

Women and Leadership

by

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Thank you very much. In Chinese Taipei, the Vice President is female, and the ex-Vice Prime Minister is female too. But that is not to say that in Taiwan female leadership is as strong as that. If we look at small- and medium-sized enterprises, the level of female ownership is only 29%, and in large enterprises it is 17%. At the executive and manager level, it is 18%. I admire women's participation in Australia.

When we look at the professional side, such as universities or doctors in hospitals, the rate is around 47%. If we look at participation in politics, or in government or at the ministerial level, the rate of women's participation is about 15%. In the national Parliament it is about 21%, and at the local county or city level it is about 26%.

You just mentioned how we can help women to take leadership, especially in Asian society. There may be thousands of reasons women lose the chance to be leaders — a [weak] social network, difficulty in reaching a support system, being isolated by the need to do endless housework, by not being in a position to learn new technology. No matter what the reason, it's important that we take action. The government can do a lot and I would like to share with you what the government of Taiwan has achieved over the past year in three policy areas.

The first policy we undertook was to help women organise a women's business network. The second was to provide special loans to help women set up new enterprises. The third was to establish a special plan to encourage women to help other women build their capacity.

I want to share some details of these policies.

Firstly, we organised a mutual assistance network and set up an information exchange platform for women entrepreneurs. We began to establish regional networks of consultation committees for female entrepreneurs, and invited successful female entrepreneurs to organise volunteer support assistance groups to give advice to female executives on business management and relevant professional skills. We now have more than 200 volunteers, and we encourage the committee to invite interested women to participate, county by county, so women have a direct contact network with business.

Over and above the real face-to-face network, we set up a virtual network for women, and try to realise the supply chain concept, which we discussed at Hanoi's WLN meeting. We set up an e-commerce web site for women's business, the Taiwan Trade Portal. Through a single window, any buyer in the world can easily find Taiwanese

businesswomen. If all APEC members had their own women's business web site portal hyperlinked, it would result in a women's business supply chain and network that would enable women to take on leadership roles in business. The concept of women helping women is very important, and we can do it.

Secondly, we provide a small business start-up loan to give women the chance to establish their own businesses. The loan's interest rate is very low at only 3.3% and governments guarantee 95%. Before women get a loan, we conduct a business start-up guidance program, which is about 21 hours. Women between the ages of 20 to 65 may participate, but they must finish their business plans and the review by the advisors. If their plan is practical, they can get a loan of up to US\$15 000 from the bank, with the government guaranteeing 95%. This means that if the loan is not repaid, the government will pay back 95%. This encourages all the important banks in Taiwan to participate in this project.

Now, there are more than 5000 women taking part in this process, and US\$30 million is ready to be loaned.

Thirdly, we launched a plan to reduce the digital divide between genders. By combining resources from the government and the private sector, we cooperated with NGOs to provide women with basic training in computer use. This year, 10 000 women received 24 hours of computer training free of charge, and 20 000 opportunities are available in the coming year.

Last year, Taiwan's economic growth rate was 4.7% and the unemployment rate was 3.9%. I agree that economic growth is not being driven by China, India or the Internet. It is being driven by women. If we can pay more attention and put more effort into women's human resources, it will improve our economic growth.