

Chapter 10

**ASIAN-BORN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN SYDNEY:
INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY**

by

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Female ethnic minorities in international trade

In this era of globalisation and fast-changing technologies that affect the way business is done, little is known about women entrepreneurs engaged in the global world of trade and investment and there are few successful women role models. However, the number of immigrant women travelling back and forth between their adopted countries and their countries of origin appears to be increasing. These women are engaged in international trade between Florida and Cuba, England and India, Germany and Turkey, Canada and Hong Kong (China), Australia and Vietnam, etc. They can be seen in airports, on ferries, in trains, in buses and trucks as they cross borders and continents to do business. There is little research on the entrepreneurial activities of these migrant women, most of whom are from non-English speaking backgrounds and are often referred to in terms of "ethnic minorities". As these women entrepreneurs contribute to shaping the process of globalisation, their international trading activities are attracting the attention of policy makers who seek to ensure that they reap the benefits from changes in communication technologies and electronic commerce.

International migration

Around the world, more than 150 million migrants have either settled or remain for an extended stay in a foreign country. Broadly, they are either voluntary or forced migrants. According to the International Organisation for Migration (2000),¹ "Voluntary migrants include people who move abroad for employment, study, family reunification or other personal factors. Forced migrants leave their countries to escape persecution, conflict, repression, natural and human disasters, ecological degradation or other situations that endanger their lives, freedom or livelihood."

1. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), based in Geneva, is an intergovernmental body committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. IOM acts with its partners in the international community to assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants. See: <http://www.iom.int>.

Those who have settled in a foreign land, for whatever reasons, eventually have to earn a living using whatever resources they possess, such as education or skills, labour and savings. Where possible, they re-skill, innovate and adjust and seek new opportunities for work and enterprise. Many have succeeded and, in so doing, made substantial contributions to the wealth and social well-being of their adopted country. This is evident in countries that receive many migrants, such as Australia, the United States and Canada.

Australia is home to 3.9 million people born overseas. Between 1993 and 1998, more than 1.2 million people intending to stay for one year or more arrived in Australia. They came from over 200 countries. The 1996 Census showed that one or both parents of a further 3.8 million persons born in Australia were born overseas. It identified 2.6 million persons who spoke a language other than English at home. Altogether, Australia's population of 19 million speak 282 languages.² This diversity is also evident in the United States and Canada. Today, almost 1 million legal immigrants a year enter the United States and another 300 000 enter by unauthorised means. On a per capita basis, Canada's intake of planned immigrants is one of the highest in the world, averaging 200 000 a year.

In Australia, the largest group of those born overseas are from the United Kingdom and Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, the Former Yugoslav Republics and Greece. However, over the last two decades, beginning with the acceptance of refugees from Vietnam, Asian countries have become an increasingly important source of both settlers and long-term visitors. Today, first-generation Asian-born migrants still make up less than 10% of Australia's population.

An interesting trend in international migration is its increasing feminisation, with women making up 47.5% of all international migration (International Organisation for Migration, 2000). In other words, there are over 71 million female migrants around the world. Often, the resettlement, social and economic issues facing women migrants differ from those facing men. Women migrants have different human, social and economic needs owing to their roles as wives and mothers or as single mothers and as care providers. In addition, many have to be both bread givers and breadwinners. They seek employment and need access to the same economic opportunities as men. Unfortunately, policy makers frequently overlook gender issues associated with female migrants. Nonetheless, there is much evidence of the capacity of women to help themselves. If gender barriers are removed and access to resources and opportunities improve, the capacity of migrant women to contribute to the wealth of nations and society at large could be enhanced.

Lack of official statistics and research on women entrepreneurs

Little has been done to increase the collection and presentation of gender-disaggregated statistics on women-owned businesses in Australia since the first OECD conference on women entrepreneurs in SMEs, held in 1997. Over the past five years, there has been hardly any substantial official research on female entrepreneurship and the economic activities of female minorities in Australia (ethnic women, aboriginal women and young women entrepreneurs). There is no official statistical information on women-owned SMEs that invest and do business overseas. This lack of official statistics, of gender-disaggregated data and of research on female entrepreneurship is unfortunately true of most countries. This is a major gender equity issue of concern to all women and needs to be addressed.

2. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996 Census, *Australia Now: A Statistical Profile, Population, Australia's Cultures*, See: <http://www.abs.gov.au>.

At the OECD Conference for Ministers responsible for SMEs, held in Bologna, June 2000, ministers of industry and representatives of 47 governments adopted the Bologna Charter³ on SME Policies. It referred to “recognising the increasing importance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in economic growth, job creation, regional and local development, and social adhesion, also through the role played by women and young entrepreneurs”. This official recognition of the role of women entrepreneurs is encouraging. There is much concern that women entrepreneurs in general are not aware of opportunities for international trade and investment. Their business activities are mainly confined to domestic markets, but rapid changes in technology make it urgent for women to engage in e-commerce and be encouraged to “go global”, as foreign competition may threaten their position in their domestic market. More research is needed on the extent to which women are managing the impact of globalisation and changes in electronic technologies on their business. Gender issues related to promoting entrepreneurship, forming small businesses and the use of new technologies in business need to be carefully considered by policy makers and government.

Migrants who achieve economic independence

Australia’s experience shows that migrants generally have a high capacity to help themselves and achieve economic independence. This is especially the case for the so-called ethnic minorities (a term used to refer to migrants from a non-English speaking background). As Table 1 shows, in the 1996 Census, ethnic minorities, both men and women, achieved higher participation rates in self-employment or as employers than migrants from English-speaking countries. The table shows that migrant women born in non-English speaking countries are more likely to be employers (2.13%) than Australian-born women or than migrants born in English-speaking countries. Women in the Asian-born minorities group also had higher participation rates (2.05%) as employers when compared with those born in Australia (1.95%) and with migrants from an English-speaking background (1.82%).

Those born in an English-speaking country have the highest participation rate for working independently (5.05%). In the category of “contributing family workers”, which refers to those working in family enterprises where their work or employment is often not fully formalised, women migrants from Asia have the highest participation rate (1.87%) and migrant women from English-speaking countries had the lowest (1.16%). The point here is not to find reasons for the differences in participation rates in the various categories of employment, but to highlight the capacity of ethnic women (and men) to achieve economic independence and business ownership in their adopted country.

In addition, migrant women entrepreneurs, and ethnic minority women especially, are active participants in international trade and have a high propensity to adopt new technologies. They possess social and cultural capital and networks that help them to establish trading links with their countries of origin. They grow their international business and expand their trading links to other countries by leveraging their trading record and networking with other migrant ethnic groups around the world. Their paths to success are by no means simple. They face the obstacles that other entrepreneurs face. However, their workload, which comprises business development, day-to-day operations, and business travel, is often heavy. They are expected to juggle domestic chores and family and childcare responsibilities. Often, they are expected to play all these roles because of cultural gender bias and tradition. Normally, businessmen do not face this burden of domestic responsibilities.

3. OECD Conference for Ministers Responsible for SMEs and Industry Ministers, “Enhancing the Competitiveness of SMEs in the Global Economy: Strategies and Policies”, Bologna, Italy, 14-15 June 2000. See: <http://www.oecd.org//dsti/sti/industry/smes/>.

