



# **Women Entrepreneurs in the Digital Economy: Building (e) Business Capacity**

**Dr. Patrice Braun**

**Centre for Regional Innovation  
&  
Competitiveness**



# Presentation Overview

- **Background**
  - Forces of Change
  - Women entrepreneurs in APEC region
- **Frameworks**
  - Enabling Environment
  - Atlantic Canadian Framework
- **Policy Implications**



# Forces Of Change

Challenges & Opportunities for today's woman entrepreneur:

Globalisation

Mobility

Networks

Virtual markets

Flexibility

Complexity

Rapid change

ICT

Information Flows

Constant upgrading

→ Need enabling environment to advance in the digital economy



# What does this mean ?

## Globalisation

- Opportunities for companies of all sizes to compete in new markets and reduce costs;

## Economy/ Finance

- Deregulated markets create more competition, better product offering and prices for small businesses.



# What does this mean ?

## Technology

- New platforms, new business channels, enhanced visibility;
- Knowledge and relationships (networks) are key commodities;
- Greater need for women entrepreneur capacity building and support.



# Women Entrepreneurs

Across Asia, up to 35% of small or medium enterprises are headed by women;

In Australia, 31.9% of small business operators are female;

In China, women account for 25% of all new business start ups;

In Vietnam, women-owned businesses currently account for about 20% of the total number of registered enterprises;

In Japan, the percentage is much higher -- now four out of five Japanese small businesses owners are women... **but**

Do these women enjoy enabling business environments?



# Conditions Of Women-led Business

- Women are continuing to find it difficult to break into traditionally male dominated industries and positions – few women CEOs or executive managers;
- General lack of awareness of contribution and potential of women entrepreneurs;
- Social, cultural and economic factors hinder or limit women's entry into entrepreneurship;
- Communication gap between women entrepreneurs, policymakers, service providers and financial institutions;
- Academic studies the only sources for data on women entrepreneurs and gender entrepreneurship: APEC focal point study 2005 first baseline study on gender-disaggregated (e)business activities.

# Creating Enabling Environments

- Empowering and encouraging women to become involved in entrepreneurship can have a significant and positive impact on any country's economic performance and be an important force in alleviating poverty
- Requires more than Laws on Gender Equality – requires an integrated policy, research and training framework
  - Opportunities to focus on key areas of concern
    - Access to finance
    - Access to training
    - Access to networks
    - Profile
    - Work-life balance

# Creating Enabling Environments

To advance women's entrepreneurship and skill base:

- A holistic approach to capacity building, with adaptation to local conditions/economy context.
- Empowerment as a partnership between private sector and forward-thinking governments to ensure that women entrepreneurs achieve parity with men;
- A long-term empowerment strategy to build capacity in core business skills and access to/use of technology;
- A raised profile of women's entrepreneurship through mainstreaming gender issues into economic development policies, promotion of credible role models and challenging stereotyping.



