



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



**AUSTRALIA ADVANCING  
WOMEN'S ECONOMIC  
EMPOWERMENT THROUGH  
AID, TRADE AND  
ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY**



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The Hon Julie Bishop, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs meeting with staff and beneficiaries from the Aga Khan Foundation to announce funding initiatives for urban renewal programs run by women's groups in India. April 2015, New Delhi. Credit: Graham Crouch, DFAT

# MINISTERIAL FOREWORD



The Australian Government recognises that women’s economic empowerment is a significant driver of economic growth and prosperity. This is why promoting women’s economic empowerment is a core priority for us, integrated across Australia’s foreign policy advocacy, trade negotiations, economic diplomacy and aid investments.

Australia’s commitment to women’s economic empowerment is central to our bilateral, regional and global engagement, which continues to deliver quality economic outcomes for women, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. For example, as a member for the Indian Ocean Rim Association, we are supporting female entrepreneurs from a range of industries such as textiles, retail, hospitality and fisheries to grow their enterprises and move into mainstream and export markets.

Advocacy on this issue is fundamental to the role of the Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls and continues to influence and shape opportunities for women in our neighborhood. Australia’s third Ambassador for Women and Girls, Dr Sharman Stone, champions the need for partnerships among individuals, society organisations, the private sector, media organisations, governments and international agencies to achieve women’s economic empowerment.

This booklet highlights Australia’s efforts in advancing women’s economic empowerment – from initiatives that bring equality to the coffee industry in Papua New Guinea to promoting women’s participation in building rural roads in Timor-Leste.

Our strategic priority and commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment form a solid foundation for achieving a better standard of living.

Women’s ability to participate in the formal economy in an unconstrained and fair way is a basic human right. It is also vital for realising our shared hopes for a prosperous and sustainable future for our region.

**The Hon Julie Bishop MP**  
**Minister for Foreign Affairs**



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# INVESTING IN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The message is clear: 'The global economy is not working for women.'<sup>1</sup>

Women are disproportionately affected by poverty. They are discriminated against and exploited in ways that limit their life choices. Women are more likely to end up in insecure, vulnerable and low-wage jobs because they do not have equal access to education, skills training, financial resources, information, and social protection measures.

Gender stereotypes constrain women's opportunities to get jobs, and burden them with an unfair proportion of unpaid work, and family and household responsibilities. These and other factors exclude women from making critical financial decisions at household, local, national and international levels.

Gender inequality has an adverse impact on economic growth, so investing in women's economic empowerment is both the right and smart thing to do. Not only is gender equality a basic human right, it facilitates women's economic empowerment, which generates great gains for human development and economic growth.

Global evidence is clear that gender equality, economic growth and sustainable development are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.<sup>2</sup> According to the McKinsey Global Institute, advancing gender equality could lead to US\$28 trillion a year in global growth.<sup>3</sup> This is why the priority theme of the 61st Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, to be held in March 2017, will focus on women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work.<sup>4</sup>

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1 UN Women, 2015. *Progress of the World's Women*. New York. <http://progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/recommendations/>.

2 Institute of Development Studies Working Paper, 2013. *Gender Equality and Economic Growth: Is there a Win-Win?* Brighton. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.2040-0209.2013.00417.x/pdf>.

3 McKinsey Global Institute, 2015. *The Power of Parity*. London. <http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>.

4 For information on the 61st Commission on the Status of Women: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw61-2017/>.



The new eco-friendly stove is a women's enterprise seeking to save Cambodian women time and money. Credit: Jessica Wong, Communications Consultant, United Nations Capital Development Fund's Shaping Inclusive Finance Transformations and CleanStart Program.

# AUSTRALIA'S COMMITMENT TO ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Australia is committed to promoting women's economic empowerment, but recognises that economic growth alone does not deliver gender equality. Australia understands that progress is linked to the *kind* of growth, the *nature* of the economy, a country's *policy* environment and its *political* will.<sup>5</sup>

This holistic approach to women's economic empowerment means that it is important to implement all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), not just Goal 5 even though its explicit focus is on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. While Goal 5 calls for recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work and providing equal access to economic, financial and technological resources, many other SDGs also support women's economic empowerment. For example:

Goal 1—'no poverty' focuses on access to economic resources and financial services.

