

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

Proceedings from the Youth Aspiration Track

1st BREAKOUT SESSION: STEPPING UP

Identifying the aspirations of youth in achieving work-life balance

The first breakout session explored the concerns about young people regarding WLB. As students, friends, sometimes caregivers for elderly relatives and volunteers in communities, and other responsibilities, even the youth understand the importance to take the time to care for our own physical and mental well-being.

Speaker: Mr. Hareez Haiqal Shaari

Mr. Hareez Haiqal Shaari, Head of Member State Committee of Malaysia for ASEAN Youth Foundation shared his experience in striking a balance between his studies and life. He mentioned that in his current role, he actively works with public and private agencies concerning education. This has allowed him to understand that the work/life conflict is a societal issue and requires a systemic response.

He is currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts and Design Education program. Combining work and study to him is challenging but rewarding. It allows the application of what he learns immediately instead of waiting till after his graduation.

His passion towards ASEAN and international relations never fade. This ability of member states of ASEAN to come together and support each other is a significant step towards ASEAN integration.

He spoke about how many of ASEAN's brightest students struggle to graduate because of job and family commitments. It is a delicate balance for young people to get right, choosing between investing in themselves by going to college or getting a job — or giving back to

loved ones who need help. He hoped that government and civic officials adopt a broader acceptance of family-friendly workplace practices, and offer expertise to organizations seeking to improve productivity, retention, and the working environment.

Speaker: Ms. Anna Mae Yu Lamentillo

Ms. Anna Mae Yu Lamentillo serves as a Development Communication practitioner working as a Media and Legislative Officer in the Office of Congressman Mark Villar. Previously, she has worked with various international organisations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), producing communication materials and comprehensive communication strategies.

Anna Mae shared her experiences working in this field of public service and the political arena. To her, it is a fascinating area of work. She has published over a hundred articles on a broad range of topics in various media publications, such as GMA News Online and Rappler, Philippines. Anna Mae earned her degree in Development Communication from the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) and is currently taking her Juris Doctor degree in UP Diliman.

She shared the results of the youth survey conducted in the Philippines. Overall, 50% of Filipinos surveyed regularly made hard decisions between home and school or work obligations. It is, therefore, a challenge to find a balance between work and life. It is difficult given the expected roles at work and home.

Being predominantly poor, the country's population, whether young or old need to work to survive. Thus, balancing work and life without official sanctions could be far from reality. This is where she feels politics can make significant contributions.

In this digital age, those of this generation feel the importance of being connected online either because of work or social functions. Connectedness has become an entitlement, a right to work and have a life. The youth would like to be connected regardless of time or space. Connectedness makes work and life possible.

2nd BREAKOUT SESSION: LOCKING IN

Finding balance in the Work you Love

While the first breakout session focused on why the youth need to be involved in work-life balance, the second session urged the youth to find work they are passionate about. Some may be lucky and pursue a career that encapsulates their passions, life purpose, personal essence, and technical skill. While there will be others whose professional job may not be infused within their passions, but will still find time to pursue what they love.

Speaker: Ms. Alena Murang

Ms. Alena Murang has a rich and varied work experience. In 2015, she was appointed as a mentor for Sarawakian art forms by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. She set up Kelas Sape, Kuala Lumpur, to pass on cultural music, consulting on art and music projects, and continuously learning music from tribal elders. She chose to be self-employed, combining her passions for art and music with her management skills to bring about positive impact while making a living for herself.

Being part Kelabit, she grew up in Borneo, surrounded by a rich natural environment and many different indigenous cultures of the island. This experience has ingrained in her love for diverse cultures and to champion their cause. She spoke about the key to contentment is the work life balance and played some of her music on the traditional instrument of Sarawak-Sape. Just like with any other job, Alena emphasizes that it is important to reflect deeply on the purpose why one wants to be an artist. It is important to take a step back, and analyze the real motivator, *“Is it to please people or is it to express oneself or is it to make a social contribution?”* is a question she often asks herself before embarking on a new venture. From her experience, passion always involves pain. It does not always guarantee that it will fulfill desires. Work-life balance can always be achieved when passion is the motivator to earn a living. It is the best way to earn, but how does one make a living by living out one's passion is always a question.

