Customised Business Strategies in India

In July 2012, Access India in partnership with the ‘Australian Centre for Asian Business’ hosted a series of workshops designed to introduce Australian business from a wide variety of sectors to market opportunities in India. Customised workshops were offered in clean energy, water and waste management, education, defense, building and infrastructure, mining and food and beverage.

In recent times both the Australian state and federal governments have emphasized the need to develop India focused strategies. This has largely been driven by an expansion of domestic growth in the Indian economy, and an increased awareness of opportunities that exist in India for bilateral trade and investment. Australian businesses are beginning to ask what are the opportunities for my business in India. We believe the next step is to translate supply and demand into transactional business opportunities for Australian business.

During the workshops we engaged with approximately ninety businesses. What emerged during the sessions was that whilst there is a demand for business to have an India strategy, many companies struggle to take the next step. The workshops used case studies to examine the pathways of entry into the Indian market. What did emerge from these discussions is the importance of planning and adopting the right strategy.

At times there was some robust discussion around the opportunities versus our government policies. We also discussed the challenges and potential risks, and the nuances of dealing with India. The entry pathways are not easy, but we hope that we have inspired business leaders to think about how India fits into their overall plans for business growth. Furthermore we are optimistic that there will be some that take the next step to develop an India strategy for their business.

Many South Australian industry bodies participated in the workshops, their key goal was to identify ways in which they can assist their members to be better informed. We believe that Industry associations play a key role in disseminating information and identifying business opportunities for their members in India.

We thank the following key bodies for their participation: Defense Teaming Centre, Food SA, Master Builders Association SA, Property Council of Australia SA, Urban Development Institute of Australia SA, Clean Energy Council, The Water Industry Alliance of South Australia, Education Adelaide and the SA Chamber of Mines and Energy. We also acknowledge and appreciate the support of Business SA, Advantage SA, the Council for International Trade and Commerce SA and the Australia India Business Council. The workshops were kindly sponsored by Finlaysons, and the InterContinental Adelaide.
Tell me how you first became involved with Ying and more broadly the Centre?
I first met Ying last year when I attended his powerful public lecture on ‘The Chinese Economy – Its ‘Transformation and Future Opportunities’. What inspires me most about Ying is his passion for helping rural communities in China to develop sustainable business opportunities. Soon after the lecture we met and found we shared common interests, and I was pleased when Ying invited me to contribute to the Centre. He quickly established a Research theme around ‘Sustainability and Innovation’ and provided a small amount of seed funds. We then set about working on ways that rural communities could attract private investment and infrastructure projects to their communities - finding that Infrastructure Australia shared these ambitions. Ying has a very strong social justice passion and he is dedicated to improving the plight of rural people in China, Australia and throughout the world. I share this philosophy and enjoy the contribution that I can make both intellectually and more broadly in a practical sense.

What do you enjoy most about your collaboration with ACAB?
Teamwork and understanding - we all work well together. The ACAB Affiliates are drawn from a wide variety of areas and members possess a variety of skill sets which give strength to the Centre and its objectives. To answer many of today’s complex research questions requires a multidisciplinary approach, it’s about good people working together to achieve reforms. More fundamentally it’s about people supporting each other, having a common vision and values and, not least, sharing good humour.

Tell me a bit more about your recent ‘Group Mission’ to China?
Our trip included a preparatory two day workshop in Beijing, followed by meetings and fieldwork with remote rural and ethnic communities in mountainous areas across China. Firstly investigations in Yunnan Province including Lancang County, then Zhejiang Province including Hangzhou, Lishui, Jingning She Autonomous County, and Baisha model Village, Lin’an. An amusing moment occurred in Zhejiang Province when I tried to ‘show off’ my limited Mandarin. Unfortunately, I introduced our Chinese colleague to the head of the People’s Bank of China in Lishui as ‘his mother’. Luckily, everyone saw the funny side and suggested I continue to practice my Mandarin, with much more endeavour.

Can you describe what a pro-poor infrastructure system and service is?
First off, I’d like to start out by saying that I don’t really like using the term pro-poor as ‘poor’ can be demeaning. It just happens to be a term used by the UN. Aside from that it is a system that recognizes that rural communities often have many ideas and solutions to their own problems. What they need is a hand-up (not a hand-out) to develop businesses, infrastructure and technology in their communities. It is vitally important that young people are given the option to remain in rural communities - if they wish to. In order for this to happen, employment needs to be created, plus access to education, health and other services that are taken for granted by people in the larger cities. Development and infrastructure needs to be culturally appropriate, involve local communities in its construction and ongoing management to create local jobs, and use local materials and skills.

How does a conceptual model translate into practice?
Most of my work to date, with close colleague Dr Ke Xing, has been around conceptual models, but what we are trying to achieve with the Group Mission is to translate these models into practice and give them a real world to operate in and see what we can learn from it. I am excited about the possibility of contributing new thinking and practical applications to build on the work of others before me. It has been so refreshing getting out there and talking with communities, getting to understand what they lack and what they are doing at the moment to get by. I am passionate about connected, synchronistic infrastructure systems - because structures do not operate in isolation.
So it stands to reason that our water, energy and transport systems should be planned holistically.