Goal 2—'zero hunger' aspires to double agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, especially women.

Goal 4—'quality education' seeks equal access to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education.

Goal 8—'decent work and economic growth' focuses on full productive employment in safe and secure working environments, equal pay for work of equal value, and protection of labour rights.

Goal 9—'industry, innovation and infrastructure' emphasises the importance of developing quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure to support economic development.

Goal 10—'reduced inequalities' encourages adoption of fiscal, wage and social protection policies to achieve greater equality.

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<sup>5</sup> Esther Duflo, 2012. *Women Empowerment and Economic Development*. <http://economics.mit.edu/files/7417>. Also see World Bank 2012. *World Development Report: Gender quality and development*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/4391>.

To meet the SDGs, Australia aligns its work to the seven primary drivers of women’s economic empowerment highlighted by the United Nations Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment.<sup>6</sup> These drivers aim to make it possible for women and girls to gain the skills and resources they need to earn more money, and expand their businesses. They also challenge negative stereotypes that limit women’s access to work while empowering them to make and act on financial decisions at all levels—household, community, national and international.<sup>7</sup>

### Seven primary drivers of women’s economic empowerment



Source: Leave No One Behind, Report on the UN Secretary General’s High Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment, p. 4

6 UN Secretary General’s High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment, 2016. *Leave No One Behind: A Call to Action for Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment* <http://www.womenseconomicempowerment.org/assets/reports/UNWomen%20Full%20Report.pdf>.  
 7 International Center for Research on Women, 2011. *Understanding and Measuring Women’s Economic Empowerment Definition, Framework and Indicators*. <http://www.icrw.org/publications/understanding-and-measuring-womens-economic-empowerment>.

# AUSTRALIA'S GLOBAL EFFORTS TO PROGRESS WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The *Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy*<sup>8</sup>, reflects the Government's commitment to promote the empowerment of women and girls across Australia's foreign policy, economic diplomacy and development program. Australia's three priority areas of work are:

1. enhancing women's voice in decision making, leadership and peacebuilding
2. promoting women's economic empowerment
3. ending violence against women and girls.

These priorities inform our international and regional advocacy, specifically through the work of the Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls, Dr Sharman Stone. The Ambassador champions the need for partnerships among individuals, civil society organisations, the private sector, media organisations, governments, and international agencies to achieve women's economic empowerment.

Australia plays a significant role in multilateral, global and regional platforms, including the Group of Twenty (G20), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, East Asia Summit, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)<sup>9</sup> and Pacific Islands Forum. We ensure that gender equality and women's economic empowerment objectives are integrated into these deliberations.

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8 DFAT, 2016. *Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy*. <http://dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/gender-equality/pages/gender-equality.aspx>.

9 IORA is the only regional forum linking most countries on the Indian Ocean Rim through an annual meeting of foreign ministers. Australia completed its two-year term as IORA Chair in October 2015.

Australia played a crucial role in establishing Women 20 (W20), a sub-group of G20. W20 promotes gender-inclusive growth to advance G20 commitments on women's empowerment. In line with these commitments, Australia is working to reduce the gap between women and men in the workforce by 2025.

The Gender Equality Fund, established in 2015, supports high performing and innovative aid that promotes gender equality and women's empowerment. Many of the initiatives described in this booklet are supported by the Gender Equality Fund, including the Australian Government's new \$46 million flagship, Investing in Women Initiative, which expands women's economic participation through new partnerships with the public and private sector in South East Asia. It is strengthening market opportunities for women. This innovative approach to Australia's aid delivery introduces new ways for small and medium enterprises led by women to leverage capital from investors who want to make a positive social impact. The program began in May 2016 and is being implemented in Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam.

Australia's long-standing commitment to women's economic empowerment, through foreign policy advocacy, trade negotiations, economic diplomacy and aid investments, has seen many positive results. Important results include creating better quality jobs for women, establishing better access to finance and markets for business development, and breaking many institutional barriers through workplace reform and cross-border trade facilitation.

# CREATING BETTER QUALITY JOBS FOR WOMEN

The Australian Government works in partnership with countries in the Indo-Pacific region to improve access to better quality jobs so women and girls can gain more from participating in the economy.