Table 1. Participation rates of female and male employment in Australia
As a percentage of total employed

| Birth place | Employer | Own account worker | Contributing family worker | Employee |
|---|----------|--------------------|----------------------------|----------|
| <i>Australia</i> | | | | |
| Female | 1.95 | 4.28 | 1.32 | 92.45 |
| Male | 3.10 | 6.83 | 0.74 | 89.33 |
| <i>Overseas</i> | | | | |
| Female | 1.98 | 4.81 | 1.55 | 91.66 |
| Male | 2.79 | 7.07 | 0.75 | 89.39 |
| <i>Selected Asian countries¹</i> | | | | |
| Female | 2.05 | 3.63 | 1.87 | 92.45 |
| Male | 2.74 | 4.21 | 1.17 | 91.86 |
| <i>Born in an English-speaking country</i> | | | | |
| Female | 1.82 | 5.05 | 1.16 | 91.98 |
| Male | 2.56 | 7.90 | 0.41 | 89.14 |
| <i>Born in non-English-speaking country</i> | | | | |
| Female | 2.13 | 4.66 | 1.84 | 91.38 |
| Male | 3.02 | 6.50 | 0.98 | 89.50 |

1. China, Hong Kong (China), Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan, Laos, and Vietnam.
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996 Census.

Asian-born women entrepreneurs in international trade

To understand migrant women's participation in international trade and the impact of globalisation on their businesses, a study of Asian-born women entrepreneurs (ABWEs) in Sydney was carried out.⁴ This group of migrant women, many of whom have lived in Australia only for the last 10-15 years, successfully established their enterprises in a totally new environment. Asian-born women were chosen as subjects for the study because of the diversity of their starting positions, their underlying motivation and the different paths they took. For example, many came as refugees with almost nothing more than the clothes they were wearing. Some more affluent arrivals held university degrees and had work and business experience, but their qualifications and past achievements were not recognised. They had to start over again to rebuild their credibility. Others who found work faced the "accent ceiling" in their workplace and had to venture out as self-employed.⁵ Eventually, their business grew and they employed others. In addition, the economic activities of ABWEs in Australia and elsewhere around the world where they have resettled are highly visible owing to their physical presence in shops, factories and airports.

Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with women entrepreneurs from ten Asian countries: China, Hong Kong (China), Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Chinese Taipei, Laos and Vietnam. The interviews were semi-structured. As a starting point, a fixed set of questions was used to determine the women's demographic profile and their immigration experience.

4. A. Low (2000), Doctoral Research, University of Technology, Sydney.

5. The *accent ceiling* explains blocked mobility in career and social advancement based on ethnicity, as opposed to the *glass ceiling* and the *glass door*. Migrant women from a non-English-speaking background may find it harder to find employment or progress in career and social status because they are different, sound different and look different and may approach work tasks and career challenges differently. See J. Collins (1998), "Cosmopolitan Capitalism: Ethnicity, Gender and Australian Entrepreneurs", 3 vols., PhD Thesis, University of Wollongong, Australia.

Another set of questions was used as an interview guide to probe each woman's experience in her path to entrepreneurship: how she did it, the milestones and hurdles along the way, the resources she has and how she gained access to the resources needed to start her business, her experience in international trade, the extent of her computer literacy and her adoption of Internet technology and e-commerce in her business. They were also asked about their experience with banks and with government authorities in matters relevant to their businesses and the contributions they have made to Australia.

The following research findings serve to highlight the participation of ABWEs in the global, technology-driven environment, as characterised by their international trading activities.

ABWEs: participation in international trade

Just over half of ABWEs are engaged in one or more forms of international business activity.⁶ The remainder are in businesses that cater to the domestic market. Some of the latter group expressed their intention of entering international trade in the immediate future. If these plans are realised, it is expected that by the year 2002, at least 55% of these ABWEs will be engaged in international business.

ABWEs: participation rates in international trade by country of birth

Four groups of women, categorised by their countries of birth, had a higher participation rate in international business than others. Those born in Chinese Taipei have a participation rate of 83%, followed closely by those born in Malaysia (80%), and by those born in Hong Kong (China) and the Philippines (68% and 67%, respectively). Women entrepreneurs born in China and Singapore have participation rates of 50% and 40%, respectively. However, less than a third of the Indonesian, Vietnamese, Thai and Laotian ABWEs are engaged in international business activities.

ABWEs: participation in different types of trade

The research shows that ABWEs are just as likely to be engaged in export as in import activities: 65% export goods and services, mainly to Asia, and 63% import, again mainly from Asia. Close to one-third of ABWEs are engaged in both export and import trade.

ABWEs' trading partners

Almost all of the ABWEs engaged in international trade carry out their trade with their countries of birth (90%). Only 10% trade with other countries. In addition to trading with their countries of birth, these women entrepreneurs are very likely to trade with other Asian countries, and 63% do business with other Asian countries, including Korea and Japan, while 39% do business with non-Asian countries, mainly exporting to and importing from Europe and the United States.

6. The term "international business activity" includes the import or export of goods or services and overseas investments in office, plant and machinery, or direct management, marketing or technical support given to overseas local agents or overseas suppliers.

Networks/relationship building and tools of trade

Based on the experience of the ABWEs engaged in international business activities, it was found that the critical factor for success is the network of business relationships they possess or continue to build. These networks may be formal or informal and can be used in different ways and in different combinations to produce successful outcomes for the entrepreneur. Business relationships are not built overnight. They may come as part of the individual's social capital⁷ or be acquired through ethnic or class resources, but they all take time to build and need careful nurturing. Once built, these business relationships can increase social capital or networks.

How does one build strong overseas business networks? The following simple model of building networks gives valuable insights into how migrant women, especially the ABWEs engaged in international trade, acquire and build strong business relationships across oceans, gender, age and interests. While these building blocks and networking activities for constructing overseas business relationships may apply to men as well, they must be viewed from the perspective of women. While not the focus of this paper, it is important to recognise, when looking at globalisation issues and barriers that women face for international trade, that there are significant gender differences between male and female constructs of relationships and power in business. It is not just the similar tools men and women use, but how much access and ease of access they have to various avenues of relationship building and networks and why this is so.

