Dubai and Morocco. This provided us with further insights into group dynamics and functioning of the consortia.

Fourth, we receive implementation data from our political partners. The data provides information about firms' participation in the group-consulting sessions and their use of the subsidy for participation in international trade fairs. We present the take-up statistics in Sections 3.3 and 6.5.

⁹We are indebted to Nadia Ali, Eric Verhoogen, Massimiliano Cali and Jawhar Abidi as well as our partners Lisa Menucha and Majed Khairi for their support.

4 Empirical strategy

4.1 Estimation

We estimate average treatment effects based on intention-to-treat (ITT) in an ANCOVA model as defined in [McKenzie \(2012\)](#):

$$Y_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Treatment_i + \Pi Y_{i,t=0} + \gamma M_{i,t=0} + S_i \theta + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where $Y_{i,t}$ is the given outcome variable measured post-treatment, $Treatment_i$ is an indicator for being assigned to treatment, $Y_{t=0}$ is the baseline value of the outcome variable, and $M_{i,t=0}$ a dummy variable indicating whether or not the baseline value is missing, S_i is a vector of randomization strata dummy variables, and ε_i is the error term. We follow [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#) in clustering standard errors on the consortium-level for treatment group firms and on the firm-level for control group firms. β_1 provides the intent-to-treat or average treatment effect, which is the effect of being selected to receive the treatment among the 176 firms. Given the small size of the firms and their differentiated products, it is unlikely that the stable unit treatment value assumption (SUTVA) is violated, e.g., by treated firms stealing business from firms in the control group.

Based on the invited firms' decision to participate in the consortium (year 1, midline) and their decision to remain in the consortium (year 2), we instrument take-up with treatment assignment to estimate the treatment effect on the treated (ToT):

$$Y_{i,t=1} = \beta_0 + \beta_2 Takeup_i + \Pi Y_{i,t=0} + \gamma M_{i,t=0} + S_i \theta + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

where $Takeup_i$ is an indicator whether firms' joined the consortium after year 1 and remained in the firm consortium after year 2 instrumented (predicted) via the exogenous treatment assignment in a Two-Stage Least Squares estimation. β_2 measures the impact for firms having decided to become a member of an export consortium.

4.2 Outcome measurement

We consider four different outcome dimensions. The first outcome dimension is female entrepreneurs' networks. We think about the consortia as a new network of business contacts, independent of family and existing contacts. To quantify and qualify female entrepreneurs' networks, we use the following indicators based on survey questions. First, we ask female entrepreneurs about the number of female and male entrepreneurs that they meet regularly to discuss business challenges. This provides us with a proxy for the size of female entrepreneurs' business networks. We also differentiate between contacts related and unrelated to family and between male and female contacts. Secondly, we ask respondents to rate the quality of their network on a scale from 1 to 10.

The second outcome dimension concerns female entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial confidence or empowerment. Exporting requires traveling abroad, negotiating and attracting international customers, and investing in export readiness while uncertain about potential returns. Moreover, existing literature has shown that an entrepreneurial mindset is important for entrepreneurial achievement ([Frese and Gielnik, 2014](#); [Campos et al., 2017](#)). We measure entrepreneurs' confidence through three conceptual proxies of "confidence" used in the existing literature ([Alibhai et al., 2019](#)), namely "locus of control",

”self-efficacy”, and ”sense of initiative”. For each dimension, we ask female entrepreneurs to affirm on a 5-point Likert scale a series of statements. Each statement asks about a different dimension of firm and export management. We normalize each question to a z-score and build the average of the z-scores for each dimension as well as across all three dimensions as in [Kling et al. \(2007\)](#).

Moreover, we conduct a list experiment as an additional source of evidence of female entrepreneurs’ confidence. One crucial part of (female) empowerment is independent decision-making, which is defined as independent decision-making in intra-household bargaining power toward male partners. This paper is interested in female entrepreneurs’ independence in business decision-making. Existing research has shown that male role models, e.g., fathers or other close family members, such as uncles or partners, are important predictors for women’s choice to engage in entrepreneurship ([Alibhai et al., 2019](#)). In our sample, 60 percent of the female entrepreneurs have one family members that is an entrepreneur. In the list experiment, we ask female entrepreneurs how many of the following statements apply to them, emphasizing that we do not know which of the statements apply to them. All female entrepreneurs see the same three initial, non-sensitive options.¹⁰ A randomly selected half of the respondents also see the sensitive option: ”I consult my husband (or another man in the family) before making strategic decisions for the company”. At midline, we re-randomized half of the treatment and half of the control firms to receive the question with and without the sensitive option. In response to early feedback that consulting one’s partner before taking important decisions can also be a sign of a functioning relationship rather than a lack of independence, we adapted the statement at midline to emphasize obligation : ”I feel obliged to consult my husband (or another man in the family before making decisions for the company.”

The third outcome dimension is knowledge transfer, measured as the adoption of management and export-related practices as well firm innovation. We measure management practices based on selected key outcomes indicators that were found to correlate strongly with the indicator used in [Bloom et al. \(2013, 2020\)](#). We measure export readiness based on selected questions used in export readiness assessments of export promotion agencies as well as applied in [Kim et al. \(2018\)](#); [Breinlich et al. \(2017\)](#). Finally, we measure innovation based on the Oslo Manual definition as significant improvements in product, process, marketing, or organizational innovation ([Cai and Szeidl, 2018](#)).

The fourth outcome dimension consists of firms’ business and export performance. We measure business performance through the standard self-reported survey indicators, such as annual sales in Tunisia, total annual sales, the annual number of employees (including differentiation between young and female workers), and annual profits. We measure export performance based on self-reported or administrative firms’ export sales, the number of export countries, and the income level of the main exporting destination. In the following section (section 4), we describe how we analyze this data.

5 Results - Main Effects

In this section, we show that the consortia enabled firms to export and grow their sales. In section 6, we study the mechanisms underlying the consortia’s economic effects.

¹⁰The three answer options are ”I always encourage and support my team”, ”I dreamed of being a successful woman when I was a child” and ”I try to do my best job”

5.1 Export Performance

We begin by examining the extensive margin of firms' export performance: Did the consortia help firms become exporters? Table 5 examines whether the consortia increased firms' likelihood to have exported in 2023 or the first six month of 2024, and the number of countries to which firms exported based on the endline survey. Column (1) shows firms invited to treatment were 16.5 percentage points ($p < 0.05$) and firms that joined the consortium at endline were 28.1 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) more likely to have exported in 2023 or 2024. The latter is equivalent to a 107% increase relative to a control mean of 0.26. How do these effects compare to results from other studies?

The effects are large. In comparison, subsidized trade fare participation increased Japanese firms' export likelihood by 9 percentage points, and market intelligence increased Danish firms' export likelihood by 8-9 percentage points - about a third of the consortia's effect (Makioka, 2021; Munch and Schaur, 2018). Consulting or information provision alone did not firms' export likelihood in Colombia and Vietnam (Kim et al., 2018; Iacovone et al., 2023). The effect size may reflect i) efficiency gains from being able to explore several potential export countries simultaneously thanks to the shared effort with other consortia members, ii) the bundled nature of the treatment, which combined supply-side aspects (e.g., consulting, knowledge spillovers from peers) and demand-side features (e.g., online marketing and trade fair visits). We explore the mechanisms further in Section 6.

Column (2), Table 5, investigates the intensive margin of export, namely, if the consortia enabled firms to export to more countries? The intention-to-treat results suggest a positive, but insignificant point estimate of 0.33 additional countries on average, while the point estimate of 0.56 additional export countries for firms that joined and remained in the consortium is weakly significant ($p < 0.1$). Half an additional export country corresponds to a 48.5% increase relative to control mean of 1.02. In Figure 16 in the appendix, we examine if the effect on export countries depends on firms' prior export experience. It is in particular firms that already had realised one export operation at baseline that managed to export to one additional market, while there is no difference with the control group for firms without one export operation at baseline.

Table 5: Export: Market Access Intensive and Extensive Margins

| | (1) Exported (Yes = 1) | (2) N. of Export countries |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | |
| Treatment | 0.165** (0.064) | 0.329 (0.228) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | |
| Consortium member | 0.281*** (0.094) | 0.560* (0.337) |
| EL control group mean | 0.26 | 1.02 |
| EL control group SD | 0.44 | 1.55 |
| Observations | 127 | 127 |
| BL controls | Yes | Yes |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes |

Notes: The outcome variable 'Exported' is based on firms' survey response to whether they exported in 2023 or the first six month of 2024. The 'Export countries' variable is winsorized at the 95th percentile as pre-specified. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in [McKenzie \(2012\)](#). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors are clustered on the firm-level for the control group and on the consortium-level for the treatment group following [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#) and reported in parentheses. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata and baseline values of the outcome variable. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

5.2 Business Performance

In the following, we investigate whether the consortia promoted firms' sales, both in terms of export and domestic sales, their profits and their number of employees.

In Table 6 we investigate first the results of the consortia on their sales (or revenue) in 2023. Column (1) presents the results for total sales in 2023 - when the consortia have been operating for one year. We estimate that firms invited to treatment increased their total sales by 91.5% ($p < 0.1$) and consortia members by 151.8% ($p < 0.05$). In column (2) and (3) we examine whether the increase is driven by domestic or export sales. The coefficients suggest domestic and export sales grew by 150% and 171% respectively, although the point estimates are not statistically significant. Given levels of domestic sales are about 2.5 times larger than export sales, the similar relative growth rates translates in much larger increases in domestic than export sales.

Is it surprising that domestic sales grow, and even more than export sales in total amounts? Only on first sight. In fact, there is nothing that restricted the firms to cooperate only in exporting. In contrast, the joint digital marketing and branding of the consortia likely increased firms outreach and notoriety with domestic clients. In addition, we show in Section 6 that consortia firms are significantly more likely to refer each other to clients and bid together for contracts. Finally, implementing oneself in an export market takes time, which is corroborated in our interviews with consortia members who suggest their firms are only starting their business in new export markets.

Where do the domestic sales come from, might consortia firms steal the business of control group firms, therefore violating the stable unit treatment value assumption (SUTVA)? This is unlikely for two

reasons. First, few firms in the sample produce the same product given products are very differentiated. Therefore, few firms compete for the same product and could steal each others sales. Second, the firms are small and the increases in sales are unlikely to have an effect on market shares. Given firms are located in different places across Tunisia, this holds even in local markets.

The effect on sales, however, is not matched with an equivalent effect on profits and employment. The results for profit are noisy; suggesting a significant increase at midline (1 year after treatment start), but no effect at endline (1 year after the consortium started operating). The noisy results on profit may have several reasons. One potential reason is that several firms in the treatment group reported negative profits in year 2, explaining that they invested in implementing themselves in new markets, increasing variance and reducing our power as well as suggesting investment may result in future profits.

Table 6: Business Performance: Sales 2023

| | (1) Total Sales | (2) Domestic Sales | (3) Export Sales |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | |
| Treatment | 0.915* (0.485) | 0.911 (0.672) | 1.017 (0.797) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | |
| Consortium member | 1.518** (0.673) | 1.500 (0.934) | 1.710 (1.150) |
| Control group mean | 11.03 | 10.09 | 3.82 |
| Control group SD | 4.14 | 4.67 | 5.55 |
| Observations | 119 | 119 | 124 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Notes: All outcome variables are winsorised at the 95th percentile and inverse hyperbolic sine transformed as pre-specified. 'Total', 'Domestic', and 'Export sales' are in units of Tunisian Dinar before transformation. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in McKenzie (2012). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors are clustered on the firm-level for the control group and on the consortium-level for the treatment group following Cai and Szeidl (2018) and reported in parentheses. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata and baseline values of the outcome variable. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

6 Results - Mechanisms

We expected the increase in exports and sales to be driven via four mechanisms (see Figure 6 for a visual theory of change): First, the consortia should expand female entrepreneurs business networks (section 6.1). Second, regular interaction with other entrepreneurs and/or experienced consultants in the group workshops should strengthen their entrepreneurial confidence (section 6.2) and, third, lead to knowledge transfer/human capital spillovers (section 6.3), e.g., in the form of learning about better management and export practices from peers or consultants, and innovation, e.g. by imitating peers. Fourth, the subsidy and joint participation in trade fairs should improve female entrepreneurs' export readiness.

6.1 Business Networks

Table 7 displays how the consortia have expanded and changed the composition of female entrepreneurs' business networks at the endline, two years after the start of the intervention. We define the business network as the number of people female entrepreneurs regularly discuss business during a regular month, and ask entrepreneurs to decompose their networks into female/male CEOs and friends and family. Column (1) shows that treatment group firms discuss on average with 3.3 more people and consortium members even with 5.8. The effects correspond to a 40% and 70% increase respectively and are significant at the 5 and 1 percent level.

