

GENDER-RESPONSIVE PROCUREMENT IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR AN EQUITABLE ECONOMIC FUTURE

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



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Foreword:

GENDER-RESPONSIVE PROCUREMENT

Over the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic's socio-economic impacts have had a devastating effect on both the lives and livelihoods of millions of women across the Asia and Pacific region. Women's businesses and jobs have borne the brunt of the region's economic downturn, with surveys indicating a strong share of such businesses struggling to overcome the pandemic's impacts on trade and markets. Against a pre-pandemic backdrop of declining female labor force participation and gender gaps in business ownership and survival, the urgency to build our region's economies back better has never been more vital.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and UN Women share a common objective of promoting women's economic empowerment and gender equality in the Asia Pacific region. As part of this joint commitment, ADB and UN Women have joined forces to identify additional effective means of supporting women's entrepreneurship and fostering gender-responsive enterprises. Gender-responsive procurement is an exciting tool that can support governments in the public sector and enterprises in the private sector to strengthen their support for gender equality. Buying from women-owned businesses and promoting gender-responsive business conduct by protecting women's labor rights across their supply chains are providing promising opportunities to create more sustainable market and trade prospects for women-owned businesses and to build more gender-responsive supply chains.

This brief aims to provide public and private sector actors in Asia and the Pacific with some concrete suggestions to pursue more inclusive procurement practices. Its key findings highlight the absence of sex-disaggregated data on women-owned businesses in both procurement and supply chains; the limited accountability and reporting mechanisms in place for business; the gendered challenges facing women-owned businesses, including size, sector and position within value chains; and the low attention to supplier diversity and limited investments in supporting gender-responsive value chains. This brief also highlights good practices across the region that can be duplicated and scaled.

As economies in Asia and the Pacific search for renewed growth and enhanced economic inclusion, now is the time for innovation. We very much hope that this brief serves as a catalyst to all stakeholders across the public and private sectors: gender-responsive procurement is a timely strategy for sustainable and inclusive recovery that can also promote positive development impact and regional cooperation.



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Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CoST	(construction) Infrastructure Transparency Initiative
GDP	gross domestic product
GDIFT	Gender Data and Impact Framework and Tool
GRE	gender-responsive enterprise
GRP	gender-responsive procurement
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization
KONEPS	Korea On-line E-procurement System
MSE	micro and small enterprise
MSME	micro, small, and medium-sized enterprise
NMSDC	National Minority Supplier Development Council
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
UN	United Nations
WEPs	Women's Empowerment Principles
WEPs Tool	Women's Empowerment Principles' Gender Gap Analysis Tool
WGE	workplace gender equality
WOB	women-owned business





Executive Summary

GENDER-RESPONSIVE PROCUREMENT (GRP)

GRP is an important vehicle for enriching supply chains by broadening the range of suppliers of goods and services available to businesses and governments and for advancing women's economic empowerment. GRP promotes the principles of buying from women-owned businesses (WOBs) to enable their equitable access to markets and buying from gender-responsive enterprises (GREs) in order to create more gender-responsive value chains.

Defining gender-responsive procurement and enterprises

Gender-responsive procurement (GRP)

is defined as “the sustainable selection of services, goods, or civil works that takes into account the impact on gender equality and women’s empowerment.” It is founded on international standards, agreements, and principles relevant to improving gender-responsive working conditions and essential for upholding women’s basic rights in the supply chain. This brief considers an expanded definition of GRP that includes buying from **WOBs** and leveraging the potential of buying from **GREs**, regardless of the ownership.¹



A gender-responsive enterprise is defined, for this brief, as one that meets criteria for integrating gender equality and women’s empowerment principles in its policies and practices, and that is aligned with international norms and standards, including the Women’s Empowerment Principles and International Labour Organization standards.²

A woman-owned business is defined by the International Finance Corporation for small and medium-sized enterprises as one that has (1) at least 51% ownership by women; or (2) is at least 20% female-owned and has (a) at least one woman as chief executive officer, chief operating officer, president, and/or vice president; and (b) 30% or more females on its board of directors, where a board exists.³

Supplier diversity: a formal programme which promotes the procurement from businesses that are at least 51 per cent owned and operated by a traditionally underrepresented or underserved individual or group.⁴

Recognizing the importance of enhancing WOBs’ participation in business, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and UN Women studied how GRP can enhance and deepen supply chains by promoting policies and practices that enable WOBs to participate in them. This Introductory Brief outlines the business and economic potential for the public and private sectors to adopt GRP, and provides a few examples of current good practices in Asia and the Pacific and beyond. The main report will be published in 2022.

1 UNGM

2 UN Women and the ILO, 2001

3 UN Women and the ILO, 2001

4 Bateman, Barrington and Date, 2020

KEY FINDINGS FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



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The vast majority of WOBs are micro, small, or medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are vital engines for growth and dynamism in Asia and the Pacific.

They comprise close to 98 per cent of all businesses, employ 60 per cent of national labour forces across many Asian economies, and contribute about 20–30 per cent to national GDP.

WOBs in Asia and the Pacific have largely been on the sidelines of the region's dynamism.

Across the region, approximately 60 per cent of MSMEs are owned by women. But the overwhelming majority of MSMEs owned by women are microenterprises, are informal enterprises, and struggle to scale up or survive due to gender-specific challenges in accessing finance, business skills and training, and markets. Conversely, most larger businesses are male-owned. For example, in Fiji, one of the Pacific's largest economies, only 12 per cent of all formal enterprises are led by a woman and in Viet Nam 57 per cent are women owned micro enterprises, 42 per cent are SMEs, 1 per cent are large.⁵ Moreover, the region has the largest global SME financing gap, with 59 per cent of the gap attributed to credit constraints faced by woman-owned SMEs. In Indonesia, the gender financing gap is estimated to be US\$6 billion, and in Viet Nam it is estimated to be at \$1.19 billion.^{6,7}

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges. Rapid assessments of the pandemic's impacts on WOBs indicate that an overwhelming majority fear that their businesses may not survive, with many reporting significant loss of sales. As the region turns towards economic recovery and aims to "build back better," GRP offers the public and private sectors a concrete means to do so by promoting greater participation of WOBs.

GRP is a largely untapped/invisible opportunity among both private and public sectors. Of the Asian and Pacific businesses that participated in a recent analysis (the Women's Empowerment Principles Gender Gap Analysis Tool [WEPs Tool]), over three-quarters did not respond to questions related to GRP, indicating that few companies understand or are informed about GRP practices in their businesses. And there are very few examples of governments proactively integrating GRP into their procurement systems.⁸

5 Viet Nam, 2021

6 IFC, 2016

7 IFC, 2017b

8 According to the GAT database, of the 203 Asian and Pacific companies that completed the GAT assessment as of 15 December 2021, 78.8% had not answered the GRP-related question, demonstrating that few of them had engaged with the concept of GRP. Globally, the percentage stood at 79.6%.



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GRP presents an untapped opportunity to disrupt the existing inequity in market dynamics. The public procurement market (purchasing of goods and services by governments) is worth approximately one-fifth of global gross domestic product (GDP). In addition, public procurement accounts for over 30 per cent of GDP in developing countries and 10–15 per cent of GDP in developed countries. In the Asia Pacific region public procurement is equal to or higher than the global average,⁹ where WEConnect estimates that globally, only about 1 per cent of procurement spending goes to WOBs. Due to the absence of sex-disaggregated data in public and private sector procurement mechanisms, the share of procurement in Asia and the Pacific cannot be determined, but is likely to reflect global trends and the overall weak position of WOBs in the region. GRP could be a game changer for Asia and the Pacific by opening market opportunities for millions of WOBs and GREs.

The review of existing practices in Asia and the Pacific highlights the important opportunity to integrate GRP into public and private sector programmes as a means to enhance supply chains, build equitable and resilient societies, promote women's economic empowerment, and promote entrepreneurship and inclusive trade. The research also identifies a range of mechanisms and strategies that have been pursued across public and private sectors.

The review also focuses on the distinct role of governments and companies in promoting GRP. Governments have the dual roles of both fostering an environment that can incentivize GRP in the private and public sector, as well as being a buyer that integrates GRP into their own practices. Asia and the Pacific has employed promising examples of strategies pursued, including using preferential treatment such as quotas and set asides. While Asia and the Pacific focuses strongly on promoting women's entrepreneurship, it has paid less attention to adopting proactive GRP policies and practices to support WOBs and GREs. Based on the recent research conducted jointly by ILO and UN Women, there are no policy and legislative frameworks that explicitly support or actively promote gender-responsive procurements among the ASEAN Member States.¹⁰

Businesses can use GRP as a vehicle for challenging inequality across their value chains, within corporations, and in the broader economy and society. GRP's multiple benefits include: strengthening brand and business reputations and consumer loyalty, which can increase revenues; increasing staff diversity, loyalty, innovation, and retention as part of the broader corporate commitment to equality and diversity;¹¹ and increasing inclusion, diversity, resilience, and innovation in the supplier base.

9 World Bank, 2021

10 UN Women, 2021

11 UN Women, 2017



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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The review found five key recommendations for governments and business to consider, to assist their economies by advancing GRP.



Recommendation 1: Raise awareness of the business case for GRP

Progress has been made to create strong evidence to support the business case for gender equality. A 2018 report estimated that advancing women's equality could add a total of \$4.5 trillion to Asian and Pacific economies between then and 2025.¹² GRP provides a pathway to realize this opportunity, yet available data on GRP is still limited. To establish more evidence and data it will be essential to create more alignment on definitions on GRP, and specifically WOBs and gender-inclusive enterprises. Various definitions are used for each of these terms in Asia and the Pacific, and globally. Because GRP is a relatively little-known or utilized concept, countries tend to use the broad United Nations definition cited in the box.

Definitions of WOBs are key to monitoring and tracking GRP, yet few countries in the region have a national definition. Thus, adopting a definition is an important first step to proactively supporting WOBs by helping to identify the share of MSMEs that they represent, and their access to finance and to public- and private-sector procurement. A commonly used definition of WOBs follows the IFC definition, which has the advantage of allowing for international comparability. Some countries, such as Indonesia, have adapted this definition to their national contexts.¹³ Several companies in Asia have realized the value of supporting GRP and women-owned companies and of fostering an internal culture that supports hiring and promoting women.

¹² McKinsey, 2018b

¹³ On 9 June 2020, the Government of Indonesia launched the National Women's Financial Inclusion Strategy, which aims to promote access to finance for Indonesian women in a way that accommodates their diverse needs, interests, and backgrounds. The strategy commits the government to working with relevant government agencies to develop the national definition of women-owned or -led small and medium-sized enterprises.

Buying from GREs is an important adjunct to GRP. Because this is a new effort, internationally recognized standards for identifying and monitoring gender-responsive businesses have not yet been established, but are being considered (i.e. Women's Empowerment Principles, or WEPs) and can contribute to create a more gender-responsive market-place at large.



Recommendation 2: Collect sex-disaggregated data to track and monitor

Few Asian and Pacific governments collect sex-disaggregated data on the proportion of WOBs that are awarded public-sector contracts. To remedy the lack of data, governments and industry associations in each country could facilitate or lead the creation of databases of registered WOBs and allow public and private buyers to access the information. Such a database helps public- and private-sector buyers to identify WOB suppliers and invite them to tender bids. Public and private actors can also consider certification programmes, building on governmental certification programmes or international initiatives such as WEConnect. Governments could require that suppliers provide such basic descriptive statistics and information through government e-procurement systems. By having such data available, government procurement processes can benefit from increased transparency and use the information gathered to promote inclusion and diversity in the pool of potential contractors.



Recommendation 3: Develop provisions in procurement laws to enable GRP

Some Asian and Pacific governments have adopted key strategies for making public procurement more inclusive. The strategies include increasing the use of e-procurement systems, building capacity to help WOBs apply for government contracts, establishing WOB certification, and simplifying administrative procurement and company registration processes. However, there are few examples of gender-specific provisions in procurement laws that could encourage and support GRP in both public and private sector procurement. Through specific GRP legislation, the government can clarify the ability of buyers to use preferential treatment methods to facilitate WOBs' participation.



Recommendation 4: Tailored solutions should be provided to each country or company's needs to promote GRP

There are myriad ways for companies and governments to increase the number of WOBs in their procurement. These can include having set asides and targets for total procurement spending per year and other forms of preferential treatment, including gender-responsive clauses in supplier codes of conduct, establishing regular spot-checks and audits and reporting on gender in supply chains, building suppliers' capacity to upgrade their facilities, setting policies and approaches to ensure female workers have healthy and safe working environments, and therefore contribute to establish more gender-responsive enterprises regardless of the gender in ownership. In addition, implementing targets for WOB suppliers should be considered.

Access to procurement opportunities and tender documentation can be improved by establishing gender-responsive e-procurement systems. Such systems are essential to simplify suppliers' ability to find and collect information on bidding. Increased transparency facilitates planning, saves time and costs for potential suppliers, and increases the quality of bids. This is especially important for small businesses and WOBs are overrepresented among these.

