

# **Promoting Work-life Balance for Women's Economic Empowerment in the Context of ASEAN Integration**

## **Proceedings from the Corporate Leadership Track**

### **1st BREAKOUT SESSION: STEPPING UP**

#### **Demonstrating Corporate Leadership: Becoming an Agent of Change**

Hosted by Mr. Aziz Johan, TV Presenter, 'Go ASEAN' Brunei, the first break out session of the Corporate Leadership track explored the constant battle for most employees trying to coordinate work and personal schedules. The speakers shared their experiences about how their organization/employers allowed more flexibility in dealing with the everyday demands of life and supported a healthy work-life balance that benefitted not only the employee but the employer as well.

Speaker: Dato' Zuraidah Atan

Dato Zuraidah shared her personal struggles with WLB for more than 25 years in the banking industry where she served as President/CEO of Affin Merchant Bank, an investment bank. She juggled multiple professional roles and was the first woman Director of HSBC Bank Malaysia and has also served on Boards of Financial Institutions such as Bank Rakyat and MBSB.

Dato Zuraidah wears many hats – from running her very successful legal firm, Chambers of Zuraidah Atan, to the President of the Student Volunteers Association, Malaysia as well as the Honorary Advisor to the National Cancer Society, Malaysia, Dato Zuraidah still finds time to give back to the community.

She spoke about the joy from voluntary work in a host of NGOs. As Chairperson of Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa / Students Volunteer Foundation, a wholly-owned entity of Government of Malaysia (via Ministry of Higher Education), she focused on the objective of building Global

Volunteer Leaders. She helped train university student volunteers to become leaders through capacity building work which are project-based and training them to take on responsibility with integrity.

To her, a good employee would be one with a soul to give back to society. As a member of the company board, her advice would be to invest in the right company with social integrity.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> BREAKOUT SESSION: LOCKING IN**

### **Work-Life Balance and the Reversal of Brain Drain**

Presented by Praveena Nathesan, Assistant Coordinator in Knowledge Development, the Secretariat, the second breakout session began with a presentation on the results of the ASEAN-wide Women and Work Life Balance survey.

A quick age break up of WLB survey which involved 1,830 women from the corporate sector from all ten countries of the ASEAN region - the majority of the respondents (53.5%) were within the age range of 26 to 40. 25.6% were under 26 years while the ones over 40 years old comprised 20.9%. Basis these findings, we can assume that majority of the women workforce in the ASEAN region are relatively young.

Another key finding from the survey was the direct relation in poorer quality of life and family time with higher working hours and workload. 40.3% said they overworked and by the time they reached home, they would be too tired to spend quality time with the family. At the same time, job satisfaction was described as having higher salaries, personal growth (soft skills and technical skills development), better compensation and benefit (higher annual leave, healthcare, and insurance, etc.). Flexible working arrangements (flexi-time, compressed working schedule, etc.) was given lower priority, with higher salaries being the top contributor to their job satisfaction. Living closer to the workplace was often cited as another hurdle to achieving WLB, as heavy traffic added more hours to the commute and away from personal life. This suggests that while women want to succeed, they also desire to spend quality time with their families, a simple desire which can come true if WLB policies are in place.

Speaker: Mr. Hou Sopheap

As the Executive Director, Cambodian Organization for Research, Development, and Education (CORDE), Mr. Hou Sopheap spoke about his organization's aim to promote transformation in communities through alternative education. CORDE was established in 1994 by a group of returning refugees who wanted to fill the intellectual vacuum left by the war.

CORDE's program is based on the twofold moral purpose of education - personal transformation while contributing to social change as well. CORDE trains youths to be 'Promoters of Community Well-being' by building their capacity in the villages to take social action in revitalizing the rural economy. For its efforts in training thousands of youths in Cambodia, CORDE was a recipient of the 2011 ASEAN Ten Accomplished Young Organization-TAYO award.

Speaker: Ms. Nina Terol

Ms. Niña Terol described herself as a communicator, connector, idea curator, and change maker. She shared her experience from her 16-year career that spanned the public and private sectors, including roles in marketing, non-profit consulting, creative enterprise, publishing and media, politics, and corporate communications. With her busy schedule as the head of corporate affairs for McCann World Group, Philippines, she finds time to educate the youth and often addresses the students of the Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines.

