



International  
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## ► Facilitating peer and technical support programmes to women entrepreneurs: A manual



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- ▶ **Facilitating peer and technical support programmes to women entrepreneurs: A manual**

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# Foreword

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Women's entrepreneurship constitutes an important source of job creation and wealth generation. Through entrepreneurship, women can access livelihoods and decent work and contribute to the economic growth and sustainable development of their countries. In the South-East Asia region, entrepreneurship is an essential source of employment for women, and countries have increasingly been investing in the potential of women entrepreneurs. Yet, most women entrepreneurs still tend to operate informal businesses in low-value-added sectors – unable to grow their businesses beyond the micro segment. There is still much untapped potential when it comes to investing in women entrepreneurs by providing them with more support and resources that are tailored to their needs and opportunities.

While witnessing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that targeted support to women entrepreneurs should be a part of an inclusive and human-centred recovery from the crisis. If not, we will see much of the progress made in recent years reversed. In these pandemic times, many women entrepreneurs have been particularly vulnerable, with pre-existing gender disparities exacerbated. For example, intensified childcare and domestic responsibilities, limited access to financial services and lagging uptake of information and communication technologies and digitalization, have made it harder for women entrepreneurs to adjust to the new “normal”.

This manual will guide the implementation of peer and technical support programmes organized to support women entrepreneurs, and in particular during these difficult times. Through the Rebuilding Better: Fostering Business Resilience Post-COVID-19 Project, the International Labour Organization and its partners have designed a model programme to support women entrepreneurs in Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines to exchange, support each other and gain important information and knowledge that will help them rise above this crisis and eventually prosper and grow.. The first aim is to help counter the gender-specific effects of the pandemic but the programmes will also contribute towards helping women entrepreneurs operate more resilient and sustainable businesses over time and contribute to the economic recovery of the countries.

## **Graeme Buckley**

Director

ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team for East and South-East Asia and the Pacific and ILO Country Office for Thailand, Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic

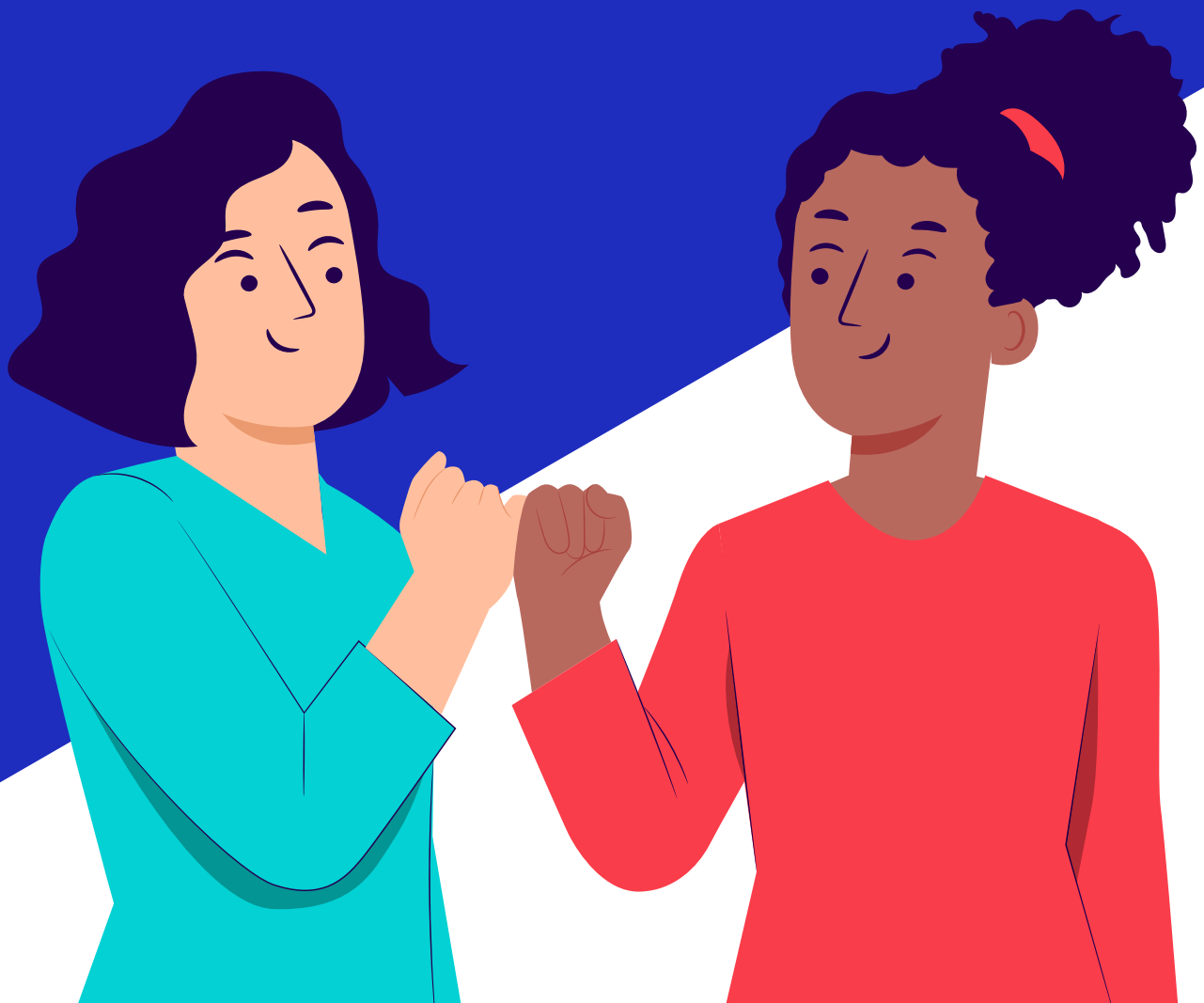
# Acknowledgements

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This manual was drafted by Joni Simpson, Senior Specialist, Gender, Equality and Non-Discrimination, and Sara Andersson, Project Technical Officer, with the ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team for East and South-East Asia and the Pacific, together with Jenn Weidman, Founder and CEO of the social enterprise Space Bangkok for the Rebuilding Better: Fostering Business Resilience Post-COVID-19 Project, funded by J.P. Morgan.

The manual also benefited from technical inputs and feedback from ILO colleagues Virginia Rose-Losada, Charles Bodwell and Lee Dong Eung.

Karen Emmons edited the text, and Nattawarath Hengviriyapanich designed the manual.



# Abbreviations

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<b>CanCham</b>	Thai-Canadian Chamber
<b>COVID-19</b>	novel coronavirus
<b>EBMO</b>	employers' and business membership organization
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>MSME</b>	micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
<b>SME</b>	small and medium-sized enterprises
<b>WE-Can</b>	Women Entrepreneurs Can Programme
<b>WE-Can-BR</b>	WE-Can Be Resilient Programme
<b>WED</b>	women's entrepreneurship development

## ► About this manual

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The International Labour Organization (ILO) developed this manual with contributions from Space Bangkok for the Rebuilding Better: Fostering Business Resilience Post-COVID-19 Project.

The manual builds on practical experiences and content from the WE-Can programme, developed and piloted in Thailand in 2019.<sup>1</sup> The manual offers to inform the delivery of peer and technical support programmes to support women entrepreneurs impacted by COVID-19 in Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines targeted by the Rebuilding Better project.

The manual further provides guidance to other ILO technical cooperation projects and partner organizations on how to set up and deliver programmes for women entrepreneurs to facilitate peer learning, foster networking within the business community and enhance women entrepreneurs' access to support services. It introduces one model that is currently being tested in South-East Asia, and that can be further innovated and modified over time. It is left to ILO project managers and partners to adapt the model to align with objectives as well as the local context. Resource materials and templates developed by the Rebuilding Better project are available in the Appendices. They can be modified as needed and used when delivering the programme in the future.

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1 The WE-Can programme was developed by Joni Simpson, which was initially launched under the Thai-Canadian Chamber (CanCham).





# Introduction to the Rebuilding Better: Fostering Business Resilience Post-COVID-19 Project

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The ILO's Rebuilding Better: Fostering Business Resilience Post-COVID-19 Project, supported by J.P. Morgan, aims to support women entrepreneurs in Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and adopt more sustainable and resilient business models by strengthening their access to vital support services.

The project targets women-owned small businesses in the manufacturing, service and retail trade sectors in urban areas of the three targeted countries, all of which have seen a severe decline in economic output.

The project works with partners, including government agencies, employers' and business membership organizations, women entrepreneurship associations, financial institutions and the private sector, to deliver interventions that improve small businesses' access to training provision, financial services and market information. Digitalization is a cross-cutting component, and the project delivers virtual activities to ensure safe support during the COVID-19 pandemic to support women entrepreneurs to increase their online presence and apply digital technology.

Over time, the Rebuilding Better project will contribute to a more inclusive and enabling environment for women entrepreneurs and to the economic recovery of the targeted countries from the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Promoting gender equality and inclusion

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Women-led businesses make up about 30 per cent of all businesses worldwide, and women are succeeding in businesses across all sectors and sizes.<sup>2</sup> A large proportion of them, however, contend with challenges due to societal norms and attitudes that shape the choices and experiences of women and men in the world of work. In particular, micro and small enterprises in the informal sector and/or enterprises led by women experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on ethnicity, indigenous status, disability, gender identity, HIV status, etc.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit women harder, with income and job losses, increased childcare and family duties and increased risk and prevalence of gender-based violence at home and at work. A dedicated support programme with a tailored approach could be vital for the women most affected by the pandemic's ensuing socioeconomic crisis.