**If you could change one thing about our cities and how we design them – what would it be?**

I believe that our cities are too extravagant, it’s not just about waste, it’s the way we use our resources. We need to try and deliver more output with less input, such as by thinking in terms of multiple use, shared spaces and facilities. Secondly, we must overcome the inequity. Our Eco Footprint in South Australia is almost 7 global ha per person, when it should be around 2. To put that into perspective, Australia has the 7th largest eco-footprint in the world when compared with other nations. We sit just behind China’s per capita footprint is currently 2. So we need to reduce our developed world footprints and live more modestly. There is the perception that people will have to do without, but it is simply not the case. It’s not just about low carbon living either; we need to create jobs and provide equitable and affordable access to community services so that more people are given the opportunities to lead a good quality of life.

**There is still much work to be done to improve people’s lives around the globe, are you optimistic about how we are tracking?**

We are not tracking all that well at the moment, but I am still optimistic for the future. I believe that Australia can be an influential player in our region by partnering with China and India, and linking up with other Asia and ASEAN countries. We have a wonderful opportunity to lead by example in our region. That is why the ACAB is so important.

**The enormity of the challenge must get you down sometimes, how do you stay positive and keep moving forward?**

I think it’s the good people that I work with that keep me motivated - we have trust in each other and support each other. I have an extensive network of colleagues around the world that are working on improving the plight of poorer communities. The not for profit ‘Ecological Development Union International,’ which I have chaired since 2007, is an International collective of people determined to bring about positive changes in ecological development. We believe that by implementing the necessary economic, social and political policies and by applying a better standard of resource efficiency and a circular economy, we can simultaneously create more jobs, improve social livelihoods, and alleviate poverty all while protecting and strengthening the environment. The Group Mission provides one practical path to achieve this.

**What do you believe is one of your most important professional achievements?**

I prepared a methodological background paper that underpinned a United Nations publication titled ‘Are we building competitive and livable Cities? Guidelines for developing eco-efficient and socially inclusive infrastructure’. The project’s aim was to inform and guide governments in the Asia Pacific and Latin American regions to adopt eco-efficiency as a core urban value. Alicia Barcena, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UN-ECLAC) stated ‘The project aims to deliver important information, methodologies and guidelines for use by city planners and other prominent decision makers throughout Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia, applying eco-efficient criteria to reduce emissions, save energy and natural resources, and enhance social inclusion. It is heartening to know that a piece of my thinking and values has gone into creating such an important international document.’

Want to Know more about the work of the Australian Centre for Asian Business?

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Community Enterprise Development with Connected Infrastructure Systems: Group Mission Research in China

An ACAB team, including Prof Ying Zhu, Director, Dr David Ness (Affiliate) and Dr Ke Xing (Barbara Hardy Institute), with partners from Renmin University Beijing, recently conducted fieldwork in China.

This was part of the Australia-China Science and Research Fund ‘Group Mission’, which aims to build a multi-disciplinary platform for ongoing research collaboration to create stronger rural and remote communities. The initial focus is on how community enterprises such as tourism, food, tea, ecological services and bamboo/tree plantations may generate employment and improve sustainable livelihoods, when supported by integrated infrastructure systems such as telecommunications, renewable energy, water, transport, eco-housing and financial mechanisms such as forest property rights and carbon credits. This includes considerations of social entrepreneurship and leadership.

Above: Research team with heads of East China Forestry Property Rights Exchange, Hangzhou. From left: Dr Ke Xing, Prof Ying Zhu (3rd left), Dr David Ness, Prof Lan Hong (6th left) and Ms Kris Schneider.

The group conducted meetings and fieldwork in Beijing, Yunnan, Jingning She Autonomous Country and Zhejiang Province. This included talks with East China Forest Property Rights Exchange in Hangzhou www.hdlqjy.com, People’s Bank of China, interviews with remote rural communities, and inspections of Baisha model village and Service Centre of Modern Science and Technology for Forestry, Lin’an www.hzbamboo.net.

Grants & Awards

The recent Group Mission to China was made possible by an Australia-China Science & Research Fund grant to the value of $44,400.

Professor Ying Zhu, Director, and Dr David Ness, Research Affiliate, Australian Centre for Asian Business, were recently awarded $11,000 in research funding (2012-2013) from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s Australia-Malaysia Institute for a project entitled, ‘Building bilateral relationships on benefits of ICT systems for remote communities in Australia and Malaysia’.

Recent Publications


Prof. Ying Zhu, Director of the ACAB, IGSB, co-authors with A/Prof. Sarah Biddulph and A/Prof. Sean Cooney (Melbourne Law School), published an article entitled ‘Rule of Law with Chinese Characteristics: The Role of Campaigns in Lawmaking’, Law & Policy (A ranking journal in ERA), pp. 373-401.