Table 7: Business Networks: Size and Composition

| | (1) All persons | (2) CEOs | (3) Male CEOs | (4) Female CEOs | (5) Friend/ Family | (6) Male Friend/ Family | (7) Female Friend/Family |
|--|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | | | | | |
| Treatment | 3.3** (1.41) | 2.0** (0.92) | 0.5 (0.36) | 1.4** (0.72) | 1.0 (0.60) | 0.3 (0.32) | 0.8** (0.32) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | | | | | |
| Consortium member | 5.8*** (2.09) | 3.6*** (1.38) | 0.9* (0.54) | 2.5** (1.07) | 1.7* (0.90) | 0.6 (0.48) | 1.4*** (0.49) |
| Control group mean | 8.22 | 4.75 | 1.80 | 2.91 | 3.38 | 1.54 | 1.65 |
| Control group SD | 8.23 | 5.43 | 3.05 | 4.27 | 3.44 | 1.54 | 2.13 |
| Observations | 119 | 119 | 119 | 119 | 119 | 117 | 117 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | No |

Notes: The outcome is the number of people with whom the female entrepreneurs discuss business regularly in a regular month. All variables are winsorised at the 95th percentile as pre-specified. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in McKenzie (2012). Panel B documents IV estimates instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors are clustered on the firm-level for the control group and the consortium-level for the treatment group following Cai and Szeidl (2018) and reported in parentheses. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata, baseline values of the outcome, and a missing baseline dummy for the outcome variable when available. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

What are the characteristics of the new contacts? Columns (2)-(7) illustrate that 60% of the new contacts are other female entrepreneurs, to lesser extent new female friends and family as well as other male entrepreneurs, at least for consortium members. More specifically, Column (2) documents female entrepreneurs in the treatment group discuss business with 2 additional entrepreneurs and consortium members with 3.6, corresponding to a 42% and 75% percent increase, significant at the 5 and 1 percent level. Among those additional CEOs, 70% are other female entrepreneurs. Figure 10, in the appendix, shows that the firms in the treatment group met all but one of the female entrepreneurs that they regularly discuss business with via the consortium, emphasizing the effect the firms had in creating new and first connections between female entrepreneurs. For example, 22 female entrepreneurs, or about one-quarter of the firms in the control group, meet zero other female entrepreneurs regularly to discuss business at midline (endline numbers suggest the same is true in the second year after the intervention). The same applies to less than half or 9 firms in the treatment group, out of which 8 did

not take up the consortia intervention. A drawback might be that the female-only consortia did not create much interfirm linkages with male-led firms, which could be economically beneficial (Campos et al., 2015). At the endline, consortium members regularly discuss business with one additional male entrepreneur. Given there was no effect on contacts with any male person at the midline (see Table 17, suggesting once operational, the consortium may also facilitate linkages with male entrepreneurs.

Who benefitted most from the consortia? Figure 9 examines whether the network expansion effects depend on entrepreneurs' initial network size, splitting the sample by firms with less or more than 10 people that they regularly discuss business with at baseline. The results suggest it is firms with smaller initial business networks that discuss business with five additional people while there is no significant difference between treatment and control group firms with large baseline networks.

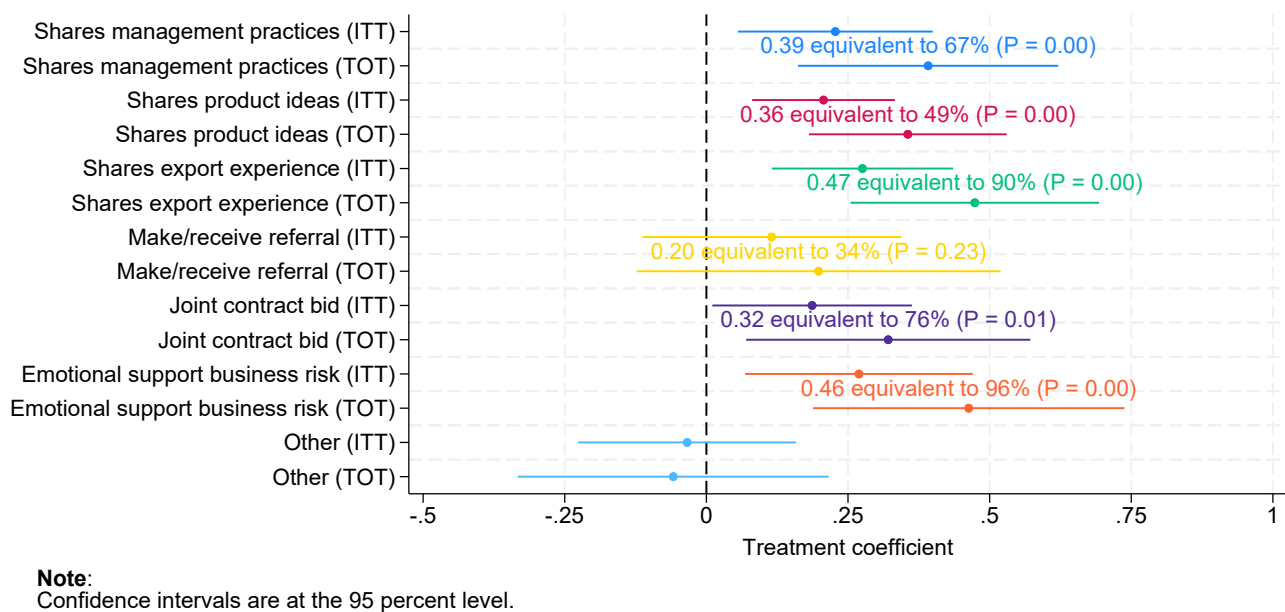


Figure 3: Network Use

Importantly, the treatment changed *how firms use their networks for business* (Figure 3, Table 18). Two years after the start of the intervention, treated firms are 23, 21, and 8 percentage points, and consortia members even 39, 36, and 47 percentage points, more likely to share information about management practices, product ideas, and export experience. This corresponds to a 67%, 49% and 90% increase relative to the control group endline mean, significant at the 1 percent level. Treated firms and consortia members are equally 12, 19, and 27 percentage points, and consortia members, even 20, 32, and 46 percentage points, more likely to make or have benefited from a referral to clients, submitted joint bids with other firms for contracts, and to have received emotional support vis-a-vis the risks and uncertainties of business and export from other entrepreneurs. While the effect on referrals is not statistically significant at conventional levels (CI 95% [-0.11;0.34]), all other effects are.

What is more, we were interested in (female) entrepreneurs' view of cooperation between entrepreneurs (Dimitriadis and Koning, 2019). Tunisian stakeholders and local (female) business consultants were skeptical about entrepreneurs' willingness to cooperate with other entrepreneurs due to cultural and business reasons. Female entrepreneurs invited to the consortia choose on average 0.3 more positive words than the control group when asked about their view of the cooperation with other

entrepreneurs, a 12.5 percent increase relative to a control group mean of 2.3 words (Table 16 and Figures 12 and 13). The increase is driven by firms that took up the intervention and, in particular, an increased view of other CEOs as *partners* (81 percent in the treatment group vs. 62 percent in the control group). Treated female entrepreneurs also choose fewer negative words when asked about the interaction between CEOs, although the effect is not statistically significant.

In sum, the consortia have enabled female entrepreneurs to meet almost twice as many other female entrepreneurs as they would have otherwise; for some female entrepreneurs, these were their first interactions with other female entrepreneurs. Crucially, female entrepreneurs also use their networks differently for business, including knowledge and experience exchange about management, export, and innovation, as well as directly cooperating in growing their business, e.g. via joint contract bids, and providing each other emotional support to remain confident vis-a-vis business and export challenges.

6.2 Entrepreneurial Confidence

The treatment significantly increased female entrepreneurs' belief in their own ability (efficacy), which we refer to as entrepreneurial confidence, but not their sense of control over their business environment, which we refer to as locus of control.

We measure entrepreneurial confidence and entrepreneurial locus of control through a series of self-affirmatory questions, building on earlier work (Alibhai et al., 2019; Campos et al., 2017). We adjust the survey items to the specific context of export and female entrepreneurs. For both dimensions, we ask female entrepreneurs to evaluate on a 7-Likert scale to which extent they agree with three statements. At the endline, the three statements used for entrepreneurial confidence target entrepreneurs' perceived ease of managing their business, accessing funding (which was listed as main barriers in focus group interviews), and motivating and managing employees. The three statements used for the entrepreneurial locus of control relate to entrepreneurs' ease of establishing new business contacts, including internationally, mastering administrative and logistical processes involved in exporting and reconciling private and professional life.¹¹

Treated entrepreneurs have 0.228 standard deviations ($p < 0.05$) more confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities than entrepreneurs in the control group (Columns (1) and (2) in Table 8). The effect is even stronger for entrepreneurs that join initially and remain in the consortium over two years: the remainers' confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities increases by 0.457 standard deviations. How big is the effect? The effect is equivalent to moving a female entrepreneur from the 25th to the 50th or 50th to the 75th percentile of entrepreneurial confidence in the control group. In comparison to existing studies (Alibhai et al., 2019), the effect size is large, persists and even becomes stronger two years after the intervention. The effect corresponds to an 8% increase in the first year and an 11.7% increase in the second year relative to the control group mean, while a business training with psychological mindset elements in Alibhai et al. (2017) led to a 2% increase one year after the intervention and dissipated in the following year. The intervention in this paper and in Alibhai et al. (2019) have much in common: a similar target group (e.g., female entrepreneurs managing firms for 6-7 years) and a similar intervention (e.g., blending group-level training/consulting/coaching with business skills and encouraging network formation).

¹¹We adjusted the questions slightly between midline and endline. The midline questions had only a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 8: Entrepreneurial Confidence: Efficacy and Locus of Control

| | (1) ML Efficacy | (2) EL Efficacy | (3) ML Locus of Control | (4) EL Locus of Control |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | | |
| Treatment | 0.228** (0.110) | 0.265** (0.129) | 0.177* (0.095) | -0.156 (0.111) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | | |
| Consortium member | 0.297** (0.123) | 0.457** (0.196) | 0.233** (0.109) | -0.276* (0.167) |
| Control group mean | 0.00 | -0.00 | -0.00 | -0.00 |
| Control group SD | 0.77 | 0.82 | 0.75 | 0.69 |
| Observations | 135 | 119 | 134 | 119 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

All dependent variables are indexes calculated based on z-scores as described in [Anderson \(2008\)](#). Each specification includes controls for randomization strata, baseline outcome, and a missing baseline dummy. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in [McKenzie \(2012\)](#). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered on the consortia-level for treatment group firms and on the firm-level for control group firms following [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#). *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

Two factors may explain why the consortia intervention led to larger and more lasting effects. First, several consultants implementing the consortia intervention were experienced business owners themselves, while the conductors in [Alibhai et al. \(2017\)](#) are young university graduates who receive three weeks of training before acting as workshop conductors. When [Alibhai et al. \(2019\)](#) conducts a heterogeneity analysis based on whether the conductor is an entrepreneur him-/herself, they find effects of equivalent size for conductors with entrepreneurship experience. Second, the consortia intervention created lasting network ties between entrepreneurs, who continued sharing knowledge and emotional support after the group workshops ended (Table 18), explaining why the effects lasted. This touches on the question of what drives the effects on entrepreneurs' heightened belief in their entrepreneurial ability. The network services received, documented in Table 18, and the knowledge and coaching received from consultants, documented in Tables 9 and 34, seem both to positively affect female entrepreneurs' belief in their ability.

Next, we examine the treatments' effect on entrepreneurs sense of control over their business environment (Columns (3) and (4) in Table 8). The results suggest an interesting dynamic, at first sight surprising. At midline, treated firms feel 0.177 ($p < 0.1$) and consortium members 0.233 ($p < 0.05$) more control over their business environment. At the endline, the point estimate has changed signs and turned negative, although statistically insignificant for the ITT and weakly significant ($p < 0.1$) for the treatment effect on the female entrepreneurs that joined the consortium. This seems to be driven by two aspects. First, the index component that has taken the deepest switch is entrepreneurs' ease of establishing new business contacts, including internationally. While the midline was conducted when the consortium was created, this question was largely theoretical for all entrepreneurs without export ex-

perience. At the endline, the consortium members had all at least visited one international trade fair or participated in a B2B abroad, which was, for many entrepreneurs, the first such experience. Qualitative interviews and the documentation of a research assistant who accompanied two consortia to two trade fairs suggest that an important share of the female entrepreneurs was taken by surprise and realised part of the formal export requirements, e.g. having an international quality certification and informal requirements export requirements, e.g. comfortable presenting and convincing international buyers of their products. The second explanatory factor is, that we changed one of the questions composing the locus of control index; namely, we included a question on reconciling personal and professional life. While the negative point estimate for the question is insignificant, it contributed at least partially when aggregating the three questions in an index.

Overall, we interpret the results as strong evidence that the consortia strengthened female entrepreneurs' belief in their own entrepreneurial ability through exchange with entrepreneurship-experienced female consultants and knowledge exchange, encouragement, and emotional support from other female entrepreneurs regarding business challenges.

6.3 Knowledge Transfer

A key intermediary outcome and mechanism is knowledge transfer. Knowledge transfer could occur between the firms in the same consortia, as in [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#) and [Asiedu et al. \(2023\)](#). Knowledge could also flow from consultants/experts to the treatment group firms, as in [Iacovone et al. \(2021\)](#). We think about knowledge transfer in terms of management practices (Section 6.3.1) and innovation (Section 6.3.2) driven by observing and imitating innovative solutions from other firms in the same consortium.

6.3.1 Management Practices

The consortia intervention improved management practices. Treated firms seem to learn about formal management practices, e.g., bookkeeping, from consultants and discuss ad-hoc management challenges with peers. The effect size is similar to earlier work on firm network interventions with no consultancy component ([Cai and Szeidl, 2018](#)), suggesting that if network members' knowledge of management practices is generally low, external expert knowledge input into the network is essential.

Treated firms have 0.14 standard deviations ($p < 0.1$) and consortium members 0.19 ($p < 0.05$) standard deviations higher management practices index at midline when one year of group-consulting workshops was completed (Column (1), Table 9). The effect increases to 0.16 and 0.28 standard deviations with the same levels of statistical significance at the endline when the consortium was operational for one year (Column (2), Table 9). Considering each index component separately as an outcome variable suggests that the effects are driven by improvements in firms' monitoring of production performance indicators and basic accounting principles, such as distinguishing personal and private accounts (Table 22, appendix).

When asking firms in the survey about their source of information regarding new management practices, consortium members are 22 percentage points ($p < 0.1$) and 29 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) more likely to indicate consultants or training, and 47 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) less likely to indicate friends and family. This corresponds to a 45% and 161% increase in learning about management

practices via consultants and training and a 77% reduction in learning from friends and family relative to the control group mean at the endline. The effects document the substitution of knowledge sources thanks to the intervention from informal knowledge of friends and family to the consultants and the training they received from them in the intervention. Finally, treated firms and consortia members are less likely to learn about management practices from other entrepreneurs than the control group at midline and endline. At first, this is surprising. Given we have shown in section 6.1 that between-firm exchange is intensified and entrepreneurs in the treatment group are 23 percentage points more likely to exchange about management practices with other entrepreneurs, we rationalize that entrepreneurs had similar knowledge of management practices and rather discussed ad-hoc management questions, but learned about new, formal practices from consultants.

