

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

Proceedings

INTRODUCTION

The Work-Life Balance Movement

The Work-Life Balance (WLB) movement, supported by the ASEAN Foundation and the JASF (Japanese-ASEAN Solidarity Fund), has gained strength over the last ten months and has successfully generated awareness about the concept of work-life balance. WLB related conceptual papers, national reports, and articles, which are easily available on the ASEAN Work-Life Balance website, aimed to raise the consciousness of the readers and advance conversations at a grassroots level. This was further strengthened with short videos, photo campaigns, talk shows, radio programs, and workshops all over South-East Asia. Most noteworthy campaigns were the ones run on social media –WLB related stories posted on the WLB Facebook pages of different ASEAN countries, were widely shared and drew interests of netizens.

The movement culminated with a three-day conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, which further strengthened the inclusive and action-oriented definition of work-life balance. The speakers and panelists invited were from different backgrounds – corporate and rural change agents who shared their vision and contributions to WLB. In line with women's economic empowerment in the context of ASEAN integration, the agenda over the three days was packed with talks and discussions, reinforcing the theme of 'Creating Prosperity, Fulfilling Lives'.

The Conference auditorium was filled with delegates representing all ten countries of the ASEAN region with a total of over 300 attendees. There were 37 government and public administration officials from all over the ASEAN member countries, led by Yang Terhormat Ibu Shinta Nuriyah Wahid, the fourth First Lady of the Republic of Indonesia accompanied by her public activist

daughter, Ms. Inayah Wahid. The Executive Director of the ASEAN Foundation, Ms. Elaine Tan also graced the conference. Their presence throughout the three-day conference, including dinner programs and other informal get-togethers, showed the passion and commitment of the ASEAN Foundation and member states to the WLB movement.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the Work-Life Balance (WLB) conference was to provide a forum for policymakers, practitioners, advocates and interested participants to share experiences, showcase successful community-based projects, and advance the discourse on work-life balance.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONFERENCE

OPENING CEREMONY

Turning a Dream to a Conference

In her welcome remarks, Founder and Executive Director of eHomemakers, Ms. Chong Sheau Ching, shared her dream of WLB for the entire ASEAN region and the journey of bringing this dream to a fruitful reality. Her commitment to WLB was motivated by a vision of WLB as a public good that would generate positive externalities. She believes that if a woman is economically empowered because she enjoys work-life balance, she can then uplift her family and community. The ripple effects of this will empower hundreds, even thousands of other lives. This will bring about economic returns many times beyond what the investment in this public good of WLB itself.

She emphasized that providing work-life balance requires multilevel collaboration and cross-sectoral coordination. The participation of mayors and governors, activists and academics, business owners, employees and students augured well of this movement. Everybody is a stakeholder in the future of work-life balance within ASEAN.

The Conference offered a platform for work-life balance advocates, experts, and even novices, to gather together and share resources and exchange stories. She expressed her hope that the conference will encourage debate and exchange of ideas in a congenial setting. This was the rationale why the first ever ASEAN Work-Life Balance Conference was built on storytelling. Ms. Chong also appealed to the participants to be generous with their experiences and thoughts so that all aspirations for better work-life balance could be conveyed to the regional decision-makers.

Integrating the ASEAN Vision

Ms. Elaine Tan, Executive Director, ASEAN Foundation, shared the vision and mandate of the ASEAN Foundation. Continuing the ASEAN Foundation's long legacy of promoting ASEAN unity and community development, Ms. Elaine Tan said "the ASEAN Foundation has helped turn an idea into a meeting of the minds and commitment into action. It has enhanced interaction among various ASEAN stakeholders. It has helped to develop human resources and build capacity from among the member countries to address socio-economic disparities and alleviate poverty be it urban or rural."

Furthermore, she explained that the WLB project for women's economic empowerment contributed to the inclusion of the youth. The ASEAN Foundation, she said has been working towards socio-economic integration within the ASEAN, with emphasis on the conditions and opportunities found in the region. Capitalizing on the contribution of women and the youth will strengthen inclusive growth within the region.

