

# Summary Report

## Stakeholder Roundtable 2 December 2021

### Sri Lanka Australia: Building Better Networks for Gendered Economic Development

The Sri Lanka Australia: Building Better Networks for Gendered Economic Development Initiative is supported by the Australian Government and implemented by Australia Aid



THE AUSTRALIAN  
APEC STUDY CENTRE



Asia Pacific  
Economic Cooperation

In partnership with



# Contents

- Contents**.....2
- Introduction .....3
- Roundtable Summary .....4
- Conclusion .....12
- Recommendations / Next steps.....12
- Annexes .....13

# Introduction

A Stakeholder Roundtable consultation was held virtually on 2 December 2021 on "Sri Lanka Australia: Building Better Networks for Gendered Economic Development". This was the first of many consultative activities scheduled in this two-year initiative that combines capacity building and research components to build a suite of interconnected and complementary activities to deliver outcomes such as policy recommendations and online professional development training programs. These outputs will be designed to be used as a tool across organisations in Sri Lanka at different levels, be accessible, and positively impact women's economic empowerment and labour force participation.

This project is funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). It is organised and administered by the Australian APEC Study Centre at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (AASC-RMIT) with support from DFAT's Sri Lanka Support Unit (SLSU).

The purpose of the first roundtable was to create linkages, exchange perspectives, insights and experiences on the positive development of women's economic empowerment, and obtain recommendations on policies that can encourage women's economic empowerment and labour force participation to guide the project's research and capacity building activities. The roundtable meeting brought together representatives of various organisations and institutions from Australia and Sri Lanka. It was an opportunity for stakeholders to contribute to developing the themes addressed across the project.

This online roundtable included two presentations and a facilitated discussion which aimed to:

- Identify what needs to be done to promote women's economic empowerment and increase women's labour force participation in Sri Lanka.
- Understand the pressing issues and priorities from the stakeholders point of view
- Learn what Australia can offer in terms of knowledge linkages to support increased women's economic empowerment and labour force participation.

This report provides a summary of the discussions at the Roundtable meeting and the recommendations emerging from the meeting. Other scheduled activities outside of the roundtable include the following:

- Literature Review (2022) & Collaborative Research (2023)
- Online Pre-Study tour workshop / Virtual Roundtable (April 2022)
- Australian Study Tour / Virtual Study Tour (July 2022)
- Two-day research Roundtable in Sri Lanka (November 2022)
- Online Training Program (March 2023)
- Online Stakeholder review and future planning (April 2023)
- Website and communications (ongoing)

# Roundtable Summary

Twenty seven participants representing Sri Lankan and Australian subject matter experts participated in the roundtable meeting. In addition to the attendees the meeting included the facilitator from the University of Sydney, presenters from the Sri Lanka Support Unit, and RMIT University. There were a total of 36 participants in the meeting.

## 1. Welcome and Opening Remarks

As part of the welcome, **Marian Baird AO**, Professor of Gender and Employment Relations, University of Sydney delivered an Acknowledgement of Country.

- Marian acknowledged the traditional owners of Australia and recognised their continuing connection to land, water, and culture.
- Marian shared the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) map of Indigenous Australia with the participants to show the different lands and languages that Australian aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples inhabited in Australia before European settlement.

**Dr Craig Emerson**, Director of the Australian APEC Study Centre, RMIT University and former Trade Minister of Australia gave introductory remarks on "Policy Cooperation on Women's Economic Empowerment – A Regional Perspective". Craig:

- Explained that Australia APEC Study Centre at RMIT University supports research and capacity building in the APEC region and in partnership with other countries across the Indo Pacific region and APEC participants value the benefits of shared best practise and learning from peers.
- Highlighted that APEC is leading several gender-related projects and has supported gender equality in the Indo Pacific region, including in gender data, trade promotion for women entrepreneurs, gender inclusion and the fourth industrial revolution, and gender policy dialogues.
- Emphasised the need for policy initiatives to support gender equality and economic empowerment for women worldwide, demonstrating the pay gap issue reality in Australia.

