Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

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Women's Leadership in the Digital Era: Agility, Adaptability and Fluency

APEC Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy

January 2022

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Virtual Conference | Putrajaya, Malaysia | 20-21 October 2021

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1.0 BACKGROUND

The widening gender gap especially in leadership roles stunts economic growth. Data shows that there is an imbalance in the ratio of leadership roles for women in the job landscape[1][2]. Digital disruption and IR 4.0 are predicted to further widen the gender gap by contributing to higher job losses for women. Industry barriers to hiring women for leadership roles, particularly in the technology sector, include a lack of female role models and qualified incoming talent. COVID-19 is exacerbating existing social and economic inequities, making the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)'s mission to encourage inclusive growth and shared prosperity more relevant than ever, particularly concerning women's economic participation[3].

This project is designed to provide capacity building activities benefiting the APEC economies with lessons applicable to women's digital leadership. The project aims to contribute to the efforts in mitigating the leadership gender gap by enhancing digital literacy among women and providing a platform for learning and exchanging knowledge as well as experiences in developing digital leadership. This is necessary, as the pandemic has caused a reliance on 4.0 Industrial Revolution technologies, and this heightens the risk of job losses which is higher among women across APEC economies. Providing reskilling and upskilling programs can help women to adapt to these changes with needed and marketable skills.[4] This initiative is in line with the La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth, which focuses on improving women's access to leadership positions at all levels of decision-making, as well as supporting women's education, training, and skills development and access in a changing world of work. In addition, the Individual Action Plan (IAP) of the Ratio of Women's Representation in Leadership was enacted to realise the equitable ratio of women's representation in leadership, as this is an imperative ingredient to encourage economic growth[5].

Hence, to achieve the objective, Malaysia, led by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development together with its strategic collaborators have conducted a conference-based programme. The programme included:

a) A pre-conference survey;
b) A two-day, online conference on "Women's Leadership in the Digital Era: Agility, Adaptability and Fluency." This conference was held on 20-21 October 2021 in

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[1] https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace

[2] https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-management/

[3] https://www.apec.org/Publications/2020/12/Women-COVID-19-and-the-Future-of-Work-in-APEC

[4] Ibid.

[5] https://www.apec.org/Publications/2017/12/Individual-Action-Plan-for-the-Enhancement-of-the-Ratio-of-Womens-Representation-in-Leadership

Putrajaya, Malaysia using the platform Microsoft Teams. The conference consisted of panel sessions in current and emerging digital technologies, strategies and digital leadership; and

c) Post-conference survey. Participants' self-assessment was conducted after the conference to measure their level of understanding of the topics presented and issues discussed during the conference.

2.0 PROCEEDINGS

2.1 Pre-conference survey

The aim of this survey was to get an overview of APEC economies' experience in enhancing women's digital leadership. Overall, the survey received responses from Peru, Malaysia, Canada, Chinese Taipei, the United States of America, The Philippines and Russia. The survey was conducted between May to June 2021. It consists of four sections: a) Profile b) Issues c) Challenges; and d) Recommendations. The findings of the survey are as follows:

i) Digital Leadership
The economies were asked to describe "digital leadership" in the context of their economy, and the overall responses can be divided into three perspectives. First, the meaning of digital leadership. In this context, "digital leadership" is generally understood as the ability to utilise the digital technology effectively in problem-solving, decision making and management. Second, the process. The economies described "digital leadership" as integrating the element of digital leadership in state policy initiatives/measures and governance, in all spectrum of business activity and industrial sectors. Third, digital leadership as a mechanism for transformation. "Digital leadership" is described by the economies as a means and tool to facilitate digital transformation and enhance the effectiveness of businesses. In addition, "digital leadership" is a way to promote the accessibility and equitability of women in business and economics.

ii) Issues in Digital Leadership
From the responses received, respondents identified the following as impediments to digital leadership:
a) Social stigma and lack of support;
b) Digital illiteracy;
c) Lack of infrastructure and technological support;

d)   Gender gap and discrimination in economic and social sectors; and

e)   Lack of access to digital technology.

iii)   Policies or Programs in Digital Leadership

Economies were asked whether there were any policies or programs that encouraged and prepared women for roles in digital leadership, 44.4% of economies indicated "Yes", and the rest indicated "No". From the responses received, some economies have impressive centralised programs, yet some have limited programs for women.

iv)   Training for Digital Leadership

The responses show that the economies do have training for women to be skilled in digital leadership roles to varying degrees. Most of the economies have specific training, while some do not. Economies such as Russia and The Philippines shared that the training provided works and is effective. Some responses show that certain economies have good training engagement or involvement with various sectors (public-private-NGOs), whereas some are state-based projects.

v)   Women Representation in Digital Leadership

The response from economies on Women representation in digital leadership indicates that women's representation in digital leadership is between high and low/limited levels. The range is between the high positions such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), and Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) leaders. In terms of whether there are any gender-specific indicators in digital leadership in their respective economies, 44% stated that there are specific indicators, while the rest reported that they do not have it.