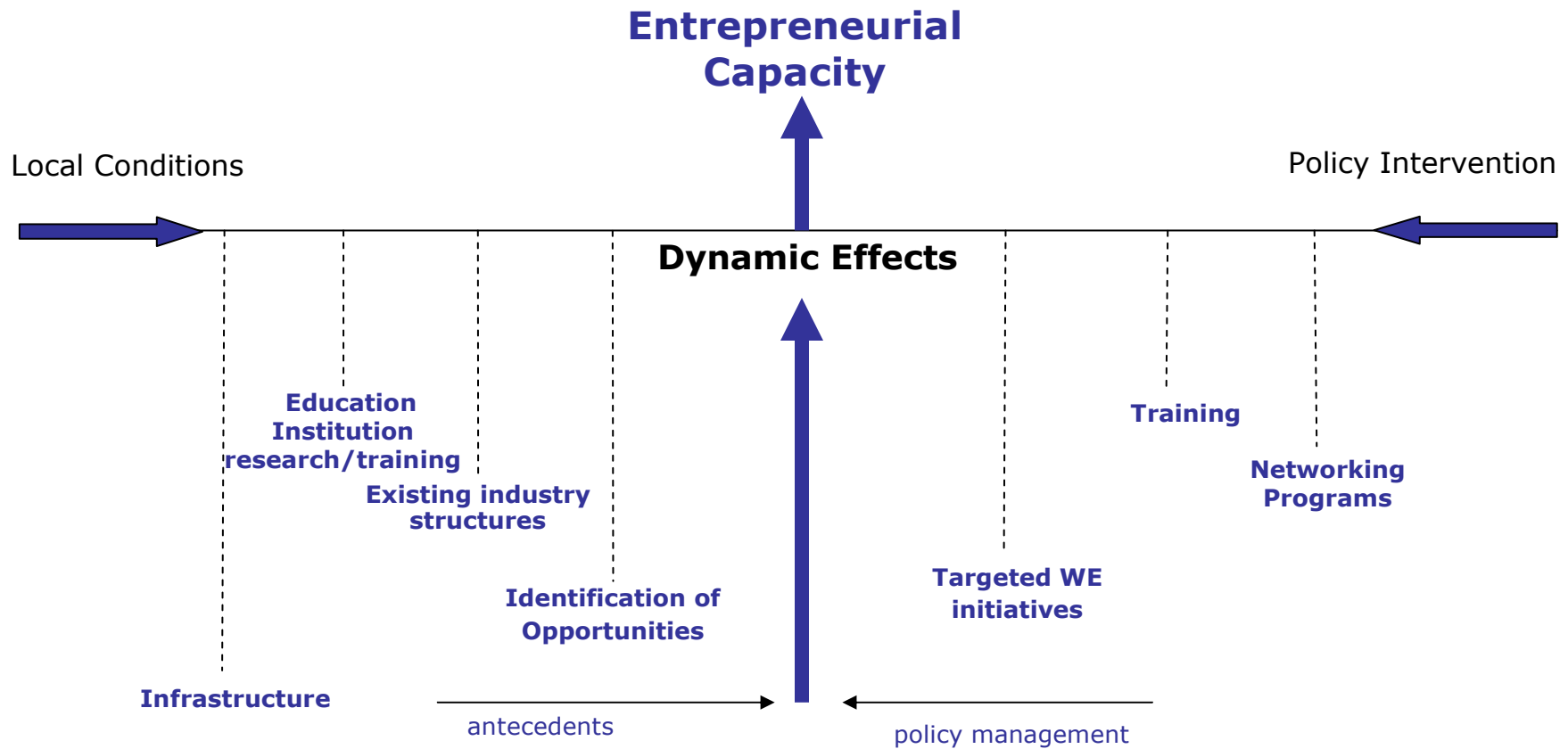
# Advancing Women's Skill Base

Through:

- Policies and initiatives (mainstream + women-centric) that foster a supportive culture and business climate;
- Improved access to resources/networks and strategic knowledge/know-how;
- Improved visibility and access to markets/value-added services;
- Access to communication infrastructure/tools/training/ICT advisors for governance of ICT.



# Enabling Environment



# Atlantic Canada Integrated Framework



Framework elements are inter-connected and used for assessment purposes; actions may be necessary in each area

# Strategic Approach

- Augment visibility;
- Impart technical skills and education;
- Build partnerships and communities of practice;
- Focus on research and innovation;
- Conduct research/planning for women entrepreneurs;
- Provide focal points/mentor/advisors/help line;
- Provide access to strategic knowledge;
- Facilitate/broker broader network connections/collaboration;
- Influence political decisions.



# Policy Implications

- Coordinated approach to remove barriers to business;
- Variety of measures to build strategic options for women entrepreneurs towards point of (e)capacity
- Is this a replicable process across economies?
  - Recognition that women are not homogeneous group;
  - Recognition of Local Conditions/Opportunities and Market forces;
  - Establishment of Focal Point(s) to assess/support WE & appropriate combination of public and private actions;
  - Adopt locale-specific combination of initiatives
    - Affordable entrepreneurship and just-in-time training structures/solutions
    - Facilitate and support existing infrastructure and resources; best practice promotion
    - Ongoing research, formative and summative evaluation

Thank you for your attention

For further information contact

Dr Patrice Braun  
[p.braun@ballarat.edu.au](mailto:p.braun@ballarat.edu.au)

