

The Future of WLN

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Introduction

This paper is a brief overview of the WLN past and present, in order to set the agenda of the session on The Future of the WLN. This paper should be read in conjunction with the results of the Focal Point Survey and the futures paper by Dana Peebles.

The Women Leaders Network (WLN) was launched in Manila in October 1996. Hosted by the National Council for the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) and financially supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Philippine government, the first meeting was attended by over 50 women representing 14 of the then 18 APEC member economies. The WLN was created as a result of a meeting in Jakarta during which senior women in science and technology in both the private and public sectors met to discuss gender issues within the context of APEC and trade policy. This was followed by a further meeting in Manila in April, 1996 during which the positioning of gender, science and technology was discussed.

The following is a brief overview of this paper:

- The development of the WLN, including its declarations and recommendations since 1996
- WLN achievements to date
- The status of WLN recommendations
- WLN's current status
- Weakness of WLN
- WLN's relationship to the Ad Hoc Group on Gender Integration (AGGI)
- The need to determine a future strategy
- Appendices following include:
 - Cascade of APEC meetings
 - Stocktaking of past recommendations
 - Gender related developments in APEC

- List of APEC Seniors Officials
- List of APEC SME Ministers
- List of APEC Trade Ministers
- List of APEC Lead Shepherds
- List of representatives on the Ad Hoc Group for Gender Integration (AGGI)

The Development of the WLN since 1996



Manila, 1996: A Call to Action

In October, 1996, the Philippines, during its year as APEC host, further developed the idea of a networking of senior women in science and technology and launched the first WLN meeting which included women from the private sector, public sector, science and technology, academia and civil society. The original Call to Action which created the WLN and was drafted during the October, 1996 meeting was presented to President Ramos of the Philippines. The Call to Action urged APEC Leaders to:

- Recognise and integrate gender as a cross-cutting theme in APEC;
- Develop a partnership with the Network to identify mechanisms to achieve this objective; and
- Recognize the Network as a flexible, consultative forum and a strategic partner toward the achievement of the APEC vision, goals and action agenda.

In addition, specific recommendations were made with respect to small and medium enterprises, human resource development and industrial, science and technology.



Hull, 1997: From Action to Implementation' - The Economic Impact of Women in the APEC Region

In 1997, during Canada's Year of Asia Pacific, Canada hosted the second WLN in which over 200 women representing 16 of the then 18 APEC economies participated. During that year, the WLN was successful in lobbying APEC to organize the first Women's Ministerial Conference to be hosted by the Philippines in October, 1998 and obtained an invitation to present recommendations directly to the SME Ministers at the SME Ministerial meeting. This was achieved by a joint public/private sector lobbying by senior women in Canada.

The declaration that year built on the Call to Action and urged APEC Leaders to take the following actions:

- Recognize gender as cross-cutting priority in all APEC fora and integrate a gender perspective at all levels of APEC work;
- Approve the recommendations of APEC Senior Officials to convene a Minsiterial Meeting in the Republic of the Philippines in 1998, bringing together Ministers whose responsibilities cut across women's issues, in order to address women's concerns more effectively; and
- Ensure the full participant of women through equitable representation at all levels of APEC, including such APEC-appointed bodies as ABAC, and all APEC activities.

Further general recommendations were made as well as those in the areas of SME's, Academia and Science and Technology.



Kuala Lumpur, 1998: Dynamic Partnership and Co-operation Towards Capacity Building for Sustainable Economic Growth

In 1998, Malaysia hosted the WLN and again, more than 200 women attended representing all 18 economies plus observers from Russia and Viet Nam in preparation for their admittance into APEC. By working closely with its Senior Officials in Malaysia, the WLN was once again invited to present its recommendations to the SME Ministers. This meeting was particularly interesting because it occurred during the financial crisis in Asia.

The WLN reaffirmed its original commitment and among its other recommendations, the WLN offered the following to Leaders and SME Ministers:

- That APEC continue to integrate gender throughout its work; and
- That the effect of the financial crisis on women be fully understood and addressed.

In addition, the Confederation of Women's Business Councils in APEC Economies was launched to act as catalyst to facilitate and enhance business networking and partnerships among women entrepreneurs in the region. Once again, workshops were held addressing specific sector issues.