Since 2008, the ILO has operated a dedicated programme promoting women's entrepreneurship development, or WED ([www.ilo.org/wed](http://www.ilo.org/wed)). The ILO-WED programme uses a human-centred and integrated approach based on its [WED Strategy](#) and built around a set of tested policy and capacity-building tools to implement targeted actions that empower women entrepreneurs. The ILO also works with service providers and policymakers to provide a more gender-sensitive and enabling ecosystem in which women entrepreneurs can be supported to sustain and grow their businesses to their full ambitions.

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<sup>2</sup> ILO, *Women in Business and Management: Gaining Momentum* (2015), [https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS\\_316450/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_316450/lang-en/index.htm).



## Programme format

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### Overview of programme components

The ILO's peer and technical support programme (hereafter "the programme"), is a five-month support programme that was designed to support women entrepreneurs to take their business to the next level. The programme provides peer support, technical support and networking opportunities to women entrepreneurs.

As part of the peer programme, small groups of 10–12 women entrepreneurs are formed from one larger cohort to share their experiences, lessons, knowledge and support to help enrich each other's businesses. The peer groups provide a continuous 'safe space' to support one another and keep participants on track and motivated to achieve their objectives. For this reason, it is important when forming peer groups to ensure that no direct competitors are grouped together.

Several groups may be active concurrently as part of one cohort, and interact with each other during technical sessions, which are open to all active participants and sometimes also to programme alumni.

The peer programme is meant to provide "just-in-time" support, according to the priorities of the participants. Sessions are spaced over time to enable progress and reflection. These support sessions are based on lived experiences, and resource persons come with practical experience from the business world.

Women entrepreneurs who are part of the programme meet twice per month for two types of regular sessions: (a) one goal-setting and updating session per month, when participants set their monthly objectives, share updates on the progress made, problem-solve, encourage one another and share contacts and information; and (b) one technical session per month, which involve guest speakers on a technical topic that the group has agreed upon. Additional core components of the programme include regular networking opportunities and the documentation of women entrepreneurs' profiles and success stories.

In addition to components listed above, there are opportunities for the ILO and the implementing partner to add additional features and benefits to the programme. The coming section lists the core components of the programme, as piloted by the Rebuilding Better project, as well as suggest a few other optional features that could be considered.

#### ► Box 1. Glossary of terms

- **Cohort:** Larger group of women entrepreneurs engaged in the programme. Made up of peer groups.
- **Facilitator:** Person delivering peer group support sessions with women entrepreneurs.
- **Implementing partner:** Organization delivering the programme.
- **Peer group:** Group of 10-12 women entrepreneurs.
- **Resource persons:** External individuals delivering technical sessions for women entrepreneurs.

#### ► Box 2. Programme objectives and values

##### Programme objectives

- Facilitate **peer learning and sharing** between women entrepreneurs.
- Foster **networking** between women entrepreneurs and other business community actors.
- Create an **enabling environment** for women entrepreneurs to grow their business and achieve other business objectives.

##### Programme values

- Participants are open and willing to share their experiences, both the struggles and triumphs of being an entrepreneur.
- Participants support each other by encouraging ambitious goal-setting and continual progress and learning.
- Participants hold each other accountable to the sessions and their individual and group goals.
- Participants are committed to creating a safe space for each other, and information is shared in confidence.
- Participants practise radical generosity with one another and themselves during this process of growth.

#### Core components of the programme:

1. **Peer group support sessions:** Once a month, participants come together for approximately two hours to set objectives, discuss progress, successes and challenges to advancing their goals. Each participant is given a time to share their experience, and the peers provide feedback, suggestions or information. Topics discussed may vary according to the needs and experiences of each participant. These sessions are facilitated by resource persons assigned by the implementing partner and semi-structured, with each participant invited to share on their progress, successes and challenges. Time-keeping is important so that all participants are able to speak. Specific effort is made to encourage sharing between peers of resources, contacts or information that could help them to achieve their objectives. As the programme progresses, participants get to know one another and ideally collaborate more closely.

Peer sessions are meant to be supportive, and the tone is always positive and encouraging. This is the safe space to discuss issues of importance to the group, which is to be highlighted to women entrepreneurs by the implementing partner during the course of the programme as deemed needed. They are meant to provide learning opportunities as well as support women entrepreneurs to see themselves as successful business leaders. An environment of support and sharing is promoted, and participants are intentionally asked if they have tools, tips and resources to share with one another during the discussions. The facilitator ensures that this safe environment is maintained and that no one takes over the conversation. As part of the peer sessions, participants keep a record of their goals and actions during the programme to thus track their progress over time. The template for keeping this record is available in Appendix 13.

During peer sessions, the participants and the facilitator should ensure that the objectives of each participant are noted. These can be uploaded to a knowledge-sharing platform or entered directly into, for example, a Facebook group so that they are “visible” to the peer group. Not only does this render the commitment more serious, it also enables the group to identify any synergies or resources that they can share with each other in the peer group. For the programme and facilitators, noting these can be useful for identifying other support as well as for putting participants in touch with other resource persons. It’s also useful for the programme’s monitoring of progress (of course, also respecting anonymity).

- 2. Technical sessions:** A core component of the programme is the monthly technical sessions which participants from the entire cohort joins. During each of these gatherings, a specific topic is addressed, corresponding to challenges that the women entrepreneurs participating in the peer group or cohort have cited as important to them. Sessions may focus on improving marketing and communications, growth planning, managing business and family obligations, leveraging capital investments, the platform economy, stress management, sustainable enterprises or procurement readiness, to name a few topics.

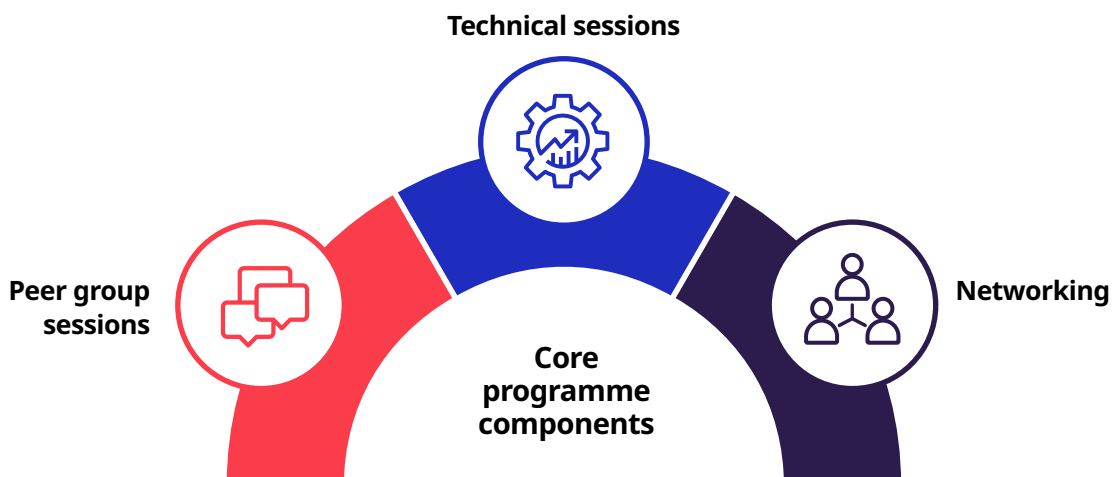
For each session, a resource person is identified by the programme partner. The resource person, who is often a seasoned business person, is introduced by the facilitator and subsequently provides an initial 20-minute technical presentation to share their knowledge and experiences. Presentations are followed by a 45-60-minute Q&A, providing ample time for participants to pose questions according to their own needs (see Appendix 6 for more information and guidance for resource persons supporting the programme).

As soon as the topics are decided and a calendar of meetings has been agreed for the programme (which normally is done as part of the first meeting with the peer group), it is important to start lining up resource persons for the various topics. This can be a time-consuming task and may require a lot of explaining, in particular if the programme is not yet well known.

**Tip:** Keep in mind that programme partners and the Advisory Committee can be leveraged to make this task more streamlined. Experts can be women or men. They can be volunteer speakers (as has been the case so far for the WE-Can programme in Thailand) or contracted for a flat fee. The quality of the resource person’s inputs is critical for the success of the programme. It is good to have references for resource persons – and provide clear guidance and support in the lead up to the session.

- 3. Networking** – Participants are encouraged to network with other peers to identify partnerships and possible collaborations. Additionally, participation in other networking events organized by the programme and its partner organizations can help expand their network and marketing. Over time and as the programme cohorts grow in number, a significant body of alumni will be established, which can also be leveraged as a network in its own right for establishing business-to-business links and supporting new cohorts in the spirit of radical generosity.

► **Figure 1. Overview of core programme components**



It is recommended for a brief profile to be established of every woman entrepreneur in each cohort at the beginning of the programme, with their permission. These can be used to share information about the participants, identify potential mentors or to promote the programme when recruiting future cohorts. The profiles can also be used to help promote women entrepreneurs as role models and leaders. Documenting stories of the successes of women entrepreneurs who take part in the programme will highlight the kinds of successes that women entrepreneurs in the programme achieve. And it will support the programme's further development, including new partnerships, resource mobilization and scaling up.

► **Box 3. The prevalence of gender-based violence has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Stubborn gender gaps have persisted and even have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Domestic violence and work-related gender-based violence and harassment have worsened with the pandemic due to the additional stresses and confinement during lockdowns. Gender-based violence and harassment disproportionately affect women. It undermines women's ability to engage in paid work and affects their health, well-being and income. Women entrepreneurs are no exception. Facilitators and programme partners should be aware and recognize this issue as valid if it is raised during a session. While it is not expected for facilitators to deal with the issue, they can be supportive and provide information and referrals to support organizations at the local level. These can be found by contacting local community organizations or local government offices to provide the names for such referrals.