A simplified model of building overseas business networks

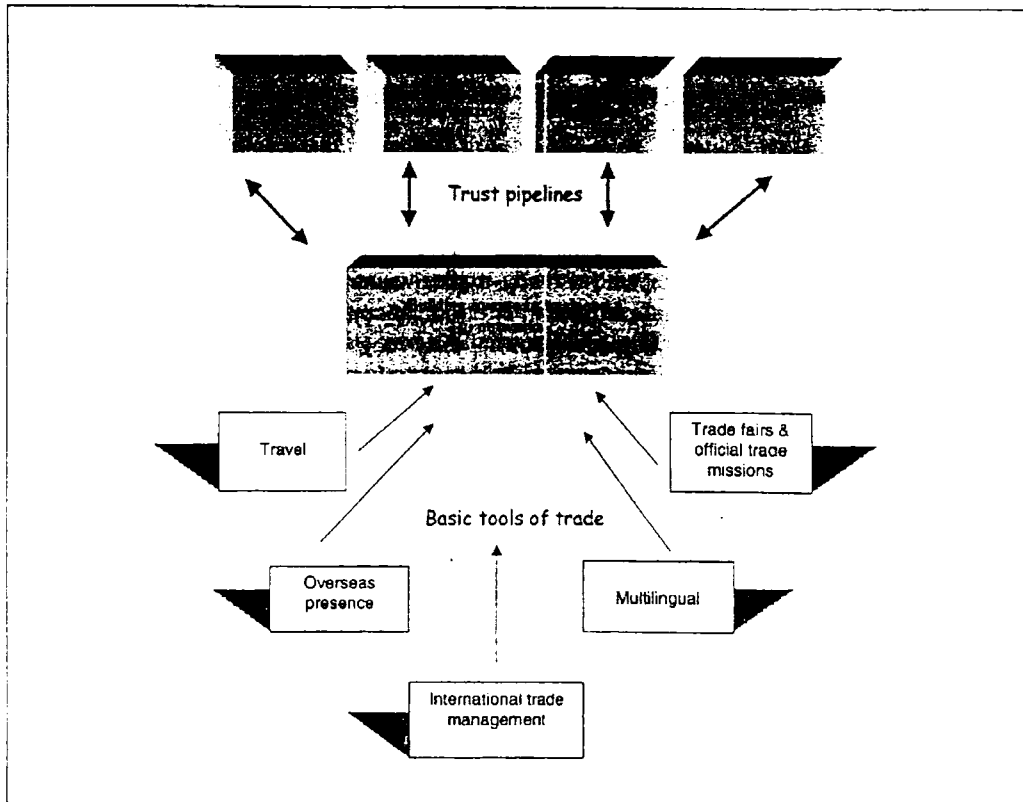
Trust

Trust is the fabric of strong business relationships between ABWEs and their overseas suppliers or buyers, as the interviews of women entrepreneurs demonstrate. The analysis of the interviews shows the existence of a two-way flow of trust in Asian business relationships. These "pipelines of trust" support migrant women entrepreneurs when they start their international trading business and continue to sustain them as they grow the business. The model of relationship building based on trust which emerges from the experience of the group of migrant women entrepreneurs studied is presented in Figure 1. The components of trust are family trust, pre-migration trust, bought trust and referred trust.

The more combinations of the components of trust an entrepreneur possesses, the stronger her network of support, sources of information, choice of partners and suppliers and the greater the opportunity to build her overseas customer base. The greater the intensity of each component of trust that exists between her and the trusted party, the stronger her base of overseas business relationships. The following describes the various components of trust as illustrated and verbalised by these migrant women themselves.

7. The concept of social capital is one of the most exciting discoveries in the study of entrepreneurship in modern times. Paths to entrepreneurship and success can be determined to a large extent by the quality and intensity of social capital one possesses and by how the individual entrepreneur uses his or her social capital. The simplest form of social capital is one's social network. These networks can be class-derived or ethnic-derived social capital. See I. Light and S. Gold (2000), *Ethnic Economies*. Academic Press, California.

Figure 1. The simplified ALow model for building overseas business networks



Source: A. Low (2000), "The Simplified ALow Model for Building Business Networks, A Model Based on Trust".

Family trust

In Asian society, family trust remains strong and binding. A family member or a close relative is assumed to be trustworthy. ABWEs often do business with family members and relatives still living in their countries of birth or in other countries where their relatives may have resettled. When the ABWE is importing, family members overseas may give support in more ways than referring the entrepreneur to reliable suppliers. They may set up another business to support her work, for example to provide local business liaison work and organise samples and price quotes. Sometimes, close relatives overseas actually manufacture the goods the entrepreneurs need. To ensure that a shipment is properly executed, ABWEs may rely on close family members overseas. Shipments may be organised by a trusted relative who checks the finished products, packs them or witnesses the packing and then arranges for shipping.

If you don't know them, the product you get may be of different quality and workmanship. Jurida Lee⁸ (importer of gift products and restaurateur)

Similarly, ABWEs exporting to their countries of origin are supported by their families there. In fact, trusted family members receive the made-in-Australia goods, which are shipped directly to them. They then deliver the goods to the foreign buyer. In such cases, trusted family members may enter into

8. All names have been changed to respect the privacy and the identity of the individual.

a more formal arrangement to act as the entrepreneur's appointed overseas selling agent or exclusive distributor.

Yep, my family, they are my main distributor in Malaysia ... I gave them exclusive distribution rights. (Barbara Sim, importer and exporter of books)

Pre-migration trust

Adult migrants, especially those who relocated to Australia under the business migration or skills migration programme, enter Australia with a ready-made, valuable chain of business networks and contacts in their countries of birth and elsewhere. It is not uncommon for them to work or team up with people they knew before migrating to Australia. Knowing the "right" people in business and having worked with them either as colleagues or as business-to-business associates can obviously have advantages when it comes to choosing the "right" overseas business partner. This is somewhat like the "old boys" network that men commonly use to their advantage. In addition to her own networks, the woman entrepreneur working with her husband or a male partner can also tap into his network.

I was talking to a friend, in fact an ex-colleague, about my marketing business and she was looking for someone to set up ... trading in Australia so it was just the right time when I mentioned it to her. I've got a partner in Canada and Hong Kong and I am based here. (Jodie Yong, importer/exporter and wholesaler of promotional products)

He's my husband's schoolmate. Told us he had a friend doing photo framing, would we like to [be their] associate agents in Australia. (Sara Liew, importer and wholesaler of picture frames)

Bought trust

What happens if an ABWE has no family support, no overseas relatives in business or in a position to assist her? In the case of well-known products and more established manufacturers, the ABWEs can identify these companies and contact them directly. They travel back to their countries of birth and from there make cold calls or call for an appointment to meet export managers or potential suppliers. They introduce themselves to these companies and then build up a trading relationship. Often in such cases, the trading relationship is based on the ABWE's ability to pay for the products before shipment.

Another important factor of success in building a reliable supplier relationship is the ABWE's ability to create credibility not only by prompt or advance payment of goods but also by sustaining volume or quantity in her orders. Often a small businesswoman finds it difficult to deal with a big manufacturer who does not know her and who may not give her priority in its production schedules.

You have to have a very good paying record. They will not trust you without money. I pay by telegraphic transfer a month before they ship the goods. Most of my imports are prepaid. Also, you have to have the capacity to buy in volume or they will ignore you. I buy by containers not by boxes. (Marissa Madrid, importer, wholesaler, retailer of food)

Referred trust

Referrals given by families and friends are just as important in building business relationships as family, pre-migration and bought trust. ABWEs and their overseas suppliers or buyers are dependent

on the trust their mutual intermediary has in them. Often, referrals are given without obligation, condition or commitment by families and friends because they want to and not because they have to. They act only if they are approached personally for referrals or support by ABWEs. However, referrals are only given if families and friends have confidence in the woman entrepreneur and want to see her succeed and also trust the referred party and hope that both parties will derive mutual benefits from their introduction or intervention.

Through connections ... because ... people introduced us to the agency ... we know people from overseas, not just France, a few places. We import from Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong (China), India. (Laura Lam, importer, wholesaler and retailer of bridal fabrics)

Even in referred trust, the women entrepreneurs need to do a great deal to build a lasting business relationship. Often this must be combined with the ABWE's ability to buy trust as shown earlier, make prompt payments, order large volumes and make regular purchases.

Yes, you just have to pay right up front, sometimes containers, sometimes not a container, just one parcel. It depends on the goods. (Laura Lam, importer, wholesaler and retailer of bridal fabrics)

Tools of trade

Given trust and network support, it is then up to the ABWEs to succeed. The following five basic tools are used by ABWEs to develop their international business: travel, trade fairs, overseas presence, language, and management.

Tools of trade 1: Travel

Travel overseas is a must for any woman doing business internationally, either to look for new products, identify suppliers or markets or to look at new trends and developments in overseas markets or new products coming into the market that may be suitable for Australian consumers.