Table 9: Management Practices Index (MPI): ML and EL

| | (1) ML MPI | (2) EL MPI |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | |
| Treatment | 0.143* (0.083) | 0.163* (0.082) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | |
| Consortium member | 0.190** (0.094) | 0.276** (0.119) |
| Control group mean | 0.01 | -0.02 |
| Control group SD | 0.60 | 0.57 |
| Observations | 139 | 123 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | Yes | Yes |

Notes: All dependent variables are indexes calculated based on z-scores as described in [Anderson \(2008\)](#). Each specification includes controls for randomization strata, baseline outcome, and a missing baseline dummy. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in [McKenzie \(2012\)](#). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered on the consortia-level for treatment group firms and on the firm-level for control group firms following [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#). *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

To approximate the economic magnitude of the effects, we compare the index with similar studies ([Cai and Szeidl, 2018](#)) and calculate a management practices adoption rate ([Bloom et al., 2013, 2019; Iacovone et al., 2021](#)). Regarding the management index, the effect size corresponds to the 0.2 standard deviations in [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#). Given there was no consulting component in [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#), it suggests either knowledge of formal management practices was insufficient among network peers or the knowledge exchange between firms was not intensive enough, e.g. due to meetings being held in neutral locations rather than at the firms' premises as in [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#). Regarding the management practices adoption rate, the estimates suggest the treatment increased adoption by 5.9 and 6.6 percentage points at midline and endline (Table 23, appendix). The effect size is roughly a sixth of the 35 percentage point increase in [Bloom et al. \(2013\)](#) and [Bloom et al. \(2019\)](#), and smaller

than the 8-12 percentage points in [Iacovone et al. \(2021\)](#). Given that group training in the consortia intervention had only 20 per cent of the face-to-face hours between firms and consultants in [Iacovone et al. \(2021\)](#), the impact of the consortia intervention is rather strong. However, the firms in the consortia intervention are much smaller, less experienced and have lower management practices at baseline, which made it easier to move the needle on simple adjustments, e.g. distinguishing personal and professional accounts. In contrast, the sample in [Iacovone et al. \(2021\)](#) consists of manufacturing firms in the automobile industry.

We measure management practices via 15 indicators based on core ideas of the Management and Organizational Practices Survey (MOPS) ([Bloom and Van Reenen, 2007](#); [Bloom et al., 2019](#)) and business practices for small firms in low-and middle-income countries ([McKenzie and Woodruff, 2017](#)). Due to survey fatigue, we focus on performance monitoring and employee incentives from the MOPS and accounting and financial planning from [McKenzie and Woodruff \(2017\)](#). More precisely, we ask firms at the endline whether they measured their firms' performance in terms of financial, production, input quality, stocks, employees, and delivery, and at what frequency. Moreover, we ask firms whether they followed key accounting and financial planning practices, such as maintaining an up-to-date written or digital budget and/or business plan, calculating costs and profits for each product, distinguishing personal and professional accounts, and providing employee performance incentives. For each indicator, we calculate the z-score as in [Bloom and Van Reenen \(2007\)](#) and [Anderson \(2008\)](#), and take an average of all z-scores as a management practices index.

6.3.2 Innovation

We first examine whether the consortia intervention has changed entrepreneurs' source of inspiration for innovations. Table 25, Columns (1) and (2) show that the treated firms are 15 ($p > 0.1$, insignificant) and 18 ($p < 0.05$) percentage points more likely to have been inspired by consultants or other entrepreneurs. For consortium members, the effect is stronger at 26 ($p < 0.1$) and 31 ($p < 0.05$) percentage points. For treated firms, this corresponds to an increase of 90% for consultants and 100% for entrepreneurs relative to the endline control group mean. Next, we investigate whether the change in the source of inspiration for innovation changed the extent of innovation.

We consider both product and process innovation. Within product innovations, we distinguish between developing new products and improving products. Note that, in general, even new products correspond to new variants, e.g., starting to sell carob molasses on top of carob powder rather than entering a new category of products. For process innovation, we measure changes in business practices related to production processes and technologies, pricing, marketing and logistics, and supplier choice and terms of conditions. Table 10, Columns (1) and (2) show that there is no significant difference in the number of product innovations or product improvements between the treatment and control group. For well-known complexities of measuring innovation in firm surveys, we follow [Cirera and Muzi \(2020\)](#) in asking firms to provide an example for product and process innovations and correct their initial answers manually. For the corrected variables, we only code improved or new products as such if the example illustrates it convincingly.

The treatment has a mixed effect on process innovations. Treated firms are 16 ($p < 0.05$) and consortium members 27 ($p < 0.01$) percentage points more likely to have changed their pricing methods. Why did treated firms adjust their pricing? First, pricing was one of the topics entrepreneurs discussed

in one-to-one coaching sessions with the consultants who helped the entrepreneurs, e.g., to conduct cost estimations, negotiate prices, and account for differential logistic costs on export markets (see Table 24 in the appendix). Second, the treatment might have equally helped firms improve their pricing through discussing prices with other entrepreneurs and visiting international trade fairs. On the contrary, treated firms are 16 ($p < 0.05$) and consortium members 27 ($p < 0.01$) percentage points less likely to have introduced new marketing methods. One potential explanation may be that consortium members benefit from the joint marketing via the consortium and did therefore invest less in developing new marketing channels.

How do the effects on innovation compare with other studies with similar interventions? Regarding product innovation, Cai and Szeidl (2018), Table IV, find regular group meetings improved product innovation, defined as new or improved products, by 8.2 percentage points. Asiedu et al. (2023), Table A25, find networking via phone with other female entrepreneurs increases product innovation, defined as new or improved products, by 6.2 percentage points. Regarding process innovation, Cai and Szeidl (2018) do not report their findings even though their online appendix suggests they included process innovation questions at endline. Asiedu et al. (2023) find an 8 percentage points increase in the likelihood to make any change in business practices, equivalent to process innovations, including new or improved processes, new marketing or selling channels, hiring or motivating workers, or relationships with suppliers. There are several reasons that could explain why the consortia intervention did not have the same positive effect as the cited alternative network interventions. First, the control group mean innovation is significantly higher in our sample. Two-thirds of the firms in the control group report product or process innovations in our sample, in comparison with 15% in Asiedu et al. (2023) and 12% in Cai and Szeidl (2018). Given (self-reported) innovation levels are four to five times as high in this sample, it suggests that either firms are very innovative and remained innovative, or there is a measurement issue, e.g., due to online and telephone surveys that persists despite our manual corrections. Second, an alternative explanation may be that firms shifted limited resources from innovation to exporting, a mechanism documented recently in small firms (Bergin et al., 2024). However, given we do not find a reduction in innovation relative to control, this explanation seems less likely. Third, it could be that firms' knowledge domains were too similar given they operate in the same sector. Cai and Szeidl (2018) and Asiedu et al. (2023) regroup firms from different sectors. The latter suggests network interventions that target innovation should aim for diversity. In contrast, networking interventions like this one that target sales promotion likely require a degree of product complementarity that would not spur (but also not hinder) innovation.

Table 10: Innovation: Improved or New Products

| | (1) Improved products | (2) New products | (3) Both | (4) No innovation |
|--|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | | |
| Treatment | -0.062 (0.080) | 0.012 (0.067) | -0.025 (0.071) | 0.026 (0.054) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | | |
| Consortium member | -0.107 (0.119) | 0.021 (0.099) | -0.042 (0.106) | 0.045 (0.082) |
| Control group mean | 0.68 | 0.66 | 0.52 | 0.16 |
| Control group SD | 0.47 | 0.48 | 0.50 | 0.37 |
| Observations | 130 | 130 | 130 | 128 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Notes: All dependent variables are dummies [0;1]. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata, baseline outcome, and a missing baseline dummy. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in McKenzie (2012). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered on the consortia-level for treatment group firms and on the firm-level for control group firms following Cai and Szeidl (2018). *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

6.4 Export Readiness

The treatment has improved firms' export readiness in three specific dimensions: trade fair participation, knowledge of trade agreements with, and access to Sub-Saharan markets. Trade fair participation was one of the subsidized activities in the second year of the intervention, and access to Sub-Saharan markets was a specific goal of the program.

We first examine whether the treatment had an effect on firms' general and Sub-Sahara-specific export readiness at the endline (Table 26). Column (1) suggests no difference between the treatment and control groups regarding our export readiness index. The index is formed by averaging z-scores for a series of binary questions such as having an export manager, participating in an international trade fair, having a business partner abroad, holding an international certification or having invested in a sales and distribution structure abroad. On the contrary, Column (2) illustrates that treated firms have a 0.176 standard deviation ($p < 0.05$) and consortium members a 0.3 standard deviation ($p < 0.05$) higher Sub-Sahara export readiness index.

We further explore the sub-components of each index in Table 28. The null effect on the general export readiness level masks a heterogeneity between the subcomponents. Column (2) shows that treated firms are 33 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) and consortium members 56 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) more likely to have participated in international trade fairs. This is equivalent to an 89% and 151% increase relative to the endline control group mean. We interpret this as evidence that the firms have been put into contact with potential international clients thanks to the subsidized trade fairs visits (recall Table 4) but have not (yet) engaged in further investments, e.g., in a sales structure abroad, or did not make organizational changes, e.g., appointing an employee solely responsible for managing the

export business. In terms of Sub-Sahara Africa-specific export readiness indicators, Table 27 shows treated firms are 25, 28, and 7 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) and consortium members 41, 47, and 12 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) more likely to have a client or business partner in a Sub-Saharan country or to have received funding to export to a Sub-Saharan market. At midline, we additionally document that treated firms are 45 and 42 percentage points more likely to know Tunisia's trade agreements.

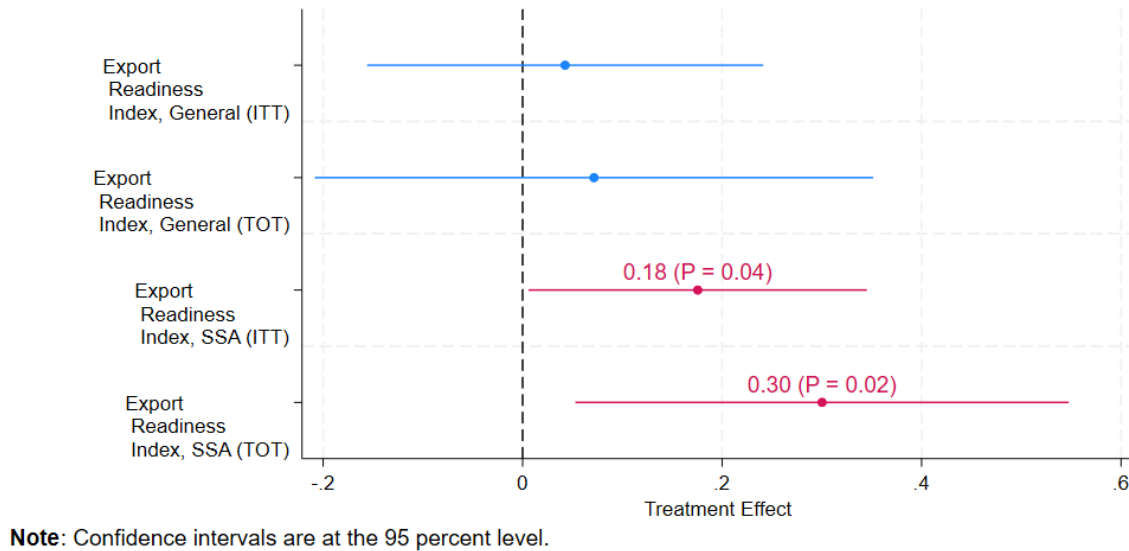


Figure 4: Export readiness indexes

6.5 Take-up

Finally, we examine what pre-treatment characteristics determine whether firms decide to join and remain in the consortium and how firms perceive the interaction with other businesses.

Two-thirds and half of the invited firms decided to join the consortium at midline and endline, respectively. Based on descriptive statistics and qualitative interviews with consortia members, differences in export experience and firm size or, more generally, firm maturity and personal conflicts explain the participation decision for two-thirds of the dropouts. Another third of the dropouts simply did not show up. Several firms stated in qualitative interviews that the consortia creation and operation process was complicated by firms' heterogeneous maturity, capabilities, and growth orientation. This led to some (not all) larger, more mature firms exiting the consortia while smaller, less export-experienced firms remained in the consortium. This is the case for the Agro-Food, Handicraft and Consulting Services consortium. A similar dynamic was observed in the Digital Services consortium but in the opposite direction as smaller, less experienced firms were in the minority and quit the consortium at midline.

While the initial consortia creation phase was shaped by a positive, cooperative spirit and a sense of mutual empowerment among female entrepreneurs, personal conflicts over the allocation of resources and decision-making (power) and group dynamics kicked in during the second year when the consortium became operational. At midline, consortium members chose 0.4 more positive terms (+15%) and 0.25 less negative terms (-53%) when asked to select the three most fitting among 10 terms describing their view of the interaction between CEOs. The positive term partnership drove these results. At endline, there was no significant overall difference anymore. Still, some consortia were significantly more

likely to select negative terms, e.g. conflict or jealousy, while others were significantly more likely to select positive terms, e.g. cooperate. These results are corroborated in qualitative interviews. Overall, the evidence on take-up and group dynamics suggests improving selection, e.g., by selecting more homogenous firms in terms of maturity and size or entrepreneurs with more cooperative psychological traits, and establishing conflict resolution mechanisms could further improve the intervention.

Table 30 shows that the following stylized facts apply to three among the four - the agro-food, the handicraft, and the business service consortium - while the fourth consortium, digital services, presents an opposite selection dynamic.

Consortia participation seems to be driven by more sociable female entrepreneurs with twice as many business contacts outside families who felt more negative about the prevalent interaction among CEOs in their environment. Joiners have almost twice as many, 11 vs. 6.5, business contacts outside their families with whom they met 50 percent more often in the past three months to discuss business. At the same time, joiners also felt ex-ante considerably more pessimistic about the interaction between CEOs as they selected 0.3 or 57 percent more negative words to describe it. Joiners were unambiguously motivated by "becoming part of a female business network to learn from other female CEOs".

