

# ASEAN-Japan Women Entrepreneurs’ Linkage Program debuts in PH

**P**ROMISING women entrepreneurs from the ASEAN member-states and Japan gathered in Manila to participate in the inaugural ASEAN-Japan Women Entrepreneurs’ Linkage Program (AJWELP) organized by the ASEAN Promotion Centre on Trade, Investment and Tourism, or the ASEAN-Japan Centre (AJC), last November 22-23.

The program was co-hosted by the Department of Trade and Industry of the Philippines, in collaboration with the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (ACCMSME), ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ABAC) and Go Negosyo. The Asian Institute of Management (AIM) supported the program as the academic partner.

The two-day program held at the AIM campus in

Manila consisted four components—one-day learning program, one panel talk session, one business presentation and one networking reception.

The AJWELP started with the one-day special learning program coordinated by the AIM. Dr. Federico Macaranas from the institute discussed global value chains (GVCs) and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) with special emphasis on gender issues, as well as best business practices, which provided

insights for the participants on business from academic perspectives. It was followed by a workshop with AIM graduate students and a panel discussion attended by Pacita Juan, the chairperson of the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network.

In the panel talk session organized on the second day, experienced business women representing the ASEAN region and Japan shared their wisdom and experiences, including challenges at the time of start-up and during growth stage and how they successfully conquered those challenges as women and as entrepreneurs.

The main program of the AJWELP was the business presentation event following the panel talk. In the event, emerging ASEAN business women who were selected by the government of each ASEAN member-state and relevant agencies presented on

their businesses in front of established companies and successful women entrepreneurs who acted as supporting enterprises and mentors respectively. The companies and mentors were all volunteers who lent a helping hand to guide new entrepreneurs who were not only in the same industry but also in other or cross-sectional interfaces. Unlike other similar events, the AJWELP was not a competition to choose a winner. All participating entrepreneurs were given equal opportunities to meet with and find their own business supporters/mentors through the event.

The AJWELP successfully ended with a networking reception where the participants forged their linkages with supporting enterprises, mentors, academic partners and participating peers. In total, as many 45 linkages were created for 10 ASEAN women entrepreneurs.



Special learning program at the AIM



Business presentation



Panel talk session



Group photo of participants

## Message from Sandy Sanchez-Montano, Founder of Community Health Education Emergency Rescue Services (CHEERS) Corp.

I would like to congratulate the AJC for coming with a program for women entrepreneurs for ASEAN and its member states because it gives us a rare opportunity to bond and bench mark with each other.



The launching of the AJWELP was very timely and perfect for MSMEs, especially now that there is a massive outpouring support for women entrepreneurs in ASEAN. Japan being known as our Big Brother gave women a voice and that was meant to be heard by other women who have the same passion in life.

I was also fortunate to represent my country, the Philippines, last year for the AJC’s women entrepreneur exchange program, I noticed that there was great improvement in the AJWELP 2016 set up. The panel talk session of which I was the facilitator was a great way of sharing our journey as entrepreneurs complete with the pains, the heartaches, the trials, the love and support we get from our family, support group and the community, which we adopted and where the social impact of our work was mostly being felt.

My wish is that the two-day event will be a launching pad for all women entrepreneur to move up to the next level, to be known not only in their community for their services and their products that they will showcase to the world. The event was very engaging and personally, being part of the organizing committee, it makes my heart grow fonder after seeing the women empowered, with their little girl’s dream into turning into reality.

My salute to the AJC and I am looking forward to the next AJWELP!

## Message from Federico Macaranas, Ph.D. Chairperson, Economics Department Asian Institute of Management

Two days of intensive sharing and friendly critique of business ideas created lasting impressions on women entrepreneurs and graduate management students when they gathered at the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) last 22-23 November 2016. The enthusiastic women presenters from nine ASEAN countries and Japan mixed well with the equally energetic graduating MBA and MDM participants from the AIM course on Regional Integration in Asia.



To prepare for the project, the ASEAN-Japan Centre visited AIM’s Makati campus last April. Immediately, it became obvious what the role of AIM would be – not only as a venue for the event but as a substantive contributor to the program. AIM President and Dean Jikyeong Kang stressed the business and society focus of the Institute, noting that AJWELP is perfectly timed because AIM had just re-introduced the Master in Entrepreneurship (ME) program.

As academic partner, I therefore designed the first day to make sure participants had a short lecture/ discussion and a workshop; it involved over 30 of our graduate business and development management students scrutinizing the projects of the women delegates.