I travel back and forth. There was one year in which I did six trips to Malaysia in six months. (Jen Ying Soo, architect)

Six times a year. I go back for four days each time. Just business trips. (Marissa Madrid, importer, wholesaler, retailer of food)

In some cases, ABWEs are unable to travel because of children and domestic responsibilities and because they need to take care of the day-to-day running of the business. Instead, their business partners, for example their husbands, make the overseas trips.

My husband and myself, we are a husband and wife team, my husband usually does a lot of travelling overseas. Usually my husband will go and visit the factory and inspect the stock, whether they are reliable people, whether the goods are up to our standards before we place an order (Elizabeth Ng, importer and wholesaler of seafood)

We established exports to Thailand. Some Taiwanese factories moved to Thailand and I suggested that my husband visit some tanneries in Thailand. Our first customer was a Taiwanese factory in Thailand. (Evelyn Wee, exporter of raw hides)

Some women have little or no problem travelling regularly overseas for business, but others find it hard to balance home and travel. When they make long overseas trips they worry about the running of their homes and the welfare of their children and families in Sydney. When they return home, they often find household chores left undone while they were away and have to catch up on cleaning, washing and ironing. Consequently, they have little time to recover from travel fatigue, unlike entrepreneurs with few or no domestic chores or with some form of paid or unpaid household help.

Some women who travel alone may encounter problems in coping with men who do not take women in business seriously and who see them as easy targets for sexual advances. Most women stated that they cope well when travelling alone. Those who reported having no problems are generally those supported by an overseas network of family and friends. They meet and deal with businessmen who know them and their families and friends. Those who have to do cold calls or meet suppliers and buyers for the first time have experienced problems. With some visible signs of discomfort, an attractive entrepreneur who travels at least six times a year to Thailand to buy costume and sterile piercing jewellery for her wholesale and retail business related her experience in unfinished sentences.

For a woman it is very hard. First time, I was scared of those people [men making sexual advances], but once I show that I am not like that ... you know? Business is business. If you want to be a friend, I'll be a friend. If don't want to be a friend, business only, you can talk only business with me. If you [the men]... talk about something else, I won't talk ... that's all. That is very common for women, very common. (Dolporm Noparat, wholesaler and retailer of real and costume jewellery)

Tools of trade 2: Attend or participate in trade fairs or official trade missions

At the first OECD Conference on Women Entrepreneurs in SMEs, the author noted that women have neglected the opportunity to gain new and wider overseas business contacts and markets by not participating in official trade missions. In addition, they have missed out on new developments in product trends and establishing contacts with manufacturers by not making this one of their business strategies for international trade. Owing to cost and time constraints as well as a lack of expertise or experience, they have not considered exhibiting their products overseas and therefore may lower their opportunity to expand their market base.

The ABWEs were asked if they had experience contacting Australian or foreign government agencies with their trade enquiries or for trade visits overseas. Fewer than a handful had tried to do so and did not find such contacts helpful or useful. One woman entrepreneur related that she contacted a foreign embassy for the list of names and contacts of exporters and packers for the products she wanted to import into Australia. However, the list she received was outdated. Unfortunately, government programmes and database information in many countries, especially in developing countries, are either outdated or not available. The lesson she learned and the measures she took to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the foreign supplier apply to all wishing to source supplies overseas.

You can get names from the embassy. You can say, "I wish to buy X, could you provide me with a list of exporters and packing houses there?" They only provide that and then you have to do your homework. Ring them up, talk to the people to find out how reliable they are. Even if they say they are good, you have to be careful. They [the embassy] never update their list. Even if a firm is bankrupt, it is still on the list. You have to go and see if it really exists. I have been to factories with hardly anything and they say they can supply you with a container of prawns. Can you believe them? (Elizabeth Ng, wholesaler and importer of seafood).

While trade consulates and embassies appeared to be of little help, a number of migrant women entrepreneurs found direct contacts and attendance at trade fairs useful in helping secure suppliers and improve their “bought trust”. Among the ABWEs engaged in international trade, only a handful indicated that they had been to an overseas trade fair and only one had experience as an exhibitor. None of the ABWEs had ever participated in an official trade mission overseas.

Women entrepreneurs and especially migrant women entrepreneurs have yet to learn to access the support available from government, overseas embassies and trade consulates. They need to be targeted and encouraged to join the official trade missions that other businessmen have learned to use to their advantage. Governments and policy makers can do much to formulate gender-sensitive policies and programmes that will support and encourage women entrepreneurs to find new markets or to improve their sourcing activities. Women entrepreneurs pay taxes that fund the running of the offices of trade ministries, their departments and embassies the world over. The following are examples of beneficial experiences described by those who had been to trade fairs.

Laura Lam regularly attends trade fairs in Sydney. She only managed to attend an overseas trade fair once, as she finds it hard to travel on business, given that she has two young children and runs a busy bridal fabric shop and a fabric wholesale business almost seven days a week. In fact, it was by attending an overseas trade fair that she identified a Chinese supplier who has become her largest overseas supplier. Her sister who works in Hong Kong (China) attends the bridal trade fairs, establishing contacts with overseas fabric manufacturers and accessory suppliers for her. Through her sister, Laura is able to keep abreast of international fashion trends. This again highlights the power of family-based networks.

Each April, Manee Hartientam travels back to Bangkok to attend a gift trade fair.

I enjoy going to trade shows. It's good, because some of the products you see, you can't get locally. It's especially for export. I really enjoy going there. Even if I find a couple more things I don't have the time to market them (laugh). Just to have a look at what's going on outside. It's different. Something you can touch. It's just like going shopping. (Manee Hartientam, importer of natural deodorants and an independent IT contractor)

Tools of trade 3: Establish some form of overseas presence

Having an overseas presence is one of the strongest commitments the migrant woman has in operating an international trading business; it indicates that she is there for the long haul. Overseas presence can take the form of an appointed agent or distributor for the product or service or an office presence, whether through the establishment of a representative office, a branch office or a fully incorporated company. ABWEs commonly work through agents to access foreign markets.

We have agents. So far about thirty... targeting Asia, definitely Indonesia [because of the recent riots and raping, more affluent parents are sending their children overseas to study]. In Indonesia I have my own representative. Like a representative office. Yes, the office is supported from here. They only work for us. We have independent agents in Korea, Japan, Thailand, India and Vietnam. That is in the Asian market. We also have Eastern European agents. Oh, we also have agents there in China. Slovakia – we just came back from Slovakia two months ago. Slovakia is a big market because they need English. And Hungary and Poland. (Hillarie Yee, owner, private college for overseas students)

When Jurida Lee first started an export business, she incorporated a company in Thailand and employed a couple of staff to take care of orders and organise the freight forwarding. Later she converted the arrangement so that her staff worked on a commission basis. She has entered into a

formal arrangement to change her employees' status to that of independent commission agents. Her former employees are people she knows well and has built trust with. Though she has family members still in Thailand, she did not feel that they would give the time or that they had the competence for the work. She had her Thai company formally set up by professional accountants and her Thai company holds a special license for the import of organic fertiliser from Australia. By having a legal presence overseas and a license (expensive because of the unofficial facilitation fees she had to pay), she has control over export rights and can now safely leave the selling to her trusted commission agents.

When Natalie Soong migrated to Australia, she did not close down her advertising, promotion and production company in Hong Kong (China). Instead she made an arrangement with her sister to work there and run the company as though it were her own. Her sister provides her with competitive printing services and support in developing her exports to mainland China.