## Improving women's working conditions in the garment industry in South and Southeast Asia

Being employed and earning a wage does not automatically lead to women's economic empowerment. Women who work in factories, such as in the garment industry, often do not earn enough to enjoy a decent standard of living and meet their own and their families' basic needs. Women often work in dangerous and unsafe conditions. They are often vulnerable to sexual abuse and have little or no access to labour rights.

Through the Gender Equality Fund, the Australian Government is a significant donor to the Better Work program, a joint initiative of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Finance Corporation. The program improves women's working conditions in the garment industry. In partnership with the private sector and trade unions, Better Work improves workplace standards, including those covering wages, work hours, health and safety, leave, and labour relations. The program is active in 1300 factories that together employ more than 1.6 million workers in seven countries, most of whom are women. Australia's funding for Better Work goes to projects in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia and Vietnam.

Better Work is showing promising results. In Vietnam, for example, women now have more access to pregnancy-related healthcare and do not work as many hours. Those working in factories participating in the program are earning at least the minimum wage. In Indonesia, where workplace sexual harassment frequently occurs, Better Work is increasing women's awareness of their rights. Women now more often raise issues with their trade union representative, helping to prevent such harassment.

Australia is working with ILO to address violence against women, which has a negative impact on productivity, and providing female factory staff with healthcare and childcare services. In the coming years, Australian support will help women build the skills they need to contest trade union leadership positions and progress to senior management.



Eland Long, a factory in Vietnam, provides improved working conditions for women. Credit: Better Work

## Bringing equality to the coffee industry in Papua New Guinea

In the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea (PNG), coffee is an essential cash crop. Women work longer hours than men in coffee production but receive, on average, less than one-third of the income earned. Women are also involved in time-consuming activities, including harvesting and sorting, which have a significant positive impact on the quality of coffee produced. Despite their valuable contribution, services that improve coffee farming techniques are predominantly provided by men, for men. Women rarely benefit.<sup>10</sup>

Through the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program, the Australian Government supports CARE's Coffee Industry Support Project, which makes the coffee industry more equitable. The project improves the economic and social wellbeing of women farmers through opportunities to participate along the coffee value chain.<sup>11</sup> This includes increasing women's ability to earn more and have more control over their income. It also includes influencing the workplace policies, practices and programs managed by key industry stakeholders so they are more inclusive.

Alma Lance exemplifies what can be achieved through such a project. Alma has gained valuable experience in delivering services that improve coffee farming techniques through her internship with one of CARE's private sector partners, Sustainable Management Services PNG. She now works full time with Sustainable Management Services PNG to address the significant gap in the number of women providing and receiving support services that improve coffee farming.

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<sup>10</sup> CARE, Coffee Industry Support Project. <http://www.care.org/work/world-hunger/coffee-industry-support-project>.

<sup>11</sup> A value chain is a set of linked activities that work to add value to a product.

Alma has seen the positive impacts of the project. Companies are changing their practices, for example, by holding support service sessions at a time which maximises women's participation. Some companies have also changed their human resource policies so they are more transparent and equitable. As a result, women's participation in coffee-related support services since 2013 has increased from less than 5 per cent to more than 40 per cent.



Alma Lance discusses improved farming techniques with coffee farmers in PNG. Credit: Coffee Industry Support Project, CARE

## Promoting women's participation in building rural roads in Timor-Leste

Effective infrastructure attracts commercial investment by reducing transportation costs and improving access to labour and materials. It also reduces poverty by connecting poor people, including women and girls, to vital health and education facilities, markets and employment opportunities. Integrating gender equality into rural roads development increases economic growth.



ILO Social Safeguards staff member, Dirce Correia, discusses workers' rights, health and safety, and diversity inclusion with a roads contractor during one of her regular compliance checks. Credit: R4D/ILO

In partnership with the ILO, the Australian Government supports Timor-Leste through the Roads for Development (R4D) program. By rehabilitating and maintaining rural roads, R4D boosts economic growth and reduces poverty by connecting coffee farms and other productive businesses to the country's broader road network.