Speaker: Ms. Baitulhusna Ahmad Zamri

Ms. Baitulhusna Ahmad Zamri is a social entrepreneur who founded Nazkids. She could not find work-life balance in her job, so she decided to pursue her dream to build a legacy, living her life to the fullest and not to be financially dependent on others.

She joined various programs as a volunteer such as the ASEAN Young Professional Volunteers Corp. (AYPVC), Volunteering for International Professional (VIP), and recently, MyCorps. The volunteering experience inspired her to make Nazkids a social enterprise, by involving her community in the business. She is also working on a few projects around the ASEAN region related to education, youth empowerment, and community development.

Nazkids is a not-for-profit enterprise for underprivileged women by economically empowering them. The business is on creating an exclusive traditional and modern baby clothing line from newborn to 3 years old. She provides training and equipment to women who are interested to change their lifestyle. The women join in as team members or partners to produce clothes to strengthen the company. She believes that the more people Nazkids help, the stronger the brand and the company will be.

She advised that to find one's WLB; one has to move on to other fields if the current one does not fulfill it. From her journey, she felt being strong is the only option for a fulfilling life.

Speaker: Mr. Ross Stephenson

Mr. Ross Stephenson labels himself a funny man with a funky hairdo! He wanted to use his God-given talent to bring joy to people as a service to sweeten people's lives. He works as a master of ceremony, magician, and comedian at events.

To him looking for work-life balance begins with reflecting on one's life asking whether one is making sacrifices for the right thing. The reason is to gain something we have to give something else.

“When learning to measure life regarding sacrifices, we can't have all and do everything. Don't try to fit all in your schedule until the last minute. The most important thing to do is make time for yourself.”

3rd BREAKOUT SESSION: THINKING OUT

My Roles in Life

Although many companies still take on a traditional approach to business, youth today has different needs and wants and it is no secret that the younger generation puts a lot of emphasis on work-life balance. Companies need to engage with them by asking what they need to be productive and then giving it to them.

Speaker: Ryan Liang Yen

Mr. Ryan Liang Yen is the Co-Founder of Society Staples, a social enterprise that fosters greater social integration and acceptance of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) through team building programs and sports initiatives.

He encouraged the youth to start their social enterprise. For him, social entrepreneurship is a mindset applied to creatively find solutions to social issues or enhance social good. His efforts and work in this space have generated multi-dimensional impact regarding raising awareness, integration, health, and employment. Under his leadership, Society Staples has won prestigious awards like the 2015 President's Challenge Social Enterprise Start-up of the Year and was also nominated by the Young Business Leaders Alliance (led by the Singapore Business Federation) to receive the 2015 ASEAN-China Outstanding Young Start-up Entrepreneur Award at the 7th ASEAN-China Young Entrepreneurs Forum.

Ryan has used numerous media channels in championing the inclusion and integration of marginalized communities through innovative engagement platforms. He spoke about the need to envision an inclusive society and to be aware of preconceived notions of things that can limit us.

Many people think that the capacity of people with disabilities is limited. He has organized an event where a person in his wheelchair pulled a car. It opened up many people's eyes and questioned their preconceived notions. People with disabilities do not have access to the same opportunities be it employment, schools or even basic public transport. He runs media campaigns to generate awareness sessions with people as a platform to gain better insights about marginalized groups such as PWDs.

Speaker: Diody P. Fadullan

Mr. Diody P. Fadullan is currently the assistant head of the Provincial Youth Affairs and Indigenous People's Desk in the Province of Antique, Philippines since 2015. He finished his undergraduate degree from the University of the Philippines Visayas with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Media Studies. He is currently pursuing his Master of Development Communication from the University of the Philippines Open University. Mr. Fadullan first taught Maritime English and research subjects in the University of Antique from July 2014 to March 2015. At present, he serves two sectors; its primary role is to organize and cater to the needs of the youth and indigenous people of Antique. As the person-in-charge, Mr. Fadullan facilitated the first Antique Youth Leader's Summit held from November 27 to 29, 2015, and the Youth Day Celebration on December 23, 2015. An Indigenous People's Congress was also held on October 30, 2015, under his care. Mr. Fadullan's interest in social work is focused on facilitating development projects regarding staging events and conducting livelihood programs.

