

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

Advancing Free Trade for Asia-Pacific **Prosperity**

APEC Forum on Digital Innovation and Entrepreneurship (II): Building Capacity and Collaborative Connectivity for Young Entrepreneurs

APEC Human Resources Development Working Group
October 2021



APEC Forum on Digital Innovation and Entrepreneurship (II): Building Capacity and Collaborative Connectivity for Young Entrepreneurs

Summary Report

APEC Human Resources Development Working Group

October 2021

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Produced by

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For

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INTRODUCTION

1. BACKGROUND

Chinese Taipei held this 3-day virtual event "APEC Forum on Digital Innovation and Entrepreneurship (II): Building Capacity and Collaborative Connectivity for Young Entrepreneurs" from 12 to 14 July 2021.

This three-day forum, a crucial component of the project, focused on the issues of youth employability and female labour force participation and proposed the enhancement of digital skills and the cultivation of innovative entrepreneurship as principle measures to boost youth employment in this digital age.

The objective of this project was to create a platform that encouraged the sharing and discussion of best practices, processes of project implementation, knowledge, business trends, and regional start-up ideas and experiences. This project aimed to encourage digital innovation and female entrepreneurship, strengthening the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem to provide a supportive environment for young entrepreneurs within the APEC region.

2. MEETING PLATFORM

Microsoft Teams was chosen to be the online platform this time, the platform that was used for the APEC SOM2 meeting. MS Teams is an easily accessible and stable platform.

3. SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT DATES

Task	Date
Registration deadline	02 May 2021
Test Runs	 05 July 2021 06 July 2021
Virtual forum	12 to 14 July 2021

4. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The outcomes expected to be achieved through the project are as follows:

 Participants from the APEC region will be fully immersed in and educated on the startup environment in Chinese Taipei. This will be achieved through an introduction of related programs that have been successfully implemented here, the sharing of experiences by local and regional start-ups, and visits to successful start-up companies, incubators and accelerators.

- 2) The encouragement and empowerment of female participation in the entrepreneurial market through the introduction of successful female entrepreneurs from non-traditional sectors such as AI, IoT, biotechnology, or new media. By sharing their start-up journeys, their business models, and detailing the efforts they put into their business as well as the obstacles encountered as female founders, participants from the region, especially female participants, will be inspired by their experiences and better understand the required capacities of being a successful entrepreneur in the digital age.
- 3) The participants' knowledge of innovative and digital entrepreneurship will be broadened as the CEOs of successful start-ups, incubators and accelerators will be invited as forum keynote speakers. The awareness of technological trends and the business knowledge the participants acquire through this will be the cornerstone for them to develop their own business that will then benefit the regional economy.
- 4) Through the introduction, dissemination and exchange of innovative youth and entrepreneurship related programs, facilities and best practices in the APEC region, and educational visits to successful start-ups, incubation centers or accelerators, the project will be key to creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem to provide a supportive environment for young entrepreneurs that will encourage them to start their own businesses in the region.

SUMMARY OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

1. OUTPUT

A three-day online forum was held as the output of the project. This project carries out forum activities under the framework of the APEC to enable young entrepreneurs, young entrepreneurs-to-be and university students from APEC member economies to obtain knowledge and skills for digital entrepreneurship, and to further promote collaborative connectivity among economies and participants. This forum was developed to build capacity for emergent entrepreneurship through the transfer and development of knowledge, skills and technical know-how between experienced entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs-to-be from various economies in the Asia-Pacific. Below are the detailed descriptions of each session's presentation. Due to the pandemic, we unfortunately could not have an in-person event as originally intended. However, the resulting virtual event was successful and provided exceptional opportunities for participant development.

1.1 Day 1

The forum opened with a digital performance recorded by Yi Xin Creative Entertainment, representing the innovative spirit of youth entrepreneurship. We were also very honoured to have Dr. Dong Sun PARK, the Lead Shepherd of APEC Human Resource Development Working Group (HRDWG) to deliver a pre-recorded opening remark to all participants.