vi)   Main Challenges in Digital Leadership

Economies highlighted that the three main challenges in digital leadership are: difficulty in raising awareness and providing social support for women, lack of digital infrastructure and the issues of tackling social stereotypes.

vii)   Suggestions to Facilitate Digital Leadership Within Economies

Economies recommended three main suggestions. First, the need for policy initiatives and mechanisms to incorporate the specific needs of women in digital literacy. Second, the need to increase the accessibility and infrastructure of digital knowledge in various

areas and sectors. Third, the need to provide the necessary support and strengthening the effort for:

a) women entrepreneurship in digital and women's business digital transformation;
b) women digital literacy programs and training; and
c) STEM education and pipeline leadership program for women and underrepresented groups.

viii) Suggestions to facilitate Digital Leadership Within APEC
Economies recommend the following aspects:

a) Share practical experiences, best practices from member economies, and lessons learned on implementation experiences, as well as effective policies, regulations or measures;
b) The Roadmap should be set up by APEC leadership as a common vision among APEC cross-fora;
c) Construct comparable indicators and data on gender analysis to monitor the overall progress in the APEC region;
d) Increase and strengthen existing mechanisms, initiatives, and implementation plans in APEC such as APEC working groups and collaboration among them e.g. collaboration between PPSTI and PPWE, the La Serena Roadmap Implementation Plan, The Women and the Economy Dashboard etc;
e) Provide equitable access to digital resources in fulfilling the digital divide between urban and rural areas; and
f) APEC could lead by example by digitalizing its processes and encouraging member economies, especially developing economies, to adapt accordingly.

ix) Useful Initiatives or Training to Prepare Women Towards Digital Leadership
Economies have suggested the following initiatives/training:

a) Training in foundational and transferable skills, including skills in gathering data and addressing discriminatory policies on women in digital leadership; initiatives in building networks and mentorship system for women leaders and girls' education in infotech and digital fields;
b) Initiatives focused on strategic capabilities such as digitalization, strategic management, decision-making in crisis scenarios, and innovation management, among others; and
c) Active participation and involvement of highly qualified experts in training courses and development of mentorship systems.

Overall, based on the responses received from the Pre-Conference Survey, it indicates that there is a gap between economies on the achievement of digital leadership. It also shows that there is a need for data from economies, on gender-specific indicators in digital leadership. The responses also indicate that the main areas of concern among economies are on issues of women on digital literacy and accessibility, as well as the digital divide among women between areas and sectors.

2.2   The Conference

The conference was held virtually via the Microsoft Teams platform from 20th to the 21st of October 2021 in Putrajaya, Malaysia.

Day 1: 20 October 2021 (Wednesday)

<u>Keynote Address</u>

Day 1 began with a Welcome Address by H.E. Datuk Seri Rina Binti Mohd Harun, Minister of Women, Family and Community Development. The H.E Datuk Seri Rina welcomed all the participants and gave a brief overview of the conference. Before formally officiating the conference, she emphasised that women should embrace the digital revolution to empower them to be agile, adapting and fluent in their respective careers and position, especially their leadership skills. The agile women labor force is able to respond proactively to the changes in the environment and adapt quickly to make the best use of opportunities.

The Keynote Address entitled, "Embracing the New Normal – How Digital Agility Can Help Women Leaders Succeed in the New Normal", was presented by Dr Zurina Binti Abdul Hamid, Director General, Department of Women Development (JPW). Dr Zurina highlighted the concern over women's challenges in the digital era, especially in the labour forces. She shared the commitment of Malaysia as an APEC economy in improving the ratio of women to men labour force participation through the Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women. Financial incentives and capacity building training also are provided for women in supporting the digitalisation in business and

YBrs. Dr. Zurina binti Abdul Hamid
Director General, Department of Women Development

entrepreneurship. This also includes the support for women in commerce who were mostly affected by the COVID-19 situation.

Forum Day 1

The forum on Day 1 was focused on "Embracing the New Normal: How Digital Agility Can Help Women Leaders Succeed in the New Normal", whereby four speakers presented their respective topics:

a) Ms En-chia Tsai, Co-Founder Bened Biomedical Co., Ltd - "Remote working, Teamwork and Decision Making: How to Make Businesses Work?";
b) Ibu Lenny N Rosalin, Deputy Minister for Gender Equality, Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection Republic of Indonesia – "Digital Agility in Business: Overcoming Challenges in the New Normal";
c) Prof. Dato' Dr. Rashila Ramli – Principal Fellow, Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS) - "Post COVID-19: Rebuilding/Strengthening Economies through Digital Agility and Leadership"; and
d) Ms Atikah Amalina Mohd Zaini - Channels Diversity Program Manager at Google – "Focus on the Human: Opportunity and Leadership Within the Organisation".