**Briony Wood-Ingram**, Program Director, The Australian APEC Study Centre presented the "Overview of Building Better Networks for Gendered Economic Development Initiative". Briony:

- Provided a brief outline of the project's background, project design, intended outcomes, goals for the network, project plan, activities, and policy roundtable.
- Highlighted that this roundtable is the first of the scheduled activities which comprises live online policy dialogues and workshops, an online self-paced training program, study tour in Australia, networking activities, a website with regular communication interventions, and a final in-country policy roundtable.
- Pointed out women's economic empowerment and labour force participation are broad topics, and this roundtable hopes to identify key areas to focus on that will be pertinent and topical to the challenges faced today in both Sri Lanka and Australia as well as themes that can then be common across the networking, research, capacity building and training activities.
- Advised the overall intended outcomes are to:
  - Draw on lessons from Australia and Sri Lanka to increase understanding of good policy and advocacy practice for government, private sector and civil society in supporting women's labour force participation and women's economic empowerment in Sri Lanka.

- and in turn, hope to improve the capacity and linkages of government, private sector and civil society to support training and research related to women's labour force participation and women's economic empowerment
- Informed the long term goal of this two year project is to establish networks and linkages between Australian and Sri Lankan experts to continue to work on this theme beyond the project

As the lead coordinator for the research component of this project, **Aaron Soans**, Senior Advisor at the Australian APEC Study Centre, talked about the goals for the network. He noted that the project aims to:

- Establish linkages between domain experts in Sri Lanka and Australia as well as across the different policy issues
- Understand the interdependencies between structural, social, cultural, political, and economic factors that impinge on women's economic participation in Sri Lanka
- Identify points of leverage across identified issues
- Co-create policies, research or interventions that drive Sri Lanka towards greater women's economic participation.

Aaron concluded that just like crew members on a ship, we all need to work together to reach the destination of greater gender equality.

## 2. Presentation on Policy and Programming Challenges on Women's Labour Force Participation – a Sri Lankan Perspective

The first presentation focused on policy and programming challenges on women's labour force participation from a Sri Lankan perspective. In an opening statement, **Kamane Hapugalle**, Sri Lankan Support Unit, Advisor to Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, highlighted that her presentation perspectives from a governance and accountability background and she recognised, respected, and appreciated the wisdom and experience from stakeholders in this roundtable meeting. Kamane:

- Presented a brief contextual overview of women's labour force participation in Sri Lanka. Out of the 8.6 million economically active population, 35% are female<sup>1</sup>; Women constitute 50% of Sri Lanka's population however, in 2020 only 5.3% were represented in parliament. Despite Sri Lanka's women's right to vote and to participate in political activities, over the past eight decades representation of women has never exceeded 6% in political participation; Women labour force participation for the first quarter of 2020 was 32.5% of the **total** population
- Sri Lankan women face many challenges regarding labour participation. These include: lack of affordable and quality child care services, lack of support in sharing household chores and some work place cultures that are not supportive of female employees. Other points to note are, deeply entrenched attitudes that play an integral role in limiting women's potential, including complex conventions, beliefs and values based on tradition and historical practices that are embedded in Sri Lankan society. Investment is required to shift social norms to help ease the path of working women.

---

<sup>1</sup> UNDP Sri Lanka 2021, *Gender equity and equality* <https://www.lk.undp.org/content/srilanka/en/home/gender-equality.html>