She achieved work-life balance by blogging and writing about subjects she was passionate about. When not working, teaching, writing, or speaking, she indulged in running, yoga, and promoting sustainability and mindful living. An important piece of advice she shared with the audience was the need to know the values of the people she worked with and to recognize their contributions.

Speaker: Ms. Josephine "Jopen" R. Cobangbang

Josephine "Jopen" R. Cobangbang shared her vast experience of 30 years in the field of human resource management, strategic leadership, staffing, training and development, organization

development, design, and change. Part of the Philippines NGO Council on Population, Health and Welfare, she provided a perspective on WLB in her country.

She described various practices for better WLB offered by different multinational companies and those affiliated with international organizations. These included flexi-time and other work arrangements. She has been responsible for the design, implementation and success of major change initiatives, organization design and leadership programs. Her focus is on aligning people strategically; creating business strategy and organization culture, values, and purpose.

Some measures that contributed to WLB were childcare at work, organizing a fun run, celebrating happy occasions together as well as opportunities for participating in corporate social responsibility programs e.g. feeding lunches, contributing to women's livelihood program, a vocational program for high school senior students and other social-civic initiatives.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> BREAKOUT SESSION: THINKING OUT**

#### **Navigating the 21st Century towards Work-Life Balance**

This session raised awareness of WLB as a serious business issue to the wider corporate sector. The speakers discussed ways to integrate a culture of work-life balance in their lives and organizations. This included understanding the needs and interests of employees, sharing best practice and providing training on how to implement work-life balance strategies.

Speaker: Mr. Hakimi bin Hassan

Mr. Hakimi bin Hassan, Chief Operating Officer of the Malaysian Foundation for the Blind, shared his love for photography, the great blessing of having sight and empathy one should have for those without it. As a member of the Board of Trustees for the Malaysian Foundation for the Blind and also the Advisory Board of Braille Publication Society for the Advancement of the Blind Malaysia, he advocated for the blind community.

Mr. Hakimi encourages the local publication of braille books and has called for subsidies for the development of smartphones usable by the visually impaired, computers equipped with

accessibility software and more job opportunities beyond telephone operator, telemarketer, therapist/ masseur, and musician.

He champions more campaigns to generate awareness about blindness and the plight of the visually impaired, and for employers to accept the differences and the needs of people with disabilities to facilitate their participation in a workplace.

Speaker: Mr. Suporntum Mongkolsawadi

Mr. Suporntum Mongkolsawadi presented his 30-year experience working for social development work in various government committees and expert groups for people with disabilities. Specifically, he wants to enable them to join the workforce as well as to enjoy WLB. As Secretary General, The Redemptorist Foundation for People with Disabilities, Thailand, he aims to encourage, empower and give PWDs a chance to be part of the larger community.

Besides job placement, people with disabilities were assisted in starting social enterprises and setup small businesses. Opportunities were provided for those with severe disabilities to work at home like call centers, consultation services, and insurance companies. They were also assisted in using ICT such as security and CCTV for surveillance. He helped build capacities in more people with disability to setup advocacy organization in creating awareness about the rights of individuals with disabilities and disseminate information about the needs of individuals with a disability including wheel-chair accessibility, transportation, and PWD-friendly public facilities and amenities.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> BREAKOUT SESSION: BREAKING OUT**

##### **Building Up Your Own Business for WLB**

Chaired by Ms. Adrienna Zsakay, Founder, of the Keep Malaysia Beautiful initiative, the fourth breakout session under the Corporate Leadership track spoke about the struggles for business owners with WLB for themselves and their employees. As some of the hardest working people, it

is no surprise that it is difficult for them to provide a WLB work environment that extends to their employees as well – balancing work and personal time equally is never easy.

Speakers: Mdm. Peej Abu Bakar and Ms. Intan Fairuza Fadzli

Mdm. Peej Abu Bakar and Ms. Intan Fairuza Fadzli, a mother and daughter team, discussed their efforts in establishing ReQa Design, an advertising, and event management agency. As founders of ReQa, they take pride in producing out-of-the-box, cutting edge advertising to truly harness the power of all social media platforms and unlock the potential of their client's brands.

Their work is their passion, and this has helped them maintain a healthy work-life balance. They enjoyed building healthy relationships with people which also enhanced their joy in working. Their satisfaction with work came from the combination of personal chemistry and a shared set of values.

