

Public Policies to Promote Women Entrepreneurs in APEC

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Summary

This paper is based on a review of best practices and public policies to promote women entrepreneurs in four APEC economies: Australia, Canada, Chile and Peru. The review consisted of an in-depth study of official websites, NGO websites and private sector websites as well as interviews with key stakeholders in each economy, a review of research papers and government policies and programs.

The review revealed that where public resources have been committed to developing and implementing targeted programs to support and promote women entrepreneurs, particularly in private/public programs the level of awareness and activity of women entrepreneurs increases substantially. This should not be considered favouring one sector over another but strategic target marketing by trade promotion officials. A number of successful programs have been identified and details of those programs are provided with recommendations that they could easily be implemented in other economies or APEC wide.

A substantial amount of research on women entrepreneurs has been undertaken in virtually every economy as well as at the APEC level, and international level. References are made to the OECD, the ILO, the World Bank and IFC and the GEM reports to help re-enforce the case for supporting women entrepreneurs. Underutilized resources exist throughout APEC such as the Women Leaders Network, the Gender Focal Point Network and various other Working Groups and NGO's that could be coordinated to implement women's international trade. APEC represents a huge trading block encompassing three of the world's largest economies and as such creates a vibrant opportunity for women entrepreneurs to engage in international trade.

Best practices sited show that there is an opportunity to increase women's involvement and that the best opportunities are those that are private/public sector partnerships and include collaboration, implementation and monitoring.

The following recommendations and next steps conclude the report along with appendices of reference materials, websites and resources:

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Development of an online *Women's Trade Portal*. Building on existing resources, this could be a 'one-stop-shop' internet site providing practical guidance and strategic planning support for APEC women exporters and importers.
2. Continued provision of e-commerce and export training for women in the regional, rural and remote areas of APEC through continuing support for

such programs as the APWINC DEW. It is obvious that training in e-commerce and access to affordable broadband networks would assist women to overcome some of the disadvantages of geographic isolation and the challenges of travel.

3. Establishment of a web-based network for women in APEC. Strong networks, internationally, have been identified as critical to export success. They are all the more important for women experiencing common challenges related to their isolation.
4. Publishing and disseminating case studies showcasing women and in particular indigenous women in small business who have developed export capacity. Assistance to Indigenous women exporters should be part of a broader program of business development. This will help build the confidence and skills of Indigenous women to develop their businesses to the point where moving into exporting is a viable opportunity. Austrade has been successful in publicizing the success stories of women exporters which serve as role models for other women.
5. WLN has created important fora and platforms on which to build trade not just among women in APEC but for women throughout APEC. Better use of WLN and women in trade days can help profile women's businesses, encourage more women to participate and also help towards benefitting the Bogor Goals.
6. Better training for women in the service sector as well as trade officials will open tremendous doors for increased trade opportunities. The International Trade Centre of Geneva has created an excellent series of training modules aimed at women entrepreneurs, trade promotion officers, NGO's and trade negotiators that are available at no or low cost and can be implemented in all APEC economies easily.
7. It is important to ensure that there is outreach to women and indigenous women and those in remote and rural areas are not being included in globalization so that they can experience the benefits of trade liberalization without a threat to their traditional ways of life.
8. GFPN should be elevated to a higher level of decisions makers and given the support that it needs to drive better and higher level activities and influence within APEC.
9. Copious amounts of research at the APEC level and the economy and regional level, concerning the impact of women in the economy, the community and the types of jobs women are creating have been undertaken. It is important to start implementing the recommendations of this research so that women can become fully integrated into the economy..
10. Export market development programs that are designed to assist first time exporters or SME let alone women exporters are highly effective in some economies and should be considered an essential role to

supporting healthy competition as well as integrating women into international trade.

11. Access to export financing is usually not available to women entrepreneurs because their businesses are too small, the amount of funding they require is not enough or the nature of their businesses do not meet the threshold requirements. Accessible, affordable export financing for smaller and women owned businesses could provide protection as well as the support and funding needed to assist market entry and should be designed to capture those not currently captured by current programs.
12. Support for training women entrepreneurs to export their goods and services is still needed, and APEC economies should create national programs to address the gap in mentoring, partnering, and training women entrepreneurs to be export ready. Such training can also be provided in conjunction with WLN and GFPN as well as other relevant working groups.
13. APEC should show leadership and ensure that women entrepreneurs are fairly represented on advisory councils and other positions associated with multilateral trade fora that APEC supports such as ABAC and APEC working groups
14. Recognizing that trade policy is not gender-neutral, the APEC economies should review trade policies and agreements to ensure that there are no adverse effects on women-owned businesses, particularly those in the service sector.
15. The last Women's Ministerial Meeting was convened in Mexico in 2002. It is time to reconvene with a topic focussing on women's economic contribution to APEC and how women entrepreneurs can help lead the way to sustainable and healthy economic recovery in the region.
16. It is important that Ministers Responsible for Trade, specifically address issues of IPR protection of indigenous knowledge, arts and design, and ensure that indigenous communities are brought into the world of globalization through export training, access to markets, access to export support programs and without exploitation of traditional knowledge and ways of life.
17. Expectations were raised by the IWEBS meeting in 1999 and it is time to reconvene a second IWEBS meeting in order to build on the opportunities that these women have and the momentum created by previous meeting.

NEXT STEPS

Following the delivery of this report and the four participating economy reports, it is crucial to not let this important work finish here, therefore the following steps

are recommended to continue to promote good public policies that promote women entrepreneurs and international trade throughout APEC:

1. Continue ongoing briefings with WLN, GFPN and other significant working groups such as the SME WG, the ECWG and the trade promotion groups on specific programs within APEC and at the economy level that can continue to promote women entrepreneurs
2. Obtain additional briefings from related Ministries at the economy level and implement Best Practices that have been cited in this report. It is not necessary to create new programs when excellent successful prototypes already exist in other economies. Implementing these models and building on them to form linkages will strengthen the programs both domestically and within APEC.
3. Proceed with specific recommendations to existing and potential programs within APEC and the economy levels and expansion into other economies, and other related Ministries, based on, inter alia, consultations with Ministry officials
4. Provide a more detailed strategy for developing a database of women-led businesses
5. Make specific recommendations to potential new programming that could more effectively support “Women in Business”, the GFPN’s mandate, and the Women Leaders network and which will include the following:
 - Programming that engages women more actively in investment and trade activities
 - The development of a mentorship program
 - An APEC wide “Women in Business” Economic Summit, including potential private sector partners as part of a future WLN event or APEC Women’s Ministerial Meeting that would be a high level private/public policy think tank with concrete deliverables and would feed into the Senior Officials and Ministerial meetings and result in active implementation of support for women entrepreneurs throughout APEC.