Tools of trade 4: Be multilingual

It is a recognised fact that to do business overseas it is an advantage to be able to speak the language of the land. Multilingualism is a relationship-building tool that ABWEs are using to their advantage in international trade. In fact, all ABWEs who carry out business with their countries of birth have an Asian mother tongue and are therefore proficient in at least one Asian language.

Table 2. Languages spoken by ABWEs engaged in international trade

| Languages spoken | Share of ABWEs in international trade (n=41) |
|---|--|
| Total number of Asian languages ¹ spoken (including Korean and Japanese) | |
| 1 or 2 | 46% |
| 3 or 4 | 34% |
| 5 to 7 | 20% |
| Total number of non Asian languages spoken other than English | 66% |
| None | 27% |
| 1 | 7% |
| 2 or 3 | |
| English language proficiency ² | |
| Fluent | 95% |
| Not fluent | 5% |
| Total number of languages spoken | |
| At least 2 | 12% |
| 3 or 4 | 44% |
| 5 to 9 | 18% |

1. Asian languages commonly spoken include Mandarin and Chinese dialects (Cantonese, Teo Chiew, Fukienese, Hokkien, Fu Chow, Hakka and Shanghainese); Thai; Tagalog; Indonesian; Malay; Laotian; Vietnamese.

2. The ABWEs indicated as "fluent in spoken English" are those able to respond to the whole research interview in spoken English and be clearly understood by the interviewer, despite grammatical errors or incomplete sentences.

The research shows that migrant women entrepreneurs from a Chinese background are likely to speak more than one Asian language; this includes various Chinese dialects. Table 2 gives a breakdown of the number of languages spoken by this group of migrant women entrepreneurs: 46% speak one or two Asian languages, 34% speak three or four and 20% speak between five and seven. A few have learned to speak Korean and Japanese as well by doing business with these two countries.

Excluding English, 66% of ABWEs do not speak any other European or any other non-Asian language. However, 27% of ABWEs engaged in international trade can speak French or Spanish. These women were originally from Laos, Vietnam or the Philippines and their linguistic competence reflects the French or Spanish colonial influence. Almost all ABWEs speak English fluently.

Tools of trade 5: Be competent in international trade management

To carry out a successful international business, it is not just who you know or who you can trust or chalking up frequent flyer points with overseas travel to attend trade fairs or visit foreign suppliers or customers or the overseas office. It is also about good business management and competence in the management of international trade. It is about knowing and managing the risks associated with trade, travel and work in a foreign land. The risks include foreign exchange risks, shipping risks, country risks and many others. The interviews showed that the ABWEs interviewed had little or no formal training in international trade management.

Those who succeeded had largely learned “hands on”. Sometimes, the lessons were painful, as in the early experience of Diana Bloch, who suffered losses owing to currency devaluation and foreign bad debts.

I tried to export meat but it was cut off because the peso was devalued so suddenly. They used the money. Supposedly they collected the money but I never saw it. (Diana Bloch, owner, travel agency, and investor in an overseas fish farm)

One of the ABWEs who had accumulated sound knowledge and experience in international trade management from her previous job in Chinese Taipei related having to comb through every word and figure on the shipping and contract documents. She had to keep track of foreign exchange fluctuations daily.

In my work I have to be very careful with the documents. You can't even make one mistake in typing or the bank or buyer may cancel. I prefer to concentrate on working from nine to five. You can't mix housework with business work because you will make mistakes, it is dangerous. You see, each container is worth AUD 60 000-80 000 and two containers may be ordered at a time. I have to take responsibility for the goods. My work involves lots of pressure. Sometimes buyers have complaints about quality or weight shortage. We always have to follow international trade regulations. (Evelyn Wee, exporter of raw hides)

Governments and policy makers should address improving the knowledge and skills of women entrepreneurs in international trade management and ensuring easier access to such training. The issue of training women entrepreneurs in international trade was raised at the first OECD Conference, and should be followed up.

Computer technologies and e-commerce in international trade

The OECD Bologna Conference debated many of the challenges and issues faced by SMEs in the rapidly changing technological environment in which they operate. It is urgent to create greater awareness among SMEs of the benefits of a knowledge-based industry and of including the Internet and electronic commerce in their business strategies. The OECD recognises that “With the acceleration of the globalisation of economic activities, enhancing the export potential of women entrepreneurs is becoming an important policy issue. Technology and information systems, in particular electronic and mobile commerce, are bringing about deep-seated changes in the ways small

firms do business, and this is especially true for women entrepreneurs. Today, new technologies compensate for size and distance and enable companies to grow and do business globally" (Workshop Guidelines, 2nd OECD Conference on Women Entrepreneurs in SMEs). Therefore, it is important to ensure that policy makers take into account the special issues faced by women entrepreneurs in gaining and improving their computer literacy and in their access to computer technology and e-commerce opportunities.

To ascertain women entrepreneurs' current position with respect to the knowledge-based industry and their participation in global activities, it is necessary to look at ABWEs' computer literacy rates, their Internet usage, e-mail applications, ownership of business Web sites and their on-line business applications. Findings are compared with the 1998 Australian Bureau of Statistics Study on Business Use of Information Technology,⁹ and the February 2000 Yellow Pages Small Business Index Survey¹⁰ of computer technology and e-commerce applications in Australian SMEs. These studies do not have gender breakdowns, so the number of businesses owned and operated by women is not known. The 1998 ABS study may be outdated, but the data on ABWEs may be fairly comparable with the more recent Yellow Pages survey as most interviews of ABWEs were conducted at around the same time.

Computer literacy

In the study of ABWEs in Sydney, a section of the interview schedule was devoted to determining the computer literacy of the 80 women interviewed and whether they used computers in their business and the nature of their computer applications. The reference to computers usage concerns use of desk-top or personal computers and does not refer to the use of other computerised equipment in their businesses. The research demonstrated that ABWEs in Sydney who are engaged in international trade are ahead of other SMEs in Australia in business use of computers.

Table 3 shows that 79% of ABWEs indicated that they use computers in their businesses. However, it was found that a small number of the women who use computers in their business are actually computer-illiterate, that is, they do not know how to operate a desk-top computer. A few others were competent computer users but indicated that they did not use computers in their business, as they did not find the need to do so. It is perhaps not surprising that the ABWEs engaged in international trade have a higher percentage of women who can operate a computer (93%) and use computers in their businesses (95%). Of those not engaged in international trade, only 64% can operate a computer and only 62% used computers in their businesses.

When compared with the ABS and Yellow Pages studies, it appears that this group of ABWEs achieved a higher overall level than the Australian 1998 national average of businesses using personal computers. The ABS study found that at the end of June 1998, 64% of all employing businesses in Australia used personal computers. The Yellow Pages Small Business Index Survey presented figures in terms of computer ownership in SMEs; this can be taken as indicative of the extent of computer usage in business. The February 2000 index shows that 84% of SMEs owned at least one desk-top computer, reflecting a higher average computer usage than that of all 80 ABWEs studied, but a lower usage than ABWEs engaged in international trade.

9. Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Business Use of Information Technology, Australia, 1997-98" (Preliminary) (8133).

10. February 2000 Yellow Pages, Small Business Index, Survey of Computer Technology and E-Commerce in Australian Small and Medium Business, June 2000.