These female entrepreneurs predominantly own and manage much younger and smaller firms with only half as many employees and a third of the domestic sales of those who did not join the consortium. Joiners manage or own firms created four years before program participation, while dropout firms existed already for eight years, four years more. Joiners count 6 employees, 4 employees less than drop-outs on average. In a similar realm, joiners generate roughly 113 thousand Dinar in domestic sales on average, which is less than a third of the 364 thousand Dinar that the dropouts generate on average. This is reflected in proportionally smaller average profits among joiners.

What is more, consortia participants are much less experienced and performing in terms of export than those that dropped out. Roughly a third of the joiners exported or invested in exporting in 2021, while about half of the drop-outs exported and seventy percent invested in export. This is reflected in the below (above) average export readiness scores among joiners (dropouts) and resulted in starkly different average export sales of 13 thousand Dinar among joiners vs. 260 thousand among drop-outs. While true across the three consortia, this pattern is particularly pronounced for the agro-food consortia where the largest 20 percent of invited firms or all firms with more than 400.000 Tunisian Dinar in sales in Tunisia dropped out. The drop-outs were also much more performing in terms of export: 63 percent reported positive export sales (vs. 14 percent among the takers) and 88 percent positive export investments (vs. 29 percent among takers).

As mentioned above, the selection dynamic in the digital consortium defies and reverses the above pattern. The firms that opted to join the digital services consortium outperform the dropouts in all dimensions. Joiners are more likely to report positive investment in exports (71 vs. 0 percent), have 300 thousand Dinar more domestic and 210 thousand Dinar higher export sales on average, resulting in roughly three times as much generated profit and almost double the number of employees (11 vs. 6). What is more, the joiners are considerably older (9 vs. 5 years), have larger networks, report more innovations and better management practices.

In conclusion, we observe two opposite selection dynamics. In three consortia, younger and smaller firms decide to cooperate in setting up a joint consortium to market their products jointly, and larger,

more established firms quit. In the fourth group, smaller and less export-oriented companies dropped out and larger, more export-experienced companies joined. These selection dynamics suggest that companies prefer to cooperate with peers of the same caliber and performance. For example, the standard variation in a z-score size index¹² is nine times smaller among the joiners than those invited to join the agro-food, handicraft, or professional business service consortia.

7 Conclusion

In this paper, we use a randomized controlled trial to measure the effect of female export consortia on firms' export and business performance, and a series of intermediary outcomes. We find significant and large effects on firms' export likelihood and their sales two years after the start of the intervention. The consortium also expanded female entrepreneurs' business networks, resulting in human capital spillovers and strengthening their belief in their own entrepreneurial abilities. We now discuss some of the implications of the results.

First, this paper provides proof-of-concept that firms small can overcome the fixed costs of export if incentivized to cooperate and share them within a business association, a consortium. Given only six percent of respondents to a World Economic Forum survey believe small firms have benefited from globalisation and the stark concentration in export markets in a few large firms (World Bank, 2020; Freund and Pierola, 2015; Zavala, 2023), there is ample opportunity for government agencies in low and middle-income countries around the world to experiment with different approaches to incentivize and organize cost-sharing arrangements for fixed export market access costs. Consortia might be only potential mechanism to achieve such an arrangement. Other legal formats, e.g. long-term contracts, cooperatives or paying collectively for an export representative may achieve similar or even better results. Organizing collective action via a government agency that coordinates private actors could also be applied to other types of fixed costs that are prohibitive for small firms. For example, multiple small firms could share the fixed costs of adopting a new technology, e.g., small farmers could share the costs of a water-saving technology to combat water scarcity or the fixed costs of investing in cooling houses for export crops.

Second, improving female-entrepreneurs access to business associations, potentially female-only or at least including women-specific events seem to come with several benefits, but also some trade-offs. We see three key advantages of female-only groups. First, the consortia meeting documentation suggests that the shared gender identity played an important role in terms of initial trust-creation, solidarity among female entrepreneurs, and enthusiasm for joining the group activities. Second, the safe space enabled often very personal exchanges, including about traumatizing experiences, that are hard to imagine in a gender mixed consortium. Third, similar government interventions may be particularly successful in contexts with strong traditional gender roles where female entrepreneurs have few role models and have to fight strong stereotypes and preconceptions as they foster new linkages with similar minded peers, in particular for entrepreneurs with small initial networks. Having said this, we cannot exclude that other benefits, such as heightened entrepreneurial confidence and peer-to-peer knowledge, experience, and ideas exchange as well as emotional support regarding business risks would have also accrued to female entrepreneurs in mixed consortia. Importantly, the results on management practices,

¹²The size index is an average of the z-scores of employees, total sales, and profits

which were improved rather thanks to knowledge input from consultants than peers, suggest that some external knowledge input maybe necessary if the most peers within the group have low prior knowledge. The female-only focus may also cement female entrepreneurs focus on sectors with lower returns and prevent cross-overs into male domains or linkage-creation with influential male-owned firms that would be economically beneficial (Campos et al., 2015).

For future work, it would be promising to test gender-mixed vs. female-only consortia, improve targeting, and reducing cooperation frictions within the groups. First, cross-randomising female with male entrepreneurs may provide access to promising business opportunities and/or more experienced peers (Campos et al., 2015); yet, there might be a trade-off regarding trust creation and depth of personal exchange that certainly contributed to strengthening female entrepreneurs heightened belief in their own entrepreneurial ability. Second, selecting more homogenous firms in terms of their maturity and capacity as well as entrepreneurs with cooperative psychometric traits could improve the functionality of groups. And, third, one should not be mistaken in thinking communication and cooperation happens naturally - communication trainings and professional conflict resolution mechanisms will help further increase the effectiveness of such group level interventions.

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8 Appendices

8.1 Figures

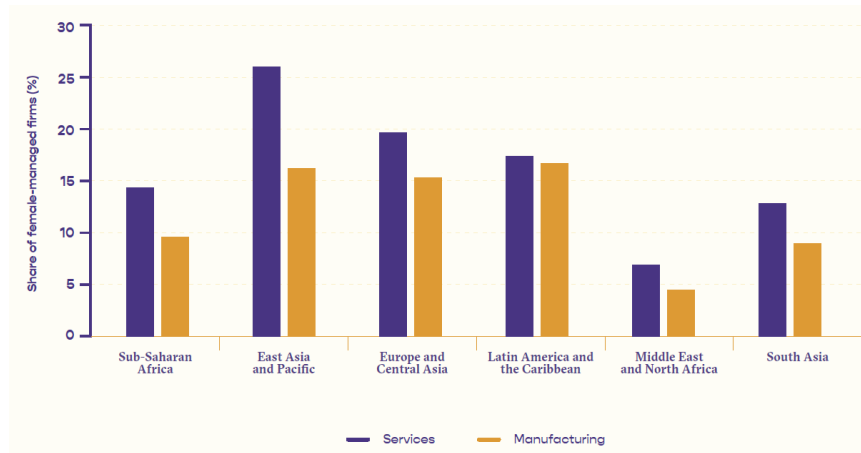


Figure 5: Female-managed firms, by region
World Bank (2019, p.123)

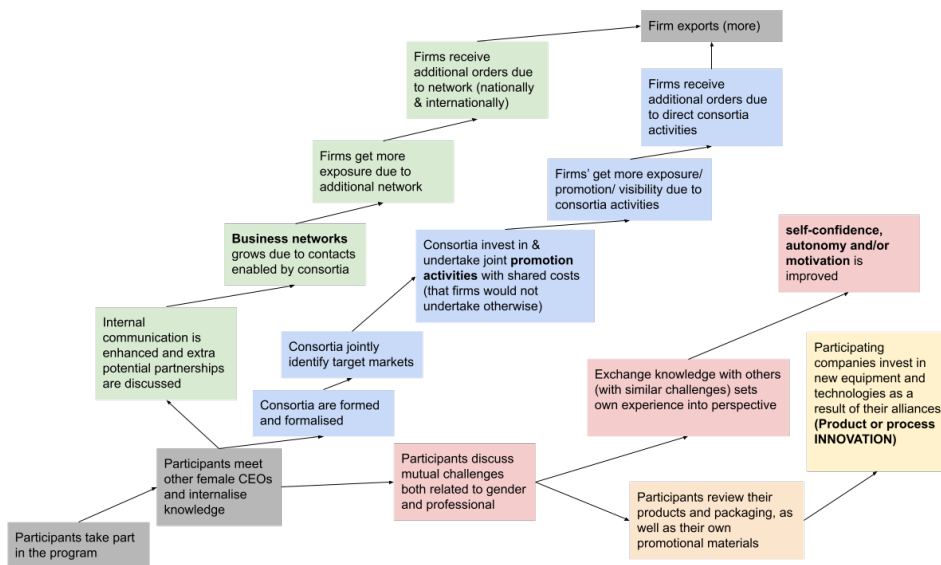


Figure 6: Theory of Change developed before the program started

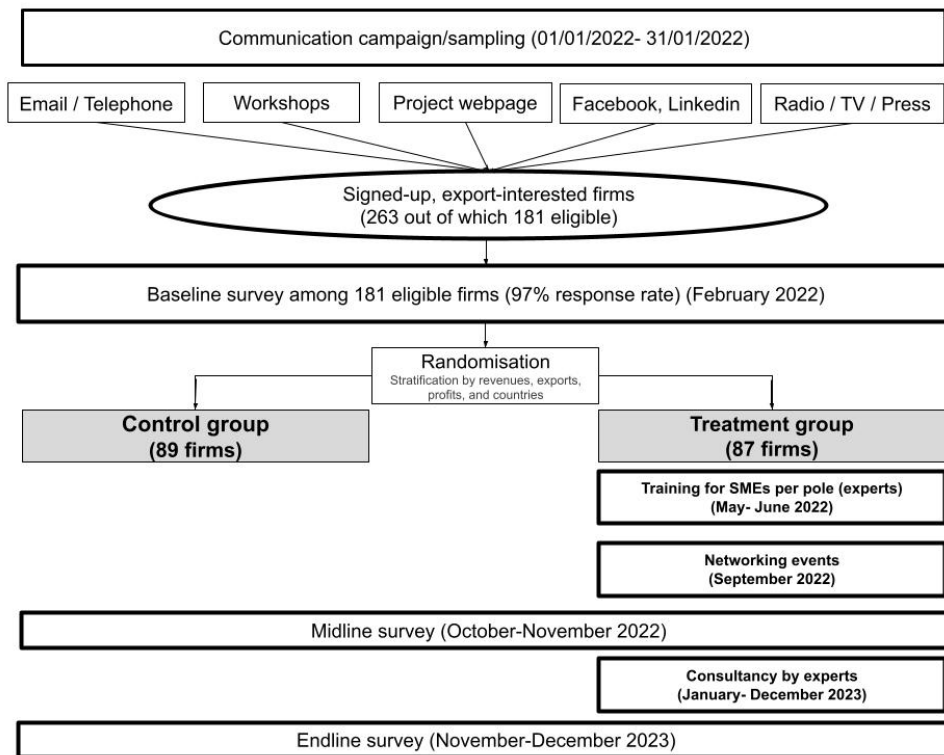


Figure 7: Study design flow chart and timeline

| Questions | About |
|-----------|---|
| | Introduction |
| Q1-3 | Essence of the enterprise |
| Q4-7 | Knowledge exchange & innovation |
| Q8-12 | Networking size / business contacts |
| Q13-19 | Management practices |
| Q20 | Marketing practices |
| Q21-27 | Export management readiness /export outcomes |
| Q28-31 | Accounting |
| Q32-38 | Characteristics of the enterprise including the gender aspect |
| Q39-45 | Expectations of the enterprise |
| Q46-47 | Contact information |

Figure 8: Baseline Questionnaire

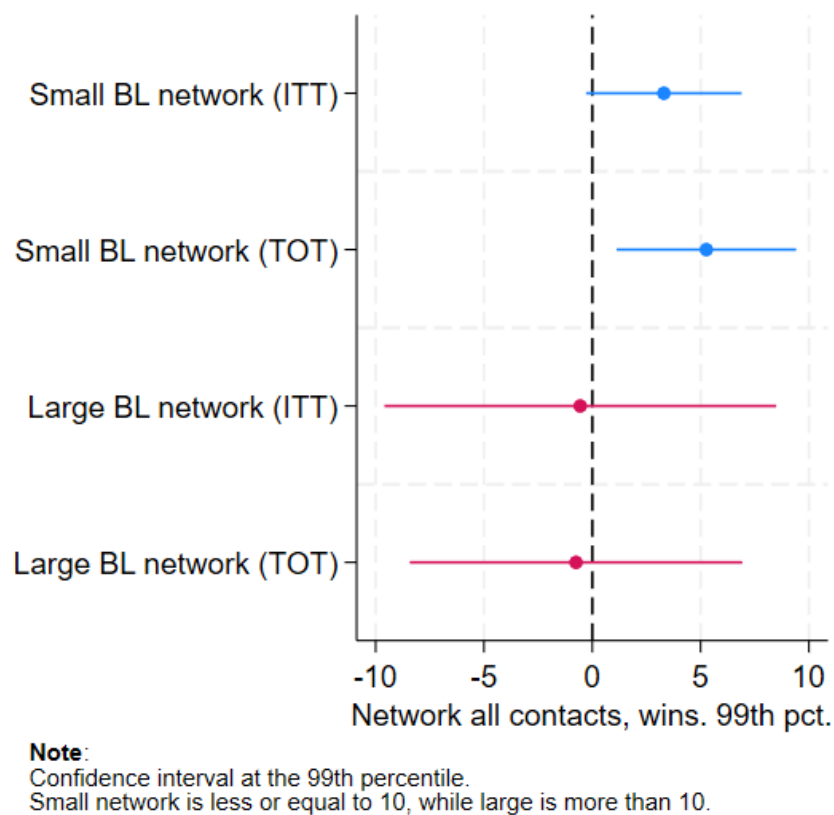
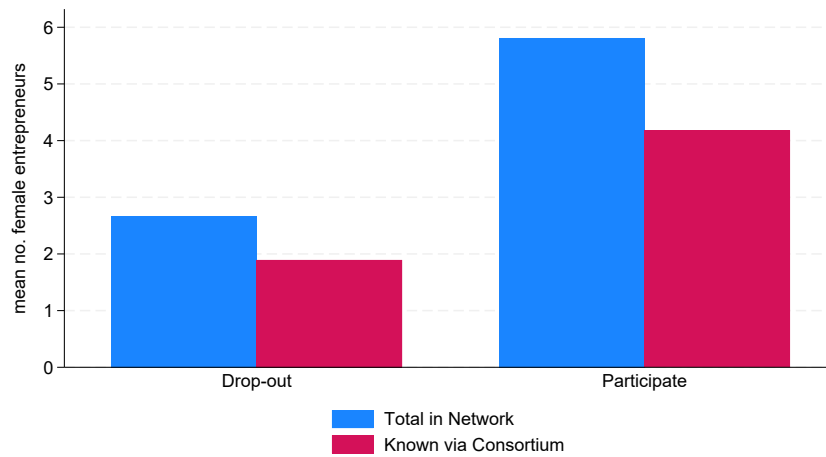


Figure 9: Heterogeneity in network expansion by small vs. large baseline number of contacts.



