MAS Holdings

Empowering women to reach their full potential

Commitment to action

IMAGE: COURTESY OF MAS HOLDINGS
About IFC

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About IFC’s Women in Work Program in Sri Lanka

Women in Work (WiW) is a five-year, $9.5 million initiative launched in partnership with the Australian government in April 2017. It is IFC’s largest, standalone country-based gender program designed to close gender gaps in the private sector while improving business performance. The program, which benefits from multisector program design and works closely with the World Bank on research, tackles women’s access to jobs and assets at the same time. It aims to increase women’s workforce participation in Sri Lanka’s private sector, create more and better jobs for women, and has the potential to increase profits and drive overall economic growth. WiW also contributes to the vision of the government of Sri Lanka where all citizens can achieve higher incomes and better standards of living by 2025.

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MAS Holdings is one of the largest design-to-delivery solutions providers in the apparel and textile manufacturing industry in South Asia. Headquartered in Sri Lanka, with 53 manufacturing facilities across 16 countries and design facilities in key locations across the globe, the company produces for brands like Calvin Klein, Marks & Spencer, Nike and Victoria’s Secret among others. MAS Holdings employs more than 99,000 employees (70 percent women) globally, and close to 76,000 employees in Sri Lanka (70 percent are women).

**PROPELLING WOMEN TO LEADERSHIP, WHILE EXPANDING JOB ROLES**

Tackling an industry wide challenge in graduating factory associates to managerial positions, MAS has a structured process for career development called the Team Leader and Group Leader program and technical and leadership skill development that grants a certification and a diploma for factory workers. A mentorship program was introduced for female team members, connecting them with a manager at their own facility to support and develop a pool of talent for the MAS’ flagship’ Empowered Woman of the Year’ Award. A female executive mentorship program was also introduced in all divisions in the group, which connects high performing female executives to mentors in senior management. This program aims to connect female mentees to female mentors, wherever possible, in a bid to develop both junior executives and senior women in the organization.

Since 2018, there has been a noteworthy improvement in the recruitment of women to the position of Assistant Manager and above, from 18 percent to 42 percent. Recruitment of females in the overall executive and higher grades increased from 35 to 38 percent which shows a substantial increase in recruitment efforts. Internal promotions of women have progressed from 29 percent in 2018 to 37 percent in 2019.

**INCREASING THE NUMBER OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN NON-TRADITIONAL ROLES**

There were 67 women appointed to roles traditionally filled by men in the apparel industry, such as mechanics, electricians, printers, and cutters. Women were provided training under the ‘Iron Lady training program’, which aims to expand job opportunities for women in this sector. Twenty female employees were trained to be cutters, 11 to be mechanics, three to be end-line printers and 33 to be technicians in 2019.

**BUSINESS RESULTS:**

- **Share of women on the boards increased by 8% to reach 15%**
- **Over 850 women were promoted**
- **67 women were appointed on roles traditionally filled by men**
**WOMEN GO BEYOND PROGRAM MAKING POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF FEMALE ASSOCIATES**

MAS’ women’s empowerment program Women Go Beyond (WGB), operating since 2003 as a strategic initiative, is resourced with people from across the group to carry out programming focusing on women’s empowerment and gender equality. It recognized 154 inspirational women from across all MAS facilities around the globe for their exceptional achievements at the 13th Abhimani Empowered Women of the Year Awards in 2019. The awards also recognized excellence in entrepreneurship, innovation and continuous improvement, community service, sustainability and sports. Winners are recognized and their stories of achievement amidst extremely trying circumstances, are shared widely, through written media, audio and visual media, creating role models and ingraining women’s empowerment as a core value or the organization. The organization carries out leadership development, language and other training for winners over the years following the award and winners also receive cash awards.

The MAS Women Go Beyond Program provides education, awareness and services in reproductive health and rights, female related health issues, gender-based violence, career development for women and skill development leading to the creation of female entrepreneurs.

MAS Vaanavil and Vidiyal together provide employment for approximately 2,000 direct employees in the northern region of Sri Lanka and positively contribute to the livelihoods of their families.

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**CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE**

MAS leadership advocated for increasing women’s leadership throughout the company. Directors from across MAS companies voiced their support and outlined action plans for empowering women in the workforce via a series of video interviews. These messages from the ‘Champions of Change’ are being shared with employees and communities, with the objective of increasing employee buy-in for the Group’s target of increasing the number of women leaders and of encouraging more women to pursue leadership positions. Sensitization workshops are being held for all executive and above cadre on the topics of unconscious bias and the business case for diversity.

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**“**

When I joined MAS Vaanavil and saw a sewing machine, I was terrified as it was the first time, I ever saw one and I had no idea what to do with it. The Women Go Beyond program really helped me to understand the culture of the organization and has taught me not only how to be the best in my job but also many other life skills. I lost my father during the war and had to take the family and financial responsibility of my mother and sisters. I have not only grown in my career but I am also proud to say that I have built a house for my family and also influenced many of our neighbors, that are also single female-headed households, to join MAS Vaanavil”.

