

# Workshop Report: Information and Communications Technology

by

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Thank you. I have a dual task in that I am going to start my report with the outcomes from the third *APEC Digital Economy Forum for Women*, which was held as a lead-up to the WLN meeting. Many of you were there, and you will note quite a bit of overlap in today's report and what we started to talk about at the Forum. This was the third year for the *Digital Economy Forum for Women*, and I would like to pay tribute to the Asia-Pacific Women Information Center (APWINC) and the Korean government, who have been working very hard to put women in ICT and women in the digital economy on the map.

We have been continuing the theme of 'Womenomics' from last year's Forum, and harnessing the power of women in the digital economy toward the theme of this year, which was 'building a sustainable e-future'. This, of course, ties in very much with building a sustainable future across all of the different components that Annabelle Bennett has just been talking about.

One of the main themes from that Forum was the continuing lack of gender-disaggregated data – data that we need. There is indeed a great need for investment to build research capabilities within APEC in gender and ICT, so we can generate and disseminate research data and best practice. Each and every one of you within your homes, workplaces and economies should be able to access such information.

Another theme was that women are still not considered within the ICT business and policy environment, which is rather surprising in light of the immense contribution we make to each of our economy's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). At the same time we need continued education and capacity building, because many of us still lack technical and e-business skills.

To build a sustainable e-future we need strategies and programs that provide women with ICT competencies, as well as trade and entrepreneurship support, so we can continue to increase our capacity to contribute to and benefit from the growth of each of our economies. By doing so, we need to harness our gender differences and recognise that women do things differently, communicate differently, work our businesses differently. We need to harness those competencies and capabilities as part of the capacity building process.

I would like now to turn to the ICT workshops held during the WLN and, as I said earlier, you will notice considerable crossovers. One of the main themes that came up in these workshops was that we cannot get away from ICT anymore —it underpins every part of our lives, both our everyday lives and our business lives. Nonetheless, there is still very much a need to demystify ICT as being too complex and too hard to adopt. ICT provides the opportunity to achieve a level playing field for women. ICT offers significant opportunities, as we heard in the last few days in the case studies that were presented on how ICT has been harnessed by women entrepreneurs across APEC economies. I have been most impressed with the case studies that have been put forward.

We are gaining access to markets, and ICT offers that opportunity. We are able to develop creative, niche business environments and create innovative business solutions with ICT. ICT does provide low-cost start-up business options that we can take advantage of. And it certainly creates opportunities for women who are out there in the regional, rural, and remote areas. One theme that keeps coming up is the flexibility that ICT can offer women in terms of working more flexibly and take advantage of the opportunities ICT provides to create a work-life balance.

The other extremely important theme that has been coming up is that we need to continue to build our networks. We can use ICT to expand our networks to communicate with one another. Indeed, as we have seen in some examples over the past few days, ICT can help build virtual networks and teams to work collaboratively by using ICT platforms.

To fully benefit from ICT opportunities, women of all ages —young ones, old ones — need technological literacy and access to ICT infrastructure. They also need access to ICT business skills, mentoring and networking. In short, they need education, the theme that has continued to emerge throughout the WLN. We also need to recognise that the adoption of ICT, and e-business in particular, is an incremental process —it does not just happen all at once. Adoption moves from email, to a web presence, to adopting e-commerce and e-business as part of your overall business model. It is a step-by-step process and women need to be supported every step of the way.

We deal with rapid technological changes and the potential of such capabilities as mobile commerce are considerable. New technologies also offer challenges and we recognise that it is not easy to keep up with these challenges. We need to adopt programs and policies that continue to strengthen women's technological literacy and e-business capacity toward women's full participation in the digital economy. We can do that by encouraging public and private partnerships. We need education, business and government in the mix.

In summary, we need partnerships to build enabling environments where women can interact and network, access e-learning and e-mentoring, and access business-to-business (B2B) opportunities. All of it needs to be underpinned by research. That way we will learn with and from one another, and create knowledge transfer.

In closing, we recognise that there are complementary roles to play for APEC, for government, for business, for universities and for women's organisations in assisting women to adopt ICT and to access markets.

Before I hand over to the next reporter, I would like to express my thanks to all the terrific speakers who have contributed to the ICT sessions. You have all been inspiring. I would also like to thank the Office for Women secretariat for the tremendous support you have provided to make this happen. It has been inspiring for me.

Thank you very much.

## WOMEN AND ICT

### Main Issues

- ICT now underpins business and life - need to demystify ICT as being complex to adopt and ensure that technology achieves its potential of providing a level playing field.
- ICT offers significant opportunities to women entrepreneurs:
  - in gaining access to markets;
  - to develop creative and niche business solutions;
  - in providing low-cost start up business options;
  - in creating opportunities for women in rural and remote areas;
  - in enabling women to flexibly balance work and family; and
  - to develop social and business networks through ICT, including virtual team building via collaborative platforms.
- To fully benefit from ICT opportunities, women of all ages need technological literacy, access to ICT infrastructure, ICT & business skilling, mentoring, as well as network building.
- The adoption of e-business is an incremental process (from email, to a web presence, to adopting e-commerce, to integrating e-business and transforming the business) - every phase needs to be supported.
- Rapid technological changes and adoption of advanced capabilities, such as mobile-commerce and ubiquitous-commerce, offer both advantages and challenges.

## WOMEN AND ICT

### Ideas/Solutions

- Adopt specific programs to continue to strengthen women's technological literacy and e-business capacity towards women's full participation in the digital economy;
- Encourage public-private partnerships to achieve women's participation in the digital economy;
- To implement virtual environments where women entrepreneurs can access (e)learning, (e)mentoring, (e)networking, markets and B2B opportunities;
- Generate, aggregate and disseminate research, information, case studies and good practice about women, ICT and (e)entrepreneurship;
- Recognise the complimentary roles of APEC, governments, business, universities and women's organisations in assisting women to adopt ICT, e-business practices and access markets.