Bid specifications need to be formulated to ensure that WOBs can be systematically integrated into existing procurement processes. The bid process provides opportunities to strengthen gender aspects in all stages, collect sex-disaggregated data on businesses and supply chains, and ensure use of criteria that do not hinder WOB participation. WOB-specific and certified WOBs databases can be used to ensure that bid material reaches specific groups of WOBs and helps them compensate for their limited experience in financial and bid processes. Preferential payment periods can help to address the structural financial exclusion of WOBs.

Company procurement department staff need to be aware of the importance of GRP and to have clear guidelines, training and continued support to implement them.

To build WOBs' capacities and help them grow their businesses, especially in the high-spending procurement areas where they are under-represented, governments and the private sector should help address the digital and financial gender divides through capacity-building programmes targeted to women entrepreneurs.



Recommendation 5: Incentivize private sector companies to report publicly on gender indicators and disclose their diversity and inclusion policies

Asian and Pacific governments, industry bodies, regulators and companies themselves should encourage alignment with WEPs recommendations, encourage the use of the WEP Transparency and Accountability Framework, and advance company reporting to track and advance gender-responsive business conduct. Indicators should be looking at the overall company level and highlight essential indicators for progress towards gender inclusiveness.¹⁴

Increased reporting is needed on how companies are advancing their procurement spending through WOBs and GREs. Key GRP measures to report are: procurement spending on WOBs; spending with businesses that have gender equality commitments (GREs); and the proportion of workers in supply chains who receive a living wage, disaggregated by sex.

Procurers in the private and public sector should include monitoring of progress on GRP in procurement sustainability reporting systems. Based on these commitments, suppliers can be held accountable. Contract renewal can include an assessment of suppliers' progress on implementing contract criteria. If necessary this can then lead to remediation measures or, if unsuccessful, contract termination.





1 INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality is prevalent across markets, workplaces and societies throughout Asia and the Pacific, with women structurally disadvantaged compared to men. Consequently, women’s opinions and ideas are often left out of processes that design and provide the services and produce the goods for which they are a major target consumer. Gender-responsive procurement (GRP) provides opportunities to expand the access of women-owned businesses (WOBs) to markets and trade and to improve the conditions for female employees within the supply chain.

GRP links suppliers to buyers, offering a tool to leverage public- and private-sector procurement spending to address gender gaps in access to markets and financial inclusion and to broaden supply chains by including gender-responsive enterprises (GREs). Public- and private-sector organizations can benefit from the increased diversity and innovation that women bring to the supply chains, enhanced reputation, and increased customer and staff loyalty. GRP is also a key mechanism for governments in Asia and the Pacific to facilitate the public and private sectors to meet their legal obligations on women’s economic empowerment and protecting human rights, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW), and Conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Box 1, which is in the Executive Summary, defines the basic terms used in this report.

GRP is a tool for contributing to women’s economic empowerment—supporting women’s entrepreneurship, increasing women’s access to markets, and promoting gender-responsive business conduct by securing women’s labour and employment rights. As noted by the UN High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment, GRP is one important way to advance gender equality and women’s rights in local, national, and international economies.¹⁵

15 Combaz, 2018

The disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in has made the need for responses such as GRP more urgent than ever. While the full impact of the pandemic on women's economic empowerment and gender equality is still unfolding, it is clear that the vast majority of women entrepreneurs' businesses in the region have been negatively affected by the pandemic, their caregiving responsibilities have increased, and they are selling fewer products and services (UN Women 2020).

Globally, women have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. They comprised 39 per cent of total employment before the crisis (2019) but 48 per cent of employment losses in 2020.¹⁶ In Asia and the Pacific, 40 per cent of women who work are employed in the sectors most affected by the pandemic.¹⁷

GRP complements supplier diversity initiatives that aim to promote inclusivity in supply chains for marginalized or excluded groups. Excluded groups include businesses owned by people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups, or people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientation. Diversity initiatives and GRP complement the "leave no one behind" principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs.¹⁸

Environments favourable to GRP can also serve as a strong mechanism for implementing the emerging gender mainstreaming in trade across Asia and the Pacific. The Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment in Buenos Aires in 2017 commits signatories to working on the (1) enhancement of women entrepreneurs' participation in public procurement markets; and (2) inclusion of women-led businesses, in particular MSMEs, in value chains (WTO 2017). Following this, networks such as the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation have developed gender mainstreaming guidelines. The guidelines include a specific focus on WOBs and supply chains, highlighting the need to establish information on the share of SMEs and WOBs in industries, where women employees are in the organizational structure, and where WOBs sit in the value chain (GATF 2021). GRP could unlock markets and increase trade opportunities for WOBs, and is therefore a key tool to support the broader gender and trade agenda.

This report focuses on GRP in sourcing from WOBs and GREs. Because women are not a minority group, GRP merits separate treatment from supplier diversity initiatives that target minority groups. An intersectional approach to GRP highlights differences between women, ensuring that all women are addressed and taken into consideration when designing GRP policies and initiatives. Initiatives of inclusive procurement practices targeting other groups can provide ideas about and concrete experiences of how to implement GRP.

16 ILO, 2021

17 ILO, 2020

18 UNSDG

1.1 Gender-responsive procurement: potential to address gender gaps

The total value of public procurement globally is estimated to be \$9.5 trillion per year;^{19, 20} however, the International Trade Centre notes that WOBs receive only 1 per cent of public procurement spending.²¹ For the private sector, WEConnect International reports that only 1 per cent of corporate purchasing goes to women's businesses.²² The 2020 Annual Report of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) states that, of the companies that have used the WEPs Gender Gap Analysis Tool (WEPs GAT Tool) worldwide, only 4 per cent tracked the percentage spent on WOBs and 3 per cent reported these figures publicly.²³ The number of Asian and Pacific companies completing the WEPs GAT Tool rose from 2 in 2016 to 291 in 2020, but 81 per cent of them did not provide information on specific procurement steps they are taking.²⁴ UN Women (2021b) reported that only 2 of 75 surveyed listed companies reported having a policy of supplier diversity programmes that actively seek to expand their business relationships with WOBs. The same report found that no ASEAN Member State has legislation to promote GRP.

The current report will, however, share promising practices in the Asia and Pacific region demonstrating the emerging interest in GRP to unlock this opportunity to overcome the existing inequity in market dynamics. Globally, public procurement—government purchasing of goods and services—is worth approximately one-fifth of global GDP. Public procurement accounts for over 30 per cent of GDP in developing countries and 10–15 per cent of GDP in developed countries. In Asia and the Pacific, public procurement is equal to or higher than the global average share of GDP.²⁵

1.2 Gender gaps affecting gender-responsive procurement

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) has estimated that more than 70 per cent of women-owned SMEs worldwide have inadequate or no access to financial services. A 2019 report by IFC and Goldman Sachs states that women-owned SMEs in developing economies face a \$1.5-trillion credit gap.²⁶ The biggest financing gap for MSMEs (women and men owned) is found in Asia and the Pacific, which accounted for half of the global MSME financing gap, or the equivalent of \$2.7 trillion".²⁷

The size of WOBs in Asia and the Pacific is a key factor in why they receive such a low proportion of procurement spending, as women entrepreneurs are concentrated in MSMEs. In East Asia, women own 50 per cent of micro enterprises and 59 per cent of SMEs; in South Asia, women own only 10 per cent of micro enterprises and 8 per cent of SMEs;²⁸ in Southeast Asia, only one in ten WOBs employs more than five people.²⁹ The size of WOBs is a key hindrance for their participation in global supply chains. Informality is another concern. For example, in Cambodia while 65 per cent of MSMEs are classified as "women-led," only one-third of all formally registered businesses are women owned.³⁰ These figures are even lower in South Asia, where WOBs account for only 8 per cent–9 per cent of all formally registered SMEs.³¹

19 World Bank 2021.

20 States spend \$1.8 trillion. Some 14 countries spend between \$100 billion and \$1 trillion per annum. From highest to lowest, these are Japan, Germany, India, France, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Canada, Italy, the Republic of Korea, Australia, Brazil. More than 77% of the total is spent by 16 countries. People's Republic of China is by far the largest procurer at \$4.2 trillion and the United Nations, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, and Spain (Open Contracting Partnership, 2020).

21 ITC, 2020

22 Vazquez and Sherman, 2013

23 BSR and UNGC, 2020

24 Internal Data Analysis

25 World Bank, 2021

26 IFC 2019a

27 IFC, 2017a]

28 SME Finance Forum

29 OECD and ASEAN, 2017

30 SME Finance Forum]

31 UNESCAP, 2015

WOBs in Asia and the Pacific have largely been on the side-lines of the region's dynamism

Across the region, 98 per cent of all businesses are MSMEs,³² and MSMEs employ about 60 per cent of national labour forces: approximately 60 per cent of MSMEs are owned by women.³³

But the overwhelming majority of MSMEs owned by women are micro enterprises, are informal enterprises, and struggle to scale up or survive due to gender-specific challenges in accessing finance, business skills and training, and markets. Conversely, most larger businesses are male-owned. For example, in Fiji, one of the Pacific's largest economies, only 12 per cent of all formal enterprises are led by a woman in Viet Nam, women-owned SMEs made up 24 per cent of all formal enterprises: among which 57 per cent are micro, 42 per cent are SMEs, 1 per cent are large. Women are under-represented in leading the medium and large enterprises that are more frequently connected to larger, more profitable market opportunities.³⁴

^{35,36} Moreover, the region has the largest global SME financing gap, with 59 per cent of the gap attributed to credit constraints faced by woman-owned SMEs. In Indonesia, the gender financing gap is estimated to be \$6 billion, and in Viet Nam it is estimated at \$1.19 billion.³⁷

A range of mechanisms have been put in place throughout Asia and the Pacific to support women's entrepreneurship (Box 2 provides an example). These include dedicated financial products and services for WOBS and collection of sex-disaggregated data by financial institutions and governments.

Box 2: Bangladesh Bank: data-based policies for women entrepreneurs

The Alliance for Financial Inclusion has worked extensively to build the commitment of central banks to track and use sex-disaggregated data. For example, Bangladesh Bank, a principal member of the Alliance, has collected and analysed sex-disaggregated financial data in order to adjust its financing policies regarding SMEs and to establish guidelines to ensure that banks and financial institutions in Bangladesh will adequately serve women entrepreneurs. The bank now requires all financial institutions in the country to establish a separate women entrepreneurs' dedicated desk to provide training in accessing financing for SMEs. It has required that all financial institutions allot 15 per cent of their funds to women entrepreneurs in that sector. All microfinance institutions are required to report on board gender diversity to Bangladesh Bank.³⁸

32 ADB, 2020

33 ADB and The Asia Foundation, 2018

34 UNESCAP, 2020

35 UNESCAP, 2020

36 Viet Nam, 2021.

37 IFC, 2016 and 2017b

38 Alliance for Financial Inclusion, 2017

1.3 Gender-responsive framework: conceptual framework

Implementing GRP presents an opportunity to have an impact on women in supply chains across Asia and the Pacific by using procurement processes to induce suppliers to become more gender-responsive, following global frameworks such as the WEPs. GRP practices can also have a positive impact on the quality and quantity of women's participation in the labour market by promoting good practices and compliance with international laws.

The GRP approach adopted in this report is based on the broadened definition of GRP (Box 1). Assessing and advancing GRP is based on two themes: buying and procuring from WOBs and from GREs.

Theme 1: Buying from women-owned businesses

The first theme has two key dimensions: increasing the number and proportion of WOBs in supply chains and increasing the proportion of procurement spending on WOBs. The latter is important to ensure that WOBs are not concentrated in low-spending areas of procurement and are able to secure larger and more sustainable contracts.

Many governments and companies in Asia and the Pacific lack a working definition of WOBs. A few governments have their own national definitions. Research for this report determined that the most commonly used definition across the public and private sectors is that of the IFC: "An enterprise qualifies as a woman-owned enterprise if it meets the following criteria:

- ≥ 51 per cent owned by woman/women; or
- ≥ 20 per cent owned by woman/women; and (a) has ≥ 1 woman as chief executive officer/chief operating officer/president/vice president; and (b) has ≥ 30 per cent of the board of directors composed of women, where a board exists."³⁹

Theme 2: Procuring from gender-responsive enterprises

Procuring from GREs is an emerging and still evolving dimension of GRP. The focus is on encouraging direct suppliers ("tier 1") and suppliers of suppliers ("tier 2") in the public and private sectors to openly demonstrate a commitment to gender equality and women's economic empowerment. This involves linking up with regulatory and reporting mechanisms in the procurement ecosystem to ensure that suppliers are held accountable for their commitments and that tangible results are monitored and regulated.

While internationally recognized standards for identifying and monitoring gender-responsive businesses are yet to be established, a number of existing frameworks can guide this practice. A key such initiative is the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) established by Global Compact and UN Women. The WEPs provide a series of organizing principles for what it means for a business to be gender-responsive. This is supported by the WEPs Tool, a free, confidential online assessment tool that allows companies to identify current successes and areas for improvement (see Appendix).⁴⁰

39 IFC

40 UN Women and UNGC b





2

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE PROCUREMENT

This section sets out the key benefits of GRP followed by the key challenges for effective use of GRP in Asia and the Pacific looking at the two key themes of buying from WOBs and GREs.

