



# CELEBRATING THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNITY



## VOICES: Bulletin of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community

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one vision  
one identity  
one community

# The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community: Working towards a Dynamic and Resilient ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community



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On the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ASEAN, I am pleased to present to you this inaugural issue of "VOICES": Bulletin of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community as a new quarterly publication of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). "VOICES" showcases the commitment of the ASCC Department towards building the ASEAN Community, thus reaching out to the peoples of ASEAN to keep them informed on issues that have direct impact on their lives.

Over the past 50 years, ASEAN has made great stride in improving the quality of life of its people. With the establishment of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community and adoption of the ASCC Blueprint 2025 in late 2015, this commitment has been given a renewed impetus.

The ASCC Blueprint seeks to build a community that engages and benefits the people, and is inclusive, sustainable, resilient and dynamic. Fifteen sectoral bodies under the ASCC have been working relentlessly toward these common goals. Our work touches upon as diverse areas as rural development and poverty eradication, women and children, labour, education, health, culture and arts, environment, disaster management and humanitarian assistance.

To illustrate this, here are some of the issues "VOICES" can bring to the fore:

On disaster management, ASEAN is able to effectively respond to natural disasters through the *"ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN One Response: ASEAN Responding to Disasters as One in the Region and Outside the Region"*.

On labour, ASEAN provides better work environment through the *"Vientiane Declaration on Transition from Informal Employment to Formal Employment towards Decent Work Promotion in ASEAN"* which articulates the necessary concrete actions towards such transition in ASEAN Member States.

On education, the *"ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out-of-School Children and Youth"* strengthens education services targeted for this vulnerable group.

On health, ASEAN promotes the culture of healthy lifestyle among its people, also ensuring the quality of food products produced and traded within ASEAN through the *"ASEAN Food Safety Regulatory Framework"* (AFSRF).

On culture, the *"Vientiane Declaration on Reinforcing Cultural Heritage Cooperation in ASEAN"* aims to protect, preserve and promote our cultural heritage for our next generations.

In 2016, ASEAN established the new ASCC Analysis and Monitoring Directorate within the ASCC Department with the aim to support ASEAN Member States in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the ASCC Blueprint.

"VOICES" is a product of the Directorate. For this inaugural issue, we focus on the theme of poverty reduction and inequality so as to provide readers with an overview on ASEAN's commitment in addressing these challenges.

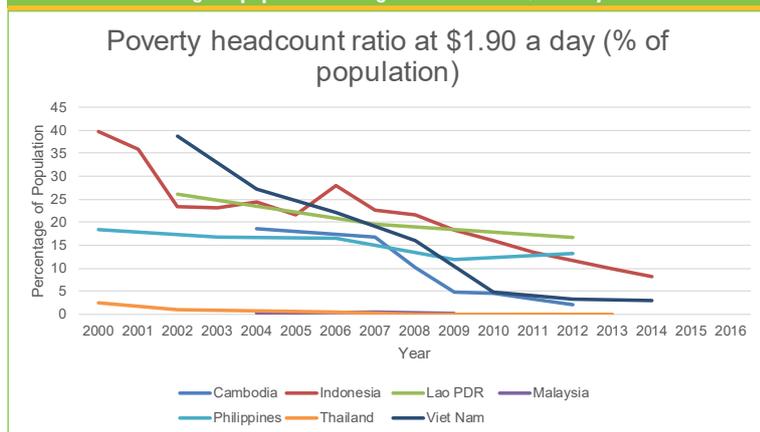
This issue of the Bulletin also features the complementarities between the ASCC Blueprint and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), enabling for a clearer understanding on mutually-reinforcing activities between both development agendas within the socio-cultural community pillar of ASEAN.

It is my sincere hope that "VOICES" will serve as a platform for framing and generating wide interest on various important issues under the ASCC pillar, or as we often passionately refer to as the "People's Pillar" of the ASEAN Community.