Achieving work-life balance requires taking some time off like travelling or photography or a learning activity as refreshers. Valuing oneself and others makes life in balance. It is imperative, therefore, for the government to embrace work-life balance for a better society.

Speaker: Ms. Heidy Quah

Ms. Heidy Quah's message to the youth was to translate the feelings of anger towards injustice into action to bring about change. That was how a group of 18 year-olds started Refuge for the Refugees (RFTR) in June 2012. It began with a simple wish – to help a particular refugee school stay open. Refuge for the Refugees (RFTR) is a Non-Government

Organization that aims to help raise the standard of living of refugee children and provide aid to refugee schools regarding sustenance and education.

Social media was used to post stories as well as raise awareness about the state of refugees and the importance of helping them and to consider education as a gift to those who cannot have it.

She challenged the youth to search for the purpose of their lives. She and her friends who established RFTR are passionate about living life to the fullest and making every single day count. This can be achieved by putting others before oneself, placing their needs before their own, touching lives and making a difference wherever they are, wherever and whenever possible.

RFTR has provided support of basic education to more than 700 children across six schools in the Klang Valley and Penang. Heidy also advocates for the refugees locally and globally. She has received a couple of awards: the Digi WOWWW Most Inspiring Internet for Good Award in 2013 as well as the NGO Leadership & Excellence Award and Laureate Here for Good Award in 2014.

She strongly believes in empowering young people and helping them discover their full potential, identity, and purpose in life. She believes that no one is too young to make a difference, and everyone can contribute to society. With that in mind, she is driven by a quote by Richard Leider: "The purpose of life is to live a life of purpose."

Speaker: John Tarawe

Mr. John Tarawe is a councilor of the Kelabit Council and a member of Rurum Kelabit (Kelabit Association) in Bario, Sarawak, Malaysia.

He told of a childhood tragedy where his father and several uncles died from a helicopter accident in the mountain community. He and his cousin were the only ones alive. After several months of hospitalization, he recovered physically, but the incident impacted his life. He saw how his mother grew rice and collected jungle vegetables to feed the family of seven by herself. He wanted to do something to make sure no one need to live such hardship ever in the village. The growing up years molded him into a man of determination who wanted to

bring development to his community so that everyone would have food and access to necessities in life.

He combines his love for his people and culture with his earning and living. He runs a 6-room lodge in the heart of Bario, surrounded by paddy fields. Paddy cultivation has been on the decline as it is six months of very hard work. Not even half of the 500 acres are now cultivated.

These are some of his concerns. He does not want to see the children's education jeopardized by the need to do hard manual labour or hiring foreign labour. He introduced machines to assist with the cultivation, combining modern technology with culture and livelihood. Rurum Kelabit under his leadership, collaborated with the Agriculture Ministry, Pemandu (Performance and Delivery Unit) and a private company, Ceria Group, in revitalizing paddy cultivation in Bario. Mechanised farming replaces traditional methods to increase yield to at least double the present level.

The Internet played a great role to bring in community radio and eBario. ICT was used to create a virtual museum to preserve songs, music, and other audiovisual recordings as well as collections of art in digital form.

When life and love for one's people and culture are also one's work, there is certainly a work-life balance.

4th BREAKOUT SESSION: BREAKING OUT

Purposeful leadership: "It's not about Me."

Delivered by Mr. David Nelson, this session dived into the idea of finding and following your passion. David argues that for many, this idea is often seen as an oversimplified, naïve approach to life. He further explains by suggesting that following your passion doesn't mean taking a simple view of it, but instead having a nuanced understanding of where your passion lies, of the difficulties you may face in following it, of the unexpected places you may find it. It doesn't mean acting unintelligently, following impulses and blindly sticking to your guns no matter what. It means understanding and intelligently reflecting on the work you're passionate about so that you become a great practitioner, not a fruitless fanatic.

