



## UNESCAP and EIF High-Level Forum

# Empowering Women to join Global Value Chains through E-commerce: Experiences in South Asia in COVID-19 Context

## Concept Note and Tentative Programme

Tuesday 20 October 2020

15.00-16.30 (IST)

### Background

Inclusive trade is an important dimension of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development to ensure that all actors of the society, particularly those being marginalised, should gain from increased trade. However, engaging in international trade, and joining global value chains pose significant challenges to women and small enterprises, due to various factors embedded in the ecosystem and their capability. Specific to women entrepreneurs in South Asia, their small scale of production, scattered and unorganised business, lack of knowledge to use ICT tools, lack of access to trade logistics and international market information, coupled with their daily family obligations are among major challenges which has deterred their economic growth. These are the factors which has slowed down the progress of South Asia in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality.

The present context of COVID-19 has further worsened the situation and has interrupted many existing supply chains. In such a context, e-commerce can provide unprecedented opportunities for women entrepreneurs to overcome those challenges and to explore the global and regional markets. However, to grasp these opportunities, some impediments – both at policy level as well as entrepreneurship need to be addressed. These include interalia bringing in regulatory reforms to improving business operation, creating awareness for changing the mindset, and upgrading the skills of entrepreneurs to use e-commerce as a tool to promote their business. EIF and UNESCAP are jointly organising this Forum to create awareness on the existing opportunities for promoting business through e-commerce.

### Objective

To further shed light on what needs to be done, and how to do it, the UNESCAP and EIF are hosting this Forum under the GTPA initiative of Digital Festival on Inclusive Trade. The UNESCAP and EIF will also take this opportunity to share insights into the implementation of on-going regional project on e-Commerce

capacity building for women-led SME in South Asia. A web portal on e-commerce for Women-led MSMEs in South Asia will also be launched at the event.

The Forum aims to focus on the opportunities and challenges relating to empowering women to join global value chains through use of e-commerce tools. The expert panellists will share their experiences, best practices, identify challenges and opportunities, and the way forward on this issue.

**Tentative Programme**  
*Tuesday 20 October 2020*  
(Indian Time: 15.00-16.30 IST)

**Virtual platform: Zoom (link will be provided soon)**

**15.00 – 15.05** – Welcome and introductory remarks by the moderator: **Mr. Nagesh Kumar**, Director, South and South-West Asia Office, UNESCAP

**15.05 – 15.10** – Launch of ***E-Commerce Capacity Building Portal for Women-led MSMEs in South Asia*** <https://www.unescap.wesellonline.org/> (by Mr. Nagesh Kumar, Director, ESCAP and Mr. Ratnakar Adhikari, ED, EIF)

**15.10 – 16.00** – Moderated panel discussion:

**Panel**

- **H.E. Ms. Selima Ahmad**, Member of Parliament, Bangladesh, and President, Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- **H.E. Ms. Shandana Gulzar Khan**, Member National Assembly of Pakistan, Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Commerce, and Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians
- **Ms. Jahnabi Phookan**, National President of FICCI Ladies Organization (FLO), India
- **Ms. Nikita Acharya**, CEO, Co-founder of "Urban Girl", e-Commerce start-up in Nepal
- **Ms. Shirley Jayawardena**, President, Federation of Chamber of Commerce & Industry in Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka

**16.00 – 16.25** – Q & A and comments from participants

**16.25 – 16.30** – Concluding remarks by **Mr. Ratnakar Adhikari**, Executive Director, EIF Executive Secretariat (at the World Trade Organization), Geneva