The keynote speech was delivered by Wei-Shuan Chang, the founder and CEO of Womany. Womany is the first popular gender-oriented media community in Asia. Ms. Chang is regarded as the key opinion leader in female leadership and entrepreneurship across Asia. She is listed in the top 20 influential women in Chinese Taipei by the local newspaper Digi Times. Her keynote speech was dynamic and interactive, inviting all participants to express their innovative ideas and thinking. One delegate from the Philippines, Alonzo Miranda, shared her vision to create financial literacy for everyone by launching free education videos. A Russian delegate, Stanislav Gazul, shared the importance of social networks and having online feedback at all time. This feedback highlights the growing digital skills of the youth in this region.

Following the keynote speech, two successful young entrepreneurs shared their start-up experiences in the APEC region. The first speaker was Andy Peng, CEO and co-founder of Surreal, a company dedicated to revolutionizing the current education system using AR/VR. His company's innovative digital system helps teachers bring the flipped classroom into the new digital age. The second speaker was Jeff Hu, co-founder and CEO of Turing Chain, a company that utilizes blockchain to offer a repository for certificates. Despite the economic downturn that resulted from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, his company was able to grow because of the growing need of digital certificates. Not only was this a market-driven growth, but it also legitimized online learning by providing authenticated credentials helping to increase educational opportunities and help solve education inequalities.

After, the forum showcased U-start Plan, a program promoting youth innovation and entrepreneurship that was launched by the Youth Development Administration in the Ministry of Education, in Chinese Taipei. Since 2019, this program has given birth to 717 start-up companies that have allowed 2,880 people to achieve their entrepreneurial dreams, and has accumulated 1.7 billion in funds raised. This ongoing and successful program combines the momentum of the government and industry with the incubation and innovation resources of colleges and universities, with 80% of higher education institutes in Chinese Taipei participating. In the first stage, innovative plans submitted by university students are eligible to receive US\$ 11,000 in subsidies. In the second stage, another US\$ 8,000-32,000 is available to be awarded to selected start-ups. This program has proven to be highly effective in motivating and assisting youth in Chinese Taipei to start their own business without the burden of having to secure seed funding. We hope that this model can be shared throughout the region to help developing economies to improve their entrepreneurship environment.

Day 1 of the forum concluded with an address by a journalist at MEET, a Chinese Taipeibased start-up community. MEET reports on ambitious local start-ups that aim to go global, as well as covering the latest news in the local start-up environment. Their annual flagship event, "Meet Taipei Startup Festival", takes place every November and has become one of the largest start-up conferences in Asia. In their address they welcome all our delegates to join their virtual conference this year.

1.2 Day 2

The second day of the event was the Youth Entrepreneurship Contest. A total 13 teams consisting of students and entrepreneurs-to-be from Chinese Taipei presented their innovative digital start-up plans. Awards were given to the best presentations and business pitches that showed the most creativity and potential.

Four entrepreneurial experts were invited as judges and to provide contestants with professional feedback on their ideas.:

- Jackey Wang (500 Startups Venture Partner)
- Jack Shih-Lung Chao (Silicon Valley Entrepreneur Association)
- Eric Chuang (Chenco Holding Company)
- Dr. Michael Ho (TTA)

Each team was allocated 6 minutes to present their start-up ideas followed by a 4-minute question period during which the judges asked about the start-up business structure and feasibility. Due to time limitations, we asked online participants to leave their questions in the chat room where they were collated and used in the networking session of the forum.

In the networking session several delegates from other economies shared the challenges they encountered along their own entrepreneurship journeys and steps they took to overcome challenges and persevere to become successful businesses.

Feedback from participants was positive, with many suggesting that the information presented and the context given would be influential in their own entrepreneurial journeys. Ana Isabel Perez Gaona, a female participant from Mexico was a returning participant and said she was honoured to participate in the forum for the second time. She felt that she was able to deepen her understanding of entrepreneurship and would be able to apply this in her goals of helping youth employment in Mexico.

