

Workshop Report: Women and Trade

by

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Thank you. It is my pleasure to present the report on trade day and also on women and trade.

On Sunday we had a very successful *Women in Export Trade* day, as the lead-in event to the WLN meeting. I think this was very valuable in providing practical information about exporting, but it also served as an inspirational day where women were able to meet other women who had been successful in establishing their export businesses, and to hear their stories about the opportunities and challenges they have been through in developing a successful export business. We are certainly going to encourage future WLN events to have a similar *Women in Export Trade* day.

One of the key messages coming out of the day was that APEC economic growth has created a wealth of new trade opportunities, both for goods and for services. The real issue is how we ensure that women are in the best position to take advantage of these opportunities so they can grow their own businesses through export, and thereby contribute in a more important way to the economic growth of the region.

Two real issues emerged around that theme. One is making sure that women have the practical information and support they need to get their goods to market. This included information about market opportunities, selecting which market to take your goods or services to, practical advice about freights and logistics and, also increasingly important, how to link into a global supply chain. This is particularly relevant for SMEs and micro businesses as they seek to expand internationally.

The good news is that there is a lot of help out there, both in terms of government and NGO programs and services. It is important to make sure that women are aware of, have access to and can tap into the information and support that is available.

A second key issue relates to the area of market access in the broader trade policy sense. That is really about removing both traditional trade barriers in the form of tariff reductions, but also some of the more behind-the-border regulatory impediments that can have quite an important impact on business, particularly SMEs. It is very important that the WLN link even more closely to the business facilitation work that is being done by APEC in this area, so that the WLN can influence the direction APEC is taking in this area. That might include more work in standardising customs across APEC economies, or standardising things like packaging and labelling —very practical, behind-the-border issues that, I think, would be of particular benefit to SMEs and micro businesses that are looking to expand internationally.

We talked quite a lot about the services sector, which is clearly increasing in importance throughout the APEC region, and offers particular opportunities for

women. It offers flexibility in terms of exporting. However, it is quite a complex sector, and women may need specific training and upskilling to take full advantage of it, especially in such areas as the protection of intellectual property, a key area in terms of exporting services.

The topic of e-business came up —this has been a recurring theme throughout the conference. It is a very important enabler for women in business and those who want to export. It can actually be quite important in reducing costs and time for women who do want to export, particularly again for SMEs and micros who may have trouble visiting the markets or developing marketing plans. E-business can be a fantastic tool for both exploring market opportunities, and presenting and showcasing your products and services to various markets.

This is a very strong message for women in rural and regional areas about having the right government, infrastructure and support around accessing e-business and e-commerce. I think in Australia the message around broadband has been particularly well heard.

E-business is also important for women in indigenous regions as well. It opens up real opportunities to access international markets through that medium.

We talked quite a bit about cross-cultural issues and, of course, APEC is a rich tapestry of cultures right across the economies. Cross-cultural learning will be very important. We talked about the various cultures across APEC economies, but also there was quite a bit of discussion about cultures within APEC economies, both indigenous and other cultures. The good news is, of course, that women have particular skills that are well suited to navigating some of these cross-cultural differences.

In terms of some of the ideas going forward, certainly we are recommending that future WLN meetings incorporate a *Women in Export Trade* day. As I mentioned, linking in more closely with the trade facilitation agenda, and perhaps doing a bit of research around some of the trade liberalisation that has been done in the APEC region.

Also, with the APEC digital economy workshops, we encourage a stronger focus on exporting and exporting online.

Finally, with the right support I think we can conclude that women in business will be able to harness their skills to take full advantage of the opportunities in trade in the APEC region.

Thank you.

Main Issues

- APEC is a dynamic economic region with new emerging trade opportunities. It is important to ensure that women have the necessary skills and support to take advantage of these opportunities. This is central to enabling women to grow their businesses through export and to build a sustainable future for themselves, their families and their communities.
- Facilitating market entry by women to regional markets is fundamental to the economic development of the Asia Pacific region. It is critical to ensure that women are aware of, and can access, government and non-government trade promotion programs, information and services.
- Continued negotiations within APEC to remove trade barriers will be vital to ensure improved market access for women in business.
- The services sector is the fastest growing sector in the APEC region and offers particular export opportunities for women. Women will need specific training and skills to take advantage of opportunities in this sector.
- E-business is an important enabler for women to access regional export markets, particularly for SMEs. More needs to be done to encourage and train women to understand and embrace e-business and e-commerce. In turn, governments need to provide adequate ICT infrastructure and have sound policies that build trust in electronic processes.
- The Asia Pacific is a rich tapestry of cultures, and cross-cultural learning and communication is an important part of trading in this region. The good news is that many women's strengths lie in sensitively navigating cross-cultural communication.

Ideas/Solutions

- Future WLN meetings to incorporate a *Women in Export Trade* day as part of their program.
- WLN to influence APEC's trade facilitation agenda to ensure that it focuses on issues of particular concern to women in business.
- WLN to request that APEC Ministers commission research on the differential impact on women of regional trade liberalisation.
- APEC economies to be encouraged to provide women with practical training on e-business and exporting on line.