Note: Sample : Endline respondents in the treatment group.

Figure 10: Average number of female entrepreneurs encountered in the consortia relative to the total average number of female entrepreneurs with whom firms in the treatment group regularly discuss business by drop-outs vs. consortia members at endline.

10. **net_coop** Choose the 3 words that best describe how you think CEOs interact with each other in business.

3 POSSIBLE ANSWERS.

| | | | |
|---------------|---|-------------|----|
| Win | 1 | Retreat | 6 |
| Communication | 2 | Partnership | 7 |
| Trust | 3 | Adversary | 8 |
| Beat | 4 | Connect | 9 |
| Power | 5 | Dominate | 10 |

Figure 11: Survey question regarding female entrepreneurs perception of the interaction between CEOs in business.

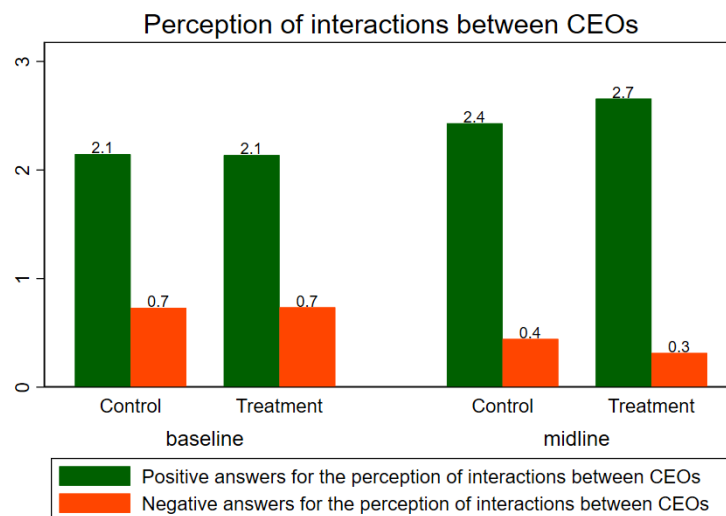


Figure 12: Perception of interactions

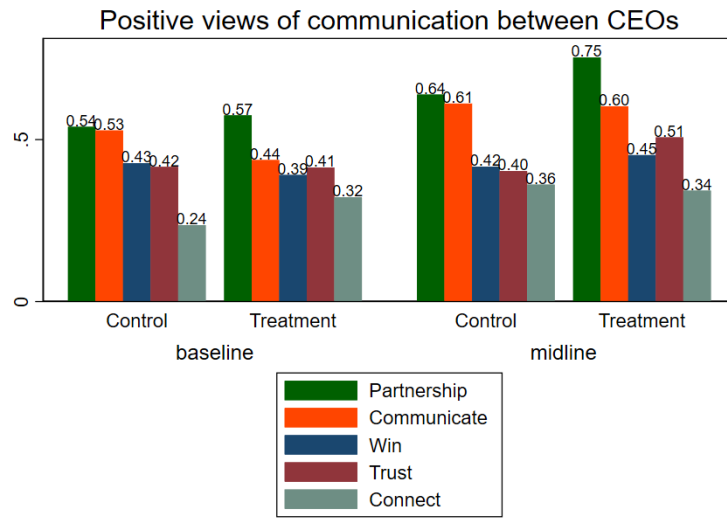


Figure 13: Most common word selected in positive interactions

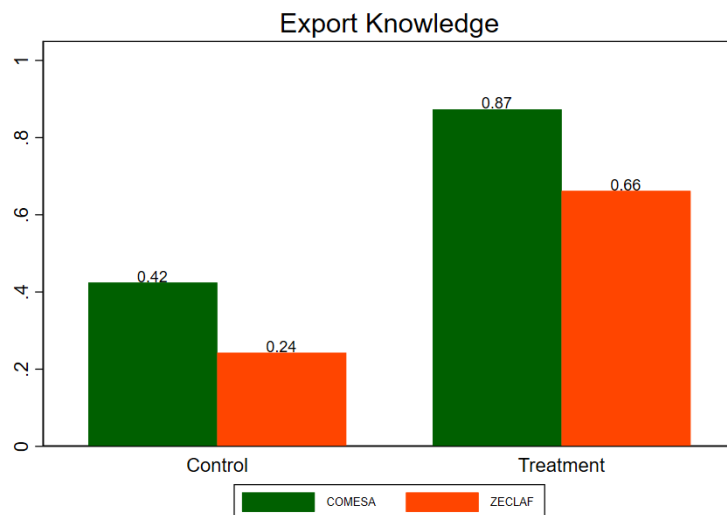


Figure 14: Knowledge about African Trade Agreements

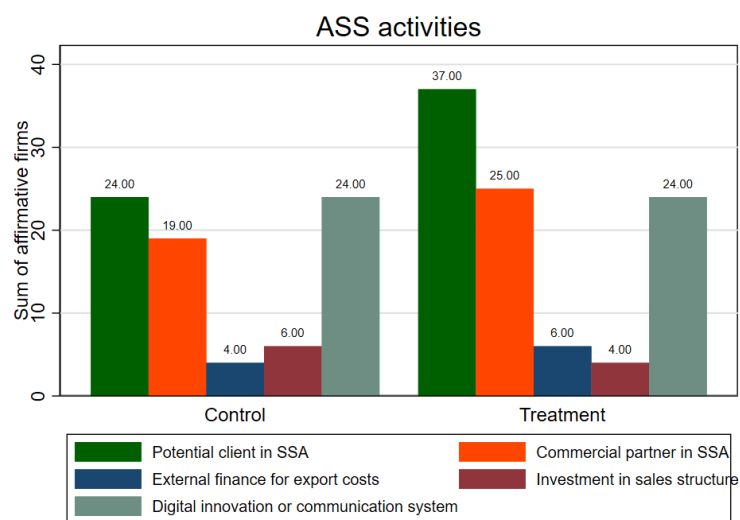


Figure 15: Actions done in Sub-Saharan African markets

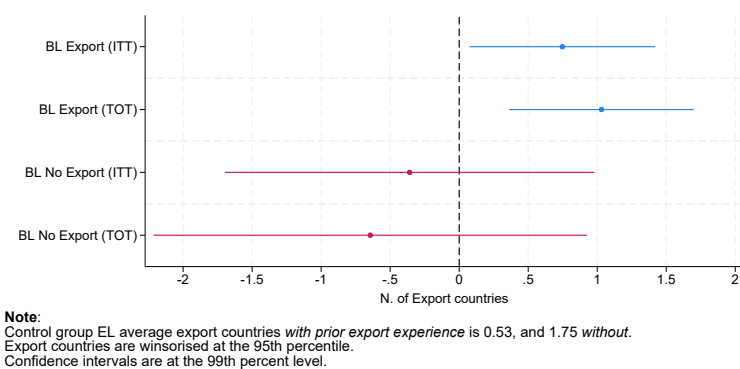


Figure 16: Heterogeneity in export country effect

8.2 Tables

Table 11: Focus groups: Relative importance of barriers to entrepreneurship

| Company | Social norms and family commitments | Lack of funds and resources | Lack of business and export knowledge | Regulatory and administrative barriers | International barriers: travel, language, culture | Important Risks: high costs, uncertainty, competition |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Company 1 | 4 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 6 |
| Company 2 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| Company 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 3 |
| Company 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| Company 5 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Company 6 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 7 |
| Company 7 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Company 8 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| Company 9 | 4 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 7 |
| Company 10 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 7 |
| Company 11 | 1 | 7 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 7 |
| Mean: | 4,27 | 5,64 | 4,55 | 4,64 | 4,00 | 4,91 |

Table 12: Description of main outcome variables

| Outcome dimension | Indicators | Source |
|----------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Network | Network size | Firm survey |
| | Network advice quality | |
| | Perception of interaction between CEOs | |
| Entrepreneurial confidence | Female Empowerment Index | Firm survey |
| | Locus of control | |
| | Efficacy | |
| | Initiative | |
| | List experiment | |
| Knowledge transfer | Management Practices | Firm survey |
| | Innovation | |
| | Export readiness | |
| Business Performance | Sales (domestic, total) | Firm survey |
| | Profit | |
| | Number of Employees | |
| Export | Export sales | Firm survey & admin data |
| | Export countries | |
| | Investment in export | |
| | Perception of export costs | |

Table 13: Baseline balance: Untransformed variables

| Variable | (1) Control Mean/SD | (2) Treatment Mean/SD | T-test P-value (1)-(2) |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Network size | 12.33 (16.02) | 13.21 (17.62) | 0.73 |
| Network quality | 7.11 (2.61) | 7.31 (2.68) | 0.62 |
| Pos. view CEO interaction | 2.15 (0.78) | 2.14 (0.73) | 0.94 |
| Neg. view CEO interaction | 0.73 (0.64) | 0.74 (0.60) | 0.95 |
| Entrepreneurial empowerment | -0.01 (0.66) | -0.08 (0.60) | 0.44 |
| Effifacy | 0.00 (0.76) | -0.10 (0.72) | 0.36 |
| Locus of control | -0.05 (0.73) | -0.03 (0.72) | 0.85 |
| Management practices | -0.00 (0.48) | 0.05 (0.51) | 0.53 |
| Total innovations | 1.69 (1.40) | 1.68 (1.38) | 0.97 |
| Innovated | 0.74 (0.44) | 0.72 (0.45) | 0.80 |
| R&D expenditure | 53,044.41 (318,164.24) | 18,825.96 (36,859.08) | 0.32 |
| Age | 7.13 (9.85) | 6.66 (8.31) | 0.73 |
| Sales | 391,879.33 (856,501.52) | 624,609.70 (3,419,255.86) | 0.54 |
| Costs | 386,105.02 (854,081.57) | 624,506.76 (3,419,259.51) | 0.53 |
| Profit | 29,258.93 (106,668.96) | 17,594.97 (219,209.12) | 0.66 |
| Employees | 7.94 (10.44) | 14.68 (48.49) | 0.21 |
| Export readiness | -0.04 (0.53) | 0.01 (0.52) | 0.60 |
| Export costs | 5.74 (2.60) | 5.54 (2.82) | 0.62 |
| investment in export activities | 10,520.96 (22,582.69) | 24,624.40 (97,126.99) | 0.19 |
| Export sales > 0 | 0.37 (0.49) | 0.40 (0.49) | 0.67 |
| Export sales | 96,287.29 (465,104.02) | 127,063.70 (419,091.85) | 0.65 |
| number of countries exported to in 2021 | 1.14 (2.12) | 1.41 (2.72) | 0.45 |
| N | 89 | 87 | |
| F-test of joint significance (F-stat) | | | 12.34*** |
| F-test, number of observations | | | 176 |

Notes: The value displayed for t-tests are p-values. The value displayed for F-tests are the F-statistics. Standard deviations are robust. All missing values in balance variables are treated as zero.***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5, and 10 percent critical level.

