

Workshop Report: Strengthening Capacity

by

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When I was first given the task of being in charge of the strengthening capacity stream, I must say I was not exactly sure what it encompassed. So, I have listened long and hard to the various papers that have been presented, and a single theme has come through —the same theme that was mentioned by Julie Bishop. That has to be education. Education is at the heart of strengthening capacity and ensuring sustainability.

It is also interesting to see that education is not a single concept. Certainly, intellectual capital is a core resource. A well-educated society is at the core of ensuring a sustainable future and we all heard the figures that demonstrate that it mandates the commercial bottom line. In framing education policy, we need to remember that we are educating our children for what will be a very different world from the world we grew up in.

We heard about the complex systems and the differences they create in the way we have to deal with the changing world and manage solutions. We also understand how far technology has changed the world we live in. As I was reminded this morning, two decades ago no one spoke of ICT. I tend to look at it slightly differently. When I was a child and watched Star Trek (a science fiction show), the idea that when you walked up to a door it would open automatically was science fiction. How far have we come!

It is important, of course, that we understand the need to enable women to become and take advantage of basic opportunities to which they are entitled and which they wish to seize. We know that formal education is simply not enough. Formal education is a beginning —it is an essential foundation, but increasingly it is being seen as a starting point rather than the finishing point. As we have been reminded, it is an essential ingredient for innovation and it is important not only in the formal sense but also in teaching the capacity for play —both for children and for us.

We need to expose our children to broad experiences without the artificial barriers imposed by traditional gender roles. Our girls need to be exposed to the hard sciences, to mathematics and core engineering subjects, which can encourage them to take up first-time occupations for women. Our boys need to develop their life skills and emotional intelligence. We all need to be taught developments in technology as they occur in order to continue to take our place in the world.

We need to give greater emphasis to encouraging our children to ask questions rather than simply to provide them with the answers or masses of data. We all need to have less reliance on dense data that conceal rather than reveal and more time to speculate about possible futures and solutions.

As we were reminded, imagine what might have happened if we had asked the question 100 years ago about the long-term consequences of carbon emissions.

We have been reminded, however, that there are different ways to look at education and different recipients for the education that we need to pass on. There are women in rural communities and less developed parts of our own communities who need to be educated to a basic level to teach them what their basic rights are in the most basic sense. Education can and should be delivered for the recipients and we heard just this morning about using radio to bring education to everyday women.

There is also the education delivered by governments and institutions, but we have our own role in providing education. We have been reminded that formal education, even where it is at a high level, does not necessarily reflect itself in political and economic power. We need a critical mass of women to form organisations —not just to network, although that is important—but to provide that critical mass to enable them to position themselves in society. While we know that we are billions of individual voices, in order to exercise our potential we need to provide groups of women such as those here today to take their place in society. More importantly, we need to provide the teaching and mentoring to each other and to the next generation of young women.

We have also been told that the example that we provide can give opportunities to young women who come to our midst and to those within our own organisations to achieve what they never before thought was possible—to create their own businesses, to create their own futures and to change the environment not only for themselves but also for other women in their societies. We were given wonderful examples of that.

Education is necessary to create awareness of, and to enable us to understand and find, solutions in our global world. It is critical in enabling us to address the challenges that arise from climate change, to raise the awareness of climate change and to understand what it means. We need to see that as part of a complex system. We need to be educated to recognise and accept that it is occurring, and that it is a problem we need to understand. We need to frame the solutions at the macro level.

Energy policy, disaster recovery and the opportunities presented by technology were discussed at length. But unless we are educated to understand them and to deal with them, we will not know how to apply them.

We need to insist that scientific, social and ethical moral dimensions are incorporated into our policy debates and in the development of business solutions. At the micro level, as individuals, we have great capacity with everyday responses. Sustainability is as much about the outcomes for millions of individuals as it is about the macro actions of government.

As we were also reminded on a number of occasions, we need to change the mentality, to overcome and not only the negative stereotypes inflicted on us by others, but also the ones we inflict on ourselves. We needed to change the mentality

to deal with ICT and now we need to change the mentality to provide a response to climate change.

Each of us has a role. The government has a role to understand the dynamics of complex systems, identify gaps and make strategic interventions to maximise outcomes. Our role is to provide the means of implementation, the understanding and the solutions.

We are all successful, talented and powerful women, even if we say so ourselves. We have a unique opportunity and obligation to ourselves, to those we teach and mentor and to those who come after us. Importantly, also, as mothers we have a direct and multiplied effect on the next generation of girls and boys to realise the intellectual capital that exists across the population that is roughly 50-50, male and female. And do not forget that one woman can, and does.

Thank you all for creating for me this wonderful concept that I have been able to take away. I hope that you enjoyed it. Thank you to all the contributors and to all my panel members.