CBL Group
Gender inclusivity for sustainable business
Commitment to action
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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November 2020
The CBL Group is one of the largest and fastest growing Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) manufacturers in Sri Lanka, producing and marketing leading brands in confectionary, nutrition and convenience, organic fruit and spices. The business caters to a large overseas market and is a technology and innovation-led manufacturer. The Group employs over 6,000 employees of which 31 percent are women and works with a registered network of over 12,000 conventional and organic farmers of which 30 percent are women.

‘SENEHASE PIYASA’ (SHELTER WITH LOVE) – TACKLING CHILDCARE ROUND THE CLOCK

CBL launched an in-house childcare facility, using the services of a recognized service provider in October 2018. The facility is open from 5.30 a.m. to 10.30 p.m. to accommodate the needs of CBL working hours. Senehase Piyasa can accommodate 40 children and is available to staff at the subsidized rate of 6,000 rupees per month. CBL covers all overhead costs and half the monthly variable costs. A committee consisting of the service provider, associates’ union, parents and management, conducts monthly quality assurance meetings to ensure the service delivers what parents need and addresses any grievances.

I was about to leave my job, as we just could not find childcare that suited my shift hours. The pressure from my family was increasing as well for me to resign. This increased my stress levels. But when Senehase Piyasa was opened, I was able to leave my daughter in a trusted place close to me, I know she is well cared for and is happy. My stress levels have reduced, and I don’t need to take days off because of childcare commitments.”

N P Monika Udaya Kumari
Manufacturing Department and mother of one

At present Senehase Piyasa cares for 32 children. CBL states that maternity return rates improved by 23 percentage point among the staff once the creche was introduced. Before, around 10 new mothers would resign every year, after the creche was introduced this rate drastically went down to 2 which accounts for an 80 percent increase of the return rates. Staff also report reduced stress and distractions due to the availability of quality, trusted round the clock childcare.

Since the creche was opened, there has been a marked reduction the number of no-pay leave days taken by staff who are parents – it has reduced by 40 percentage points, and lateness has decreased by 42.5 percentage points.

‘BEST PLACES TO WORK’ Awards presented by Great Place to Work® (GPW®) Sri Lanka

BUSINESS RESULTS:

- Share of women in middle management increased from 14% to 18%
- Introduced On-site Childcare facility operational from 5:30am to 10:30pm
- Maternity return rates increased by 23%
- Reduced absenteeism rate by 40%
- Initiated training and business development program for women in CBL supply chain
This year, CBL and CBL Natural were recognized as one of the 40 best places to work. CBL Exports was not only certified as a Great Place To Work in 2020 but became one of the top 10 Employers for Millennials.

**WOMEN IN VALUE CHAIN**

Sri Lanka’s one million SMEs – 25 percent of which are owned by women – are an engine for job creation, accounting for 80 percent of all businesses in the country. The FMCG sector – which accounts for 30 percent of the country’s gross domestic product and close to 20 percent of employment – relies significantly on SME multi-brand distributors and retailers to reach consumers. Limited business planning, coupled with weak financial and HR management, often curtail the growth of these retailers and distributors, with women retailers and distributors often the most constrained.

To help respond to this challenge, in December 2019 IFC and CBL launched a program to provide training and business development opportunities to strengthen and increase female participation in CBL’s distribution chain across Sri Lanka. In addition to business capacity building, the program also focuses on promoting digital payment methods among retailers and distributors. Through this program CBL aims to double the number of women distributors, which is currently at 10 percent, in its network and to support existing distributors and retailers to introduce new business processes, including a target of 40 percent to be using new digital payments methods, within two years.

Increased sales demonstrate the clear business case for CBL Group with the distributor revenue increasing by 10 percent and the retailer’s revenue increasing by 10 percent within 6 months.
FACING COVID-19

When the pandemic hit, as one the country’s largest food manufacturers, CBL Group was classified as an essential service. This meant the company had to introduce an entirely new way of working virtually overnight in order to meet the continued, and in some cases increased, demand for products while also ensuring the safety and wellbeing of its staff. CBL prioritized staff engagement and communicating detailed safety procedures, making them active partners in the process. Despite the grave economic challenges posed by the pandemic and with companies across Sri Lanka and the world compelled to resort to layoffs and pay cuts, CBL continued to ensure job security for its employees with zero layoffs or pay cuts and ensured that staff remuneration and benefit packages were rolled out, even providing essential goods and transport for employees engaged in factory work during the lockdown.

CBL established innovative solutions for how to meet the demand for its products in a context where members of the public were unable to access retail outlets. These included partnering with delivery platforms like PickMe and Daraz. The company also developed its own online platforms for select brands, ensuring the food distribution chain was intact.

Keeping the supply chain intact proved to be most challenging when the government mandated travel restrictions. With over 10,000 farmers supplying local produce for CBL’s manufacturing, CBL was forced to find new ways of accessing supplies and supporting farmers. To protect these suppliers, CBL dispersed dedicated agricultural teams to help farmers face the challenges of the pandemic.

“The Group’s focus will remain on strengthening the food supply chain in the months to come. It is increasingly evident that the food supply chain must be developed to face the challenges of the future and, building a diverse and inclusive supply chain is key to its sustainability. We want to see increased participation of women and youth across our value chain, in our farmer network, our core manufacturing operations and our distribution networks so we will continue to take action that creates meaningful growth in these areas.”

Shea Wickramasingha
Group Managing Director of the CBL Group reflecting on the Group’s focus in the new normal.

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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.