She ended her opening remarks by mentioning that the Conference has successfully integrated its purpose into the ASEAN Vision 2020. It was able to assist the participating ASEAN stakeholders to gain a stronger ASEAN awareness and identity. The Conference would eventually help promote the bonding together of the people of ASEAN towards living in peace, stability, and prosperity within the region.

Presentation of Concept Videos

Two concept videos about WLB from various perspectives were presented to set the tone of the Conference. The concept videos aimed to contextualize the parameters of WLB. It shared insights as perceived by various stakeholders especially the youth. The thought provoking spiels drew on research with different advocates, providing an overview of current work-life balance (WLB) practices as well as theoretical advancements. These short videos captured what WLB should be and identified how work-life balance can be self-managed and managed in others.

Inspirational Talk: Aspiring towards Work-Life Balance in Malaysia – Why Our Youth Should Care

In his opening speech, Mr. Khairul Azwan Harun, Deputy Leader of UMNO Youth Wing championed the cause of work life balance and how WLB policies can lead to unity and diversity, challenging young Malaysians to tolerate and take in diverse opinions as long as all are geared towards imagining a healthier and more thoughtful Malaysia. He spoke of the role of youths in an increasing technological disconnected society. As future leaders, they have much to contribute in determining the future of the workplace and the progress of the nation as a whole. He called upon the youths of the ASEAN region to take their place in society and build a caring and better nation.

Welcome Ceremony: Pineapple Ceremony from Bario

To commemorate the opening ceremony, the guests of honour were greeted with a special pineapple ceremony. The pineapple is recognized as a traditional expression of “welcome” throughout the island of Borneo. The ritual symbolizes bountiful blessings in welcoming guests as practiced in Bario, Sarawak, Malaysia, by the Kelabits -- one of Malaysia’s indigenous groups. During the conference, 11 ladies from Bario, a remote mountainous area performed the welcoming ritual as they sang *Tutu Udan*, a song blessing the conference and the ASEAN community.

Inspirational Speech: Pursuit of Happiness and Work-Life Balance

Ms. Inayah Walundari Wahid, who heads an NGO, Positive Movement, in Indonesia, advocates a holistic approach to happiness by youth. Such a form of happiness is characterized by emphasizing on balance and integrity of the individual. It hopes to translate individual's experiences to societal changes.

Ms. Wahid shared her concern about the increasing radicalization and the spread of violence and injustice in Indonesia, which led her to campaign for pluralism and inter-faith collaboration, especially among the youth. Positive Movement sponsors a series of programs to manage anger and hatred. It helps people to find solutions and explore approaches to happiness. Happiness is more than an emotion but a state of aligned mind, feelings, and action to create positive conditions in the surroundings.

She drew examples from her late father's life. President Gus Dur's qualities of gratitude, spirituality, and resilience won the hearts of millions to her father who is still affectionately referred to as 'Gus Durian.' She moved the audience with her story of how thousands flocked to the hospital immediately after his death and millions lined the streets to pay respect. Till today, thousands still come by the busloads to his graveside from the distant villages to pray.

To her, a life worth living is a life full of meaning and that the effects of the life's work are to touch the life of others.

SETTING THE CONTEXT – IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES

In the next segment, Mr. Daniel Devan, a member of the ASEAN Work-Life Balance Project Secretariat, was joined by two representatives of the country teams, Dr. Kamolrat Intaratat and Ms. Mai Sison, to set the context of the Conference.

Daniel Devan is the Knowledge Development Coordinator under the ASEAN Work-Life Balance Project. He is also the co-founder of Project WHEE! a social enterprise that promotes socio-economic development in rural communities in Malaysia via training in agro-ecotourism. Mr. Devan took the audience through the concept videos that explained the 'One Million Grassroots

Voices Campaign.' These videos set the tone for the conference and outlined an inclusive and action-oriented definition of work-life balance, as well as provided a roadmap for realising this definition of work-life balance for all within the ASEAN.