2.1 Economic and social benefits of supplier diversity

Given the extent of government purchasing (section 1.1), it offers a huge lever for transforming current market dynamics to become more inclusive. Government purchasing can advance fundamental labour, social, and economic rights, which is essential from a business and human rights perspective and will increasingly be important for Asia and the Pacific to reap the economic benefits of international trade. Box 3 provides an example of pressure to advance GRP in supply chains.

Box 3: European Union legislation impacts supply chains

Recent EU legislation on due diligence in supply chains, along with increasing pressure to report on environmental, social, and governance measures, together demonstrate the growing concern worldwide from consumers, customers, and trading partners about the provenance of goods and services in global value chains. In this context, GRP provides an opportunity for companies to demonstrate their commitment to values of equality and upholding women's labour rights and equal treatment in the workplace in supply chains. Forthcoming EU legislation will affect private sector companies that operate in Asia and the Pacific and thus needs to be considered as a key strategy for future work on supply chain oversight. The EU is the ASEAN's second-largest partner, with a 13-per cent share of the ASEAN's total trade with the world.⁴¹

For individual businesses, GRP can be a vehicle for challenging inequality across their value chains, within corporations, and in the broader economy and society. It can yield multiple business benefits, ranging from increased revenues and reduced procurement spend, greater supplier availability and resilience, strengthened brand loyalty, increased business reputation, more innovation and adaptability and improved service delivery⁴² GRP can comprise part of the broader corporate commitment to equality and diversity that many talented people expect from their employers,⁴³ thereby leading to increased loyalty and staff retention, which can enhance innovation capacity and contribute to efficiency by lowering staff turnover. Increasing WOB and GRE participation in supply chains creates a more inclusive and diverse supplier base that creates a more innovative, forward-thinking, and resilient supplier mix.⁴⁴

GRP can enhance brand reputation and customer loyalty

When women are aware that a company supports WOBs, their likelihood of patronizing its products increases. One study indicated that 78 per cent of surveyed participants would try such a company's products or services, 80 per cent would solidify their brand loyalty, and more than half would give the company a second chance if the product or service falls short of initial expectations.⁴⁵ GRP can comprise part of the broader corporate commitment to equality and diversity that many talented people expect from their employers.⁴⁶

Increasing WOB participation can increase innovation, resilience, and productivity in supply chains

Including a wider range of supplier types in a supply chain creates a more innovative, forward-thinking, and resilient supplier mix.⁴⁷ Widening the pool of potential suppliers to include WOBs can improve product quality and enhance innovation.⁴⁸ That 75 per cent of consumer spending worldwide (accounting for an estimated \$28 trillion) is controlled by women underscores the importance of increasing WOBs in the supply chain.⁴⁹ By providing more sourcing options, inclusiveness can make supply chains more resilient and agile—an increasingly important advantage in the post-COVID 19 economic climate.⁵⁰

Theme 1: Buying from women-owned businesses

Before the benefits from GRP can be obtained, some challenges need to be surmounted

Few Asia and Pacific companies report on their procurement from WOBs. Since the launch of the WEPs GAT Tool in 2016, as of December 2021, 78.8 per cent of the 203 companies that completed the GAT assessment across the Asia and Pacific region had not answered the question: “Does your company take proactive procurement steps to expand relationships with women-owned businesses in the value chain and when contracting vendors?” This compares with 79.6 per cent of global companies that did not answer the question. Thus, a very low proportion of companies using the WEPs GAT Tool have engaged with the concept of GRP.

41 European Parliament, 2020 and 2021
42 UN Women. 2022. “Procurement’s strategic value: Why gender-responsive procurement makes business sense.” <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/04/procurements-strategic-value>

43 UN Women, 2017
44 Robinson, 2016
45 Vazquez and Sherman, 2013
46 UN Women, 2017
47 Robinson, 2016
48 IFC, 2018
49 Kelly et al., 2016

50 Bateman, Barrington, and Date 2020

2.1.1 Three major impediments for women’s economic participation

UN Women classifies bottlenecks for WOBs in terms of lack of access to financial, social, and human capital.⁵¹

Financial capital: Women typically start their businesses with less capital and have less access to financing than men, which limits their ability to start and grow their enterprises and their resources to participate in a procurement process.

Social capital: Women business owners tend to have difficulty establishing robust business networks and connections with individuals and organizations that can generate business.

Human capital: The OECD (2012) found two main reasons that helped to explain why WOBs generate less income than men’s businesses: women lack managerial experience and have less time to devote to their businesses mainly due to household work, hindering their participation in time-consuming bid processes.

The three bottlenecks are rarely taken into consideration in procurement policies and bid specifications. Thus, WOBs are disadvantaged in bidding processes that do not “level the field” for WOBs to participate in procurement and supply chains. Procurement takes place at each stage or node in a value chain.

2.1.2 Procurement and bidding processes

Procurement processes can provide numerous entry points for supporting the participation of WOBs and GREs. Procurement processes provide opportunities to strengthen gender aspects in all stages.

Company procurement departments can play an important role in implementing GRP if their procurement staff members are aware of its importance and have clear guidelines and support to implement it. Buyers can ensure that procurement departments have gender-diverse teams, particularly in terms of senior management and decision-making positions.

The bid process has specific steps, from planning through prequalification and bid evaluation through management of bid provisions. Each step should be used to ensure access and transparency for all, including WOBs (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The bid process



Source: Authors.

⁵¹ UNGM

⁵² “E-procurement is the use of information and communications technology ... to assist in conducting the procurement of goods, works, and services, and in the management of contracts” (ADB, 2018).

2.1.3 Planning phase

The bid process and details of the bid material are developed during the planning phase. It provides opportunities for buyers to collect information and sex-disaggregated data to analyse where WOBs are active and to ascertain the type and size of WOBs working in a given sector or supply chain. This information may help the procurer establish mechanisms pertinent to WOBs in the bid process such as determining if the procurement scheme modalities, quality criteria, or quantity requirements disadvantage WOBs, and whether using preferential mechanisms for WOBs and GREs could level the playing field. Challenges at the planning stage include: (1) a lack of databases and networks of WOBs in the region; (2) tax and administrative constraints that discourage WOBs from entering the formal economy and linking with formal supply chains; and (3) lack of training and capacity building building to enhance women entrepreneurs' ability to prepare bids and meet procurement standards required by larger buyers.

Aspects that could either facilitate or hinder WOBs' participation include: the size of contracts being procured from one supplier; use of preferential treatment for specific supplier groups; criteria for the prequalification phase and means of verifying the criteria; and publications and information channels to be used. Decisions on such aspects will have a large impact on who can and will participate in a procurement. International and regional examples show how procurers are engendering this phase using contract reservations for WOBs, setting minimum requirements for suppliers' corporate gender responsiveness, ensuring appropriate publication methods such as via an e-procurement system,⁵² and facilitating the procurement process, including bids. Because WOBs are overrepresented among MSMEs, buyers could use payment schemes that can accommodate different types and sizes of suppliers. Procurers could streamline tender and contracting processes and ensure that criteria are not set disproportionately higher than necessary. In Asia and the Pacific, translating bid material into local languages is essential to reach specific groups of WOBs.

To facilitate GRP, bidding processes could:

- ensure that the internal procurement policy includes the possibility to divide big contracts into smaller lots, giving an opportunity for WOBs to compete for the lower value lots;
- use contract reservations for WOBs (e.g. preferential treatment such as set-asides for WOBs);
- set minimum requirements for suppliers regarding their corporate gender responsiveness;
- ensure publication methods are appropriate to reach WOBs;
- set transparent procurement procedures; and
- include mandatory sex-disaggregated reporting of ownership, management, and compliance with gender-responsive criteria.

2.1.4 Prequalification phase

Prequalification gives suppliers the opportunity to show interest and provide evidence of their qualifications. The buyer then selects a number to be invited for bidding. The use of WOB-specific databases and WOB certifications is emerging and is used to facilitate the inclusion of WOBs' in the bidders invited. Company-specific tools at this stage include developing a diverse supplier list that includes WOBs, organizing road shows and match-making events to understand what the market/WOBs can offer, and using WOB networks to disseminate information and provide guidance to potential bidders.

Meeting the challenges includes, among other things, ensuring that:

- bid information is provided;
- questions asked are responded to in relevant languages; and
- specific groups are supported to compensate for their limited experience in financial and bid processes.

2.1.5 Evaluation phase

The buyer evaluates bids received depending on the procurement method and in line with the evaluation grid system set in place. This usually entails a technical and financial evaluation and the weighting assigned to the various factors within each bid depends on the rules and procedures selected in the planning phase. The contract is awarded to the bidder with the highest combined score.

The contracting phase gives opportunities to ensure that WOBs' specific needs are addressed. For example, WOBs could be given preferential payment periods to address their structural financial exclusion. If a WOB needs to procure goods and services in order to meet tender specifications, longer payment timelines can be integrated to allow the company more time to collect the required resources. And if a WOB is the contract holder, the top-level procurer could shorten the time to execute payment, to help with the burden of frontloading larger expenditures, recognizing that WOBs have less access to credit than men-owned businesses.

Options to help overcome some of the challenges include:

- setting specific requirements for WOBs that facilitate their being certified to bid;
- providing alternates to written bids; and
- ensuring that GRP criteria set in a contract are met.

2.1.6 Contracting and management

When the buyer has contracted a supplier, implementation starts and monitoring of performance clauses and contract management commence. Throughout implementation, the buyer and supplier will be in close contact. Contract clauses can be set to allow the buyer the right to terminate a contract on the basis of noncompliance.

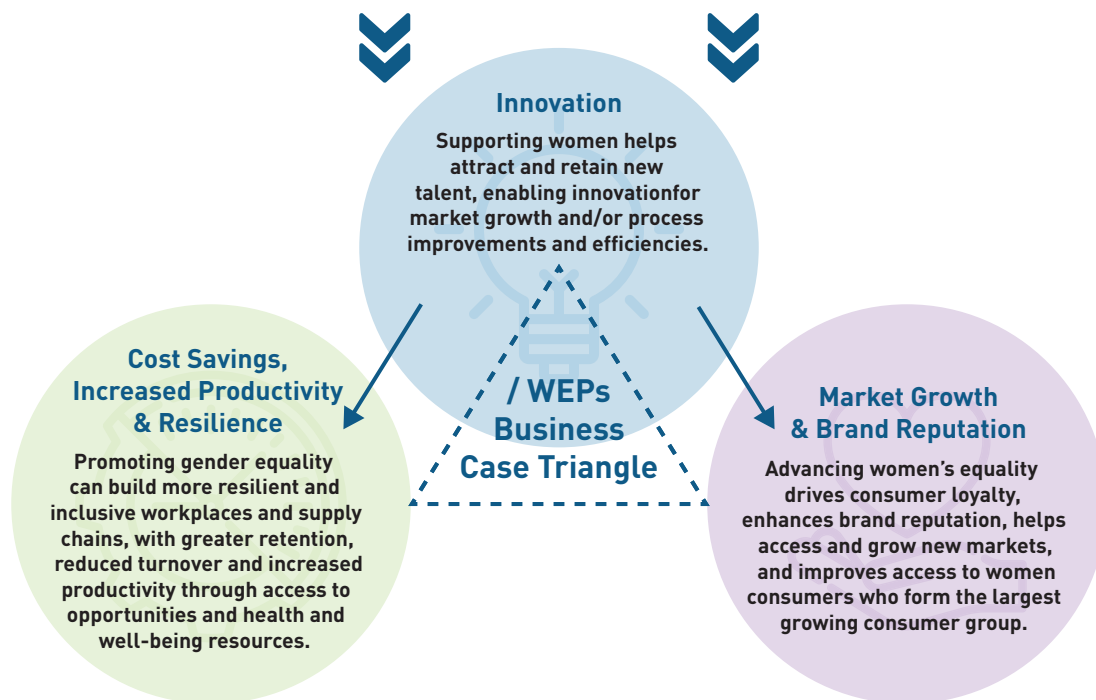
To help overcome the challenges, company procurement departments can:

- give feedback to bidders, including unsuccessful bidders;
- monitor, assess, and enforce gender commitments; and
- create a database of bidders for future opportunities

2.2

Theme 2: Procuring from gender-responsive enterprises

GRP is a pathway to advance women's economic empowerment. For individual companies, it offers an opportunity to garner the benefits from achieving gender equality in their organizations and of enhancing innovation (Figure 3). While the evidence base for the business case of GRP in Asia and the Pacific is still limited, the business case for gender equality in general is well-established by substantive data. More businesses with more diverse leadership teams perform financially better and are more likely to have superior value creation (McKinsey 2018a). Thus, buying from GREs means buying from the more resilient and financially better performing businesses.

Figure 3: Innovation through diversity⁵³

Deep gender inequalities are embedded in markets across Asia and the Pacific and globally. They narrow supply chains as well as access to the innovations and perspectives that come with including women's enterprises. Only 8 per cent of the companies surveyed worldwide have robust due diligence or assessment processes for suppliers and vendors.⁵⁴ Increasing procurement from GREs is a key mechanism for addressing some of the gender gaps. In addition to closing the gap in sourcing from WOBs, supplier bases need to become more gender-responsive. The work that many companies are doing on gender equality in their workplaces needs to be translated into gender equality in the marketplace, including in enterprise development, supply chains, and marketing practices. The WEPs provide a holistic framework for embedding women's economic empowerment across the full value chain.

