

KEY STEPS TO INCREASE GENDER-INCLUSIVE SOURCING AMONG CORPORATIONS IN SRI LANKA

The Women's Empowerment through Economic Inclusion project **funded by the United States Department of State and implemented by WEConnect International**, aims to generate long-term opportunities for Women-owned Businesses (WOBs) in Sri Lanka to **connect and conduct business** with large buyers, including local and multinational corporations, government agencies, and non-profit and non-governmental organizations.

KEY FINDINGS



40% of WOBs report facing **challenges in responding to procurement opportunities** due to language barriers and lack of access to information.



Corporate buyers have **limited understanding of SD&I** and do not have policies to promote or encourage purchasing from WOBs. Diversifying the supply chain is not a priority.



35% of WOBs report they **do not get information** on Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and Request for Quotations (RFQs) that are published by corporations.



82% of buyers stated that they have WOBs in their supply chain, but there are no means to verify if they are women owned or managed and controlled by women.



The majority of WOBs is **struggling to articulate their Unique Selling Propositions (USPs)** and unable to pitch properly when there is an opportunity of response from the corporations.



82% of buyers indicate interest in participating in a training on gender-inclusive sourcing.



39% of WOBs are **not members of any business association**. This is a limitation to expanding industry connections.



70% of corporate buyers have **no means to verify** if they are sourcing from WOBs due to the absence of tracking on WBO spend.



91% of WOBs report having **less than 20 employees**.



Buyers report they cannot find WOBs who have **capacity to supply** the quality and quantity required. They would be interested if quality standards are met.



41% of WOBs report an **annual revenue growth** of 10-15%.



Sectors that meet buyer need and WOB supply capacity include: food, beverages and tobacco products, travel, lodging and entertainment services, live plant and animal material, apparel, luggage and personal care products, farming, fishing, forestry, and wildlife contracting services.

ECOSYSTEM RESEARCH

The ecosystem research entailed a desk review, buyer and supplier survey, and key informant interviews. The desk review highlighted key characteristics of local WOBs, key characteristics of the corporate sector, and the national policy situation for SMEs in Sri Lanka. **28 corporate representatives and 121 women entrepreneurs responded to the survey across Sri Lanka**. Findings were validated through KILs with 3 corporate representatives and 2 women entrepreneurs.

The ecosystem research was followed by a **two-hour virtual roundtable discussion** to present findings from the ecosystem research amongst the corporate sector and to open a discussion on best practices of Supplier Diversity and Inclusion. The event was held on the 17th of June 2021 and was joined by approximately 60 participants from the corporate sector, NGOs, non-profit organizations, and WOBs. The event was a good opportunity for Sri Lankan buyer companies and organizations to network with WEConnect International and its member organizations to **understand the business case and implement supplier diversity and inclusion**.



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OPPORTUNITIES

- 1 **66%** of corporate buyers are willing to buy from WOBs when the quality standards are met.
- 2 There is **Demand and Supply** across these common Products and Services categories: food & beverage and tobacco products, travel, food, lodging and entertainment services, accessories and supplies, apparel, luggage, and personal care products, agriculture and fish.
- 3 **81%** of corporate buyers are willing learn about SD&I and implement it in their organization.
- 4 There are **WOBs in each of these key sectors** with adequate capacity to supply to large buyers.

NEXT STEPS

In addition to Sri Lanka, the Women's Empowerment through Economic Inclusion pilot project in the Indo-Pacific includes India, Bangladesh, and the Maldives.

WEConnect International's first step was to commission research to identify key market linkages, challenges, needs and capacity of WOBs, corporations and other key stakeholders in Sri Lanka. Through this three-year project, WEConnect International will work with partners to create a more seamless integration of Sri Lankan certified women's business enterprises into corporate, multilateral and government value chains as a win-win solution. The project will provide capacity development training to Sri Lankan women-owned businesses as well as engage more corporations in their efforts to initiate gender-inclusive sourcing. To further support these efforts, WOBs will be encouraged to register in the WECommunity platform to provide a link between women entrepreneurs and procurement professionals. A training program will also be organized for buyers to provide more insights on supplier diversity and inclusion.

GET INVOLVED

Women-Owned Businesses can join WEConnect International by registering in the [WECommunity platform](#). Larger corporations can [become members](#) with WEConnect International to achieve their supplier diversity & inclusion goals and committing to source more goods and services from WOBs. Contact us to learn more.

ABOUT WECONNECT INTERNATIONAL

WEConnect International is a non-profit organization established in 2009 by many of the largest global corporations to connect women-owned businesses to qualified buyers around the world. WEConnect International identifies, educates, registers, and certifies women's business enterprises based outside of the U.S., and then connects them with qualified buyers that provide mentorship, connections, training, and opportunities to grow their businesses through globally available online tools and resources and a network of comprehensive events and meetings.

WEConnect International helps drive money into the hands of women-owned businesses by enabling them to compete in the global marketplace, contributing to poverty reduction and boosting future economic growth. Our vision is a world in which women have the same opportunities as men to design and implement business solutions that create wealth and sustainable prosperity for their communities.

Our more than 120+ WEConnect International member buyers are committed to supplier diversity and inclusion and sourcing from women-owned businesses around the world, and they represent over US\$1 trillion in annual purchasing power.



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