The program was further enriched in a lively discussion led by an afternoon panel of three women entrepreneurs with various experiences; one of them, Pacita (Chit) Juan, is the current chair person of the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network.

Finally, in the evening, the delegates were honored with the presence of the Philippines’ former President Fidel Ramos who inaugurated the ASEAN Society Philippines earlier that same afternoon. He was joined by the first ASEAN woman Foreign Affairs Secretary, Ambassador Delia Albert, who is spearheading the people-to-people movement in the Philippines for ASEAN. This paves the way for closer ties with ASEAN-Japan Centre especially in 2017 when the Philippines hosts the 50th anniversary celebration of ASEAN’s founding.

AIM serves as the Secretariat of the ASEAN Society Philippines. It looks forward to case-writing projects and delivering training programs, especially related to the ASEAN and Japan women enterprises.

## PROMOTING GENDER PERSPECTIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION

THE ASEAN-Japan Centre is an intergovernmental organization established by the ASEAN member states and Japan in 1981. It has been working to promote economic partnership in trade, investment and tourism, as well as promoting exchanges of persons between the two parties. As part of its exchange promotion activity, the Centre has annually organized an exchange program among women entrepreneurs in the ASEAN Member States and Japan since 2014.

“Since I assumed the post of Secretary General of the ASEAN-Japan Centre in September 2015, I have committed to promoting a gender perspective in Centre’s activities as it contributes to the sustainable development of the region,” Secretary General Masataka Fujita of the ASEAN-Japan Centre explained during an exclusive interview with *The Manila Times*.

He explained that as the international community contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were adopted in 2015 at the United Nations, ASEAN is making efforts to create a people-centered, people-oriented community; ASEAN women entrepreneurs are also expected to play an active role in it. Women, however, continue to represent an under-utilized pool of entrepreneurial talent. Therefore, he continued, enhancing human capital development for women MSMEs is advocated in the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025 and the ASEAN Strategic Action

Plan for SME Development (SAP SMED) also highlights the need of promotion of women entrepreneurs through capacity building, market access, branding and packaging (Action Line E-2-2-2).

In response to this, the Centre launched the AJWELP, which is a renewed exchange program for women entrepreneurs designed to include various approaches to empower them as well as provide them with a platform for a meet-up with private companies that could become their supporting enterprises, mentors and academic partners, and help them support each other with their knowledge and resources for sustainable development.

Fujita mentioned that there are three areas in which the Centre can orient itself toward furthering women entrepreneurship in ASEAN and strengthening the partnership between ASEAN and Japanese women entrepreneurs.

One area is to establish a network on women entrepreneurs in ASEAN and Japan to exchange best practices and share experiences in overcoming gender-related problems and expanding their own businesses. The Centre’s past exchange programs for women entrepreneurs rather focused on this aspect.

The second area is how the Centre can support women’s business start-ups and provide training that can help such businesses to grow. The comprehensive training program is

required if the objective is to foster women entrepreneurship.

Third, women entrepreneurs should be more linked formally with the big or established companies. Some transnational corporations (TNCs) have already supported women’s empowerment through the provision of training, skill upgrading and the promotion of gender non-discrimination policies and actions within their businesses. Linking women entrepreneurs with TNCs is another strong venue to propagate gender equality in businesses.

The business presentation of the AJWELP, which pursued to foster voluntary support linkages, was close to this third area, but the approach was different, he said.

“Formal establishment of the linkage between local SMEs and TNCs requires involvement of the central or local government as has been seen in Malaysia and Thailand. On the other hand, linkage formation on a voluntary basis does not necessarily lead to concrete results such as business expansion and transfer of technology to women entrepreneurs, but they operate free from any constraints, and many parts of SME businesses grow by chance.” As voluntary linkage and formal linkage have benefits respectively, he emphasized that both are important.

Fujita also stressed that women entrepreneurs are powerful agents of change, the change that can contribute to sustainable development.



Masataka Fujita, Secretary General of the ASEAN-Japan Centre

Women business persons tend to be engaged more in sustainable development sectors and, even if engaged in different sectors, pay more attention to corporate social responsibility and should contribute to sustainable development. Therefore, he continued, the AJWELP is also designed to contribute to sustainable development by emphasizing more socially responsible entrepreneurship.