Wellington, 1999: Women in APEC - Our Contribution to Economic Prosperity' and the first 'Indigenous Women in Exporting Business Seminar

In 1999, as host of APEC and thus the WLN, New Zealand also played host to the first Indigenous Women in Export Business Seminar (IWEBS) which was co-funded by Canada. Thirty-seven women from 10 APEC economies with an observer from the South Pacific Forum attended this seminar which presented the following three recommendations to the WLN in order for them to be forwarded to the APEC Leaders:

- Note the success and value of the Indigenous Women in Exporting Business seminar and the importance of its continuation;

- Recognize and acknowledge the significant and unique role and contribution of indigenous women in each of our economies and to the APEC region as a whole; and
- Recognize the existence of indigenous knowledge systems in APEC economies and the importance of protecting indigenous cultures.

The WLN meeting was attended by more than 400 participants representing all 21 APEC economies. For the first time, recommendations were made directly to APEC Ministers for Trade. However, responses were included in statements from the Leaders Summit the Minister's Joint Ministerial, the Ministerial responsible for Trade and the Human Resources Development Ministerial.

The WLN declaration recommended the following:

- Adopt the *Framework for the Integration of Women in APEC* which included the following elements: gender analysis, collection and use of sex disaggregated data, involvement of women in APEC, and an implementation plan;
- Ensure the full implementation of the *Framework* that will lead to a stronger, more inclusive, responsive and effective APEC;
- Develop processes and mechanisms for coordinating and monitoring the integration of women, as means of enhancing the management of APEC; and
- Ensure that APEC economies address the differential impacts of trade policies on women and men and ensure that any measures taken as a result of this are an integral part to the WTO process.

The Declaration included the three recommendations from the Indigenous Women In Exporting Business Seminar as well as recommendations in the following areas:

- Expanding business opportunities;
- Strengthening the functioning of markets; and
- Broadening understanding of and support for APEC.



Brunei, 2000: SMEs as a Global Trader

The WLN is delighted to have Brunei Darussalam host the fifth meeting of the WLN. This year, the emphasis is very much on the private sector and the WLN has been attached to both the SME Business Forum and the SME Ministerial meeting. Themes for this year are primarily focused on SMEs but will include representation from other sectors. The four themes include:

- Human resources development
- Finance
- Information and communications technology

- Strategic alliance

An important reason for the success of previous WLN meetings is that each economy has worked closely with its own senior officials and Minister in order to lay the ground work for WLN. At all WLN meetings, there has been the active participation of Ministers in the agenda.



Future Hosts of APEC

In keeping with APEC protocol, the next four hosts of APEC and, therefore, possible future hosts of WLN are as follows:

- 2001 - People's Republic of China
- 2002 - Mexico
- 2003 - Thailand
- 2004 - Chile

It is important to remember that the WLN is not a formal part of APEC but rather an APEC-related fora which has been invited to participate by the most economies and has received substantial support both in funding and in promotion throughout the APEC bodies by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). While CIDA shall continue to support the work of the WLN, it is not realistic to expect it to be the single largest and most consistent funding source of the WLN. As such, alternative funding sources and methods need to be explored and established in order to ensure its sustainability.

In addition and to date, the WLN has been invited into the host economy for APEC as a courtesy by that economy. As the WLN has grown larger and more ambitious the costs and expectations to the host economy have grown as well. While it is desirable and hopeful that each economy shall host WLN during its year as APEC host, it is not required and not certain that each economy shall do so.

WLN Achievements To Date

Notable achievements of the WLN to date include the following:

- Being hosted and organized by five economies during their year of APEC since 1996;
- Being recognized as a reliable APEC-related fora and invited to make recommendations to three SME Ministerial Meetings and one Trade Ministers's meeting;
- The holding of the first meeting for Ministers Responsible for Women in APEC (Manila, 1998);
- The support and adoption of the *Framework for the Integration of Women in APEC*;

- The launch of the Confederation of Women's Business Councils of APEC;
- The creation and promotion of the Expert's Data Base for Women;
- Involving and educating in excess of 1,000 women from across APEC with respect to APEC, its agenda and the effect of trade liberalization and facilitation on women;
- The organization of the first Indigenous Women in Exporting Business Seminars (IWEBS, New Zealand, 1999); and
- Mentions of women and gender as a result of WLN recommendations are summarized in the appendix under Gender Related Developments in APEC.