Challenges to procuring from GREs in Asia and the Pacific include uneven commitment to gender equality, lack of awareness about procuring from GREs, lack of clear regulations and requirements on gender reporting, and lack of a globally agreed definition of the term "gender-responsive enterprise."

GRP is an emerging approach to gender equality in the Asian and Pacific private sector (Tables 1). The WEPs are a useful data source for measuring private-sector commitment to gender equality in the region. The number of Asian and Pacific WEPs signatories has grown from just 59 in 2016 to 1,400 in 2021. In the same period, the proportion of the region's represented businesses within the global database has grown from 22 to 26 per cent (Table 1). This is in line with experience in the Americas and the Caribbean and in Europe and Central Asia, and far ahead of that in Africa and the Arab States. However, WEPs signatories worldwide are highly concentrated in a few countries.

53 UN Women Asia and the Pacific, 2020

54 BSR and UNGC, 2020

Table 1: Women’s Empowerment Principles signatories by region, 2016–2021

Region	Number of WEPs signatories (Baseline 2016)	Number of WEPs Signatories (19 August 2021)
Asia and the Pacific	59	1,400
Americas and the Caribbean	50	1,485
Africa	18	233
Europe and Central Asia	127	1,285
Arab States	5	309
Global	264	5,310

WEPs = Women’s Empowerment Principles.

Source: UN Women WEPs Database

Large variations in the number of signatories occur between Asian and Pacific subregions, with the highest number in East Asia (556) followed by South-East Asia (345), South Asia (333), Central and West Asia (136), and finally the Pacific Islands and Australia (98). Within the subregions, WEPs signatories are again dominated in East Asia, by Japan (257) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (257), accounting for 95 per cent of all signatories; in South Asia by India (223) and Pakistan (73) for 89 per cent of signatories; in Central and West Asia, Georgia (82) has 61 per cent of signatories; in the Pacific, Australia (58) and New Zealand (33) account for 93 per cent of WEPs signatories; and in South-East Asia, Viet Nam (102) and Indonesia (78), account for 52 per cent.⁵⁵

Most companies and governments would benefit from enhancing their awareness of the need for and ways to enhance procurement from GREs.

Feedback from companies who tested a UN Women GRP Assessment Tool⁵⁶, developed alongside this research highlighted the need for greater clarity on the definition of “gender-responsive enterprises.” These insights suggest a gap in the Asian and Pacific private sector between awareness of gender equality issues and the integration of gender equality considerations into procurement policies and processes.

Another issue is barriers caused by discriminatory laws, norms, and practices. For example, legal recognition of men as the head of household in some countries provides a challenge to women applying for loans without male consent; similarly, women’s low asset and land ownership affects their ability to access finance without sufficient collateral.⁵⁷ Products and services that directly recognize these challenges are also essential to support WOBs in acquiring a good credit score, which is necessary for procurement processes.⁵⁸

55 BSR and UNGC, 2020

56 ‘UN Women GRP- Assessment Tool’ : This has been developed alongside this research, external publication is subject to further testing

57 UNESCAP, 2018b

58 Marchessault, 2020





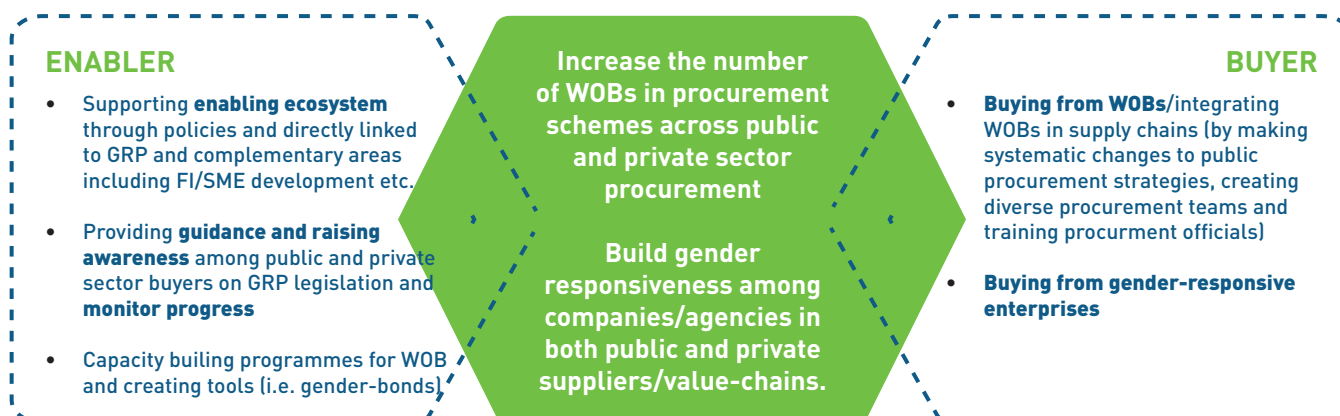
@ADB/ Abir Abdullah

3

MAPPING PUBLIC-SECTOR PROCUREMENT IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Governments in Asia and the Pacific use multiple approaches to establish an environment favourable to GRP processes. Through their dual roles as buyers and enablers, governments can have a major impact on advancing GRP (Figure 4). However, few governments have established WOB supplier-certification models, preferential mechanisms, or strategies and legal instruments to make procurement more inclusive. Where preferential mechanisms have been used, they have been facilitating inclusion of WOBs in supplier schemes. By adding building blocks that together are favourable for GRP, different measures can be introduced at different times, taking advantage of other reform work and adding aspects over time.

Figure 4: The two roles of the government and the impact on GRP



Source: Authors.

Governments in Asian and the Pacific have taken advantage of their roles as buyers to “level the playing field.”

Some governments have legislated the right to use measures restricting competition in certain circumstances. A few governments have endorsed specific GRP legislation, used set-asides in their procurement schemes, used preferential treatment for specific subgroups of WOBs (Table 2), and endorsed a definition of WOB. To facilitate the bid processes, some governments have established e-procurement systems that include measures to address some general challenges that WOBs face—measures such as simplifying WOBs business licensing and providing Asia and the Pacific development programmes specifically for WOBs to improve their capacity to tender. Some governments have also used their procurement processes to set expectations for all suppliers to demonstrate gender responsiveness in their bids, e.g. ensuring their supplier chains are gender-responsive and in line with national gender equality policies.

Table 2: Policies on preferential treatment in procurement in Asia and the Pacific as of May 2021

System Elements	East Asia	South Asia	Southeast Asia	Central and West Asia	Pacific
Set-asides	PRC Japan Republic of Korea	India	Philippines Indonesia	Afghanistan ^a Tajikistan	Australia
Preferential treatment	PRC Japan Republic of Korea Taipei, China	India Maldives	Indonesia Malaysia Philippines Viet Nam	Kazakhstan	Australia New Zealand Samoa Solomon Islands Tonga

^a ADB placed on hold its regular assistance in Afghanistan effective 15 August 2021

3.1 Government as an enabler

Although Asian and Pacific governments have focused on promoting women’s entrepreneurship, limited laws are in place to support GRP. Based on the recent research conducted jointly by ILO and UN Women, there is no policy or legislative framework that explicitly supports or actively promotes GRP among the ASEAN Member States.⁵⁹

However, some governments in the region have established preferential-treatment clauses, which are examples of entry points to more specific GRP legislation. Preferential treatment in public procurement means that a government has specific rules allowing favourable criteria to be used for a specific target group during procurement. Examples include allowing general set-asides, evaluation grids that differentiate between bidder groups, differential pricing, and target groups allowed to bid before other groups. General set-asides are usually

⁵⁹ UN Women, 2021b

established as a percentage of government procurement reserved for a specific target group. In this case, certain bids are open only to the targeted group. Other examples include the following: (1) the Republic of Korea and Japan have adapted some evaluation grids by allowing additional points for representatives from target groups; (2) Viet Nam has adapted the evaluation process to allow for preferential treatment; (3) the Philippines has adjusted for price difference by providing targeted groups with the opportunity to be awarded a contract even if the proposed offer is more expensive than other groups' bids; and (4) Australia has given target groups an opportunity to bid before the procurement is open to the market.

3.1.1 Setting up preferential mechanisms

Many Asian and Pacific governments use preferential mechanisms. Through them, governments can act as an “anchor buyer” for inclusive businesses and WOBs.⁶⁰ Such mechanisms could enable the central government to reach out to the smallest decentralized units, thus building capacity and creating reliable demand.⁶¹ Preferential mechanisms are used to improve opportunities for specific groups and have been used to encourage employment of women and persons with disabilities in Asia and the a few governments have used the mechanisms to encourage gender responsiveness among suppliers. Australia uses government procurement to establish companywide gender-responsive strategies in suppliers and ensure alignment with ILO and other workplace-related standards, and Viet Nam sets preferential treatment for employers of women. Government procurement can be a major incentive for companies to become more gender responsive and government can play an important role in shifting the private sector to gender responsiveness.

Preferential treatment of bidders employing women: Viet Nam

The Vietnamese Law on Public Procurement sets preferential treatment for bidders employing women during qualification for bidding.⁶² Article 14 of the law provides legal ground for preference in the selection of contractors whose workforce is at least 25 per cent female. The same preference is applied to companies employing people with disabilities (25 per cent of the workforce) and to local small businesses.

The Workplace Gender Equality Act: Australia

Australia uses procurement to implement the national gender equality policy. The Workplace Gender Equality (WGE) Act promotes procuring services and goods solely from gender responsive suppliers. Australia passed the Act in 2012 (effective from 2013). It requires non-public sector employers and corporate structures with 100 or more employees to submit an annual report to the WGE Agency. The Agency then uses the collected data to produce reports, such as its annual **Gender Equality Scorecard**. The scorecard provides a snapshot of the critical trends in gender equality across the Australian labour force. Since the WGE Act came into force, the share of companies with female chief executive officers has increased slightly (by 1.2 percentage points) and female representation in the board has also edged up (by 1.3 percentage points).

60 An “anchor buyer” is usually a large-scale buyer that facilitates a supply chain finance programme for its suppliers and whose credit risk is the economic basis of the finance provided.

61 WBG, 2016

62 Intracen. Viet Nam: Preferential procurement for women-owned businesses. https://procurementmap.intracen.org/Data/Results?countryID=704&sort_by=Deadline&order_by=asc§ion=women

The gender-responsive suppliers policy aims to ensure the government only buys from organizations that comply with the WGE Act.⁶³ To be considered for Australian Government procurement contracts valued at or above the relevant procurement thresholds, all employers must be able to demonstrate they are compliant with the WGE Act.⁶⁴ As a result, all companies willing to participate in public procurement must demonstrate compliance with the minimum gender equality standards, and companies that do not comply can be publicly named by the government.

To help implement the WGE Act, the government developed a set of principles and a user guide for employers and government agencies, making it easier for businesses to sell to government and improving access to the Australian Government marketplace.⁶⁵ This GRP policy is part of the government's financial management framework, which creates an overarching requirement to manage an agency's affairs and in accordance with government policies. The passing of this national-level policy encouraged subnational governments to reaffirm their commitment to the law by adopting their own frameworks for implementation.

3.1.2 Setting up set-asides (reserved contracts)

Governments use set-asides specifically for WOBs as well as for disadvantaged groups, e.g., small businesses, marginalized groups, and indigenous businesses. Governments see set-asides as a useful measure and have established specific policies that clarify the right to reserve contract amounts for specific groups. Mixed approaches are also being used, whereby set-asides are combined with other measures. Set-asides are being used to award certain acquisitions to target groups that are considered to be in a disadvantaged position. Some Asian and Pacific governments use set-asides to establish socially responsible procurement practices that promote supplier diversity and employment.

Many Asian and Pacific governments have clauses that encourage SMEs, local suppliers, and minority groups to participate in government procurement. Set-asides are often also combined with other measures that support MSMEs and SMEs: Indonesia uses down payments aimed at improving the cash flows of cooperatives and micro and small-sized enterprises (MSEs) and ensuring their business continuity. The Philippines combines set-asides with another preferential treatment method by specifying that bids from the target group can be more expensive than other bids. The following examples from Indonesia, India, and the Republic of Korea show government efforts at targeting WOBs. Such WOB-specific policies can encourage reporting of spending for WOBs and facilitate the creation of interventions that make sure contract gender targets are met.

Set-asides: India and the Republic of Korea

The Republic of Korea's Act on Assisting Female-Owned Businesses of February 1999 sets a goal of 5 per cent of the total procurement value of goods and services contracts to be awarded to female-owned business, and 3 per cent of the value of construction contracts. In 2018, India introduced a target of 3 per cent of the 25 per cent annual government procurement to go to MSMEs owned by women, and in 2019 launched a marketplace for direct purchase from WOBs (Box 4).

