

Workshop Report: Women in Business

by

Alison Terry

Executive Director - Corporate Affairs, General Motors Holden Ltd (*Australia*)

Thank you and good afternoon, everybody.

As you know, I am reporting back on Women in Business, picking up on things that came through from the forum on strengthening the capacity of businesses to meet the challenges of climate change, as well as the workshops yesterday afternoon on business opportunities for SMEs, and raising capital and trade formation.

More broadly, I would also like to reflect on many of the other issues that came through the plenaries and the other sessions with many other implications for business. I would also like to start with an observation. As you know, I work for General Motors, a company that is probably not well known for its high levels of female participation. We are certainly making big strides, but my experience in my career has been to be in the minority of female participants among large rooms full of men. So, I can feel for those few men who have lasted the distance with us over the course of the past few days.

What it has shown me, however, is how differently groups of women work, and I think that has influenced all of the findings, recommendations and outcomes. Women work with a sense of optimism. They collaborate, they solve problems and they support each other in addressing challenges and working on opportunities. I think we have seen that in the comments from my fellow Reference Group members already. But I think it has had a big impact on what we have all discovered and are reporting back on.

Turning to the main issues that came through for women in business, it is important to recognise that women in business have differing needs and make differing contributions according to the scale of the businesses they operate in, whether it be micro businesses, SMEs or large businesses.

At the micro level, women in those enterprises require access to finance and information, and their business contributes to an individual's, or indeed a family's, economic wellbeing. Women in SMEs also require capital. They are looking at growth opportunities, and their enterprise can assist an entire community. Women in large businesses need the opportunities to become decision makers —this is what will ensure women's full participation in their businesses and economies.

Economies are adopting a multi-sectoral approach, covering the public, political and private sectors to address issues for women in business, such as educational and skill requirements and assistance in starting and growing businesses. Strategies include a number of measures, including educating women about non-traditional occupations and conducting women-in-business programs. It is important to note that governments in the

economies represented in APEC are typically leading the private sector in increasing female participation at the policy-making level. Large businesses also need to continue their progress in this regard.

On the subject of climate change, women certainly recognise and embrace the need for urgency in addressing the effects of climate change, and they have the ability to drive this change through their high degree of influence on decision making.

In some economies, however, there is a need for greater emphasis on the emerging issues, in particular the need for new and increased skill levels in occupations that businesses are increasingly demanding as communities adapt to changing circumstances.

We had outcomes for business in six key areas:

Firstly, in the area of skills and education, there is a need to equip the future workforce through primary and secondary education, to address issues as economies change. This includes the need to ensure that workforces have the skills in the emerging ICT industry and in non-traditional fields such as engineering and science-based occupations. Governments and business must work together to ensure that women's participation in these emerging and critical fields is strong.

We have heard about climate change many times over the course of the past few days. Business, government and the community must work together to address these challenges. Raising awareness, facilitating urgent action, but also developing adaptation strategies are all required. There is a role for business to contribute through investment in new technologies, again working with the government and the community.

The third area of our outcomes is in the area of trade. Free and open trade is a key APEC objective, and in the absence of multilateral negotiations, making great progress, APEC does provide an opportunity to move forward, as we have heard. Tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade must be addressed.

Fourthly, the area of technology is again a very consistent theme. Governments and business need to recommit to ensuring that current and future women in business have access to appropriate and new technologies. Particular attention must be paid to those women in disadvantaged communities, including rural and isolated women and indigenous women.

In the area of finance, we have heard many speakers talk about women in business continuing to experience barriers to accessing finance. Governments and financial institutions need to ensure that they are non-discriminatory to ensure that women have access to all forms of financing that they require.

The last, but not least, area of our outcomes is support for communities. Continued partnership between governments, business and communities is required to ensure that women at all levels of business have access to information and support. Infrastructure must also be adapted to address needs arising from the modifications and rebuilding that result from climate change.

In closing, I also have greatly appreciated the opportunity to participate in this event, and I would like to add my thanks to the wonderful secretariat, to all the workshop and forum participants, and to all of you who have contributed to make this a wonderful event.

Thank you.

WOMEN AND BUSINESS

Main Issues

- It is important to recognise that women in business have differing needs and make differing contributions according to the scales of their business, micro, small and medium, or large:
 - women in micro-enterprises require access to finance and information, and their business contributes to an individual's economic well-being;
 - women in small and medium enterprises require capital and growth opportunities, and their enterprise can assist a community; and
 - women in large business require opportunities to become decision-makers. This will ensure women's full participation in their business and economies.
- Economies are adopting a multi-sectoral approach covering the private, political and public sectors to address issues for women in business, such as educational and skill requirements, and assistance starting and growing a business. Strategies include various measures, such as educating women about non-traditional occupations, and conducting women in business programs. Governments are typically leading the private sector in increasing female participation at the policy-making level. Large businesses must also continue to progress in this regard.
- Women recognise the need for urgency in addressing the effects of climate change and have the ability to drive change through influence on decision-making. In some economies however, there is a need for greater emphasis on emerging issues, such as the need for new and increased skill levels in occupations in increasing demand as business, communities and economies adapt to new circumstances.

WOMEN AND BUSINESS

Outcomes

Skills and Education

- There is a need to equip the future workforce through primary and secondary education to address issues as economies change. This includes the need to ensure that workforces have skills in emerging ICT industries, and in non-traditional fields, such as engineering and science-based occupations. Governments and business must work together to ensure that women's participation in these emerging and critical fields is strong.

Climate Change

- Business, governments and the community need to work together to address climate change. Raising awareness, facilitating urgent action and developing adaptation strategies are all required.
- Business will also contribute to addressing climate change through investment in new technologies, working with government and the community.

Trade

- Free and open trade is a key APEC objective. In the absence of progress in multi-lateral negotiations, APEC provides an opportunity to move forward. Tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade must be addressed.

Technology

- Governments and business need to recommit to ensure that current and future women in business have access to appropriate and new technologies. Particular attention needs to be paid to women in disadvantaged communities, including rural and isolated women, and Indigenous women.

Finance

- Women in business continue to experience barriers accessing finance, and governments and financial institutions need to abide by the principles of non-discrimination to ensure that women have access to all forms of finance.

Support for Communities

- Continued partnership between governments, business and communities is required to ensure that women at all levels of business have access to information and support. Infrastructure must also be adapted to address needs arising from the modifications and rebuilding resulting from climate change.