Seminar on Empowering Women through ICT for Inclusive Growth

Host: Chinese Taipei, the Philippines
Venue: PICC, Manila
16 September 2015

Briefing

The theme of APEC Women and Economy 2015 Fora is "Women as Prime Movers of Inclusive Growth." Empowerment, innovation and resilience are the subtopics for private- and public-sector dialogues. Given the advance of ICT and profusion of innovative applications of technology, the WEF since 2012 has listed innovation and technology as key means to bolster women's economic rights. Echoing this year's theme, the seminar co-hosted by Chinese Taipei reviewed successful cases of female entrepreneurs in the Asia-Pacific region utilizing technology. Through the seminar, the host hopes to create a consensus on improving women's economic opportunities and explore suggestions and strategies to help businesswomen in the region expand their opportunities.

In the seminar, the participants are in agreement in the importance of empowering women as catalyst for social change and economic development. It is in alignment with these mindsets that the seminar speakers have thus presented several case studies of women entrepreneurs who designed game-based learning applications, e-tools and programs, and research demographics of women in areas like Chile, Australia, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Peru, and Chinese Taipei. The strategic approaches respond to challenges posed by women in business to address issues about isolation, of women working from home and not empowered about her capabilities and skills, the opportunities for her to develop her skills and access capital funds to service and develop her markets and learn new marketing initiatives, and bridging the digital divide between the genders. The initial attempt to empower women through inspiring programs that addresses cultural make-up and processes and how training programs can be designed and be user-friendly, accessible, affordable, and interesting for women to actually use and apply to their business.

Innovation for Women and Economic Development：

Toolkit and Game-Based Learning Application

APEC Multi-year Project "Innovation for Women and Economic Development", co-sponsored by 14 APEC economies, has been implemented by Chinese Taipei since May 2013. This project was proposed by both the PPWE and the SMEWG, and the ABAC Women's Forum.

The first phase baseline survey findings on how ICT can empower women by creating an environment to participate in community---based activities, create business and employment opportunities for women, create business---enabling networks that address women's needs.

Introduce innovative ICT solutions to solve issues of financial literacy and family consent, provide e---commerce platform and cost effective package to assist micro businesses break market limitations, boost the confidence for entrepreneurship, and build networks to enhance leadership qualities.

The second phase on online training addressed pre and post business concerns for monitoring and guidance and collected data on personal background. It involves 20 participants, 20 hours of online business tutoring over 100 course topics, examine the functions of e---learning platform, explore participants' expectation and satisfaction and study the interaction between mentors and participants. The Phase 2 survey results reveal the preferred topics (human resources management, financial literacy, marketing skill, access to market), behavioral support and stable infrastructure service. The findings and recommendations reveal the women's unfamiliarity with utilizing ICT for market information, high level of ICT literacy does not assure the ability to access market information or how to translate them to benefit their business.

Training courses in ICT-enabled tools and E-learning could help women entrepreneurs to build self-esteem, business-related knowledge, e-business-related skills and financial knowledge. However, our studies found that women's high ICT literacy did not pertain to their access of business information. How to convert market information into business opportunities is another challenge in designing e-learning programs tailored for women entrepreneurs.

Mobile technology opens doors to maximize learning experience. The Multi-year Project work on the principle that gamification engages people on an emotional level to achieve their goals thus developed fingertip gaming app on entrepreneurship. The global app downloads, "WE boss" (Women Economy), objected to educate women to develop skills using game applications while addressing limitations on time, cost and

space. The fun and user---friendly application educate and train women in startups in an interactive way allowing them to gain competence and learn to SWOT (identify strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats), and provide translations into different languages to close the communication gap between people from urban cities to those from villages/provinces.

Breakout Session & Conclusion

I. CAPACITY BUILDING

The development and enhancement of skills and knowledge from the grassroots level to marginalized groups, from training and workshops to enhance character build up and proper structures to empower women not only in the macro economy but also from small home---based initiatives, address language barrier and other communication concerns, provide technical support and infrastructure will address business and financial literacy, provide access to jobs or business ideas, peer teaching/counseling.

II. ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The major challenges affecting women entrepreneurs are cultural differences and practices, economic status of their country and their family which affects financial viability, biased gender roles and expectations, limitations to legal avenues and capital funds, support group to build business confidence and share skills and knowledge, economic sanctions, and inability to utilize ICT to source, build, access markets.
An enhanced program for sustainable entrepreneurship status for women through ICT must have regional cooperation and shared vision to seek support and push their agenda from their government to support women---led businesses, access to loans and simplified loan process, provide baseline data and other data source, create a pilot program, develop ICT learning tools and capabilities to access market and develop ideas.

III. INFRASTRUCTURE

The active presence of government support in activating its authority to make ICT accessible and effective is crucial. This participation requires the appointment of an ICT Specialist who can provide knowledge and vision in improving connectivity and activating robust networking programs. For marginalized countries with limited funds for proper infrastructure support, the support and assistance of regional groups like APEC may provide the proper channels to activate and enhance connectivity weakness. The provisions of incentives for sponsorships and donors and additional support from

pooled private organizations and institutions must also be tapped. There is also a clamor for active online support to push infrastructure agenda and get government support and funding. Infrastructure support includes up---to---date hardware devices, internet access even outside of the city, daycare centers, online learning programs with well---designed courses and system compatible platform, affordable internet infrastructure and equitable access to ICT.

IV: PUBLIC---PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

The dynamics of the support coming from PPPs in terms of scholarships, private collaborations, government incentives, proper policy and implementation support, economic/capital funding, and exchange program, women empowerment programs, can enhance the proper network and cooperation in different countries and the regions. But the crucial and integral part is how to be able to harness these partnerships. And how can initiatives convey proper support channels and meet the needs and demands of women especially in SMEs.

The recommendations presented were to network directly with government or political and authority figures conversant and sympathetic to the cause of women to aggressively push the agenda of crafting legislation, support effective language translation and technical support and pass effective policies and proper implementations of laws that will allow easy access to women---led initiatives in grants funding and organizational support. Another is to create a portal for regional cooperation of women to seek assistance, redress and support.