63 Australian Government, 2012

64 Australian Government

65 Australian Government

Box 4: The Indian Government's e-Marketplace

The Indian Government's e-Marketplace (GeM) was launched in 2016 to better manage India's public procurement spending (approximately 22 per cent of India's GDP, or \$417 billion). To support GeM, the government also announced legislation whereby 25 per cent of procurement contracts would be reserved for SMEs, 3 per cent of which would be reserved for women entrepreneurs.

Purchases up to INR25,000 (\$370) can be made directly by any ministry or department from any of the GeM suppliers that meet the requisite quality, specification, and delivery period. For amounts larger than this, purchases have to be made through price comparison, bidding, or reverse auction, following the criterion of the lowest price among available suppliers on the GeM. Indian government data indicate that the average prices on GeM are lower by at least 15 per cent–20 per cent, and in some cases up to 56 per cent. Further, demand aggregation for most of the common-use goods and services is estimated to result in annual savings of \$400 million.

In 2019, "Womaniya" was launched to enable women entrepreneurs to sell products and services directly to government departments and institutions. Government of India data show that nearly 80 per cent of women-owned businesses in India are self-financed and more than 60 per cent of 8 million establishments are owned and led by women entrepreneurs from low-income households.

Notes: Exact numbers on the impact of GeM vary between sources.

Sources: Government of India. n.d. Government Marketplace (GeM): Procurement Reimagined. <https://www.india.gov.in/spotlight/government-e-marketplace-procurement-made-smart#tab=tab-1>;

The Centre for Public Impact. 2019.

The Indian Government's E-Marketplace (GeM) <https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/indian-governments-e-marketplace-gem>;

World Bank Blogs. 2018. How government e-marketplace is revolutionizing procurement in India. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/governance/how-government-e-marketplace-revolutionizing-procurement-india>

Government regulation: Indonesia

The Indonesian Omnibus Law on Job Creation aims to improve the ease of doing business and boost the national investment climate. Specifically, Government Regulation No. 7 of 2021 concerning the Ease, Protection and Empowerment of Cooperatives and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises lays the ground for providing incentives and facilities for MSMEs. Most importantly, the regulation includes a provision that 40 per cent of the procurement of government goods and services should come from cooperatives or MSMEs.⁶⁶ Down payments required to be given to MSMEs and cooperatives are structured as follows: 100 per cent of a contract value of less than IDR50 million, (\$3,000) 50 per cent for a contract value of IDR50 million–IDR200 million (\$3,000–\$12,000), and 30 per cent for a contract value of IDR200 million–IDR2.5 billion (\$12,000–\$50,000). Although the regulation does not directly target WOBs, given that women own 34 per cent of medium enterprises and 51 per cent of small enterprises, they are likely to own more than half of the MSMEs (IFC 2016).

3.2 Government as a buyer

3.2.1 Legislating gender-responsive procurement

Specific GRP regulation is a proactive measure to support WOBs and confirm the right to use preferential treatment for them. GRP legislation can provide clarity that such mechanisms do not violate the principle of equal treatment. The effectiveness of such legislation can be enhanced by additional measures such as e-procurement. Examples from Asia and the Pacific include India and the Republic of Korea (UN Women 2021b).

Public procurement policy for micro and small enterprises owned by women entrepreneurs: India.⁶⁷

In 2018, India updated its **Procurement Law** from the initial target of earmarking 4 per cent of procurement to be from micro and small-sized enterprises (MSEs) owned by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of the 20 per cent annual procurement, the targets were increased to cover 25 per cent of the annual procurement and widened to include 3 per cent from MSEs owned by women entrepreneurs in addition to the 4 per cent from MSEs owned by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. These changes were coupled with setting up a public portal called MSME Sambandh (sambandh.msme.gov.in), launched by the central government to monitor the public procurement of central public-sector enterprises from MSMEs. Procurement from women's MSEs doubled between fiscal years 2019–2020 and 2020–2021.⁶⁸

Act on Assisting Female-Owned Businesses and online e-procurement: Republic of Korea.

The Republic of Korea pioneered GRP legislation that requires public procurement entities to promote the purchase of goods and services manufactured by female-owned small businesses. The Act sets a goal of awarding 5 per cent of the total procurement value of goods and services contracts to female-owned small businesses, and 3 per cent of the value of construction contracts. To support the implementation of the prescribed allocation, the government simplified procedures for contracts of up to KRW20 million (about \$43,000), making it easier for WOB suppliers to compete. In practice, such small contracts can be directly awarded to WOBs without competition. Furthermore, public institutions provide additional evaluation points to WOBs.⁶⁹

In 2002, the Republic of Korea's procurement was simplified and made more accessible through the establishment of the Korea On-line E-procurement System (KONEPS), one of the most advanced e-government systems globally. The integrity assessment conducted by the Korea Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission indicated that the perception index of the public procurement system's integrity has improved from 6.80 to 8.52 out of 10 (the highest score) since the launch of KONEPS. In addition, the share of contracts that go to SMEs, which traditionally includes most WOBs, rose from 55 per cent in 2003 to 75 per cent in 2010.⁷⁰ The data collection is disaggregated to demonstrate the total number and value of contracts; number of low-value contracts; and size, location, and special status of supplier, such as WOB status.⁷¹ In addition, KONEPS monitors the performance of WOBs and provides feedback based on their procurement results to help attain the set-aside goals.⁷²

The data show the effectiveness of the Public Procurement Service's work: increased purchases and contracts that go to SMEs, and improved perceptions of integrity and trust. The results demonstrate the potential impact of GRP when public procurement processes are simplified; made accessible and transparent; and, most importantly, support SMEs and WOBs.

67 Indian Government DCM, 2018
78 Indian Government DCM, 2021

69 Korea Institute of Procurement, 2018
70 OECD, 2017

71 Republic of Korea, 2015
72 Republic of Korea, 2016

3.2.2 Establishing and simplifying e-procurement systems

Establishing e-procurement

E-procurement systems can have positive impacts on SMEs and WOBs. For a government, the advantages of implementing e-procurement systems include: reduced administration and transaction costs; increased transparency, accountability, and efficiency; enhanced anticorruption efforts; and improved competition.⁷³ A global study on public procurement found that SMEs have been a main driver for establishing simple public procurement systems.⁷⁴ One reason why e-procurement is advantageous for small businesses is that it reduces the human and financial costs of the procurement process. Open-source simplified procurement platforms open opportunities for more actors, which can result in financial and quality gains for the procurer as well as the buyer. Publishing tender notices online can reduce the resources that WOBs have to expend searching for notices physically by visiting offices or searching through hardcopy publications. Allowing suppliers to download and submit bidding documentation online can also reduce often considerable documentation fees and geographical constraints.

As part of e-procurement and any procurement process and especially in large public procurement spends such as infrastructure or education, a gender assessment is essential across the entire project cycle from planning, within technical procurement process and throughout the implementation to ensure a true gender-responsive implementation of government programmes.

Box 5: Integrating gender into infrastructure programmes

The infrastructure sector has a significant social, economic, and environmental impact on local communities and on men and women. The (construction) Infrastructure Transparency Initiative (CoST) has increased its focus on promoting greater gender equality across its member programmes and the infrastructure sector. This includes developing gender assessments in member programmes, as in the case of CoST Thailand, and assisting members to attain mainstream gender equality throughout the infrastructure project cycle.

In the initial stages of infrastructure development, for example, CoST members are encouraged to explore whether gender needs have been assessed and women's voices and needs heard during project planning. During tender, CoST supports procuring entities in collecting data and information on the participation of women-led companies in public bids, helping to provide key insights on gender challenges and obstacles and assisting authorities in designing effective GRP rules. For project implementation, CoST encourages members to report gender-based wrongdoing and to gather information on the ratio of jobs held by women across the project cycle. CoST fosters local partnerships to improve young female leadership in monitoring infrastructure projects and promotes more equal representation in the multi-stakeholder groups that guide project delivery, transparency, and accountability.^{75,76}

73 Republic of Korea, 2015
74 Bulut and Yen, 2013

75 CoST, 2021a
76 Prado, 2020

An e-procurement system can also be a building block to later establishing a WOB database. The experience from India and the Republic of Korea shows a positive societal impact when such a system allows more diversified enterprises to benefit from the procurement market.

The challenges related to an online system may include low digital literacy of a target group, which may be overcome with targeted training. An approach used in the Phoenix Micro Start-up Plan in Taipei, China is aimed at providing supply-side support programmes to potential WOB suppliers, including tendering courses and access to networks in combination with loans for start-ups, with favourable repayment terms.⁷⁷

Online shopping system Tandoo: Kyrgyz Republic

In 2019, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development facilitated technical amendments to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on Public Procurement. The change led to the development of an online shopping system, Tandoo. Tandoo is one of the government's steps in removing barriers to SMEs' participation in public procurement. Tandoo takes advantage of technology that could facilitate small business operations (EBRD 2020). Although the system does not address women directly, it targets SMEs, a group where many WOBs belong to.

Simplifying procurement processes and business registration

A second key measure governments have taken is to simplify their procurement and business registration processes. Several Asian and Pacific governments and businesses have reformed their processes to make them simple, fast, and accessible. A simplified process reduces the administrative burden for companies and therefore the time spent and the financial cost. Ultimately, simple registration and licensing create incentives for businesses to enter the formal economy and allow governments to collect data, track performance, and monitor economic activity. A key aspect of formal business registration is the ease of identifying WOBs. Essential measures include establishing SME databases with sex-disaggregated data on the ownership and management positions.

Simplified business licences: Tonga

The Business Licences Act 2002 of Tonga is an example of a simple, SME-friendly policy with positive results for WOBs. To register as a business in Tonga, companies complete a single, five-page application, submit it to the Ministry of Commerce, Tourism and Labour, and pay the administrative fee. No supporting documents are required and the process takes only seven days. The **Business Licences Act** also allows companies to use one licence to cover multiple business activities. In addition, the business licences are perpetual and do not need to be renewed annually; registered businesses are only required to file a notice of continued business activity every year. The low administrative burden makes it easy for SMEs to operate. Importantly, the application form requires entities to provide information on ownership composition (e.g. women- or male-owned). Tonga thus has sex-disaggregated data for WOBs showing that starting a business requires the same time, effort, and money for all sexes.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ APEC, 2013

⁷⁸ Intracen. Japan: Preferential procurement for women-owned businesses

3.2.3 Adapting scoring methodologies and evaluation grids

Preferential methods of scoring and evaluating bids can be used to facilitate the participation of WOBs and GREs in supply chains and procurement. For example, additional points may be assigned to WOBs and GREs when scoring and evaluating bids received.

Preferential scoring methodology: Japan

In Japan, based on the **Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace**, tenderers that promote women's participation can receive additional points during bid evaluation. To be considered for the additional points, a company should have received a certification (e.g., Eruboshi and/or Kurumin certification).⁷⁹ The Eruboshi certification is based on Article 9 of the Act. A company can obtain Eruboshi certification if it implements and correctly disseminates information on an action plan to support women in the workplace. The Kurumin certification is based on Article 13 of the **Act on Advancement of Measures to Support Raising Next-Generation Children**, whereby companies demonstrate commitment to improve work-life balance for mothers by extending maternity leave, removing overtime, etc.

3.2.4 Certifying suppliers

Certification programmes allow governments to identify firms that meet the eligibility criteria established by procurement law and to collect data on the firms.⁸⁰ In the process, certification facilitates the generation of information on the target groups and allows governments to analyze their status, design strategies and policies addressing their needs and track performance of the policies. By advertising their certifications, businesses can increase their visibility, enhance their reputations, and influence decisions of their suppliers and buyers. WOB certification provides an independent, objective seal of confidence that a business has been validated as owned, managed, and controlled by women.



79 Intracen. Japan: Preferential procurement for women-owned businesses. 80 ITC, 2014





@ADB/ Abir Abdullah

4

GENDER-RESPONSIVE PROCUREMENT IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

GRP is a powerful mechanism to strengthen gender equality in organizations. It is one of the key practices highlighted in the WEPs Guiding Framework for the private sector. WEPs Principle 5, “Enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices,” recommends that companies require business partners, contractors, and suppliers to adopt the WEPs and to establish supplier diversity programmes that actively seek to expand business relationships with WOBs and support their participation.⁸¹ In turn, this will help yield direct benefits from GRP.

Companies that have a higher adoption rate of supplier diversity programmes generate 133 per cent greater return on the cost of their procurement operations than companies with only an average rate of adopting supplier diversity programmes.