Ms. Mai Sison spoke of her involvement in engaging people in the grassroots initiative and her joy in sharing her concept of work-life balance. She shared how her spiritual life contributed to her family's happiness, how a supportive family enriched her work-life balance.

Dr. Kamolrat Intaratat shared the efforts of her organization, the Research of Center of Communication and Development Knowledge Management (CCDKM), based at Sukhothai Thammarat Open University in Thailand, towards the work-life balance initiatives. CCDKM has carried many workshops, programs; talk shows to contribute to the understanding of work-life balance. A video of their grassroots initiative was shown.

SETTING THE CONTEXT: THE ASEAN WAY TO WORK LIFE BALANCE

Challenges, creative efforts, issues and good practices guided the conference agenda that emerged after the conduct of two major data gathering processes:

- Cyber Advocacy through a Grassroots Initiative 'One Million ASEAN Voices for WLB.'
- Preparation of a set of living documents in the form of national reports and articles (features, profiles, and issues)

These two processes challenged the organizer and its partners to find innovative ways to reach out to people who are active on social media. Netizens were invited to share through the usual social media channels - Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, and Instagram and voice their concerns and issues related to WLB in their respective countries.

For those who lacked access to the Internet, another set of activities were designed. These took the form of:

- Popular Campaign ' Internet for ASEAN: Everyone, Everywhere, Every Time
- A Work-Life Balance for Corporate Women survey

- A Youth Perspective on Work-Life Balance Survey
- Civil Society Organization (CSO) submitting a letter for change to prompt the government and civic administration to adopt WLB policies

The National Reports were written as living documents inviting experts and novices to share opinions and contributions to enrich perspectives on WLB. Though these reports were not strictly “academic” they nevertheless shared women’s voices on WLB challenges and offered unique and often overlooked viewpoints. The writers are part of the respective country’s cyber advocacy and multi-media one-million-voice-collection team. Thus, besides literature and field research, the national report is also the result of grassroots conversations and consciousness-raising about work-life balance.

Highlights from the National Reports presented, focused on the each ASEAN country’s challenges with WLB. Dr. Lee Lee Loh, a prominent gender equality advocate and speaker at the conference, took the audience through each country’s status on WLB, issues faced and emphasized certain cross-border issues including those related to human resource flow and environmental deterioration such as haze, trans-boundary diseases, or climate change.

She was joined by Dr. Benjamina G. Flor, Head of Development Communication, UP Los Baños, Philippines. Dr. Benjamina Flor shared the National Paper of the Philippines entitled ‘*Breaking Women Stereotype 4PEACE (Parenting (digital), Patience, Perseverance, and Play; Education (eLearning and eServices); Adaptation; Career, and Equity)*’. The paper focused on the issues afflicting the workforce in the Philippines with special emphasis on the plight of overseas workers and the impact of absentee parents on the families and children. The paper proposes some ways of overcoming these challenges through the use of Information, Communication Technology e.g. eParenting, eLearning and eServices.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS: MATRIX OF THEMATIC ISSUES IN A CONTINUUM OF PROGRESS

The breakout sessions were conceived along four themes, which represent the core issues gleaned from the National Papers and Cyber Advocacy. The four themes were:

- Corporate Leadership
- Women Empowerment
- Rural Ambition
- Youth Aspiration

Each theme, explored existing efforts, practices, and projects that are in various stages or a continuum of progress. There were five milestones along the continuum as follows:

- **Stepping up**

Showcasing stories of people who may have previously found it difficult to implement or conceptualize work-life balance for themselves and their communities, but nevertheless took the first step to creating ripples of change by starting a community-driven project or innovating current technologies to suit different needs.

- **Locking In**

Highlighting stories of people who have started something, a project or a venture, and throughout the process, learnt to zoom in, with clarity, onto the main obstacles to work-life balance they are facing.

- **Thinking Out**

Featuring stories of people who came up with creative and innovative solutions to overcome obstacles to work-life balance, individually or alongside their community.