Governments, employers and workers from around the world have deemed violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence and harassment, as unacceptable and incompatible with decent work. They adopted the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention in 2019 to address and prevent all forms of violence and harassment in the world of work. For more information, go to: [Building Forward Fairer: Women's Rights to Work and at Work at the Core of the COVID-19 Recovery](#).

**Other possible features to add to the programme**

There are plenty of opportunities when organizing the peer programme to identify opportunities or resources that can benefit women entrepreneurs and help participants to achieve their monthly objectives. This will depend on the capacity of each implementing partner, their ability to allocate time and resources to establish these partnerships and the availability of relevant service-providers in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Additional activities may include<sup>3</sup>:

- **Mentoring** – Promoting a mentorship programme can be an effective means to provide valuable expertise to women entrepreneurs. Mentoring can be provided in person or online. If there are already mentorship programmes in existence in the local context, partnerships could be made to connect with them. Alternatively, mentoring can be established with employers' and business membership organization or a women's entrepreneurship network to also promote engagement of members inside a partner organization because they represent a rich source of potential mentors to be matched with women entrepreneurs. The choice of having a woman or a man for a mentor should be agreed with the participants, although it is recommended to primarily recruit women.

<sup>3</sup> Depending upon the availability of service providers and the target groups, other possible services to associate could be financial products and financial literacy, digital literacy, health and reproductive rights, etc.

#### ► Box 4. Multipliers support women entrepreneurs!

As part of the Rebuilding Better Project's peer programme, the ILO and partners engage with "multipliers" to support women entrepreneurs participating in the programme. Multipliers are inspirational women leaders/role models who join one or two peer sessions during the course of the programme to provide an additional opportunity for network expansion and exchange. Multipliers have included previous alumni and other inspirational women ready to "pay it forward" and share their experience with other women entrepreneurs. Multipliers can be recruited prior to the start of the peer programme. For example, Thai entrepreneur, food activist and educator, Duangporn "Bo" Songvisava, who previously operated the famous fine-dining Thai restaurant Bo.Lan, joined the peer programme delivered in Thailand as a "multiplier".

#### ► Box 5. Tapping into global and regional mentorship programmes

Connecting the programme with a mentorship programme is one way to provide additional support to women entrepreneurs. Below are some global and regional programmes that could be considered.

- Cherie Blair Foundation Mentoring Women in Business, at [Mentoring Women in Business](#)
- Endeavor Mentorship programme, at [Mentors | Endeavor](#)
- APEC-Canada Growing Business Partnership, at [Mentorship](#)
- ASEAN Mentors-Entrepreneurs Network, at [ASEAN Mentorship for Entrepreneurs Network \(AMEN\) | JAIF | Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund](#)

- **Women entrepreneurs' contest:** This contest could be established as a category within an existing annual entrepreneurship contest or as a standalone event promoted by the programme in partnership with its partners. The most sustainable option would be to partner with an existing contest to deliver this type of initiative. Women entrepreneurs from the peer programme could be nominated for women entrepreneurs' contests. The ILO has published a women's entrepreneurship contest resource guide called *Month of the Women Entrepreneur*, known as MOWE. Please contact the ILO-WED team if you are interested in this guide at: [www.ilo.org/empent/areas/womens-entrepreneurship-development-wed/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/empent/areas/womens-entrepreneurship-development-wed/lang--en/index.htm) or email: [wed@ilo.org](mailto:wed@ilo.org).
- **Marketplace activities:** Partners may identify market opportunities or develop dedicated spaces for participants to showcase their products or services. This could be either a virtual or physical marketplace. For example, organizing a marketplace alongside a relevant conference or event may be of interest to some participants. All opportunities to market their products or services can be explored, making sure that the context is appropriate and that these provide actual market opportunities. It would be advisable to have a debrief after each market venue to both monitor the kinds of events and partnerships that worked for women entrepreneurs as well as to enable women entrepreneurs to distil and share their knowledge of these experiences during updating sessions.

## Internal communication

A private channel should be set up at the start of the programme so that participants of each cohort can interact and support each other continuously. During the first session, participants will discuss how they want to communicate and agree on the channel to use during the programme. Potential platforms to be used for communication include WhatsApp, Facebook or Line. This communication channel can be set up by the implementing partner and also be used to inform participants about upcoming technical sessions and other learning opportunities.

It is also recommended that the implementing partner create a Facebook page or similar online platform where they can communicate information and news about the programme to women entrepreneurs and partners who may be interested in or are currently participating in the programme as well as programme alumni. By building a following over time, it will enhance the implementing partner's ability to reach women entrepreneurs and recruit future cohorts. Word-of-mouth communication is essential for convincing new participants to invest – and can also help connect with potential participants with the supportive and generous mindset the programme is looking for.

► **Box 6. Delivering programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Given the current COVID-19 context, a programme will likely be implemented partly or fully online. Delivering the programme virtually to women entrepreneurs puts additional pressure on the organizers to ensure that sessions are accessible to participants who may not be so familiar with a virtual format. This can be ensured by (a) working primarily through channels that women entrepreneurs are comfortable with or (b) if another platform, such as Zoom, will be used, then sufficient support should be provided, such as onboarding sessions and coaching on how to use the platform, before the programme starts. If the programme is to be delivered with the most vulnerable population, issues such as connectivity and access to data should be considered by the ILO and the implementing partner prior to programme launch to enable the participation of the target group.

**Tip:** Search for available online tutorials provided by platforms that can be used for onboarding sessions.

## Timeline

The programme is recommended to be delivered over a period of five or six months. This leaves sufficient time between sessions for the participants to implement the different objectives they set during each session. It is both short enough and long enough to see progress but keep participants engaged. However, the final length of the programme can be adapted based on the resources at hand, the needs and plans of the implementing partners, the needs of the women entrepreneurs etc.

## Sessions

- **Number and frequency of sessions:** One peer group goal session per month (in total five in a five month programme) and at least one technical session per month (but if a large group of women entrepreneurs are engaged with different needs and prioritized, it is possible to cater to their needs by offering additional sessions every month).
- **When:** Dates to be determined in consultation with the group.
- **Length:** Peer sessions generally last two hours each, while technical sessions last 90 minutes.
- **Time of day:** The time of day should be set out with inputs from women entrepreneurs in the specific context, avoiding (as much as possible) the peak times when women may have to tend to their family responsibilities.

► **Box 7. Managing Work and family during COVID-19 times**

According to ILO research, women face more demands on their time due to their disproportionate share of unpaid care work. And when paid and unpaid work are added up, women's days are longer than men's days. On average, women do four times as much unpaid care work as men in Asia and the Pacific,\* meaning that they have less time for other activities, including their businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated women's unpaid care duties further. This has led to more pressure and potential impacts on women's mental health. This may also impact women's ability to expand their business. Therefore, programme partners and facilitators should take this issue into account not only in the planning of the sessions but also as a potential theme to be discussed throughout the programme. For example, they can organize meetings at times that are outside "peak" times in the household. They can discuss this issue among participants and partners to raise more awareness and highlight and share strategies and solutions at the household level – and at the policy level – on the need for equal sharing of household and caring duties. For more information on this, go to: [Creating a Family-Friendly Workplace](#) and [Family-Friendly Policies and Other Good Workplace Practices in the Context of COVID-19](#).\*\*

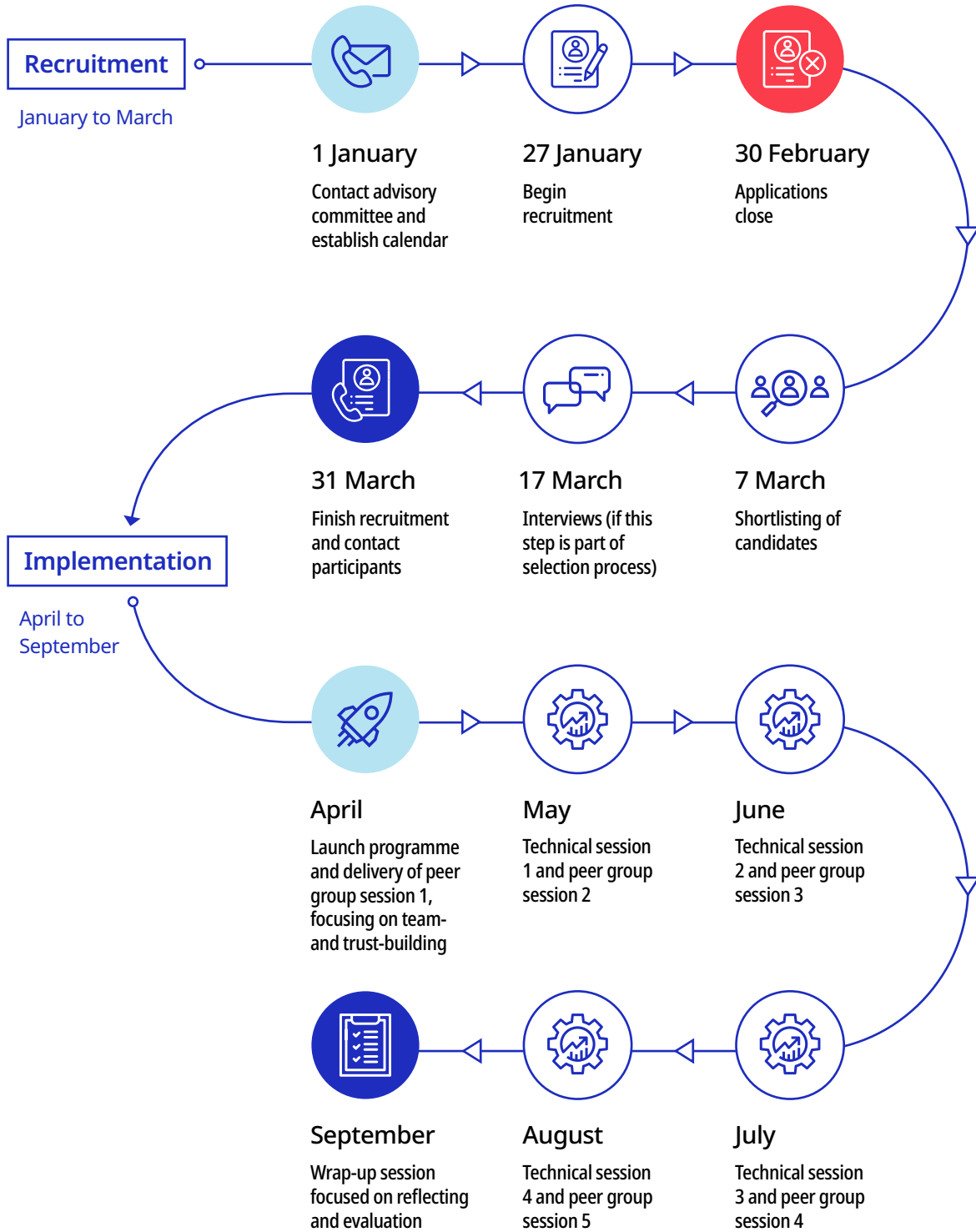
\*ILO, *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work* (2018), [www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_633135/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang--en/index.htm).

