

26 July 2018

Mr. Fredrick Tamarua

APEC PPWE Chair

APEC High-Level Policy Dialogue on Women and the Economy

Department of Prime Minister & National Executive Council

Papua New Guinea

Dear Mr. Tamarua:

Advancing women's economic empowerment is key to the inclusive growth that APEC strives to promote and is vital to the future competitiveness of the Asia-Pacific region. As representatives of the private sector, we recognize that addressing the barriers that prevent women's economic participation is a business imperative that impacts our bottom line as well the GDP growth in our economies.

We applaud APEC's work to advance economic opportunities for women and to integrate gender perspectives across the spectrum of APEC's work, sectors, and working groups. We welcome the creation of the Women and the Economy Sub-fund and hope that it stimulates increased collaboration between diverse public and private stakeholders.

APEC presents an important opportunity to equip policymakers and industry leaders to effect further changes. With the right policies, training, and education, APEC economies can further leverage their existing workforces as well as invest in future productivity. For example, having access to larger numbers of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) educated women increases our pool of skilled employees. In addition, developing a leadership pipeline that strives to train, retain and promote women within our organizations enables our firms to perform better and more effectively serve customers by leveraging new perspectives.

Recognizing the significant potential missed opportunities in relation to women and trade, ABAC has this year commissioned the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business to examine how to help MSMEs, and in particular women-led MSMEs, to participate more successfully across borders and in global value chains. The research is due to be completed later in the year, but the preliminary findings reveal that in many economies, women-led MSMEs struggle to formalize, and tend to be concentrated in low-margin, low-growth "domestic extension" industries. Women entrepreneurs face particular challenges in relation to access to finance (and financial upskilling), in tapping into networks and finding mentors, and in terms of business readiness, especially in relation to technological onboarding. The research suggests that women continue to encounter bias in legal, regulatory and financial systems. By contrast, the potential benefits from greater success in cross-border activity include higher output, more innovation, better business growth, and greater social and economic improvements, making this a compelling area of focus for economies. The Marshall School has identified that gender-neutral,

gender-sensitive and gender-transformative approaches are likely to be central to enhancing women's participation in trade.

Addressing the barriers that prevent women-owned Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) from accessing to finance will accelerate not only economic but also social contributions of women-owned firms. Bundling of financial services with business skill trainings, mentorship, better access to market, networking and due diligence assistance will help women-owned MSMEs to better achieve their entrepreneurial journey.

APEC has taken important steps to advance women's economic inclusion. It is increasingly clear that their advancement is not only a social imperative, improving their lives and the lives of the families, but an economic imperative as well. As representatives of the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC), we have actively engaged in this conversation within ABAC. Initiative including the ABAC Women Connect Program was developed in 2017 to enable women entrepreneurs to leverage digital technologies to create their own economic future and realize entrepreneurial dreams through effective sharing, learning and awarding. We pledge further action and seek to collaborate with the Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy. Providing equal opportunities to all members of our communities is a central part of APEC's mission to promote sustainable economic growth and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region.

Yours sincerely,



David Toua

ABAC Chair 2018