



## Asia-Pacific 2023 Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) Forum Accelerating Business Action for an Equal Future

November 7-8, 2023

Citadines Bay City Manila

Manilla, Philippines

### I. Background and Context

#### The Women's Empowerment Principles

Launched in 2010 by UN Women and the UN Global Compact, the [Women's Empowerment Principles \(WEPs\)](#) are a set of 7 principles that provide companies a roadmap to become more gender-responsive throughout their value chain. The WEPs is the only framework that encompasses gender equality at all organizational levels, beginning with **leadership** and providing guidance for the **workplace**, **marketplace** and **community**, underpinned by a strong emphasis on **accountability and transparent reporting** of progress.

#### The seven Women's Empowerment Principles are:

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
2. To treat all men and women fairly at work is to respect and support human rights and non-discrimination.
3. Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all workers.
4. Promote education, training and professional development for women.
5. Implement business development and supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
6. Promote equality through community and advocacy initiatives.
7. Measure and publish reports on progress towards achieving gender equality.

Businesses of any size and sector, including Stock Exchanges, Chambers of Commerce and Industry Associations, can sign on to become WEPs signatories. To date, more than 8,000 companies have signed the WEPs globally. The UN Women 2019-2022 [WeEmpowerAsia \(WEA\)](#) programme, funded by and in partnership with the European Union, leveraged the WEPs to accelerate commitment to and implementation of gender-responsive business conduct in the Asia-Pacific over its three years of implementation. During this time, the WEPs Signatory community in the region grew from just under 600 in 2019 to more than 2,200 by 2023.

Beyond private sector entities, governments and regional bodies have demonstrated interest in utilizing the WEPs framework for policy guidance and development. The 2021 report '[Ecosystem Landscaping to advance the Accountability to implement the Women's Empowerment Principles in ASEAN](#)<sup>1</sup>' provided country scorecards and roadmaps for ASEAN governments to align their gender equality policies and corporate reporting criteria to the WEPs. After continued engagement with ASEAN and select country policy briefs, UN Women and the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) jointly developed the policy brief '[Advancing gender and business reporting to implement the Women's Empowerment Principles \(WEPs\) as part of an inclusive COVID-19 economic recovery](#)<sup>2</sup>.' Supported by UN Women, India has adopted

<sup>1</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/06/ecosystem-landscaping-to-advance-the-accountability-to-implement-the-weps>

<sup>2</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/10/advancing-gender-and-business-reporting-to-implement-the-womens-empowerment-principles>



new corporate reporting guidelines<sup>3</sup> and Indonesia has developed a set of corporate gender equality guidelines based on the **WEPs Transparency & Accountability Framework**<sup>4</sup> to also support companies in their ESG reporting.

The WEPs have been a key vehicle over the last years to advance private sector commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment. As noted in UN Women's recently published report '**Trends and Opportunities to Advance Gender Equality in the Asia and the Pacific**'<sup>5</sup>, from 2018 to 2021, there was a 186 per cent increase in companies in Asia and the Pacific that have signed the WEPs. In that same period, 400 companies have completed the [WEPs Gender Gap Analysis Tool](#) (GAT) over the last four years, signaling increased commitment to taking action.

One of the key mechanisms to raise awareness and encourage companies to advance gender-responsive business conduct in their organizations has been the [Asia-Pacific WEPs Awards](#), launched in 2020 and open to businesses of all sizes and sectors in the region. As the only regional awards initiative aligned to the WEPs, the **Awards have been an essential initiative to catalyze this action and momentum at policy and business level to accelerate business action** to advance gender equality.

