

## Management Responses

This review was drafted and delivered during the height of Sri Lanka's economic crisis and social unrest in 2022 which presented clear challenges for the evaluation team in terms of travel to and within the country. The crisis has also increased concerns about the low participation of women in the country's workforce (the International Monetary Fund noted the need for improvement on this front in their memorandum to Sri Lanka in March 2022<sup>1</sup>).

In this context, the rationale for supporting a program such as Women in Work (WiW) would appear more relevant than ever. With WiW due to end in June 2023, Colombo Post felt the appropriateness, efficiency and effectiveness of WiW as the country's flagship, targeted gender program should be tested before moving on to the design of a successor program.

The evaluation explores the unique benefits and challenges of implementing a women's economic empowerment program with an influential multilateral partner such as the International Finance Corporation. IFC's ability to access and work with the Sri Lankan private sector for the benefit of women employees in medium to large companies is a key strength and opportunity. However, WiW's focus on institutional gains (with the assumption these gains trickle down to employees) comes at the cost of being able to measure improvement in the empowerment and inclusion of individuals. The evaluation lacks the voice of grassroots informants who may have benefited from WiW activities. This reflects not only the consultant's inability to interview beneficiaries due to Sri Lanka's current instability, but also a lack of emphasis on outcomes and impacts in the original monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework attached to WiW's design. Developing a Theory of Change with a strong focus on end of program outcomes for Sri Lankan women will be a priority for any successor program to WiW.

## Next Steps

The evaluation offers several options for the way forward after WiW concludes in June 2023 but does not preference any of its recommendations. With Australia's new international development policy to be delivered in the first half of 2023, Colombo Post will use the next six months to undertake further stakeholder engagement and analysis on the situation for women in Sri Lanka and to understand Australia's comparative advantage in any targeted support. The advantage of Australia's existing partnership with IFC in Sri Lanka is clear, but DFAT's ability to influence and engage on end of program outcomes for women at the local level needs to be further considered in any new design, especially in the context of a new development policy.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Sri Lanka: 2021 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Sri Lanka \(imf.org\)](#)