\*\*ILO Convention No. 156, Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, and its accompanying Recommendation No. 165 provide policy guidance.



## Indicative calendar

Below is an indicative calendar for the implementation of the programme. If engaging a larger cohort of women entrepreneurs, this cycle could be staggered or concentrated all at once, according to the context.



## Costs and pricing for sustainability and accessibility

Items to consider in costing the programme, formulating the pricing and ensuring sustainability include:

- ▶ Administration and coordination costs, including programme promotion, graphics and materials, etc.
- ▶ Peer group facilitation costs, especially for the opening peer group sessions and in models employing a “hands-on” facilitation approach to peer group meetings.
- ▶ Technical session costs. This can include logistics and virtual platform costs, computer equipment, facilitation costs and speaker costs. Speakers can be asked to participate pro bono (without payment or voluntarily) or for an exchange of promotion of their work.
- ▶ Logistics costs. If meeting in person, it might be possible to partner with a co-working space or similar location to sponsor peer group meeting arrangements. Otherwise, these costs need to be factored in.
- ▶ Relevant events. It may be possible to engage partners and sponsors to offset the costs of participation of peer programme participants in other organizations’ events. For example, WE-Can cohort attendance to the annual Women in Leadership conference, organized by CanCham Thailand, was sponsored by the Canadian Embassy in Bangkok.
- ▶ Market pricing. Explore what are other programmes are charging. What is the market threshold for the fee for a programme such as this? What price is both accessible for participants and sustainable for the implementing organization?

## Sustainability

The sustainability of the peer programme is key to consider from the early design stage. Important factors to ensure the sustainability of the programme include the selection of implementing partners, costing and demand for women-specific programmes. The peer programme preferably should be housed within an organization that has the capacity, mandate and interest to replicate the programme in the future. It is preferable to select an implementing partner with a track record for delivering gender-sensitive programming.

Costing and pricing are important factors to ensure the financial viability of the programme over time. The ILO may help the implementing partner to develop and carry out a sustainability strategy that may cover a cost-recovery strategy, fund raising and sponsorship etc. Having an Advisory Committee in place can further help support the thinking and strategy for the programme’s sustainability. As much as possible, the ILO and the implementing partner should seek in-kind contributions to keep costs to a minimum. For example, by engaging resource persons to deliver technical sessions on a volunteer rather than a cost-basis. The cost of the programme would need to be evaluated annually to ensure its accessibility and sustainability.

To manage the expanding number of peer groups, the ILO and the implementing partner could consider identifying and working with women entrepreneurs who joined earlier cohorts as facilitators. This model enables the peer programme to scale up over time while also encouraging continued involvement of past cohorts by implementing the programme’s principle of radical generosity. It is also possible to explore a self-guided model (for more information, see Appendix 5).

The programme lends itself to being implemented in multiple locations, either through online delivery or by working with community partners with a local presence, such as microfinance institutions or local chapters of chambers or women entrepreneurs’ associations.

## Monitoring and evaluation

The ILO and the implementing partner will closely monitor the programme during each stage of implementation. This serves to ensure accountability to the women entrepreneurs participating in the programme and to capture lessons from the implementation for adjusting and further scaling up the concept. When implementing the programme, it is important to consider participants confidentiality and to ensure that participants' personal information and/or business information will not be shared with third parties without their consent. The monitoring of data should primarily serve to improve delivery and to monitor progress of the participants and the objectives achieved.

The ILO and the implementing partner should come together at least twice during the course of a programme to review the information collected through monitoring; once during the first three months of the programme when some initial feedback from participants has been collected and once at the end. Meetings should focus on assessing information collected to decide whether any changes to the programme need to be made, for example in terms of length, group size, number of peer sessions, number of technical sessions or new areas to include for technical discussions.

It is important that the monitoring framework should be in line with that of the implementing partner. However, it is also essential to ensure that any dedicated questions related to indicators and measurement criteria of the ILO development cooperation project is included to be able to report back to the donor. Emphasis should be placed on capturing data on participants' progress, such as changes in business practices, business growth or new partnerships established.

Remember that it is important to not only capture quantitative data when monitoring the programme but that stories also matter. Effort should be made to capture qualitative elements of the programme to fully capture results.

Surveys can be made available to women entrepreneurs through, for example, SurveyMonkey or Qualtrics. Data can be stored in Excel or using software such as STATA, depending on the preferences and current practices of the implementing partner and the ILO.



► **Box 8. History of the WE-CAN programme**

The Women Entrepreneurs Can Programme (WE-Can) programme was launched in Thailand in 2019 under the Thai-Canadian Chamber (CanCham) to provide a dedicated service to women-led micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). It also looked to contribute to the Chamber's efforts to increase the number of women joining the Chamber as well as to promote women in business leadership. The WE-Can concept and programme were designed and developed by Joni Simpson, ILO Senior Specialist on Gender, Equality and Non-Discrimination, with contributions from Erin Haubrich, CanCham intern and volunteer.

Participants of WE-Can benefited from a six-month membership to the CanCham, which provided additional services and access to networking events to these temporary members. This combination of services and benefits made the programme attractive to early adopters. The fees for the programme were kept reasonable to make it both attractive and accessible. All fees went to the CanCham as a contribution towards the administrative costs.

The programme established a volunteer Advisory Committee that supported marketing of the programme, recruited participants and then followed the programme's progress. CanCham provided the secretariat. Marketing, branding and tools were created. CanCham also forged in-kind partnerships with WE-Can's launching partners: SPACES (co-working space in Bangkok) and Space Bangkok (a Thai training and facilitation service provider). Space Bangkok provided the team-building session, and SPACES offered meeting rooms, both in-kind. These early partnerships were important for a programme with few resources. In addition, the initial co-facilitators with the programme were both volunteers, as were external resource persons drawn from the expansive networks of the CanCham and the facilitators.

Recruitment of the initial cohort was challenging because the programme was new. Evidence indicates that women entrepreneurs are often hesitant to take up business development services. Although a marketing plan was put in place, mainly using social media channels, the early adopters came predominantly through word-of-mouth connections.

In 2019, as the first cohort was going through the programme, COVID-19 emerged onto the scene, and the programme pivoted to deliver online. The successes of the programme's participants – even with the COVID-19 challenges – were testament to the programme's relevance for fostering resilience by establishing a strong support network of peers as well as a "space" for frank exchange, sharing lessons, being generous to one another and forging collaborations between the participants. Then in early 2020, as WE-Can was in the process of recruiting its second cohort, CanCham agreed to hand over the programme's secretariat to Space Bangkok, a woman-led social purpose enterprise. Space Bangkok now leads in implementing WE-Can in Thailand, and CanCham remains a partner. Because WE-Can was initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been conducted mainly online.

From the outset, there were aspirations to take the model to a larger scale in Bangkok. However, it was too early to move during the pilot phase. Then in 2021, an opportunity opened up: The ILO launched its new Rebuilding Better project, in partnership with J.P. Morgan, and an agreement was made with Space Bangkok to further develop the programme to provide a five-month adapted version called WE-Can Be Resilient (WE-Can-BR). This programme caters to Thai nationals and will reach out to women entrepreneurs across Thailand. The WE-Can-BR programme maintains the peer-to-peer element but integrates other components as per ILO contributions and technical capacities to support women entrepreneurs. The model used in Thailand is also delivered in Malaysia and the Philippines with local partners and under a different name.

**WE-Can: Emergence of collaborative efforts, partnerships and launch of new initiatives**

**Referrals and business linkages**

During a WE-Can peer group session, one participant shared the challenges she was experiencing with the manufacturer of her business product. Her story prompted another participant to recommend her own trusted and proven product manufacturer and to make the connection between them. This crystallized as a turning point for the first participant's business. The higher-quality and more reliable manufacturer brought a good working relationship and consistent quality to her product, which allowed the participant to quickly grow her reach, sales and following.

► **Box 8. (cont.)**

**Business partnerships to take on new clients**

At the end of a WE-Can session, a WE-Can alumna was approached by a current client of hers about supporting an event for the client. Some of the tasks in this contract were beyond the scope of the alumna's company, and she would have normally turned down the job. This time, however, she knew that the areas beyond the purview of her own company neatly fell into that of another WE-Can alumna from her cohort. She enlisted the help of her WE-Can colleague, and they took on the sizable contract together, successfully exceeding the client's expectations.