- Highlighted sexual harassment as an issue on public transport. According to the findings of a study conducted by UNFPA in 2019, 90% of Sri Lankan women and girls have faced sexual harassment on public buses and trains at least once in their lifetime<sup>2</sup>.
- COVID 19 has disproportionately affected female households and female led businesses. Many female heads of households lack access to social protection and more likely carry a triple burden of supporting the family whilst engaging in unpaid and domestic work. There was reference to UN Women having evidence that COVID 19 has intensified violence against women
- Sri Lanka's public finance management, public policies and programs and industries also face challenges of lacking interest and commitment in responding to gender equality.
- Highlighted concerns in the agricultural industry, in particular the plantation sector, where women face serious challenges ranging from sexual harassment from male supervisors to sanitation concerns, lack of privacy, period poverty, medical services and midwives having trouble reaching them. Other issues include wages and maternity benefits being given to husbands, high incidents of alcohol and drug dependency among men, early marriage of girls, lack of workers' rights, lack of proper child care, no or little power sharing, etc
- Presented issues around the female migration for work opportunities as an integral part of the Sri Lankan economy and the largest contributor to the country's foreign earnings. This group of women face exploitation at many levels from within Sri Lanka and overseas. They are victims of various forms of schemes of extortions and there is a lack of awareness of their rights and benefits. There is a lack of acknowledgment of their contribution to foreign exchange earnings to the country and there is poor re-integration programs available or alternative livelihood options available for returnees.
- Outlined the challenges around female entrepreneurship and challenges associated with promoting female entrepreneurship. Women operate in an unregulated micro finance environment creating challenges leading sometimes to suicide. Limited access to micro finance due to collateral issues such as guarantors. Financial literacy, management, credit awareness, skills, etc are lacking among women wanting to become entrepreneurs. Despite train the trainer programs being available there is a lack of comprehensive knowledge, resources and skills to support women entrepreneurs. Women lack digital literacy and access to technology. Few incentives are made available for women entrepreneurs and they often fall prey to dubious schemes. There is general perception that women's micro enterprises are not as profitable as men's.
- Cited that Sri Lanka specifically has the potential to add \$20 billion a year to its GDP by 2025, which would increase its current economic growth trajectory by about 14%<sup>3</sup>.
- Discussed enabling factors including the possibility of working from home and flexible work hours or working part-time, access to local areas employment opportunities, support with technology for connectivity and communication, safe and convenient transport to and from work, supportive partners willing to share household chores, wage equity and carer's leave policies which will be learned from Australia. Policy considerations were presented with an aim for the growth of female labour force participation.
- Discussed what research considerations are for policy making. It is important to analyse the relationship between the institution of marriage and the labour market, understand social norms to achieve gender related health and wellbeing outcomes, map laws, policies and programs that impact gender equality to assess cohesion and monitor implementation, examine barriers to

---

<sup>2</sup> UNFPA Sri Lanka 2019, *Sexual harassment in public transport: Speak up, Intervene and Be the Change* <https://srilanka.unfpa.org/en/news/sexual-harassment-public-transport-speak-intervene-and-be-change#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20study%20conducted,the%20incident%20to%20the%20police.>

<sup>3</sup> McKinsey & Company, 2019, *Advancing gender equality in Sri Lanka: A crucial balancing act* <https://www.mckinsey.com/lk/our-insights/advancing-gender-equality-in-sri-lanka-a-crucial-balancing-act>

women's employment imposed in through legislation , advocate for supports that need to be provided for women to enter the labour force and evaluated existing gender related policies to assess impact.

- Suggested some areas/questions that could be further researched and discussed:
  - Is gender equality adequately enshrined in Sri Lanka's constitution?
  - Can and should the state be empowered to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women?
  - Is there adequate disaggregated data available? Is it being utilised/presented to build a case for gender equality?
  - Can data showcase that greater representation of women in senior state and corporate positions benefit government and private institutions in the long run?
  - Have impact assessments, performance or outcome evaluations been done to see the efficacy of the existing legal and policy framework as well as the institutional mechanisms that are in place to promote and protect women's rights in Sri Lanka?
  - How effective is the current national machinery for women and gender? Does it need to be evaluated to draw lesson and propose recommendations for strengthening? What support needs are there?

### **3. Presentation on women's economic empowerment and increased women's labour force participation in Australia**

The second presentation was dedicated to promoting economic empowerment and increased women's labour force participation based on experiences from Australia. Dr **Leonora Risse**, Senior Lecturer in Economics, RMIT University used her opening statement to describe the significance of the quest for gender equality and women's empowerment and how this transcends country borders. She shared the insights and reflections of Australia's experience in the journey of pursuing gender equality and proposed how Australia can also learn from Sri Lanka as part of a two-way exchange of knowledge and experiences. She highlighted human elements as the essence and motivation, beyond economic outcomes to achieve the goal. She explained the pursuit of gender equality involves a fusion of economic, sociological, cultural, environmental, and political factors which are underpinned by human rights, labour rights, and moral principles. Leonora:

- Showed statistical picture of women's labour force participation rate of Australia<sup>4</sup> and Sri Lanka<sup>5</sup>. Particularly, Australian women's labour force participation rate has gradually climbed over time, and is currently at around 61% but is still volatile and 10% points lower than men's, while Sri Lankan women's labour force participation rate reached a high of 37% in 2017 and is currently trending downwards.
- Shared conceptual ideas that will lay the framework for how to approach the issues related to women's economic empowerment, including workforce economic participation, economic advancement and dignity and respect. Although Australia already has strong and growing understanding of what factors give rise to gender gaps, what benefits of gender equality and what policies needed for advancing gender equality, there is universal challenge which is tackling the factors that stand in the way of putting this knowledge into action.
- Discussed putting forward the "Business case" for gender equality with strong reasons to advance women's economic empowerment and its limitations.