Annual Awards cycles from 2020-2022 generated more **than 1,500 applications from over 1,000 participating companies** across the Asia-Pacific. **More than 300 leaders, business associations, companies, and SMEs have been awarded** for their efforts and actions across the key pillars of the WEPs: Leadership, Workplace, Marketplace, Community and Transparency & Reporting. Following the success and visibility of the inaugural 2020 Awards, 2021 and 2022 saw a noticeable increase in applications from large national companies and SMEs, demonstrating the increased awareness and commitment generated among national private sector actors. **The WEPs Awards contributed substantially to the overall progression of the WEPs community in the Asia-Pacific.**

## The 2023 Asia-Pacific WEPs Forum

**The WEPs brand has become increasingly well-known** amongst different sizes of businesses, evidenced by the increasing number of applications from national corporates and MSMEs. Further, **governments and business regulators are recognizing the WEPs framework as a basis for policymaking.** As noted above, UN Women's official policy brief with ASEAN and respective country level legislation guided by the WEPs builds a strong case of the WEPs' application across the public and private landscape.

While commitment to the WEPs has increased drastically over the past four years, the 'Trends' report found that actions to implement the WEPs lag behind<sup>6</sup>, presenting a major opportunity for capacity building and platforms to drive collective action. During COVID-19, it was difficult to bring organizations across countries together to exchange on the WEPs implementation, which has been identified as a key strategy to accelerate implementation.

Building on the seized momentum created through the WEPs in Asia-Pacific and leveraging the established stakeholder networks, inclusive of UN Women's business network (2,000+ Asia-Pacific WEPs signatories), broader ecosystem stakeholders, such as regional governmental bodies ASEAN<sup>7</sup>, country governments<sup>8</sup>, policy makers, Security Exchange

<sup>3</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/01/assess-the-implementation-of-laws-on-promoting-gender-equality>

<sup>4</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/03/creating-transparency-on-gender-equality-to-transform-business>

<sup>5</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/11/trends-and-opportunities-to-advance-gender-equality-in-asia-and-the-pacific-web-introduction>

<sup>6</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/11/trends-and-opportunities-to-advance-gender-equality-in-asia-and-the-pacific-web-introduction>

<sup>7</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/10/advancing-gender-and-business-reporting-to-implement-the-womens-empowerment-principles>



Commissions, Stock Exchanges and various business organizations (i.e. Chamber of Commerce), UN Women is leading the organization of a two-day **2023 Asia-Pacific WEPs Forum to create a platform for learning and networking and to further catalyze commitments and deeper business action towards gender equality.**

The Forum is organized as part of the new DFAT-supported programme '**Advancing the implementation of Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) for Accelerated Business Action for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific,**' which will contribute to the broader Business and Human Rights and Sustainable Development Agendas, particularly to advancing gender equality (SDG 5) and strengthening the engagement of the private sector towards sustainable development (SDG 17), ultimately contributing to more inclusive economic growth in Asia and the Pacific.

## II. Objectives

The WEPs Forum has the following objectives:

- Enable peer learning, networking and knowledge exchange of a community of Asia-Pacific businesses and enablers advancing gender equality women's empowerment in the world of work and business in line with the WEPs;
- Build capacity of WEPs Signatories, potential Signatories, and key business enablers to initiative and/or deepen WEPs implementation;
- Generate key action points and multi-stakeholder recommendations for advancing gender-responsive business conduct through WEPs implementation in the Asia-Pacific
- Inspire other businesses, business leaders, and the broader ecosystem stakeholders to collaborate in finding ways to meaningfully contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and promoting an inclusive, equal, and sustainable future for all;
- Launch the Asia-Pacific WEPs Awards 2024 and/or other knowledge products and tools useful for enhancing business performance for gender equality and women's empowerment.

## III. Format and Participants

The 2-day Forum will take place as an exclusively in-person event in Manila, Philippines from **November 7 –8, 2023**. The Forum will bring together approximately 150 CEOs and business owners who are WEPs signatories and aspiring to be signatories and practitioner-level business representatives, as well as representatives from Securities and Exchange Commissions, Stock Exchanges, industry associations and business clubs/circles, government agencies and development partners. The forum will be regional in nature, with maximum 35% representation from the Philippines.