



ANNUAL REPORT

2025/2026

**Implementation of the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Code
(WE Finance Code) in Sri Lanka**



**Department of Development Finance
Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
The Secretariat
Colombo 01
Sri Lanka.**

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A. Executive Summary

The Women Entrepreneurs Finance Code (WE Finance Code) marks a transformative step in Sri Lanka's efforts to advance gender-inclusive finance and unlock the economic potential of women-owned and women-led micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (WMSMEs). Launched nationally in March 2025 under the auspices of the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development with technical assistance from the Asian Development Bank, Sri Lanka is the first country in South Asia to adopt this global initiative, demonstrating strong leadership in aligning international best practices with national development priorities.

Anchored within Sri Lanka's broader policy framework – including the National Financial Inclusion Strategy and the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment – the Code supports the country's economic recovery and long-term growth by positioning women entrepreneurs as critical drivers of productivity, resilience, and inclusive development.

The implementation of the WE Finance Code is guided by four strategic priorities – **expanding access to finance for WMSMEs, strengthening data-driven policymaking, enhancing non-financial support, and fostering an enabling ecosystem**. A robust governance structure comprising a Steering Committee, Working Committee, and thematic Working Groups, has been established to ensure coordinated action across government, financial institutions, and development partners.

Key achievements in the inaugural year reflect strong early momentum. A landmark milestone was the introduction of Sri Lanka's first unified national definition for WMSMEs, enabling consistency in identification, data collection, and reporting across institutions. This has laid the foundation for more precise market segmentation and targeted interventions.

The **formal launch of the Code** mobilized high-level policy commitment and brought together key stakeholders, while **13 leading financial institutions**, comprising both state and private banks, joined as initial signatories – collectively committing to advance gender-inclusive finance

through leadership, data, and action. These institutions have pledged to strengthen internal governance, enhance gender-disaggregated data systems, and design tailored financial products and services for women entrepreneurs.

A structured framework for collecting and reporting gender-disaggregated MSME financial data has been established, supported by standardized indicators and guidance issued by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka as the National Data Aggregator. This represents a critical step toward improving transparency, enabling evidence-based policymaking, and fostering more responsive financial solutions for WMSMEs.

Complementing policy and institutional advances, the report highlights **real-world impact through women entrepreneur success stories**, demonstrating how access to finance, technology, and markets can enable business expansion, export growth, job creation, and inclusive community development across sectors.

At the same time, the first year of implementation has generated important **lessons and priorities for the future**. These include strengthening data quality and consistency, improving insights into unmet demand for finance, integrating informal enterprises into formal data systems, expanding analysis beyond credit products, and incorporating non-financial indicators. Expanding participation beyond the initial signatories to include a wider range of financial institutions is also essential to deepen impact and scale.

Looking ahead, the WE Finance Code provides a powerful platform to catalyze systemic change. By combining strong public sector leadership, private sector engagement, and data-driven accountability, the initiative aims to build a more inclusive financial ecosystem where women entrepreneurs can thrive. Sustained collaboration across stakeholders will be critical to translating early progress into long-term, measurable outcomes that advance gender equality and drive inclusive economic growth in Sri Lanka.

Foreword by the Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Sri Lanka



The 2024 Department of Census and Statistics Labour Force Survey highlights the growing contribution and untapped potential of women in the economy of Sri Lanka. Women currently represent 34% of the economically active population, demonstrating a strong foundation for further inclusive economic growth. By creating greater opportunities for women's participation in economic activities, Sri Lanka can drive higher levels of innovation, productivity, and sustainable development. Strengthening women's economic empowerment will contribute to building more resilient, inclusive, and prosperous communities across the country.

Women in Sri Lanka continue to make meaningful contributions across a wide range of sectors, demonstrating resilience, innovation, and entrepreneurial potential. Strengthening access to finance, markets, skilled labour, and modern technology will further enhance their economic participation and create greater opportunities for women to thrive in both business and professional spheres. Continued efforts to foster supportive social and economic environments, including measures that help women effectively balance domestic and professional responsibilities, will further contribute even more significantly to national development.

Recognizing the importance of increasing women's participation in the economy, the Government of Sri Lanka introduced the

Women Entrepreneurs Finance Code (WE Finance Code) to support women-led Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (WMSMEs). This landmark initiative reflects the country's strong commitment to inclusive and sustainable economic growth. As a globally recognized framework, the Code brings together financial institutions, regulators, development partners, and ecosystem stakeholders to strengthen access to finance for women entrepreneurs. Empowering WMSMEs through this initiative is expected to stimulate business growth, create employment opportunities, and contribute meaningfully to the country's economic development.

An important milestone in this journey was achieved in August 2024, when Sri Lanka established a national definition for women-owned and women-led businesses. This achievement provides a strong foundation for more consistent data collection and reporting, enabling evidence-based policymaking and the development of more targeted financial solutions for WMSMEs. Building on this progress, the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, together with the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, the Asian Development Bank, and 13 licensed banks as Code Signatories, officially launched the WE Finance Code in March 2025, positioning Sri Lanka as the first country in South Asia to implement this forward-looking initiative.

It is in this backdrop, Sri Lanka presents the first Annual Report of the WE Finance Code for 2025/2026. The report highlights gender-disaggregated financial data provided by the Code Signatories and reflects the country's steady progress in advancing women's financial inclusion. Future editions of the report are expected to provide an even more comprehensive perspective through the inclusion of data from both financial and non-financial sectors, further reinforcing Sri Lanka's commitment to inclusive, resilient, and sustainable economic growth.

Dr. Harshana Suriyapperuma

Secretary

Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development

Foreword by the Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka



It is with great pleasure that I acknowledge the Annual Publication of the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Code (WE Finance Code) initiative in Sri Lanka. This publication stands as a testament to our collective commitment to advancing inclusive, equitable, and sustainable economic growth by empowering women entrepreneurs, who remain an essential yet often underserved pillar of our national economy.

In recent years, Sri Lanka has made notable progress in strengthening the financial inclusion landscape. However, persistent gender gaps in financial services usage, and entrepreneurial opportunities continue to underscore the need for focused and data-driven interventions. The WE Finance Code represents a transformative step in addressing these disparities by fostering greater transparency, accountability, and responsiveness within the financial sector towards women-led Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (WMSMEs).

As the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, we are deeply cognizant of our dual responsibility not only as the apex monetary authority but also as the steward of financial system stability, integrity, and inclusiveness. In this regard, the Central Bank has assumed a pivotal role as the National Data Aggregator under the WE Finance Code initiative. This responsibility is instrumental in generating reliable, gender-disaggregated financial data from formal financial institutions

that enables evidence-based policymaking and supports the design of tailored financial products that meet the unique needs of women entrepreneurs. This, in turn, allows us to cultivate a more inclusive financial ecosystem where women entrepreneurs are not merely participants but drivers of economic resilience and growth.

Importantly, the WE Finance Code initiative is firmly anchored within the broader strategic vision of the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS), led by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka. The NFIS serves as a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder framework aimed at expanding access to and usage of quality financial services across all segments of society, with a particular emphasis on vulnerable and underserved groups, including women.

The WE Finance Code's progress is fundamentally driven by strong partnerships, and I acknowledge the committed contributions of participating financial institutions, development partners, and all stakeholders advancing women's financial inclusion.

Beyond recording progress, this publication is a call to action, especially as Sri Lanka's economic recovery demands women's entrepreneurship be advanced as both an equity imperative and a strategic priority to unlock MSME potential, drive inclusive growth, and strengthen resilience.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka remains steadfast in promoting this agenda, and I trust this report will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, financial institutions, and partners while inspiring continued collaboration to advance women's economic empowerment nationwide.

Dr. P. Nandalal Weerasinghe
Governor
Central Bank of Sri Lanka

B. Introduction

Sri Lanka: Prioritizing Gender Inclusive Development

Women's financial inclusion and economic participation are central to Sri Lanka's national development and recovery agenda, particularly in the wake of recent economic shocks that have disproportionately affected women. Sri Lanka's **National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2023–2032)**¹ explicitly identifies economic empowerment and productive employment as a core thematic area, recognizing that equitable access to financial resources, assets, and markets is essential for women to participate fully in the economy and to reduce structural poverty, especially among women-headed households. This policy framing aligns closely with **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** and **SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)**, which call for women's equal access to economic resources and financial services as a prerequisite for inclusive and sustainable growth. From a policy perspective, enhancing women's economic participation is therefore not a standalone social objective but a macro-critical catalyst to boost productivity, resilience, and long-term growth.

Within the financial sector, Sri Lanka's first-ever **National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) 2021–2024**², led by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, placed strong emphasis on MSME financing, financial literacy, and data as cross-cutting enablers, with women-led MSMEs (WMSMEs) recognized as a priority segment facing persistent access to finance gaps. Recent policy directions towards **NFIS 2.0** further highlight safeguarding the interests of WMSMEs through improved consumer protection, digital finance, and better gender-disaggregated data to inform policy design and monitoring.

The **Financial Literacy Roadmap 2024–2028**³, which is a core initiative of the NFIS, further focuses on improving financial knowledge, attitudes and behaviour, tax literacy and digital financial literacy through non-financial capacity building – particularly for vulnerable social groups, including WMSMEs. The roadmap also recognizes the importance of a cohesive approach with multi-stakeholder collaboration from different sectors including the public sector, financial sector, educational entities, and community organizations, to minimize fragmentation and duplication of efforts, establish uniformity and promote sustainability.

At the fiscal level, successive **National Budgets**, including the 2026 National Budget, have increased allocations for women's economic empowerment through microfinance, entrepreneurship support, skills development, and institutional strengthening of the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, signaling a growing recognition of women as economic actors rather than beneficiaries of welfare alone. Complementary investments in financial literacy, business development services, and multi-stakeholder initiatives – often implemented in partnership with development agencies and the private sector – underscore the importance of non-financial support and a collaborative ecosystem for WMSMEs to grow, formalize, and integrate into value chains.

Considered holistically, Sri Lanka's policy architecture increasingly reflects an integrated approach – expanding finance for WMSMEs, promoting financial and business capacity development, strengthening institutional data and coordination, and fostering an enabling environment where government, regulators, financial institutions, and development partners collectively advance women's financial inclusion and economic participation.

¹*National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Sri Lanka.* Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment, Sri Lanka.

