As stated by the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, “women’s equal participation is the game-changer we need”.

Our recent review of the SDGs at the regional level revealed that substantive challenges remain in ensuring women’s equal access to decent work and economic empowerment, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work burdens on women and girls, eliminating violence against women and girls, and promoting women’s equal participation and leadership in governance and decision making. The large gaps that remain related to data for SDG 5, Gender Equality, (and other SDGs more broadly) continue to hinder monitoring progress and evidence-based policy.

The intersection of COVID-19, small businesses and gender inequality highlights the interdependence of the world of work in Asia and the Pacific. Even before the pandemic, on average women-owned businesses often lagged behind male-owned businesses in terms of size, productivity, profitability or finance readiness. Additionally, women entrepreneurs in the Asia Pacific region tend to be operating in the most disadvantaged sectors such as garment, footwear, accommodation, and F&B industries or in the lower ends of value chains. The barriers in accessing finance became more pronounced as women-led MSMEs in countries across Asia and the Pacific found it harder to access funding support due to issues around complex procedures and official documentation. The internet user gender gap also affected the ability of women entrepreneurs to leverage technology and alternate business models during the pandemic.

Put quite simply, women must flourish as decision makers and as businesspersons if countries are to succeed with rebuilding after the pandemic and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. With the reduced fiscal space, no country can afford to forego advancing gender equality that could add as much as $4.5 trillion annually to the region’s GDP by 2025. But to grasp this opportunity, countries will need to overcome the challenges faced by women in their pursuit of entrepreneurship. Women’s limited access to information and communication technology, discriminatory legislative frameworks and cultural and social norms all impede women’s ability to start, sustain and upscale their businesses. As does women’s lack of access to finance.
The region is unlikely to achieve SDG 5 and SDG 17 by 2030, unless Governments and other stakeholders make significant investments to accelerate progress. Enabling women entrepreneurs’ meaningful and equal participation has a proven multiplier effect on other SDGs: decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), poverty reduction (SDG 1) and health and wellbeing (SDG 3), among others. It is clear that supporting women entrepreneurship is vital for reducing gender inequalities by ensuring women’s full economic participation and their contribution to resilient and innovative economies.

Providing scalable solutions and support for women entrepreneurs is vital for ensuring continued inclusive, resilient, and sustainable recovery from COVID-19. During these trying times for women entrepreneurs, ESCAP’s programme on Catalyzing Women’s Entrepreneurship (CWE), supported by the Government of Canada, has become even more of a lifeline. The programme addresses three fundamental barriers that hinder the growth of women-led businesses: access to finance; digital and business skills; and an enabling policy environment.

Take the above framework, the side event will facilitate discussions to promote scalable solutions in the key areas of policy interventions, access to finance and digital skills for addressing challenges facing women entrepreneurs in Asia-Pacific in achieving SDGs. The conversation will facilitate an exchange of good practices from country, regional and global perspectives while underlining the importance of supporting women entrepreneurs during and after the crisis.

Expected outcomes of the side event are:

- Enhanced understanding of the power of catalyzing women’s entrepreneurship for economic growth and achievement of SDGs.
- Perspectives from member States, the private sector and CSOs on the challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs
- Key avenues for regional and global cooperation to replicate and scale up solutions for women entrepreneurs
**Programme outline:**

<table>
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<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>19:00 – 19:05</strong></td>
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| **19:05 – 19:25** | Opening remarks by  
1. Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary of United Nations ESCAP  
2. Ms. Sue Szabo, Director General of Innovative and Climate Finance Bureau, Global Issues and Development Branch, Global Affairs Canada |
| **19:25 – 20:25** | **Panel Discussion**  
Moderated by: Mr. Kaveh Zahedi, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP  
1. Ms. Tiffany Tong, Co-Founder, Aeloi Technologies in Nepal  
2. Ambassador Christine Clark CSC, Ambassador of Women and Girls in Australia  
3. Ms. Trinh Thi Huong, Deputy Director General of Agency for Enterprise Development, Ministry of Planning and Investment in Vietnam  
4. Ms. Diana Tjoeng, Asia Regional Manager of Good Return  
5. Mr. Md Shahid Uddin Akbar, Founder and CEO of Bangladesh Institute of ICT in Development |
| **20:25 – 20:30** | Concluding remarks from the Moderator and vote of thanks |

**12th July 1900 – 20.30 (NY Time)**