



[#OneSouthAsia Conversations](#) explore ideas for regional cooperation in economic connectivity, climate resilience, and human development. The bimonthly series began in 2020 and is open to the public. The World Bank's South Asia Regional Integration and Engagement team organizes the events and welcomes your feedback at OneSouthAsia@worldbank.org.

Highlights and Key Ideas

Watch a video recording of our [15th OneSouthAsia Conversation](#) on Equalizing Opportunities: Women in Regional Trade in South Asia. The event was also streamed on [Facebook](#). For more information about our series and the program, visit our [website](#).

Key ideas discussed included:

- South Asia has the second lowest female labor force participation globally— less than 1 in 4 women of working age are employed here. It also has the lowest rate of female ownership of firms. Women are generally excluded from most trade activities and if women are involved, they are mostly related to lower and less remunerative levels of production value chains.
- Some of the key impediments to women's participation in trade and entrepreneurship include gaps in access to finance, digital and information access gaps; lack of skills and training; inadequate infrastructure; lack of knowledge of trade and customs procedures; delays in processing export permits and customs paperwork; and difficulties in accessing overseas sales agents.
- Digital technologies have been instrumental in removing traditional barriers to trade. Gender inclusive digital access policies can help women traders and entrepreneurs get more access to finance, and expand markets and e-commerce opportunities.
- Regional organizations can play an important role in strengthening women's participation in trade by forging networks, advocating for greater representation of women on boards and policy forums, and sharing knowledge and best practices across the region.
- Public private partnership can strengthen end-to-end ecosystem that supports women entrepreneurs and traders in areas ranging from accessing finance to legal compliances to building skills and more.
- Bilateral and regional trade agreements can play a role in integrating gender and youth focused trade policies. The African Continental Free Trade Area. (AfCTA) Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade is a good example, with a focus on

integrating women, youth, and small and medium enterprises in formal trade and addressing specific barriers like reducing costs, accessing finance, broadening markets, and participating in regional value chains.



Anna Roy
Senior Advisor, NITI Aayog, India

" To promote women in trade and entrepreneurship, we need both online and offline networks. If there are organizations who are doing their incremental bit, they can join hands into a larger network to provide robust solutions that address end-to-end needs. At Women Entrepreneurship Platform, which is a public private partnership, we are building an ecosystem that provides support in wide range of areas including access to finance, legal compliances, skill development, marketing, research, and data on women entrepreneurs."



Cecile Fruman
Director, Regional Integration and Engagement, South Asia, World Bank

" Equalizing opportunities for women in trade, entrepreneurship, and economic activities is good economics. It is good for growth, it is good for societies, it is good for women and for families. Countries which provide the most economic opportunities to women, including entrepreneurship and exports, are more competitive in the global economy. We also know that women's participation in trade makes trade fairer and more resilient. It is estimated that if women had equal opportunities in South Asia at getting jobs and becoming entrepreneurs, South Asia's GDP could increase by up to 25%."



Munir Chowdhury
National Trade Expert, Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh

"In regional trade in South Asia, women are generally not involved in the value chains including in marketing and exporting. They face many non-tariff and informal challenges, which increase cost of entrepreneurship and trade for them. Based on our research, we have recommended that infrastructure gaps in cross-border trade and connectivity should be reduced and integrated gender-focused policies must be implemented. There is a need for the Chambers of Commerce across countries to collaborate and crystallize a regional association of women chambers. There should also be a database of women traders in the region which will help in networking, knowledge sharing, and providing e-commerce opportunities."



Pramila Acharya Rijal

President, South Asia Women Development Forum

“For women entrepreneurs and traders, the cost of starting an enterprise is often very high and finance is limited, so common infrastructure can help these businesses. In Nepal, we are starting a Green Industrial Park which will have common infrastructural facilities, specifically for women entrepreneurs. This will help them reduce the cost of doing business and at the same time promote sustainable products. This is a public private partnership model which focuses both on promoting green economy and supporting women entrepreneurs and local communities.”

Rifa Musthapha

Former chairperson, SAARC Chamber Women Entrepreneur Council



“There are many talented women who are producing their own products, but due to lack of knowledge, resources, and guidance, they are unable to enter or engage in international and regional markets. There is also lack of research and development. Mostly goods in Sri Lanka are being exported without any value add, and women are usually lower down the value chains, supplying raw material to exporters. They are also underrepresented at decision making levels that prevents inclusive policies. To accelerate gender-based policies, there should be a mandatory requirement to have women on boards of businesses and on regional and national trade forums or platforms.”

Tell us what you think

We value your feedback. Please click [here](#) or use the QR code on the right to answer a four-question survey about how we can improve future #OneSouthAsia events.



Follow our activities supporting regional cooperation

The #OneSouthAsia Conversation series has examined regional responses to air pollution, digital tools to advance human development, plastic pollution of the ocean, women entrepreneurship, food trade, and COVID-19. All past events are available [here](#), with links to video recordings, text summaries, blogs, and related World Bank reports.

Follow our activities supporting regional cooperation in economic connectivity, climate resilience, and human development:

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For more information, email OneSouthAsia@WorldBank.org

#OneSouthAsia Conversations

**Equalizing Opportunities:
Women in Regional Trade
in South Asia**

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**THURSDAY
APRIL 27,
2023** Washington D.C.
5:00 PM Islamabad/ Male
5:30 PM Colombo/ New Delhi
5:45 PM Kathmandu
6:00 PM Dhaka/Thimpu

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