

# Workshop Report: Global Challenges

by

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Thank you. As a first-time participant at WLN, you as a new family of friends for me, and the women who have been involved in the organisation of this event, remind me that we can have a glimpse of what the future governance of our world could look like. It is exciting, it is warm, and full of love and friendship, but it is also full of ideas and creativity. It has given me the sense, personally, that if we had more women in positions of real power across our economies, we would not have to worry about the problems because we would be solving them before they arose.

There is no doubt that across this meeting and in our workshops, we identified many global challenges for women. One of those challenges that was covered by Catherine Livingstone yesterday was about systems, and I must apologise that many of my comments will cross over the other panellists, because we are in a system with lots of feedback loops and lots of things going on in the various committees that are interwoven. I will repeat a few things that may have been said before so eloquently by my fellow panellists, but I think they are worth repeating.

Unsurprisingly, climate change has loomed large as probably one of the major challenges, but it was joined by various other challenges, such as population pressures; human security and development; food, energy and water security; the effect of trade liberalisation; international labour migration; population health issues; and of course, the flattening consequences of technology across the world and the impact of the digital divide.

Returning briefly to climate change, we noted the urgency of this challenge, the need to act now, and the importance of being realistic about the scale and complex nature of this challenge. Climate change presents APEC economies with complex, interrelated and urgent challenges. These include such varied things as recovery from natural disasters; rebuilding critical infrastructure; the expansion in the rates and spread of disease in collision with the increasing diseases of affluence; the management of displaced people; the potential shortage of skilled workers and trained people, particularly women engineers and health workers; and the unpredictability and volatility of our weather system.

And none of us has mentioned it but it sits behind us all: the impact of loss of species and the effect of the loss of biodiversity right across our globe.

When we look specifically at micro businesses and SMEs, we identified that these essential contributors to our economies suffer acute vulnerabilities to these global challenges. In particular, we identified the lack of access to technology and reliable information, and the difficulty in accessing capital as critical matters.

Our workshops also recognised that the ability to recover and start again in the face of disasters challenges the resilience and courage of women, whether they are alone or in micro and small enterprises. At a very practical level, we acknowledged that in order to succeed today, we need a good understanding of the global context and its impact on local conditions and opportunities—something that we must not assume is available to many women in the APEC economies.

Back to education: We have to know what context we are working in before we can hope to deal with those opportunities or problems.

As our speakers and workshops have identified, women possess the unique and underrated skill so desperately required to meet these enormous challenges and convert them into opportunities and deal with them with optimism. I worry that when I meet men involved in policy making on these critical global issues that they seem scared of the issue. What they want to do is solve it immediately with one answer, one solution. They do not like talking about it or engaging in a conversation, because it is too scary to imagine what might come out of that conversation.

Women, on the other hand, bring a conversation to the collaborative nature of just who we are. We imagine a world where compassion and consciousness defines leadership, and when you are acting consciously, you must engage in a debate and a conversation with people who may not share your views, in order to come up with a solution that sits within a system that will have positive effects rather than just simply solving one part of that system.

We are holistic, generous and passionate people. We tackle challenges in playing critical roles in discovering solutions. In our workshop, we also identified the fact that we need to spend a lot more time seeking the information and wisdom of indigenous women across our economies, who have so much more to share with us and rarely get the opportunity to appear in these forums.

Again, as Catherine Livingstone said yesterday, we can no longer regard the world as a loose association of countries, but rather as an interdependent group of business units, where some are corporations and some are nations. Systems thinking should be applied across the APEC economies, from the establishment of governance infrastructure, to the effective response to the complex challenges already highlighted.

Looking at micro businesses and SMEs, we believe in the workshops that leaders in government and business must specifically design policies that support women and build their capacity to have sustainable businesses. Providing the necessary networking and information-sharing platforms is critical.

We saw examples such as web portals, policy and practical help lines, and the rise in soft loans and grants, and of course, there is no doubt that the critical role of micro-finance is central to this.

There was a strong feeling that across the APEC economies, we must find a way to publish the excellent loan-repayment records of women, to establish the fact that we

are probably the less risky people in the world to invest in to help meet these challenges.

And one last look at climate change. While there is no doubt that governments will play important roles in emissions trading and new forms of energy, we are concerned that much more must be done about building early warning systems for disasters, when so much critical damage is done without warning.

And for us, as women leaders, we can leave this meeting committed to do everything we can do, in our families, businesses and communities, to address very practically the impacts of climate change and ensure that our voices are heard.

Let us never forget that we need to keep listening to one another, learning from one another and sharing our insights. In a systems-based world, we will play the most important role with our interconnectedness, and I think we must take forward to Peru the spirit of interconnectedness and a real sense of compassion in dealing with these global issues, with a great sense of optimism that they are all solvable, and they provide great opportunities for women in the future generations of this great century.

Thank you very much.

## WOMEN AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES

### Main Issues

- The urgency of climate change and its impacts as a global challenge can not be underestimated.
- Through our unique perspectives, our collaborative and practical way of working, and our holistic, multidisciplinary way of tackling issues, women have a particular role to play in addressing global challenges. The WLN itself is about women from across the Asia Pacific coming together to address the challenges we face in our region with optimism, passion, determination and practicality.
- Collaboration across APEC will be needed to address multidisciplinary challenges such as climate change, and women's voices need to be heard in that collaborative effort.
- As women and as representatives of business, government, academic and civil society, we need to identify and take opportunities to collaborate with APEC on new technologies, innovations, and adaptations that are urgently needed to solve challenges such as climate change and its impacts.
- For business –Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises as well as big business –it is hard to operate without an understanding of the global context in which we all

now exist. Having access to high quality information and education which increases our understanding of broader global challenges and opportunities and how they affect our own local environments is imperative for all business operators.

### Ideas/Solutions

- Every person attending 2007 WLN to commit to examining what they can do in their own businesses, families and communities to address climate change and its impact.
- Use our strengths as holistic thinkers to seek out who we need to collaborate with to multiply the impacts of our own individual actions.