Table 14: Baseline balance: transformed variables

| Variable | (1) Control Mean/SD | (2) Treatment Mean/SD | T-test P-value (1)-(2) |
|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Network size | 12.00 (14.23) | 12.76 (15.23) | 0.73 |
| Network quality | 7.11 (2.61) | 7.31 (2.68) | 0.62 |
| Pos. view CEO interaction | 2.15 (0.78) | 2.14 (0.73) | 0.94 |
| Neg. view CEO interaction | 0.73 (0.64) | 0.74 (0.60) | 0.95 |
| Entrepreneurial empowerment | -0.01 (0.66) | -0.08 (0.60) | 0.44 |
| Effifacy | 0.00 (0.76) | -0.10 (0.72) | 0.36 |
| Locus of control | -0.05 (0.73) | -0.03 (0.72) | 0.85 |
| Management practices | -0.00 (0.48) | 0.05 (0.51) | 0.53 |
| Total innovations | 1.69 (1.40) | 1.68 (1.38) | 0.97 |
| Innovated | 0.74 (0.44) | 0.72 (0.45) | 0.80 |
| R&D expenditure | 21,985.02 (47,898.69) | 18,087.04 (36,663.11) | 0.54 |
| Age | 7.13 (9.85) | 6.66 (8.31) | 0.73 |
| Domestic sales | 1.02 (1.22) | 1.04 (1.18) | 0.92 |
| IHS Costs wins. 99th K ⁴ | 0.78 (1.03) | 0.80 (1.08) | 0.93 |
| Profit | 29,258.93 (106,668.96) | 17,594.97 (219,209.12) | 0.66 |
| Employees | 7.94 (10.44) | 14.68 (48.49) | 0.21 |
| Export readiness | -0.04 (0.53) | 0.01 (0.52) | 0.60 |
| Export sales | 0.27 (0.74) | 0.40 (0.91) | 0.29 |
| number of countries exported to in 2021 | 1.14 (2.11) | 1.34 (2.25) | 0.53 |
| Export investment | 0.09 (0.20) | 0.15 (0.38) | 0.20 |
| Export costs | 5.74 (2.60) | 5.54 (2.82) | 0.62 |
| Export sales > 0 | 0.49 (0.49) | 0.40 (0.49) | 0.67 |

Table 15: Firm characteristics by economic activity

| Variable | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | T-test | | | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | agro-alimentaire Mean/SD | artisanat & cosmétique Mean/SD | service Mean/SD | TIC Mean/SD | (1)-(2) | (1)-(3) | (1)-(4) | (2)-(3) | (2)-(4) | (3)-(4) |
| Gender index -Z Score | -0.05 (0.58) | 0.02 (0.72) | -0.03 (0.61) | -0.17 (0.58) | 0.63 | 0.91 | 0.36 | 0.72 | 0.18 | 0.32 |
| Women's entrepreneurial efficacy - z score | -0.05 (0.74) | 0.01 (0.74) | -0.07 (0.82) | -0.12 (0.68) | 0.68 | 0.90 | 0.64 | 0.61 | 0.37 | 0.76 |
| Women's locus of control - z score | -0.08 (0.68) | 0.06 (0.82) | 0.02 (0.63) | -0.22 (0.72) | 0.34 | 0.46 | 0.38 | 0.78 | 0.08* | 0.12 |
| total sales in TND | 525,790.65 (1,093,526.27) | 204,894.61 (338,162.35) | 320,982.90 (498,322.78) | 798,336.58 (1,799,212.50) | 0.06* | 0.26 | 0.43 | 0.20 | 0.05* | 0.13 |
| profit in TND in bl = 2021, ml = 2022, el = 2023 | 40,839.53 (107,481.35) | 18,230.54 (84,648.97) | 52,462.24 (87,086.93) | 30,916.15 (129,271.25) | 0.26 | 0.58 | 0.71 | 0.06* | 0.60 | 0.40 |
| nombre d'employés de l'entreprise | 14.82 (52.02) | 7.22 (6.83) | 5.83 (6.31) | 11.22 (15.03) | 0.34 | 0.26 | 0.66 | 0.31 | 0.14 | 0.05** |
| export sales in TND in bl = 2021, ml = 2022, el = 2023 | 161,649.55 (516,418.59) | 26,537.04 (96,838.26) | 58,352.37 (195,457.25) | 241,280.11 (745,559.18) | 0.09* | 0.22 | 0.59 | 0.34 | 0.09* | 0.16 |
| export sales $\hat{\epsilon}_0$ | 0.39 (0.49) | 0.31 (0.47) | 0.41 (0.50) | 0.47 (0.51) | 0.47 | 0.79 | 0.45 | 0.32 | 0.14 | 0.62 |
| costs of export activities | 5.98 (2.61) | 6.09 (2.74) | 5.15 (2.89) | 5.00 (2.37) | 0.83 | 0.17 | 0.08* | 0.11 | 0.05** | 0.81 |
| investment in export activities | 32,710.23 (131,680.76) | 7,960.37 (27,890.11) | 7,867.07 (17,686.67) | 19,294.72 (37,652.42) | 0.22 | 0.22 | 0.52 | 0.98 | 0.13 | 0.10* |
| N | 44 | 54 | 41 | 36 | | | | | | |
| F-test of joint significance (F-stat) | | | | | 5.29*** | 5.70*** | 2.73*** | 4.32*** | 6.69*** | 1.93* |
| F-test, number of observations | | | | | 98 | 85 | 80 | 95 | 90 | 77 |

Notes: The value displayed for t-tests are p-values. The value displayed for F-tests are the F-statistics. Standard deviations are robust. All missing values in balance variables are treated as zero.***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5, and 10 percent critical level.

Table 16: Business Networks

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|---|------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | Network size | Female CEOs met | Male CEOs met | Network quality | + view CEO exchange | - view CEO exchange |
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | | | | |
| Treatment | 2.187 (2.295) | 2.242* (1.197) | 0.106 (1.435) | 0.188 (0.397) | 0.239* (0.136) | -0.168 (0.128) |
| | 0.342 | 0.063 | 0.941 | 0.637 | 0.082 | 0.192 |
| | .568 | .107 | .874 | .568 | .05 | .107 |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | | | | |
| Consortium participant | 2.924 (2.676) | 2.994** (1.382) | 0.142 (1.692) | 0.252 (0.454) | 0.324** (0.162) | -0.229 (0.153) |
| | 0.275 | 0.030 | 0.933 | 0.579 | 0.046 | 0.136 |
| | .543 | .082 | .874 | .543 | .034 | .082 |
| Control group mean | 8.46 | 3.67 | 4.80 | 7.76 | 2.43 | 0.44 |
| Control group SD | 12.35 | 6.23 | 8.27 | 2.26 | 0.84 | 0.67 |
| Observations | 141 | 141 | 141 | 123 | 145 | 145 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Y0 controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Notes: Each specification includes controls for randomization strata, baseline outcome, and a missing baseline dummy. The only exception are columns 2 and 3 for which we did not collect baseline data. The number of observations for network quality is only 123 as all other 18 firms reported zero contacts with other entrepreneurs. The total of female, male and all other CEOs met are winsorized at the 99th percentile. Coefficients display absolute values of the outcomes. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in McKenzie and Bruhn (2011). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Clustered standard errors by firms in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level. P-values and adjusted p-values for multiple hypotheses testing using the Romano-Wolf correction procedure (Clarke et al., 2020) with 999 bootstrap replications are reported below the standard errors.

Table 17: Business Networks: Midline

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|---|------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | All persons | Female CEOs | Male CEOs | Network quality | Pos. View CEO interaction | Neg. View CEO interaction |
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | | | | |
| Treatment | 1.683 (1.282) | 1.979*** (0.609) | -0.068 (0.702) | 0.188 (0.388) | 0.141 (0.098) | -0.191* (0.109) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | | | | |
| Consortium member | 2.252 (1.482) | 2.643*** (0.685) | -0.091 (0.826) | 0.252 (0.439) | 0.189 (0.115) | -0.257** (0.128) |
| Control group mean | 7.75 | 3.23 | 4.07 | 7.76 | 2.57 | 0.47 |
| Control group SD | 9.86 | 4.11 | 5.41 | 2.26 | 0.61 | 0.68 |
| Observations | 141 | 141 | 141 | 123 | 140 | 140 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Y0 controls | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Notes: Each specification includes controls for randomization strata, baseline values of the outcome, and a missing baseline dummy for the outcome variable when available. The total of female, male and all other CEOs met with whom the female entrepreneurs discuss business regularly in the past three months are winsorised at the 95th percentile as pre-specified. The number of observations drops to 123 for Network Quality as 18 entrepreneurs to not discuss their business challenges with anyone. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in McKenzie (2012). Panel B documents IV estimates instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors are clustered on the firm-level for the control group and the consortium-level for the treatment group following Cai and Szeidl (2018) and reported in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

Table 18: Networks: Use

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| | Manage- ment | Innovation | Export | Referral | Joint bid | Emotional support | Other use |
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | | | | | |
| Treatment | 0.23** (0.09) | 0.21*** (0.06) | 0.28*** (0.08) | 0.12 (0.11) | 0.19** (0.09) | 0.27*** (0.10) | -0.03 (0.10) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | | | | | |
| Consortium participant | 0.39*** (0.12) | 0.36*** (0.09) | 0.47*** (0.11) | 0.20 (0.16) | 0.32** (0.13) | 0.46*** (0.14) | -0.06 (0.14) |
| Control group mean | 0.58 | 0.74 | 0.52 | 0.58 | 0.42 | 0.48 | 0.20 |
| Control group SD | 0.50 | 0.44 | 0.50 | 0.50 | 0.50 | 0.50 | 0.40 |
| Observations | 112 | 112 | 112 | 112 | 112 | 112 | 112 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |

Notes: All outcomes are based on a binary yes-no-question whether the entrepreneur either shares, e.g., management practices, innovation ideas, export experience with or has made or received a referral, emotional support vis-a-vis business and exports risks and uncertainty or participated in a joint contract bid with other entrepreneurs. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in Bruhn and McKenzie (2009). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors are clustered on the firm-level for the control group and on the consortium-level for the treatment group following Cai and Szeidl (2018) and reported in parentheses. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

Table 19: View of interaction between entrepreneurs

| | (1) Pos. view ML | (2) Pos. view EL | (3) Neg. view ML | (4) Neg. view EL |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | | |
| Treatment | 0.14 (0.10) | 0.09 (0.18) | −0.19* (0.11) | −0.09 (0.18) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | | |
| Consortium member | 0.19* (0.12) | 0.17 (0.27) | −0.26** (0.13) | −0.16 (0.28) |
| Control group mean | 2.57 | 2.07 | 0.47 | 0.93 |
| Control group SD | 0.61 | 0.92 | 0.68 | 0.92 |
| Observations | 140 | 119 | 140 | 119 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Notes: Respondents selected three among the following five negative terms (Jealousy, Protect business secrets, Risks, Conflict, Competition) and positive terms (Cooperate, Trust, Learn, Partnership, Connect). Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in [Bruhn and McKenzie \(2009\)](#). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors are clustered on the firm-level for the control group and on the consortium-level for the treatment group following [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#) and reported in parentheses. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata and baseline values of the outcome variable when available. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p \leq 0.1$ denote the significance level.

Table 20: Knowledge Transfer: Management and Innovation Indexes

| | (1) Management practices | (2) Innovation practices |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | |
| Treatment | 0.18** (0.09) | -0.02 (0.09) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | |
| Consortium member | 0.30** (0.13) | -0.04 (0.13) |
| Control group median | 0.08 | 0.06 |
| Control group SD | 0.60 | 0.64 |
| Observations | 124 | 131 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | Yes | No |

Notes: The outcomes are z-scores following [Anderson \(2008\)](#). Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in [Bruhn and McKenzie \(2009\)](#). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors are clustered on the firm-level for the control group and on the consortium-level for the treatment group following [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#) and reported in parentheses. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

Table 21: Management practices: Sources of New Management Practices

| | (1) Consultant | (2) Entre- preneur | (3) Family/ Friend | (4) Event | (5) Training | (6) Other |
|--|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | | | | |
| Treatment | 0.13 (0.08) | 0.05 (0.07) | -0.27*** (0.07) | 0.06 (0.07) | 0.16** (0.07) | 0.01 (0.08) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | | | | |
| Consortium member | 0.22* (0.12) | 0.08 (0.10) | -0.47*** (0.10) | 0.11 (0.11) | 0.29*** (0.10) | 0.01 (0.12) |
| Control group mean | 0.48 | 0.59 | 0.61 | 0.66 | 0.18 | 0.59 |
| Control group SD | 0.50 | 0.50 | 0.49 | 0.48 | 0.39 | 0.50 |
| Observations | 120 | 120 | 120 | 120 | 128 | 120 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Notes: The outcome variables are either zero or one. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in [McKenzie \(2012\)](#). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors are clustered on the firm-level for the control group and on the consortium-level for the treatment group following [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#) and reported in parentheses. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

Table 22: Management practices: Deep Dive into Index Components

| | (1) KPIs | (2) Prod- uction | (3) Input | (4) Stock | (5) Empl- oyees | (6) Logis- tics | (7) KPIs Freq. | (8) Bud- get | (9) Cost estimate | (10) Business/ private |
|--|-----------------|------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Treatment | -0.01 (0.04) | 0.11* (0.05) | 0.06 (0.07) | 0.07 (0.07) | -0.08 (0.07) | 0.03 (0.06) | 0.05 (0.04) | 0.07 (0.08) | 0.06 (0.09) | 0.15** (0.06) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Consortium member | -0.02 (0.07) | 0.18** (0.08) | 0.09 (0.11) | 0.12 (0.11) | -0.14 (0.10) | 0.06 (0.08) | 0.09 (0.06) | 0.12 (0.12) | 0.10 (0.13) | 0.25*** (0.09) |
| Control group mean | 0.88 | 0.71 | 0.73 | 0.59 | 0.75 | 0.83 | 0.64 | 0.66 | 0.80 | 0.78 |
| Control group SD | 0.33 | 0.46 | 0.45 | 0.50 | 0.44 | 0.38 | 0.25 | 0.48 | 0.41 | 0.42 |
| Observations | 124 | 124 | 124 | 124 | 124 | 124 | 120 | 124 | 124 | 124 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | No | No | No | No | No | No | Yes | No | No | No |

Notes: The outcome variables are either zero or one. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in [McKenzie \(2012\)](#). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors are clustered on the firm-level for the control group and on the consortium-level for the treatment group following [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#) and reported in parentheses. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

Table 23: Management Practices Adoption Rate: ML and EL

| | (1) ML MPI | (2) EL MPI |
|--|---------------------|------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | |
| Treatment | 0.045*** (0.016) | 0.039 (0.030) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | |
| Consortium member | 0.059*** (0.018) | 0.066 (0.043) |
| Control group mean | 0.52 | 0.75 |
| Control group SD | 0.13 | 0.22 |
| Observations | 139 | 123 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | Yes | Yes |

Notes: All dependent variables are indexes calculated based on z-scores as described in [Anderson \(2008\)](#). Each specification includes controls for randomization strata, baseline outcome, and a missing baseline dummy. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in [McKenzie \(2012\)](#). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered on the consortia-level for treatment group firms and on the firm-level for control group firms following [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#). *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

Table 24: Innovation: Process Innovation

| | (1) Production Technology | (2) Marketing Channels | (3) Pricing Methods | (4) Suppliers | (5) Other |
|--|---------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | | | |
| Treatment | -0.095 (0.080) | -0.162** (0.068) | 0.163** (0.073) | -0.070 (0.067) | 0.092 (0.069) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | | | |
| Consortium member | -0.160 (0.118) | -0.275*** (0.101) | 0.277*** (0.107) | -0.120 (0.099) | 0.155 (0.102) |
| Control group mean | 0.52 | 0.63 | 0.43 | 0.65 | 0.25 |
| Control group SD | 0.50 | 0.49 | 0.50 | 0.48 | 0.44 |
| Observations | 127 | 127 | 127 | 127 | 127 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Notes: All dependent variables are dummies [0;1]. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata, baseline outcome, and a missing baseline dummy. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in McKenzie (2012). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered on the consortia-level for treatment group firms and on the firm-level for control group firms following Cai and Szeidl (2018). *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