Participation of women is a high priority and the project is on track to meeting its target of 50 per cent women, having already met its minimum quota of 30 per cent. Nine (15 per cent) companies owned by females have been contracted as part of R4D. Short-term employment opportunities have benefited women by increasing their skills and confidence in work. As a result of improved rural roads, women can access more diverse food sources and better health services. They now also spend less time collecting water.

R4D is piloting innovative approaches to breaking barriers that constrain women's participation.

# INVESTING IN WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Globally the number of female entrepreneurs continues to rise. Approximately 126 million women around the world now own a business.<sup>12</sup> Developing countries must tap into this potential for women in business to support economic growth. The Australian Government contributes to economic development in the Indo-Pacific region by supporting the establishment and expansion of women-led enterprises and improving their access to finance and markets.

## Women entrepreneurs rebuilding lives and economies in Nepal

Women and children in Nepal were disproportionately impacted by the devastating earthquakes that struck the country in early 2015. This disaster presented new challenges for women to earn incomes and support their families.

Since 2006, Australia's support to the Micro-Enterprise Development Programme (MEDEP), through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has promoted women's economic empowerment. Nearly 70 per cent of the poor who have been trained and supported through MEDEP are women.

Maiya Ramtel is one success story emerging from MEDEP. She challenges traditional ideas about the kind of work Nepalese women can do. Maiya is one of the few women entrepreneurs in her village making shoes for women and children, generally considered a man's job.

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<sup>12</sup> Jackie VanBurg, 2013. *The Global Rise of Female Entrepreneurs*. <https://hbr.org/2013/09/global-rise-of-female-entrepreneurs>.

The entrepreneurship development training she received from MEDEP provided her with skills and equipment to scale up her shoe-making enterprise. However, Maiya lost her home and business when earthquakes struck Nepal in 2015. In response to the earthquakes, the Australian Government supported the Rapid Enterprise and Livelihoods Recovery Project to help more than 12 000 micro-entrepreneurs, such as Maiya, revive their businesses and livelihoods. Maiya bought new machines to restart her business with support from the project. Her wish to contribute to her family through her business was fulfilled once again. Being an entrepreneur has helped Maiya become independent and self-reliant, which continues to contribute to the prosperity of her family and community.



Maiya received support from the Australian Government to revive her shoe business in her village after Nepal was hit by disastrous earthquakes in 2015. Credit: UNDP/MEDEP

## Disability inclusion in women-led enterprises in Cambodia

An estimated two million people live with disability in Cambodia. They often face discrimination and are less likely to get an education or stable employment. Moreover, women with disabilities in Cambodia face many additional intersecting forms of discrimination.

In Cambodia, the Australian Government focuses on inclusive participation through women's empowerment. It incorporates disability inclusion across all program areas, focusing on assisting disability groups, building the evidence base for disability-inclusive development, and funding rehabilitation.



Sokchan (middle) with training colleagues Chantha (left) and Sophea (right), making handicrafts.  
Credit: Cambodian Disabled People's Organization

Australia is the primary donor to the disability sector in Cambodia, providing most of its support through Disability Rights Initiative Cambodia (DRIC). This joint program is implemented by the UNDP, United Nations Children's Fund and World Health Organization. It forms local advocacy and support organisations that work to build the capacity of and empower women with disabilities to be leaders.

Sokchan is an enterprising woman who has benefited from DRIC. Her disability was caused when she was injured by a stray bullet. Today, Sokchan promotes the rights of women with disabilities and provides them with opportunities to earn a living through the small tailoring shop she opened in her hometown, Battambang. Through her shop, Sokchan trains members from the Women With Disabilities Forum, of which she is the Director.

Products such as carry bags, pencil bags, hats and scarves, which Sokchan and forum members make, are sold in souvenir shops across Battambang. At a national workshop conducted by the Cambodia Disabled People's Organisation, supported through DRIC, Sokchan convinced a Japanese restaurateur and shop owner to sell these items in Japan.

Sokchan invests profits from her expanding tailoring shop business back into the Women With Disabilities Forum so it can meet increasing demand. Her dream is to grow her business by mobilising resources from the private sector and development partners. Sokchan ultimately wants a bigger, fully-equipped tailoring shop with better sewing machines and handicraft materials.

