

The Himalayan

T I M E S

Women entrepreneurs' summit concludes on high note

Kathmandu, September 5



A three-day International Women Entrepreneurs' Summit concluded here today, with participants pledging to work collectively to combat common challenges faced by women to embrace entrepreneurship in the region.

Speakers, during different sessions of the three-day event, laid emphasis on evidence-based policy formulation and developing congenial environment to motivate women to embrace entrepreneurship.

The event was organised by South Asian Women Development Forum (SAWDF), a SAARC-recognised body which works towards the economic issues of women in the region.

Pramila Rijal, president of SAWDF, said that lack of data on cottage, small and medium enterprises run by women in the region is a major challenge in formulating policies specified for them. “Every government in the South Asian region has been treating women entrepreneurship development with the similar mentality,” said Rijal, adding, “They have been putting everything related to women entrepreneurship in the same basket, when they should categorise the scale of enterprise and specifically address their problems.”

A book launched at the event titled *‘Reflections on Policies for Women Small and Medium Entrepreneurs: Status Challenges and Opportunities in Hindu Kush Himalayas and the SAARC Region’* has prescribed recommendations to South Asian governments, as ‘problems faced by women entrepreneurs in this region are common’.

Addressing the closing ceremony, SAARC Secretary General Amjad Hussain B Sial laid emphasis on collaborative efforts for shared prosperity in the region and beyond. Sial further stated that SAARC is supportive of any initiative, particularly those led by women, and expressed his happiness that SAARC-affiliated bodies like SAWDF are working towards accelerating women’s full participation in the economic sector.

Ibukun Awosika, chairperson of First Bank of Nigeria, shared her experience on how important it is for women to organise themselves for building personal wealth. She also mentioned that it is women who have to take charge of other women and create opportunities for them.

Nagesh Kumar, director of Social Development Division, UNESCAP, mentioned how the ASEAN women entrepreneurs had made a big leap and that the women entrepreneurs from South Asia have to learn from the success of ASEAN women.

Mona Shrestha Adhikari, executive director of Enterprise for Management, Economic Reform and Gender Equality (EMERGE) based in Switzerland, opined that the intervention from the government or development partners in the past was witnessed for the very shortest period of time, which is contrary to what is actually required for women entrepreneurship development and its sustainability.

“We need interventions to develop entire entrepreneurship ecosystem, so the results can only be seen over a period of time,” she reiterated. “Creating conducive policy environment, enhancing the capacity and skills, and access to credit are critical, apart from the support of the family and community for women to embrace entrepreneurship and also to upscale the enterprises they are running.”

She further said governments of the region should promptly move towards formulation of gender-responsive policies and effective execution.

The summit concluded with signing of a few memorandums of understanding (MoUs) to take forward some initiatives.

AnMoU was signed to launch the TATA water project for Nepali women entrepreneurs.

SAWDF's affiliation with the Indo-African Chambers was also announced. SAWDF will work with the Middle East and North Africa and African region entrepreneurs through this chamber.

An MOU was signed between UNIDO Bahrain and SAWDF to replicate the 'Gender Equality for Manufacturing', a UNIDO model project that is already implemented in 42 countries will be replicated in Nepal.

Moreover, a Bio Technology Park for Nepali women entrepreneurs was discussed among the government officials of Nepal and Manish Diwan, head of Strategic Partnership and Entrepreneurship Development, Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council; Bio Technology Ministry of government of India; SAWDF; and Federation of Women Entrepreneurs Associations of Nepal.

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