²*National Financial Inclusion Strategy.* Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

³*Financial Literacy Roadmap of Sri Lanka.* Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

The WE Finance Code: Tailoring a Global Initiative to National Priorities

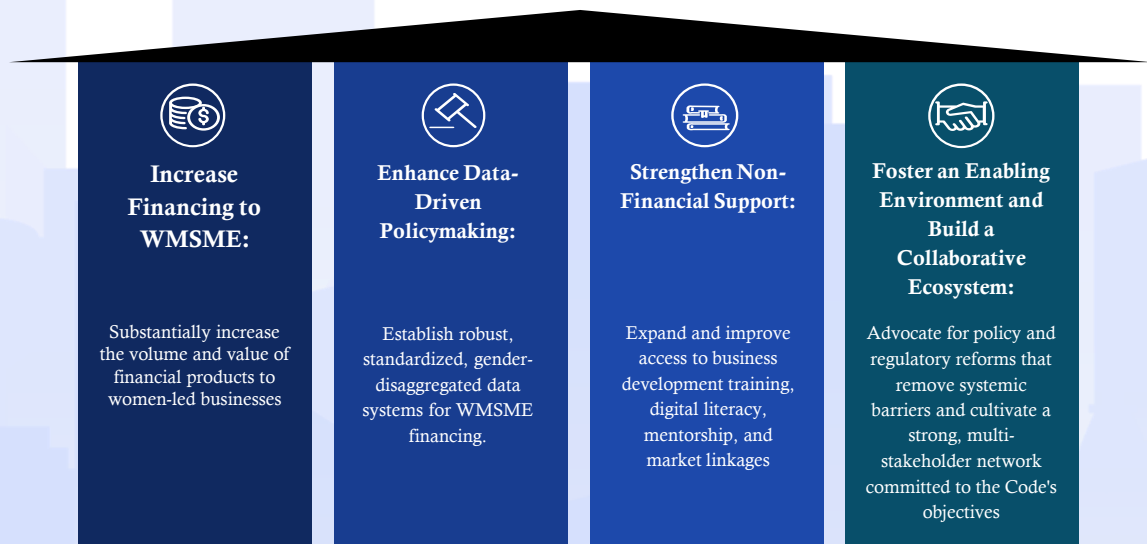
The Women Entrepreneurs Finance Code (the “WE Finance Code”) is a global commitment established under the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) to advance financial inclusion for WMSMEs worldwide. The Code seeks to improve access to finance for WMSMEs by addressing persistent financial and systemic constraints, strengthening evidence-based policymaking, and fostering enabling ecosystems in which women entrepreneurs can grow and thrive. Central to this approach is the generation and use of high-quality, consistent gender-disaggregated MSME data, alongside coordinated engagement among public and private stakeholders to analyze barriers and translate insights into practical, results-oriented actions.

Sri Lanka has emerged as a pioneer in adopting this global framework, becoming one of the first countries worldwide – and the first in South Asia – to sign up to the WE Finance Code. This commitment reflects Sri Lanka’s determination to elevate the economic participation of women entrepreneurs and integrate global best practices

into the national development agenda. The initiative is led by the Government of Sri Lanka, with joint leadership from the Department of Development Finance of the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, and with technical assistance from the Asian Development Bank.

The official launch of the WE Finance Code in Sri Lanka in March 2025 marked a significant milestone. Recognizing that meaningful impact depends on local ownership and relevance, Sri Lanka has prioritized the national operationalization of the Code in a manner that aligns closely with its broader policy objectives on women’s economic empowerment and the development of women-led businesses. Accordingly, Sri Lanka’s WE Finance Code has been tailored around four nationally defined priority areas: increasing access to finance for WMSMEs, strengthening data-driven policymaking, expanding non-financial support, and fostering a supportive and sustainable enabling environment. Through this contextualized approach, Sri Lanka seeks to translate a global initiative into tangible outcomes that respond to national needs and priorities.

The key pillars of progress for the WE Finance Code in Sri Lanka:



Operationalization, Sustainability and Impact: Nurturing a Collaborative Ecosystem

Sri Lanka has established a dynamic national coalition to ensure alignment with national

priorities, sustained stakeholder engagement, effective operationalization of key activities and monitoring of outcomes, and long-term impact. This coalition brings together key public sector institutions, financial sector actors, and private sector stakeholders committed to advancing financial inclusion for WMSMEs.

Sri Lanka's Code ecosystem:



National Code Champions

National level leader(s) passionate about driving women's financial inclusion, who will set the vision for Code, champion it and drive strategic direction

Mr. K.T.I. Premaratne
Director General,
Dept of National Planning
Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic
Development

Ms. S.D.N. Chamindani
Deputy Director, Dept. of Financial Inclusion
Central Bank of Sri Lanka



National Code Coordinator

Responsible for coordinating the Code rollout, convening the steering committee and ensuring progress is being monitored nationally and globally as per the requirements.

Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development



National Code Aggregator – financial data

Responsible for collecting and analysing financial data reported by the Code participants.

Central Bank of Sri Lanka

National Code Aggregator – non-financial data

Responsible for collecting and analysing non-financial data reported by the Code participants.

Dept. of Census and Statistics

Responsible for overall strategic direction, implementation and monitoring of the WE Finance Code in Sri Lanka

National Steering Committee

Responsible for overall strategic direction, implementation and monitoring of the WE Finance Code in Sri Lanka

- Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
- Ministry of Industry and Entrepreneurship Development
- Ministry of Women and Child Affairs
- Department of Census and Statistics
- Central Bank of Sri Lanka - Bank Supervision Dept
- Central Bank of Sri Lanka - Dept of Supervision of Non-Bank Financial Institutions
- Ceylon Chamber of Commerce
- Women's Chamber of Industry and Commerce
- ADB Sri Lanka Resident Mission

National Working Committee

Responsible for operational oversight and implementation of the National Action Plan

- National Enterprise Development Authority
- Industrial Development Board
- Export Development Board
- Small Enterprises Development Division
- National Credit Guarantee Institution
- Central Bank of Sri Lanka - Regional Development Dept
- Sri Lanka Bankers' Association
- Finance Houses Association
- NGO Secretariat

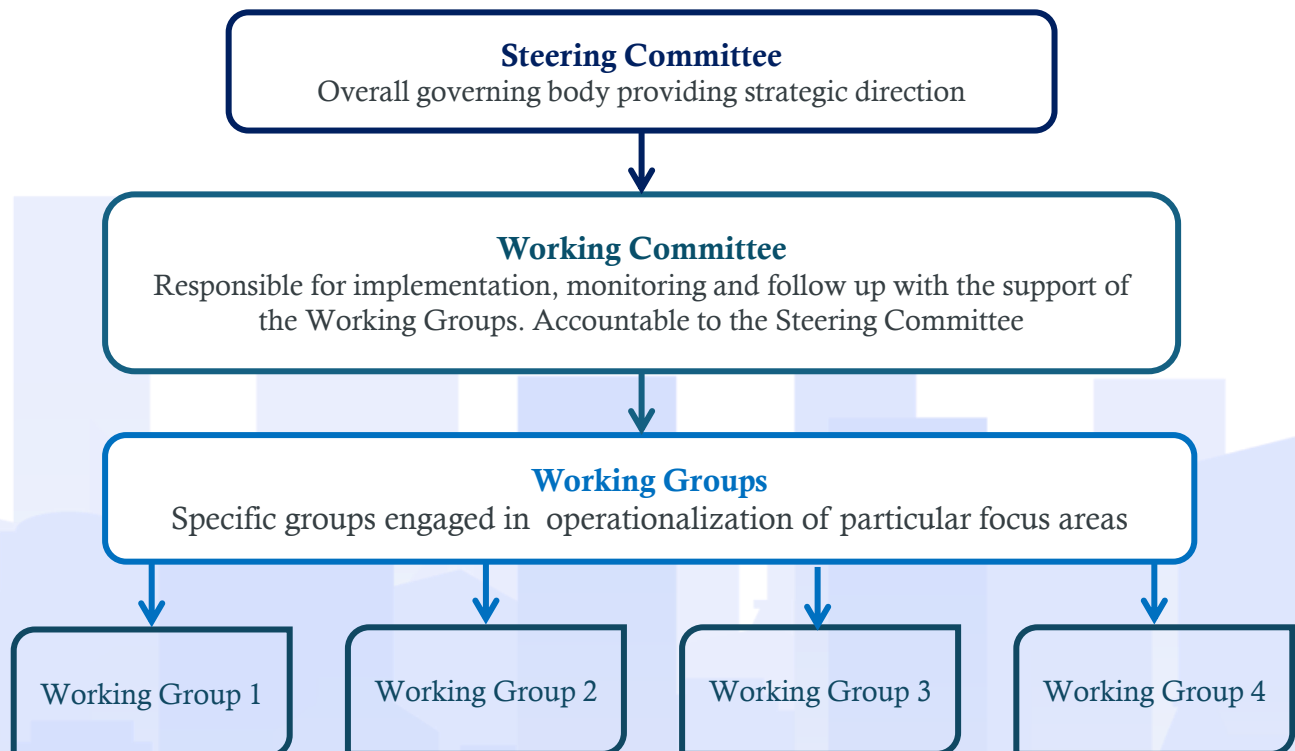
The implementation framework for the WE Finance Code in Sri Lanka is anchored in a tiered governance structure comprising a Steering Committee, a Working Committee, and thematic Working Groups. The Steering Committee provides overall strategic direction and oversight, guiding implementation through a National Action Plan for gender-inclusive financing. The Working Committee supports this mandate by overseeing operational progress and ensuring effective follow-up, while the Working Groups are responsible for operationalizing specific action items within their respective areas of focus.

The Steering Committee's responsibilities include providing strategic leadership and high-level advocacy for the Code, endorsing national priorities and goals, mobilizing resources, expanding the Code ecosystem and ensuring sound governance and accountability.

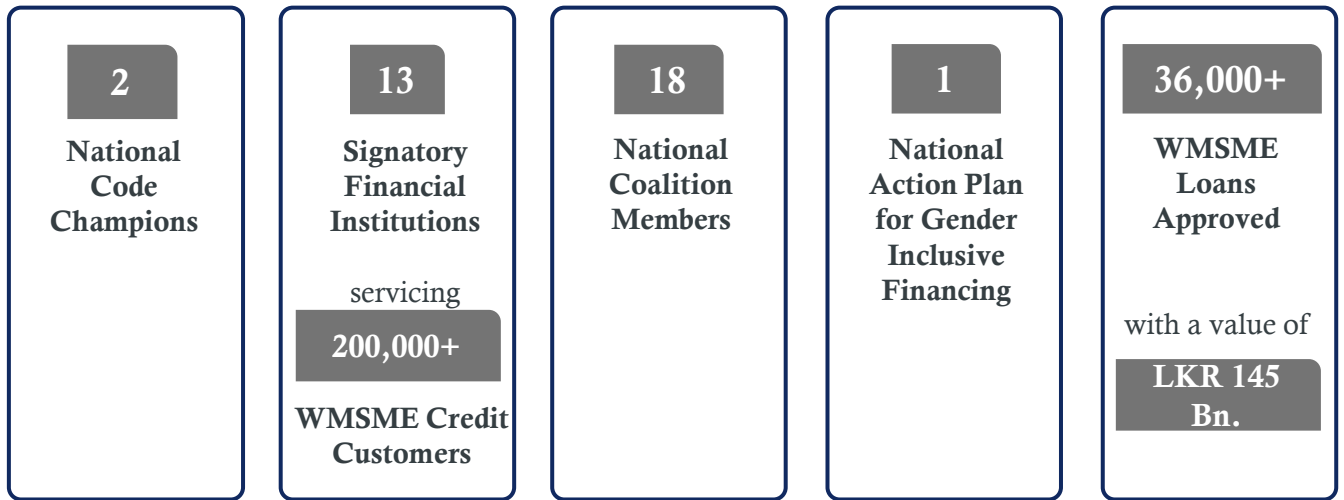
In support, the Working Committee ensures alignment between strategic objectives and on-the-ground implementation through regular monitoring, operational guidance, and course correction where required.