The forum was moderated by Dr Murni Binti Wan Mohd Nor, Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Human Ecology, University Putra Malaysia (UPM). Generally, all speakers highlighted the challenges and implications of Covid19 to women, especially at work and in business. They also shared similar concerns on the need to improve gender equality and leadership empowerment at large. Each of them shared their respective economies' experiences and tips from their organisation's representation on ways to increase women's digital agility.

Ms En-chia Tsai's presentation focused on two main aspects, firstly, the issues and impact of the Covid19 pandemic on women who are working remotely at home. Secondly, some suggestions for women to cope and balance their life between work and family. According to her, the bright side of Covid19 has brought digital transformation to most companies and organisations. Yet many women are stressed from burnout while working from home as they are

struggling between crying children and adapting to the latest technology. At the same time, the issue of gender inequality remains lingering in the work environment. The employer should provide the best approach in monitoring their employees at home and being considerate to women challenges while working from home. Women, on the other hand, should learn how to embrace the transition of digitalisation and be open to sharing their feeling to reduce stress. In terms of leadership, Ms En-chia Tsai suggested that the company may practice a bottom-up approach so that workers at the lower level can become leaders by allowing them to have their strategy for problem-solving. She also shared the practice of her organisation which emphasises on a consensus approach.
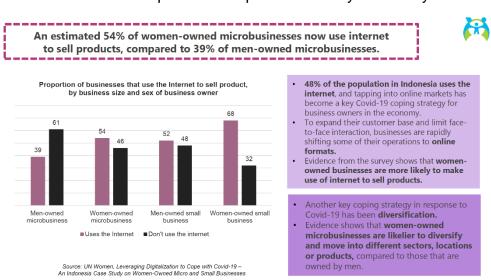
Picture 1: A snapshot of the presentation by Ms En-chia Tsai

Meanwhile, Ibu Lenny highlighted a similar issue about how COVID-19 has badly affected women in the business and informal sector in Indonesia. She explained Indonesia's experience in accelerating efforts for gender equality and empowering women in different ways such as improving access to financial support and information, as well as providing training and marketing opportunities. This effort is part of Indonesia's 5 Priority Programs for Women and Children (2020-2024) i.e. increasing women empowerment through gender perspective entrepreneurship. Indonesia provides financial support for women entrepreneurs especially for women-owned MSMEs through Micro Finance program under the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (MoWECP). Besides financial support, MoWECP conducts a series of gender-sensitive entrepreneurship training and business coaching, for example, the entrepreneur literacy program for home businesses called Incubation Class of

Sispreneur and "HERfuture" which is a result of a few collaborations with several partners from various local and international business institutions such as UK-ID Tech Hub and Du'Anyam. The training focuses on assistantship, mentorship and coaching. In supporting women in business to cope with the digitalisation process, Ibu Lenny also informed that Indonesia is also committed to digital literacy programs for women in business through programs such as Digital Entrepreneurship Academy (DEA).

Picture 2: A snapshot of the presentation by Ibu Lenny

Similarly, with the previous presenters, Prof. Dato' Dr Rashila Ramli also highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the APEC community and women, especially from the B40 category and the informal sector. She pointed out that the pandemic requires women to quickly adapt to changes, be agile with personal and organisational digital skills. She raised a few gaps which occurred due to digitalisation including the lack of learning and technological skills as well as the existing social protection system which is not equipped to face the new norms and changes. According to Prof. Dato' Dr Rashila, there are three at least key issues of gender inequality. Firstly, there is no situation as "Care Economy" for women because their economic activity was not measured during the pandemic, and the burden of caring for the children and the elderly tend to fall on women. Secondly, the productivity issue whereby there is an underused pool of qualified women such as women involved in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and SMEs. Thirdly, the issue of women's economic autonomy is greatly affected by economic losses due to the increase of cases of domestic violence against women.

Prof Dato' Dr Rashila suggested the importance to adopt the approach of "Inclusivity" – where no one is left behind. To increase the digital agility of the

workforce, she recommended that incentives for the private sector in the skill development process should be provided and technology based on the curricula should be developed for different groups. In supporting all the processes, she also highlighted a few key points to be taken by the leadership of economies. Among other points are: transformational leadership in organisations need to acknowledge that work from anywhere (WFA) is becoming the norm, discover work trend/patterns of non-standard workers especially women in the informal sector and apply a gender-responsive approach. She finally concluded by suggesting a similar perspective with Ms En-chia Tsai that the bottom-up approach should be applied to rebuild our economies through strategic planning and all this effort can be taken up within domestic development plans as well as the domestic budget.

