

Panel Discussion

Digital Skill Development of Women Entrepreneurs on Enhancing Business Opportunities

In collaboration with ESCAP

Women entrepreneurs are using digital tools to promote products, reach customers and manage their businesses. New Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools can also support simple tasks such as market research, content development, customer communication and business planning. However, access to these tools does not automatically lead to stronger businesses or new market opportunities. Many women-led Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) still face gaps in digital skills, market information, finance, logistics, export procedures and support networks.

Trade can create new opportunities for women-led businesses, particularly when they are able to connect with markets, value chains and buyers beyond their immediate location. However, practical barriers remain. These include limited access to reliable trade information, high logistics costs, complex procedures, uneven digital access and a lack of trusted support services. Such barriers are often more difficult for smaller firms and women entrepreneurs to manage.

With these issues in view, this session will build on United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)'s pilot initiative on 'E-Commerce Capacity Building for Women-led MSMEs in South Asia.' Through this programme, ESCAP's Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia (SSWA) has supported women entrepreneurs strengthen their understanding of e-commerce, digital marketing and online business development. The aim is to help women-led enterprises connect with local, regional and global value chains. The programme has also shown the value of practical dialogue that links e-commerce, digital marketing and AI with export readiness, trade procedures and real business questions and highlights the importance of bringing government agencies, business support institutions and entrepreneurs together to identify practical solutions. The proposed session will draw on these lessons in the context of Pakistan and SDPI's capacity building work.

It will provide a platform for dialogue among government agencies, the private sector, development partners, think tanks, women's associations and women entrepreneurs on how digitalisation and AI can support women-led MSMEs to participate more effectively in inclusive trade at the local, regional and global levels. The discussion is expected to contribute to:

- A shared understanding of the key constraints and opportunities facing women-led MSMEs in adopting digital tools and accessing domestic, regional and global markets.

- Actionable recommendations to improve access to information, trade-related support services and targeted capacity building opportunities.
- Stronger collaboration among public agencies, women's business associations, entrepreneurs, business support organisations and development partners to support women-led MSMEs.

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