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Empowering Women through PPPs to achieve scale impact for implementing the UN SDGs

Conference room paper submitted by the secretariat

Summary

The secretariat is circulating a proposal to empower women in PPPs. This scheme utilizes public and private sector cooperation to support women entrepreneurs in a transformational programme in achieving SDG 5 on gender equality. Its key aim is to mobilize private companies in the infrastructure industry to support women entrepreneurship in their operations and services.

The scheme will be facilitated by several centres established in different parts of the world working together as well as crowd sourcing techniques / IT platforms. The scheme will offer women mentoring, entrepreneurship training, access to company supply chains, employment opportunities, internships etc. as well as possible joint ventures for women led companies that can offer financing to expand their businesses.

The project is open to public and private sectors, especially infrastructure companies and has a target - following the launch of three pilots - to create 500 women-led start-up companies and 5000 new positions for women in the corporate sector in the UNECE region and beyond.

The Working Party is requested to take note of this initiative.

Project Proposal

Avant propos

Almost twenty years ago in central and eastern European, a major social and environment change took place, as countries began the process of moving their economies from state control to the market: One of the challenges at this time was how to develop the new management skills and functions such as accounting, marketing, human resources for the new market economy. The demand for the new skills was huge but the supply rather limited. The solution however was near at hand. Many international companies took over declining state owned enterprises integrating them into their global supply chains. In time, their newly acquired employees obtained the new skills both from learning on the job as well as from new management schools supported by these companies - and many moved upwards to become top senior managers; while some left to set up their own businesses using the skills which they had acquired. All in all, the private sector played a big role in this vast training exercise.

Oxana A. is a young lady in her early 20s from Kiev in Ukraine. Her parents sadly have recently died leaving her some money and a ground floor flat that can be made into a shop. She is an only child. Her dream is to set up a chain of shops selling high end, fresh nutritious fruit and vegetables (she has an uncle with a small outside the city) to private customers and pre-prepared meals for corporate clients looking to give their employers a nutritious lunch: But how can she live her dream when she does not know how to register a company, apply for a bank loan, and has no accounting nor marketing skills and has never paid taxes?

Core Challenge

Women's empowerment is a key focus of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) and one of the ways of doing this is to empower women, especially young women, to set up their own enterprises. But women's entrepreneurship is a multifaceted challenge. Women need to acquire skills through training. Government policy needs to be also revised to help women to become business leaders and to remove the formal and informal barriers to them operating their own companies. Even the local culture is a challenge as it makes women risk averse and reluctant to leave their domestic work or what is termed 'emotional work'.

On top of tackling the multiple challenges, there is the question of impact and scale. It is not just one training of a few women every week that is required. What is needed is rather a comprehensive support that tackles all these issues and at a scale which can achieve a genuine breakthrough in women's social and economic advancement.

Proposal

The idea is to create a mechanism whereby private companies working in the infrastructure sector can help not just one person like Oxana (see box) but thousands of Oxanas all over the world lacking access to capital, know-how, proper training and mentoring, etc.

What kind of support will private companies be expected to give?

Support will be given to women in their business career development (at different levels):

- Senior management within the company
- Start up projects at the grass-roots/community level
- Already operating women led companies

"Entrepreneurship for women in my view is one of best ways to generally achieve gender equality. Promoting women's leadership inside the company, advance women to be a part of the supply value chain, supporting women step into business by using smart IT technology to sell their creative products to the international market. All this is happening here in Hong Kong where many of the world's market leaders are based. At the same time women cannot advance without excellent education and management training and of course a will to succeed as the stairs are somewhat higher to climb than they are for men."

Annie Wu, Entrepreneur Hong Kong

By signing up to this programme, such companies would mobilize their own human resource departments to offer women and women led companies:

- Opportunities to join the company and advance inside it
- Possibilities for women lead companies to become suppliers to the enterprise in inter alia food services / canteen facilities , financial services etc
- Joint venture operations with women led companies in for example IT etc.
- Assistance in setting up their own companies though contributing to training support in local management training centres etc..
- Finance: Alibaba Tencent etc through blockchange technologies will facilitate financing, loans etc at market rates from banks etc.