Table 25: Innovation - Knowledge Sources

| | (1) Consultant | (2) Entrepreneur | (3) Event | (4) Client | (5) Other |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | | | |
| Treatment | 0.15 (0.10) | 0.18** (0.09) | 0.10 (0.08) | 0.10 (0.10) | -0.03 (0.09) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | | | |
| Consortium member | 0.26* (0.14) | 0.31** (0.13) | 0.17 (0.11) | 0.17 (0.14) | -0.05 (0.13) |
| Control group mean | 0.15 | 0.20 | 0.35 | 0.41 | 0.50 |
| Control group SD | 0.36 | 0.41 | 0.48 | 0.50 | 0.50 |
| Observations | 115 | 115 | 115 | 115 | 115 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | No | No | No | No | No |

Notes: The outcome variables are either zero or one. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in [Bruhn and McKenzie \(2009\)](#). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors are clustered on the firm-level for the control group and on the consortium-level for the treatment group following [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#) and reported in parentheses. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

Table 26: Knowledge Transfer - Export Readiness Index

| | (1) Export readiness | (2) Export readiness SSA |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | |
| Treatment | 0.043 (0.099) | 0.176** (0.085) |
| | 0.669 | 0.043 |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | |
| Consortium member | 0.072 (0.143) | 0.300** (0.126) |
| | 0.616 | 0.017 |
| Control group median | -0.17 | -0.35 |
| Control group SD | 0.63 | 0.69 |
| Observations | 125 | 126 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | Yes | No |

Notes: The outcomes are z-scores calculated as in [Anderson \(2008\)](#). Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in [McKenzie \(2012\)](#). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors are clustered on the firm-level for the control group and on the consortium-level for the treatment group following [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#) and reported in parentheses. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata and baseline values of the outcome variable when available. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

Table 27: Knowledge Transfer - Export Readiness Subsahara-Africa: Sub-componenents

| | (1) Client | (2) Business Partner | (3) Funding | (4) Sales structure |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | | |
| Treatment | 0.25*** (0.07) | 0.28*** (0.07) | 0.07** (0.03) | -0.00 (0.04) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | | |
| Consortium member | 0.41*** (0.11) | 0.47*** (0.10) | 0.12** (0.05) | -0.01 (0.06) |
| Control group mean | 0.37 | 0.15 | 0.05 | 0.08 |
| Control group SD | 0.49 | 0.36 | 0.22 | 0.28 |
| Observations | 125 | 125 | 125 | 125 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | No | No | No | No |

Notes: The outcome variables are either zero or one. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in [McKenzie \(2012\)](#). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors are clustered on the firm-level for the control group and on the consortium-level for the treatment group following [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#) and reported in parentheses. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

Table 28: Knowledge Transfer - Export Readiness General: Sub-components

| | (1) Export manager | (2) Trade Fair | (3) Business Partner | (4) Intl. Certification | (5) Sales structure |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | | | |
| Treatment | -0.08 (0.08) | 0.33*** (0.08) | 0.04 (0.08) | -0.07 (0.08) | -0.08 (0.06) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | | | |
| Consortium member | -0.13 (0.12) | 0.56*** (0.11) | 0.07 (0.11) | -0.12 (0.11) | -0.13 (0.09) |
| Control group mean | 0.23 | 0.37 | 0.35 | 0.30 | 0.22 |
| Control group SD | 0.43 | 0.49 | 0.48 | 0.46 | 0.42 |
| Observations | 125 | 125 | 125 | 125 | 125 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |

Notes: The outcome variables are either zero or one. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in [McKenzie \(2012\)](#). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors are clustered on the firm-level for the control group and on the consortium-level for the treatment group following [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#) and reported in parentheses. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

Table 29: Business Performance: Profits, Costs, and Employment

| | (1) Profits | (2) Costs | (3) N. of Employees |
|--|-------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Panel A: Intention-to-treat (ITT) | | | |
| Treatment | -0.094 (1.376) | 0.911 (0.665) | -0.075 (0.120) |
| Panel B: Treatment Effect on the Treated (TOT) | | | |
| Consortium member | -0.157 (1.954) | 1.516 (0.941) | -0.127 (0.176) |
| Control group mean | 4.94 | 10.57 | 2.18 |
| Control group SD | 8.98 | 4.89 | 1.08 |
| Observations | 119 | 119 | 124 |
| Strata controls | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| BL controls | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Notes: All outcome variables are winsorised at the 95th percentile and inverse hyperbolic sine transformed as pre-specified. 'Profits' and 'Costs' are in units of Tunisian Dinar before transformation. 'Costs' values are calculated by subtracting profits from total sales. Panel A reports ANCOVA estimates as defined in [Bruhn and McKenzie \(2009\)](#). Panel B documents IV estimates, instrumenting take-up with treatment assignment. Standard errors are clustered on the firm-level for the control group and on the consortium-level for the treatment group following [Cai and Szeidl \(2018\)](#) and reported in parentheses. Each specification includes controls for randomization strata and baseline values of the outcome variable. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ denote the significance level.

Table 30: Take-up and firm characteristics across consortia

| Variable | Agro-food, Handicraft, Business Service | | | Digital Services | | |
|---|---|----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| | (1) | (2) | T-test | (1) | (2) | T-test |
| | Drop-out Mean/SD | Participate Mean/SD | P-value (1)-(2) Variable | Drop-out Mean/SD | Participate Mean/SD | P-value (1)-(2) |
| Export sales > 0 | 0.52 (0.51) | 0.29 (0.46) | 0.07* | 0.50 (0.58) | 0.50 (0.52) | 1.00 |
| Export investment > 0 | 0.70 (0.47) | 0.34 (0.48) | 0.00*** | 0.00 (0.00) | 0.71 (0.47) | 0.00*** |
| Export to SSA | 0.23 (0.42) | 0.20 (0.40) | 0.77 | 0.16 (0.18) | 0.36 (0.50) | 0.22 |
| Export readiness | 0.18 (0.52) | -0.08 (0.52) | 0.04** | -0.29 (0.35) | -0.00 (0.49) | 0.19 |
| Sales | 364,790.80 (634,830.34) | 113,417.88 (153,604.64) | 0.05** | 189,000.31 (184,640.71) | 486,001.52 (774,453.07) | 0.21 |
| Export sales | 258,004.16 (612,340.75) | 12,982.20 (31,955.24) | 0.04** | 69,510.94 (111,704.33) | 283,624.55 (545,488.92) | 0.19 |
| Profit | 57,683.20 (109,927.78) | 23,219.02 (58,453.61) | 0.14 | 19,558.75 (21,594.03) | 57,713.93 (154,832.54) | 0.39 |
| Profit > 0 | 0.78 (0.42) | 0.80 (0.40) | 0.79 | 0.50 (0.58) | 0.43 (0.51) | 0.81 |
| Employees | 10.19 (13.39) | 5.88 (4.76) | 0.11 | 5.75 (3.10) | 10.93 (10.73) | 0.13 |
| Online presence | 0.93 (0.27) | 0.90 (0.30) | 0.74 | 1.00 (0.00) | 0.93 (0.27) | 0.34 |
| HQ in Tunis | 0.56 (0.51) | 0.46 (0.50) | 0.46 | 0.75 (0.50) | 0.64 (0.50) | 0.69 |
| Age | 8.00 (10.48) | 4.44 (3.83) | 0.09* | 5.00 (3.16) | 9.36 (10.97) | 0.21 |
| Capital | 51,397.41 (135,722.38) | 29,170.88 (41,315.34) | 0.41 | 33,750.00 (57,575.31) | 54,785.71 (86,478.26) | 0.56 |
| Family business network | 2.68 (2.01) | 3.99 (5.33) | 0.16 | 2.63 (1.09) | 3.43 (3.69) | 0.49 |
| Outside family business network | 6.57 (5.94) | 11.03 (17.59) | 0.14 | 11.13 (5.57) | 15.79 (18.29) | 0.42 |
| Network quality | 7.04 (2.82) | 7.88 (2.18) | 0.19 | 4.50 (5.26) | 7.07 (2.59) | 0.32 |
| Meetings with other CEOs, past 3 months | 6.45 (6.67) | 9.42 (16.65) | 0.31 | 10.28 (7.40) | 9.36 (9.21) | 0.83 |
| Neg. view CEO interaction | 0.56 (0.58) | 0.88 (0.64) | 0.03** | 0.25 (0.50) | 0.79 (0.43) | 0.05* |
| R&D expenditure | 13,596.91 (17,859.45) | 19,102.85 (48,583.84) | 0.51 | 13,651.25 (10,791.61) | 24,774.29 (29,442.94) | 0.26 |
| Total innovations | 1.37 (1.42) | 1.88 (1.40) | 0.15 | 0.75 (0.96) | 2.07 (1.14) | 0.03** |
| Innovated | 0.63 (0.49) | 0.78 (0.42) | 0.19 | 0.50 (0.58) | 0.86 (0.36) | 0.23 |
| Management practices | 0.01 (0.52) | 0.08 (0.52) | 0.59 | -0.34 (0.56) | 0.11 (0.46) | 0.13 |
| Marketing practices | 0.01 (0.57) | 0.09 (0.51) | 0.56 | -0.17 (0.84) | 0.16 (0.33) | 0.42 |
| Entrepreneurial empowerment | -0.06 (0.60) | -0.08 (0.65) | 0.90 | -0.31 (0.84) | -0.10 (0.43) | 0.60 |
| N | 27 | 41 | | 4 | 14 | |
| F-test of joint significance (F-stat) | 62 | | 5.70*** | | | |
| F-test, number of observations | | | 68 | | | |

Notes: Sample limited to treatment group. Accounting variables are winsorized at the 99th percentile. One observation is not included given it is

8.3 Questionnaire and Hypotheses From Pre-Analysis Plan

This study focuses on the following major outcomes: (i) export performance, (ii) business performance, and (iii) network size, composition, and quality. We are also interested in the following secondary outcomes: (i) knowledge transfer (between firms and from consultants to firms), including for example management and export practices and innovation, and (ii) entrepreneurial gender empowerment.

The following hypotheses are tested:

8.3.1 Primary Hypothesis

(PH1) Primary Hypothesis 1: Consortia promote export.

We use the following outcomes to test this hypothesis:

1. Extensive margin. 1: self-reported indirect (via an intermediary) or direct export (0 = no export). 2: administrative custom records (0 = no export transaction recorded in a given year). We will look at 1. and 2. separately and combined to maximize the available information, given, for example, service firms may export without an administrative custom record.
2. Direct/indirect export activities to an African country ¹³ : This is a binary variable that takes the value 1 if the company directly or indirectly export (part of) its products and services to an African country, and 0 otherwise. Note that one objective of the program is to specifically promote intra-African trade, which is why we are interested in this outcome.
3. Intensive margin: inverse hyperbolic sine transformed annual export sales. This variable will be winsorized before the IHS-transformation at the 95-99th percentile depending on the number of outliers, and will be reported in Tunisian dinars. It will be coded as zero for firms that have not invested anything in the export. Note that we will also consider a regression specification that includes only treatment and control firms with export sales ≥ 0 in at least one surveyround to reduce variation in export sales.
4. Number of annual export destination countries, coded as zero for firms that did not export, and winsorized at 99th percentile.

We aim to detect impact mechanisms, such as sharing of fixed costs of exporting in consortia and collective investment in export preparation activities, through the following variables:

1. Annual investment in export preparation activities, measured in Tunisian Dinar, inverse hyperbolic sine transformed, and winsorized at the 95-99th percentile depending on the severity of outliers. Coded zero for firms that have not invested anything in export readiness.
2. Export costs per dollar of export sales: annual investment in export (readiness) activities (as outlined above) divided by annual export sales. Coded as zero for firms that have no export or export but have zero investment in export activities.

¹³an indirect export is self reported

3. Export readiness index: average of standardized z-scores of the following outcomes: a) participate in international trade exhibitions/fairs, b) engage or work with an international trading company, c) designate an employee in charge of export-related activities, d) undertake an analysis of target export markets, e) undertake a trade mission/travel to one of the target markets, f) access the customs website, g) maintain or develop an export plan, h) Product is certified according to the quality standards in target markets. All variables are binary which takes the value 1 if the participant firm did the activity during the last 12 months and 0 otherwise.
4. Export to sub-Saharan Africa (SSA): index, average of standardized z-scores of the following outcomes: a) knowledge of COMESA and ZLECAF, b) expression of interest from a client in SSA, c) external finance for export (subsidy, credit, guarantee), d) investment in sales structures in SSA destination market. All variables are binary which takes the value 1 if the participant firm did the activity during the last 12 months and 0 otherwise.
5. Raw value of self-reported costs of export activities: scale from 1 to 10, with 1 meaning the estimate of the firm's perception of export costs is extremely low, and 10 means extremely high.

(PH2) Primary Hypothesis 2: Consortia generates business growth (sales, profits, employees).

This will be tested by measuring the treatment effects on the following outcome measures in the surveys:

1. Annual sales: winsorized at the 95-99th percentile depending on the number of outliers, IHS-transformed and reported in Tunisian dinars.
2. Annual profit: winsorized at the 95-99th percentile depending on the number of outliers, IHS-transformed and reported in Tunisian dinars.
3. Annual number of employees: winsorized at the 95-99th percentile depending on the number of outliers, IHS-transformed and reported in Tunisian dinars.

Note that we will also consider a regression specification that includes only treatment and control firms with sales ≥ 0 in at least one surveyround for all three business growth variables to reduce their variation.

(PH3) Primary Hypothesis 3: Consortia increases size, changes composition, and improves quality of business network and intensity of interaction.

