

WLN Meeting Vietnam 2006: Contents and Priorities

by
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Dear representatives of WLN members,

We, leaders of the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU), are very happy to host 11th WLN Meeting in Hanoi. The taking up of this position demonstrates VWU commitment to become more active and productive in promoting women entrepreneurship, particularly when Vietnam is about to enter WTO. Our honor as a host is accompanied with numerous responsibilities and challenges, but we are very lucky to have been receiving generous assistance and support from all the WLN members. Thank you very much for your help in making this event possible.

Taking the WLN Chair position after the WLN flag hand-over ceremony in the 10th WLN Meeting in Daegu, Korea 2005, VWU have been actively preparing for the 11th WLN Meeting in Hanoi. Along with logistics preparations, a lot of time and grey matters have been invested in defining the contents and priorities of this year's meeting, firstly its theme and sub-themes.

In line with the overall theme of APEC 2006, the theme of the WLN Meeting 2006 is ***"Towards a Dynamic Community: Enhancing the Competitiveness of Women's Business for Sustainable Development and Prosperity"***. This also coincides with the theme of the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Working Group and Ministerial Meeting, as the 2006 WLN Recommendations will be addressed to this APEC Ministerial Meeting.

With this orientation, the 11th WLN Meeting defines 2 sub-themes:

- 1) "Women entrepreneurs vs. dynamic and effective economic development" and
- 2) "Women entrepreneurs and sustainable development".

As the Meeting this year celebrates WLN's 10th Anniversary, it dedicates the third sub-theme to the Network's future:

- 3) "WLN in the second decade: Where do we go from here?".

The subthemes reflect the common concerns of our Network, i.e. supporting and developing women's businesses, the role of information technologies and media in this process, and the need for balancing social concerns and economic growth. They also require us to look critically at our Network's functioning, effectiveness and future road-map at this important moment marking a decade of WLN existence.

In the program, as you see, the 3 sub-themes are translated into 4 workshops and 1 plenary (i.e. plenary No.2), which makes the core substance of the 11th WLN Meeting. There are also the opening and closing session, obviously; this plenary No. 1, which is mainly to provide participants with background information and orientation about the event; and plenary No. 3, in which we will wrap-up the previous sessions' outcomes and discuss common issues in preparation for the closing ceremony. After the Statement/Recommendations are approved and handed over to the Vietnam Minister of Planning and Investment, who is in charge of APEC SME Ministerial Meeting 2006, international delegates are all invited to have a field trip and visit the famous Ha Long bay.

An important "behind the scene" part of our Meeting, as we already know, is the meetings of the Statement Drafting Committee. Each economy has 1-2 representatives in the Drafting Committee to work on the revision of the draft Statement/Recommendations, which has been penned and circulated by the WLN host

to focal points for comments and inputs. The Statement/ Recommendations will need adjustments in tune with the outcomes of the sessions as well the WLN off-side events, i.e. the APEC Forum on Digital Economy for Women 2006, the 4th APEC Business Incubator Forum and the APEC SME Forum. I am sure that with constructive contributions and consensus from all the delegations, this critical document will reflect the truest our needs, desires and determinations.

I would also like to inform you that Madam Chair of WLN 2006, Mme. Ha Thi Khiet, just received an invitation from Vietnam Minister of Planning and Investment to attend the coming APEC Ministerial Meeting on SME. The 2006 WLN Statement/Recommendations will therefore be presented in this important meeting, bringing to the attention of APEC Ministers responsible for SME our critical concerns and proposals.

Having briefed you of the agenda, I would like to introduce some of the priority issues that we suggest for the most substantial sessions – the 4 workshops and plenary No. 2.

Under the sub-theme 1, **workshop 1** has the title “*Enhancing ICT capacity and promoting Business Development Services (BDS) to support women entrepreneurs*”. ICT has been a big concern for WLN Meeting. The continuous advancement of ICT and the Internet is changing the way business is done throughout the APEC region. Therefore it is important to make women more aware of ICT and at the same time make it more accessible, affordable and available to women. It is expected that in this workshop, best practices in improving women’s ICT literacy will be identified and promoted.

Also under sub-theme 1, **workshop 2** looks at the ways of “*Creating a business-enabling and gender-sensitive legal environment for women to develop business in the context of globalization*”. Legal restraints are marginalizing a huge part of an economy’s workforce, the majority of who are women. The workshop will identify and propose ways to eliminate gender biases against women entrepreneurs. We all want to head closer to gender-responsive legal framework and law enforcement that ensure women entrepreneurs’ fair playground and higher competitiveness in the economy. You are encouraged to propose how.

Workshop 3 will focus on “*Promoting women-owned Micro Enterprises (MEs) and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs): an effective measure for poverty eradication and sustainable development*”. Here the participants will discuss “best practices” to increase supporting women entrepreneurs through micro-credit schemes, development initiatives, and sustainable ways to strengthen the MSME capacity of women.

Workshop 4 entitled “*Women entrepreneurs coping with social and environmental issues*” will underline the importance of balancing economic growth on the one hand and social development and justice on the other. You are encouraged to look at the impact of the critical social and environmental issues of our time, such as HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, migration, domestic violence, natural disasters and environmental degradation, to women and women entrepreneurs.

Lastly, **plenary 2**, with the title speaking for itself, will try to answer the question about the Network’s future “*WLN the second decade: Where do we go from here?*”. Moving into its 11th year, the WLN has built strong relationships and partnerships to speak for women throughout the region. It is now important that the network looks at ways to further communicate the work it does and seek more visible appreciation and support from APEC economies and APEC Secretariat. It is anticipated that at the end of this session, WLN will have a concrete ‘roadmap’ to go forward and achieve an even greater impact than it had in its first decade.

As this plenary coming to the end, I guess you all have the basic information about the 11th WLN Meeting, the agenda, working manner, and priority issues. As the host of WLN 2006, we welcome and encourage you all to intensively discuss and put forward recommendations that highly reflect the concerns and desires of APEC women entrepreneurs. Let’s try our best to make the event as productive as possible.

Also, we propose all delegates to make use of this event to meet and exchange, and to hold diverse activities to increase understanding, friendship and cooperation.

As the host economy, we also hope representatives from other economies will not miss the opportunity to enjoy the dynamic and friendly Vietnam, to share our recent achievements as well as our current challenges. We know that many of you come to Vietnam for the first time, so please make it as enjoyable as possible.

Finally, on behalf of the Chair of WLN 2006, allow me to extend whole-hearted thanks for your precious assistance and support in the preparing and organizing this important meeting.

Thank you very much for your attention!