- **Breaking Through**

Highlighting stories of people who managed to go through the tough process of problem-solving and emerge as winners in work-life balance, and how they influenced others to do so by scaling up their efforts

- **Carrying On**

Featuring stories of people who place much importance on sustaining their efforts to promote socio-economic wellbeing through work-life balance, by constantly monitoring, evaluating and improving their ways of operating in work and life.

The breakout sessions continued into the second day of the conference, and the proceedings for each are attached as Appendixes.

THE DINNER PROGRAMS

There were three dinner programs organized for the participants. These dinners were filled with cultural performances showcasing the cultures of the ASEAN countries. It truly illustrated the beauty and richness of the region. The participants worked hard as well as played, danced and sang with enthusiasm and joy. It was truly memorable for all who participated.

PANEL DISCUSSION: FAMILY FRIENDLY EMPLOYMENT CREATION

Chaired by Azwa Kamarudin, Corporate Women's Network, NCWO, Malaysia, the panel discussed how the changes in technology and the immediate access to information, entertainment, emails, deadlines and demands has created an environment where work and life are harder to separate. Especially for those who are ambitious and interested in a growing career, the pressures to be 'always on' continue to rise.

Azwa Kamarudin was joined by Mr. Herbert Serrano Borja, Provincial Board Member of Albay, Philippines, Mr. Mark Villar, Congressman, Las Pinas, Manila, Philippines and Dr. Kamolrat Intaratat (CCDKM), Thailand.

Mr. Villar shared that both he and his wife are in the Congress, and he can understand what women go through in trying to serve the public. He spoke about how if workplaces truly want to be WLB friendly, they need to make more family friendly facilities and policies like longer maternity leave and breastfeeding rooms as well. Dr. Kamolrat too agreed with this view and called for work-life balance policies to assist working parents combine work and caring responsibilities.

The panelists spoke about the various flexible work arrangements especially with the availability of ICT. Platforms can be created to allow more flexibility of work arrangements. With ICT, changes can be made to family, lifestyle and use of time for work-life balance. With ICT, people can work from home and care for the family and elderly.

If employees are happy, they will be productive. More can be done during office hours, and there is less need for over-time. With better work-life balance, the employees and families will have better living and healthier life. Those without families will benefit even more from these efforts for family-friendly employment creation.

DIALOGUE: WHAT MAKES A GOOD WORK PLACE

This session was a dialogue lead by three youths represented by Ms Inayah Wahid, Ms. Lee Rui Ci, Mr. Devraj Sathivelu on one side while three panel speakers, Ms. Salika Suksuwan, Human Resource Director, PwC, Malaysia; Ms. Dinh Thi Thuong Huyen of Mental Health Initiative of Vietnam; and Dr. Alexander G. Flor, Open University, Philippines.

The questions were posed, and the experiences were shared by these speakers. The panelists discussed their experiences at their different workplaces. The top three criteria that make a good workplace are the flexibility of time, healthy working environment, openness and an atmosphere of willingness to learn.

Ms. Huyen shared her experience as a fresh graduate who just joined the workforce. She shared the initial expectations she had and what she eventually learned in the process of working at different work-places.

Dr. Flor shared his view that a work place does not need to be in a building or office, it can be anywhere: open places, at home. As a professor at the Open University, he is conducting his classes mostly online.

All three panelists agreed that many companies have mistaken that longer working hours would lead to better performance. These companies thus, require most of their employees to work overtime. However, the panelists' experiences have shown that it is critical to be flexible with the working time. Flexible working arrangements help to reduce stress, result in better balance work-life and thus, enhance the work performance.

In response to a question on why many fresh graduates get disappointed when they start working full-time, the panelists shared that the working environment should be more supportive, open, performance-centered, and learning-centered. If both employers and employees can consult, listen to each other and offer encouragement and support, the employees will not be disappointed.

Ms. Salika shared the efforts of her company to organize many team building activities and connect different generations of employees. She shared an experience of a new employee teaching her how to use technology. This new employee felt appreciated and proud of his contributions.

The panelists also spoke of the importance of ICT at the work-place and how it enables people to work anywhere. Dr. Flor spoke of how he could work even when he's travelling with just the laptop and internet. Ms. Salika shared a story of how she watched YouTube prepare for her presentation while cooking meals for the family in the morning.