Table 3. Asian born women entrepreneurs in Sydney

| | Know how to operate a personal computer | Use computer in business |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| All ABWEs (n=80) | 79 % | 79 % |
| ABWEs in international trade (n=41) | 93 % | 95 % |
| ABWEs not in international trade (n=39) | 64 % | 62 % |
| ABS, June 1998 study ¹ | N/A | 64 % |
| February 2000 Yellow Pages ² | N/A | 84 % (at least one computer owned) |

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Business Use of information Technology, Australia, 1997-1998" (Preliminary).

2. Yellow Pages Small Business Index, Survey of Computer Technology and E-commerce in Australian Small and Medium Business, June 2000.

Source: A. Low (2000), Doctoral Research, University of Technology, Sydney.

Internet usage

In the ABWE study, the women were asked if they knew how to access the Internet and the purposes of use. If they did access the Web, they were asked if they had a Web site, if they did business on line and if they did business research by surfing the Net. Those who indicated that they did not have a company Web site or homepage were asked if they planned to create a Web site in future.

Table 4. Use of the Internet in business by Asian born women entrepreneurs in Sydney
Percent of ABWEs or SMEs

| | Internet | | | Business Web sites | | |
|---|---------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| | Access the Internet | Do business via the Internet | Own business Web site | Currently creating Web site | Create Web site in future | No plan for Web site |
| All ABWEs (n=80) | 71% | 20% | 19% | 30% | 14% | 37% |
| ABWEs in international trade (n=41) | 88% | 24% | 24% | 37% | 19% | 15% |
| ABWEs not in international trade (n=39) | 54% | 15% | 13% | 23% | 8% | 22% |
| February 2000 Yellow Pages Survey ¹ (small businesses ²) | 60% | N/C | 25% | N/C | 18% | 17% |

1. Yellow Pages, Small Business Index, Survey of Computer Technology and E-Commerce in Australian Small and Medium Business, June 2000.

2. Figures shown only for small businesses employing less than 19 people.

N/C = Data not comparable.

Source: A. Low (2000), Doctoral Research, University of Technology, Sydney.

Table 4 shows the extent of Internet usage by these migrant women entrepreneurs. In the group of ABWEs engaged in international trade, 88% have access to the Internet compared with 54% of those that concentrate on the domestic market. Overall, 71% of ABWEs are able to access the Internet either by themselves or with the help of family members (often, children) or staff. The remaining 29% did not know how to access the Internet; they are computer-illiterate, do not have access to a computer or do not have an Internet connection. The February 2000 Yellow Pages Small Business Index Survey showed that 60% of small businesses (employing fewer than 19 people) use the Internet. It therefore appears that ABWEs are more ready to adopt new communication technologies and e-commerce in their business. The ABWEs commonly use the Internet for e-mail and surfing. The surfing they do is often to familiarise themselves with what is on the Net and to look for competitors' and suppliers' sites.

Business Web sites

When the ABWEs were asked whether their businesses have established Web sites, only 19% indicated they have a dedicated Web site or homepage for their business: 15 had Web sites and 24 others were creating one. It was therefore expected that by the end of year 2000, 49% of all the ABWEs interviewed would be operating a home page for their businesses. Another 11 (14%) indicated that they would develop one in the near future. It is likely that by the end of the year 2001, 70% of all ABWEs would have business homepages. The remaining 30% indicated that they were unlikely to establish a Web site, probably owing to their ignorance in the use of the Internet, but this may change as they become more aware.

The Yellow Pages survey found that 25% of small businesses had a homepage at the time of the survey conducted in February 2000 as compared to 18% in 1999 and 12% in 1998. The current Yellow Pages finding is higher than the overall ownership of homepages or Web sites by ABWEs. However, ownership of homepages by ABWEs engaged in international trade is comparable with the Yellow Pages findings. ABWEs are expected to keep up with developments in Internet technologies. They have been shown to be pragmatic and ready to adopt e-commerce in their business strategies.

Doing business via the Internet

Women with an installed Web site at the time of interview were asked if they did any business via their Web site, including e-commerce features with direct or click-on ordering of their goods and return e-mail addresses for trade enquiries. However, e-commerce is a new way of doing business and as none of the women had the direct ordering feature in place, the question was subsequently refocused on determining the extent to which the women do business on line, that is, use the Internet for on-line banking, on-line ordering or for procurement of goods and services.

All the Web sites so far created have return e-mail addresses and list contact numbers. This indicates that these ABWEs have business Web sites that advertise their company's products and services. Also, 20% of the ABWEs do business on the Web, including on-line banking, trying out on-line ordering or buying of goods and attending to e-mail enquiries from others. Those ABWEs engaged in international trade are more likely to develop and to use online business communication tools and to do business on line.

Recommendations

- That the implementation of the *Bologna Charter on SME Policies* take into account the issues of concern to women entrepreneurs highlighted in the 2nd OECD Conference on Women Entrepreneurs in SMEs.
- That more research be carried out on ethnic female entrepreneurship to support and recognise their contributions to wealth and job creation.
- That data collection be improved to include gender breakdown of industry statistics relevant to SMEs involved in international trade. In addition, ethnic data, composition and breakdown should be collected and collated to allow migrants' contributions to be recognised and encouraged and to allow issues of ethnicity, discrimination and social and economic inequities to be addressed appropriately.
- That research be carried out to understand how women entrepreneurs around the world network and to look at how women can build global networks to increase their participation in international trade.
- That women's business organisations be strengthened to provide leadership to encourage networking and building of trust in business relationships with other women entrepreneurs.
- That women entrepreneurs be encouraged to join mainstream business organisations, chambers of commerce, local and international industry organisations and to participate actively in their country's international trade programmes.
- That women entrepreneurs be encouraged to attend formal training in international trade management and government-run workshops on issues in international trade, tariff policies, workings of WTO and others.
- That all women entrepreneurs be encouraged to adopt Internet technologies, such as e-commerce, in their business strategy so that they can benefit from globalisation and the knowledge-based economy.

