Women’s Business Agendas (WBA)

A Women’s Business Agenda (WBA) is both an advocacy process and a product. The process is cyclical: convene businesswomen and their allies, build consensus on key issues and their respective priorities, develop policy prescriptions, advocate to policymakers, monitor the policymaking process and evaluate the effectiveness of advocacy, reconvene to begin the process again with an updated set of issues. The WBA product is a document containing research and data on barriers to women’s participation in commerce and a set of policy recommendations vetted and endorsed by a diverse group of private sector stakeholders whose number and breadth of representation carries serious weight for governing leaders.

Women’s Business Agenda Process

CIPE adapted the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s National Business Agenda advocacy tool to create a Women’s Business Agenda tool to give a strong, diverse and credible voice to women in the private sector globally in shaping the laws that govern them. CIPE works with local women’s business associations to include vulnerable groups, such as indigenous communities, youth, ethnic or religious minorities, LGBTI+ and people with disabilities, in the WBA process.

The goal of the WBA process is to incorporate the needs and perspectives of marginalized communities in collective action efforts focused on women’s empowerment and to advocate against discriminatory laws and barriers that limit full participation in the economic sector. The process is iterative. Each cycle usually lasts a year and involves building local ownership so that the issues put forward are developed organically and benefit from strong local buy-in from the women businesses involved in the process. At the end of each cycle, stakeholders reconvene to assess their achievements and identify new priorities for advocacy.

Success Story

In 2009 CIPE partnered with the Bangladesh Women’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWCCI), the country’s first women’s chamber of commerce, to develop a WBA. The Agenda contained 30 policy recommendations for three categories of barriers – social, capacity, and financial. The related advocacy resulted in an increased proportion of women entrepreneurs receiving commercial bank loans, from 19 percent in 2007 to more than 50 percent by 2014; more than $93 million in loans for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) given to 10,000 women; and more than 65 percent of the country’s banks staffing dedicated desks for women borrowers.
The WBA process involves seven steps:

1. **Introduction and coalition development** - an overview of how the private sector employs advocacy through business agendas around the world and adapts the business agenda model to champion progress in changing the barriers to women’s participation in commerce.

2. **Coalition meetings** - regular meetings to begin building consensus on priority advocacy issues.

3. **Research on economic barriers and recommendations to the private sector** – coalitions finalize a preliminary list of priorities in the country and work with local researchers to assess them and develop policy recommendations for reform. After the first draft of the agenda is complete, it is distributed to coalition members and the wider private sector to solicit feedback and gain buy-in.

4. **Public launch** – the WBA is launched locally with media to government officials, business leaders, journalists and members of the general public, as well as representatives from international organizations and embassies. Mainstream Chambers of Commerce often serve as an ally in combatting the barriers to women’s business participation.

5. **Public-private dialogue** - following the launch, coalition members meet with the private sector, legislative and executive representatives and other key decision-makers and identify champions and allies to focus problems, priorities and key areas for reform.

6. **Legal assessment** – creation of a tracking system to follow reform progress based on business agenda recommendations.

7. **Public relations/outreach/capacity development** - CIPE provides continued support to coalitions in the new advocacy processes.

Countries where the model has been employed successfully:

- **Bangladesh** (2009)
- **Nigeria** (2016)
- **Pakistan** (2017)
- **Papua New Guinea** (2021)
- **Morocco** (2021)