## Supporting women entrepreneurs to drive growth in the Indian Ocean

In August 2015, representatives from governments, chambers of commerce, civil society and business leaders from IORA, met in Seychelles to reaffirm their commitment to advance gender equality and women's economic empowerment in the region. The outcome was the Mahé Consensus.<sup>13</sup>



Australia's High Commissioner to Mauritius, HE Susan Coles (third from right), launches the coaching manual developed by representatives of Australia and Mauritius. Credit: DFAT

<sup>13</sup> IORA, 2015. *The Mahé Consensus on Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment*. [http://www.iora.net/media/159820/mah\\_\\_consensus.pdf](http://www.iora.net/media/159820/mah__consensus.pdf).

Recommendation 4 of the Mahé Consensus focuses on training and supporting women entrepreneurs to develop business strategies and establish business networks. To support this recommendation, the Australian High Commission in Port Louis, Mauritius, has funded a tailored coaching and mentoring program for micro, small and medium women-owned businesses in Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rodrigues and Seychelles. The program draws on local and Australian expertise. Women entrepreneurs, from start-ups to established businesses, and from sectors such as textiles, retail, hospitality and fisheries, are being coached and mentored in growing their enterprises and developing opportunities to move into mainstream and exports markets.

This initiative is also helping women entrepreneurs drive economic growth in the Indo-Pacific region and strengthening links between Australia and IORA countries.

“The coaching and mentoring program is an excellent example of Australia’s commitment to women’s economic empowerment as a cross-cutting issue.”

Australia’s High Commissioner to Mauritius, HE Susan Coles

## The Australia Awards advancing women's agribusiness in Ghana and Kenya

Through the Australia Awards, the Australian Government strengthens women's agribusiness in Africa to reduce malnutrition, promote women's and children's health and food security, and contribute to economic growth.

Two Australia Awards Scholarship Alumni, Mildred Songbanyere Suglo in Ghana and Romana Mbinya in Kenya, are leading the way. As agricultural officers for their respective governments, these women are putting their Australian studies into practice by promoting the cultivation and consumption of orange flesh sweet potato. This work is building productive value chains for small farmers and entrepreneurs by creating new products and markets. It is also reducing Vitamin A deficiency and improving women's and children's health.

Romana Mbinya, Senior Agricultural Officer, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Kenya, inspects the quality of rice.  
Credit: Australia Awards



“Success to me is a food and nutrition-secure community, sustainable agricultural systems and vibrant and inclusive communities devoid of poverty, hunger and other social and economic inequalities.”

Romana Mbinya, Senior Agricultural Officer,  
Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock  
and Fisheries, Kenya

In Kenya, Romana draws on the knowledge of agribusiness value chain management she gained studying in Australia, to help women farmers grow and market sweet potato crops. The production of maize and cassava will supplement their earnings. Romana's goal is to help create healthy and productive communities.

Across the continent in Ghana, Mildred has trained local farmers, more than 80 per cent of whom are women, to develop new products produced from orange flesh sweet potato. *Potaghurt* (potato yoghurt) and orange flesh sweet potato drinks and bread are now available in Ghana's markets.



Mildred Songbanyere Suglo, Agriculture Officer, Women in Agricultural Development Directorate, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Ghana, promotes the cultivation and consumption of orange flesh sweet potato. Credit: Australia Awards

“Studying in Australia equipped me with in-depth knowledge and skills in effective nutrition program planning and implementation. The knowledge gained on sociology of food and nutrition, critical thinking, teamwork and facilitation has played a key role in making this project successful.”

Mildred Songbanyere Suglo, Agriculture Officer, Women in Agricultural Development Directorate, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Ghana

# PROMOTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH TRADE

Improving women's ability to participate in trade is important for their economic empowerment, and sustained national economic growth. Such growth is difficult to achieve without international trade. The Australian Government supports developing countries to address trade barriers and better integrate into the global trading system. Trade boosts employment, incomes and government revenue. It helps economies grow by improving access to larger markets, providing higher returns on unskilled labour, and generating greater competition, innovation and entrepreneurship.