ASEAN LEADER'S HEAD TO HEAD: DESIGNING WLB FRIENDLY CITIES AND REGIONS

The Panel was chaired by Yg. Bhg. Datin Paduka Dr. Dahlia Binti Rosly, President of the Malaysian Association of Social Impact Assessment & Board Member of Commission for SPAD, Malaysia. The panel shared the various efforts of their government as well as their personal contributions towards bringing work-life balance to their staff. They spoke about the importance of excellence in their work and bringing out the excellent qualities in their staff. The workers have families to care for and cannot neglect their responsibilities both at work and at home.

The panel consisted of H.E. Mr. Pongsak Yingchoncharoen, Mayor of Yala Municipality of Thailand; H.E. Mr. Kittisak Kanasawat, Mayor of Maha Sarakham City; Yg. Bhg. Datin Paduka Hjh Adina Othman, the former Deputy Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Brunei Darussalam; and Yg. Bhg. Dato' Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Mayor of Seberang Perai Municipality of Malaysia.

The chairperson also probed the panel about how they were able to have work-life balance when they work long hours demanded by their jobs as Deputy Minister, Mayors and Deputy Governor. They spoke of the importance for every family to know how to balance work and family time so that the family institution is not sacrificed due to the rise in both parents working outside of the home. They realized that it was crucial to have time and financial management, parenting time and communication with the employees. However, their duties demand they serve their people 24 hours a day and seven days a week especially when there is disasters or crisis in their municipalities or country.

The former Deputy Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Datin Paduka Hjh Adina Othman spoke about the Work-Life Balance Program launched by the Government of Brunei Darussalam to help both men and women staff in managing their time between family and work.

Through the Institute of Civil Service, courses on work-life balance for both the public and the private sectors were conducted. It is a fact that the increase in the number of working women has an impact on the quality of family life.

Their management style differed with Dato' Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Mayor of Seberang Prai Municipality of Malaysia, for example, enforces strict procedures, such as a finger print punch

card system, to ensure great discipline during work and break times. She also shared how the workers are rewarded and taken care for. Although Seberang Prai is not affected seriously by traffic jams, she is committed to solving the public transport problem as she foresaw that there will be more vehicles on the road as the economy expands. As the first woman Mayor of Seberang Prai, she also shared the many challenges she faced to be a Mayor, who wants to make her city a liveable one. She also mentioned that with passion and a supportive family, any challenge can be easily overcome.

H.E. Mr. Sieng Suthang, Deputy Governor of Battambang Province, Cambodia, shared that Cambodia practices a compassionate system where civil servants are allowed time to attend to their second job or private business since the government salary is not enough for the livelihood of their families.

H.E. Mr. Pongsak Yingchoncharoen, Mayor of Yala Municipality of Thailand and H.E. Mr. Kittisak Kanasawat, Mayor of Maha Sarakham City told the Conference that they are committed to better the lives of the people by giving them a better living space. An innovative approach instituted was to set up community halls in villages and towns whereby the population could access the free or low-cost internet to find information, to acquire knowledge and to talk to family members through video-conferencing. The municipalities also encourage the planting of trees annually. Rural Thailand has been promoting cultural-rich agro-tourism to bring economic development to farming areas so as to retain more young people in the rural area.

All the panelists spoke of their personal passion for their work which drove them to achieve work-life balance. H.E. Mr. Sieng Suthang especially told of his extreme struggle during the Pol Pot days. When the hardship was over, he swore that he would devote his life to better the life of the population in his province. He works long hours doing what he could for his province, but he doesn't feel tired of his responsibility. When he sees a child smile, he knows his own children are also smiling. His work-life balance is his satisfaction of what he has done for the day.

GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES: NATIONAL MACHINERY AND POLICIES

H.E. Hans Ola Urstad, Ambassador, Royal Norwegian Embassy to Malaysia spoke of Norway's efforts to bring work-life balance to its population of five million. It is the 24th largest economy with 100% hydro-electric power. The Government is headed by female Prime Minister as well as Finance and Defense Ministers. Half of the government and 40% of Parliament are women.

