

Johannesburg - An estimated 126 million women were starting or running new businesses in 67 economies around the world, according to the 2012 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Women's Report.

In addition, an estimated 98 million were running established businesses.

Across the regions, Sub-Saharan Africa exhibits the highest average intentions, with 52% of women possessing the intention to start a business in the next three years.

According to Gugu Mjadu, executive general manager of Business Partners, female clients currently make up 38.9% of their client book and over the past financial year 41.2% of disbursements were invested in female businesses.

The distribution of disbursements made to female businesses has also remained constant, averaging at 40.5% over the past three financial years.

“While only 24.5% of finance applications received by Business Partners in the last financial year were submitted by women owned businesses, they accounted for 35.9% of all applications approved,” said Mjadu.

Their statistics also reveal that of these women owned businesses, 37.1% are run by black women.

About 21.5% of these women run businesses operate within the real estate services space, followed by hotel services at 12.5%.

The majority of women owned businesses operate within Western Cape (29.5%), Gauteng (19.8%) and KwaZulu-Natal (19.6%).

Mjadu said that the average category age of these female clients is between 46 and 55 years.

“This is probably due to the fact that women in this age category have learnt a great deal, both personally and professionally, and are

more confident at this stage of their lives to venture into their own business,” said Mjadu.

Referring to the GEM Women’s Report, Mjadu explained that when it comes to established business activity, South Africa has equal percentages of women and men running established businesses.

Ultimately, the growth of women entrepreneurship is very positive for the South African economy.

“Not only are these women creating jobs for themselves and providing for their families, they are employing various other South Africans, who are then able to provide for their families,” she said.

Mjadu said research confirms that when a woman entrepreneur is funded, the opportunities and wealth which they create with this funding is likely to be spread further than when a male is funded.

“This is because women are more likely to share wealth and resources with family, employees and shareholders,” she said.

Women entrepreneurs also have an added responsibility, as they are often breadwinners in their families and are perceived as role models to the younger generation.

“Success stories often inspire young women to pursue their own goals and can therefore lead to the empowerment of even more women in society,” she said.

South Africa, however, still does have a long way to go when it comes to developing women owned businesses and entrepreneurs.

“According to the GEM Women’s Report, the total entrepreneurship activity rate in South Africa is rather low when compared to neighbouring African economies,” she explained.

“We need to create an environment within South Africa, which encourages women to embrace opportunities, develop successful businesses and see entrepreneurship as a viable career option,” concluded Mjadu.