

Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas

Supporting Women Entrepreneurs



The Department of State has long supported women entrepreneurs. The Pathways to Prosperity Women Entrepreneurs Mentoring Network has become a signature initiative of that commitment. Pathways to Prosperity links together countries in the Americas to identify policies and programs that ensure all citizens share in the benefits of economic integration and globalization. One of the key objectives is to empower participation in the global economy. Countries participating in Pathways have placed a particular focus on promoting women's entrepreneurship.

Launching the Women's Entrepreneurs Network

Supporting businesswomen provides a boost to the economy and a multiplier effect for their communities and the region. Ongoing assistance and programs under the initiative offer:

- Networking opportunities for entrepreneurs and mentors;
- Discussions on finance, marketing, trade, technology, and leadership;
- "How To" seminars to address issues such as financial backing, branding, logistics of importing, and identifying relevant resources;
- Field visits to local women-led businesses; and
- Expos for entrepreneurs to exhibit and make business connections in the Americas.

The Women Entrepreneurs Conference (ACCESS), hosted by the United States in October 2009, launched a network which helps promote these programs. Early career entrepreneurs were linked with seasoned women entrepreneurs, from the United States and the region, to develop their skills.

Tracking and Ensuring Success through Continuing Mentorship

Women have participated in visitors' programs to the United States to meet with and observe women-owned small businesses and other programs. Participants in the mentoring network attended the Pathways Ministerial in Costa Rica in March 2010. In May 2010, on the margins of the Vital Voices Summit in Guatemala City, the Department of State's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs held a regional workshop that promoted leadership and excellence to entrepreneurs and young women ages 14-18.

Working with a variety of public, private and civil society partners, the Department of State has expanded its programming for women entrepreneurs. In 2010, small grants were provided to U.S. Embassies in Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay to promote expansion of the Network at the local level.

In Colombia, partnerships with the municipal governments in Bucaramanga and Buenaventura are helping Afro-Colombian and indigenous women entrepreneurs. Embassy El Salvador has partnered with Vital Voices and the Government of El Salvador to provide training for businesses ready to export. Embassy Honduras is supporting a women-owned flower growers' cooperative. Embassy Panama provides English-language training and mentoring for young women through partnerships with two NGOs and the Peace Corps. In Costa Rica, the Embassy is partnering with Coca-Cola and the Costa Rican government to help women entrepreneurs find their place in the global supply chain.

In Peru, the Department of State's Pathways Access Initiative (PAI) aims to support U.S. corporations seeking supplier diversity in Latin America by certifying qualified women-owned businesses. The State Department and USAID have contracted with WEConnect International (WECI) which represents over US\$700 billion in annual purchasing power, to implement PAI.

Looking Forward

During the Fourth Pathways Ministerial meeting, October 5-6, 2011, in the Dominican Republic, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton opened an event that brought together 30 women entrepreneurs and program partners for a discussion on how best to advance women's entrepreneurship in the Americas. The Department of State's Assistant Secretary for Economic, Energy and Business Affairs, Jose W. Fernandez, led the discussion with participation from partners such as Walmart, Coca Cola, and WEConnect International. Entrepreneurs can use an online tool, <http://pathways-caminos.org>, to facilitate mentoring relationships.

Private Sector Partners

Collaborating with the U.S. Department of State in the Women Entrepreneurs' Network are Agora Partnership, Apple, Business Council for International Understanding, Coca Cola, Count Me In, Endeavor, Ernst & Young, FedEx, Global Brigades Goldman Sachs, Inter-American Development Bank, Organization of American States, Peace Corps, WEConnect International, and Vital Voices.

Pathways Countries

Pathways countries include Belize, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, and the United States. Brazil and Trinidad and Tobago have attended Pathways meetings as observers and special guests.