Picture 3: A snapshot of the presentation by Prof. Dato' Dr Rashila

The last presenter, Ms Atikah Amalina, the Program Manager for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) at Google shared some management approaches by Google in nurturing leadership skills within the organisation. At the beginning of her presentation, she highlighted that digital transformation has to be adapted to during this pandemic. However, she emphasised that meaningful change requires more than just technology. Ms Atikah shared based on the organisational perspective and the importance of taking care of people within the organisation. She shared data that 65% of venture capitalists attributed the failures within their organisation to "people issues," which is why it is imperative to focus on establishing good connections with the people, as they are the foundation for a successful business/operation. Ms Atikah also shared the processes which Google adopts to establish effective teams and the elements which assist them to perform well, such as 1) providing psychological safety, 2) dependability of team members, 3) structure and clarity, 4) finding meaning in

their work, and 4) having/creating an impact within their organisation. In achieving the objectives, she shared some of the DEI commitments to promote diversity, equity, inclusion and equality in the workplace.

Picture 4: A snapshot of the presentation by Ms Atikah

What high performing teams do well

1 **Psychological Safety**
Team members feel safe to take risks and be vulnerable in front of each other.

2 **Dependability**
Team members get things done on time and meet Google's high bar for excellence.

3 **Structure & Clarity**
The team has clear roles, plans, and goals.

4 **Meaning**
Work is personally important to team members.

5 **Impact**
Team members think their work matters and creates change.

She also pointed out the important role of managers, and the attributes of good managers. As such, it is important to acknowledge and look after their interests. This effort should include taking care of women leaders or managers in this pandemic as everyone is affected, particularly women. Women leaders and managers are generally more people-focused and are stronger advocates for DEI, and this important contribution should not be overlooked by any organisation. Ms Atikah also emphasized the strategies and roles that women need to play in advocating for their own interests. For example, women should not be intimidated by their male colleagues, but make them allies. More women leaders should support their teams to be productivity driven. To do this, Ms Atikah suggested women should demonstrate engagement, be inclusive in decision making, be authentic, and be generous with recognition. As a conclusion, she reiterated the importance of focusing on the human connection – taking care of people within the organisation, team members, and women leaders.

Day 2: 21 October 2021 (Thursday)

<u>Keynote Address</u>

Day 2 commenced with a Keynote Address entitled, "Gender, Technology and the Future of Work", by Mr Thomas Mathew, CEO of TalentCorp. Mr. Thomas Mathew highlighted the significance of digital literacy as a prerequisite and essential skill in the current job market as well as the concern on the growing digital gender divide. He emphasised the need to heighten the fluency of women and girls in digital knowledge through skills training and education in digital technology. Besides the inclusion of digitalisation infrastructure in the 12th Malaysian Plan, he also shared the commitment of TalentCorp Malaysia Berhad in supporting women's economic empowerment in various sectors of the digital economy.
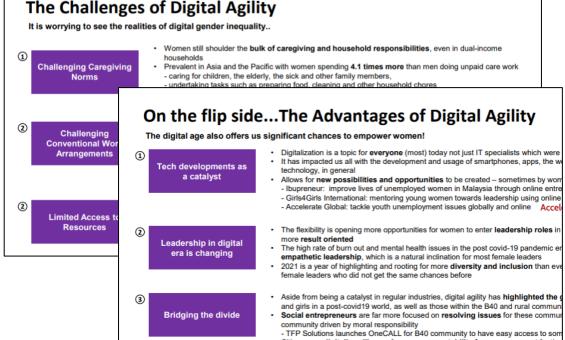
<u>Forum Day 2</u>

The forum on Day 2 was focused on Gender, Technology and the Future of Work. It was moderated by Dr Camellia Siti Maya Mohamed Razali, Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Human Ecology, University Putra Malaysia (UPM). Three speakers who presented their papers were:

a) Ms. Izzana Salleh, RISE Human Capital Sdn. Bhd. – "The Challenges of Digital Agility and Gender Divide at Work";
b) Ms. Joni Simpson - Senior Specialist in Gender, Equality and Non-Discrimination at Decent Work Technical Team for East and South East Asia and the Pacific, ILO – "Gender, Technology and the Future of Work"; and
c) Dr Zatul Himmah Adnan – Senior Lecturer at the Universiti Putra Malaysia – "Pre-Conference Survey Sharing Session".

Overall, Ms Izzana Salleh and Ms Joni Simpson both addressed the challenges of women at work, the digital gender divide and how it affects many aspects of women's issues, especially their digital agility during the pandemic. At first, Ms Izzana highlighted a few key points on the challenges of digital agility and the gender divide at work. She acknowledged that the problem in women's issues is universal, and, in most economies, women are affected

socially, economically and personally. She then highlighted three main challenges of digital agility. The first challenge according to her is challenging caregiving norms. Women still shoulder the bulk of caregiving- the juggling of work from home and online schooling, caring for the children and undertaking more tasks is 4.1 times more than men in doing unpaid care work, and this caused the burden of care to become greater. The second challenge is conventional work arrangement. Employers rapidly digitalize everyday work processes and adopt flexible ways to work from home, yet the societal norms expect workers to put in long hours and always prioritize work, with no boundaries. At the same time, she also said that women suffer from negative perceptions in terms of lower competency, commitment, recommended and received salaries. Also, these situations resulted in the rate of burnout and mental health to increase.