**New initiative developed and launched**

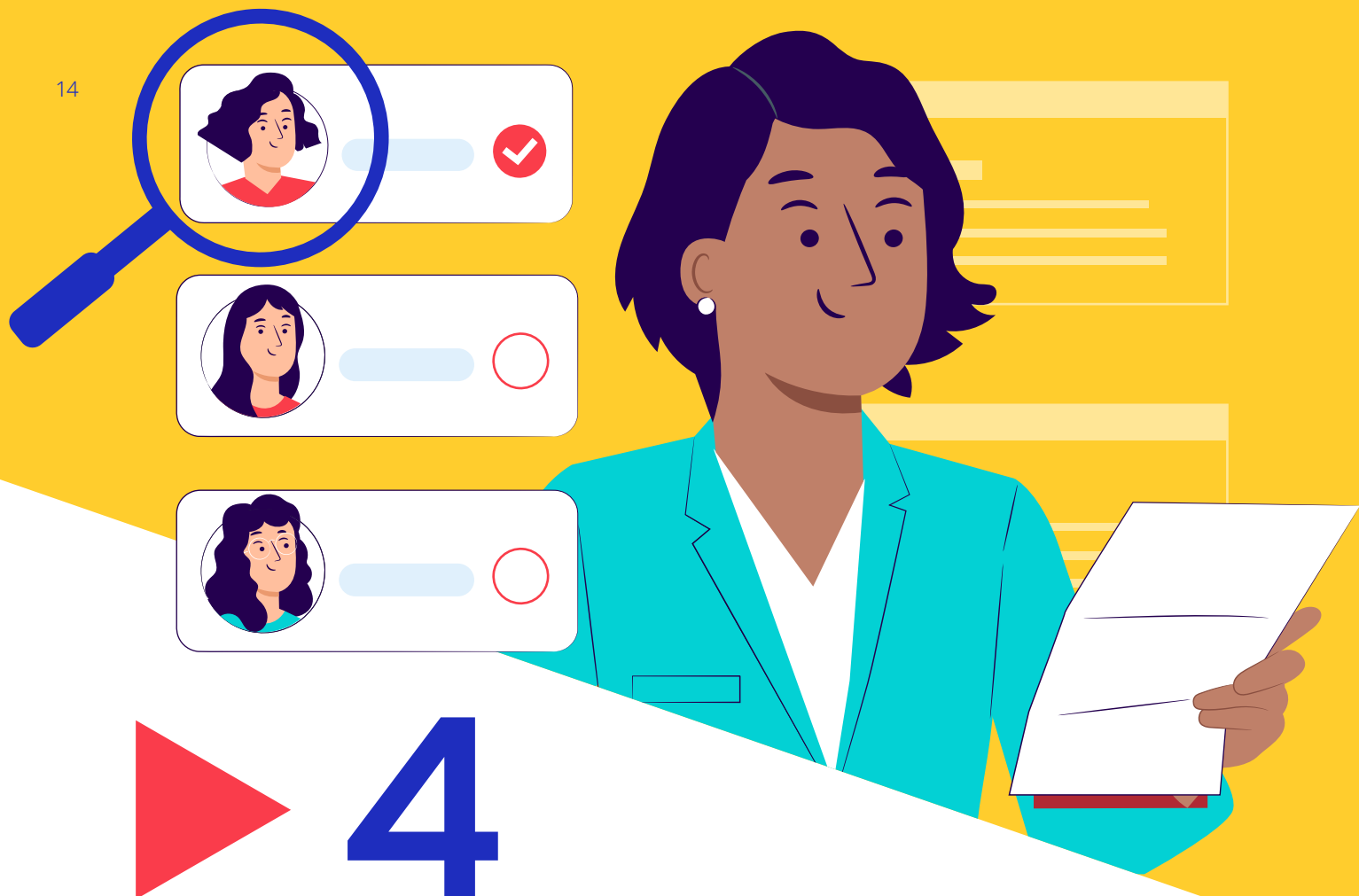
The WE-Can programme has seen the launch of several new initiatives. One such initiative that was incubated during a programme is WE-Brand, or the Women Entrepreneurs' Brand, which is a logo promoting women's entrepreneurship development in Thailand. The WE-Brand logo is used to market and support the growth of women's enterprises, by highlighting that products have been made women entrepreneurs. WE-Brand also aims to link women-led businesses to companies, clients and new markets.

**Feedback on the WE-Can programme**



- The WE-Can programme was exactly what I needed.
- Being part of WE-Can will benefit you more than you expect for sure.
- I found new friends and new networks for my business through WE-Can.
- WE-Can brought me some sanity.
- I'm still thinking about the experiences shared and problems solved in my WE-Can cohort.
- WE-Can is my safe place where I can talk about my failures and successes and we can push through any problem together.
- I learned a lot from the technical sessions and we got energy from each other and each other's victories.
- WE-Can is a great place to find opportunities for collaboration.
- To share business issues is not an easy thing, but We-Can makes it much easier. Always such a safe place for us! It's more than affiliation, it's a friendship.

► WE-Can participant



## Engaging women entrepreneurs: Promotion, application and selection

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### Promoting the programme and recruiting women entrepreneurs

An important part of the application process is making information about the upcoming programme known to women entrepreneurs. There are multiple avenues that organizations can use to recruit future cohorts. It is strongly recommended to make social media and online platforms where women entrepreneurs are already active an integral part of any promotion strategy. It is also beneficial to engage others in this process to maximize outreach. Possible stakeholders who could disseminate information about the programme are:

- ▶ programme partners and sponsors;
- ▶ women's entrepreneurship associations and networks;
- ▶ chambers of commerce and sector-based associations;
- ▶ government agencies promoting SMEs;
- ▶ co-working spaces;
- ▶ universities with entrepreneurship programmes;
- ▶ microfinance organizations; and
- ▶ commercial banks and local economic development organizations.

As previously mentioned, ensuring that women entrepreneurs sign up is one of the most challenging aspects of organizing the programme. Women entrepreneurs tend to be hesitant to join business support programmes and activities. That is why it is critical to ensure a well-elaborated and aligned marketing strategy before the actual application process begins. The ILO team should aim to support this process and could, for example, provide guidance to the implementing partner on how to effectively promote the programme (based on experiences and lessons learned in other countries) and help with the recruitment and outreach. The ILO and partners should consider organizing information sessions and lead-up events (which could be linked to other bigger women's entrepreneurship development events taking place). Preparing communications materials will be necessary, such as posters to publish in social media and on a visible space on the implementing partner's website.

## Application and selection process

The application and selection process can be designed in different ways. Factors to consider when determining how to design the process are mainly practical, such as how many women entrepreneurs to select. For example, it is less feasible to interview women entrepreneurs individually if you need to recruit hundreds of women entrepreneurs to join the programme in a short period of time.

The application process for the programme should be simple and straightforward. It is recommended to accept applications for at least one month to ensure that a sufficient number of women entrepreneurs apply for the programme. Alternatively, applications can be accepted continuously. To apply for the programme, women entrepreneurs could be asked for example to complete an online form or submit a video.

To select women entrepreneurs, the ILO and the implementing partner could use several different methods. In some cases, the ILO and the implementing partner may do a direct selection based on completed forms or videos. It would also be possible to conduct interviews with women entrepreneurs interested in the programme.

One possibility is for the ILO and the implementing partner to form a selection panel or committee to take part in this process. This could be beneficial to the programme because it would, for instance, increase the prestige of the programme if government agencies or representatives from academia were invited to join. The members of the selection panel may also have a large network of women entrepreneurs whom they can promote the programme to and thus enable the ILO and its partner to select women entrepreneurs from a larger pool of candidates.

### **The selection process may include the following steps:**

1. Potential participants will submit their application online.
2. The ILO and the implementing partners will do a preselection round of applications based on a basic set of criteria (if this is deemed necessary due to a large volume of applications).
3. The selection panel will review the applications based on a set of criteria and either
  - a. Create a final list of candidates or
  - b. Create a short-list of candidates who are interviewed to ensure a good fit with programme values and objectives. Upon completion of the interviews, the final candidates are then selected and invited to join the programme
  - c. Upon transferring payment to the implementing partner (if any) and submitting information as requested, the candidate is ready to join the programme.

## Eligible candidates

There is much flexibility when it comes to selecting future women entrepreneurs to participate in the programme. Ultimately, it is up to the ILO and the implementing partner to decide on the minimal criteria.

It is recommended to set a minimum of one year in business as this ensures women have experiences from which to draw from, share, learn and/or grow from.

Other criteria to be used in the selection process could include certain business characteristics, such as business size, sector or industry or growth stage and formal or informal. It could also take into consideration characteristics

of the participating women entrepreneurs and include a certain focus, such as female youth entrepreneurs. In some cases, it may vary over time, depending on the partners who have been engaged to support the programme or changing donor requirements.

What is important for ensuring a successful outcome of the programme is that the women entrepreneurs are committed to co-creation and joint learning, and that they are interested in building business connections, passionate about continuous learning and motivated to take their business to the next level. They should also be excited about becoming a part of a group of fellow dynamic women entrepreneurs.

► **Box 9. Informal enterprise prevalence**

The informal economy comprises more than half of the global labour force and more than 90 per cent of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises worldwide.\* Women entrepreneurs are disproportionately self-employed and operating businesses in the informal economy. The programme could promote and facilitate the transition from the informal to the formal economy through assistance and targeted support to women entrepreneurs.

\*ILO, *Formalization of the Informal Economy: Follow-Up to the Resolution Concerning Efforts to Facilitate the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy* (2015), [www.ilo.org/gb/GBSessions/previous-sessions/GB325/pol/WCMS\\_413231/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/gb/GBSessions/previous-sessions/GB325/pol/WCMS_413231/lang-en/index.htm).