The composition of the Steering Committee and Working Committee was proposed in consultation with the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, ensuring balanced representation from the government, financial sector and the private sector. This inclusive governance model is designed to support a holistic, nationally grounded approach to Code operationalization, addressing WMSME development, gender empowerment, and both financial and non-financial inclusion of women entrepreneurs across Sri Lanka.

Overall structure for operationalization:



B. Year in Numbers



To date, 13 leading financial institutions in Sri Lanka have become signatories to the WE Finance Code. A key commitment under the Code is the tracking and reporting of gender-disaggregated financial data across selected indicators. The financial year 2025/2026 represents the inaugural reporting period for Code signatories in Sri Lanka, and some of the preliminary insights derived at this stage are outlined below.

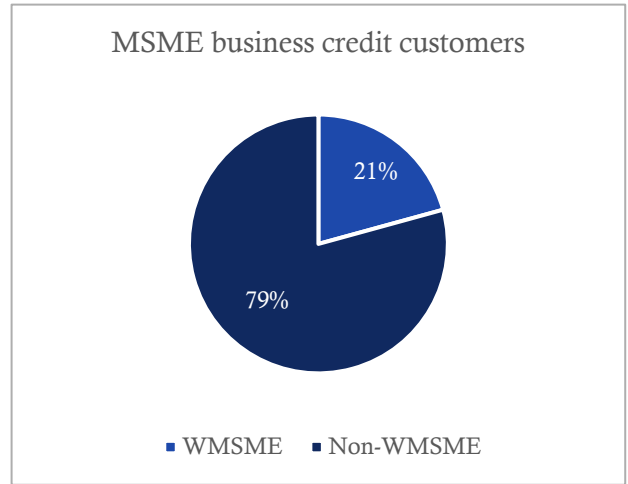
It is important to note that signatories are currently in the process of strengthening their internal systems and processes to support data collection and reporting. As these enhancements are completed, institutions are expected to improve their data readiness, enabling more comprehensive and detailed reporting and analysis in the forthcoming financial year.

No.	Financial Institution	Sector
Licensed Commercial Banks:		
1	Bank of Ceylon	State bank
2	Commercial Bank of Ceylon	Private bank
3	DFCC Bank	Private bank
4	Hatton National Bank	Private bank
5	National Development Bank	Private bank
6	Nations Trust Bank	Private bank
7	Pan Asia Bank	Private bank
8	People's Bank	State bank
9	Sampath Bank	Private bank
10	Seylan Bank	Private bank
11	Union Bank of Colombo	Private bank
Licensed Specialized Banks:		
12	Regional Development Bank	State bank
13	Sanasa Development Bank	Private bank

MSME Business Credit Customers

As at 2025/2026, the 13 signatories have serviced over 965,000 MSME business credit customers, from which 21% are women.

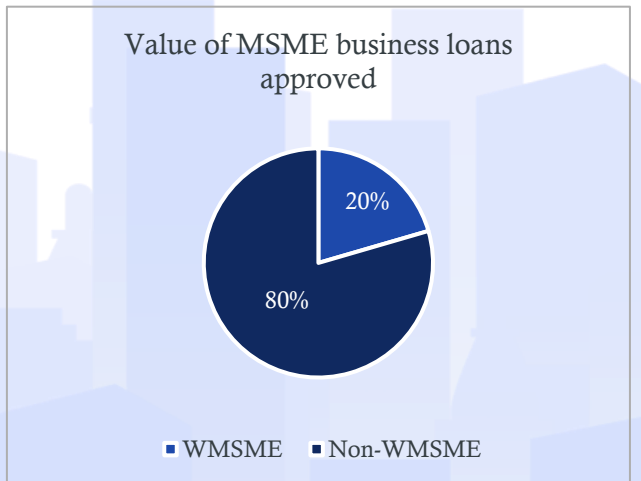
MSME credit customers	Number of credit customers	Percentage (%)	Number of signatories reporting
WMSME	200,272	21%	13
Non-WMSME	765,481	79%	13
Total	965,753	100%	



MSME Business Loan Approvals

Based on the data provided by 11 signatories, over 120,000 MSME business loans were approved for the period 2025/ 2026, from which 30% are for women. In terms of value, WMSMEs comprise 20% of the total value of loans approved.

MSME business loan approvals	Number of business loans approved	Value of business loans approved (LKR Mn)	Number of signatories reporting
WMSME	36,087	145,500.00	11
Non-WMSME	84,293	564,340.00	11
Total	120,380	709,840.00	

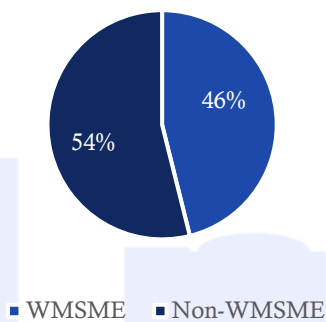


MSME Business Outstanding Loans

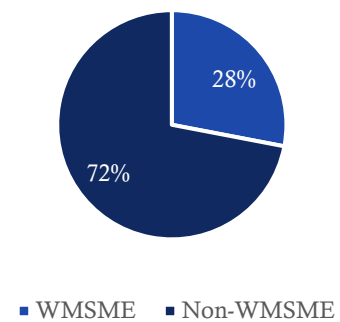
Based on the data provided by 12 signatories, nearly 1.7 Mn. MSME business loans were outstanding for the period 2025/ 2026, from which 46% are for women. In terms of value, WMSMEs comprise 28% of the total value of outstanding loans.

MSME business outstanding loans	Number of outstanding loans	Value of outstanding loans (LKR Mn)	Number of signatories reporting
WMSME	780,881	558,960.00	12
Non-WMSME	912,765	1,436,497.00	12
Total	1,693,646	1,995,457.00	

Number of MSME business outstanding loans



Value of MSME business outstanding loans

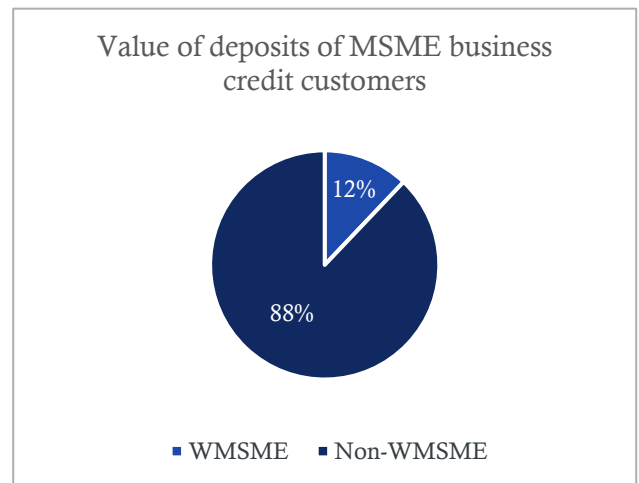
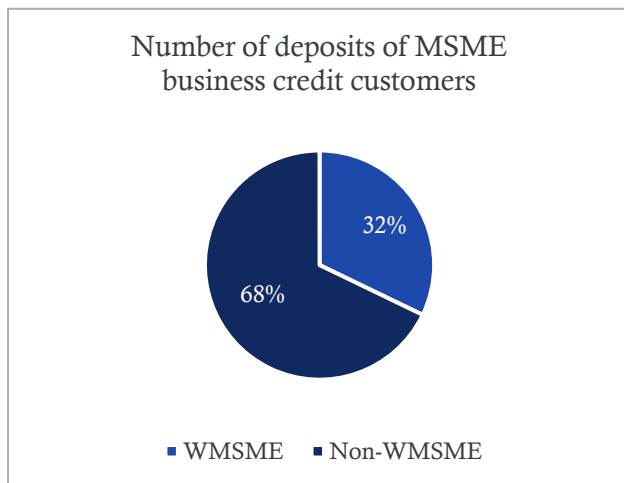


Deposits of MSME Business Credit Customers

Based on the data provided by 11 signatories, over 586,000 MSME business credit customers

currently hold deposit accounts with these institutions. Of these, 32% are women. With regards to value, however, WMSMEs comprise only 12% of the total value of business deposits held by MSME business credit customers.

Deposits of MSME business credit customers	Number of deposits	Value of deposits (LKR Mn)	Number of signatories reporting
WMSME	188,614	74,907.00	11
Non-WMSME	397,899	544,388.00	11
Total	586,513	619,295.00	



Based on the preliminary data received from signatories, it is observed that there is a need to enhance financial penetration to WMSMEs, both with regards to the demand (credit) side as well as the supply (deposit) side. It is further noted that the majority of WMSME customers of all signatories comprise the micro segment, as opposed to SMEs. This indicates that in addition to increasing the volume of WMSME customers served, it is also crucial to focus on increasing average ticket sizes and ensuring greater share of financing in monetary terms as well. Our insights further reveal that percentage of non-performing loans (NPLs) of all signatories are consistently lower among WMSMEs comparative to their male counterparts

which presents the ideal business case for promoting access to finance for WMSMEs as a core business strategy for financial institutions.

Since this is the first experience of collecting gender-disaggregated data for the WE Finance Code, the signatories are currently in the process of developing their data reporting systems with the objective of providing comprehensive data to the National Aggregator of financial data in the coming years.

D. Key Achievements

Consistency in Classification: Formulating a Unified National Definition for WMSMEs

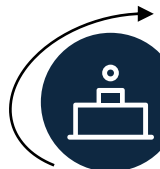
The first win in Sri Lanka's journey toward gender-inclusive finance under the We Finance Code was the development of the country's first-ever unified national definition for women-owned and women-led businesses (WMSMEs), finalized in August 2024. This achievement represents a critical step in operationalizing the Code by creating a shared framework for identifying and serving women entrepreneurs across the financial ecosystem.

While the importance of comprehensive gender-disaggregated data for evidence-based policy and decision-making is widely recognized, the adoption of a common classification standard for WMSMEs was a necessary first step to ensure consistency and comparability in data collection and reporting. Prior to this initiative, Sri Lanka had implemented several financial and non-financial interventions targeting women entrepreneurs. However, the absence of a unified definition meant that the identification of the target segment varied significantly across sectors and institutions, often depending on specific program objectives.

