

World Bank Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi)

Corporate Connect: Creating Market Opportunities for Women, Small and Medium Enterprises in Bangladesh

About the Women Entrepreneurs' Finance Initiative

The World Bank is an implementing entity of the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative ([We-Fi](#)). We-Fi is a groundbreaking partnership to support women-led/owned businesses in developing countries. We-Fi's partners include 14 donor governments, six multilateral development banks as implementing partners, and numerous other stakeholders in the public and private sectors around the world.

Since 2017, We-Fi has allocated \$354 million to programs, one of which is *Corporate Connect: Creating Market Opportunities for Women Small and Medium Enterprises in Bangladesh*. We-Fi programs have so far benefitted over 50,000 WSMEs with financial and non-financial support.

World Bank We-Fi programs aim to develop innovative approaches to empowering female entrepreneurs to promote business growth and competitiveness. The program focuses on support to governments, business associations and public-sector players and other development partners to help open markets, promote financial technology and innovation and strengthen ecosystems for women-owned businesses.

About Corporate Connect: Creating Market Opportunities for Women Small and Medium Enterprises in Bangladesh

Overview:

The World Bank We-Fi team is implementing the Bangladesh *Corporate Connect Program* jointly with local and international partners, including the Bangladesh Ministry of Commerce, SME Foundation, North-South University, and consulting firms Innovision and Breakbite.

Project activities include a comprehensive WSME training program, networking events, informing and actively engaging larger corporations and financial institutions to stimulate sourcing from Bangladeshi WSMEs, maintaining a WSME online procurement platform, and supporting related business regulatory reforms to create sustainable market linkages between women-owned businesses and local and multinational corporations in Bangladesh. The project also provides e-commerce support and hands-on advice and guidance to WSME program graduates via a dedicated business support center.

Project Components:

a) Capacity Building of WSMEs

This component delivers an in-depth training program to more than 600 WSMEs (229 completed in the initial year) to increase their capacity to become suppliers to larger firms. Component activities further include a "business pitch" training and participation in a pitch competition for high-performing WSMEs; graduation events; conferences, and a suite of interventions to build demand from corporations and financial institutions.

b) Ecosystem awareness-raising, promotion, and population of the Supplier Database for WSMEs

This component aims to broaden and deepen engagement and partnerships among stakeholders such as corporations, financial institutions, and women's business associations and chambers to

raise the profile of supplier diversity efforts in the country. Activities include providing support to populate, promote, and ensure quality control of the online supplier platform, delivering a series of events to render the platform vibrant through supporting face-to-face linkage activities and sign-ups, and organizing a large supplier diversity conference.

c) **E-Commerce Platform**

This activity will strengthen the recently launched e-commerce marketplace WEHATBAZAR, a site designed specifically for Bangladeshi WSMEs. Doing so is expected to address the challenges faced by WSMEs, such as limited access to financing, marketing, and e-commerce infrastructure, and it will also support women entrepreneurs in making their products export-ready and showcase and sell their products on a global platform. Activities include website and mobile app development; product development, business and marketing assistance for WSMEs; as well as export readiness and market linkage support for WSMEs.

d) **Women Entrepreneurs Business Support Center**

This activity establishes and operates a hands-on help center to provide support and technical assistance to WSME graduates of the training program delivered under the project. The business support center will work with WSMEs, upon request and as needed, to incorporate key training concepts into day-to-day business and provide additional resources, including in e-commerce. The center also holds seminars and workshops on relevant topics of interest to WSMEs as they ramp up to become better equipped to market and sell to corporations.