# ▶ 5

## Governance and partnerships

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### Implementing partner

The ILO will identify and work with one (or several) implementing partner(s) per country that will be responsible for the overall coordination of the programme. The partner should be a not-for-profit organization or social enterprise, and it is important that it is a local organization with mandate, interest and capacity to serve women entrepreneurs. For example, this could be a women's entrepreneurship association or another organization with a mandate that is clearly aligned with the aims of the programme. This organization should already be offering services to women entrepreneurs and be open to adopting the programme as an additional service. By having this organization "own" the programme, the project will increase the chances of the sustainability of the programme beyond the project's duration.

During early planning stages, it is important to ensure that the ILO project team and the implementing partner share a common vision and idea of how to execute the peer support programme. While it is important to the ILO that certain factors are taken into consideration to ensure alignment with donor requirements stipulated in the project agreement, it is also important for the implementing partner to indicate their vision and how they want to conduct the programme. Ultimately, the partner will be in the driver's seat (and is to continue to deliver the programme upon termination of the ILO project).

## Advisory Committee

At the outset, it would be important to establish an Advisory Committee made up of volunteers – women and men – who are able and willing to provide advice, dedicate time and efforts to promoting the programme, including recruiting and oversight. Partners of the programme could also be invited to participate in the Advisory Committee. The implementing partner should be involved in the process of identifying, selecting and inviting Advisory Committee members. See sample terms of reference (Appendix 9), which clarifies the roles and responsibilities as well as the duration of the mandate. This will help in preventing or minimizing any mismatches in objectives and expectations.

## The role of the ILO

The ILO is responsible for overseeing the successful implementation of the programme at the national level. The aim is for the ILO to gradually be involved to a lesser extent in the implementation of the programme and to transfer ownership to the implementing partner.

Responsibilities of the ILO at different stages of implementation include:

- Before launching a new programme, the ILO should support the implementing partner by transferring knowledge about the programme, including how to for example recruit new cohorts of women entrepreneurs, facilitate sessions and monitor progress. As part of this effort, the ILO should make an effort to share lessons learned from other countries with the implementing partner.
- During programme implementation, the ILO should oversee activities and provide continuous assistance to the implementing partner, as needed. This includes participating in scheduled Advisory Committee meetings and join sessions to review data collected from women entrepreneurs on their progress.
- At the end of the programme, the ILO can play an important role in ensuring that sufficient time is allocated to evaluating the programme and capturing lessons learnt, for the implementing partner to take into consideration when implementing the programme with future cohorts.

## Possible partners and sponsors

There are many opportunities for the ILO and the implementing partner to engage other organizations to support the programme and fulfil complementary roles to support women entrepreneurs. The ILO and the implementing partner should remain alert to the needs emerging from the cohorts to expand their ability to refer women entrepreneurs to other service providers for their different needs.

For partners, this programme can serve as a proactive strategy to promote women in business by providing a dedicated service to women-led micro, small and medium-sized enterprises that will attract more women members to their organization. For companies interested in partnering, this is an affirmative action that can contribute to a positive image by contributing to women's economic empowerment through their corporate social responsibility efforts.

Partners should be selected based on criteria that will make a strong contribution to the objectives of the programme, but foremost serving the needs of women entrepreneurs running MSMEs.

Stakeholders to consider for engaging in the programme include:

- **Employers' and business membership organizations**, including chambers of commerce, could be invited to sponsor the programme and to organize networking events. For employers' and business membership organization, the programme would constitute a means to increase their women-owned business membership and expand their membership base. This could also be encouraged by, for example, including a free membership for a limited duration as part of the support provided to women entrepreneurs by the programme. The programme is also an opportunity for an employers' and business membership organization to generate more demand-driven services for women entrepreneurs and to position themselves at the centre of the entrepreneurship ecosystem in targeted countries.

- ▶ **Women's entrepreneurship associations:** These associations may already have a vast network of women entrepreneurs and channels for outreach and are therefore a suitable partner that can help expand the reach of the programme. They would have an understanding of the needs of women entrepreneurs in the country in which the programme is being implemented, meaning that this is also a stakeholder to regularly consult and brainstorm ideas with. These associations advocate for the needs of women entrepreneurs and sometimes partner with employers' and business membership organizations. They could be invited to, for example, co-host events and to help disseminate information.
- ▶ **Government** programmes supporting entrepreneurship and SME promotion.
- ▶ **Corporations** could be invited to sponsor the programme financially or to support, for example, senior staff participation in events and technical learning sessions. Partnering with the private sector could also result in business opportunities for women entrepreneurs over time. In particular, larger corporations often are looking to identify smaller (and sometimes female-owned) businesses that they can include in their supply chain as part of their sustainability programme or procurement policies.
- ▶ **Financial service providers** could be interested in making their services known to women-led businesses or sponsoring the programme. While access to finance is a critical need for most enterprises, in particular for growth, women-led businesses often face additional barriers to accessing appropriate financial products for their needs. Commercial banks sometimes have dedicated products for SMEs and even for women entrepreneurs.
- ▶ **Microfinance organizations** are often providing services to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. Both can engage with the programme by making their services better known to its participants. Financial products that foster resilience, such as microinsurance for small business, may also be of particular interest to contribute to their resilience. Financial literacy tools could also be made available to participants wanting to improve their skills in this area.
- ▶ **Embassies** often have funds available to support projects. The implementing partner can explore possible partnerships with embassies that may have funds to support local initiatives, in particular ones that contribute to women's economic empowerment. Countries such as Canada, Sweden, Norway, Japan and Ireland may be possible sources of funding, according to their own criteria.
- ▶ **Universities** and their networks of partners and alumni can be great resources and often have programmes related to entrepreneurship. Business schools or entrepreneurship programmes can be sources of both technical resources and cohort participants.
- ▶ **Other service providers** can be identified and associated to provide referrals for women entrepreneurs to other services. For example, for digital literacy, affordable legal assistance, managing family responsibilities, cooperative development, social purpose enterprise resources, annual entrepreneurship competitions, Global Entrepreneurship Week celebrations, trade programmes, etc.

► **Box 10. Benefits of partnering with the ILO to deliver programmes**

The following can be used to discuss potential partnerships with employers' and business membership organization (EBMOs):

**EBMOs can provide programme participants with:**

- ▶ Networking opportunities with high-profile business leaders at the organization's networking events.
- ▶ Access to business professionals in a range of industries through the organization's member events.
- ▶ Benefit from business referrals and personal introductions facilitated by the organization.
- ▶ Promoting their business through the organization's marketing channels and events.
- ▶ Exclusive benefits and discounts that the organization negotiates for its members.
- ▶ Up-to-date information on the business context through information and knowledge shared through the organization's newsletter, etc.
- ▶ Business-to-business opportunities through EBMO activities.

**Partnering EBMOs benefit from:**

- ▶ Provision of an additional service to its members, in particular women-led businesses.
- ▶ Increased outreach to women-led businesses to promote the EBMO's services.
- ▶ Diversification of membership of the EBMO by increasing the proportion of women members
- ▶ Increased number of women attending EBMO activities.
- ▶ Co-hosted and joint events.
- ▶ Contribution to corporate social responsibility efforts and diversity in key performance indicators.
- ▶ Positive public perception that the EBMO is gender-sensitive and inclusive.
- ▶ Increased ability to recruit women board members with more women in the EBMO.

## Recruiting facilitators

"Facilitation" means the process of making something possible or easier. In the programme, the responsibility of each facilitator is ultimately to join peer sessions on a monthly basis to ensure that the group understands what their common objectives are and to assist them in reaching these objectives during the session through discussions and exchanges.

Facilitators of the programme can be recruited both internally and externally. It can be staff working for the implementing partner or programme alumni. Or they can be recruited through public announcements and calls for applications. Regardless of what strategy is used to recruit the facilitators, it is essential to ensure that those selected embody the values of the programme and are passionate about supporting women entrepreneurs. At the same time, it is important to ensure that facilitators understand that their role as a facilitator is not to be at the centre of attention but that they are ultimately there to encourage discussions in the group and provide a safe space for women entrepreneurs who are joining the programme to share information about themselves.

Given the importance of women-led spaces in relation to creating a safe space for women entrepreneurs to benefit from as part of the programme, it is recommended for facilitators to be women. This is part of the success – women participating demonstrate a leadership style that benefits the programme and the principles of mutual support.

Criteria that could be considered when selecting facilitators:

- ▶ ability to connect with new people and to build relationships;
- ▶ ability to create a supportive, open and safe environment;
- ▶ ability to stay objective and to treat other people respectfully;
- ▶ ability to keep people engaged and discussions focused;
- ▶ demonstrates values of the programme; and
- ▶ demonstrates sensitivity and ability to act with tact.

## ► Appendix 1. Facilitation plan for introductory session

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The opening peer group session lays the groundwork for creating the cohort bond, drawing out the technical topics the cohort is interested in learning more about and establishing the tone and process for the rest of the programme. If possible, this should be done in-person to enable participants to better connect with each other.

In advance of the session, gather bios, pictures and links from cohort members and their businesses. Circulate this information among the cohort so that you do not need to spend a lot of time on this type of introductions in the actual session. Also, you can ask the participants to prepare certain thoughts or items to share or use in the first session.

### Indicative agenda for the introductory session (4 hours)

#### 1. Opening and welcome (15 minutes)

- a. This may include official welcomes from sponsors or partners.
- b. Include housekeeping items, such as media release forms, etc.
- c. Include an overview of the programme.
- d. Establish some group norms.

#### 2. Introductions (30 minutes)

Use a creative activity through which participants can introduce themselves beyond simply their names and organizations – don't forget that you have already circulated this information in advance. Help the participants get to know each other more deeply.

#### 3. Celebrating achievements (45 minutes)

Have each participant share their top three achievements in a given time frame. It might be in the past year or six months, for example.