Importance of a national definition for WMSMEs:

Policymakers

- Introduce gender-informed policies
- Promote evidence-based decision making
- Monitor progress, track outcomes and evaluate impact



Financial Service Providers

- Identify financing gaps and introduce gender-smart financial products and services

Clarity, comparability and consistency of gender-disaggregated data

Support Service Providers

- Provide targeted interventions and track their progress
- Promote inclusive support

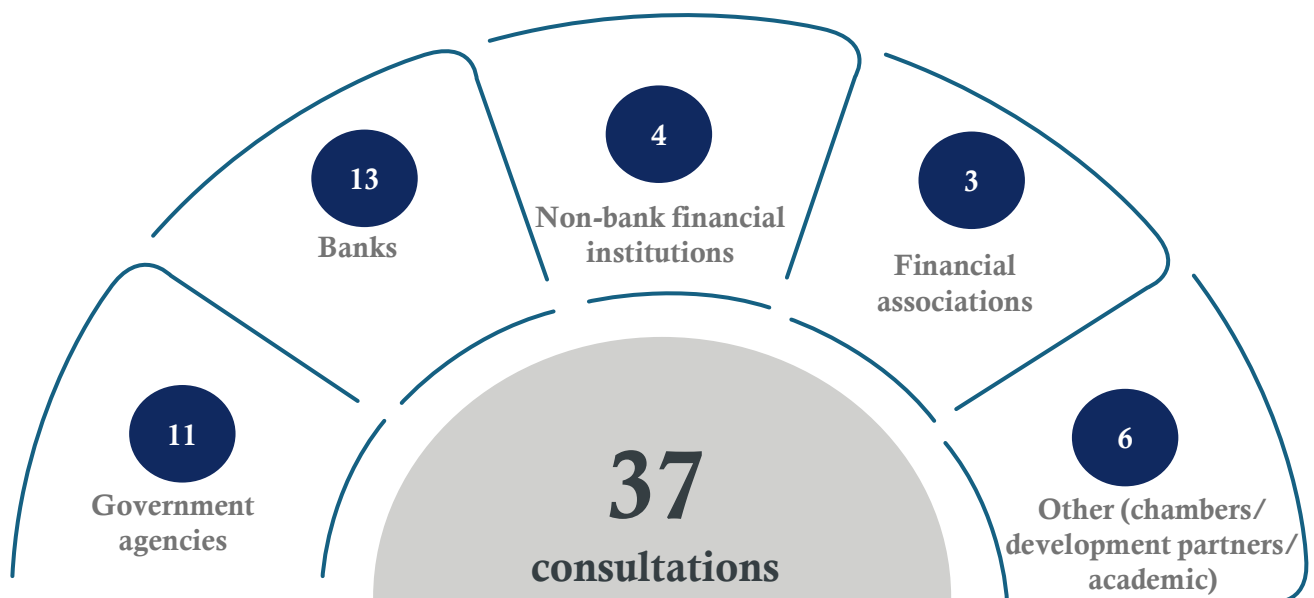


Women Entrepreneurs

- Enhanced access to opportunities

For example, financial institutions designing products for women entrepreneurs typically relied on formal business registration and legal ownership criteria. In contrast, donor-funded credit lines frequently incorporated broader indicators such as management control and decision-making authority⁴, female employment thresholds, or women-centered consumption patterns⁵. Providers of non-financial support, meanwhile, tended to focus on the technical competencies of women entrepreneurs and their level of operational involvement, regardless of formal ownership⁶. This divergence limited the ability to aggregate data, assess impact, and scale interventions effectively.

The formulation of the national definition followed a structured and participatory process, reflecting the collaborative ethos of the We Finance Code. An extensive review of existing classifications across sectors was complemented by key informant interviews with 37 stakeholders, representing government agencies, financial institutions and industry associations, business chambers, development partners, and academia. International benchmarks and definitions adopted by other countries and development institutions were also examined to ensure global alignment.



This consultative groundwork culminated in an interactive stakeholder engagement session, which facilitated the identification of common practices, operational challenges, and contextual constraints unique to Sri Lanka. The result is a definition that is globally comparable yet distinctly local designed

to be both inclusive and representative of the diverse spectrum of Sri Lankan women-led enterprises. In its role as National Code Aggregator for financial data, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka has instructed all Code signatories to align their reporting of gender-disaggregated MSME financial data to this definition.

A business identifies as a **woman-owned/ led business** if it meets the following criteria:

- >50% by females, or $\geq 20\%$ owned by females, and
- Has ≥ 1 female as a major decision-maker; and
- Has $\geq 30\%$ of the Board of Directors comprising of females, where a Board exists.

⁴ Asian Development Bank's Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Line of Credit (SME-LOC).

⁵ USAID Development Finance Corporation (DFC) Line of Credit.

⁶ Including government agencies providing business development support services such as the National Enterprise Development Agency, Small Enterprises Development Division, Industrial Development Board, Export Development Board.

While aligning with international standards by considering parameters such as ownership stake, women in leadership, management control, and decision-making authority, the definition is accompanied by a detailed guidance note, providing practical guidelines for assessing ownership and leadership roles, particularly in the context of micro, informal, and unregistered businesses, where conventional indicators such as shareholding or formal titles may not be readily observable.

The establishment of this national definition marks a significant achievement in embedding the We Finance Code within Sri Lanka's financial infrastructure, laying the groundwork for consistent data reporting, improved customer identification and market segmentation, and more effective policy interventions to advance women's economic participation.

Showcasing National Commitment: Launching the WE Finance Code in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka marked a historic milestone in its commitment to gender-inclusive finance by becoming the first country in South Asia to adopt the We Finance Code, with the National Code Launch held on 18 March 2025 in Colombo. This landmark event signalled Sri Lanka's transition from commitment to action, anchoring the Code within the national financial inclusion agenda and reinforcing high-level leadership for inclusive economic growth.

The launch convened senior policymakers, regulators, financial institutions, and development partners, underscoring the collective resolve to address structural barriers faced by women entrepreneurs and to embed gender considerations across the financial sector.

The event was graced by **Hon. Prime Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya** as Chief Guest, reflecting

strong endorsement at the highest level of government. Distinguished Guests of Honour included Mr. Takafumi Kadono, former Country Director of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Sri Lanka Resident Mission; **Dr. Nandalal Weerasinghe**, Governor of the CenBank of Sri Lanka; and **Mr. Mahinda Siriwardana**, former Secretary to the Treasury, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

In his opening remarks, **Mr. Takafumi Kadono** highlighted that the WE Finance Code goes beyond data collection, serving as a platform for leadership, accountability, and action to generate a multiplier effect for women's entrepreneurship. He emphasized that through annual public reporting on gender-disaggregated data, the development of tailored financial products, and the adoption of gender-responsive policies, the Code has the potential to significantly enhance support for women entrepreneurs. Mr. Kadono also reiterated ADB's continued commitment to strengthening MSMEs and WMSMEs in Sri Lanka through both financing and technical assistance.

Delivering the keynote address, **Dr. Nandalal Weerasinghe**, Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, described the WE Finance Code as a transformative framework for advancing a gender-inclusive financial system, aligned with global best practices. He emphasized its strategic relevance to Sri Lanka's National Financial Inclusion Strategy, spearheaded by the Central Bank, and highlighted the strong synergies created by integrating the Code within national policy frameworks. This alignment, he noted, would help unlock new opportunities for women entrepreneurs across the MSME sector while strengthening systemic accountability within the financial system.

As a guest speaker, **Mr. Mahinda Siriwardana**, former Secretary to the Treasury, underscored the centrality of inclusive growth to Sri Lanka's

long-term development trajectory. He identified the lack of reliable gender-disaggregated data as a critical constraint to effective financial inclusion, stressing the need for accurate and granular data to assess risks, design appropriate financial products, and monitor trends. Mr. Siriwardana further emphasized the importance of a data-driven policy approach to expanding female economic participation and sustaining long-term economic growth.

The highlight of the event was the official launch of the We Finance Code by **Hon. Prime Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya**. In her address, she underscored the Code’s role as a catalyst for inclusive economic growth and women’s empowerment, with the potential to unlock Sri Lanka’s untapped economic potential through targeted financial and non-financial support.

She emphasized that addressing persistent barriers, such as limited access to finance and cultural

gender norms, would be critical to empowering women entrepreneurs and strengthening the country’s socio-economic fabric. Elevating WMSMEs, she noted, would also contribute to improving the economic participation rate of women in Sri Lanka.

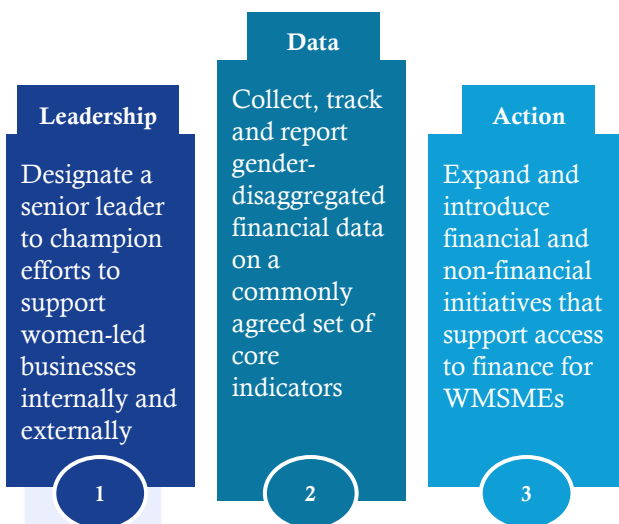
Beyond generating nationwide awareness and visibility, the launch event also marked an important step in operationalizing the Code. It provided a platform to recognize the initial cohort of 13 banks that formally committed as signatories (see below), demonstrating early championship and momentum. The event also formally introduced the National Code Coalition, establishing the governance and collaboration mechanisms necessary to guide implementation and sustain progress under the Code.



Early Momentum: Financial Sector Frontrunners

Sri Lanka's financial sector continues to demonstrate a strong and growing recognition of the importance of women as a distinct and strategic customer segment. This commitment was formally reinforced with the onboarding of the initial cohort of 13 financial institutions as signatories to the We Finance Code in March 2025, marking a significant step in translating intent into action.

Each signatory made multiple commitments across the Code's three core pillars – Leadership, Data, and Action – underscoring a comprehensive and institution-wide approach to advancing gender-inclusive finance.



Under the **Leadership** pillar, signatories committed to dedicating institutional capacity and resources to support Code implementation. A key commitment across institutions was the appointment of internal WE Finance Code Champions, tasked with advocating for the Code, driving internal alignment, and sustaining momentum within their organizations.

Many signatories also committed to institutionalizing new organizational practices, strengthening internal and external communication and advocacy efforts, and embedding gender considerations into governance structures.

Several institutions further pledged to adopt or strengthen internal gender standards, reinforcing accountability at the organizational level.

Commitments under the **Data** pillar focused on strengthening the availability and quality of gender-disaggregated data. Signatories committed to collecting and reporting on the stipulated indicators in line with the standardized national definition and reporting requirements under the WE Finance Code. In addition, many pledged to enhance their internal data systems, tools, and analytics capabilities to enable more informed decision-making, improved risk assessment, and effective monitoring of lending to WMSMEs.

Under the **Action** pillar, signatories demonstrated a strong emphasis on translating data and leadership commitments into tangible market outcomes. Most institutions committed to reviewing and adapting existing financial products and services to be more gender-responsive, while several also pledged to develop new, tailored financial solutions specifically targeting WMSMEs. Complementing product innovation, many signatories committed to strengthening market research and expanding non-financial services, including financial literacy initiatives and capacity-building programs designed to address the specific needs of WMSMEs. Some institutions also indicated their intention to introduce internal targets to progressively increase lending to WMSMEs, signalling a shift toward measurable impact.

The initial group of 13 signatories – comprising 11 Licensed Commercial Banks and 2 Licensed Specialized Banks from both the private and state sectors – represents a substantial share of Sri Lanka's formal banking system. As early adopters of the Code, these institutions are well positioned to act as frontrunners in championing gender-inclusive finance, setting benchmarks for the broader financial sector, and accelerating access to finance for women-owned and women-led enterprises across Sri Lanka.

