REMARKS BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT THE BPW ASIA-PACIFIC CONFERENCE

KEYNOTE SPEECH
“ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN"

AUCKLAND
10 APRIL 2016
9:15 – 9:40
FOLLOWED BY 10 MINS Q&A SESSION

ARANCHA GONZÁLEZ
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Tihe mauri ora!

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e rau rangatira mā

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

(Behold the breath of life!

To all authorities, all voices, to the many chiefs gathered here

Greetings, greetings, greetings to everyone.)

Thank you for the invitation to contribute to the Asia Pacific Regional Conference of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women.
BPW International is a remarkable organisation with a long history of advocating for women’s rights. Just a few weeks ago, I was at the United Nations in New York with members of your leadership. I was struck both by their advocacy and by BPW’s historical role in the establishment of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the principal intergovernmental body dedicated to promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment. Since 1947, BPW International has used its consultative status to the United Nations to champion the interests of women in business and the professions.

For the International Trade Centre, BPW International has been an important partner in advancing women’s economic empowerment. In 2011, for example, BPW’s Mongolia chapter led a group of women entrepreneurs to Chongqing, China, for the first ever edition of what is now one of our flagship annual events, the Women Vendors Exhibition and Forum.
The contacts they made there led to a project to enable Mongolian cashmere makers to develop their skills, create new products and sell into lucrative foreign markets. One of the women on that BPW delegation was Badamkhand Bataa, who heads Khatan Suljee, a mid-sized Mongolian firm dealing in cashmere, wool, and leather. The contacts and training have enabled her business to export to new markets.

This has in turn paid dividends for her staff – 95% of whom are women. In 2013/14, the company built a daycare for employees’ kids, together with skills training, housing loans, and even a beauty and health salon. We hope to build on this history of partnerships with BPW chapters in Papua New Guinea, where we are working to boost export sales and incomes for bilum producers.
Another initiative on which ITC and BPW are collaborating closely is the Women’s Empowerment Principles, a UN initiative launched in 2010 that offers the private sector guidance on how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community. By bringing together our respective comparative advantages – ITC’s trade expertise and BPW’s network of women entrepreneurs to help signatories to the principles deliver on their commitments to implement enterprise development, supply chain, and marketing practices that empower women.

I should take a step back here to introduce ITC, for those of you who are unfamiliar with us. Founded in 1964, the International Trade Centre is a joint agency of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, with a mandate to enable businesses in developing countries to become more competitive and connect to global markets, thus boosting economic development and contributing to the achievement of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development.
Women's economic empowerment is both an explicit goal in the new global development agenda, and an essential means for achieving its broader objectives of poverty eradication and equitable, sustainable growth. At ITC, the economic empowerment of women is at the heart of our work. We believe that lasting social and economic progress is impossible unless women are economically empowered and socially respected. In the course of our work to connect women-owned businesses to international markets, we are constantly reminded that women’s empowerment and trade are mutually reinforcing – trade supports women to become empowered, and empowered women contribute disproportionately to the economy and society.
A growing body of evidence points to the potential gains from economic equality for women at every level: households, businesses, countries, and globally. Women in paid work spend far more of their income than men do on their families’ health and education. Companies with greater gender diversity in top management tend to outperform on profitability and market valuation. Countries that provide greater economic opportunities for women generally score higher in rankings of competitiveness and national income. And finally, the McKinsey Global Institute recently estimated that if women participated in the economy on an equal footing with men, it would add about $28 trillion to global GDP by 2025 – more than a 25% increase over current trends.
This is why I'd like to salute the Honourable Louise Upston, Minister of Women, who is with us here today. New Zealand has always been a trailblazer on gender equality - it was the first nation to give women the right to vote. Thanks to Minister Upston and others in this room, New Zealand continues to lead, encouraging women to break stereotypes, build skills, get involved in politics, start businesses, and take up work in non-traditional sectors.

In spite of these potential gains, nearly a billion women around the globe are either prevented from becoming full economic actors, or lack the skills or capital to do so. These women have been called a ‘third billion’ who could follow China and India into the global economy, transforming their own lives and improving economic prospects for all of us.
The road ahead is long. ITC research shows that women, despite making up 40% of the workforce, own only one in five exporting companies. Studies suggest women-owned SMEs in emerging markets have unmet financing needs of between US$260 billion and US$320 billion a year. Women in developing economies are 20 percent less likely than men to even have a bank account. Women entrepreneurs often lack support networks and access to information about export opportunities.