The Status of Recommendations

Please see the appendix marked *Stocktaking of Recommendations*. This is an area which needs to be monitored and followed up on, as well as understood and managed better. While recommendations start out as a long document, they are condensed into a two to three page document which then is condensed into a one or two paragraph mention in the Minister's statement. It must also accurately reflect the objectives of the WLN and receive consensus approval before presentation to the respective Ministers. It is, therefore, vital that WLN creates a tracking mechanism in order to ensure that its recommendations are taken seriously. This includes active follow up and lobbying, if necessary, by WLN participants within each economy. Action should be directed at not just the Ministers but also to Senior Officials, Lead Shepherds and other key APEC representatives within each economy. For this purpose, lists of key contacts for each economy have been added to this paper as well as a 'cascade' of meetings and intervention points where the WLN can have an impact.

- List of APEC Senior Officials
- List of APEC SME Ministers
- List of APEC Trade Ministers
- List of APEC Lead Shepherds
- List of representatives on the Ad Hoc Group for Gender Integration (AGGI)
- Cascade of APEC meetings and intervention

WLN's Current Status

WLN continues to exist as an informal APEC-related forum. As such, it does not have the right of observer status at APEC meetings and is invited as a courtesy. It is an informal network of women leaders from several different and key sectors across all APEC economies. WLN continues to receive financial support from a combination of sources, including CIDA, the host economy, sponsorship raised by the host economy and personal funding from participants. This funding varies from year to year and host economy. Clearly a plan needs to be developed and implemented for future growth and financial stability of the WLN so that it is not such a burden on the host economy.

Some focal points have indicated a desire to see WLN more formalized as an official part of APEC. At this time, this is not a realistic option since official observer status carries with it a host of obligations that would then require a more formal structure and secretariat and incur costs that the WLN has no means to cover at the present time.

A strength of the WLN is that since it exists outside of APEC, it is not constrained by the boundaries of APEC. While it is important to follow the conventions of APEC as closely as possible and to always address issues in the language of APEC, WLN as a combination of representatives from different sectors can often go beyond APEC (i.e. government) goals. This was achieved in the 1999 recommendations when WLN made direct reference to the WTO which many governments did not want to do. Therefore, the independence of WLN is also one of its greatest and most important assets.

Weakness of WLN

Many of WLN's weaknesses are also its strength. Some weaknesses are also the same as those APEC as an entity faces. The fact that it is informal creates an independence but also a weakness. Lack of funding is a major issue. While it is a positive move to rotate chairs annually as APEC does, the creation and planning of a WLN events by a new secretariat each year brings its own uncertainties and challenges. However, by continually changing chairs, more women are drawn into and involved in the APEC process, which is one of the WLN's original objectives.

Consistent communication throughout APEC and the inconsistency in focal points proves to be a challenge. The lack of a website, equal access to technology and the means to sustain a website and dependable electronic communication are a challenge and reflective of APEC challenges as well. In addition, there has been no means or structure to monitor past recommendations.

Many concerns about the WLN were articulated in the Focal Point Survey conducted by Dana Peebles on behalf of the WLN.

WLN's Relationship to the AGGI

The AGGI was created in order to work with working groups, SOM and key APEC officials to ensure the integration of gender throughout APEC. The committee has a two year mandate and is half way through its first year. This is an incredibly ambitious program. It is not without its own challenges and frustrations. WLN can play an important role in supporting and assisting the work of the WLN by offering itself as a source of expertise, in lobbying key APEC players within each economy and bringing key issues to the attention of the AGGI representatives within each economy. WLN could even act as a monitoring mechanism for the AGGI and could continue the AGGI's work after its mandate is finished. In addition, the AGGI has experienced turnover among the representatives from different economies. The WLN could provide some consistency for the AGGI.

The Need to Determine a Future Strategy

This year marks the fifth meeting of the WLN. The mere fact that it continues to meet, has grown from a core group of three sector representatives per economy in 1996 to a large group of experts in their fields, still garners respect from Ministers and has gained the support of successive host economies pays tribute to the foresight and vision of the founders. However, as the WLN has grown and continues to include the issues of women from more and more different sectors, management has become a more crucial concern. In order to achieve its full potential, WLN must determine an internal management structure in order to develop a strategy for future WLN meetings, and to assist future WLN hosts. WLN today contains a vast amount of history and expertise which must not be lost, but rather built upon in order to continue to deliver its mandate.

The purpose of this brief overview, the attached appendices, the focal point survey and the session on the Future of the WLN is to determine by the end of the Brunei 2000 WLN meeting a direction and plan for the future and sustainability of the WLN.