Another female participant, Nguyen Thuy Hien from Viet Nam, shared the struggles she had encountered on her path. She had to date failed several times to secure funding or awards in entrepreneurial contests, and importantly had no feedback or interaction with mentors or judges that could to give her team advice. She felt that the interactive component of our forum was important, with all 4 judges providing her useful advice on improving her pitches. She said their support of her innovative and competitive product, combined with feedback on management, markets, and risk assessment would be important in helping her take the next steps in developing her business by finally allowing her to focus on the weaknesses. The networking session successfully met the forum's intended outcome: to provide a supportive environment for young entrepreneurs and encourage them to start their own businesses in the region. This event inspired the youth participants to take the first step on their entrepreneurial journey.

The contest concluded with an awards ceremony and closing remarks by Prof. Michael Tanangkingsing and Prof. Eric Yen-Liang Lin, the project overseers of this APEC event.

1.3 Day 3

The last day of the event had three sessions. We first introduced an entrepreneurship program specifically designed for females, had experience sharing with two successful female entrepreneurs, and finally held a virtual tour of a lab focused on sustainable development in the entrepreneurial marketplace.

The Women Entrepreneurship Program is a program initiated by MOEA in Chinese Taipei that aims to promote female involvement in and access to entrepreneurial ventures. We invited Hannah Chou to talk to participants about how women can overcome existing challenges and create viable businesses. As an entrepreneur, start-up mentor, female community builder, leadership facilitator, advocate for women in tech, and this year the U.S. Department of State's Facilitator for the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs, she was able to provide not only encouragement but importantly tangible advice on what female entrepreneurs-to-be can do to maximize their business potential.

In her presentation, she analysed the current situation of female entrepreneurship in the Asia-Pacific region. Chinese Taipei is ranked No.1 in Asia in the Women, Business and the Law Index. In this index, the most developed industry in Chinese Taipei is Retail & Distribution, in which women occupy 51% of the workforce. This is an example of a sector that has reached gender parity and is a sign that Chinese Taipei is taking serious inequities in the marketplace for women.

Ms. Chou also talked about the unique challenges female entrepreneurs' encounter. The gender inequality and unfavourable business environment are the most difficult part. In 2019, only 40,000 female applicants got approved for bank loans, compared to 73,000 males being approved. Another unique challenge is funding. She reported that 61% of business owned by women are sole ownership, which is not a good sign as having no co-founder means that either start-up capital is less for female-owned businesses or that women have to risk more of their own money to make a business work when compared to men.

She then showcased the 5 pillars of economic empowerment for women:

- Access to Markets
- Access to Capital

- Skills & Capacity Building
- Female Leadership
- Innovation & Technology

We believe that this presentation showcased a model for future female-led entrepreneurial endeavours that will not only help build successful businesses, but importantly assist other economies to build or facilitate similar programs in their region and hopefully to strengthen the growth of inclusivity in the business environment region-wide.

In the second session, two successful female entrepreneurs shared their start-up experiences in the APEC region. The first speaker was Lydia Hsiao-Mei Lin, co-founder of HEX Safety, a company that uses the active dynamic signage system (ADSS) to provide faster and more effective notification to those in danger in a building. She has participated in many women in tech communities to advocate for gender equality. In 2015, She led a gamified education app project for entrepreneurs called Women Economic boss (WEboss) and presented at the APEC Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy (PPWE) in Manila (2015) and Peru (2016). The second speaker was Red Weng, founder of the company SKY-RED, the magazine EVENT 365, and the website SHOWOW. SKY-RED is a Marketing & Communications company which specializes in event planning, graphic design, commercial performances, and exhibitions. Participants found Red Weng's accounts of her challenges and successes to be very encouraging, particularly her guidance on how successful businesses could be created with minimal start-up capital if the right steps are taken.

The last session of the day was a visit to Social Innovation Lab. Social Innovation Lab (SIL) was founded to create an open, empirical and sustainable field to help businesses meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and cultivate diverse social innovation models. It provides exhibition space and event venues to enhance the public's awareness of social innovation with the goal of making social innovation a new force driving the economy. In this visit participants were introduced to one of their key programs and got to meet two of the teams working in this lab.