1. Number of other female and male CEOs regularly met to exchange about business. Winsorized at the 95-99th percentile depending on the number of outliers. We also inquire about business contacts outside and inside family networks, and differential trust in doing business with other female vs. male CEOs internationally and domestically.
2. Quality advice of the business network: It is a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning the advice and information from the personal network is not useful for the management and 10 means extremely useful.
3. Time spent with other directors during the last 12 months: Frequency of meetings measured in number of weeks, and 0 otherwise.

4. Perception of interaction between the enterprises ([Dimitriadis and Koning, 2019](#)): 3 words must be selected from a list of 10 words that best describe the perception of interactions between CEOs in the context of business. They are divided into 5 positive and 5 negative words, and they will be transformed into a continuous variable with a minimum value of 0 and a maximum value of 3 depending on the number of positive words. It is coded as the following:

| | |
|----------|---|
| Positive | Win (=1) Communicate (=2) Trust (=3) Partnership (=7) Connect (=9) |
| Negative | Eliminate/Block (=4) Power (=5) Hold back/Retreat (=6) Opponent (=8) Dominate (=10) |

Note: at the endline, we may add a more objective measure from the psychology literature on the cooperativeness and trust of entrepreneurs, as well as conduct implicit association tests to examine whether the intervention has changed the unconscious priors about the role of men and women in business.

8.3.2 Secondary Hypothesis

(SH1) Secondary Hypothesis 1: Women entrepreneurs learn from peers about new business practices.

We test this hypothesis by measuring the treatment impacts on the following secondary outcomes (the variables are selected in line with ([Cai and Szeidl, 2018](#))):

1. Innovation: we use a binary (0 = no innovation, 1 = any innovation) and a count measure (number of innovations, max. = 4) based on firms' of one of the following outcomes: a) product innovation, b) process innovation, c) organizational innovation, d) product commercialisation innovation. All variables are binary, which takes the value 1 if the participant firm did the activity during the last 12 months and 0 otherwise. We will explore the different sources of innovation through additional questions.
2. Annual spending on innovation research and development: This variable will be winsorized at the 95-99th percentile depending on the number of outliers, IHS-transformed, and reported in Tunisian dinars.
3. Management practices index - Z Score: it is the average of standardized z-scores of outcomes envisioned to provide a summary measure of management practices: a) performance indicators for employees b) regular meetings with employees for feedback c) frequency of measuring anomalies in production d) registration of sales and purchases e) knowing the profit per product/service f) frequency of examining financial performance. At midline, we changed the management practices questions based on new research to the following practices: a) sources of new management strategies b) who is aware of production indicators c) frequency of examining performance indicators d) number of performance indicators e) employees' promotion policy.
4. Marketing practices index - Z Score: it is the average of standardized z-scores of outcomes intended to deliver a summary measure of marketing practices: a) study the prices and/or products

of one of competitors b) ask customers what other products they would like to be produced c) investigate why past customers have stopped buying from the company d) attract customers with a special offer e) advertising in any form. All variables are binary, which take value 1 if the participant firm did the activity during the last 12 months and 0 otherwise.

(SH2) Secondary Hypothesis 2: Being part of a female-only consortia increases female CEO entrepreneurial empowerment (self-efficacy, locus of control, sense of initiative and independent decision-making).

This will be measured by an index measure of female empowerment and list experiment:

1. Female empowerment - Z Score: it is the average of standardized z-scores of outcomes measuring the following binary variables:

- Belief in own ability: a) participant has the skills to access new sources of funding b) participant negotiates the affairs of the company well c) participant manages to convince employees and partners to agree with me.
- Sense of own initiative: a) participant actively confront business problems when they arise b) Participant take the initiative immediately, when others do not c) participant spot and seize opportunities quickly to achieve her professional goals. The set of answer options for this variable is not part of the midline survey.
- Sense of control over the business situation: a) participant is well able to determine the success of her business b) participant knows how to determine what is happening in the internal and external environment of the company c) participant inspires other women to be better entrepreneurs. In the midline survey, we replaced the last answer option with c) participant masters the administrative and logistical procedures around export.

2. List experiment: In order to measure self-confidence and independence in entrepreneurial decision-making, we randomly divided the sample of respondents into treatment and control groups and asked the following question to the control group:

How many of the following statements apply to you? Please note that we cannot recognize which statements you choose.

- I always support and encourage my team.
- I dreamed of becoming a successful woman when I was a child.
- I try to do my best in my job.

For the treatment group, we asked an identical question, except that a sensitive item concerning self-confidence was appended to the list:

- I always support and encourage my team.
- I dreamed of becoming a successful woman when I was a child.

- I try to do my best in my job.
- Baseline: I consult my husband (or another man in my family) before making strategic decisions for the company.
- Midline: I feel obliged to consult my husband (or another man in my family) before making strategic decisions for the company.
- Endline: I feel obliged to consult my husband (or another man in my family) before making strategic decisions for the company.

Note that at midline and endline we re-randomize within treatment and control group into a list experiment treatment group (sees sensitive option) and a list experiment control group (does not see sensitive option).

The baseline questionnaire can be found here:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xqAweVIfkZvH-sRq0-1DzJ1n_zTovqXM/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=118421303433036502342&rtpof=true&sd=true

The midline questionnaire can be found here:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MdzXARVQMqbmOegQ-DfqG16Enuc1v35Y/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=118421303433036502342&rtpof=true&sd=true

8.4 Treatment details

8.4.1 Consortia-level Workshops

Table 31: Summary workshop 1

| Workshop 1 | Presentation Topics | Summary of activities |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Women entrepreneurs conquering Africa | Program 's mission presentation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Explain the mission of the 'Consortia' program - Gender aspect of the program (role of gender equality in development,GII) |
| | Female presence in Tunisian firms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Women entrepreneurship in Tunisia (statistics, obstacles, programs to promote it) - SMEs exports managed by Tunisian women (access to funding, statistics, difficulties) - Women representation in professional networks - SSA market (member countries, GDP, official languages) |
| | Sub-Saharan Africa market | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information about each target country of the program: Cameroon, Ivory Coast, DR Congo, Kenya, Nigeria - Interests in exporting (incentives and advantages) |
| | Female-led firms ' participation in export | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Socio-economic situation of women entrepreneurs - Information about RAIDA Program - Export strategy and guidelines for direct and indirect export -The role of gender equality |
| | Opting for women's consortium: an empowerment solution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in women entrepreneurs' empowerment - Information on gender inequality in Tunisia and around the world -The trade agreements between Tunisia and the export target region |
| | Free trade agreements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Information on programs and activities of COMESA and AfCFTA in Tunisia - Free trade agreements list of countries partnered in bilateral agreements with Tunisia - Information on COMESA and AfCFTA |
| Duration | 2 days | |
| Date | May 2022 | |

Table 32: Summary workshop 2

| Workshop 2 | Presentation Topics | Summary of activities |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Creation of women's consortium | Interpersonal communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The importance of a better communication - Information on the types, filters, channels, and process of communication - Perceptions and information modeling - Practical exercise on how to actively listen and give feedback |
| | Woman- Woman Cooperation: Essential mentoring elements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information on the concept of mentorship - Advantages and disadvantages of mentorships, as well as tips for mentor and mentee - Examples of successful mentoring cases and woman-to-woman mentoring |
| | Securing exports to SSA for Tunisian women entrepreneurs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Means of payment to choose when exporting to SSA - Management of problems that may arrive using one mean of payment over another - What type of contract should a Tunisian women entrepreneur get to safeguard her financial interests - Means of transport and delivery for export to SSA |
| Duration | 2 days | |
| Date | May-June 2022 | |

Table 33: Summary workshop 3

| Workshop 3 | Presentation Topics | Summary of activities |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Women Consortia | The different types of consortia 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Information on types of consortia: definitions of joint ventures, co-contracting, formal and informal groups - Advantages and disadvantages of each consortia type |
| | The different types of consortia 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reminder of consortia types followed by a practical exercise for each type |
| | Assistance in choosing the consortium | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practical exercise to assist women entrepreneurs in choosing their consortium |
| Duration | 2 days | |
| Date | June 2022 | |

8.4.2 Individual Coaching

Table 34: Examples of individual coaching sessions

| Consortium | Session | Example of subject | Category |
|-------------------------|---------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Agro-food | 1 | Financing of a new campaign | Access to funding |
| Agro-food | 2 | Fund raising | Access to funding |
| Agro-food | 1 | Tax reporting coaching for herself and her accountant. | Accounting & Financial Management |
| Agro-food | 1 | Specificities of the SSA market. | Business Development |
| Agro-food | 2 | Specificities of the SSA market - Important terms to negotiate in an export operation to the SSA market | Business Development |
| Agro-food | 3 | How to set up a consulting office | Business Development |
| Agro-food | 1 | How to benefit from the STARTUP label | Government programs & tenders |
| Agro-food | 1 | Conflict management at work | Human relations/ resources |
| Agro-food | 2 | Tax reporting coaching. | Legal and administrative aspects |
| Agro-food | 1 | How to attract and convince customers | Marketing |
| Agro-food | 2 | How to negotiate in the African market - Which sales techniques that increase sales. | Marketing |
| Agro-food | 1 | Define the product line | Product/ Service Development |
| Agro-food | 1 | How to launch a business. | Product/ Service Development |
| Agro-food | 3 | Choice of the implantation region. | Product/ Service Development |
| Agro-food | 2 | How to launch a business. | Product/ Service Development |
| Agro-food | 2 | How to draw up a business plan considering its development forecasts. | Product/ Service Development |
| Agro-food | 1 | Communicate better in public and make a successful presentation | Self-Development |
| Agro-food | 2 | Public speaking | Self-Development |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 1 | Fund raising | Access to funding |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 1 | The price structure (calculation of direct charges, allocation of indirect charges for this product) | Accounting & Financial Management |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 2 | Price calculation formula | Accounting & Financial Management |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 5 | Review cost calculation | Accounting & Financial Management |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 1 | How to diversify into business | Business Development |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 1 | Specificities of the SSA market. | Business Development |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 2 | Lack of a clear strategy for digital communication | Business Development |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 3 | Company structure and organization chart | Business Development |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 2 | How to benefit from the STARTUP label | Government programs & tenders |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 2 | Recruitment of production management assistants | Human relations/ resources |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 1 | Lack of a clear strategy for digital communication | Marketing |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 1 | Set a communication strategy - Recruit a social media manager | Marketing |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 1 | Lack of segmentation and targeting -Campaign on social networks | Marketing |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 2 | Customer targeting - Sales action plan | Marketing |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 3 | Absence of marketing -Product visibility on the market | Marketing |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 1 | Develop a 'Business Model Canvas'. | Product/ Service Development |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 2 | Explain the business plan to set the business strategy. | Product/ Service Development |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 4 | How to diversify into business | Product/ Service Development |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 3 | Defining its mission, vision and axes of orientation | Product/ Service Development |
| Handicrafts & Cosmetics | 3 | Stress management | Self-Development |
| Services | 1 | Lack of working capital | Accounting & Financial Management |
| Services | 2 | Lack of financial resources management. | Accounting & Financial Management |
| Services | 1 | B2B export management | Business Development |
| Services | 2 | Defining the company's strategy | Product/ Service Development |

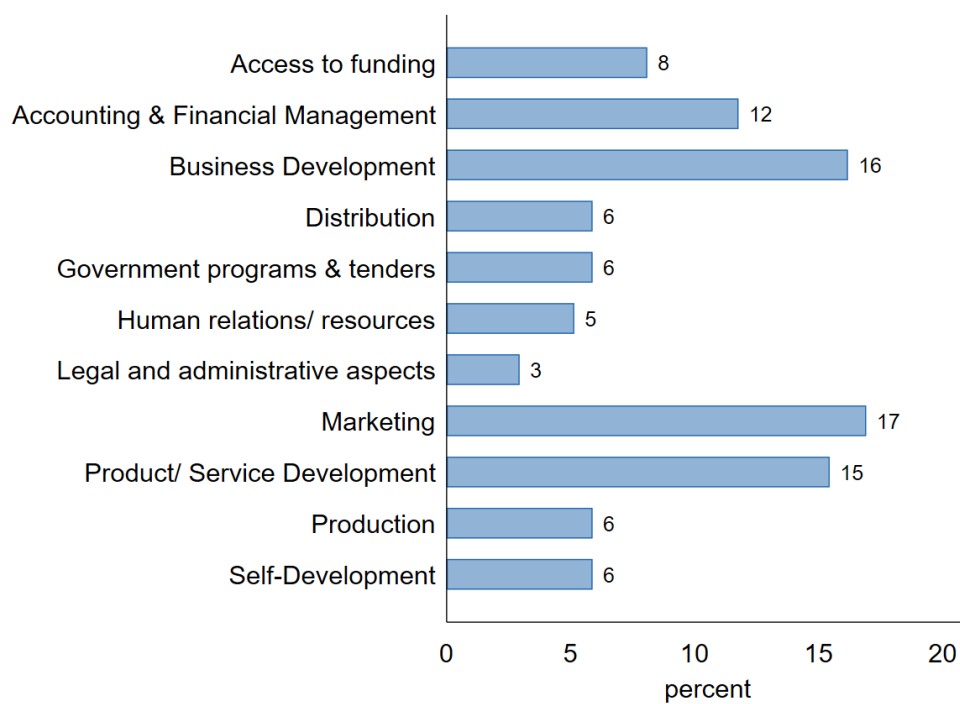


Figure 17: Distribution of the different categories in the individual coaching sessions

8.4.3 Budget & intensity of the different activities

Table 35: Cost for the first phase

| | Activity | Budget spent (€) | Hours worked (h/d) | Hours worked (duration) |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Phase I: Forming Consortiums | 1) Webinar launch | 6,500€ | 33 | 6 months |
| | 2) 3 First meetings | 33,000 € accommodation fees & 30,000 € for consultants' mobilization | 155 | 45 days (PEMA) |
| | 3) Slack exchange and individual coaching | 30,000€ | 150 | 30 days (PEMA) |
| | 4) 3 Intermediate meetings | 33,000 € accommodation fees & 31,000 € for consultants mobilization | 155 | 90 hours/day (PEMA) |
| | 5) Operationalization meeting & decision of the executive office | 8,000€ | 32 | 45 days (PEMA) |
| | Total | 171,500€ | | |