Evidence-Based Decision-Making: Advancing Gender-Disaggregated Financial Data

From both a national and institutional perspective, Sri Lanka’s adoption of the WE Finance Code has reinforced the critical business and policy case for systematic collection and reporting of gender disaggregated financial data. While it is widely acknowledged that WMSMEs face disproportionate barriers to accessing finance, the absence of reliable, timely, and consistent data has historically constrained the ability to design targeted policies, develop responsive financial products, and assess impact.

The following questions are central to better gender responsive decision making:

- How many women-owned and women-led MSMEs are seeking finance, and for what purposes?
- Why are certain financial needs of WMSMEs not being met?
- How are these financial needs currently being served within the market?
- How can a more systematic understanding of WMSMEs’ financial behaviour improve service delivery, risk assessment, and product design?

On the demand side, it is essential to estimate the overall size of the WMSME financing market and identify unmet needs and structural barriers. On the supply side, insights into existing product offerings, lending patterns, and institutional approaches are necessary. A more systematic and analytically driven approach to gender disaggregated data is therefore instrumental in assessing comparative opportunities, risks, and growth potential across the MSME segment.

As a key step in operationalizing the Data pillar of the We Finance Code, the WE Finance Secretariat proposed a set of optimal “core data indicators” designed to generate actionable business intelligence and support gender focused, market-led decision making at both institutional and policy levels. These core indicators enable analysis of overall market size, relative demand for finance, repayment behaviour, and savings patterns of WMSMEs in comparison to male owned MSMEs.

<i>Do we know?</i>	<i>How can we find out?</i>	<i>Proposed core indicators for data collection</i>
<i>01) How many WMSMEs in Sri Lanka are seeking loans and other financial services, and why?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Determine the size of the market</i> • <i>Understand the demand side</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>INDICATOR 1: Number of MSME business customers</i>
<i>02) Why some of their financial needs are not being met?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Identify the market gaps</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>INDICATOR 2(a): MSME business loan applications</i> • <i>INDICATOR 2(b): MSME business loan approvals</i>
<i>03) How are these needs currently serviced?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Understand the supply side</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>INDICATOR 3: MSME business outstanding loans</i>
<i>04) How will a more systematic understanding of women’s financial needs and behaviors enhance the servicing of these needs?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Assess the risks</i> • <i>Explore further opportunities</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>INDICATOR 4: MSME business non-performing loans</i> • <i>INDICATOR 5: MSME business deposits</i>

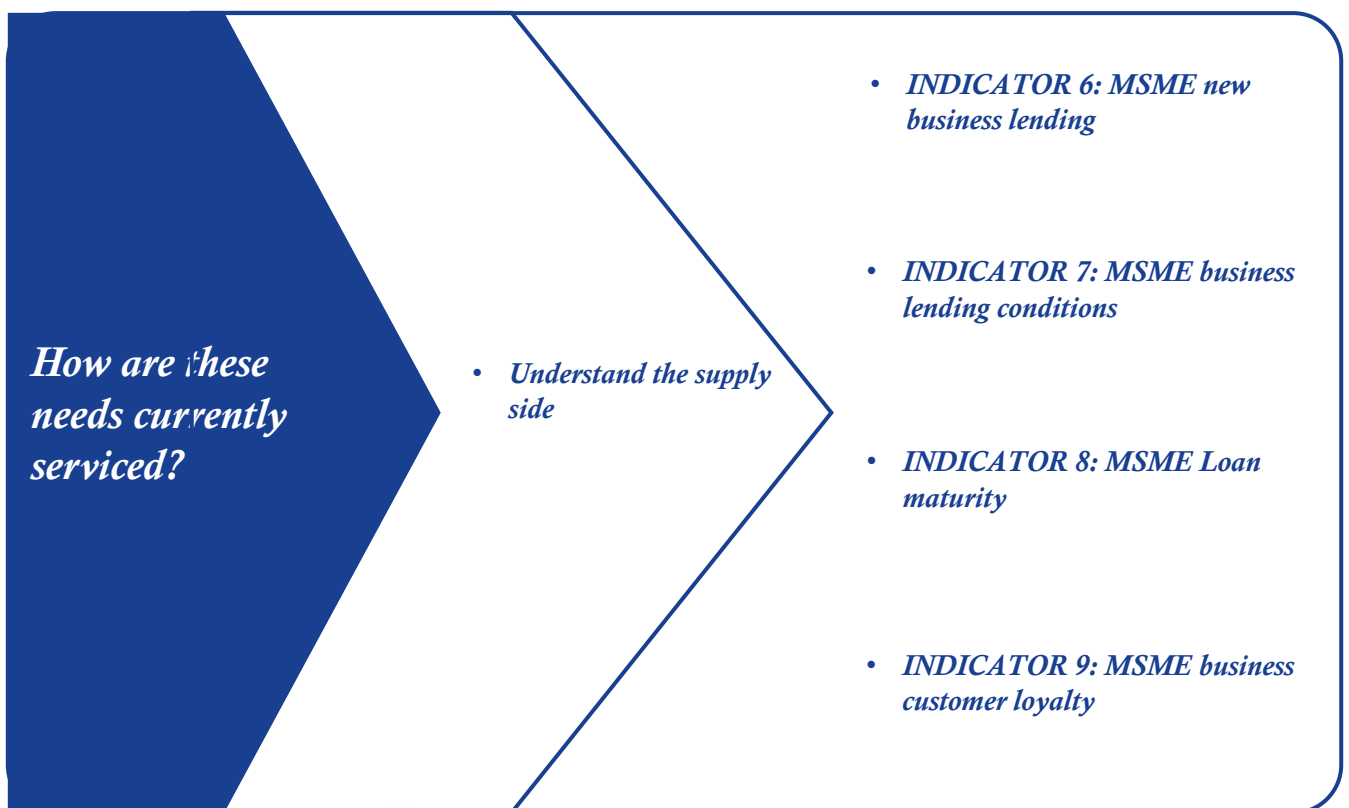
Complementing these are a set of “encouraged indicators”, which provide deeper insights into the supply side of financial services. These include data on new lending, access to collateral, and

uptake of other financial products and services, enabling a more nuanced assessment of how effectively the financial system is serving women entrepreneurs.

Do we know?

How can we find out?

Proposed encouraged indicators for data collection



To ensure relevance and feasibility within the local context, an assessment of as-is data readiness was conducted across all 13 signatory institutions. This helped analyze existing systems and processes, identifying gaps and constraints related to data availability, completeness, consistency, and reporting frequency.

Based on the assessment, it was proposed to commence data collection with the core indicators (with slight adjustments to the definitions to align with current data capabilities), while maintaining a pathway for progressive enhancement over time.

Clear definitions, aligned with the national WMSME classification, were established, and a structured mechanism for data collection, aggregation, and reporting was developed accordingly⁷. The entire process followed a participatory and collaborative approach, with continuous engagement with signatory institutions to understand operational challenges, address concerns, and build consensus, and in close coordination with

the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, ensuring alignment with national policy priorities and regulatory requirements. Once finalized, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, as the National Code Aggregator for financial data, issued instructions along with the detailed reporting templates to all Code signatories, to report the first set of gender-disaggregated data for the financial year 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026.

Recommended data reporting indicators for Sri Lanka:

Core Indicator	Data reporting period	Definition - for Sri Lanka
MSME Business Customers	As at end of financial year	Total number of MSME business credit customers.
MSME Business Loan Applications and Loan Approvals	For the financial year	<p>Loan applications - total number and value of screened applications for which a loan application form has been submitted by MSMEs for business purposes within the given period, either manually or in digital format.</p> <p>Loan approvals - total number and value of loan disbursements to MSMEs for business purposes within the given period.</p> <p>Loan approvals - loan disbursements to be used as a proxy for loan approvals.</p>
MSME Business Outstanding Loans	As at end of financial year	Total number and value of MSME outstanding business loans in the gross loan portfolio of a financial institution as of end of 31.03.2026.
MSME Business Non- performing Loans	As at end of financial year	<p>Percentage of MSME business loans (loan amounts outstanding) on which payments have been delinquent (not just the overdue portion) as at of end of the financial year.</p> <p>Delinquent payments - payments outstanding for 90 days or more.</p> <p>Data as at end of the financial year to be taken into consideration for reporting purposes.</p>
MSME Business Deposits	As at end of financial year	The count and value of MSME business credit customers that hold deposit accounts with the licensed bank.

⁷ The Central Bank of Sri Lanka has already previously issued a guideline to all licensed financial institutions for classification of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and the same classification will be maintained for WE Finance Code reporting.

This milestone represents a significant step toward embedding data driven accountability and transparency under the Code, laying the foundation for more targeted interventions, improved financial product design, and stronger policy responses to advance women's financial inclusion in Sri Lanka.

From Strategic Direction to Results-Based Action: Building a Coalition and Action Plan

A cornerstone achievement in advancing the WE Finance Code from adoption to implementation in Sri Lanka was the establishment of a formal, government-led governance framework, comprising the WE Finance Code Steering Committee, Working Committee, and thematic Working Groups. Anchored by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, this structure reflects strong public sector leadership in setting the strategic direction, ensuring policy coherence, and embedding the Code within national development and financial inclusion priorities. It also provides a credible institutional foundation for coordinating diverse stakeholders around a shared objective of expanding financial inclusion for women entrepreneurs.

At the apex of this framework, the Steering Committee provides macro level strategic oversight, political stewardship, and national alignment. With leadership from the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, representation from other government ministries and agencies, the financial sector, business chambers, women's business associations and development partners, the Committee serves as the principal mechanism through which government leadership translates global commitments under the WE Finance Code into nationally owned priorities.

Operational responsibility is delegated to the Working Committee, which functions as the execution arm of the governance structure, bridging strategy and implementation. Supported

by the Working Committee, thematic Working Groups bring together public institutions, financial institutions, industry associations, and private sector actors to collaborate on concrete actions across four priority areas: financial services, data and analytics, non-financial services, and ecosystem building.

This division of roles has enabled the Government to retain leadership over vision, coordination, and monitoring, while empowering the private and financial sectors to co create solutions, pilot innovations, and drive market level change.

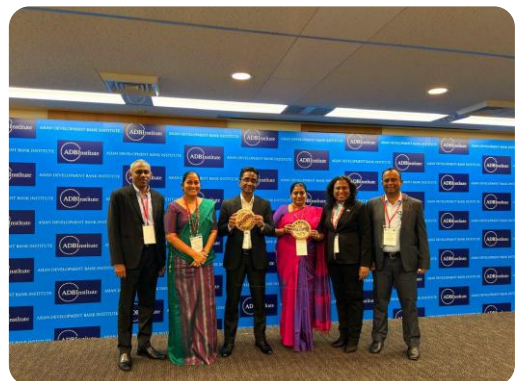


Complementing this governance architecture, a KPI-driven National Action Plan for Gender Inclusive Financing was developed as a central implementation tool. The Action Plan sets out clear priorities, sequenced actions, defined institutional ownership, and measurable indicators across short, medium, and long term horizons. By establishing a transparent framework for monitoring progress and follow up, the Action Plan strengthens accountability across all stakeholders, builds cohesiveness and provides clarity on expectations, timelines, and opportunities for engagement.