Speaker: David Nelson

Mr. David Nelson, a son of uneducated parents and a 3rd year Mechanical Engineering student, had the privilege of having access to quality education. Thus, he sees the need for every child to receive that privilege. He is the managing partner of The Stella Project Ltd., a company founded to wage defiance against illiteracy and poverty in the African continent. Nelson is also a speaker, trainer, and author.

He has trained and impacted over 4000 youth in Africa and Asia and is associated with global brands like The Clinton Foundation, McKinsey & Company, TEDx and Intel. He has, for his work, been featured in publications including the New Straits Times, The Star, and Top Class (Focus Malaysia).

5th BREAKOUT SESSION: CARRYING ON

Solving Work-Life Balance Issues Amongst Youth: Valuing Innovation

Work-life balance is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and other activities that are important to youth - including spending time with family, taking part in sport and recreation, volunteering or undertaking further study. In this session, the speakers explore ways how to improve the balance between working lives and personal lives outside work through innovative methods.

Speaker: Dr. Thomas Tang Sek Khuen

Dr. Thomas Tang Sek Khuen has been in the sustainability practice sector for over 20 years. He has worked on urban city projects covering aspects of planning, technical assessments, and stakeholder engagement. In KLCSI (Kuala Lumpur Centre for Sustainable Innovation), he is the Director of Projects and Training. Dr. Tang has conducted numerous stakeholder workshops on building resilient and sustainable communities. He has led training on social innovation, disaster risk reduction, materiality, and sustainability strategies.

In 2012, he co-authored “Global Best Practices in Sustainable Urban Development,” a review of over 50 cities. Dr. Tang has a doctorate and MBA degree. He is a Fellow of the Royal

Society of Arts, Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, and an Honorary Fellow of the College of Estate Management.

Dr. Thomas gave several examples of how some cities in the world promote green living, and he emphasized the role of youth to create such cities in ASEAN where air pollution and severe jams have become problems for sustainable living. By taking up actions to clean cities, green cities and reduce personal carbon footprints, youth are creating a better future for themselves.

He urged youth to take on cycling in the cities to reduce carbon emission from fossil fuels. Cycling also can be a great social and family activity. He also urged youth to join up-cycling activities, buy and use up-cycled products as consumers. The youth of today, whose talent are unstoppable, can address landfill problems by personal actions in up-cycling, recycling and make innovative uses of things we discard.

Speaker: Dr. Ong Kian Ming

Dr. Ong Kian Ming obtained his Ph.D. in political science from Duke University, where he was a Fulbright Scholar. He is currently the Member of Parliament for Serdang, representing the Democratic Action Party (DAP) which is part of Pakatan Harapan (PH). Before being elected to public office, he was a lecturer and political analyst at UCSI (University College Sedaya International), a private university in Kuala Lumpur. He was also the director of the Malaysian Electoral Roll Analysis Project (MERAP). Before his Ph.D., he worked as a consultant with the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) in the KL office and as a policy analyst with two politically-linked think tanks, the Institute of Strategic Analysis and Policy Research (INSAP) and the Socio-Economic Development and Research (SEDAR) Institute.

He holds a BSc in Economics from the London School of Economics (LSE) and an MPhil in Economics from the University of Cambridge. Throughout his education years and working years, he has always tried to do his best. He loves learning as it brings satisfaction to him when he knows he has acquired a piece of knowledge. Doing one's best means loving what one does, and loving what one does means one achieves work-life balance.

His philosophy is to “see the problems with our own eyes and understand the problems by talking to those most affected, working with like-minded people to come up with possible solutions.”

For instance, his initiative to clean Sungai Klang as a recreational destination was faced with many objections. Many people said the river was polluted and therefore cannot be done. He organised a kayak expedition to explore and see what it is like and to determine the next course of action.” Without immersion, he could not have identified the needs of the people and how these can be solved.

He is also a cycling enthusiast who urged youth to take up the activity to reduce carbon emission. Taking up causes to promote green living through various means should be a calling for young people who love their countries.