In conclusion, Fujita said, “The ASEAN-Japan Centre will continue to assist in creating links between ASEAN women entrepreneurs through the ASEAN-Japan Women Entrepreneurs’ Linkage Program because we believe that by creating links, ASEAN women entrepreneurs could grow far. With the many challenges these women are facing, support from the big companies would be of great help until the linkages are established formally.”



# Junko Kemi, the woman behind *kay me*

**I**NFLUENCED by her grandmother who used to own a kimono shop in Osaka, Japan, Junko Kemi, established *kay me*, a Japanese clothing brand that specializes in women's business wear inspired by the traditional kimono design.

"My grandmother owned a kimono shop in Osaka. She influenced me in establishing *kay me*," Kemi shared as one of the speakers during the recent ASEAN-Japan Women Entrepreneurs' Linkage Program (AJWELP) held at the Asian Institute of Management in the Philippines.

Kemi explained, "One of the many lessons my grandmother taught me was to do something for others to help them achieve their goals. She used to tell me that the goal of life is not to

focus on attaining lovely things for yourself but how you can give to others. That will be your legacy. This customer centric mantra that I learned from my grandmother was essential in my creation of *kay me*." She added, "*kay me* means Kemi, my family name, and 'me' symbolizes our customers. That's why our products are specially made for our customers' specific needs."

All products of *kay me* are 100 percent manufactured by skilled artisans in Japan and over 90 per-

cent of *kay me* items are made in Tokyo. The motto of *kay me* is simple—"instant elegance with day-long comfort." Founder and lead designer, Kemi used to be a marketing consultant working in various organizations including PwC and the Boston Consulting Group, before she launched her own consultancy, maojian works at age 31.

After the Japan March 11, 2011 earthquake, Kemi decided to follow her true passion and founded *kay me* in 2011 in Ginza, Tokyo. That was also the time when she realized that there is a market for career women across the globe who are looking for suitable, elegant and comfortable work wear that will give them confidence throughout their

busy schedule.

"I always wanted to make my own clothes so I developed a brand where I thought of myself as the customer because after studying the market, I learned that there are a lot of busy career women like myself who need comfortable clothes," she explained. Now, *kay me* has five stores in Japan and an international web site delivering globally.

For Kemi, joining ASEAN-Japan Women Entrepreneurs' Linkage Program for the first time is a privilege and an honor. AJWELP aims at empowering ASEAN women entrepreneurs to build the networks with supporting enterprises, successful women entrepreneurs who can be their mentors and AJWELP peers.



Junko Kemi, Founder and Lead Designer of *kay me*

"AJWELP is a unique concept. I learned a lot from this program and networking with other ASEAN and Japan entrepreneurs will give me more opportunities to improve my business while my counterparts can also learn from my experience as a founder and designer of *kay me*," explained Kemi.

Although Kemi is a supporter of women empowerment, the young designer also reminded participants that the world comprises 50 percent women and 50 percent men, and that's why she suggested that the ASEAN-Japan Centre should also launch the same program but with participating men entrepreneurs so that they will learn from the op-

posite sex.

She also shared how ASEAN women should be open to possibilities and changes. In fact, she has been studying English language for a year now and her company is conducting English lessons with her employees to be able to communicate well with other nationalities.

Kemi is hopeful that with the help of ASEAN-Japan Centre, many dreams of ASEAN women entrepreneurs will be realized. On the other hand, she believes that just like the enduring elegance of the kimono, *kay me* will endure, expand and evolve to the ever-changing needs of modern women.

## DK KEMARIAH PG HJ DURAMAN

### The cosmopolitan and corporate traveler is also a successful tour guide and homestay operator

THINK of Brunei and you imagine golden mosques and streets paved in gold...

To Dayangku Kemariah, one of the presenters of the business presentation of the AJWELP, there is definitely more to Brunei than just that. "We have lush forests, for those who like to trek, and water villages too, where tourists from all over the world can experience a different side of Brunei, that is steeped in tradition and culture."

Kunyit 7 Lodge is situated in the renowned Kampong Ayer in Brunei Darussalam, owned and managed hands on by Dk Kemariah herself. "Before the thirty-year-old house was converted into a homestay, it was our home – where the family lived, where our children were born and grew up in. Where kids in the neighborhood swam to their hearts' content. And it is all within the perimeter of the water village at the Brunei Bay, where the fishing village is located."