Picture 5: A snapshot of the presentation by Ms Izzana

On the other hand, Ms Izana also noticed some advantages of digital agility such as tech development as a catalyst where digitalization is a topic for everyone, which was previously a male environment. The new changes also allow new possibilities and opportunities to be created for some women organisations to support specific disadvantaged communities. For example, Ibupreneur improves the lives of unemployed women through online entrepreneurial activities, Girls4Girls International which provide a mentoring program for young women towards leadership using online platforms, and Accelerate Global which is tackling youth unemployment issues globally and online.

Ms Izana also highlighted that leadership in the digital era is changing. Flexibility is opening more opportunities for women to enter leadership roles in an organization that is more result-oriented. However, empathetic leadership is required as the high burnout rate and mental health issues are increasing. She then highlighted the effort of some social entrepreneurs who are far more focused on resolving issues for these communities as an individual, and communities driven by moral responsibility in bridging the divide. For example, TFP Solutions launched OneCALL for the B40 community to have easy access to some of the financial services. Finally, she shared some experience in adapting to the digital era through RISE, a future female leaders forum and Girls for Girls partnership with various government agencies such as the Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Women Development, Family and Community.

The second presenter, Ms Joni Simpson, who is a Senior Specialist in gender, equality and non-discrimination at ILO shared statistics of how the world of work impacts Covid19 and pre-existing inequalities. She showed that 1.6 billion of the world's 2 billion informal workers are considered at risk of losing their livelihood in 2020. 13million fewer women in employment in 2021 compared to 2019 and 8.7% fall in global youth employment in 2020 compared with 3.7 per cent for adults. The crisis has affected the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups disproportionately, with the risk of long-term scarring affects informal workers and other vulnerable groups such as those in insecure work, women, young people, older workers, low-paid and low-skilled workers, migrants and ethnic and racial minorities, people with disabilities and people living with HIV/AIDS.
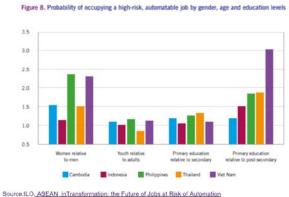
She also highlighted how vulnerable women's jobs are to the risk of displacement by technology. Women, workers with less education and workers in lower-wage occupations are more likely to be impacted. Either women are largely not hired or women are not retained when upgrading occurs due to some negative perceptions such as gender stereotypes about men and women's abilities and qualifications (direct and indirect discrimination), occupational segregation in education and various other sectors. At the same time, there is a need for skills to be upgraded and to provide for more equal opportunities. In this situation, she also emphasised that caregiving plays an important role to support women.

Picture 6: A snapshot of the presentation by Ms Joni Simpson

The last presenter, Dr Zatul Himmah Adnan on the other hand shared some insights on APEC economies' digital leadership from the findings of the pre-conference survey conducted a few months earlier among the APEC economies. The findings overall are in line with most of the concerns and highlights from all the conference presenters. The content of her presentation was the gist from the 2.0 Proceedings para 2.1. In brief, she highlighted main topics from the findings: 1) the description of Digital Leadership from the view of the economy; 2) issues in digital leadership, 3) policies or programs in digital leadership; 4) training for digital leadership in economies; 5) women representation in digital leadership; 6) main challenges in digital leadership; 7) suggestions to facilitate digital leadership within economies, and finally 8) suggestions to facilitate digital leadership within APEC. This confirms the importance of the issues of digital leadership among women during the pandemic, which requires women to be agile and fluent in adapting to the new norms.

Breakout Room Session

Breakout room session aimed to promote regional cooperation in alleviating standards and practices, to discuss and exchange perspectives and to brainstorm implementation of initiatives in the respective economies. There were 4 rooms with an equal number of participants from different economies moderated by two moderators (from Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia) and two rapporteurs (from Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia and Ministry of Women, Family and Community

Development), an equal number of participants from different economies. Key takeaways from each room were presented by the moderators are as follows:

i) The best practice of digital leadership training.
   a) More inclusive online training programs;
   b) Discussion or sharing session with experts; and
   c) Mentoring system.

ii) The challenges of women in digital leadership.
   a) Achieving work-life balance during pandemic and Work From Home;
   b) Low accessibility to online platform facilities;
   c) Low skills and literacy gap on digital technology;
   d) Women with multiple roles (wife, worker, caregiver etc.); and
   e) Lack of funding for training programs.

iii) Suggestions to overcome the challenges.
   a) Effective educational and training program on digital knowledge and business;
   b) Digital literacy/ skills training especially through adult education;
   c) Training for coping strategies as well as stress management;
   d) TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) education
   e) Promote gender equality at home; and
   f) Public–private partnership in providing training and facilities for digital knowledge/skills.

iv) Suggestions to increase activism and awareness on the issue of women leadership.
   a) Provide good role models;
   b) Utilise social media & the role of influencers; create knowledge products;
   c) Include men in programs as teammates, not as competitors to women; and
   d) Prioritise platforms for women leaders to share their thoughts and experience.

v) The ways to improve policy implementation on the inclusion of women in digital leadership.
   Making women into leaders;
   a) Revisit and review the implementation of women policies, particularly on women involvement in important positions;
   b) Collaboration of private and public bodies/organisations in the relevant policy implementation;

> c) Integrating awareness for women into educational policies; and
> d) Equal representation in decision-making roles in both government and private sector.

