



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



Paths to Women's Economic Empowerment:

Tourism and Textiles in IORA Countries

17 – 19 August 2014

Summary Report

Executive Summary

Australia hosted an Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) women's economic empowerment event in Kuala Lumpur from 17 – 19 August 2014: *Paths to Women's Economic Empowerment, with a Focus on Tourism and Textiles in IORA countries*.

The purpose of the event was to promote women's economic empowerment as a key element of broader economic growth in the Indian Ocean region: promoting economic empowerment of half of the world's population is smart economics. The focus of the event was tourism and textiles industries—a common thread that runs through the diverse countries of the Indian Ocean rim, engaging women right across the region.

The discussions and presentations resulted in a series of principles and practical recommendations that IORA Ministers will consider at the 2014 Council of Ministers' Meeting.

The event was attended by over 100 participants working in the textile and tourism sectors from academia, government and business. This was the first IORA event of its kind to involve participants from all 20 member states. The event was chaired by the Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls. The IORA Secretary General, His Excellency Ambassador K V Bhagirath, addressed the participants.

Supporting women's economic empowerment in Indian Ocean rim economies:

Six Priority Messages

1. Invest in women's education, professional development and training
2. Promote national cultural identity—self, product and place—in a way that encompasses the strengths and contribution of women
3. Contribute to broader understanding of the lived reality of women in IORA countries by funding research and analysis to develop the evidence-base to inform policy decisions and measure progress to achieve gender equality
4. Implement gender responsive policy frameworks and budgets
5. Develop an IORA framework for responsible tourism to advance women's economic empowerment
6. Take a whole-of-community approach to the women's economic empowerment, acknowledging the complex interaction of gender roles, responsibilities and norms

Context

Tourism and textiles is a common thread running through all Indian Ocean rim economies, engaging women right across the region. The textiles sector is reflected strongly in trade: the total value of textiles exports (fashion, carpets, yarn and wicker-ware) in IORA countries in 2011-12 is estimated at \$5.5 billion. The proximity to the ocean offers economic significant potential—according to the UN World Tourism Organization, one in every two tourists globally visits a coastal area. Women are active in both sectors, especially as workers, and have the capacity to scale-up their participation. The creative economy plays a key role in textiles and tourism, and holds potential for shaping women's empowerment with positive value chain effects for both textiles and tourism.

Among women in the Indian Ocean rim, there is growing entrepreneurialism, labour force participation and leadership aspirations. Yet barriers in the region remain. The region includes countries with some of the lowest rates of women's labour force participation in the world, and many countries still do not have equal inheritance laws between men and women for land and property. Disparities in employment, education, political participation and legal rights remain.

In this context, women's economic empowerment is defined as:

- › Women's economic advancement (economic success and gain for women)
- › Women's power and agency (the ability of women to make and act on decisions, and control their resources and profits).

Australian focus on women's empowerment in the Indian Ocean rim

Gender equality and women's empowerment are key priorities for Australia's foreign policy, aid and trade advocacy work. Gender inequalities impose economic and social costs on families, communities and states. When women cannot participate in the labour force, are excluded from management roles, or unable to enter certain occupations because of law or customs, GDP growth can drop as much as 2 per cent.

Australia is looking to global and regional frameworks, including IORA, to take meaningful steps towards addressing women's empowerment. In our role as chair of IORA (2013-2015) we have championed women's empowerment as a key area of focus.

At the 2013 IORA Council of Minister's Meeting (COMM), Women's Empowerment was named as a cross cutting issue that would be mainstreamed across IORA's six other priority areas.

Building on this momentum, Australia co-hosted an IORA Women's Economic Empowerment Event with UNDP in Kuala Lumpur, 17-19 August 2014:

- › this was the first IORA event of its kind to involve participants from all 20 member states
- › the event participants prepared key messages on how IORA members can support women's economic empowerment.



Event structure and participants

The event was held over two days. It included academic presentations, individual stories, interactive panel discussions, small group discussions, question and answer forums, and opportunities for networking in the margins. The program was designed to stimulate collective thinking and discussion on actions, interventions, and conditions required to increase women's economic empowerment in IORA countries.

Participants were from academia, business, civil society and government to capture a broad range of views and experience. Participants were selected on the basis that they were able to contribute to the development of the key messages, ensuring an evidence base for the discussions on policy implications.

During the course of the event, participants considered which issues resonate with their own lived experience and country context—noting that each country in IORA is unique, the opportunities for women are different, and the support necessary for women to take advantage of these opportunities may look different in each context.

The six priority messages were developed over three interactive sessions. Participants were each first asked to put forward a single issue—a principle, action or acknowledgement—that resonated with their lived experience and country context and priorities. These issues were categorised as having local, national, or regional relevance. All suggestions were included to provide a record of each participant's view.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Asia-Pacific Regional Office and the Australian National University were partners in the event. The IORA Secretariat played a key supporting role.