#### 4. Biggest challenges (45 minutes)

- a. Starting in pairs, have participants talk about their biggest challenges.
- b. Share and unpack the biggest challenges in a plenary discussion.

#### 5. Expectations and topics (45 minutes)

- a. Brainstorm and sort technical topics of interest and other needs.
- b. Be sure to gain a more detailed understanding of each topic before concluding this part of the session.

#### 6. Goals and schedule (55 minutes)

- a. Introduce the goal-setting and checking process that will continue throughout the programme. This includes the element of peers noting resources, recommendations and encouragements for each person.
- b. Give time for participants to think of their goals.
- c. Have each participant share their goals in one minute.
- d. While listening, have participants jot down resources, recommendations and encouragements as applicable. This can be done in person on cards or virtually.
- e. If in person, have participants pass out their cards to each other. If virtual, have participants message each other.
- f. Set the next meeting and, hopefully, a meeting trend (such as the last Tuesday of every month for goal sessions, etc.).
- g. Determine how the group will keep in contact between sessions (such as a closed Facebook group, Line group chat, etc.).

#### 7. Closing and group photo (5 minutes)

## ► Appendix 2. Facilitation plan for peer sessions

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The objective of the peer group goal-setting and updating sessions is to provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on progress, lessons and challenges and set the objectives for the next month. Participants can also problem-solve or ask for specific help.

### Facilitator notes:

- Encourage participants to reflect on progress, lessons and challenges and set the objectives for the next month.
- Ensure that the objectives and main successes are documented and gathered.
- Time should be well managed to provide enough space for each person to speak.

### Indicative agenda for peer group goal-setting and updating sessions (1.5–2 hours)

**1. Opening welcome from the facilitator** (setting a positive tone for the meeting and sharing any news or important information about the programme).

**2. Objective setting and reporting back (about 1 hour – 5 minutes per person):**

Reporting back on monthly progress (each participant should explain):

- What did I achieve this month? What were my successes?
- What were my main lessons learned?
- Were there any great surprises?

Objective-setting (again, each participant should explain):

- My objective(s) for this month (what results do I want to achieve next?)
- Is there anything I want to ask of the group (support, advice, contacts, etc.)?
- Is there anything the group wants to ask or share back?

**Note:** It often works well to go around the group once to report back and then again to share new goals. But it also works if each person reports back and then immediately speaks to their new goals.

**3. Any other business and wrap-up:** (10 minutes) (use this timeslot to wrap up, remind about upcoming events and next technical session, etc.)

**Note:** If time allows, conduct a series of conversations in groups of two or three participants to help cohort members connect and exchange. Pairs can be randomly assigned or can self-select. The point is to create time for cohort members to have conversations with each other to explore questions, ideas, opportunities, etc. beyond the plenary conversations. Conversations should be unstructured. It is important just to give the time and framework for members to talk to each other in pairs and rotate throughout the cohort so that, ideally, each person has spoken to every other member, or at least as many as possible, by the end of the rounds. This can be done both virtually and in person.

## ► Appendix 3. Facilitation plan for final session

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The closing peer group session serves to wrap up the programme and provide time for reflection, celebration and commitment going forward. In advance of the session, ensure that participants bring their record of goals and experiences from throughout the programme.

### **Indicative agenda for the introductory session (2 hours)**

#### **1. Opening and welcome (10 minutes)**

Set the stage of being at a transition point at the end of the programme and the beginning of what's next.

#### **2. Reflection and celebration (60 minutes)**

Allow time for individual reflection on each participant's journey, referring to their record of goals and experiences throughout the programme. Share in the group around: impressions, themes, reflections, celebrations; etc. Celebrate how far each cohort member has come.

#### **3. Next goals (30 minutes)**

Keep the momentum going by asking each participant to set their goals for the coming month.

#### **4. Future commitment (10 minutes)**

End with looking forward and commitment from the group to continued connection and support of each other.

#### **5. Closing and group photo (10 minutes)**

## ► Appendix 4. Guidance on how to facilitate peer support groups

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A facilitator is there to encourage participants to participate and ensure the flow of discussion towards the session's objectives.

A facilitator should be good a listener who helps point out, identify or reinforce lessons or messages during the sessions. For example, if a participant shares a success, make sure that it is highlighted and celebrated.

A facilitator should use gender-sensitive and inclusive language during their interactions with participants, generating a "safe space" for sharing and learning. A facilitator should avoid imposing their opinions or taking over the conversation. They should also ensure that others are respectful and supportive to other participants.

Each participant should share back with the group, normally starting with reporting back on progress, then setting the objectives for the next month. In the first session, however, the objective-setting will be first – but subsequently, reporting back on progress will happen first. The guiding questions (see sample agenda) can be made visible on a screen, but with time, participants know the format and will simply start sharing. Once a woman entrepreneur has shared, the facilitator should ask if other participants have any questions for them. A facilitator should ask participants if they have any specific needs to ask of the group before moving to the next person. It is important to encourage support between one another to generate a collaborative spirit within the group. This also aligns with the principle of "generosity" between them.

It is best for participants to volunteer to share because some people like to hold off at the beginning. However, if participants are not volunteering, the facilitator can ask the participant who speaks first to nominate the next person to speak. This works especially well for virtual sessions. Participants can be asked to place their objectives in the chat box or on Facebook in real time.



## ► Appendix 5. Guidance for self-managed peer groups

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Self-managed peer groups are groups that are not supported by an external facilitator. These groups are responsible for managing their own peer sessions as well as scheduling and logistics. The programme will provide materials to assist groups in managing their own sessions and is also available for questions should any arise. For technical sessions, self-managed peer groups will join with other groups in technical sessions arranged by the programme.

Self-managed peer groups should use the peer group facilitation plan as a guide for their meetings. The group can nominate one member to keep the flow and ensure the group stays on task and on time. This also allows cohort members to practise essential facilitation skills in low-risk settings. Alternatively, the group can manage the session jointly following the provided facilitation plan. It is recommended that this model is piloted only by those implementing partner that have completed the programme at least once with a cohort using the facilitator model.

## ► Appendix 6. Template – invitation to resource persons to deliver technical sessions

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Dear [INSERT NAME],

In an effort to advance gender equality and women's entrepreneurship, we are pleased to invite you to support a new initiative called [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME].

[INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] was developed to support women entrepreneurs to advance their business objectives. This five-month programme will provide women entrepreneurs with networking, peer learning and technical sessions by resource persons from the business community.

The programme provides technical sessions, each time focusing on a different area of business, depending on the cohorts' current growth objectives. Our hope is to draw on your experiences and technical know-how during a session to share with these growing business owners.

This programme will provide you with an incredible opportunity to:

1. Support the business development of women entrepreneurs.
2. Showcase the expertise of our current membership base.
3. Further the dynamic partnerships between our members.

As a successful professional and expert in your field, we hope you will engage and support this exciting programme with us.

If there is an area of business expertise that you would like to contribute, please respond to this email and we will add you to our list of resource persons who are willing to be invited to deliver a technical session to women entrepreneurs.

We hope to hear from you and to work together to support women entrepreneurs ready to take their business to the next level.

Best regards,  
[INSERT NAME]

## ► Appendix 7. Guidance for resource persons delivering technical sessions

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Thank you for taking up this opportunity to make a difference in the life and business of a woman entrepreneur by sharing your expertise with participants of the [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME]. We are certain that this will be an enriching experience for you – and a valuable contribution to the women entrepreneurs participating in the programme.

### What is [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME]?

[INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] is a five-month initiative to promote women's entrepreneurship. This is a coveted space where women entrepreneurs share knowledge, advance their business objectives and ultimately grow their businesses.

The women entrepreneurs who participate in [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] are running small businesses in the early stages of the business cycle. This programme aims to encourage and support them to take action to stay resilient in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic but also to take their business to the next level.

### What are the objectives of [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME]?

The direct objectives of the programme are to:

- Facilitate **peer learning** between women entrepreneurs.
- Foster **networking** between the women entrepreneurs and the business community.
- Create an **enabling environment** for participants to **take action** on their objectives.

The overall objective of the programme is to support women entrepreneurs to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and to grow their business over time.

### What are the values of [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME]?

We want to establish a core set of values with everyone involved in [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME]. Our values are that participants:

- **Remain open and willing** to share their stories, both the struggles and triumphs of being an entrepreneur.
- **Support each other** by encouraging ambitious goal setting and continual progress and learning.
- **Hold each other accountable** to the sessions and personal objectives.
- **Commit to creating a safe space** for each other and information is shared in confidence.
- **Practise radical generosity** with one another during this process of growth.

### What is the role of the resource person?

As a [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] resource person, your expertise has been identified as a priority area by our cohort of [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] entrepreneurs. You will be invited to attend one of the technical sessions of the programme and present on a preselected topic for 20 minutes and then answer questions for around 45–60 minutes.

### What topics are covered during [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] sessions?

Sessions are tailored to the topics and business objectives of the women entrepreneurs, which are identified in the first session of the programme. Examples of topics include:

- Business basics: outsourcing, finance and accounting, sales, talent management, marketing, managing inventory and negotiations;

- Technology: social media management, technology tools and tools for efficiency; and
- Managing stress and staying positive: managing stress, tips and tools for self-care when you are a “one-woman” show, time management and managing family business priorities.

## What does [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] expect from the resource person?

The women entrepreneurs of the [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] are dedicated to their cohort and hold each other accountable; therefore, the resource person will also be held to the same standards:

- arrive on time and prepared to meetings;
- communicate any complications or delays in making the set meeting time;
- use respectful and gender-sensitive language;
- encourage discussions and challenge ideas; and
- share knowledge, know-how and useful resources generously.