## Removing barriers to cross-border trade for women in South Asia

The Gender Equality Fund is supporting Australia's \$25 million investment (2014–18) in the South Asia Regional Trade Facilitation Program (SARTFP) managed by the World Bank. This program supports gender-sensitive approaches to trade facilitation, infrastructure connectivity, improved livelihoods, and enterprise development. It challenges the assumption that trade is gender neutral and demonstrates why gender equality matters in regional trade facilitation and infrastructure connectivity.

To address the cross-border barriers that have a significant impact on women's ability to trade, SARTFP implements initiatives that promote women's participation in activities such as cross-border tourism, transport and infrastructure. It also includes initiatives that support female traders at selected land ports through public information campaigns on safety issues and education programs on trade legislation, and their rights.

Through SARTFP, the Australian Government supports the World Bank's Business Enterprise and Employment Support (BEES) for Women in South Asia Network, a regional group of civil society organisations from each country in South Asia. The goal of the BEES network is to provide a forum for knowledge sharing, learning, collective action and advocacy on women's economic empowerment as well as sharing good practices and intervening to help women climb out of poverty. The BEES network holds a series of meetings and workshops and facilitates learning exchanges in each country in South Asia, enabling access to finance, markets, training, knowledge and peer support.



Women at Kirtipur Hosiery, Nepal, during a knowledge sharing session held by the Business Enterprise and Employment Support (BEES) for Women in South Asia Network visit. Credit: Jamie Greenawalt, World Bank

## Expanding the export potential of women's small-scale agriculture in Tonga

Women on average make up 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. They make significant contributions to agriculture and food security.<sup>14</sup> Supporting women to improve agricultural productivity and giving them access to local, regional and international markets helps them increase their incomes and self-reliance, and reduce poverty.



Ma'u Naufahu, a mother of seven and a grandmother of three, is one of many women to have benefited from the ISDF program through its vocational training on agricultural products. Credit: ISDF/ DFAT

<sup>14</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization, 2014. *The State of Food and Agriculture: Innovation in family farming*. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4040e.pdf>.

In Tonga, where gender inequality undermines economic growth, the Australian Government supports a partnership between the Interim Skills Development Facility and the Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access program. The partnership transforms women's household food gardening activities into sustainable income-generating enterprises.

Fifty-five women in five villages on the island of Tongatapu participated in innovative vocational training to develop their skills in growing and exporting eggplant, chillies and capsicum. Motivated by their new skills, the women are now developing local recipes, such as chili jam, and exploring new crops, such as sweet corn, lettuce, tomatoes, bok choy and papaya. They have also been inspired to learn more about nutrition and healthy eating. Their improved numeracy, literacy and critical thinking skills have also benefited these women in other aspects of their lives.

## Supporting women to start businesses in Solomon Islands

Women are leading efforts to improve the trade and investment climate in Solomon Islands by making it easier and faster to register a business. To participate in the formal economy and cross-border trade, businesses must be registered. However, cumbersome business registration procedures are a barrier for women-led enterprises.

Australia is working with the Asian Development Bank's Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative and the Ministry of Commerce, Industries, Labour and Immigration in the Solomon Islands to reform business laws and make it easier for women to do business. Reforms to company laws now allow for single shareholder companies, which means women can start a business without a male co-director. The initiative has also established the country's first online business registry, Company Haus. The Assistant Registrar of Company Haus, Veronica Manedika, says she helps at least 10 women a month to establish new businesses or register and formalise a business.

Company Haus makes it cheaper and faster for new businesses led by women to incorporate, reducing the time needed to form a company from an average of three months to less than two days. The transition to an online system means women entrepreneurs can register their company from any location. Leading this effort is the Deputy Director of the Foreign Investment Division, Lynette DaWheya, who oversaw the migration of data from a paper-based system to an online one. She has trained more than 100 women on starting a business, including how to register, obtain a license and comply with taxation requirements.



Veronica Manedika, Assistant Registrar, and Lynette DaWheya, Deputy Registrar, at the entrance of Company Haus. As the first online business registry in Solomon Islands, Company Haus makes it easier for women to participate in the formal economy. Credit: DFAT

# CREATING AN ENABLING POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Institutional barriers are detrimental to women's advancement and national economic growth. Women's economic empowerment will remain unrealised if attention is not given to structural and policy reforms. While it is vital that women gain better quality jobs, appropriate skills training, and access to trade, these will have limited impact if not matched with institutional change. In the Indo-Pacific region, the Australian Government is working with partners to promote institutional, business and workplace reforms to allow women to claim and exercise their rights.