> vi) The ways for APEC as a regional organisation to help to increase the inclusion of women in digital leadership?
> > a) APEC can be the catalyst for the effort;
> > b) Increase awareness to master and fully utilize digital tools;
> > c) Giving incentives and rewards to encourage the participation of women in leadership;
> > d) Provide a platform to exchange ideas with other economies' experiences about successful initiatives and the best practices; and
> > e) This is to motivate economies and adapt to the local context.

Closing Remarks

The conference ended with Closing Remarks by Dr. Maziah Binti Che Yusoff, Secretary General, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. She thanked all the participants and economies who participated in the conference. She also highlighted that all the initiatives are in line with the efforts in women empowerment as planned in the La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth (2019-2030) and APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040.

2.3 Post-Conference Survey

The post-conference survey aimed to assess the feedback of the participants and measure their understanding of the topics. 24 responses were received from participants from Malaysia (78.8%), The Philippines (8.2%), Chinese Taipei (8.2%) and Papua New Guinea (4.3%). In terms of sector representatives, 34.5% were from economy representatives and 65.2% were other representatives. Overall, the feedback from the participants is positive.

In terms of the organisation of the event for both days, the rating ranged from good to excellent. The survey also shows that the content of the conference was received well by participants, whereby they rated the quality of the content as good and excellent, with a higher response for excellent on day 2. The content from the breakout session discussion and presentation of key takeaways seems to be the most beneficial to them. In terms of the knowledge

on women and digital leadership, 86.4% of participants who answered the survey rated 4 and 5 (excellent) for their level of awareness regarding challenges of women's leadership in the digital era post-conference. In terms of their awareness regarding the challenges of women's leadership in the digital era, 91.3% indicated that it has improved after the conference (rated 4 and 5). 95.7% felt that the content of the conference was very helpful in providing insight regarding the ways they can introduce/improve existing policies on women's leadership in the digital area in their respective economies. Details of the responses were received as per **Appendix 2**.

2.4 Participants and Experts

In total, there were 104 attendees from 9 APEC economies participated in the conference. attending the conference, including experts. The relevant details are reflected in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: The Participants

ECONOMY (OF PARTICIPANTS)	Male	Female	Total
Indonesia	0	1	1
Malaysia	17	69	86
Papua New Guinea	0	3	3
Peru	0	1	1
The Republic of the Philippines	0	1	1
The Russian Federation	0	1	1
Chinese Taipei	2	2	4
Participants (Total)	19	78	97

Table 2: The Experts

ECONOMY (OF EXPERTS)	Male	Female	Total
Indonesia	0	1	1
Malaysia	0	3	3
Singapore	0	1	1
Chinese Taipei	0	1	1
Thailand	0	1	1
Speakers/Experts (Total)	0	7	7

Source: Data from the online registration and entry upon conference via Microsoft Teams 2021

3.0 CONCLUSION

The IR4.0 and repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic have created a high dependency on digital technology. The impact is significantly critical in the economic and business sector. Digitalisation in these sectors indeed provided great opportunities and advantages for people who are educated, digitally literate and advanced in ICT skills. However, this transformation created a new divide for disadvantaged women and probably expanded the existing gender gap, especially in the economic and business sector. The COVID-19 pandemic seems to worsen the situation for some women in some areas. The data and output from this conference have confirmed this phenomenon is happening.

3.1   Challenges

The pre-conference survey and two-day conference highlight concerns surrounding women in the context of leadership in the digital era. Women are facing challenges in terms of limitation, gap and risk in the aspects of digital knowledge, technology, capability and infrastructure. Below are the highlights of the main issues:

a) **Digital illiteracy and lack of skills**
There is a high level of digital illiteracy, particularly among women from rural/disadvantaged backgrounds. This would lead to a low level of skills required to meet technological changes and advancements.

b) **Lack or low accessibility, support and education/training on digital knowledge**
There is a lack and low accessibility of women to the necessary facilities and technological platforms. As such, the support for education and training to increase skills in digital technology does not reach many women in need.

c) **Digital divide, low infrastructure and technological support**
There is an apparent divide between women from the younger and older generation, with the latter being less inclined to accept technological changes and adapt to the current work environment. Also, the lack of infrastructure and support provided make it difficult to facilitate women to adapt to these changes.

d) **Job insecurity**
There is a high job risk for women due to replacement by technology and a lack of skills in digital technology. The impact of the pandemic and the emphasis on digitalisation has caused more

women to be at higher risk of losing their jobs, particularly due to the lack of skills in digital technology.

e) Agility in overcoming the existing challenges and post COVID-19 repercussions
At present, many women are not agile enough in adapting to the changing environment, which is compounded by the repercussions of the pandemic.