In Return for this contribution, private companies will obtain the following benefits

- Excellent female recruits for their operations that can help their bottom line.
- Market Information from perspective customers on their services
- Major boost to the overall quality of the local workforce
- Host country recognition that the company is a “loyal partner” as a result of this action
- Demonstration by the activity of the company’s commitment to the country and its future
- Recognition from being part of a UN project to advance the UN SDGs

Oher facilitating actions and bodies that can be mobilized to help

(a) Centres of excellence

Three centres of excellence will be created in Asia, Africa and Europe, to undertaking the following:

- Liaise with local companies and seek to mobilize women in the country to join the programme.
- Conduct research within the sector and provide advisory services related to economic and business environment, including on private companies
- Develop sector specific capability development strategies for governments to promote the participation of women entrepreneurs in infrastructure and public services projects;
- Liaise with the centres of other countries being established under the project.
- Smart Capacity building:

Under the centre, IT classrooms and Innovation centres will be built to teach women various skills, which includes how to use smartphones or computers to do designing, farming and trading. Local female small business entrepreneurs will be invited to teach other young women to replicate their successful paths.

The Infrastructure Industry

Markets Infrastructure opportunities are growing all over the world as countries strive to keep up with urbanisation and climate change and national infrastructure plans to improve access and quality. To meet the UNSDGs it is calculated by various sources that a gap in infrastructure will need between 3-4 USD trillion to be closed. PPP is one of the model that is being used for this end. A considerable boost to this industry’s being provided by regional development programmes such as the EU Juncker Plan and China’s Belt and Road initiative.

Private corporate sector: Companies working in this sector are often large scale international and involved in mega road and rail projects etc. They tend to be of two types: companies working in the construction industry and those in services such as in communications, energy, health and education, water and municipal services etc.

Women representation: Women tend to be under represented at senior levels including at CEO level. There are gaps too at the level of the workforce so that in the construction industry for example, a programme is underway to overcome gender inequality.

(b) IT solutions/ crowd sourcing platforms

- Crowd Sourcing can be used as a platform by which women with business plans and commercial ideas for their companies, interact with large companies involved in the infrastructure industry (See Box Above). This interaction will concretely involve the human resources department within the enterprise. The procedures by which this would be done would be discussed during phase I of the project, and will require suitable regulation for it to be tested and rolled out successfully.

(c) Establish Project Team to Empowering Women:

- An expert team shall be formed to develop the principles under which the participating enterprises will address diversity issues inside their company operations

**Women in Construction -
Things are Changing**

The workers, an all-male crew, pause to yell out an obscene cat call, which the woman collectedly ignores. The men return to their work, having fulfilled their stereotypical duty. Unknown to the construction workers, this **woman** is the **project manager** for one of the subcontractors on the project.

- Kimberly Gallagher/ Huff Post 12/02/2014

Eligibility

Companies wishing to participate in this programme, ideally should be members of the UN Global Compact. It is further suggested that interested private companies, wishing further information might consult with the UNECE guidelines on engagement with the business community (Adopted by EXCOM September 2017)

Action Plan

- Elaboration of a brochure to advertise the project to both governments and companies
- Confirmation of the countries' willingness to host a centre on PPP and Women's Empowerment. (To date, the Government of Tanzania has officially offered to host a centre in Dar es Salam)
- Assurance that 50 companies are willing to participate in the programme
- Creation of a small advisory board/ task force to undertake the following activities:
 - Be responsible for undertaking the above mentioned tasks
 - Engage with perspective governments and private sectors to convince them to join this project
 - Engage with service providers who might be able to provide an IT Platform for the crowd-sourcing scheme

Resources

- Funding will be received from government and private funding resources.
- In support provided by the private sector, part of their contribution to women's empowerment will be in kind. Applications for funding for this project also will be made inter alia to The Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) of World Bank.