Launched Event

Launch of the EIF-UNESCAP Joint Project: e-Commerce Capacity Building for Women-led SMEs in South Asia

‘The world has witnessed 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 e-commerce platforms. However, e-commerce is still at a nascent stage in South Asia’s Least Developed Countries (LDCs). 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 such as access to finance, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as many women entrepreneurs in the sub-region are not able to expand their businesses and become part of wider regional and global supply chains due to lack of knowledge and limited scale of their businesses (micro, small and medium enterprises [MSME])’ (UNESCAP 2019).

‘Access to ICT’, especially to small e-commerce businesses, ‘can bring about additional information resources and open new communication channels, particularly for marginalised communities… Examples from developing countries illustrate that women entrepreneurs using ICT technologies find new export markets, reach a larger number of potential clients, secure a higher number of orders,’ and significantly cut setup and overhead costs (Gender Champions 2018; UNESCAP 2019). The use of ICTs also ensures efficient business practices, and allows flexible working arrangements, e.g. work from home, etc. (Ibid.). ‘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. Training and equipping women entrepreneurs for using e-commerce platform will facilitate their business opportunities and assist them in becoming part of regional or global supply chains’ (UNESCAP 2019).

In this background, EIF and UNESCAP have decided to work on a joint project on building capacity of women entrepreneurs through e-commerce platforms 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’ (Ibid.). The project mainly focuses on four least developed countries of South Asia - 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 Pakistan during the Twenty-second Sustainable Development Conference on ‘Sustainable Development in a Digital Society’ will explore such partnerships.

References


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