

Launching of the EIF-UNESCAP joint project e-Commerce Capacity Building for women-led SMEs in South Asia

Background of the EIF-UNESCAP project

The world has witnessed the rapid emergence of electronic commerce (e-commerce) or digital commerce. This has brought about significant changes in the way business is conducted across the globe. The South Asian region is also experiencing substantial growth in trade through the e-commerce platforms. However, e-commerce is still at a nascent stage in the South Asian LDC members. While domestic e-commerce is on the rise, the use of an e-commerce platform for international trade is otherwise limited.

South Asia in particular faces challenges relating to access to finance, ICT as many women entrepreneurs in subregion are not able to expand their businesses and become part of a wider regional and global supply chains mostly due to lack of knowledge and limited scale of their businesses (micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME)). Access to ICT, especially to those with small e-commerce businesses can bring about additional information resources and open new communication channels, particularly in marginalized communities. Examples from other developing countries illustrate that women entrepreneurs using ICT technologies find new export markets and reach a significant number of customers, secure a higher number of orders, and significantly cut setup and overheads costs. Also, the use of ICT ensures efficient business practices, and allow for flexible working arrangements, e.g. work from home, etc. Therefore, e-commerce can be a powerful tool for bringing in greater gains to women entrepreneurs since it addresses the outmoded barriers of geographic isolation and limited access to information and financing. Therefore, to train and equip women entrepreneurs for using e-commerce platform will facilitate their business opportunities and can assist them in becoming a part of regional or global supply chain.

In this background, EIF and UNESCAP have decided to work on a joint project on building capacity of women entrepreneurs through e-commerce platform to enhance women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship as a strategy for poverty reduction, social wellbeing and sustainable economic growth, thereby achieving the SDG 5 on Gender Equality and other related goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The project mainly focuses on four least developed countries of South Asia, i.e. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, however ESCAP and EIF are looking for partners to expand this project to all the South Asian members. The launch of this project in Sri Lanka during the South Asian Economic Summit (SAES) will explore such partnerships.

Tentative programme

17:00-18:00, 27 September 2019, Ballroom 2, Hilton Colombo

Moderator: Mr. Rajan Ratna

Speakers:

- Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Head, ESCAP- SSWA, New Delhi
- Dr. Ratnakar Adhikari, EIF Executive Director
- Ms. Shirley Jayawardena, Vice-President of SAWDF Chapter, Sri Lanka
- Dr. Dushni Weerakoon, Executive Director, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka
- H.E. Minister of Trade of Sri Lanka

Tentative programme

Time	Topic
17:00-17:05	<i>Introduction of speakers by the Moderator</i>
Setting the scene: Snapshot of the EIF-UNESCAP initiatives	
17:05-17:15	e-Commerce Capacity Building for women-led SMEs in South Asia: Why, how and expected results <i>by Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Head, ESCAP- SSWA, New Delhi</i>
17:15-17:25	Beyond project: Partnership to support women entrepreneurs in LDCs to leveraging digital technology and e-Commerce <i>By Dr. Ratnakar Adhikari, Executive Director, EIF</i>
Discussion: Towards effective implementation of the initiative	
17:25-17:30	Complementary and synergy: SAWDF regional networking for e-Commerce, participation of SAWDF chapters in the initiative <i>By SAWDF chapter in Sri Lanka</i>
17:30-17:35	Getting the e-Commerce ecosystem right: what policy support for women entrepreneurs to effectively joining e-Commerce? <i>By Dr. Dushni Weerakoon, Executive Director, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka</i>
17:35-17:40	Towards sustainability of capacity building on e-Commerce: Government Linking government efforts and regional and partner initiatives, example of Sri-Lanka <i>By Minister of Trade of Sri Lanka</i>
17:40-18:00	Q&A
18:00-19:00	Reception