3.2 Recommendations

Apparently, in this digital era, women are required to be agile and have fluency in many aspects of digital leadership. A "digitalised" woman in leadership cannot be reachable if the basic and fundamental aspects such as skills and appropriate education are not being catered for. Therefore, strong political will from various agencies and organisations is required to encourage more women to adapt to this new context. Recommendations gathered during the conference are as follows:

a) Inclusive digital leadership skills and training.
There need to be more digital leadership programs and training provided which is inclusive in nature to allow wider participation of women from diverse backgrounds. APEC with collaboration from successful economies in digital businesses could provide general guidance or modules for the training. An effective mentorship program should be built from this kind of leadership skills and training.

b) Inclusive policy measures and initiatives for women leadership in the digital sphere.
An inclusive aspect of leadership and digital technology, especially in managing the business sector including MMEs and SMEs should be the core of the measure and initiatives. There must also be an inclusive effort from the top-down, whereby policies and initiatives need to address important, gender-based issues and create opportunities for women leadership. A strong collaboration between government agencies, private and corporate organisations, as well as NGOs, should be strengthened in implementing such initiatives. Empowering the TVET and STEM education implementation should also be included in this effort.

c) Equitable access for women in business/economics and leadership.

There must be concentrated effort and assurance to open the doors for women to have better access to business, economics, and leadership opportunities. Besides policy measures and initiatives, this effort should include giving awareness and educating employers and managers on the significance of providing equitable access to women. The successful online business community also should be more involved in this effort by providing more offline outreach programs for disadvantaged women.

d) Best practice/lesson sharing by APEC and selected economies.

There should be more initiatives to share the best practices of other APEC economies in raising digital awareness, encouraging agility of women in technological advancements and increasing their fluency. A strong collaboration between APEC and selected organisations or economies to provide a suitable platform and expand the participation to various sectors and groups so that more women especially disadvantaged groups could benefit from the sharing session. A similar mentoring system that has been suggested in (a) could be developed as well in creating more effective sharing sessions.

APPENDIX I: Agenda of APEC conference on "Women's Leadership in the Digital Era: Agility, Adaptability and Fluency

Wednesday, 20 October 2021	
07.30AM – 08.00AM	**REGISTRATION AND TECHNICAL CHECK**
08.00AM – 08:05AM	**HOUSEKEEPING RULES**
08.05AM – 08:10AM	**WELCOME ADDRESS** *By H.E. Datuk Seri Rina binti Mohd Harun* *Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, Malaysia*
08.10AM – 08:15AM	**CONFERENCE OVERVIEW**
08.15AM – 08:20AM	**KEYNOTE ADDRESS** *Embracing the New Normal – How Digital Agility Can Help Women Leaders Succeed in the New Normal* *by Dr. Zurina binti Abdul Hamid, Director General, Department of Women Development, Malaysia*
08.20AM – 09.20AM	**FORUM SESSION I**
	EMBRACING THE NEW NORMAL: **HOW DIGITAL AGILITY CAN HELP WOMEN LEADERS SUCCEED IN THE NEW NORMAL** Moderator: Dr. Murni binti Wan Mohd Nor, Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Human Ecology, University Putra Malaysia (UPM) Speakers: 1. Making the New Normal a New Opportunity, Not a New Burden by Ms. En-chia Tsai, Co-Founder Bened Biomedical Co. Ltd, Chinese Taipei 2. Digital Agility in Business: Overcoming Challenges in the New Normal by Ibu Lenny N. Rosalin, Deputy Minister for Gender Equality, Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, Republic of Indonesia 3. Post Covid 19: Rebuilding/Strengthening Economies through Digital Agility and Leadership by Prof. Dato' Dr. Rashila

	Ramli, Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS), Malaysia 4. Focus on the Human: Opportunity and Leadership within the Organisation by Ms Atikah Amalina Mohd Zaini, DEI Program Manager at Google, Singapore
09.20AM – 09.50AM	**Q&A SESSION** **GROUP PHOTO SESSION**
09.50AM – 10.00AM	**CLOSING ANNOUNCEMENT AND BRIEFING FOR DAY 2**
Thursday, 21 October 2021	
07.30AM – 08.00AM	**REGISTRATION AND TECHNICAL CHECK**
08.00AM – 08.10AM	**OPENING SESSION (RECAP OF DAY 1)**
08.10AM – 08.15AM	**KEYNOTE ADDRESS** *Gender, Technology and The Future of Work* *by Mr. Thomas Mathew, Chief Executive Officer, TalentCorp Malaysia*
08.15AM – 08.45AM	**FORUM SESSION II**
	GENDER, TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE OF WORK Moderator: Dr Camellia Siti Maya Mohamed Razali, Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Human Ecology, University Putra Malaysia (UPM) Speakers: 1. The Challenges of Digital Agility and Gender Divide at Work by Ms. Izzana Salleh, Chief Executive Officer, RISE Human Capital Sdn. Bhd., Malaysia 2. Gender, Technology and the Future of Work by Ms. Joni Simpson, Senior Specialist on Gender, Equality and Non-Discrimination, International Labour Organization 3. Pre-Conference Survey Sharing Session by Dr. Zatul Himmah Adnan, Universiti Putra Malaysia
08.45AM – 09.00AM	**Q&A SESSION** **GROUP PHOTO SESSION**
09.00AM – 09.10AM	**BREAK**

