

UNLOCKING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC POTENTIAL IN SRI LANKA: BARRIERS AND POLICY PATHWAYS

3 JUNE 2026

09:00 AM - 12:05 PM

11:30 AM - 02:35 PM

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COLOMBO TIME

MANILA TIME

ZOOM REGISTRATION

The Serendipity Knowledge Program (SKOP) is ADB's flagship knowledge platform for Sri Lanka. Since its launch in 2021, SKOP has continuously identified knowledge solutions for Sri Lanka's development challenges through discussions between Sri Lankan stakeholders and global thought-leaders and experts. Serendib is one of Sri Lanka's ancient names and serendipity refers to a fortunate finding, which is a common occurrence throughout the history of product invention and scientific discovery.

ABOUT THE EVENT

Women's labor force participation is one of the development challenges faced by Sri Lanka that constrains the country's optimal utilization of its labor and human capital. Nearly one-third of women are out of the labor force despite their high access to education, which limits the country's potential for economic growth and inclusive development. Sri Lanka is seeking to overcome economic challenges and foster sustainable development through inclusive labor market and human development policies. Understanding the barriers to female labor force participation and solutions to overcome them is therefore crucial to ensure the policies and investments are gender-transformative and boost women's participation in the workforce.

ADB recently commissioned a study on Exploring the Factors Behind Low Female Labor Force Participation in Sri Lanka. The study has revealed that women's labor force participation is shaped by a complexity of factors related to care work, gender and social norms, gender-responsive policies, and others. The study also offers recommendations and future policy directions to address the existing gaps in female labor force participation.

Building on the study, ADB will conduct a knowledge event under its Serendipity Knowledge Program for Sri Lanka on 3 June 2026, as a first step in its knowledge support to promote women's labor force participation. The SKOP event will provide a forum to discuss the opportunities for promoting women's economic participation in Sri Lanka, bringing together a wide range of stakeholders including the government, industry, international experts, the academia, development partners, and others. The event will be an opportunity to explore collaborations and opportunities for tangible actions as well as further knowledge exchange, and priorities for addressing gaps in women's labor force participation. ADB expects high-level participation from all critical sectors of the government to inform the dialog and to identify further steps to transform Sri Lanka's economy through gender-responsive approaches.

The event's objectives are to share the outcomes of the ADB supported recent study focusing on women's labor force participation in Sri Lanka, initiate a dialogue among stakeholders to promote women's labor force participation in the country, and to generate recommendations and gather insights to inform the gender transformative agenda in Sri Lanka to support inclusive economic development.



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**SAVITHRI
RODRIGO**

MC



ZOOM REGISTRATION

UNLOCKING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC POTENTIAL IN SRI LANKA: BARRIERS AND POLICY PATHWAYS

Program MC: Ms. Savithri Rodrigo

09:30 - 09:35 AM **Welcome Address**
Ms. Shannon Cowlin
Country Director for Sri Lanka,
ADB

09:35 - 09:55 AM **Keynote Address**
Prof. Ito Peng
Professor of Sociology and Public Policy, University of Toronto

09:55 - 10:25 AM Findings of the study Exploring the Factors
Behind Low Female Labor Force Participation in Sri Lanka
Prof. Dileni Gunawardena
Professor of Economics, University of Peradeniya

10:25 - 10:35 AM **Question & Answer Session**

10:35 - 11:35 AM **Panel Discussion -**
Enabling Women's Labor Force Participation in Sri Lanka

Facilitator:

Ms. Ketevan Chkheidze
Gender Specialist, Gender Equality Division, ADB

Speakers:

Mr. Anoop Satpathy
Wage Specialist for South Asia, ILO

Dr. Ramani Gunatilaka
Independent Consultant

Ms. Rupika Ranawaka
Commissioner of Labour, Labour Standards Division, Department of Labour

Ms. Thanuja Jayawardene
Head of Gender Equity, DEI and Code of Conduct, MAS Holdings

Ms. Upulka Samarakoon
Vice President, Human Resources, John Keells Holdings PLC

11:35 - 11:50 AM **Question & Answer Session**

11:50 - 11:55 AM **Feedback Survey**

11:55 - 12:00 NOON **Closing Remarks on behalf of ADB**
Ms. Keiko Nowacka
Director, Gender Equality Division,
ADB

12:00 - 12:05 PM **Closing Remarks on behalf of Government**
Government Representative (tbc)