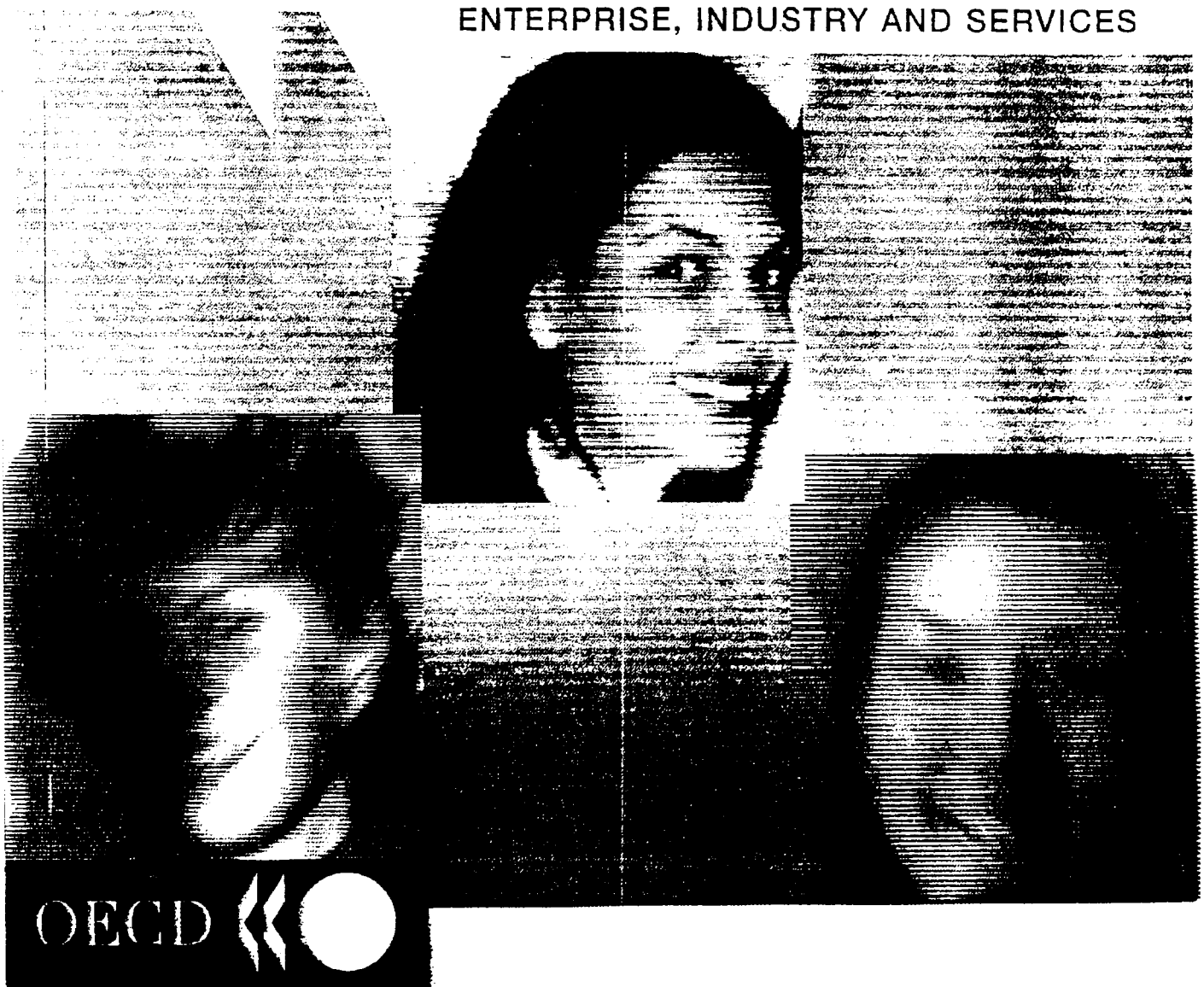
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Women Entrepreneurs in SMEs

REALISING THE BENEFITS
OF GLOBALISATION AND THE
KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY

ENTERPRISE, INDUSTRY AND SERVICES



OECD



OECD Proceedings

Second OECD Conference on
**Women Entrepreneurs
in SMEs**

REALISING THE BENEFITS OF GLOBALISATION
AND THE KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY

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ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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FOREWORD

As part of the follow-up to the international conference on “Women Entrepreneurs in SMEs: A Major Force in Innovation and Job Creation” in 1997, the OECD held the 2nd Conference on Women Entrepreneurs in SMEs: Realising the Benefits of Globalisation and the Knowledge-based Economy, in Paris on 29-30 November 2000. It was hosted by the French Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Industry’s Secretariat of State for SMEs at the Pierre Mendès France Conference Centre.

This conference brought together participants from 50 Member and non-member countries: high-level officials and SME policy makers at the local, regional and national levels, representatives from the private sector (women entrepreneurs, business representatives, banks and funding institutions), international organisations/institutions (including regional development banks), experts (*e.g.* representatives of networks and women’s business associations), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and academics.

The conference’s objectives were to:

- Review the developments that took place in the sector between 1997 and 2000, assessing the extent to which the recommendations issued at the first conference have been taken into consideration and implemented by public and private decision makers in Member and non-member countries.
- Analyse the issues involved in the four main themes of the conference: *i)* improving knowledge about women’s entrepreneurship; *ii)* financing for women-owned businesses; *iii)* international trade, new technologies and the global economy; *iv)* fostering an entrepreneurial culture for women, along with two major cross-cutting themes, namely how to apply the use of new technologies and international networking to help women entrepreneurs become active global economic players.
- Discuss the issues and challenges facing women-owned SMEs in an era of increasing globalisation and identify “best practices” in the public and private sectors around the world from which to draw lessons.
- Look to the future to determine what action is needed to ensure and improve the growth and development of women-owned SMEs, and formulate recommendations for public- and private-sector initiatives in both OECD Member and non-member countries.

The conference was structured around four workshops and an opening and closing plenary session that put the key issues facing women entrepreneurs in the 21st century into context and presented the workshop findings and conference conclusions.

The present publication brings together the highlights of the conference. Following excerpts from the key messages expressed by Ministers and senior policy makers, the Part 1 contains a synthesis of conference presentations and discussions and presents the set of recommendations that emerged. Part 2

contains a selection of papers addressing the various themes covered during the conference.¹ The conference programme is included at the end of the second part. Finally, an Annex provides a summary of the two-day Networking 2000 business matching event, organised by the French private sector, which was held back-to-back with the OECD Conference.

This publication was prepared at the OECD by the Secretariat to the Committee on Industry and Business Environment's Working Party on SMEs – Miriam Koren under the direction of Marie-Florence Estimé – of the Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry. It is published on the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD.

1. All conference papers can be found on the OECD Web site: <http://www.oecd.org/dsti/sti/industry/indcomp/>.

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**Message from Sally Shelton-Colby
Deputy Secretary-General of the OECD**

The 1997 OECD Conference on Women Entrepreneurs in SMEs explored the role of women entrepreneurs as a source of innovation and job creation. Its success led many governments in OECD Member and non-member countries to re-evaluate the contribution of women entrepreneurs to economic growth and employment and to pay greater attention to their policies in this area.

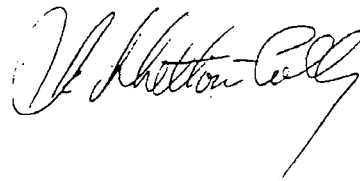
There is increasing evidence that women are starting up new businesses at a faster rate than men and expanding their share of business ownership in a number of OECD Member and non-member countries. However, women-owned businesses continue to face particular challenges to their development and expansion, with consequences for economic performance and growth in many countries. For example, women business owners are garnering just a small fraction of the growing institutional venture capital market and are only beginning to develop their export potential.

The second OECD Conference in November 2000 – hosted by the French Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Industry – brought together policy makers and representatives from business and academia for a stimulating and productive dialogue on issues of key importance for women entrepreneurs in the 21st century, notably access to information and communication technologies, use of networks and partnerships and access to finance. These issues pose a number of challenges for women entrepreneurs, but also offer significant opportunities to increase their contribution to today's knowledge-based economy.

Policy can play an important role in this context, by creating an environment that enables women entrepreneurs to take advantage of these opportunities. Indeed, it is our hope that the Conference recommendations will be implemented by decision makers from the public and private sectors in developed, transition and developing countries, within the framework for action set out by the Bologna Charter for SME Policies. In this way, we can take a significant step forward in levelling the playing field for women entrepreneurs and improving the conditions for their participation in as well as maximising their contribution to the global economy.

The OECD is proud to continue its active role in bringing these important issues to the fore.

Sally Shelton-Colby



WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN SMES: KEY MESSAGES

The following quotations illustrate the importance attached to the issues of women's entrepreneurship and SMEs. They are taken from the speeches of Ministers, senior policy makers, the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretaries-General of the OECD and of a high-level representative of the Atlanta Alliance. It is hoped that these excerpts, which provide the key messages of the conference, will stimulate thinking and provoke constructive change in the field of women entrepreneurs in SMEs.