09.10AM – 09.50AM	**BREAKOUT ROOMS**
	Room 1: Moderator: Prof Madya Dr Ratna Roshida Abd Razak (UPM) / Dr. Aini Azeqa Binti Ma'rof (UPM) Rapporteur: Abdul Faruq Manan Room 2: Moderator: Dr. Wan Munira Binti Wan Jaafar (UPM) / Dr Arfah binti Ab Majid (UPM) Rapporteur: Nasrina M. Samir Room 3: Dr Camellia Siti Maya Mohamed Razali (UPM) / Dr Mohamad Naqiuddin Bin Dahamat Azam (UPM) Rapporteur: Nadirah Zabidi Room 4: Ms Dayang Nurhazieqa Hamzani (UPM) / Dr Murni Wan Mohd Nor (UPM) Rapporteur: Chong Chai Yun
09.50AM – 10.20AM	**DISCUSSIONS ON BREAKOUT ROOM FINDINGS**
10.20AM – 10.25AM	**CLOSING REMARKS** *by Dr. Maziah binti Che Yusoff, Secretary General, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development*

: Post Conference Survey Feedback Chart

Day 1 Feedback
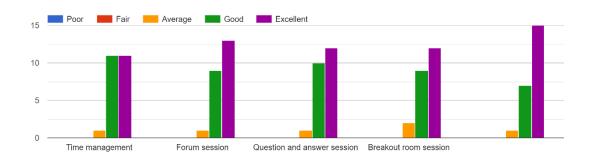
Organisation of the event

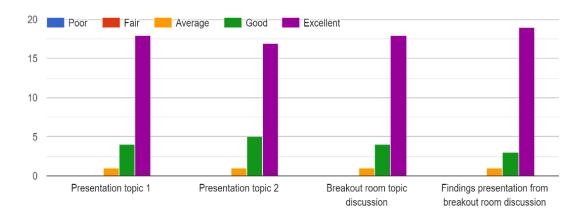### Please rate the quality of the conference content
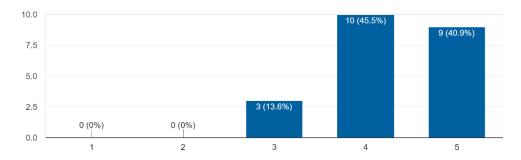
Day 2 Feedback

Organisation of the event

Please rate the quality of the conference content

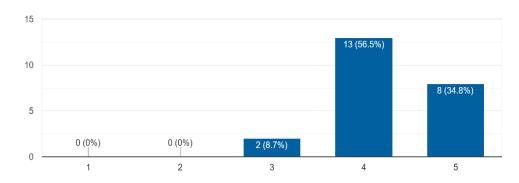# The awareness and knowledge on women and digital leadership

How would you rate your level of awareness regarding challenges of women's leadership in the digital era?
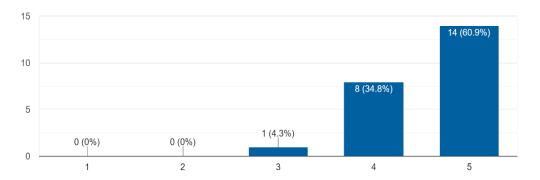
22 responses

Has your awareness regarding the challenges of women's leadership in the digital era improved after the conference?

23 responses

Do you feel the content of the conference has been helping in providing insight regarding how you can introduce/improve existing policies regarding w... in the digital area in your respective economies?
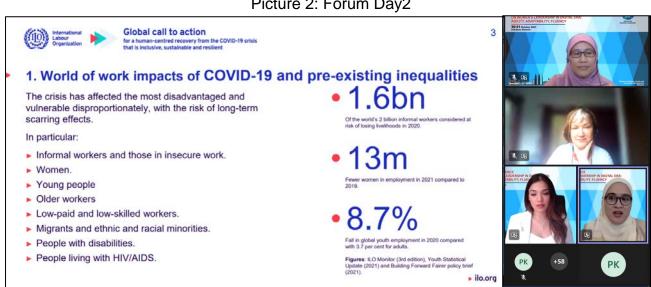
23 responses

APPENDIX III: Photos Gallery

Picture 1: Forum Day1

Picture 2: Forum Day2

Picture 3: Breakout Room session (4 rooms)

Room 1

Room 2

Room 3

Room 4

Picture 4: The Committee