By diversifying their supplier bases by engaging with and procuring from WOBs and GREs, corporations tap into a wider group of suppliers and gain advantages such as increased exposure to a large consumer group represented by women as well as increased innovation, resilience, and productivity in supply chains. An upcoming publication from UN Women lays out the six dimensions of this business case, namely: Increased revenue and reduced procurement spend; greater supplier availability and resilience; strengthened business and brand loyalty; increased innovation and adaptability to customers’ needs; influx of new diverse talent, which can improve service delivery; and strengthened markets through economic development and inclusive growth leading to new and expanding business opportunities.⁸²

81 UN Women and UNGC a

82 UN Women, 2022 (not published yet)

However, very little private-sector procurement spending worldwide goes to WOBs, very few companies track their spending with WOBs, and even fewer report publicly on such spending.⁸³

Companies that want to ensure they are responsive to the advantages of and need for diversity also need to examine diversity and inclusion in their procurement workforces. In Asia, women make up a much smaller proportion of the procurement workforce than in Europe and the Americas.⁸⁴ For example, in India, many companies have committed to gender equality through corporate social responsibility programmes, workplace initiatives, and capacity building, but have not linked this explicitly with procurement.⁸⁵

The WEPs GAT Tool provides a practical method that private sector companies can use to initially assess the gender responsiveness of their procurement practices, mechanisms, and supply chains. For a deeper assessment alongside this research report a new UN Women Gender Responsive Procurement Assessment Tool (UN Women GRP Assessment Tool) was developed, which allows companies to self-assess their performance in regards to GRP across four dimensions: (1) Gender Equality Commitments; (2) Procurement Policy and Strategy; (3) Internal Procurement and Supply Chain Organizational Structure; and (4) Supplier Database and Reporting and can be used to identify priority actions for working on GRP regardless of current levels of commitment and capacity of the company.

Four corporations participated in piloting the UN Women GRP Assessment Tool, applying it to their operations and supply chains. This was also shared with key Asian and Pacific stakeholders to gather further input. The piloting process followed a participatory approach with each company mixing learning sessions, discussions, and practical work on its own processes; sharing learning between companies; and providing practical support to the four participating companies.

Insights gleaned from the piloting process were as follows:⁸⁶

- **Supplier database.** In companies that have supplier databases, variations may include databases (1) in which suppliers enter the sex of their owners voluntarily, but there is no screening process to verify the ownership; (2) that ask vendors whether they classify themselves as enterprises that are women-owned; ethnic minority-owned; micro, small, or medium-sized; persons with disabilities; LGBTIQ+ owned; or social enterprises—but without collecting information on vendors' senior management and staff composition; and (3) that do not include sex-disaggregated data of their suppliers' ownership, management, or control.
- **Targets.** Some companies have global commitments to increase spending on diverse suppliers, but not all of them have specific targets for buying from WOBs. In some companies with established supplier-diversity programmes, targets for spending on supplier diversity are set globally, with country offices required to report annually on their performance toward these targets.
- **Procurement and supply-chain departments.** Some companies are applying different strategies including training staff to understand the importance of supplier diversity and buying from WOBs, conducting capacity building for recruiting and promoting women into procurement leadership positions. However, GRP tasks and responsibilities were rarely described in the job descriptions of procurement and supply-chain staff.

83 BSR and UNGC, 2020

84 Oliver Wyman, 2019

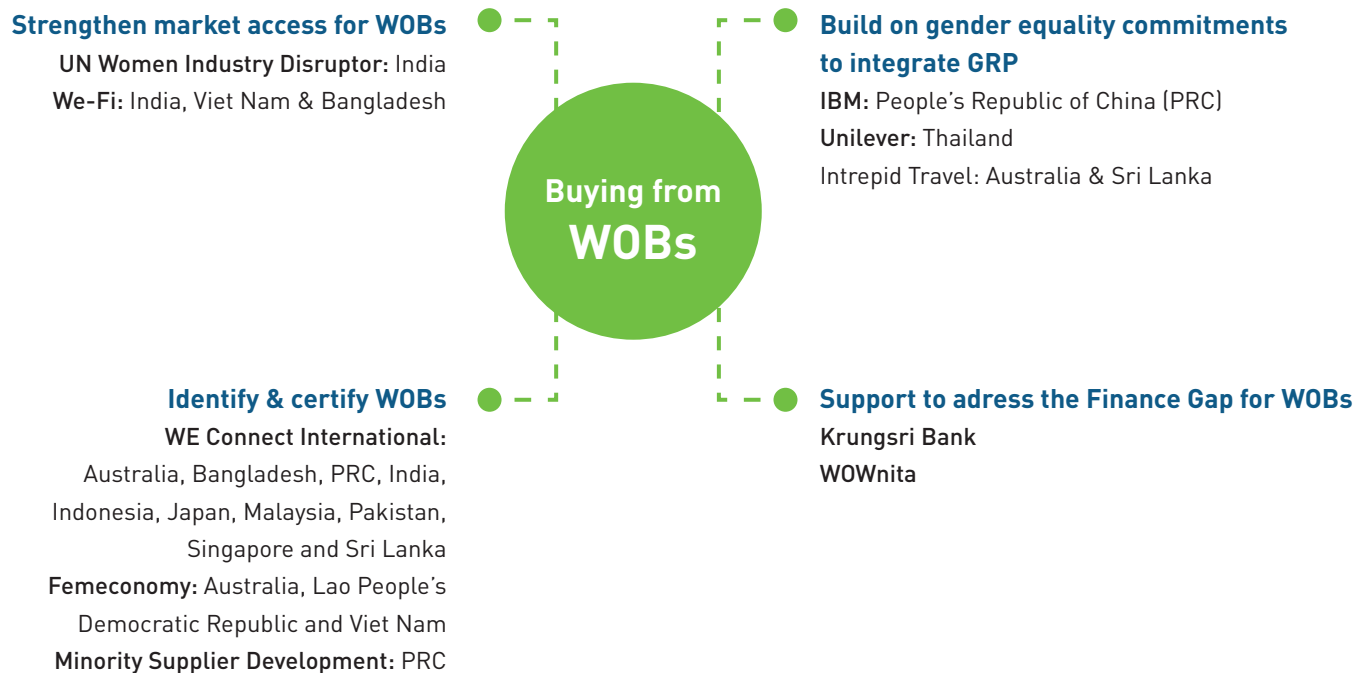
85 UN Women, 2021a

86 Companies have been anonymized.

4.1 Theme 1: Buying from women-owned businesses

The examples presented here show initiatives from the Asian and Pacific private sector.

Figure 5: What can the private sector do to increase women-owned businesses in supply chains?



Source: Author.

4.1.1 Building on gender equality commitments to integrate gender-responsive procurement

Several Asian and Pacific companies integrate supplier diversity into their procurement practices; however, such initiatives are not common. For example, only two of the 75 top ASEAN companies sampled by UN Women had supplier-diversity measures in place.⁸⁷ IBM Asia Pacific, Intrepid Travel, and Unilever show how establishing at the global level a clear corporate policy on supplier diversity and/or a GRP mandate for staff worldwide drives and facilitates implementation at regional and national levels. Clearly, setting specific targets for sourcing from WOBS within supplier-diversity programmes is important to ensure that WOBS in the supply chain are tracked. Unilever Thailand and Intrepid Travel also demonstrate how innovative partnerships can help to generate supplier development programmes to target the integration of WOBS into the supply chain. The following three examples show how companies with gender equality commitments in the workplace are well placed to focus on gender responsiveness in the marketplace.

87 UN Women 2021b

IBM Asia Pacific

IBM has a corporate policy of committing to diverse business relationships.⁸⁸ In 2005, IBM began implementing its supplier diversity programme in its Asian and Pacific offices. More than half of IBM Asia Pacific's spending for supplier diversity programmes is for WOBs. Of IBM's global \$2-billion target yearly for diversity expenditure, \$229 million (about 11.5 per cent) is from its Asian and Pacific operations, and primarily India and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The supplier diversity manager for IBM Asia Pacific noted "The secret to a successful supplier diversity programme is a procurement team who carries and embodies the corporate values."⁸⁹

Interviews with the IBM Asia Pacific procurement team identified factors that facilitated the implementation of the global corporate strategy at the regional level:

- Receiving strong support from management and clear corporate guidance for staff at all levels.
- Building capacity for and raising awareness in procurement departments of the importance of supplier diversity; clear guidance on how to implement this; and staff training on how to check, verify, and help and coach WOBs.
- Doing extensive market research on where and what kind of businesses the WOBs are.
- Collaborating through outreach events with business groups to build relationships with WOBs.
- Meeting with other corporations planning to develop supplier diversity programmes.
- Engaging with certification bodies such as WEConnect International and nongovernmental organizations to discover businesses able to meet IBM's requirements.
- Surveying suppliers to ascertain whether their ownerships meet diversity criteria.
- Inviting WOBs to bid and providing them with information on procurement opportunities.

Unilever

Unilever has made strides towards gender equality in its workforce, closing the gender gap with 50 per cent of managerial-level staff being women in 2020, up from 38 per cent in 2010. In 2021, Unilever announced a new target to spend €2 billion (\$2.43 billion) annually with diverse suppliers, including women, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+, and members of other disadvantaged groups. By 2025, Unilever also implemented a new supplier-development programme to provide suppliers with access to skills, financing, and networking opportunities.⁹⁰

Unilever Thailand has started action toward achieving its parent company's goals of spending on diverse suppliers, starting by mapping the WOBs among their current suppliers. Unilever Thailand established a baseline of its procurement from women-owned and women-led suppliers by gathering sex-disaggregated information on the suppliers' boards of directors and top management. Unilever Thailand prioritized its top suppliers (accounting for 80 per cent of its procurement) in the first round of mapping. A challenge encountered was the difficulty of verifying the gender of a supplier's ownership, as their supplier database did not contain the necessary information. However, Unilever Thailand's procurement manager noted it was easier to find the women-led businesses than other diversely owned suppliers, because women-led companies are more open than other companies to disclosing and sharing the profile of their senior leaders. Thus, prioritizing buying from WOBs may be a starting point for broader supplier-diversity programmes.

Unilever is working in partnership with Thailand's Office of SMEs Promotion to develop a programme for diversely owned, managed, and led SMEs. Most SMEs recruited to the programme were women-owned (80 of 94).

88 IBM Corporation website.

89 Diversity Manager, IBM Asia Pacific, [Interview conducted 2021 in the piloting process of the UN Women GRP Assessment Tool]

90 Unilever, 2021

Intrepid Travel

A large tourism company, Intrepid Travel, has integrated gender equality in its core operations, including procurement. From its Australian headquarters, Intrepid works with more than 1,250 staff and leaders of about 65 nationalities based in more than 40 offices globally. In 2017, 60 per cent of Intrepid's global staff were women; however, at the tour-leader level, women were under-represented. Intrepid set a goal to double its number of female tour leaders (from 154 to 308) by 2020. The goal was achieved in 2019, and by the start of 2020 Intrepid had 342 female tour leaders, almost 30 per cent of its worldwide total. Through a proactive campaign in India, Intrepid achieved a 50/50 split of women and men among the intake of new tour leaders in that country.⁹¹

Intrepid established additional gender equality goals in 2020, including increasing the number of female porters globally who assist travellers on mountain treks, a commitment to reporting on the gender pay gap, and equal gender representation in the company workforce. As 65 per cent of Intrepid's customers are female, in 2018 they began offering expeditions for women only, led by women tour guides. In Asia and the Pacific, women-only tours were at the time of research planned for Nepal.⁹² Intrepid is also working to link WOBs into the supply chains of the women-only travel packages, offering an example of how female consumer power can be harnessed to integrate GRP into corporate procurement practices.

Intrepid's commitment to gender equality paved the way for it to start mainstreaming gender into its procurement practices.

In 2020, Intrepid began to explore how WOBs could be integrated into their products. Intrepid is working with their 200 largest suppliers to reduce gender inequality and share best practice and mentoring on gender equality. By signing and implementing the WEPs, Intrepid has shown that tourism companies can move toward ensuring that their business supports gender equality and women's economic empowerment and contribute to further increasing awareness on how to advance gender equality in the tourism sector.

Intrepid is the largest B Corp certified travel company globally.

In 2018, its Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam offices were those countries' first B Corp companies.⁹³ B Corp Certification offers an opportunity for businesses to review and improve their supply chain practices. To build on its overall gender equality commitments and specifically commitments to GRP, Intrepid mapped its supply chain in Sri Lanka to determine where WOBs are. Intrepid found that only 14 per cent of its top suppliers were women-owned. Intrepid is keen to explore how the information that it has gathered can inform its corporate strategy and the next steps in GRP and supplier diversity. Intrepid plans to replicate this process in its other country offices. The Intrepid example demonstrates how Asian and Pacific companies can harness broader corporate commitments to gender equality and certification processes to set realistic and context-specific targets for buying from WOBs.

4.1.2 Identifying, certifying, and building capacity

Finding WOBs to become potential suppliers is a challenge often cited by companies. The following three international organizations provide mechanisms for identifying, certifying, engaging with, and facilitating WOBs' inclusion in Asian and Pacific supply chains.

91 Intrepid Travel. Gender Equality. <https://www.intrepidtravel.com/au/gender-equality>

92 Intrepid Travel. Women's Expeditions. <https://www.intrepidtravel.com/eu/womens-expeditions>

93 Certified B Corporation. <https://bcorporation.net/>

WEConnect International

WEConnect facilitates links between buyers and WOBs in a number of world regions. In Asia and the Pacific, WEConnect works on certifying WOBs in Australia, Bangladesh, the PRC, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, and Sri Lanka. Its most recently launched programme was in Pakistan, in November 2020. The programme sets out to address the major gender imbalance in enterprises, where only 8 per cent of firms are majority-owned by women (WEConnect International 2020). Large buyers sourcing from Pakistan have expressed interest in diversifying their supply chains. However, only 36 per cent of the 83 buyer representatives said their organization procured from women suppliers. Through its certification programme, WEConnect International will facilitate connecting Pakistani WOBs and international buyers.

