

**Women's small and medium enterprises – path to overcome poverty and  
to ensure sustainable development  
by Irina Gorbulina (Russia)**

On behalf of Russian delegates let me first of all express my cordial greetings to all colleagues and guests attending the 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Women Leaders' Network in APEC hosted by warmly welcoming Vietnam.

In a 10-years span the initiative to consolidate women leaders within the frame of the vast Asia-Pacific economic region has transformed to a successful project providing for women opportunities to face together our common challenges and to explore new horizons. I am convinced that the activities carried out by Women Leaders' Network in APEC will raise more and more interest in Russia, and representation of Russian women will be more and more substantial.

The development of women entrepreneurship everywhere in the world is a key strategy and an efficient tool to overcome problems of women unemployment and poverty.

It is well known, that in the spirit of the implementation of UN Millennium Declaration Russia made commitments to reduce poverty, to provide equal access to the education, gender equality, better infant and maternal health, to fight HIV/AIDS and other threatening diseases, to preserve environment.

At the present time Russian economy is steadily growing. High rate of the economic growth at the level of 7-8% of GDP per year is registered. Russia, alongside with Brasil, India and China represents one of the most dynamic economies of the modern world.

There is a sound social trend in our economical development, a steady growth in living standards, national projects are adopted and successfully implemented to provide citizens with affordable housing, to modernize health and care systems, to develop education. Nevertheless, the problem of poverty is still a critical issue.

Currently, about 30 million of our citizens are living below poverty line. An impressive number. This is the reason why our President Vladimir Putin voiced it and determined the alleviating of poverty as one of our national priorities. Some 60% of families with children live below poverty line, starvation is a word for more than 10% of elder persons, and more than 90% of disabled persons face critical challenges. Rural poverty represents also a serious problem. It is utterly regrettable to state that the substantial parts of our poor are persons able to work.

Same as everywhere throughout the world, Russian women are the first ones to suffer from poverty burden. Some estimates show that women represent more than 50% among poor. The most exposed to poverty are sole women and unmarried mothers, aged from 25 to 45 years old. Unemployment is also gender-specific, women represent more than a half of unemployed persons.

In a long run, only economical growth can provide solid basis to solve social problems, also to alleviate poverty, and Russian government is applying persistent efforts in this direction.

Joint efforts of state and business community should be aimed and are aimed in reality to provide better employment, to apply efficient measures for personalized social support, to develop small and medium business.

Our point is that the development of small and medium women entrepreneurship should be one of the main priorities in solving many critical issues. First of all, to solve women unemployment problems, to implement the constitutional women right for employment. Women entrepreneurship is an efficient tool allowing women not only to be better adapted to new social and economy conditions and to solve their own employment issues, but also a tool to create new workplaces, to actively alleviate poverty.

Regardless of all problems, women entrepreneurship in Russia follows the worldwide trends in its development. I can remind that in a number of industrially developed countries the enterprises managed by women provide from 50 to 60% of the national GDP. By various estimates, it amounts to 50-52% in

Germany and in the USA, to 52-55% in Japan, to 57-60% in Italy. It means that there women are successfully integrated in the economic development. It means also that in our country we have yet to go a rather long way. But even now, women entrepreneurship, especially small and medium one is a significant factor of Russian economy, and it has a huge potential for further development.

Some estimates say that Russia is one of the leaders as far as the share of women managers is concerned; women entrepreneurship is developing 1.7 more dynamically than the men entrepreneurship. The third of all Russian managers are women. Intellect, management culture, social responsibility – these are the elements of women input to business. Women managers are not only achieving stable results for their enterprises, but they are also efficient in solving social problems, not only corporate and women-specific, but also those one regarding the wider environment of their town in general.

Currently, by some estimate, the share of women entrepreneurs in Russia amounts to almost 40% of the total. I expressly use the word “some”, because unfortunately, there is no official statistics. At the present time, it is impossible to specify the number of actually operating women enterprises or a number of industrial corporations managed by women.

But I can say with certainty that Russian women have an exclusively high level of education (80%), and many of them graduated not from one university, but from several ones. Thanks to this factor and also thanks to women responsibility, to their patience in running their business, to their ability to establish relationship, the companies headed by women work more steadily, and their small businesses generate higher income.

First generation of Russian women entrepreneurs succeeded in a highly controversial environment of the transition to democracy and to the market economy in nineties. Nowadays as long as economic relations are becoming more civilized, new opportunities are emerging for women to explore them.

It often happens in Russia that women start their business and run it, in defiance of all circumstances, as we say. In many cases, to start her own business is the only opportunity for a woman willing to implement her potential to full extent, to achieve a real professional success.

Under these circumstances, it is of great importance for the future of Russia to apply efforts aimed to bring up a new generation of women entrepreneurs. It is necessary to make girls confident in their potential even at secondary school level, to promote active mentoring, throughout case studies of self-made women successes in entrepreneurship and in business administration, to establish institutes supporting women entrepreneurship and facilitating access to financing and to consulting services.

Russian Academy of Business, which I represent, is a major national business association, paying special attention to the problems of women entrepreneurship and of women leadership.

We organized dozens of congresses, conferences, “round tables”, forums, which became discussion panels, provided opportunities for new contacts and experience to be shared. The Academy established and annually awards the National Award for Russian women undertakings “Olympia”; we also regularly issue a publication “Prominent women of Russia”.

During our women forums we discuss the most urgent issues relevant for women, and formulate a consolidated position of Russian women leaders and business community on the key issues of national development.

It is of greatest importance that these panels provide opportunities to share experience with women from various regions of Russia, therefore enhancing best practices and achievements.

It is also important that the decisions and resolutions adopted at these women forums are directly submitted to the State Duma, to the Council of Federation, to the President Administration, thus allowing women community opinion to be heard by state top officials.

Within the structure of the Russian Academy of Business a Committee for the issues of women leadership and women entrepreneurship development was established a year ago. Recently another Committee is established, it will deal with maternity and childhood issues.

We are certainly interested and consider as being of great importance the experience gained by our colleagues from other APEC countries regarding the development of women small and medium entrepreneurship, in order to have a new look on our own activities, to explore new opportunities.

As a conclusion I would like to express the confidence that the participation in Women Leaders Network activities will become for Russian women an important step in the integration to the world women leader movement.

I would like to thank you all for your attention, and to say special thanks to our Vietnamese colleagues for the excellent organization and warm welcome.

I wish to the Meeting participants, to all colleagues in APEC countries new successes in your professional activities for the benefit of society, peace and well-being.