Knowledge Exchange: Opportunities for Shared Growth

The 05th Annual Forum on Expanding Women's Participation in the Asian and Pacific Economies was held from 25th to 27th March 2025 in Tokyo, Japan, in collaboration with ADB and the Islamic Development Bank. The event brought together WE Finance Code champions, bank regulatory bodies, signatory financial service providers, experts from international organizations, and policymakers from developing member countries (DMCs). The forum aimed to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences while fostering a collaborative environment to support the successful adoption and implementation of the WE Finance Code across the region.

Sri Lanka also participated in the event as a policy maker and shared the country's experience and journey towards launching the WE Finance Code. Contributions made through national policy actions such as formulation of the national definition for WMSMEs and the introduction of gender-disaggregated reporting frameworks for tracking financial data, were some of the central themes discussed at the forum. Moreover, some of the key initiatives undertaken to promote ground-level impact – such as capacity development of WMSMEs and enhancing their financial literacy – were also highlighted at the forum.



E. Spotlight: Our Women Entrepreneurs in Focus

Mangalambigai Ammal Rajaratna Iyer: Expanding Traditional Healing to Global Markets

Business: Ayurvedic drug manufacturing

City: Nallur, Jaffna

Founder: Mangalambigai Ammal
Rajaratna Iyer

Mangalopathy Ayurveda highlights how a traditional healthcare practice has successfully transformed into a modern healthcare and export-oriented manufacturing enterprise while preserving its roots in holistic healing. The business was established over 50 years ago as a traditional healing clinic in Nallur, Jaffna. Initially focused on treating patients, the clinic practiced a holistic blend of Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani medicine, earning a strong reputation within the local community.

As demand for natural and traditional remedies grew both locally and internationally, the business evolved. It was later incorporated as a limited liability company and expanded its presence with branches in Wellawatte, Mount Lavinia and Colombo. Responding to increasing market demand, Mangalopathy Ayurveda diversified into manufacturing a wide range of products. Today, its portfolio includes Ayurvedic formulations, herbal supplements, nutraceutical cosmetic products, and herbal teas.

Complementing this governance architecture, a KPI-driven National Action Plan for Gender Inclusive Financing was developed as a central implementation tool. The Action Plan sets out clear priorities, sequenced actions, defined institutional ownership, and measurable indicators across short, medium, and long term horizons.



By establishing a transparent framework for monitoring progress and follow up, the Action Plan strengthens accountability across all stakeholders, builds cohesiveness and provides clarity on expectations, timelines, and opportunities for engagement.

The company has successfully positioned itself in international markets, exporting Ayurveda products and Ayurveda healthcare services to clients in 15 countries including the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, Canada, Australia, and several European and Asian markets. To enhance customer accessibility, products are available online, while consultation and follow up services are provided both locally and internationally. To support expansion and strengthen raw material sourcing networks, the Company has also established a registered presence in India.

With the support of loan financing funded by the Government of Sri Lanka provided through the People's Bank, the company invested in modern machinery to strengthen its manufacturing capabilities, key equipment acquired includes mixing and grinding machines, an automatic weighing and packaging machine, a solar dryer, mortar and pestle machines and a mechanical sieve machine.

These investments have delivered significant operational benefits. Production capacity has increased, enabling the company to meet rising demand more efficiently. At the same time, product quality has improved through standardized processes and modern equipment. The company has also expanded its product range and introduced enhanced, export-quality packaging to meet international market requirements.

Raw materials are sourced both locally and internationally, with a majority imported directly from India. Additional supplies are procured from the Jaffna region and Colombo markets, ensuring consistent access to quality ingredients for manufacturing.

The business currently employs several staff members across healthcare, manufacturing, administration, and support functions contributing to local employment generation and regional economic development.

Nirasha Muthukumarana: Growing a Home-Based Venture into a Thriving Garment Business

Business: Baby and women's clothing manufacture

City: Kalegana, Galle

Founder: Nirasha Muthumurana

Nirasha Infant and Teenage Garments demonstrates how entrepreneurial resilience, strategic investment, and adaptability can transform a small enterprise into a sustainable and growing business, even amidst external challenges. Nirasha began her entrepreneurial journey in 2007 with just two employees, operating a small-scale home-based garment manufacturing business. The business initially focused on sewing pillowcases, gradually building skills, capacity, and a loyal customer base.

Recognizing an opportunity in the market, Nirasha expanded into neonatal and infant garments, laying the foundation for a specialized product offering. Over time, the business evolved into a comprehensive manufacturer of baby care products. Today, Nirasha produces a wide range of neonatal essentials, including baby covers, cot sheets, kapok pillows, nappies, and baby clothing offering approximately 1,600 product variations. In addition, the business caters to mothers by producing bed jackets designed for pregnant and nursing women, further diversifying its product portfolio.

At first, Nirasha supplied her products to established retail outlets in the area. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional sales channels, prompting a shift in strategy. Demonstrating resilience and adaptability, Nirasha established three retail outlets to directly market her products to customers.

With the support of loan financing and grant



funded by the Government of Sri Lanka provided through the Sanasa Development Bank, the business invested in an embroidery machine, significantly enhancing production capabilities. Prior to this investment, embroidery work was outsourced at a high cost, resulting in longer production timelines and reduced margins. The new in-house capability has transformed operations by reducing production costs, shortening turnaround times, increasing design versatility and enabling the introduction of new, value-added products.

The investment has led to notable improvements in both efficiency and product quality. The business can now produce a higher volume of garments with enhanced finishing and greater design variety, strengthening its competitiveness in the market. The expansion has also driven job creation. The factory, located on the ground floor of Nirasha's residence, now employs 28 workers, while an additional 8 staff members support operations across the retail outlets.

Theja Senarath: Crafting Quality Soft Toys through Innovation and Design

Business: Soft toys manufacture
City: Lellopitiya, Ratnapura
Founder: Theja Senarath



T K Toys & Apparel highlights how creativity, thoughtful design, and targeted investment can enable a small business to scale sustainably while maintaining quality, inclusivity, and environmental awareness. Theja began her journey by handcrafting soft toys for her own children, driven by creativity and care. What started as a personal hobby soon grew into a business venture in 2011, as demand for her unique and attractive designs increased.

From the outset, Theja focused on producing high-quality, visually appealing toys that could compete with imported alternatives, while maintaining a distinct, locally crafted identity. Today, Theja designs all products herself, ensuring they reflect current trends and customer preferences. The business manufactures a range of soft toys as well as pillows, utilizing high-quality materials.

Raw materials, including both outer fabrics and inner filling, are imported in bulk from China to maintain safety, consistency and quality. The products are competitively positioned in the market and available at well-known retail outlets such as CIB, Thilakawardena Stores, and Lady J.

The enterprise has created meaningful employment opportunities within the community. Altogether, 10 workers are employed full-time at the factory, while an additional 10 home-based workers produce items according to Theja's specifications on a piece-rate basis.

In a commendable effort to promote inclusivity, the business has also employed a differently abled



individual, providing her a means of steady income and contributing to social empowerment. Sustainability practices are also evident, with fabric offcuts and leftover materials distributed for reuse in other products, minimizing waste.

With the support of loan financing funded by the Government of Sri Lanka provided through the Bank of Ceylon, Theja invested in a filling machine, significantly enhancing the production process. Previously, manual filling caused the material to clump and lose its smooth texture, affecting product quality. The introduction of the filling machine has improved the overall quality and consistency of products, while also increasing production efficiency and output.

Samantha Helm: Elevating Natural Skincare through Handcrafted Excellence

Business: Handcrafted natural solid soap manufacturing

City: Kiula, Matale

Founder: Samantha Helm



The Ceylon Soap Company (Pvt) Ltd demonstrates how a focus on natural products, quality standards, and market positioning can enable a small-scale manufacturer to successfully penetrate premium and export markets while creating meaningful social impact. Founded in 2019, The Ceylon Soap Company (Pvt) Ltd is a growing enterprise dedicated to producing 100% natural, handcrafted soaps and personal care products. Built on a commitment to authenticity and quality, the company has successfully carved out a niche in Sri Lanka's premium hospitality and retail sectors. The Company will be launching their products to the UK market this summer of 2026.

The company produces a diverse range of natural soaps and personal hygiene products, including a specialized pet care line. All products are handmade using carefully sourced natural ingredients, ensuring both quality and environmental sustainability. Its products are highly sought after by boutique hotels, leading luxury establishments, and high-end retail outlets in Colombo, Kandy, and Galle – areas with strong tourist demand. The company also exports to international markets, including Israel and Turkey, while further expanding its reach through online sales platforms such as Facebook. A key differentiator is its ability to provide customized scent, colour, designed packaging solutions tailored to boutique leisure hotel requirements, enhancing brand alignment for hospitality clients.

The company sources premium raw materials globally to maintain high standards. Mica minerals and natural colorants are imported from the



United Kingdom, while essential oils and fragrances are sourced from India and Europe. Demonstrating a strong commitment to quality and regulatory compliance, the company has obtained Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) certification.

The business employs 5 workers, all of whom are women from economically marginalized backgrounds. By providing stable employment, the company contributes to improving livelihoods and empowering women within the local community.

With the support of loan financing funded by the Government of Sri Lanka provided through the Nations Trust Bank, The Ceylon Soap Company invested in the expansion of its factory premises and the installation of storage and display shelving. This investment has resulted in increased workspace for production activities, improved organizational efficiency and enhanced product display and handling.

Muditha Yasamali: Expanding Local Craftsmanship into International Markets

Business: Manufacture of coir doormats
City: Kottegoda, Matara
Founder: Muditha Yasamali

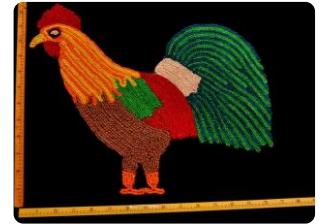


Malsha Mats highlights how a locally rooted, resource-based enterprise can successfully integrate into global value chains while supporting community livelihoods and adopting responsible production practices. Muditha leads a coir doormat manufacturing enterprise that has successfully connected traditional craftsmanship with international demand. Her business specializes in producing customized coir doormats, primarily aimed at European customers. Some of her products are also sold in the local market.

The manufacturing process begins with sourcing coir rope, which is then treated to remove its natural tannin colour through bleaching. The ropes are subsequently dyed according to customer specifications to achieve the desired designs and finishes. For the dyeing process, Muditha has implemented environmentally conscious practices. The business uses a limited range of basic colours and reuses dyeing vats to minimize water usage and reduce environmental impact.

The enterprise supports the livelihoods of approximately 40 workers, many of whom are engaged on a piece-rate basis. A significant number of these workers operate from their homes, enabling flexible employment opportunities, particularly for women with household responsibilities.

For home-based workers, raw materials are distributed in advance, and finished products are later collected, creating an efficient decentralized production model that benefits the wider community.