**S. Rohiny**
Raw Material Warehouse, MAS Vaanavil

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**“**

There are over 100 mechanics and I am proud to be one of the three women in this department. The ‘Iron Lady Training program’ gave me the on the job training required for me to be the best version of myself in my role. I ensure production machines, equipment and the associated spare-parts and work-aids are installed, maintained, optimally utilized and improved in support of the factory operations.”

**S. Pirashanthy**
Mechanic, MAS Vannavil
AWARENESS RAISING ON ANTI-HARASSMENT

MAS strengthened its existing anti-harassment policies and rolled out comprehensive tri-lingual communications to ensure all staff are aware of the standard Equal Opportunity and Anti-harassment Policy. Educational videos, workshops and email campaigns have been used to disseminate instructions on procedures for addressing claims of harassment, as well as awareness raising of the types of behaviors that are considered harassment and bullying.

The awareness sessions have been really important in helping people identify and understand what problem behavior is. The visibility around the anti-harassment policy has also increased a lot over the last two years. There are informative videos that are played on the screens around the factories and offices, as well as dedicated officers to handle cases at each location. From recruitment itself there is an emphasis on creating a workplace free from bullying and harassment.”

Sudesh Gunasekera
Manager - Innovation Strategy, MAS Active.

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TACKLING CHILDCARE ACROSS 11 LOCATIONS IN SRI LANKA, JORDON AND INDIA

MAS Holdings reported improvements in employee attendance and reduced turnover after introducing employer supported childcare facilities at 11 of its worksites across Sri Lanka, Jordan and India. Absences due to sick leave fell by 9 percentage points, within eight months of introducing a childcare center in the MAS Kreeda Al Saḥḳ-Madaba factory in Jordan.

“Being able to use the MAS Kreeda childcare center has been really helpful, as my work takes me far from home. Earlier people would make fun of fathers taking the time to drop their kids off at school or creche, because taking care of the child was perceived as a mother’s responsibility. Now I find that people are very accepting and supportive towards the fact that it’s both parents’ responsibility. As a family we have a great relationship with the center, and I can focus on work without worrying about safety and the quality of care my children get”

Supun Molligoda
Senior Executive - Plant Lean Enterprise - MAS Kreeda.

FACING COVID-19

MAS introduced a flex-work policy, in 2019 with full time and part time flexible work and started piloting a few options at a number of locations, working through the myriad of challenges posed by having manufacturing roles in a labor intensive industry and a huge mindset shift for many managers. With the Government mandated lockdown due to COVID-19, work from home, which was one of the flexibility innovations, was put to a rather extreme test.

Continuous email communications were shared with staff to help them familiarize themselves further with the policy and setting healthy guidelines related to working from home during this period. A hot line was also established for employees to flag any work-related issues. The Group HR department conducted a staff survey to assess the effectiveness of home-based work, in order to identify challenges employees were experiencing. Grievances were addressed for each employee at a team level, which increased the effectiveness and productivity of the process.

MAS is continuing to work on new ways of working with more flexibility and understanding job roles which are amenable to different types of flexibility.
Imani’s Story

“The mentorship program is the best thing that happened to me in my career development. Before I was introduced to the mentorship program, I didn’t have anyone to share my experience and concerns with, and to ask for unbiased advice,” said Imani Wimalaratne, Manager - PCU at MAS Intimates, Linea Clothing in Kandy. Imani began her career with MAS in 2006 as a planning executive. After having been identified by the ‘Women in Leadership’ program as a high performer, Imani was referred to the MAS mentorship program, to be mentored by the Strategic Transformation Director at MAS Holdings, Kasuni Silva.

Undaunted by the fact that they were in two different provinces, Kasuni and Imani took a structured approach to the mentorship experience. With regular online check-ins and calls, supplemented by a few in person meet ups, Kasuni helped Imani venture out of her comfort zone and take on a new role at the neighboring MAS plant, where she oversaw improving supplier processes.

“We spent a few sessions getting to know each other, then Kasuni ran a perception check-up with my suppliers, staff and managers to understand how other people I interact with at work saw me. This exercise was totally unexpected and was a great eye opener for me. She made me write down my career aspirations and my plans to achieve these. I saw that I was going through the motions in my present role and Kasuni helped me talk to my supervisors for me to join the MAS Casualline factory and work on improving the systems there. I loved this role and the challenge it posed!” Imani was recognized at the MAS Abhirami Awards 2019, where she was one of eleven employees who were recognized as upcoming leaders at MAS.

“We have a lot of women at the Assistant Manager level, but not enough come up to become General Managers. The Women in Leadership program introduced mentorship to help solve this. Imani was part of that program and was identified as a top talent who could one day reach that level,” said Kasuni, adding that she has seen Imani grow in confidence in her own capacity as a leader.

Paying forward what she has learnt, Imani is now a mentor in turn to several other young women working with her at MAS and looks forward to her regular chats with her mentees where she helps them navigate challenges and rise up the corporate ladder.
The IFC-DFAT Woman in Work program in Sri Lanka, partnering with leading private sector companies, aims to demonstrate that corporate performances can improve from closing gaps between women and men in the private sector.