---

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021, *Labour Force, Australia* <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release>

<sup>5</sup> Sri Lankan Department of Census and Statistics 2020, *Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey Annual Report – 2020* <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/LabourForce/StaticInformation/AnnualReports/2020>

- Explained barriers and resistance to women's economic empowerment with examples from Australia. Australia's historical experience proves that policy breakthroughs in women's economic advancement equality often occur out of economic necessity and progressive governments adopted holistic suite of policy changes as a matter of moral principle, human rights, and wellbeing.
- Summarised some key high-level themes that correlated with where the policy breakthroughs are and where the promise lies. Australia has made progress in terms of investing in data and building the evidence base, but there is still more to be done in terms of implementing policies to bring about change. This includes embedding accountability for achievement of targets; tackling resistance through shifting social expectations and aspirations for both men and women; applying 'Gender Lensing' by analysing how same policy affects men and women differently; and empowering public servants, analysts, students, future policymakers with knowledge and tools for analysis.
- Clarified other dimensions where Australia is also progressing, in terms of improving awareness of how gender intersects with other dimensions of identity and lived experience. It's a combination of these other dimensions of identity, including culture, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, region, that will impact people's experiences. There is also a need for research and policy to expand beyond the binary classification of gender and build awareness of gender across the spectrum.

#### 4. Discussion

The discussion was facilitated by **Marian Baird**, Professor of Gender and Employment Relations, University of Sydney. Marian highlighted the purpose of this roundtable where stakeholders are encouraged to present the Sri Lankan perspective and discuss possible next steps. She encouraged the stakeholders to reflect on the comments Kamanee made about Sri Lanka itself and then some of the suggestions about research or actions that have been taken in Australia, presented by Leonora, and to consider the following questions for the discussion:

- Identify what needs to be done to promote women's economic empowerment and increase women's labour force participation in Sri Lanka. Is this an area we can exchange ideas on? Are they fundamental issues that have to be dealt with?
- What are the pressing issues and priorities from the point of view of stakeholders? What are those fundamental matters we want to talk about? What do we need to discuss and get information on, research, advocate for?
- What can Australia offer in terms of knowledge linkages to support increased women's labour force participation in Sri Lanka?

The following responses and inputs were received from the participants and are organised according to eight key themes:

#### Policy Development

- Need to take a broader view to develop a research agenda to address the myriad issues impacting on women's economic participation. Need consideration of issue sequencing, timing and resistance to change.
- How do we connect the global view to the Sri Lankan context. It is important to separate out the issues and prioritise them so that they don't intersect or undermine each other as we move forward
- Supporting collective activity is imperative to achieve economic empowerment and there is a lot of collective action groups that are already happening in Sri Lanka and we can harness that and support them

- One main problem is the gap between knowledge/evidence and policy making so it is important to create awareness and make sure policies cover different angles.
- Need to revisit laws on gender equality. There is good legislation in the region, including the Women's Charter, Magna Carta for Women, but their impact is weak.

## Policy Implementation

- Proposed policies often meet barriers and resistance, which are resulted from not fully understanding the contradictions between a global view and the local context. For example, programs to boost women's entrepreneurship that take an individual focus can undermine collective labour and bargaining power.
- There is a need to fill gaps in policymaking. Multiple dimensions need to be addressed with policy reforms from many angles. Research papers come up with a list of recommendations but lack guidance on how these policies should be implemented and their cost. It's imperative to do research in those areas to make it easy for policymakers to implement reforms.
- Research needs to focus more on 'within group differences' or intersectionality.
- Research needs to separate out the issues and prioritise them so that they don't intersect or undermine each other and then come up with the proposed solutions that suit everyone.