Femeconomy

The social enterprise Femeconomy is based in Australia and has an international presence. It works to increase the impact of purchasing decisions on gender equality by educating consumers, budget owners, and business owners and by certifying WOBs.⁹⁴ For a brand to be certified by Femeconomy, 30 per cent of its board of directors must be women or it must be 50 per cent female-owned. In mid-2021, 739 Australian and 37 New Zealand brands had Femeconomy approval. In 2020, Femeconomy published a toolkit called Creating Gender Equality through Procurement to aid companies in developing and implementing GRP. Femeconomy is a partner in the Creating Gender Equality Through Trading Opportunities initiative funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs through the Australia–ASEAN Council.

Minority Supplier Development China

In 2008, Minority Supplier Development China (MSDC) was launched as the first national non-profit membership organization in the PRC's dedicated to enhancing the development of the PRC's minority-owned business corporations by connecting minority suppliers with procurement opportunities from major corporations.⁹⁵ MSDC is a subset of the US-based National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC), a membership organization that advances business opportunities for certified minority business enterprises and connects them to corporate members.⁹⁶ The NMSDC network includes international partner organizations in Australia, Canada, the PRC, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. After working on certifying businesses at least 51 per cent owned, operated, and controlled by the PRC's ethnic minority group members, MSDC focused its attention on WOBs.

At MSDC, and in the PRC generally, supplier diversity is primarily focused on business corporations owned by ethnic groups. Little or no information is available on how diversity is being defined to include women and other groups. The concept of GRP is still new in the PRC and is being discussed in collaboration with other international networking groups and organizations. To achieve MSDC certification, WOBs submit an application form, complete an interview, and receive a visit to their premises. MSDC organizes annual summits and conventions to share and gather insights on how diversely owned businesses in the PRC can utilize supplier diversity and inclusion initiatives to increase their market access.

⁹⁴ Femeconomy. About. <https://femeconomy.com/about/>

⁹⁵ GSDA, 2016

⁹⁶ National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC), Inc. About NMSDC. <https://nmsdc.org/about-nmsdc/>

4.1.3 Strengthening market access and linkages for women-owned businesses

Another key aspect of good practice in Asia and the Pacific is initiatives that aim to strengthen market access and linkages for WOBs. The UN Women Industry Disruptor demonstrates how innovation and collaboration can be used to build WOBs' capacity and generate entry points for being involved in procurement by harnessing linkages between WOBs and large brands in Asian and Pacific industries, thus benefitting all parties. Krungsri Bank and WOWNita (see below) demonstrate how banks can support financing to WOBs, increasing their access to markets and addressing the gender finance gap.

UN Women Industry Disruptor

The UN Women Industry Disruptor provides participants with access to mentorship, investors, and the opportunity to grow ideas and increase their impact.⁹⁷ The Industry Disruptor is a platform for innovation that brings together entrepreneurs, private sector companies, experts, and investors to work jointly on brand-specific sustainability challenges. In 2020, the Industry Disruptor brought together three industry partners and more than 40 women-led growth-stage ventures engaged in innovation and exchange in the European Union and India. The first phase of the programme focused on the garment industry in India, which represents 50 per cent of India's apparel and textile industries. The aim was to attract women-owned ventures that are disrupting the fashion and lifestyle industry to build a more inclusive and sustainable industry.

From across India, 300 women entrepreneurs submitted their business ideas to industry-wide sustainability challenges. Following this, 80 women were selected to complete a six-week online course. Then 22 women entrepreneurs participated in a five-day "boot camp" involving industry partners Bonprix, H&M, and Tchibo. The process is designed to connect industry partners and entrepreneurs to learn from each other and build new partnerships, and for the entrepreneurs to develop new solutions to sustainability challenges. Following this process, a number of brands have established deeper connections to H&M's supply chain. In 2020, the Industry Disruptor capacitated 150 women-led ventures, engaged 20 experts and innovators, connected the WOBs with the three industry partners, and secured venture capital funding for two companies.⁹⁸ The second phase of the programme focuses on fashion, lifestyle, and homeware. The second phase started in June 2021 to continue for six months. More brands joined as partners to phase 2, including new complementary partners, such as e-commerce giant Amazon and not for profit, pioneering platform for the private equity WinPe, to support capacity building and access to the financial and e-commerce market, thus addressing digital and finance gender gaps. Ninety-five applications were received, of which more than 80 participants benefitted from training sessions on e-commerce, funding and marketing. Further, 23 participants underwent a six-day intensive training and co-created four solutions with five industry partners. The solutions offered innovative approaches to GRP. One example was a digital platform called Authentica, which matches women entrepreneurs with larger fashion and lifestyle brands. This diversifies the supplier base for those brands, while providing business development opportunities for the entrepreneurs. Authentica is at the prototype stage and has interest from the corporations involved in UN Women's Industry Disruptor, including H&M India and Medusa EXIM.

Krungsri Bank

As part of its supplier diversity programme, in 2019 Krungsri Bank launched a "gender bond," expanding credit lines to women-led SMEs in Thailand. The IFC and German Development Investment Corporation have subscribed to the bond for \$220 million, supported by the Women Entrepreneurs Opportunity Facility. The objective of the bond is to provide financial support to female entrepreneurs who play a significant role in driving the economy, increase the country's employment, and promote sustainable development in Thailand and Asia.⁹⁹ Krungsri is the first Asian and Pacific bank to issue gender bonds for foreign investors in an effort to support women-led SMEs.

97 UN Women Industry Disruptor: India

98 UN Women Industry Disruptor: India

99 Krungsri

WOWnita

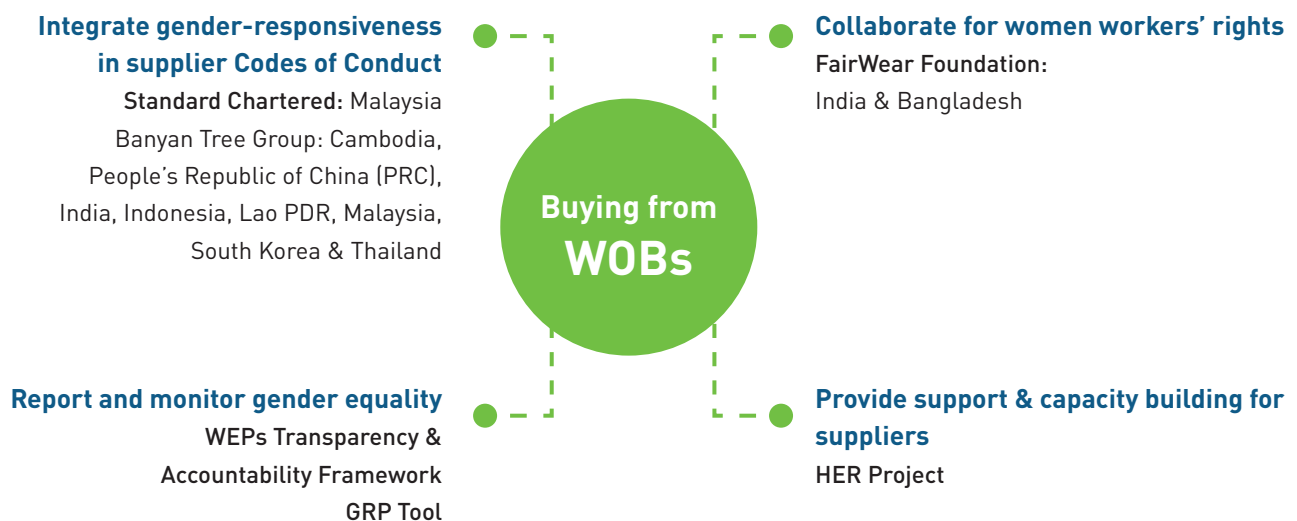
Standard Chartered's global Islamic banking network Saadiq has a strong presence in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. In 2019, Standard Chartered Malaysia introduced WOWnita exclusively for providing working capital to women entrepreneurs. Applicants benefit from preferential financing rates, collateral-free applications, rapid approvals, and flexible plans. Financing ranges from \$24,000 to \$121,000.¹⁰⁰ To be eligible for WOWnita financing, a company must have been in business for at least three years, be based in Malaysia, have at least 51 per cent shareholding owned by women, and have a woman as the key applicant for funds.

4.2 Theme 2: Procuring from gender-responsive enterprises

Working with and mobilizing suppliers to become more gender-responsive across their value chains can be a direct starting point for any company to work on GRP. While buying from WOBs is essential to any GRP approach, work to make suppliers more gender-responsive can be done in parallel with work on GRP. This is important especially for smaller companies and for governments without well-developed gender legislation. Tools for evaluating the gender responsiveness of private sector companies are available, but not for specifically assessing the gender responsiveness of a company's procurement dimensions or for building gender equality into procurement strategies, codes, provisions, etc.

Gender-responsive supply chains are a relatively new component of GRP, and the private sector in Asia and the Pacific provides some examples. In response to the challenges outlined in the Introduction, good practices include integration of gender responsiveness in supplier codes of conduct, collaboration for due diligence in supply chains, and reporting and monitoring of supplier gender responsiveness (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Examples of how the private sector could develop gender-responsive suppliers



Source: Author

Standard Chartered Malaysia provides examples of ways to integrate gender equality into a corporate structure, policies, and codes. The Banyan Tree Group demonstrates how a large Asian business has guided suppliers and ensured their procurement spending through GRE increases.

100 WOWnita

Standard Chartered

Standard Chartered's commitment to gender equality is demonstrated by its being a signatory to WEPs, recognition on the Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index, and EDGE certification.¹⁰¹ Procurement and supply policies and processes are described in Standard Chartered's **Supplier Diversity and Inclusion Charter**. Some of the Charter's 12 principles are relevant to gender responsiveness, in particular principle 3 on human rights and principle 9 on non-discrimination. Adherence to all applicable laws and the principles set out in the Charter is a material consideration in the bank's selection and evaluation of suppliers.¹⁰² Standard Chartered Malaysia's implementation of the corporation's global commitment to diversity and inclusion as well as the Charter are supported by the bank's Country Diversity and Inclusion Council. The Council is convened by the chief executive officer of Standard Chartered Malaysia, comprises representatives from all the bank's units to ensure that gender equality considerations are incorporated into all core operations, and demonstrates the importance of senior management commitment to implementing GRP and the structures needed to do so.

Banyan Tree Group

The Singapore-based Banyan Tree Group is a leading international operator and developer of premium resorts, hotels, residences, and spas. It demonstrates how large Asian businesses can guide their suppliers to become more gender-responsive and therefore contribute to increasing Banyan Tree's procurement spending with GRES. Banyan Tree has grown from its first small resort in Phuket Thailand in 1994 into one of the largest hospitality groups worldwide, with a major presence in many Asian countries. The group has strong supply-chain engagement and monitoring mechanisms that encourage suppliers to make responsible choices that drive respect for human rights and the environment. The Banyan Tree Group's code of conduct commits all suppliers to"

- support and respect human rights and ensure that all employees are aware of and understand the rights;
- eliminate all forms of forced or compulsory labour and child labour;
- engage a diverse workforce and provide a workplace free from harassment, discrimination, or abuse;
- treat employees fairly with respect to wages, working hours, and benefits; and
- implement occupational health and safety regulations and ensure a safe working environment conducive to good health.¹⁰³

In 2020, the Banyan Tree's supplier code of conduct was implemented through the Global Foundation. The target is for 100 per cent of its suppliers to conform with the code by 2025. Suppliers that do not conform will initially be supported with a corrective action plan and the contracts of those unable to complete the plan will be terminated.

4.2.2 Reporting, monitoring, and accountability for suppliers

A number of initiatives exist for reporting on the gender responsiveness of suppliers. Large buyers based in Europe can be held accountable for their actions in their Asian and Pacific supply chains through a membership organization that requires continual monitoring of supply chains, including of issues such as violence and harassment of women workers. The Fair Wear Foundation, Gender Data and Impact Framework, and WEOs Transparency and Accountability Framework are examples of initiatives for assisting buyers to guide suppliers to establish safe and equitable workplaces for women, integrate gender responsiveness into supply chains, and monitor suppliers' commitments to gender responsiveness, respectively.

101 EDGE describes itself as the "leading global assessment methodology and business certification standard for gender and intersectional equity." [EDGE website].

102 Standard Chartered, 2021

103 Banyan Tree Global Foundation

The Fair Wear Foundation

The Fair Wear Foundation is a network of European clothing and outdoor wear brands working to end violence against women in supply chains in Bangladesh and India. The Foundation's Violence and Harassment Prevention Programme includes workplace training and awareness raising for management, supervisors, and workers. To meet a member brand's requirements, at least 10 per cent of production workers must receive the training. The programme also supports factories to establish effective workplace harassment committees where workers may safely express their concerns.¹⁰⁴

The Foundation scores its corporate members on their procurement practices, tracking aspects such as how member brands structure their supply chains to improve leverage for the practices, whether members' pricing supports the payment of at least legal minimum wages, steps they take to reduce excessive overtime in the factories that produce for them, and whether they were late paying their suppliers. The scores are available publicly.¹⁰⁵

Gender Data and Impact Framework.