With the support of loan financing funded by the Government of Sri Lanka provided through the People's Bank, Muditha invested in essential raw materials, including dyes and coir yarn, to sustain and scale production. This investment has enabled the business to strengthen operational capacity and increase production volume to meet export demand. Muditha has also been successful in securing a reliable overseas buyer in Germany, enhancing her export presence.

Mayami Shamolika: Strengthening Sri Lanka's Presence in Global Seafood Exports

Business: Fresh seafood exports

City: Wennapuwa, Puttalam

Founder: Mayami Shamolika

VS Seafood (Pvt) Ltd is a leading example of how strategic modernization, adherence to international standards, and forward-looking leadership can transform a traditional business into a globally competitive enterprise while delivering significant economic and social value.

Established over 15 years ago as a fishing enterprise, the company has evolved into a successful seafood export operation under the second-generation leadership of entrepreneur Mayami Shamolika. Building on a strong foundation, VS Seafood has transformed into a modern, export-oriented business, supplying premium-quality fresh seafood to international markets while contributing to Sri Lanka's export growth and foreign exchange earnings.

The enterprise provides direct employment opportunities for approximately 90–100 individuals, contributing significantly to local livelihoods and the regional economy. Beyond its economic contribution, VS Seafood serves as a strong example of women's entrepreneurship and leadership in Sri Lanka's export sector. Under the leadership of Managing Director Mayami Shamolika, the company has created meaningful opportunities for women to actively participate in generating foreign exchange earnings for the country.

Women play a significant role across all levels of the organization, from senior management and departmental leadership to quality assurance, production, administration, and export operations.



The company fosters an inclusive workplace where young, energetic, and talented women are empowered to lead, innovate, and contribute to business growth. This culture of female leadership and participation has become one of the defining strengths of VS Seafood, demonstrating how women can successfully drive industrial development, international trade, and economic progress in Sri Lanka.

The company specializes in exporting fresh tuna and a variety of seafood products to customers across Europe, the United States, Israel, New Zealand, and Singapore, which have been identified as key strategic markets. Through its unwavering commitment to quality, reliability, and customer satisfaction, VS Seafood has established itself as a trusted supplier within the global seafood industry.

Operations are carried out in a state-of-the-art processing facility equipped with modern technology and operated in accordance with

stringent international food safety and quality standards. The company maintains rigorous quality control procedures throughout its operations, ensuring that products consistently meet the expectations of global buyers, particularly in highly regulated European markets.

To support its export activities, VS Seafood has obtained several internationally recognized certifications, including Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), and BRC certification. These certifications reflect the company's commitment to food safety, quality assurance, traceability, and regulatory compliance.

With the support of loan financing funded by the Government of Sri Lanka and provided through Union Bank, the company has invested in modern machinery and advanced technology to enhance processing capabilities, productivity, and operational efficiency. In addition, VS Seafood has implemented responsible environmental and waste management practices, ensuring the sustainable handling of by-products and minimizing its environmental footprint.

Through continuous investment, innovation, and a commitment to excellence, VS Seafood (Pvt) Ltd continues to strengthen Sri Lanka's reputation as a reliable supplier of high-quality seafood to international markets while making a meaningful contribution to national economic development, employment generation, and foreign exchange earnings.

F. Lessons Learned and Key Considerations

The WE Finance Code represents a shared journey towards building a more gender responsive financial ecosystem in Sri Lanka. As we take the first steps in operationalizing the Code, it has been important to reflect on early experiences, identify areas where systems and processes can be further strengthened, and continuously refine approaches to maximize long term impact.

The learnings from the inaugural year underscore not only the progress made, but also the opportunities ahead to enhance data quality, deepen market insights, and broaden the reach and effectiveness of gender inclusive finance. The key lessons and considerations emerging from the first year are outlined below.

Strengthening Foundations: Towards Consistent and Comparable Data

Robust, consistent data is foundational to the success of the WE Finance Code. Uniform data standards enable meaningful comparisons across institutions and sectors, allow tracking of trends over time, and support evidence-based decision making at both institutional and policy levels.

While a comprehensive financial data reporting framework has been already established under the Code, the first year has highlighted the importance of continued alignment of internal data systems and processes across signatory institutions. This includes focused technical enhancements to backend systems, as well as sustained awareness building and orientation across business units and branch networks to ensure accurate data capture and reporting.

Capturing MSME turnover – central to consistent classification of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises – has emerged as an area where a practical approach to data collection is particularly valuable. Recognizing the realities of smaller and

micro enterprises, the Code provides multiple accepted methods for determining turnover, including client declared figures, institutional estimates, and cash flow-based assessments. These alternatives create space for inclusion while maintaining analytical integrity.

Further opportunities exist to strengthen consistency in the classification of women owned and women led MSMMEs in line with the national definition. While sole proprietorships can be readily identified, other legal forms of business such as partnerships and limited liability companies require periodic updating of ownership/ shareholding structures, management representation, and governance roles. Improving the regularity and depth of such data will enhance accuracy over time and support more nuanced analysis.

From Applications to Insights: Tracking Unmet Demand

Enhancing access to finance requires not only tracking lending outcomes but also understanding demand for finance and the barriers WMSMEs face along the credit journey. Comparative analysis of loan application and rejection data between male and female entrepreneurs offers a powerful lens into these dynamics.

Currently, many financial institutions prioritize data capture once applications pass the initial screening stage, largely due to administrative considerations. However, experience under the Code demonstrates that systematically capturing and analyzing application stage data – including rejections – can unlock valuable insights. At the institutional level, it supports the identification of unmet demand and product gaps; at the policy level, it informs targeted interventions to

address structural constraints affecting WMSMEs.

Moving forward, greater emphasis on capturing qualitative drivers of loan outcomes – such as collateral constraints or documentation gaps – will enhance understanding beyond headline numbers. This shift will be supported by improved point of origin data capture, increased awareness among frontline credit officers, and progressively more centralized and automated loan origination systems. Over time, repositioning application and rejection data as strategic market intelligence will strengthen institutional ability to design tailored, gender responsive solutions.

Making the Invisible Visible: Including Informal Women- Led Enterprises

Women constitute a significant share of Sri Lanka’s informal MSME sector⁸, thereby ensuring their visibility within the WE Finance Code framework is essential for inclusive market analysis and policymaking. Capturing data on informal enterprises, while maintaining objectivity and consistency is complex, but also highly valuable.

To support this, a detailed guidance note was developed alongside the national WMSME definition to assist financial institutions in identifying women’s ownership and leadership in informal businesses using observable and verifiable indicators. These include evidence of control over business assets and operations, the woman’s voice and participation in strategic decision making, and demonstrable engagement in core business activities across production, marketing, and finance.

While most financial institutions already assess these indicators at the field level, the structured guidance offered by the Code builds on these practices by promoting a common, standardized

approach, thereby improving overall data quality while ensuring consistency across institutions. In the longer term, more comprehensive data on informal WMSMEs will generate valuable market intelligence and inform policy initiatives aimed towards encouraging business formalization and enterprise growth.

Broadening the Lens: Beyond MSME Credit Products

The initial focus of WE Finance Code reporting in Sri Lanka has understandably centered on MSME credit customers, laying a critical foundation for improving access to finance. As the framework matures, there is strong scope to expand beyond business lending to capture gender disaggregated data across a wider range of financial products and services used by MSME customers.

Within the Sri Lankan context, products such as vehicle leasing, pawning, credit card facilities, overdraft facilities, savings accounts and fixed deposits are widely utilized by entrepreneurs. Analyzing uptake and usage patterns across these products can provide deeper insights into financial behaviours, preferences, and constraints faced by WMSMEs.

While data integration across product lines presents institutional challenges – given multiple legacy systems and varying data fields – the business case for doing so is compelling. Over time, enhanced data integration can support the development of innovative, differentiated products that better respond to the realities of WMSMEs, while also strengthening institutions’ competitive positioning.

⁸ *Unlocking Challenges: Empowering Women-Owned MSMEs in Sri Lanka*. UNDP (2026).

Expanding the Ecosystem: Bringing More Financial Institutions on Board

The commitment of the 13 initial signatories has established a strong foundation for the WE Finance Code in Sri Lanka. Building on this momentum, expanding the signatory base will further strengthen the national ecosystem for gender inclusive finance.

Moving forward, a phased onboarding approach has been proposed to enable a broader range of financial service providers – including non-bank financial institutions, microfinance institutions and insurance companies to join the Code. Such expansion will widen the scope of data, deepen market -intelligence, and enhance the collective ability to influence both product innovation and policy outcomes.

Ensuring that new entrants demonstrate senior level commitment and institutional readiness across the Code's core pillars – Leadership, Data and Action – will remain central to maintaining the integrity and impact of the framework.

Completing the Picture: Integrating Non-Financial Data

Empowering WMSMEs extends beyond access to finance alone. Non-financial factors such as skills, market access, formalization status and business resilience play a critical role in enterprise success. As such, integrating non- financial data into the WE Finance Code framework represents an important next step.

Given fragmentation across agencies and the absence of a centralized national database, collecting non-financial data presents greater coordination challenges. However, the first year has helped bring the ecosystem together, created initial interest and guide the way forward. Moving

forward, a core set of priority non- financial indicators will be identified, alongside a structured data collection and reporting framework.

In its role as National Code Aggregator for non-financial data, the Department of Census and Statistics will play a pivotal role in data collation, analysis and aggregation. Over time, the establishment or leveraging of a centralized national database for gender disaggregated MSME data will support more holistic policymaking and better targeted interventions for WMSMEs.

G. Expanding the Ecosystem: A Call to Action

The WE Finance Code in Sri Lanka envisions a vibrant economy where women entrepreneurs thrive, are fully integrated into the formal financial system, and contribute significantly to national prosperity, supported by transparent, data-driven, and inclusive public and financial sectors.

The Code ecosystem aims to catalyze a transformative shift in Sri Lanka's financial ecosystem by empowering women entrepreneurs with equitable access to finance, markets, and non-financial support, thereby driving sustainable economic growth, fostering innovation, and advancing gender equality across the nation.

A phased pathway is currently available for **Licensed Commercial Banks, Licensed Specialized Banks, Licensed Finance Companies, Licensed Microfinance Companies and Licensed Insurance Companies** to join the Code ecosystem.

If your financial institution belongs to any one of the above categories and you would like to become a signatory, please reach out to *Ms. P.G.P.Rasanjalie, Director (Actg.), Department of Development Finance, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development* for further information

(rasanjalie.pgp@dfd.treasury.gov.lk).

Signatories to the Code make the following commitment:

“My organization endorses the Code and will work together with partners and other stakeholders to provide leadership, improve data and take actions that will help eliminate constraints and financing gaps for women entrepreneurs.

As a Signatory in the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Code, my organization will:

- *Designate a senior leader to champion the organization’s efforts to support women-led businesses*
- *Track a commonly agreed set of indicators on the level of financing provided to women-led firms*
- *Expand and introduce measures that will support women entrepreneurs.*

My organization will report on these commitments and indicators to an agreed aggregator after a grace period for inclusion in the Global WE Finance Code annual reports. My organization will make this commitment public.”