Two recent success stories coming out of the SIL is TACC+ and Kiipo. TACC+ is the newest public acceleration program at SIL. It provides full spectrum customer driven acceleration programs focusing on IoT and healthcare. This uniquely designed program is sponsored by Chinese Taipei to elevate the competitiveness of local start-ups by providing entrepreneurial infrastructure designed for local teams. A start-up company that benefited from the services of TACC+ is Aquivio. Aquivio is a company that is creating a new platform to re-integrate natural principles of healthier and sustainable hydration into our modern life by means of smart technology.

Kiipo is a global health-technology company aimed at leveraging technological innovations to tackle global healthcare disparity. During the visit an informative talk was

given by Jessica Ianniciello, the Head of Education at Kiipo as well as Managing Director at PhysioQ (US/Canada), a non-profit organization that creates affordable and easy-to-learn research tools for health research and health science.

On the last day of the event, we integrated female entrepreneurship program and many cross-regional cooperation stories to help participants see how all the information presented and the tangible advice provided throughout the forum fits together. After, the participants had a better understanding of the journey ahead of them, specifically the required competencies for successful entrepreneurial ventures in the digital age. Participants reported not only having learned from this experience but also a desire to continue being involved in similar future fora.

2. INDICATORS

Indicators	Planned	Actual
Workshops / events	1	1
Economies attended	15	12
Participants (M/F)	150 (75/75)	205 (76/129)
Participants from travel-eligible economies (M/F)	8 (4/4)	0 (0/0)
Participants funded by APEC (M/F)	60 (30/30)	0 (0/0)
Speakers/experts engaged (M/F)	8 (4/4)	12 (6/6)
APEC-funded speakers/experts (M/F)	0 (0/0)	0 (0/0)
Other organizations engaged	0	1
Businesses and/or academic organizations engaged	5	5
Surveys	1	1
Recommendations/best practices/action plans	5	5
Reports	1	1
Other outputs (websites, etc) : website	1	1

Below are indicators that we used for the evaluation of the project.

2.1 Economy of participants and speakers / experts

Economy (of Participants)	Male	Female	Total
Canada	1	1	2
Indonesia	0	13	13
Japan	2	1	3

Malaysia	15	54	69
Mexico	0	2	2
New Zealand	1	0	1
Peru	3	0	3
Philippines	2	0	2
Russia	2	1	3
Chinese Taipei	43	43	86
United States	2	5	7
Viet Nam	5	9	14
Participants (Total)	76	129	205
Economy (of Speakers / Experts)	Male	Female	Total
Chinese Taipei	6	6	12
Speakers/Experts (Total)	6	6	12

2.2 Gender



CONCLUSION

1. KEY FINDINGS

- 1) Gender impact: When reviewing the registration data, we found the number of female participants increased significantly when compared to our previous events. This growth was beyond our expectation. We had a total of 205 participants this year, of which 129 (62.9%) were female. In some developing economies the ratios of female participants was even higher than the average, such as Indonesia (100%), Mexico (100%), and Malaysia (78.2%). One participant from Mexico said that she liked "the approach towards the development of women. Now these are women's times, especially in Latin America." This shows the current trend of entrepreneurship is moving towards inclusive growth, and the events in our projects has shown to be effective in promoting awareness of gender equity and gender issues in entrepreneurship.
- 2) Successful Stories about female entrepreneurship: In this event, we showcased 8 best practices in the field of entrepreneurship, 4 of which were from female entrepreneurs. The keynote speech and the successful stories presented by Wei Shuan Chang, the founder of Womany, has been described by the participants as "inspiring and mindopening". The participants from different economies learned several elements of entrepreneurship: actions and execution, resources, collaboration, gender-equality, and the most importantly, pitching demonstration. The post-event survey shows that 100% of participants agreed the speakers were well prepared and knowledgeable about the topics. Panellists for the female entrepreneurship session shared their entrepreneurial journey and the regional resources that they leveraged to grow their start-up businesses. During this discussion it was a consensus among the panellists that money wasn't the most important thing entrepreneurs must have. For example, Red Chuen-Min Weng, founder of SKY-RED, founded her first company with only USD 200. With limited resources, these successful entrepreneurs still strived to start up their own businesses. It is suggested that the ability to manage with few resources should be of utmost importance, and teaching young entrepreneurs to focus on solutions to hurdles made these talks inspiring.
- 3) **Cultivating Skills Virtually:** The post-event survey shows that 96.3% of participants found the project relevant to their economy. Representatives from different economies responded that even though it was a virtual event, it proved to be beneficial in helping youth and women increase awareness of and cultivate necessary digital skills to be successful. Not only did they learn important information about the world of business, in particular business development in the digital age, but they were also able to have hands on practice with digital skills through the online webinar system to fulfil cross-regional communication and networking. The survey found that 50% of participants were planning on developing new procedures, formulating new policies and business plans, or writing