ITC is working to change this. Last year, we launched the SheTrades initiative to provide a framework of collaboration for partners to scale up and accelerate the rate at which women entrepreneurs are able to fully participate in the global economy and use trade as a lever for economic resilience and transformation.
Women’s economic equality requires a complex ecosystem of support, from non-discriminatory laws to equal access to capital and business opportunities. That is why, last September, we issued a far-reaching Call to Action, setting out a framework for companies, governments, and other organisations to make specific, measurable pledges that contribute to the goal of connecting one million women entrepreneurs to markets by 2020.

The Call to Action rests on eight pillars we need to address in order to unlock markets for women and make growth more inclusive.

1. To collect, analyse and disseminate data on women’s economic participation.
2. To create trade policies and agreements that enhance women’s participation in trade.
3. To empower women-owned businesses to participate in the US$10 trillion market in annual public procurement spending. Their current share is estimated at a mere 1 to 5%.

4. To create corporate procurement programmes that embed diversity and inclusion in value chains.

5. To set up mechanisms to certify ownership and eligibility of women-owned businesses.

6. To address supply side constraints that especially affect women-owned businesses.

7. To close the gap between men and women for access to financial services.

8. To ensure legislative and administrative reforms guarantee women’s rights to ownership and control over resources.
BPW International was one of the earliest supporters of the Call to Action. At the initiative’s launch in Sao Paulo, BPW pledged to build a global database of women entrepreneurs, to accelerate women’s engagement with international markets, and to advocate for gender diverse boards and better government procurement and corporate sourcing policies. ITC encourages your organisations to follow BPW International’s lead, sign up and spread the Call to Action across your respective networks. Whether it’s corporate sourcing, government procurement, bank lending, or data analysis – all of us have a part to play in lowering the barriers facing women-owned businesses in the world economy.
Technology can help lower these barriers in ways that were simply impossible only a few years ago. One example of this is our new web and mobile application, also called SheTrades, which provides women entrepreneurs across the globe a unique platform to connect to markets. Launched last December in partnership with Google, the Brazilian tech firm CI&T, and GreenBell Communications, a small woman-led Kenyan tech company, the app lets women-owned businesses showcase their goods and services, while prospective buyers can customise filters to identify appropriate suppliers.

In sum, the app is a tool for women entrepreneurs to share information, increase visibility, expand networks, forge connections and internationalise. The head of our women and trade programme calls it ‘Tinder for businesses’. Check out the app, either at shetrades.com or by downloading it from the Google Play Store on your smartphone or tablet. I especially urge those of you here who lead or represent businesses to join now and be part of the movement.
Another example of technology lowering hurdles to international markets is ITC’s e-learning programme, which offers a strong portfolio of online, interactive courses to allow women to upgrade knowledge in a time-efficient and flexible manner. Our SME Trade Academy’s courses cover some of the very challenges we have been talking about: access to finance, access to public procurement, access to information on supply chain management or cross-border contracts, and much more. Here too, I urge you to explore and spread the word about these useful courses.

Since brainstorming ideas and building market connections sometimes takes more than technology, five years on from Chongqing the Women Vendors Exhibition and Forum is now firmly on ITC’s calendar. Having established itself as the premier global event for women entrepreneurs and companies committed to inclusive supply chains, this year’s edition will take place in Istanbul on 1-2 September, in partnership with KAGIDER, the Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey.
If you’re a woman entrepreneur in the textiles and apparel, tourism or IT services sectors – this year’s priority sectors - there’s no better place to come to learn, connect with new partners and do business. If you are a company committed to a gender-inclusive supply chain, you are equally welcome. Do visit our website to find out more about the application process.

In closing, let me reiterate ITC’s wholehearted support for the work of BPW in promoting women’s entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. We are committed to putting our tools, networks, and projects in the service of achieving our common goals. We look forward to working together with BPW chapters in the Pacific region and beyond.

Thank you.