Annexure I:

List of Code Signatories 2025/ 2026

Licensed Commercial Banks

- Bank of Ceylon
- Commercial Bank of Ceylon PLC
- DFCC Bank PLC
- Hatton National Bank PLC
- National Development Bank PLC
- Nations Trust Bank PLC
- Pan Asia Banking Corporation PLC
- People's Bank
- Sampath Bank PLC
- Seylan Bank PLC
- Union Bank of Colombo PLC

Licensed Specialized Banks

- Pradeshiya Sanwardana Bank (Regional Development Bank)
- Sanasa Development Bank PLC (SDB bank)

Annexure II:

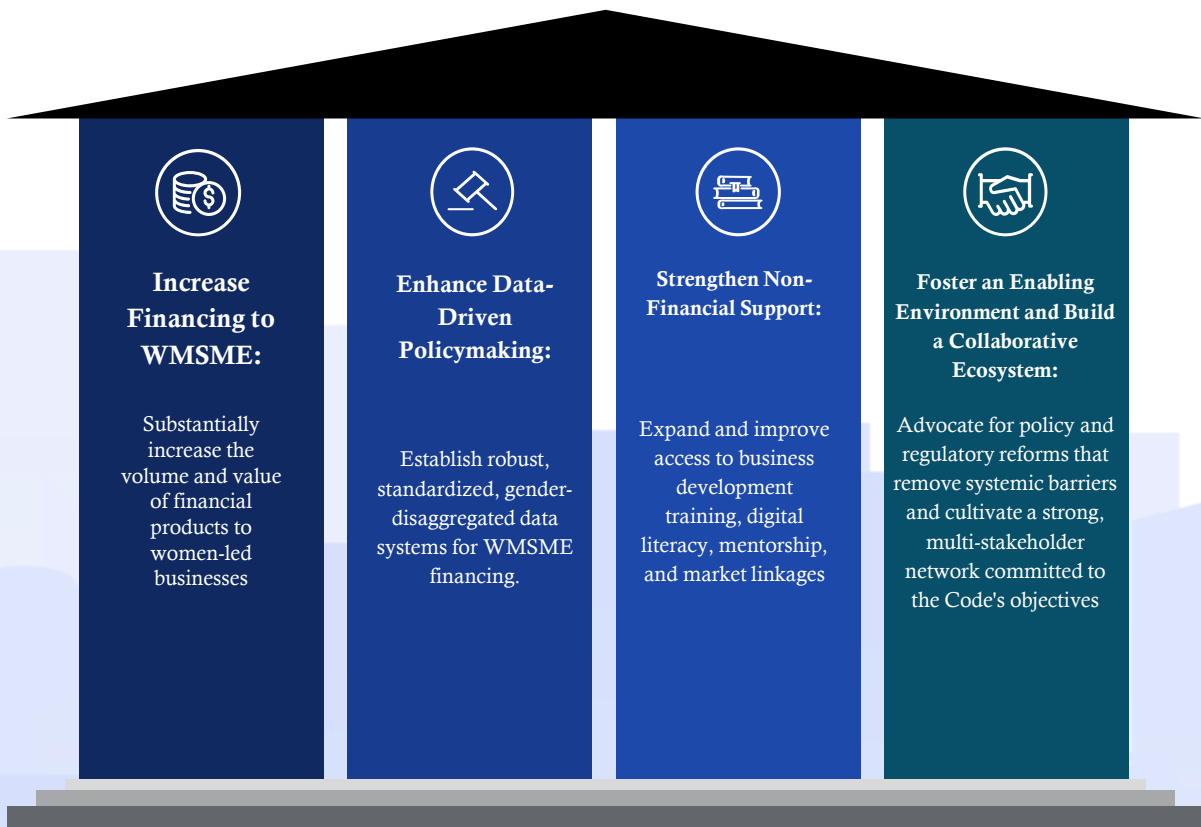
A. WE Finance Code: Draft National Action Plan for Gender Inclusive Financing in Sri Lanka (May 2026 – May 2030)

Sri Lanka pledged its national commitment to the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Code (WE Finance Code) in March 2025. As the first country in South Asia to sign up to the WE Finance Code, this reflects our strong commitment to advance gender-inclusive financing by enhancing the economic potential of our women-owned and led micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (WMSMEs).

A multistakeholder National Coalition was launched in October 2025 comprising representatives from the public, private and financial sectors to drive key actions towards promoting greater access to finance for WMSMEs.

The following National Action Plan was developed with the collaborative inputs of the Coalition, as a 5-year roadmap towards uplifting Sri Lanka's WMSMEs through tangible and measurable outcomes.

The National Action Plan is centered around 4 key areas of focus of national priority – namely, the “key pillars of progress” – increasing financing to WMSMEs, enhancing data-driven policymaking, strengthening non-financial support and fostering an enabling environment ecosystem⁹.



⁹ The National Action Plan shall be reviewed on an annual basis and updated to align with the prevailing socioeconomic context in Sri Lanka. The WE Finance Code Steering Committee will hold the authority to approve any necessary revisions to the National Action Plan accordingly.

Pillar 1: Increase Financing to WMSMEs

Overall objective: Substantially increase the volume and value of financial products to women-led businesses, including financially underserved WMSMEs

No.	Goal	Timeline ¹⁰	KPIs	Target Deadline
1	Identify gaps in WMSME financing through national MSME survey	Short term	Key WMSME financing gaps identified and prioritized	March 2027
2	Develop activity plan to enhance financial inclusion of WMSMEs and conduct capacity building programs, with special focus on financially underserved segments	Long term	Activity plan developed 100 sessions delivered island wide covering all 25 districts	June 2028
3	Onboard new signatories and ecosystem players from financial sector into the Code	Long term	10 new stakeholders onboarded, including 7 signatories (financial institutions)	June 2028
4	Code signatories to identify market opportunities and introduce WMSME-focused financial products/ services/ policies	Long term	10 market opportunities identified to serve WMSMEs (including financing opportunities for unbanked/ underbanked WMSMEs) 5 specific products/ services/ policies introduced that are targeted to WMSMEs 500 WMSMEs serviced through the new products/ services including WMSMEs from underserved markets	December 2029
5	Code signatories to develop digital based women entrepreneurship lending tools and long term digital lending strategies	Long term	Each signatory has documented digital adaptation and lending strategy	December 2029

¹⁰ Short term goals – less than 12 months; medium term goals – between 12-24 months; long term goals – more than 24 months

Pillar 2: Enhance Data-Driven Policymaking

Overall objective: Establish robust, standardized, gender-disaggregated data systems towards informed industry and policy decision-making to enhance WMSME financing.

No.	Goal	Timeline ¹¹	KPIs	Target Deadline
1	Review and update data quality, consistency and standardizations	Medium term	Gender-disaggregated data aligned with national definitions and global best practices	June 2027
2	Develop secure data repository system for gender-disaggregated WMSME data	Long term	Signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among data co-owners (including MOF, CBSL, DCS) Secure data repository and reporting system procured, developed and implemented	December 2030
3	Implement gender-disaggregated data dashboard	Long term	Data dashboard implemented and data accessible	December 2030
4	Leverage gender-disaggregated WMSME data towards national gender-inclusive policymaking	Long term	Data accessibility/ system implementation to identified stakeholders Incorporation of policy action for WMSME financing	December 2030

¹¹ Short term goals – less than 12 months; medium term goals – between 12-24 months; long term goals – more than 24 months

Pillar 3: Strengthen Non-Financial Support

Overall objective: Expand capacities of underserved WMSMEs through improved access to business development training, digital literacy, mentorship, and market linkages.

No.	Goal	Timeline ¹²	KPIs	Target Deadline
1	Identify main non-financial gender-disaggregated data indicators to strengthen gender-inclusive policymaking through national economic survey	Short term	Core non-financial data indicators identified	March 2027
2	Develop mechanism for collection and reporting of national non-financial ex-disaggregated data based on identified indicators	Long term	Key stakeholders and data collection touchpoints identified SOPs developed TOT conducted for selected group of regional Development Officers and Statistical Officers on data collection	December 2029
3	Collection and reporting of non-financial gender-disaggregated data	Long term	Non-financial gender-disaggregated data published in WE Finance Code Annual Report	June 2030
4	Create a mechanism to make WMSMEs aware of existing non-financial services	Long term	Unique platform created/ existing platform identified Platform reach (TBD) 500 WMSMEs benefited through access to non-financial services, including WMSMEs from underserved markets	December 2029
5	Scale-up WMSMEs with high export growth potential	Long term	1,000 WMSMEs export-ready High performing WMSMEs awarded	December 2030
6	Incorporate non-financial service themes with specific attention to WMSMEs within the national SME policy	Long term	Non-financial service themes incorporated into national SME policy	TBD

¹² Short term goals – less than 12 months; medium term goals – between 12-24 months; long term goals – more than 24 months

Pillar 4: Foster an Enabling Environment and Build a Collaborative Ecosystem

Overall objective: Advocate for policy and regulatory reforms that remove systemic barriers and cultivate a strong, multi-stakeholder network committed to the Code's objectives.

No.	Goal	Timeline ¹³	KPIs	Target Deadline
1	Map the relevant ecosystem partners and collate all activities	Medium term	List of stakeholders identified and briefed on WE Finance Code	December 2027
2	Review existing gaps in laws, policies and regulations that hinder women's economic participation	Long term	Gaps in the consumer protection framework identified Policy recommendations provided to enhance women's economic participation	TBD
3	NCGI to increase the share of loan guarantee provided to WMSMEs (from 10% to 20%)	Medium term	NCGI guarantee cover to WMSMEs increased	May 2028

¹³ Short term goals – less than 12 months; medium term goals – between 12-24 months; long term goals – more than 24 months

B. Establishment of Working Groups

In order to operationalize the National Action Plan, four Working Groups were established under each of the key pillars and the current member institutions are listed out below¹⁴.

Working Group	Overall objective	Target Deadline
Financial services working group	Substantially increase the volume and value of financial products to women-led businesses, including financially underserved WMSMEs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sri Lanka Bankers' Association 2. Finance Houses Association 3. Central Bank of Sri Lanka - Bank Supervision Department 4. National Credit Guarantee Institution 5. Asian Development Bank
Data analytics working group	Establish robust, standardized, gender-disaggregated data systems towards informed industry and policy decision-making to enhance WMSME financing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Central Bank of Sri Lanka - Regional Development Department 2. Ceylon Chamber of Commerce 3. Department of Census and Statistics
Non-financial services working group	Expand capacities of underserved WMSMEs through improved access to business development training, digital literacy, mentorship, and market linkages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Export Development Board 2. National Enterprise Development Authority 3. Industrial Development Board 4. Ministry of Industry and Entrepreneurship Development 5. NGO Secretariat
Ecosystem building working group	Advocate for policy and regulatory reforms that remove systemic barriers and cultivate a strong, multi-stakeholder network committed to the Code's objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development 2. Central Bank of Sri Lanka - Department of Supervision of Non-Bank Financial Institutions 3. Ceylon Chamber of Commerce 4. Women's Chamber of Industry and Commerce

¹⁴ The composition of each working group may be revised, including additions or changes to membership, subject to the approval of the Steering Committee.

