

Sunday **BIZ**

# Women leaders, unite!

By Pacita U. Juan  
Contributor

IN THE BOOK "EXTREME FUTURE" BY James Canton, it was predicted that women will soon occupy more senior leadership positions and that more women will join the workforce.

This will happen in the next eight to 10 years.

'Women are not afraid to fail. We have hits and misses ... but we rise up without losing face'



CIDA delegates proudly pose in front of their country flags.

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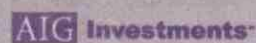
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It is increasingly becoming important for women to be forward-looking, and to network with each other to further business and development goals.

One such group that espouses networking worldwide is the Organization of Women in International Trade (Owit).

Founded in the United States in 1966, Owit has members and chapters in Canada, and in major cities like New York.

Recently, I was sent by the Canadian International Development Agency (Cida) to the Owit Annual Conference in Miami, Florida, along with 15 other delegates from developing countries.

The international group was composed of women leaders from Tunisia, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Egypt, Chile, Brazil, India, Kenya, Mexico, Peru, Vietnam and the Philippines.

**Comparing notes**

The conference gave the women leaders a chance to compare notes on what makes women leaders and how women can be enablers in society.

It was interesting to note that women—regardless of country, race and position—share a lot of similarities when it comes to leadership strategies and how to practice social responsibility in their own communities.

There was immediately a commonality of ideas, especially among women in the developing countries. Everybody faced the same issues—women empowerment, microfinance, access to corporate board rooms, and access to funding and government intervention.

The conference is also a follow-up activity to the Apec women leaders' network meeting (held in Port Douglas, Australia, I was also sent as delegate by the Women's Business Council), which suggests important women-related topics for the Apec conference each year.

The groups from different parts of the world, US and Canada are representative of women entrepreneur groups, women business associations and women-led NGOs.

We find a need now to organize an Owit chapter in the Philippines to coordinate with the many Owit chapters internationally.

**Natural networkers**

What makes us all the same? Women are natural networkers, given that we are not intimidated to reach out and get to know a seat mate in the plane, in a beauty parlor or even while shopping.

Women are multitaskers. As we are "wired" to do many tasks as mothers, career women and/or entrepreneurs, we are unfazed by many tasks that have to be done all at once.

Women are not afraid to fail. We have hits and misses at home and in the work place. But we rise up and go on without losing face.

Women, especially in our society, take the lead especially in jobs or tasks that require a lot of detail.

How often do you come across women/mothers/wives who take care of the family coffers, doing budgets, and taking the lead when the family goes for a vacation, deciding when to visit the doctor, picking up the kids, etc.

There is so much to harness in resources among our women entrepreneurs, professionals, bankers, lawyers, writers. We are now calling for all these women to rise up and be counted.

We welcome all women to be founding members of the Owit chapter in the Philippines, so we can also represent our country in this formidable organization.

(The author is chief executive officer of Figaro Coffee Corp. and president of the League of Corporate Foundations.)



THE AUTHOR (right) talks about women leaders in the Philippine setting.