There is a high rate of employment with 77% for men and 74% for women, which is much higher than the OECD employment average of 65%. Only 3% work very long hours.

This is very different from America as intimated by Dr. Melanie Billings-Yun, Author 'Beyond Deal-making'; wife of the Ambassador, the United States of America to Malaysia. The majority of Americans work 200 hours more than the British and 400 hours more than the French.

On the other hand, Ms. Genevieve Gamache, Associate Dean of Asian Studies Faculty, Asian University for Women, Bangladesh, shared her observations of the male-dominated Asian culture where women still need to be empowered to make choices for work-life.

In Norway, the efforts focus on personal development and good working environment. The employees are encouraged to take leave and compulsory to take holidays and devote time to family and leisure. There is provision for 57 weeks of parental leave, ten weeks of parental holidays and ten weeks of paid holiday and by law 40% of the leave must be taken. It is to create a situation where Norwegian live to work rather than work to live.

However, in America, it is a matter of personal choice to take leave or not. There is no paid leave. There are only 12 paid leave days and no legally paid maternity leave. Only 12% workers are given paid leave to care for children or the elderly because of its culture that emphasized individual rights and freedom, and personal choice. Americans will find it repulsive to have any national policy related to their personal choices, priorities in their lives and control of their time use.

In corporate America, it is increasingly common to provide 'play' at work places. Facebook has been voted as the best place to work. It provides a livable work place where there are gourmet food courts, bike tracks, and massages. For 20% of their time, employees work outside of the office to

do other interesting projects including community service. This kind of flexibility is regarded as highly satisfying by workers.

In Asia, women still have fewer choices -- from the courses they have to study in university, career choices to who they should marry -- are often determined by their parents. But, increasingly, the younger women want to take control of their own life's path by making decisions on their own. As a result, there is a gap in inter-generational perception as to what work-life balance is for young women and when they become mothers and wives. Teenage pregnancy should also be addressed effectively in ASEAN as it is an increasing problem in some countries despite efforts in education and social monitoring. Their talents can be harvested fully if national development policies take into consideration the needs and wants of young women and teenage girls who will be the power behind national development.

The panel concluded that some people can have 'work-life integration' instead of 'work-life balance' because they can bring family members to work place during work time, or perform some personal affairs in between work time, or manage household happily while working from home. However, such 'work-life integration' will be impossible for those whose work tasks must be performed together with others onsite with safety concerns and quantitative output standards such as those in aircraft maintenance sites, oil fields, and factories. So all in all, 'work-life balance' can be carried out in many ways, depending on the type of jobs, the environment of the work place, and a person's decision about how to carry out that particular stage of life. All in all, the panelists advocated that national policies conducive to work-life balance be inclusive of all classes and gender, tailored to rural and urban areas' special situations, and be sensitive to 'employers, employees, and personal choices,' besides addressing environmental concerns which contribute to climate change.

CLOSING THE CONFERENCE BUT ADVANCING THE MOVEMENT

Bringing these participants together paved the way for learning from each other. The efforts by the Government, work-life balance activists and champions encouraged other participants through best practices and insights into the ASEAN community. Some of these are:

- Rapidly growing ASEAN economy and workforce
- WLB enabling policies drive productivity
- National machinery support rural sector
- Full support from the telecommunication service providers
- Enable Telework, Telecommuting, Compressed Week, e-Entrepreneurship, innovative schemes
- Diversified inclusive talent pools
- Full participation from corporations and civil societies

Another highlight was the sharing in person and through video of the ‘Youth Roundtable Series: Work-Life Balance,’ a pre-conference collaborative effort between eHomemakers and Perdana Fellows Alumni Association (PFAA). PFAA is a multiracial, multicultural, non-political, and non-profit organization. Its aim is to develop the next generation of Malaysian leaders in the Government, corporate and non-profit sector, revolving around leadership, governance, and volunteerism.