Speaker: Ms. Renganayagi Adimoolam

Ms. Renganayagi Adimoolam spoke about how her sufferings from a chronic migraine and other health problems led her to find Indian Traditional Alternative medication. She met by chance an Ayurvedic doctor who cured her with traditional herbal treatment. She then shared and introduced the benefits of Ayurvedic with others through the establishment of the Sangeetha Holistic Kerala Ayurvedic Centre. Helping people to have good health and earning a good living can achieve WLB.

By combining and practicing these two philosophies at home, the conflict to find time between work and family was reduced. To achieve WLB, all aspects of life especially health have to be taken care of at the same time.

Speaker: Ms. Laili Ismail

Ms. Laili Ismail is the Executive Director, ADNI International Islamic School and also serves on the board of several other integrated Islamic Schools in Malaysia. She shared her experience in

assisting parents to understand the importance of spiritual and material education. Her mission and passion were to elevate and position Islamic schools to the international arena locally and internationally.

Due to the lack of flexibility and spiritual principles in previous works, she decided to open her school. Not satisfied with the status of how private and public schools were run, she started an Islamic school by herself.

Due to her passion and earnest work, she was chosen as one of the 'inspiring women' in Malaysia. She shared that such recognition is possible when passion and spirituality inspire work, work would automatically provide joy. Money was not the motivator but with hard work filled with passion, money was a natural outcome. She had shared personal experiences in a coffee book printed by the Federation of Women Entrepreneurs Malaysia.

## **5<sup>th</sup> BREAKOUT SESSION: CARRYING ON**

### **Fulfilling Lives through Balancing Corporate Interest and Social Responsibility**

Chaired by Ms. Andal Krishnan, NAWEM, this session examined the business case for WLB. For companies committed to corporate social responsibility, focusing on work-life balance is critical. Not only do employers have a responsibility to ensure that employees are treated fairly and respected as individuals, but work-life balance is also a business imperative directly impacting productivity, recruitment and retention and business performance.

Speaker: Ms. Makiko Akabane

Ms. Makiko Akabane's joy in work came from her over 10-year experience in corporate social responsibility in multi-sector and multi-national companies. Being passionate about environmental responsibilities and corporate philanthropy, she specializes in working with corporations including Starbucks Coffee Japan, salesforce.com, Nikko Asset Management, and LUSH Japan to involve their employees in voluntary services.

Work satisfaction came from awards received and recognition of her efforts to involve company-wide employees for volunteering. As the Director, CSR Asia, Japan Office, she had used her experience to assist in launching CSR functions and projects in Thailand, South Korea, and China.

She advised that before starting a company, one must analyze the needs of the environment and gave consideration to the life of the community. There should be public pressure for genuine CSR. CSR should not be based on a desire to gain publicity and profit but genuine interest in an ethical manner.

Speaker: Ms. Punnee Amornviputpanich

Ms. Punnee Amornviputpanich works with “The Nation Group” as Chief Editor, and is specialized in investigative reports on environmental and human rights. Her influence touched many by being the Editor of Kom Chad Lued, one of Thailand’s biggest mass-circulated Thai-language daily newspapers. At The Nation Group, Punnee was the Editor for Special Reports for The Nation Convergence Newsroom.

She shared how through her facilitation of workshops ranging from advocacy writing, investigative news and crisis reporting, she was able to raise consciousness and advocate for the rights of the child and other human rights.

To her, WLB can be achieved when the cause one fights for can be integrated into one’s work. She explained how ICT has helped her gain efficiency and speed in her reporting work. It has aided her to cover news even if she is not physically present. Reporting on impacts of environmental issues helps to save the livelihood of many who are affected by oil spills and changed lives for instance.

Speaker: Ms. Magdalena Sitorus

As Commissioner of Konmas Perempuan, Indonesia, Ms. Magdalena Sitorus, advocates for the right of children of women migrant workers. She joined many conferences all over the world to speak out for children and women’s rights.



She shared her insights on the processes in raising awareness and advocating for the elimination of domestic violence and conducting awareness programs for laborers concerning their rights through theater media.

Her organization has found some 389 laws which discriminated against women. She related a recent experience where there was a group of women who faced sex violence but her organization did not have the mandate to assist them. It was frustrating to feel helpless seeing the injustice and suffering. It took a lot of efforts to request for the mandate. It required research, networking and policy-making.