

South Asia Policy Dialogue on Women's Entrepreneurship

27 November 2013, Federation House, New Delhi, India

Concept Note

Background and Context

South Asia has shown mixed progress in development gains since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration and subsequently of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and related targets for achievement by 2015. While progress in countries of South Asia is on-track for reducing extreme poverty, performance on achieving the remaining goals and targets varies greatly across countries and indicators. With regards to goals and targets related to gender equality, the subregion has a mixed record, although it has done particularly well in achieving gender parity in primary education.

Women in South Asia still face severe deficits in health and education and in their access to power, voice and rights. As reported in the ESCAP-SSWA Development Report 2012-13, large gender inequalities exist in the subregion across all dimensions of economic and social life, from poverty and hunger, to health care, to participation in the labour market and to the rights of women to be treated equally with men.¹ Female labour force participation across the subregion for example ranges from 16 per cent in Afghanistan to 23 per cent in Pakistan, 29 per cent in India and 35 per cent in Sri Lanka.² Maldives, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal exhibit higher rates with 56, 57, 66 and 80 per cent, respectively.³ The high cost of low female labour participation is far from negligible, for example India's GDP could increase by around 27 per cent by 2020, if female employment rate were to match that of men.⁴

Women's entrepreneurship, which is conditioned both by the status of women and the status of entrepreneurship in a given country, remains widely untapped across South Asia. In India for example, although the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises sector, often referred to the engine of growth, has played a vital role in the country's economy, accounting for almost 95 per cent of the industrial units, only 13.72 per cent of enterprises are managed by women.⁵

¹ ESCAP-SSWA, Regional Cooperation for Inclusive and Sustainable Development: South and South-West Asia Development Report 2012-13, available from http://sswa.unescap.org/meeting/documents/SSWA_Report_Book.pdf

² Female labour force participation: Percentage of females aged 15 and over economically active. World Bank data, 2011, accessed from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>

³ World Bank data, 2011, accessed from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>

⁴ The Economist, calculations by Booz and Company, October 2012

⁵ MSME Annual Report, India, 2011-12

According to the ESCAP-SSWA Development Paper #1304,⁶ sociocultural factors represent important barriers to women's entrepreneurial activities in India, while combining work and family life also proved challenging for a majority of women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs surveyed, stated lacking awareness and information about available loans, funding agencies, procedure regarding certification and government programmes and schemes. Support for starting an enterprise came essentially from informal sources, while women entrepreneurs' networks represented major sources of information and means of business promotion.

The Policy Dialogue builds on the National Consultation on Creating an Enabling Environment for Women's Entrepreneurship in India, organized jointly by ESCAP (ESCAP-SSWA and the Social Development Division) and FICCI Ladies Organization in collaboration with Goldman Sachs and held on 19 February 2013 in New Delhi, as a part of a broader regional programme on the theme.

Expected outcome

Participants of the South Asia Policy Dialogue on Women's Economic Empowerment through Entrepreneurship will develop an understanding of the common challenges facing women entrepreneurs across the subregion and possible ways to harness regional economic integration and cooperation to overcome these challenges and promote women's entrepreneurship.

The Policy Dialogue will also provide a platform to exchange good practices for a more enabling ecosystem to stimulate women's entrepreneurship and women's increased access to entrepreneurial opportunities.

The Policy Dialogue will seek:

... To inspire

To provide greater visibility for women's entrepreneurship and showcase successful women entrepreneurs and their positive impact on the economy and society.

... To share

To share information, knowledge, ideas and analysis on experiences, challenges, prospects and policies related to women's entrepreneurship across South Asia.

... To collaborate/network and strategize

⁶ ESCAP-SSWA Development Paper No. 1304, available from http://sswa.unescap.org/pdf/ESCAP-SSWA-Development-Paper_1304.pdf

To strengthen dialogue and partnerships between Governments, businesses, civil society, and women entrepreneurs across South Asia, draw policy lessons and devise a Policy Agenda for regional cooperation to support women's entrepreneurship

To provide a greater understanding of synergies and complementarities of the participating organizations for potential partnership development at subregional and national levels;

To deliver concrete and action-oriented recommendations and proposals such as: creation of subregional mechanisms (ex. resource centres, platforms, knowledge institutes), knowledge products, including for the purpose of further research to maximize efforts and strengthen solidarity to promote an environment supportive of women's entrepreneurship.

Profile of participants

- Government officials from relevant Ministries, policy- and decision makers
- Representatives from South Asian women entrepreneurs' associations, experts and women entrepreneurs from across South Asia
- Representatives from relevant UN agencies and other development partners.

Event details

The South Asia Policy Dialogue on Women's Entrepreneurship is organized jointly by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific South and South-West Asia Office (ESCAP-SSWA) and the SAARC Chamber Women Entrepreneurs Council (SCWEC), which is part of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry Ladies Organization (FICCI-FLO), in partnership with the Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the South Asia Women's Network.

The Policy Dialogue will be held on Wednesday 27 November 2013 at the Federation House, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry. It will be conducted in English. Presentations by representatives from women entrepreneurs' association, select women entrepreneurs and resource persons will provide the framework for discussions in each session. (For more details refer to the Tentative Agenda).

Post-event immediate steps

A brief summary of discussions and key messages/recommendations generated by the Policy Dialogue will be presented at the ensuing Policy Dialogue on Regional Cooperation, Connectivity and Inclusive Development in South and South-West Asia, organized by ESCAP-SSWA and which will take place on 28-29 November 2013 in New Delhi.

Further to the event, a report will be also prepared containing a summary of discussions, conclusions and recommendations. The presentations, documentations and related information will be uploaded onto the ESCAP-SSWA website and other knowledge sharing

tools for dissemination to Governments, academics and civil society within South Asia and across the entire Asia-Pacific region.

Contact details

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