more specific business models. A head from a Malaysian institute said they will "adopt the program's execution and organize it in my institution in a smaller scale because my students will definitely benefit from it." They will also try to invite speakers from Chinese Taipei to enhance the cross-regional cultivation and the building of capacity through collaborative connectivity.

4) CHALLENGES

This event was originally planned to an in-person event in 2020. However, the unexpected COVID-19 outbreak required us to re-examine how the event could take place. In the interest of safety, the original event was postponed until 2021. Our original solution was to host a hybrid event, with local participants gathered for an in-person conference and joined virtually by overseas participants. This plan was then disrupted by the increasing severity of the outbreak, which turned into a global pandemic, and had to be again re-formulated into a fully virtual event. To accomplish this we had to quickly adjust the agenda and shorten speech time so participants to compensate for the reality of online events, where attention spans are reduced and energy levels are not maintained as in in-person events. This challenge created numerous problems that we had to overcome, but in the end we feel strongly about what was accomplished and how this virtual format paves the way for similar future events.

The project overseer and the organizing team are very grateful for the APEC member economies and Secretariat for their kind assistant and support throughout the process, especially for the secretariat's guidance on virtual event hosting guidelines.

5) ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

In the post-event survey, we received mostly positive feedback on the event. Some participants gave us great ideas on areas to maximize potential of further events:

Time for participants' presentation

- "Hope to have more time for youth's presentation."
- "Maybe longer pitching time."
- "Extra presentation time for participants."
- "I did not like that due to time constraints there was sometimes no space for the panellists to answer our questions."

Interaction for speakers and participants

- "It is difficult that in online events you can interact with the attendees. It would have been great to have a space to do it."
- "More interaction with online, maybe divide into break rooms of 4 persons."

Diversity of speakers

- "Invite speakers from other economies."

- "It was a great event taking into account the current Covid situation around the world; however, I consider that face-to-face events allow more interaction and give the opportunity to get to know our different cultures."

We will take these opinions into account and will make necessary adjustments to our future events:

- We will research other entrepreneurship contests and extend the pitching time accordingly. We will also allocate more time for the Q&A session.
- Due to the pandemic, it's really difficult to have face-to-face interaction. We will arrange break room discussion session to see if we can improve the interaction and engagement.
- We will invite speakers from various APEC economies and also participants / teams to join the next entrepreneurship contest.

APPENDIX - PHOTOS

Day 1

Opening Performance



Group Photo



Opening Remarks

Prof. Dong Sun Park, APEC HRDWG Lead Shepherd



Keynote Speech Wei Shuan Chang, Founder of Womany



APEC Regional Start-up Experience Sharing Andy Tsu-Wei Peng, CEO of Surreal



Entrepreneurial Resources in APEC Region

U-start Plan for Innovation and Entrepreneurship



Day 2

Introduction of the Jury

Jackey Wang, 500 Startups Venture Partner



Jack Shih-Lung Chao, SVEAT



Eric Chuang, Chenco Holding Company



Group Presentation











Regional Youth Networking Session





Award Ceremony

Dr. Michael Tanangkingsing, Project Overseer



Closing Remark

Dr. Eric Yen-Liang Lin, Project Overseer



Day 3 Hannah Chou, Women Entrepreneurship Program







Introduction of Social Innovation Lab



Red Chuen-Min Weng, Founder of SHOWOW





