

WOMEN IN BUSINESS AND GLOBALIZATION

by:

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"I am but a small voice. I need an Angel to get me away from dole-outs or hand-to-mouth existence. I need an angel to hold my hand and give me hope, teach me values and mix me with others who, like me, wish to start home-based or micro/cottage enterprises.

I need capital when I need it. I am not so concerned with interest rates as I cannot even compute total effective rates. My payments should be in small amounts, which I should be made to pay regularly.

I should be forced to save. As I build my credit history, I should have access to emergency funds, access to loans to repair my house which, by the way, is erected on borrowed land. I need to fulfill my basic needs for food and shelter.

I need to feel proud of my work, of my contribution to a supply chain of domestic and foreign volume buyers. I need to learn the rudiments of business, i.e., apply for loans, negotiate for contracts, etc.

I need to own a home and fulfill my yearning for social life, for my children to attend private schools. I need them to become what I could not.

I am but a small voice. I need an Angel to modernize my medium-sized business, expand it by multiplying my product or business lines. I need to fund my sub-contractors.

With the crisis, my cash flow got shattered; the banks are calling in my loans. I am not in small business; hence, my fixed overhead is not small. I am not in large business; hence, I have limited options, fallback positions and access to creative solutions. I need to tie-up with partners, silent or active investors, who would bring value to our joint business.

My personal needs have grown too. I continue to upgrade the standard of living of my family.

I am but a small voice! I am in large business but I am beleaguered. My foreign partners severed our manufacturing and exclusive marketing contracts as they have found cheaper options in another country. This, of course, after their brand name has been established in my country.

Where does that leave me? I thought retail selling would be my saving grace but retail trade has likewise been liberalized. The saying is so true – big business means big capital and profits means big problems.

I thought I could rest and enjoy life. I need to re-study, re-strategize, and rationalize my loan portfolio and business lines. Perhaps I should fast track my E-Commerce business and find my market niche."

Who are these women? They are living! They have names! They are women in micro, cottage, small, medium or large enterprises.

They all need access to data, technology and continuing education, market and finance. As they are in different stages of business development, their requirements to address the four similar needs vary. You may therefore say it follows that the required internal responses and external interventions may differ likewise. Yes, in shadings; no, in core character.

What we need as women in business in the face of globalization are changed mindsets and productive linkages.

We have to accept and /or do the following:

1. We need to accept that “no woman is an island.” Women in micro, cottage and small industries need to join a cooperative, a supply chain. Together, we learn and reinforce values of hardwork and fair business practices. Together, we look for our anchors, our source of technology, market or finance. Together, we gain access to shared data and technology. Together, with a distinct group of similar enterprises, we achieve economies of scale. Together, we go for volume sales. Chinese Taipei calls it “Central Satellite Systems for Development” or CSSD. The Philippines calls it “DRIVE” for “Developing Rural Industries and Village Enterprises.”
2. Firstly, as members of a particular nationality, we need to accept that competition is global, not local. There is a need to eradicate the crab mentality. Secondly, as a nationality interdependent with another, a given in globalization, we need to ride on the duality of competition and cooperation. We should accept that our similar products have common markets. We should adopt a common industry stand.

We should go back to basics, go into product specialization and market niches. Indigenous branding is one strategy open to micro, cottage and small enterprises to ride on the wave of globalized trade.

3. We need to consider seriously the dictum that “100% of zero is zero and 30% of 100 is 30.” We need size; we need to partner, to link up. If we cannot grow organically, we can grow by partnering with others and not necessarily with somebody local.
4. We need to advocate, we need to look beyond ourselves and our businesses. We need to pro-act, lobby for the passage and/or implementation of women-friendly business laws. We should support Government and NGO initiatives that work for economic empowerment of women and who encourage the establishment of linkages.

We have to support the moves for conscientization, for transparency and accountability in public governance.

5. We need to practice what we preach. Our businesses have to be women-friendly.

Likewise, we have to be in the forefront in espousing fair trade practices and transparency and accountability even in private governance.

6. We need to be proud of who we are. We are Women! Born to be nurturers and caregivers. Born to be supportive of male heads of families, rehearsed in the art of compromise, but unbending in pushing for issues that threaten inner values we hold dear.
7. Especially if we personally had a relatively easy climb up, we should never forget that half of the world's sky is being held up by women. If we look around, power is not shared equally by men and women. We should be women working for women.

