

United Nations ESCAP and SEAF Partner To Unlock US\$150 Million In Capital To Advance Women Entrepreneurship In Asia

Bangkok, Thailand – March 4, 2020 - The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Small Enterprise Assistance Funds (SEAF) have formalized a partnership to catalyze women’s entrepreneurship through impact investing in Asia. The partners will work to unlock growth capital for small and medium enterprises, through the development and management of private equity impact funds targeting women as business owners, leaders, employees, and consumers.

In late 2019, ESCAP launched its [Women Enterprise Impact Investment Fund](#), with financial support from the Government of Canada, through Global Affairs Canada. The Fund seeks to provide funding and technical assistance support for the establishment of a women enterprise impact investing fund in the region. SEAF was selected through a rigorous process, with applications received from over 30 impact funds. SEAF’s selection was facilitated by an external expert investment committee, comprised of industry leaders and was based on the firm’s established fund management expertise, thought leadership on women’s investing and entrepreneurship development, local operational capacity, and international network of investors and portfolio companies.

SEAF has been active in the region for more than a decade, having launched the Blue Waters Growth Fund in 2007, followed by SEAF Bangladesh Ventures (SEAF BV) in 2010 and the SEAF Women’s Opportunity Fund (SWOF) in 2017. The focus of the ESCAP/SEAF partnerships will be to further expand SEAF Bangladesh Ventures to take a gender lens investing approach, while in parallel launch the SEAF Women’s Economic Empowerment Fund (SWEEF) in South East Asia. This year, both SEAF BV Fund will be expanding, and SWEEF is set to be launched, with the aim of closing its first investment deals by the end of 2020.

8 March marks International Women’s Day and this year’s theme is *I am Generation Equality: Realizing Women’s Rights*. In advance of this occasion, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana stated, “As we enter the Decade of Action for sustainable development, advancing women’s equality through access to finance is key. It builds agency, catalyzes entrepreneurship, and leads to more inclusive growth. ESCAP is delighted to be partnering with SEAF to unlock private capital and channel it to women enterprises in Asia and the Pacific.”

“The promotion of equal opportunities for women entrepreneurs to access both growth capital, as well as active business development and mentoring has long been overlooked,” commented SEAF Senior Managing Director Ms. Jennifer Buckley. “The commitment of ESCAP is a welcome development and will be a true catalyst to the advancement of women entrepreneurship in the region and beyond. SEAF is proud to have been selected as a partner and will continue to work towards this ever-important cause.”

Through the partnership, SEAF will undertake the key task of launching and managing SWEEF while further expanding SEAF BV, two funds which will collectively bring over US\$ 150 million in

capital to a largely underserved region. Consistent with SEAF's mission, the funds will focus on investing in and developing small and medium-sized enterprises, an oft-overlooked class of businesses. The investment strategy will have a gender lens overlay, with the implementation of the [SEAF Gender Equality Scorecard](#). ESCAP will provide SEAF with technical assistance and grant support including knowledge, resources, networking and guidance, all aimed at catalyzing the women's entrepreneurship ecosystem in ASEAN and Bangladesh.

For more information on SEAF and the organization's approach towards closing the gender gap, please refer to their recent article <https://www.seaf.com/closing-gender-gaps/>.

About ESCAP's Catalysing Women's Entrepreneurship Programme

This initiative is implemented under a regional programme initiative titled 'Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship: Creating a Gender-Responsive Entrepreneurial Ecosystem' funded by the Government of Canada, through Global Affairs Canada, and implemented by United Nations ESCAP. The programme aims to support the growth of women entrepreneurs in the Asia-Pacific region through addressing the challenges faced at three levels: enabling policy environment, access to finance and use of ICT for entrepreneurship.

About SEAF

SEAF is a global impact private equity manager achieving meaningful and measurable impact results and positive financial returns by providing entrepreneurs in emerging markets with the capital, knowledge, and networks they need to grow their businesses. To date, SEAF has managed more than US\$ 1.2 billion of impact capital, investing more than US\$ 560 million through 430 impact investments globally. The firm made its equity investment via SWOF, an investment partnership with the Australian government's Investing in Women initiative that backs women-led businesses in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia.

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