## The W+ Certificate creating incentives to invest in women's empowerment in Southeast Asia

Another innovative approach the Australian Government supports through its Gender Equality Fund is the 'W+ Standard.' Developed by Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN), the W+ Standard is a unique certification that quantifies benefits from economic development and environment projects for women into tradable W+ units.

The W+ Standard tracks women's empowerment in six areas: time; income and assets; health; leadership; education; and food security. Projects acquire W+ certification by planning and tracking progress in at least one of these six areas. Results are independently verified by an external auditor accredited by WOCAN. Projects receive W+ units if their audit results are satisfactory. Units can be bought and used as currency by companies interested in branding their products and services as 'women-friendly', by companies wanting transparent ways of improving the lives of women producers in their supply chains, by individuals wanting to support women's empowerment, and by investors who are focused on primarily social rather than financial returns.

Australia is applying W+ to its Shaping Financial Inclusion Transformations in Association of Southeast Asian Nations activity in Cambodia, where more than 80 per cent of households rely on firewood and charcoal as main cooking fuel sources. Australia supports the distribution of a new eco-friendly stove that is twice as sturdy, consumes 20 per cent less fuel, and emits 50 per cent less carbon monoxide than its closest competitor. Australia's support means more than 13 500 Cambodian women will save time and money which they can use for other activities.

The new clean-cook stove can be bought using credit, which means more women can buy it, an important factor given that 70 per cent of Cambodian women do not have access to formal financial services. With Australia's support, WOCAN measured and verified that the innovative stove and credit model met the W+ Standard. Verified W+ units can be purchased with proceeds going to communities in Cambodia.



Making new eco-friendly stoves that will save women time and improve their health by reducing the harmful effects of traditional stoves. Credit: Jessica Wong, Communications Consultant, United Nations Capital Development Fund's Shaping Inclusive Finance Transformations and CleanStart Program.

## Implementing the Women's Empowerment Principles in the Lao People's Democratic Republic

The Australian Government is working with the Australian Chamber of Commerce Lao PDR and the Lao PDR Government to create an enabling environment for women working in the finance sector. Senior executives from 11 national banks have signed the United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)<sup>15</sup>, helping the private sector promote gender equality in the workplace, marketplace and community.



Thippavanh Chanthaphasouk, Deputy Director General of the Bank Supervision Department, Bank of the Lao PDR, discusses the business case for workplace diversity with leaders from the banking sector in Vientiane. Credit: DFAT

<sup>15</sup> The WEPs were developed by UN Women and UN Global Compact. They are seven steps to guide business on how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community. <http://www.weprinciples.org/>.

The seven WEPs are important for private sector action towards women's economic empowerment. To address the challenge of putting the principles into practice, Australia supported a four-part workshop series, targeting chief executive officers, human resource officers, chief operating officers and procurement officers. The workshops provided practical advice on issues such as unconscious bias, and supporting pregnancy and paid parental leave. After the workshops, interested banks have begun to implement the WEPs in their workplaces and develop further guidance. For example, ANZ banks in-country are aligning their human resources policies with the WEPs.

Mukdalay Xayarath, Human Resource Manager, ANZ Bank Lao PDR, says a great deal was learned from the workshops. Two important lessons were the need to promote equal opportunity during recruitment so there is no gender pay gap, and the need to encourage women to take on leadership roles.

Austrade endorsed the WEPs in 2015, reflecting Australia's commitment to promote gender equality as good for business, trade and growth.

### **The Seven Women's Empowerment Principles:**

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality
2. Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination
3. Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers
4. Promote education, training and professional development for women
5. Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women
6. Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy
7. Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality

Source: <http://www.wepprinciples.org/>.



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Cover image: Perna Devi, from Northern India has found a pathway to creating change through a women's Self-Help Group program supported through TEAR Australia.  
Credit: Hailey Bartholomew/ TEAR Australia