How do we in the Confederation of Women's Business Councils in APEC do our share in reframing development policies to help women in business manage globalization?

First, let us go back to where it all started. On May 23, 1997, 150 women in various sizes and types of businesses were invited by the Philippine Department of Trade and Industry Secretary Cesar Bautista and Undersecretary Ernie Ordoñez, as well as the National Commission on The Role of Filipino Women Executive Director Tessam Castillo to Malacañang Palace. That day, we agreed to group together and form the Women's Business Council of the Philippines (WBCP). Before then President Fidel V. Ramos, WBCP pledged "to build a business culture that is cognizant of women's contributions to the economy and supportive of women's quest for excellence, whether as workers, entrepreneurs, owners or executives, in pursuit of sustainable economic growth, global competitiveness and social equity."

WBCP spared no second to address the four needs of women. These are:

ACCESS TO MARKET

In two subsequent meetings, WBCP caused the formation of CWBC in ASEAN in a UNIFEM-sponsored meeting in Bangkok. WBCP nominated Malaysia, then the forthcoming APEC leaders' meeting host, to be the chair during the Women Leaders Network (WLN) in October 1997 in Canada. WBC ASEAN invited other countries to join them. Finally, during the WLN meeting in Malaysia in 1998, CWBC in APEC was formally launched.

Today, CWBC in APEC has members in Australia, Canada, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Korea, People's Republic of China, Philippines, Chile and Thailand. Our latest member, Brunei, will have her formal induction during the WLN meeting in June of this year. Twelve economies linked to each other, doing business, advocating for women friendly economic policies. These 12 economies will convene in Australia May 1-2 to hold its first convention. WBC Philippines and WBC Malaysia will dovetail and have trade missions in Sydney and Melbourne.

ACCESS TO DATA

In 1998, CWBC APEC, with the assistance of UNDP-UNOPS and the Asian Institute of Management, did a study of Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand measuring “The Economic Contribution of Women in Business and the Impact of the Asian Financial Crisis on Them.”

This thrust has stirred the right waters. Working with the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, we were advised that the Philippine National Census of 1998 is sex-disaggregated.

Emboldened by this, CWBC APEC accepted the invitation of Conference Chair, Undersecretary Rosario Manalo, and attended the first ever APEC Ministerial meeting on Women in Manila in 1998. We lobbied successfully for APEC economies to sex-disaggregate all government data and researches.

ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

At different levels of business, ever working with women with disabilities, home-based workers, women in armed conflict, and CWBC APEC continue to share information on how to improve their individual associations’ training programs in Entrepreneurship and Business Management. Furthermore, CWBC APEC members host various Learning and Trade missions from abroad and are generous with their sharing. Some do joint ventures and E-commerce. WBC Chinese Taipei does business incubation.

For its part, WBC PHILS has pledged to help the Philippine Department of Education to drum up sponsorships from corporations for knowledge-based curricula in public secondary schools.

ACCESS TO FINANCE

WBC Philippines, after two years of working with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Finance launched late last year a lending window for women in SMES with a P3 billion fund. The program is participated by both government and private commercial, rural and thrift banks. The program has a built in training component on how leaders can be women-friendly and how borrowers can be good borrowers.

As WBCP had hoped, Land Bank of the Philippines launched its own in-house program called “PINAY” (Puhunang Inilaan Para sa mga Pinay). Translated, it means capital for the Filipina. It has a P1 billion allocation with a minimum loan amount of P500,000. Following this example, Planters’ Development Bank will also launch its own program. WBCP hopes that, sooner than later, loans for women in SMES will be as common as car loans and housing loans. When that happens, rates and terms would have become competitive and the lending process simplified.

WBCP is working with NGOs in micro finance, like the Center for Agriculture and Rural Development and the Catholic relief services for its partners in its lending window programme to be an “Angel” and assist them.

Why do we women in business of the confederation of Women’s in Business Councils in APEC do these? I believe it is because we wish to join UNDP and the rest of the caring world in its efforts to make “globalization work for people and not just for profits.”

After all,

*To laugh often and much,
To win the respect of intelligent people,
And the affection of children,
To earn the appreciation of honest critics
And endure the betrayal of false friends,
To appreciate beauty,
To find the best in others,
To leave the world a little better
Whether by a healthy child,
A garden patch,
Or a redeemed social condition,
To know that even just one life
Has breathed easier because we lived -
This is to have succeeded.*