The PFAA Youth Roundtable has helped to redefine ‘WLB’ as a dynamic equilibrium that one achieves when his/her passion for life is truly expressed through his/her work. Y. B. Dr. Jalal Idris, Minister in Prime Minister’s Department, advised the participants that everything could be perceived as problems to overcome or opportunity to be managed. To be a global champion, it requires hard work. One had to be ruthless in prioritizing to say ‘no’ to things that would not contribute to being a champion. The mindset of ‘multiplication’ would be more important than a mindset of ‘division’. That would make the difference for the future.

The views expressed by these young leaders call for efforts to empower people from all walks of life in Malaysia with facilities and policies that allow them to turn their passion for life, be it family, or community, or culture, or faith, into a sustainable career.

CLOSING REMARKS

Yang Terhormat Shinta Nuriyah Wahid, Former First Lady of the Republic of Indonesia, Founder of Yayasan Amal Hayati, in her closing remarks, shared the vision and the works her husband, the late President Abdul Rahman Wahid. In her candid sharing, she offered glimpses of the life of a champion of the poor. In his pursuit of social justice for all, he enacted Presidential decree to give freedom to minority groups to practice their culture and religions. What he had begun and his principles continued to guide the work and service of her family to the people of Indonesia.

Her advice to the participants was to consider both internal and external factors of one's life and its impact on having a balanced life. She spoke of the need to acquire qualities and virtues based on spirituality and responsibilities to contribute to society. She shared a personal example of how WLB is very essential to in all aspects especially giving time to one's health - had her late husband spent more time to take care of his health, he may be still doing what he love. She urged the governments of various ASEAN countries to provide adequate health care to their citizens so that they have the personal resources to take care of themselves and family, thereby, achieving WLB in its entirety.

She also raised the awareness that everyone in ASEAN should give time to family. Materialism is important, but quality family bonding is even more important for a nation's economic development for it brings mental health and productivity to the work force.

She urged the ASEAN governments to take WLB seriously and incorporate suggestions from the grassroots into their policies, and that the policies they construct should be for the people. People should be the center of a nation's development policies, and that the populations have the right to achieve a high level of WLB. Therefore, 'happiness for all' should be the goal of a strong, resilient nation, and an economically integrated ASEAN.

THE CALL OF THE NEXT GENERATION

The fact that this project was closely managed, choreographed and immaculately curated by a youthful group of eHomemakers' WHEE project team (average age 29), demonstrated, without doubt, the interest and passion of the young to carry on this movement. They worked long hours and with great personal sacrifices beyond the call of duty to infuse the Conference with great dynamism and energy.

The call of the children, like that of Leah Choy, whose parents give up their full-time jobs to care for her sister who has brain damage. Her father does free lance work from home to earn income for the family while her mother writes and is responsible for most of the caring work. They complement each other's skills and aptitude and team work to maximize time-use so that the whole family has quality time together, and still be productive in working and learning.

She appealed to parents that what children truly want is 'a little of their parents' time' so that they can play, talk, eat, pray, read, sing together, or just spend quality time together. Although toys and gifts can be fun, children want parents to be there for them and listen to them.

They appeal to all parents, *"Please never give up on your children, both special and normal because they are gifts from God. With Work-Life Balance, you can achieve it!"*

CONFERENCE CONCLUSION

Work-life balance is not anymore a buzzword than it is a reminder that if we want to have better socio-economic wellbeing tomorrow, we'll have to invest our capital, expertise and time in designing, building, maintaining and improving infrastructures and institutions that support the realization of work-life balance for all.

The speakers and panelists believed that there was no space for excuses to delay any more actions towards achieving work-life balance at an individual level and national level. Some delegates told their stories while others listened, but all of us will have to do something and play our parts to

make work-life balance a reality for everybody shortly. This will all start with our region, our home - ASEAN.

It was the hope of the Conference that the participants' wish-list encapsulated into an eco-basket would be actualized in the next five years for furthering the WLB movement. The Conference witnessed the collective pledge of the participants make work-life balance a reality in ASEAN.

**So Step up! Lock in! Think out! Break through and carry on Work-Life Balance
Movement!**