## Labour Market

- UN WOMEN published a study to understand the factors associated with demand for women workers, from the employers' perspective and trying to understand the barriers, how COVID 19 has impacted female labour force participation. UN Women have indicated their willingness to share their findings with this project and to contribute where possible.
- Need to look beyond women labour supply decisions as individual decision making and bringing in the household utility maximisation perspective.
- Other factors to consider include:
  - Access and affordability of institutionalised care (such as childcare and aged care)
  - Growth and quality of jobs in sectors that are considered appropriate for women from society's perspective or sectors that women are interested in.
  - Overall safety and/or perception of safety in a community
- The labour market is changing due to changed nature of work and from changing technology.
- There were several high-level committees for improving female labour force participation (FLFP) in Sri Lanka, but they didn't work.
- Institute of Policy Studies has done several studies on FLFP, wage gap, and barriers.
- More formal sector of care work like teaching, day-care, and nursing are already dominated by females; however one of the issues that keeps women from entering these sectors is the lower wages and this would also be a challenge to transcend.
- Sectors which female entrepreneurs engaged in the labour force which is about 60 to 65% of females within the informal sector<sup>6</sup> and there are some digital literacy, digital device and infrastructure gaps which would provide them with challenges to be able to transcend the usual methods of engaging with the marketplace.
- The quality of jobs is another issue of concern. Considering the economic geography of Sri Lanka, and the concentration of (limited) formal sector employment and service jobs in and

---

<sup>6</sup> International Labour Organization 2016, *Factors Affecting Women's Labour Force Participation in Sri Lanka* [https://www.ilo.org/wcmstp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-colombo/documents/publication/wcms\\_551675.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmstp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-colombo/documents/publication/wcms_551675.pdf)

around Colombo, what are some potential employment opportunities for rural women? Are there particular jobs/industries that would benefit most from investment or policy support?

- Women might have to go for additional training if they want to come into the formal sector of care work where there is increased demand now, but what is the opportunity cost of entering the sector? We don't have the data on the opportunity cost to assist them in the decision of raising skill levels and training for particular jobs.
- There is a huge need to study women in the SME sector both in terms of recognising their contribution and understanding very specific business development services including inclusive financial services

## **Family Context**

- there are strong societal and family pressures to get married and bear children
- Once a woman enters into marriage then labour force participation is no longer her individual decision, and it becomes a household decision.
- The family structure in Sri Lanka is changing from extended to more nuclear-based families.
- Healthcare and carer services in Sri Lanka are not fully set up for the nuclear-based families. Society still has the extended family mindset in terms of care for elderly and the very young.
- Women are expected to provide unpaid care work with little social support
- Women are unable to move into paid work or income-generating work due to care responsibilities and societal expectations around women's roles
- Common economic indicators cover outcome factors only and ignore the intangible value contributed from women's labour as unpaid labour where they contribute indirectly and enormously to the economy, family, and society.
- Research needs to understand the valuable contributions of women from unpaid work and then also make that information available to policymakers.
- It would be valuable to measure and tabulate what women in Sri Lanka already offer when drafting policies.
- Women bear the large burden and responsibility on top of the existing responsibilities, for example, in case of emergency, they will take on unpaid work, ex. home-schooling.
- Socio cultural norms on women as secondary contributor to household, as primary care giver informs agriculture policy. Women are only recognised as 'home gardeners' not as farmers in their own right.

## **Gender Roles**

- clearly delineated expectations and roles of men in the paid work sphere and women in the unpaid care work sphere.
- What do women in Sri Lanka already offer? Can it be measured and tabulated?
- Are these attitudes changing amongst younger Sri Lankan women and men?

## **Organisational Policies**

- People providing care face discrimination at work, the weight of household spousal and community expectations and hence two policy interventions can be made here. One is at the organisational level looking at discrimination against caregivers. Another is in services, not just for children, but elders and people with disability and look at shifting those norms and work with men and boys as well at various levels.

- Drawing from the Australian experience, one of the concerning issues, is the lack of representation of diverse women in leadership positions in organisations, and the extent to which the care responsibilities falling on women are inhibiting women's participation in the formal economy and progression into leadership roles. Particularly concerning is the focus of women's workforce participation being in entry level roles, in insecure and informal jobs, where they are often exposed to workplace violence – all of which doesn't serve to shift the economic inequities in terms of economic participation and gender pay gaps, and at worst entrenches women in situations of poverty.
- Need to study challenging power in all its forms in very practical ways when developing policies.
- Sharing experiences: is there a possibility to undertake a study with men?
- The role of employers providing care for children needs investigating

## Violence

- Women experience violence on the way to work, but violence/harrassment also happens in all spaces, including the household, workplaces, and organisations. So, this is an important and serious issue that needs to be addressed.
- Violence against women is an area Australia is dealing with daily and which needs to be addressed. There is growing recognition that a secure job for women is one of the best mechanisms to protect them against further violence.
- Abusing vulnerability in female migrant households in Sri Lanka happens based on different reasons. It's important to do a proper causal analysis to understand what the reason is in the broken families and not just jumping to conclusions.
- Need to understand perspectives on norms and violence in research study for policy makers.
- Cost of violence and how to increase respect. Need to consider the cost of violence, which is very often an eye opener for policy makers - 1.5 trillion USD in 2016 according to a UN Women study<sup>7</sup>.