Mr. François Patriat, Secretary of State for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, Commerce, Craft and Consumer Affairs, France

The objective of the French government ... is to make known the rights and role of women in economic activity and in enterprises through measures in favour of salaried work for women. It also favours achieving a better balance between women's professional and family life and encourages them to create and head enterprises.... Women entrepreneurs at the head of SMEs have specific attributes.... In the new knowledge-based and globalised economy, their organisational ability, their talent for working as part of a network, and their presence in the services sector are more than an advantage, they are a windfall, because services already predominate today and will be even more important in the future.

Mr. Donald Johnston, Secretary-General, OECD

The OECD is ... a world centre, if not *the* world centre, for analysis and exchange of best practices in all important areas of public policy. In the issue of small and medium-sized enterprises and the role of women as entrepreneurs in the sector, we have much to learn from each other.... The concrete conclusions of this action-oriented conference will be brought to the attention of decision makers at the highest level.

Ms. Aida Alvarez, Administrator, Small Business Administration, United States

Small and medium enterprises, and particularly women-owned businesses, are critical factors for economic prosperity.... For economic growth and prosperity to continue, women must succeed. The key to enhanced competitiveness for these women-owned businesses is increased access to capital and credit and increased access to entrepreneurial expertise. Our countries must implement policies and programmes that foster growth by women-owned businesses, and it all starts at the top with the highest elected officials.... In the United States ... we believe that the key to a peaceful world lies with successful economies where small businesses can grow and flourish. Empowered women, women with economic and political clout strengthen a nation. When women win, everyone wins.

Mr. Herwig Schlögl, Deputy Secretary-General, OECD

I think one of the greatest opportunities all of us have in business and in government is the introduction and growing importance of information and communications technologies. And I think the Internet and electronic commerce are developments which by nature will help women and young people in particular to create their own business.... The key is to have the educational background and skills to succeed.... I would also like to underline that it is very important that the OECD continue its work to foster and improve collection and harmonisation of gender-disaggregated data, because ... good data can serve as a strong catalyst for good public policy.

Ms. Ariane Obolensky, President, SME Development Bank, France

“Why do banks fear women?” ... It is a question worth asking, since statistics show that women who head SMEs have more difficulty finding financing than men who head SMEs.... What can be, what should be done to improve this situation? ... the implementation and maximum use of the general mechanisms that exist for sharing risks between bankers and other institutions, other entities... the organisation of networks so that we can benefit from that support and thus reassure the bankers and those who are involved in financing. By this I mean support when creating an enterprise but also once it has been established and is growing.... I think that by seeking to create synergy among all the relevant actors we will slowly be able to promote better financing of SMEs headed by women.

Ms. Mariangela Gritta Grainer, President, Committee for Women’s Entrepreneurship and Counsellor to the Minister of Industry, Italy

At the end of the Bologna Conference on SMEs and globalisation, the *Bologna Charter* not only recognised in general terms the increasing importance of SMEs in the global economy, it also recognised in particular the role of women entrepreneurs in improving economic growth, creating jobs, in local development and in maintaining social cohesion. I think that our discussions at Bologna and those that take place here represent a point of departure for new initiatives and for reinforcing co-operation between governments in promoting women’s entrepreneurship. I see these two efforts as convergent and mutually reinforcing. I think therefore that it is necessary to find ways to exploit this synergy.

Ms. Lauren Supina, Director, White House Office for Women’s Initiatives and Outreach, United States

I join you here today for the 2nd OECD Conference on Women Entrepreneurs in SMEs, and to present the US case study on successful public and private sector initiatives for women business owners. We believe that a government focus on promoting women’s business development is the right thing to do and a smart thing for the future of our economy.... Since the last conference, our administration in the United States has been focused on creating, enhancing and increasing the growth of procurement and business opportunities for women.... It’s a co-ordinated effort of all the different bodies... that meet to talk about how the various [government] agencies can work together to support women’s businesses.... In building the vehicles that support and promote public-private partnerships, we’ve encouraged more research on women’s businesses, created better contacts and systems for procurement opportunities and, in doing so, heightened the exposure of women-owned firms. And that in turn has helped expand private sector development. If we stay on the path we have charted so far, women’s businesses will continue to grow at enormous rates. And that will be empowering for women as well as enabling for the economy.

Mr. Horace Sibley, Partner, King & Spalding, and Co-convenor, The Atlanta Alliance, United States

The information and communications revolution is changing the way we do business. Five years ago, terms such as e-business, supply chains, e-learning, application service providers, virtual trade, wireless communication and wireless Internet access were terms rarely used and today these are ways of doing business.... We must make no mistake: business is being fundamentally transformed by the Internet.... The revolution in information and communications technologies offers great challenges to women entrepreneurs but also great opportunities, and women entrepreneurs are in fact seizing these opportunities.... The power of technology will greatly strengthen your network of business relations and speed your way to success. And as a result, the barriers of time, the barriers of place and the barriers of being a woman-owned business are disappearing, and the global economy and our communities are becoming much stronger.

Her Excellency Suzanne Hurtubise, Canadian Ambassador to the OECD

The right support networks must be put in place to help women start up, expand and globalise their operations. And women must be encouraged to move into the new economy, where opportunities abound. Governments have an important role in helping to foster an entrepreneurial culture, support the participation of women entrepreneurs in global trade and promote the financing of women-owned businesses.... This conference also highlights the need to improve our knowledge of women entrepreneurs and the challenges they face.... Good policy depends on getting the facts right. There's a crucial need for gender-disaggregated data on entrepreneurship and for developing benchmarks for success, however we define success. Developing our knowledge base in these areas will help women entrepreneurs and governments to understand and respond to the challenges.

Ms. Sally Shelton-Colby, Deputy Secretary-General, OECD

Regardless of the policy sector, governments, corporations and multilateral organisations need better gender-disaggregated data. This is absolutely key to improving the conditions in which women entrepreneurs conduct business activities and gain access to finance.... [A]t the OECD, we feel that these issues should be included in our work on international trade, the use of new technologies and other topics discussed at this conference. We are committed ... to the goal of addressing all areas of private and public decision making from the perspective of both men and women.... There's a particular challenge to all of us – in multilateral organisations, governments and the private sector – in the new economy which appears to be emerging, to make sure that women-owned SMEs are not left behind ... and that women entrepreneurs in OECD Member countries, transition economies and in the developing world do not get caught in the digital divide.... Through OECD-wide work that has been carried out in the past two years on the sources and determinants of economic growth, we've begun to realise the importance of the uptake and use of ICT for national growth.... Knowledge is an increasingly valued asset in the world economy, and knowledge-based industries are garnering a growing share of global GDP. We have to work to ensure that women have access to knowledge and to appropriate technologies.

Ms. Florence Parly, Secretary of State for the Budget, Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Industry, France

It is as a woman that I would like to speak and talk about the series of recommendations that you have put forward for the active participation of women in business networks, and for the creation by women of their own entrepreneurship networks. Viewed in the light of history, I think this concern, this movement, is extremely important. If networking does not suffice to make women entrepreneurs important actors in economic development, it is in my view a necessary condition to ensure the development of women's entrepreneurship. Networking is of course made easier by the new information and communication technologies, and these networks help to diffuse the spirit of entrepreneurship which women have so long been denied. Our societies are evolving – fortunately – and are better prepared to give women the recognition they deserve, but women will not be able to fulfil their role if they do not continue to count first and foremost upon themselves.