From Trade Reform to Export Growth: Enabling Sri Lankan Firms to Compete Globally

26 November 2026, 9:30am-12:00pm (Colombo), 12:00 pm-2:30pm (Manila)

Sangam 3 Ballroom, ITC Ratnadipa, Colombo

Concept Note and Agenda

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.

A. Background to the event

Expanding exports is critical to Sri Lanka's transition from economic recovery toward sustained, private-sector-led growth. While trade agreements can create new market opportunities, translating these into actual exports requires firms to produce competitively, access imported inputs, meet international standards, and establish relationships with overseas buyers. These capabilities are particularly important for integrating domestic enterprises, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), into regional and global value chains. At the same time, evolving trade agreements and new environmental, labor, and supply-chain requirements in major export markets are reshaping international competition, creating both opportunities and risks for Sri Lankan exporters.

Sri Lanka's export base remains concentrated in a relatively narrow range of products and markets, while longstanding trade policy and structural constraints have limited diversification and international competitiveness. Tariffs and para-tariffs have historically encouraged production for the protected domestic market while increasing costs for firms reliant on imported inputs. Constraints in productivity, skills, access to finance, market information, and firm capabilities further limit businesses' ability to enter new markets and compete internationally. Addressing these challenges requires not only improving market access but also creating an enabling environment that encourages firms to become more export oriented.

The government is pursuing reforms to strengthen export competitiveness and deepen Sri Lanka's integration into international markets. These include implementation of the National Tariff Policy, the National Export Development Plan 2026–2030, and efforts to expand market access through existing and prospective trade agreements, including potential accession to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Moving toward more comprehensive trade agreements covering services, investment, and other trade-related areas also presents opportunities for deeper economic integration. However, realizing these benefits requires effective institutional arrangements, coordinated implementation of reforms, and stronger support for firms to capitalize on emerging opportunities. ADB is supporting the government's broader trade and competitiveness agenda through its Trade, Investment, and Industry Development Program, which includes measures to strengthen the business environment and promote international competitiveness.

Against this background, the proposed SKOP event will bring together government representatives, the private sector, policy researchers, and international experts to examine how Sri Lanka can translate trade reforms and market opportunities into sustained export growth. The discussion will explore how Sri Lanka can respond to changing international trade conditions while managing its transition toward a more export-oriented economy, including the policy reforms and adjustment measures needed to strengthen firm competitiveness. The knowledge event is supported through Technical Assistance SRI: Knowledge and Innovation for Transformative Economic Solutions.

B. Objective

The objectives of the proposed knowledge event are threefold:

1) Examine the key constraints preventing Sri Lankan firms from translating market-access opportunities into export growth, including structural barriers, firm capabilities, and domestic competitiveness challenges.
2) Discuss how ongoing trade policy and institutional reforms, including tariff rationalization, comprehensive trade agreements, and export-development initiatives, can support Sri Lanka's transition toward a more competitive, export-oriented economy.
3) Draw lessons from regional and international experiences in responding to changing trade requirements, strengthening export competitiveness, and managing adjustment to trade liberalization to identify practical priorities for Sri Lanka.

C. Target group

- Government agencies
- Private sector
- Development partners
- Civil society
- Think-tanks
- Academia

D. Agenda

Time	Item
09:30 -10:00 am	Registration
10.00 -10:05 am	Welcome Address **Ms. Shannon Cowlin**, Country Director for Sri Lanka, ADB
10:05 -10:30 am	Keynote Address **Ms. Jodie Keane,** Principal Research Fellow, ODI Global
10.25 -10.35 am	Q&A Session
10.30 -11.50 am	Panel Discussion - Making Market Access Work: Trade Policy, Firm Competitiveness, and Lessons from Asia Facilitator: **Mr. Dinuk de Silva,** ADB Panelists: **Mr. Shiran Fernando,** Secretary General and Chief Executive Officer, The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce **Mr. K. A. Vimalenthirarajah**, Secretary, Ministry of Trade, Commerce, Food Security and Co-operative Development **Ms. Subhashini Abeysinghe,** Senior Research Director, Verite Research **Mr. Ravi Jayawardena,** Group CEO, Maliban Biscuits Manufactories (Pvt) Ltd **Ms. Jodie Keane,** Principal Research Fellow. ODI Global Q&A to follow
11:50 -11:55 am	Closing Remarks on behalf of ADB **Ms. Cigdem Akin**, Director, Public Sector Management and Governance Sector Office, Sectors Department 3, ADB
11:55 -12:00 pm	Closing Remarks on behalf of Government **Mr. Samantha Bandara**, Director General, Department of External Resources, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
12.00 -1.00 pm	Lunch