In addition to global movements for women workers' rights in supply chains and the WEPs, other practices also specifically aim to integrate gender responsiveness into procurement practices. BSR, an organization of sustainable business experts, has developed the Gender Data and Impact Framework and Tool (GDIFT) to support brands and suppliers in conducting gender-responsive due diligence in supply chains.¹⁰⁶ The GDIFT comprises an analytical framework, key performance indicators for tracking outcomes, a data collection tool, and recommendations. The GDIFT was developed in collaboration with other stakeholders working on gender-responsive supply chains, including the Ethical Trading Initiative and Women Working Worldwide. Indicators cover six key areas that impact workers: agency, health and safety, leadership, economic empowerment, violence and harassment, and sexual and reproductive health rights and unpaid care work¹⁰⁷.

WEPs Transparency and Accountability Framework

Another mechanism for monitoring the gender responsiveness of suppliers is the WEPs Transparency and Accountability Framework. The framework is divided into three categories: (1) Essential Reporting Indicators, (2) Complementary Indicators, and (3) Input and Support Measures and Indicators. UN Women recommends that companies report publicly on the Essential Indicators as they measure "positive, irreversible, and sustainable change for gender equality"¹⁰⁸ and can be reported easily by any company anywhere in the world. Complementary Indicators measure key areas for tackling systemic barriers to gender equality and women's economic empowerment in the workplace, marketplace, and community. The Complementary Indicators are not standardized across countries, sectors, or company size. **In the context of advancing GRP it is recommended that organizations report on two of the Complementary Indicators: number 7 on percentage of procurement spend with WOBs; and 8 on percentage of procurement spend with businesses with gender equality commitments.**¹⁰⁹

The indicators in the WEPs Transparency and Accountability Framework provide a good way for companies to assess and evaluate their own gender equality performance and that of their suppliers, as well as of their suppliers' suppliers, which should also be encouraged to report on the indicators (Figure 7). UN Women is

104 Fair Wear Foundation. Programme: Creating change on the factory floor. <https://www.fairwear.org/programmes/workplace-education/>

105 Human Rights Watch, 2019
106 BSR, 2020
107 Ethical Trading Initiative, 2019

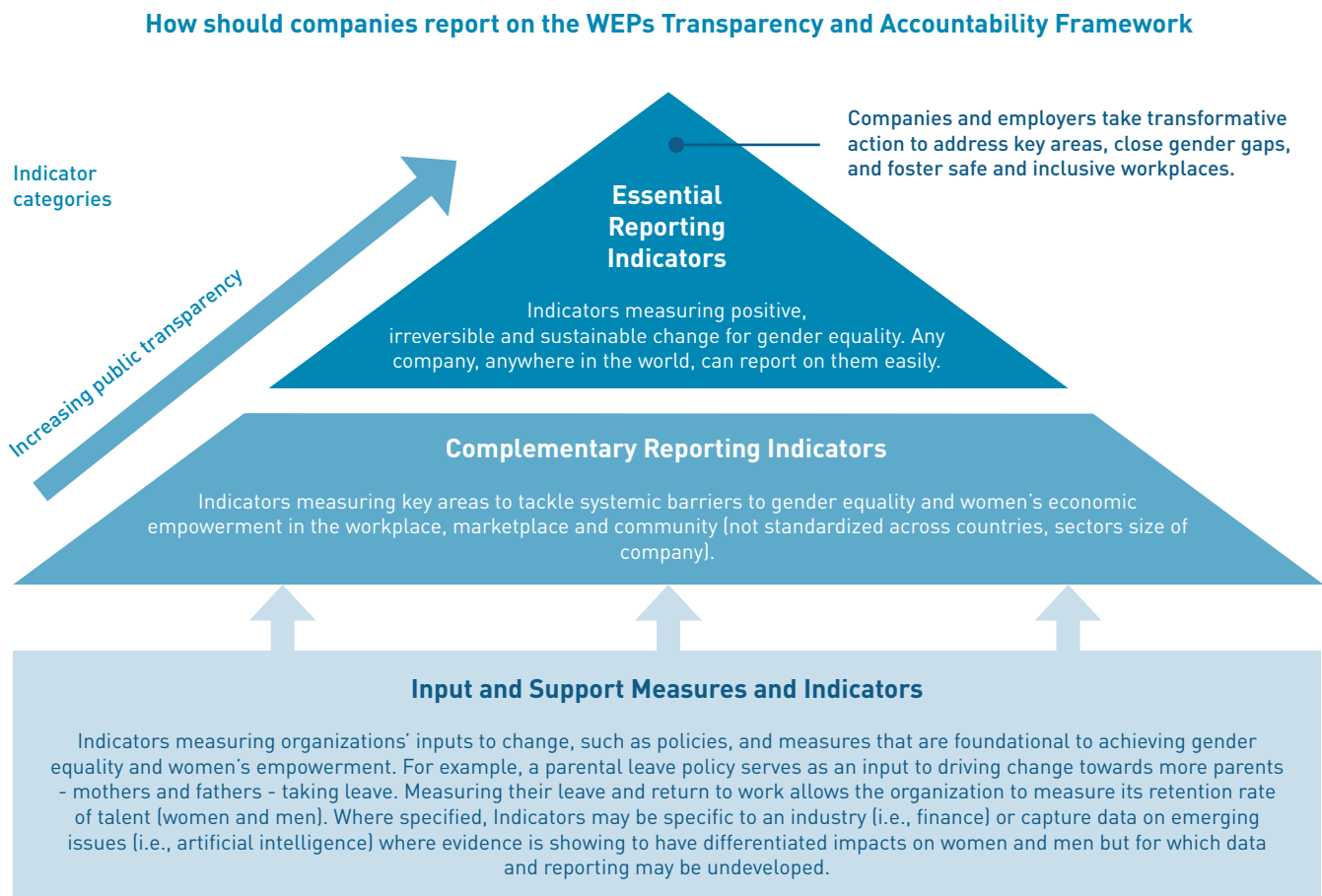
108 UN Women, 2021c
109 UN Women, 2021c

advocating for the Essential Reporting Indicators to be integrated into mandatory reporting requirements for the private sector. UN Women is advocating this action with organizations such as security exchange commissions, governments, and other regulators and through reporting mechanisms such as environmental and social guidelines.¹¹⁰

4.2.3 Supporting suppliers

Suppliers may need support and capacity building to help them become more gender-responsive. An example is the HER Project, which connects global brands, their suppliers, and local partners to create and implement workplace-based interventions on health, financial inclusion, and gender equality. HER programmes in factories and farms comprise three activities: workplace training sessions for women employees; expert guidance to brands and their suppliers on improving workplace systems and policies; and building of connections to key products and services, such as health clinics and formal bank accounts.¹¹¹ Of particular interest for GRP is the guidance provided to brands. Further research could highlight specifically how this could be incorporated into work on GREs in Asian and Pacific supply chains.

Figure 7: WEPs Transparency and Accountability Framework



Source: UN Women, 2021c

110 UN Women 2021c
 111 BSR





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5 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The review found five key recommendations for governments and business to consider, to assist their economies by advancing GRP.



Recommendation 1: Raise awareness of the business case for GRP

Progress has been made to create strong evidence to support the business case for gender equality. A 2018 report estimated that advancing women's equality could add a total of \$4.5 trillion to Asian and Pacific economies between then and 2025.¹¹² GRP provides a pathway to realize this opportunity, yet available data on GRP is still limited. To establish more evidence and data it will be essential to create more alignment on definitions on GRP, and specifically WOBs and gender-inclusive enterprises. Various definitions are used for each of these terms in Asia and the Pacific, and globally. Because GRP is a relatively little-known or utilized concept, countries tend to use the broad United Nations definition cited in the box.

Definitions of WOBs are key to monitoring and tracking GRP, yet few countries in the region have a national definition. Thus, adopting a definition is an important first step to proactively supporting WOBs by helping to identify the share of MSMEs that they represent, and their access to finance and to public- and private-sector procurement. A commonly used definition of WOBs follows the IFC definition, which has the advantage of allowing for international comparability. Some countries, such as Indonesia, have adapted this definition to their national contexts.¹¹³ Several companies in Asia have realized the value of supporting GRP and women-owned companies and of fostering an internal culture that supports hiring and promoting women.

112 McKinsey, 2018b

113 On 9 June 2020, the Government of Indonesia launched the National Women's Financial Inclusion Strategy, which aims to promote access to finance for Indonesian women in a way that accommodates their diverse needs, interests, and backgrounds. The strategy commits the government to working with relevant government agencies to develop the national definition of women-owned or -led small and medium-sized enterprises.

Buying from GREs is an important adjunct to GRP. Because this is a new effort, internationally recognized standards for identifying and monitoring gender-responsive businesses have not yet been established, but are being considered (i.e. Women's Empowerment Principles, or WEPEs) and can contribute to create a more gender-responsive market-place at large.



Recommendation 2: Collect sex-disaggregated data to track and monitor

Few Asian and Pacific governments collect sex-disaggregated data on the proportion of WOBs that are awarded public-sector contracts. To remedy the lack of data, governments and industry associations in each country could facilitate or lead the creation of databases of registered WOBs and allow public and private buyers to access the information. Such a database helps public- and private-sector buyers to identify WOB suppliers and invite them to tender bids. Public and private actors can also consider certification programmes, building on governmental certification programmes or international initiatives such as WEConnect. Governments could require that suppliers provide such basic descriptive statistics and information through government e-procurement systems. By having such data available, government procurement processes can benefit from increased transparency and use the information gathered to promote inclusion and diversity in the pool of potential contractors.



Recommendation 3: Include provisions in procurement laws to enable GRP

Some Asian and Pacific governments have adopted key strategies for making public procurement more inclusive. The strategies include increasing the use of e-procurement systems, building capacity to help WOBs apply for government contracts, establishing WOB certification, and simplifying administrative procurement and company registration processes. However, there are few examples of gender-specific provisions in procurement laws that could encourage and support GRP in both public and private sector procurement. Through specific GRP legislation, the government can clarify the ability of buyers to use preferential treatment methods to facilitate WOBs' participation.



Recommendation 4: Tailored solutions should be provided to each country or company's needs to promote GRP

There are myriad ways for companies and governments to increase the number of WOBs in their procurement. These can include having set asides and targets for total procurement spending per year and other forms of preferential treatment, including gender-responsive clauses in supplier codes of conduct, establishing regular spot-checks and audits and reporting on gender in supply chains, building suppliers' capacity to upgrade their facilities, setting policies and approaches to ensure female workers have healthy and safe working environments, and therefore contribute to establish more gender-responsive enterprises regardless of the gender in ownership. In addition, implementing targets for WOB suppliers should be considered.

Access to procurement opportunities and tender documentation can be improved by establishing gender-responsive e-procurement systems. Such systems are essential to simplify suppliers' ability to find and collect information on bidding. Increased transparency facilitates planning, saves time and costs for potential suppliers, and increases the quality of bids. This is especially important for small businesses and WOBs are overrepresented among these.

Bid specifications need to be formulated to ensure that WOBs can be systematically integrated into existing procurement processes. The bid process provides opportunities to strengthen gender aspects in all stages, collect sex-disaggregated data on businesses and supply chains, and ensure use of criteria that do not hinder WOB participation. WOB-specific and certified WOBs databases can be used to ensure that bid material reaches specific groups of WOBs and helps them compensate for their limited experience in financial and bid processes. Preferential payment periods can help to address the structural financial exclusion of WOBs.

Company procurement department staff need to be aware of the importance of GRP and to have clear guidelines, training and continued support to implement them.

To build WOBs' capacities and help them grow their businesses, especially in the high-spending procurement areas where they are under-represented, governments and the private sector should help address the digital and financial gender divides through capacity-building programmes targeted to women entrepreneurs.



Recommendation 5: Incentivize private sector companies to report publicly on gender indicators and disclose their diversity and inclusion policies

Asia and Pacific governments, industry bodies, regulators and companies themselves should encourage alignment with WEPs recommendations, encourage the use of the WEP Transparency and Accountability Framework,¹¹ and advance company reporting to track and advance gender-responsive business conduct. Indicators should be looking at the overall company level and highlight essential indicators for progress towards gender inclusiveness.¹¹⁴

Increased reporting is needed on how companies are advancing their procurement spending through WOBs and GREs. Key GRP measures to report are: procurement spending on WOBs; spending with businesses that have gender equality commitments (GREs); and the proportion of workers in supply chains who receive a living wage, disaggregated by sex.

Procurers in the private and public sector should include monitoring of progress on GRP in procurement sustainability reporting systems. Based on these commitments, suppliers can be held accountable. Contract renewal can include an assessment of suppliers' progress on implementing contract criteria. If necessary, this can then lead to remediation measures or, if unsuccessful, contract termination.



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PARTNERS

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ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region. ADB assists its members, and partners, by providing loans, technical assistance, grants, and equity investments to promote social and economic development. **ADB** maximizes the development impact of its assistance by facilitating policy dialogues, providing advisory services, and mobilizing financial resources through cofinancing operations that tap official, commercial, and export credit sources.