Her entrepreneurial spirit was spurred by her years of related marketing experience in the hospitality, and airline industry and gave her the novel idea of offering a homestay to travelers, tourists who like to explore a different kind of Brunei. "I love to sail, trek and this is what I offer extra to my guests. When guests book for a short stay at my place, I offer either nature attractions like a trip to the rain forest, boatride, walking in the surrounding area of the Water Village as the sun begins to set or under the starry night skies which is a romantic exercise."

"The homestay concept will bring life to the community center, provide livelihood

to the local boatmen, and also showcase Brunei hospitality to the whole world, so I said why not?" she said. The homegrown homestay concept of Dk Kemariah underwent renovation from December 2014 to February 2015 and then it officially opened, with an irresistible added value.

Her participation after being successfully selected by the AJWELP has given her immense opportunity to share to the rest of the ASEAN neighbors, women like herself, the other side of Brunei and how local tourism can even be further promoted across the seas. "The AJWELP is a wonderful platform where there is community sharing, where women entrepreneurs from the ASEAN countries can share best practices, connect, either to partner with or find mentors to help us grow our business even more." "In particular, the business presentation was very heartwarming as the women shared their passion in their business and the community." She views the AJWELP as a philanthropist that encourages women to go beyond business matters and actually imbibe in their core values corporate social responsibility. "Each one of us women attending the AJWELP is unique but even in our uniqueness we share a common ground. We are strong, focused, motivated because we know that we now have a voice who will listen and understand our needs."

"We can learn a lot from each other, as cultures play a big role in women gender development. I truly look forward to the opportunity too, of the continuity of this program and future exchange of ideas and cultures in Japan."



Dk. Kemariah Pg. Hj Duraman, Proprietor of Kunyit 7 Lodge

#### Message from Jose Ma. Concepcion III President and Chief Executive Officer, RFM Corporation Chairman of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC)



The ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC) has been given a prominent role by the ASEAN Leaders as highlighted in the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025. Launched in April 2003, ASEAN-BAC has been mandated to serve as the APEX Private Sector Body in processing and coordinating various priority AEC policy issues and recommendations with private sector groups, the ASEAN Secretariat and other ASEAN bodies that would impact on ASEAN's economic integration.

The launching of the ASEAN-Japan Women Entrepreneurs' Linkage Program (AJWELP) is a great milestone for the ASEAN-Japan Centre, which was established in 1981, and has built on the ASEAN-Japan partnership dating back to 1973. The AJWELP is a great opportunity for women entrepreneurs in ASEAN to connect with established companies to learn and improve their businesses toward sustainable growth.

Some of the program objectives of AJWELP are aligned with the ASEAN BAC Businesswomen Working Group (ABBWG) objectives in ensuring effective communication and partnership between ASEAN-BAC and businesswomen related organizations within and outside ASEAN. One major focus is on mentorship and advisory in the areas of access to finance, markets, innovation and other key aspects of running a successful and responsible business enterprise.

The exchange program is a positive contribution for the empowerment of ASEAN women entrepreneurs, especially those in the technological sector. In 2015, imports and exports of goods between ASEAN and Japan reached 9.6%. The exchange program could help penetrate and build on that figure as ASEAN and Japan deepen their collaboration and networking as initiated by the AJWELP.

#### Message from Ameenah Fajardo Assistant Secretary Department of Trade and Industry



Mabuhay!

It was my pleasure to witness a diverse and vibrant crowd who gathered together for the first ASEAN-Japan Women Entrepreneurs' Linkage Program (AJWELP). I am impressed at how everyone worked together toward the goal of empowering women entrepreneurs.

Congratulations to the ASEAN-Japan Centre (AJC) for organizing the first AJWELP. We are very honored and privileged to host this year's program in the Philippines.

The first AJWELP has afforded us an opportunity to listen to the insightful knowledge and successful inspirational business stories from women entrepreneurs and mentors around the ASEAN region and Japan.

The AJC has, indeed, brought valuable learning experience to the Philippines and the ASEAN countries. On behalf of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), I express my deep appreciation to all of the people behind AJC and also, of the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) for making this event possible.

We hope to continue to work together to meet the challenges and take advantage of the myriad of opportunities that will come. We hope to continue to be allies in championing women entrepreneurship in the ASEAN region and Japan to attain inclusive growth.

Now is the best time to become part of the continuing growth story of women entrepreneurs all around the globe. I am filled with anticipation and look forward to witnessing another successful AJWELP in the coming years.



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# ASEAN-Japan Centre

(ASEAN Promotion Centre on Trade, Investment and Tourism)

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