## Migration

- Women's labour migration in the context of international labour migration and in terms of abuse and vulnerability, remittance and Family Background Report. With regards to abuse and vulnerability, even incest in female migrant households, it is important to highlight that these issues are not a result of female labour migration, rather that these issues already existed in the household and may have prompted the woman to leave the household resorting to labour migration as an escape mechanism. It is important to do a proper causal analysis, as to date, there is no empirical evidence to show women's labour migration is a cause of incest, violence and broken families.
- In the case of remittances, female wages may be smaller to male's wages but it has been observed that relative to males, the amount of remittance sent by females though smaller, is a larger proportion of their wages. Further, women are more regular and reliable when it comes to their remittance.
- The Family Background Report policy restricts labour migration of women with children. This policy restricts females to take up foreign labour force participation. Efforts to change it have been unsuccessful and should consider the way we market the research findings to policy makers as to ensure real change.

---

<sup>7</sup> UN WOMEN 2020, *Violence against women and girls: the shadow pandemic*  
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>

## Conclusion

This Roundtable uncovered a myriad of issues across policy domains that impact on women's economic empowerment in Sri Lanka. Participants noted the complexity of developing policy, implementing reforms as well as nuances in each of the issue areas. There is great enthusiasm and commitment in the group of stakeholders to be involved in this project. Over the next 18 months, this project can contribute to gender empowerment in Sri Lanka by:

- Engaging the network to thoroughly map out the issues, identifying interrelationships and leverage points.
- Collectively identifying a set of priority reform areas.
- Developing research and policy recommendations that can deliver meaningful change.

## Recommendations / Next steps

- Seek feedback on this report from those who participated in the roundtable
- Incorporate into this report, with permission, feedback received in monitoring and evaluation conducted with participants after the roundtable.
- Determine from the themes and topic areas identified in the roundtable a set of priority areas on which the project can focus. This will be done in consultation with roundtable participants via follow up email and online discussions in the first quarter of 2022.

# Annexes

## Annex I: Meeting Agenda

### Sri Lanka Australia: Building Better Networks for Gendered Economic Development Roundtable

#### WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

- 0900 -0905 SLST      **Introduction and housekeeping**  
Marian Baird, Professor of Gender and Employment Relations, University of Sydney
- 0905-0915 SLST      **Policy Cooperation on Women's Economic Empowerment - A Regional Perspective**  
Dr Craig Emerson, Director of the Australian APEC Study Centre, RMIT University and former Trade Minister of Australia
- 0915-0925 SLST      **Overview of Building Better Networks for Gendered Economic Development Initiative**  
Briony Wood-Ingram, Program Director, The Australian APEC Study Centre

#### PRESENTATION

- 0925-0940 SLST      **Policy and Programming Challenges on Women's Labour Force Participation – a Sri Lankan Perspective**  
Kamane Hapugalle, Sri Lankan Support Unit, Advisor to Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- 0940-0955 SLST      **Presentation on women's economic empowerment and increased women's labour force participation**  
*This presentation will share research and policy insights, including lessons learnt from Australia's journey towards gender equality*  
Leonora Risse, Senior Lecturer in Economics, RMIT University; Research Fellow, Women and Public Policy Program, Harvard University; Research Fellow, Women's Leadership Institute Australia National Chair, Women in Economics Network

#### DISCUSSION

- 0955-1050 SLST      **Facilitated by Marian Baird, Professor of Gender and Employment Relations, University of Sydney**  
Stakeholders are encouraged to present the Sri Lankan perspective and discuss possible next steps. Stakeholders may wish to consider the following questions:
- Identify what needs to be done to promote economic empowerment of women and increase women's labor force participation in Sri Lanka
  - What are the pressing issues and priorities from the point of view of stakeholders?
  - What can Australia offer in terms of knowledge linkages to support increased women's labour force participation?

#### DISCUSSION

- 1050-1100 SLST      **Closing remarks**  
Dr Craig Emerson, Director of the Australian APEC Study Centre, RMIT University and former Trade Minister of Australia