## How should [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME]’s resource persons prepare?

You are asked to share your practical know-how on the topic at hand. Think about what you would share with an entrepreneur aiming to grow their business and wanting to know how to take concrete steps in the area you are speaking about.

Share practical tips and advice for small business-owners working to grow their business. If you can share lived experiences (stories) that you (or others whom you know or have worked with) have had can be valuable.

PowerPoint presentations are welcome, as are other resources, tools and contacts.

## Where are the [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] sessions held?

Due to COVID-19, all [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] sessions are currently held online. As a resource person, you will be provided with a Zoom meeting connection through calendar invitation, to be shared at least two weeks ahead of the meeting.

## What about materials for the session?

It would be preferred to provide a visual document, including a PowerPoint file, that can be shown during the presentation. Links to other resources can be shared on the day or prior to the meeting.

## Who should you contact for any further questions or in case of emergency?

Please contact the Project Coordinator at [INSERT NAME AND TELEPHONE NUMBER OF CONTACT PERSON].

## What to expect after the session?

The [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] programme does a session evaluation to gather feedback from participants. This can be shared if requested.

Thank you again for your willingness to support women entrepreneurs. We are grateful for our collaboration and look forward to the technical session that you will deliver shortly.

Please do not hesitate to contact [INSERT NAME OF CONTACT PERSON] for any further questions or if you would like to discuss the session further.

## ► Appendix 8. Technical session sample agenda

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Technical sessions should balance information sharing and discussion.

### **Indicative agenda for a technical session (90 minutes)**

#### **1. Opening, welcome and introductions by facilitator (10 minutes)**

- a. Have each participant introduce themselves and their company briefly.
- b. Introduce the technical resource person or team or invite them to introduce themselves.

#### **2. Presentation (20 minutes)**

- a. Technical resource person or team presents information on the technical topic using some visual supports, like a PowerPoint (which can be shared afterwards).
- b. Encourage participants to note questions that come up for them during the presentation.

#### **3. Questions, answers, discussion (55 minutes)**

- a. Facilitate a Q&A or discussion between participants and the technical resource person or team.

#### **4. Closing (5 minutes)**

- a. Thank the technical resource person or team.
- b. Remind participants to answer the post-session evaluation.
- c. Make next meeting announcements (as applicable).

## ► Appendix 9. Draft terms of reference for the Advisory Committee

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### Purpose

The purpose of the [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] Advisory Committee is to advise on the strategic direction of this women's entrepreneurship peer support programme. The main responsibilities of advisors are to:

- Attend meetings to provide strategic input into the programme's implementation, which could include identification of new partners, refer guest resource persons, etc.
- Assist with the recruitment of participants through business and personal networks.
- Participate in the interview process, based on criteria.

### Membership

The [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] Advisory Committee will consist of four to six business professionals, women and men, from various backgrounds. All members are committed to supporting women entrepreneurs and contributing to the success of the programme. As necessary, new members can be associated to the Advisory Committee by submitting candidates' names to the host organization after consultation and endorsement from the existing Advisory Committee members.

The composition of the Advisory Committee will be as follows (can be determined by implementing partner):

- At least one board member of the host organization.
- Two programme facilitators.
- Two to three external advisors from the business community.

### Accountability

When the Advisory Committee forms, each member commits to actively contribute to the success of the programme. Members can be identified according to their complementary competencies or capacities. Efforts should be made to ensure gender parity. For example, if there are five members, three out of five should be women.

Advisory members commit to uphold ethical standards in their interactions with respect to the [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] Programme, including respectful treatment and freedom from discrimination and violence and harassment. Advisory members also commit to respect the unique content of the programme and will not engage to copy or duplicate this programme elsewhere.

### Review

The terms of reference will be reviewed once a year, prior to the commencement of recruitment (September–December).

### Meetings

There will be a minimum of three meetings throughout the year, organized by the host organization and either in-person or online, according to the context.

The topics for the meetings will vary depending on the time of year. The facilitator will organize specific questions for each meeting. Meeting frequency and dates will be determined by the members and based on the needs of the programme. An indicative example overview calendar of commitments would be:

- ▶ September – Developing recruitment strategy; developing list of experts.
- ▶ December – Conducting interviews and selection of participants.
- ▶ July–September – Review of feedback and visioning for the next year.

The facilitator will organize the content and facilitate the meeting. The host organization will take responsibility for the logistics of the meeting and the meeting notes:

- ▶ Meeting agenda – circulated one week before meeting.
- ▶ Meeting minutes – circulated within one week after the meeting.

External speakers may be invited to attend a session if need be.

## Sharing of information

The [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] Advisory Committee will share documents through a Google Drive folder or any other agreed means. This file will be created, managed and facilitated by the host organization. Communication will be through a relevant channel, such as WhatsApp, Line, etc. for consistency. The information shared is for use for programme purposes only, unless otherwise agreed.

Advisory Committee members will serve for one year and their mandate can be renewed.

\*The terms of reference could be signed by the implementing partner and the Advisory Committee members.

## ► Appendix 10. Template – recruitment email to potential participants

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### Launch of the new [INSERT NAME] Programme on [INSERT DATE]

In its continued efforts to advance women's entrepreneurship, [INSERT NAME] is excited to launch a NEW initiative in support of women entrepreneurs, called [INSERT PROGRAMME NAME] together with [INSERT PARTNER NAME].

As a participant of this new initiative, you will:

1. Join a select group of dynamic women entrepreneurs (10–12) for a monthly, peer-to-peer group dedicated to women entrepreneurs.
2. Access networking and a platform of supports to advance your growth objectives.
3. Receive expert advice from businesspersons on topics that respond to your needs.

As a participant, you will take part in [INSERT NUMBER OF SESSIONS] sessions over five months, starting [INSERT MONTH AND YEAR]. Each session will focus on a different area of expertise: for example, marketing, using social media, finance and personal and business growth.

[INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION] is looking for: women entrepreneurs [INSERT PROGRAMME APPLICATION CRITERIA] and who are ready to make a commitment to growing their business and support other dynamic women entrepreneurs through a new and exciting program tailored to women entrepreneurs.

Are you a woman business-owner? Are you looking for support to take your business to the next level? Are you ready to invest in yourself?

If you fit the above criteria, see the complete programme details [INSERT LINK TO PROGRAMME].

To apply, submit your application to [INSERT LINK TO REGISTER] here. Shortlisted women entrepreneurs will be contacted by [INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION] about next steps (see programme details).

We look forward to welcoming you to the next cohort of the [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME]!



## ► Appendix 11. Template – launch dissemination email to partner organizations

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### **[INSERT NAME OF PARTNERS] launches a new initiative to support women entrepreneurs**

In its continued effort to advance women's entrepreneurship, [INSERT NAME OF PARTNERS] is pleased to launch a new initiative in support of women entrepreneurs – [INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME].

[INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME] has been created to support women entrepreneurs to advance their business objectives. This five-month programme, delivered in partnership with [INSERT NAME OF PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS], will provide women entrepreneurs with networking, peer learning and technical sessions by experts from the business community.

Are you a woman business-owner? Are you looking for support to take your business to the next level? Take part in this exciting new programme tailored to women entrepreneurs.

For more information about the programme: [INSERT LINK TO PROGRAMME WEBSITE].

We look forward to welcoming you on this journey!

Make sure to share this with your friends and women entrepreneurs in your network!

Best regards,

[NAME OF HEAD OF PARTNER ORGANIZATION]

## ► Appendix 12. Template – sample announcement poster

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### Option 1

We've launched a NEW initiative called [\[INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME\]](#).

As a participant of this new initiative, you will join a five-month support programme, with monthly peer-to-peer group sessions dedicated to women entrepreneurs. You will access networking and a platform of support to advance your objectives. You will receive expert advice from professionals in the business community.

This NEW initiative is promoted in partnership with [\[INSERT OTHER PARTNERS\]](#).

[\[INSERT PROGRAMME NAME\]](#) will begin on [\[INSERT DATE\]](#).

If you'd like to find out more, please sign up at [\[INSERT WEB LINK TO SIGNUP FORM\]](#) or contact us at: [\[INSERT RELEVANT EMAIL AND/OR TELEPHONE NUMBER\]](#).

We look forward to welcoming you!

### Option 2

We're pleased to offer [\[INSERT NAME OF PROGRAMME\]](#).

As a participant of this initiative, you will join a monthly peer-to-peer group, which is dedicated to women entrepreneurs. You will access networking opportunities and a platform to advance your business objectives. Through technical sessions, you will also receive expert advice on issues you are finding challenging.

This NEW initiative is done in partnership with [\[INSERT PARTNER NAMES\]](#).

If you are interested in finding out more, please sign up at [\[INSERT WEB LINK TO SIGNUP FORM\]](#) or contact us at: [\[INSERT RELEVANT EMAIL AND/OR TELEPHONE NUMBER\]](#).

## ► Appendix 13. Template – record of goals and progress

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Goals for the month of:

My objectives for this month (what results I want to achieve):

Is there anything I want to ask of the group  
(support, advice, etc.)?

Is there anything the group wants to ask/share  
back?

What did I achieve this month? What were my successes?

What were my main lessons learned?

Any great surprises?

## Facilitating peer and technical support programmes to women entrepreneurs: A manual

The International Labour Organization (ILO) developed this manual with contributions from Space Bangkok for the Rebuilding Better: Fostering Business Resilience Post-COVID-19 project, supported by J.P. Morgan. The manual offers to inform the delivery of peer and technical support programmes to support women entrepreneurs impacted by COVID-19 in Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines targeted by the Rebuilding Better project. The manual further provides guidance to other ILO technical cooperation projects and partner organizations on how to set up and deliver programmes for women entrepreneurs to facilitate peer learning, foster networking within the business community and enhance women entrepreneurs' access to support services.

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