# Overview on Poverty and Inequality in ASEAN

Over the past fifteen years, ASEAN Member States have made much progress in reducing poverty. Extreme poverty, defined as people living below US\$1.90 a day has reduced significantly. Table 1 shows the overall decline in extreme poverty in ASEAN Member States from 2000-2014.

**Table 1: Percentage of population living on less than US\$1.90 a day from 2000 – 2014**



Source: UN ESCAP Online Statistical Database based on data from the World Bank, 17 January 2017

Cambodia, Indonesia and Viet Nam have made notable progress in reducing extreme poverty. Cambodia successfully reduced the percentage of its population living below US\$1.90 a day from 18.6 percent in 2000 to 2.1 percent in 2012, while Indonesia reduced its rate of around 40 percent in 2000 to 8.2 percent in 2014. Viet Nam's high levels of 38.7 percent in 2000 has been brought down to 3 percent in 2012. The downtrend of people living in extreme poverty can also be observed in Lao PDR, with a reduction of 26 percent in 2002 to 16.7 percent in 2012. Extreme poverty rates in Philippines appears to also be slowly declining from 18.4 percent in 2000 to its current rate of 13.5 percent. Thailand has admirably brought its rates down to zero in 2012.

While good effort has been made to reduce the rate of extreme poverty, the percentage of people living below the international poverty line of US\$3.10 is still high. Four ASEAN Member States have at least 20 percent of their population living below the international poverty line of US\$3.10. Poverty levels among ASEAN Member States based on national poverty lines range from 0.6 – 25.6 percent, with six ASEAN Member States have at least 10 percent of their population living in poverty.

Among the challenges in drawing comparisons between countries is the fact that ASEAN Member States have different minimum standards

of poverty. While income level is certainly an indicator of poverty, ASEAN recognises the many dimensions of poverty. A multi-dimensional poverty index for ASEAN is being developed. This will allow for a more accurate measurement of poverty and also enable for comparisons to be made between countries.

Beyond addressing poverty, attention also needs to be paid to inequality within countries. The gini-coefficient<sup>1</sup> for seven ASEAN Member States where data is available range from 0.31-0.46<sup>2</sup>. While income inequality has fallen in certain ASEAN Member States, it has increased in others.

The income share of the poorest 20 percent of the population for ASEAN Member States where data is available range from 4.5 percent to 9 percent.<sup>3</sup>

Within countries, the rural-urban divide in wealth distribution is particularly pronounced. There is a higher prevalence of poverty in rural areas compared to urban areas. The rate of rural poverty is four times higher than urban poverty in Viet Nam, and three times higher than urban poverty in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Malaysia.

Promoting rural development is an area of concern within the ASCC Pillar. A study is being planned to identify key priorities for narrowing the development gap in the context of rural development and poverty eradication.

In urban areas, the quality of life remains lacking for a fairly large section of the urban population. The percentage of the urban population living in slums in ASEAN Member States range from 22 percent to 55 percent. While the percentage of the urban population living in slums has reduced remarkably over the past decade in some ASEAN Member States, it has remained constant in others.

Despite high literary rates, 25 million people over the age of 15 remain illiterate in the region. Stunting among children under 5 years of age remains a problem in the ASEAN region.

1 The gini-coefficient is a measurement used to measure income inequality. 0 indicates that there is perfect equality (everyone as the same income) and 1 indicates perfect inequality (one person has all the income and everyone else has zero income)  
 2 ASEAN Community Progress Monitoring System, p 152-153, 170-171, 188-189, 206-207, 224-225, 242-243, 260-261, 282-283, 300-301, 318-319.  
 3 ASEAN Statistical Yearbook, p 289

ASEAN is continuing its effort in reducing inequality in the region. Projects to be undertaken within the ASCC Pillar include strengthening the capacity of the local government to deliver social protection programmes, with the aim of reducing poverty and improving the quality of lives of the people of ASEAN.

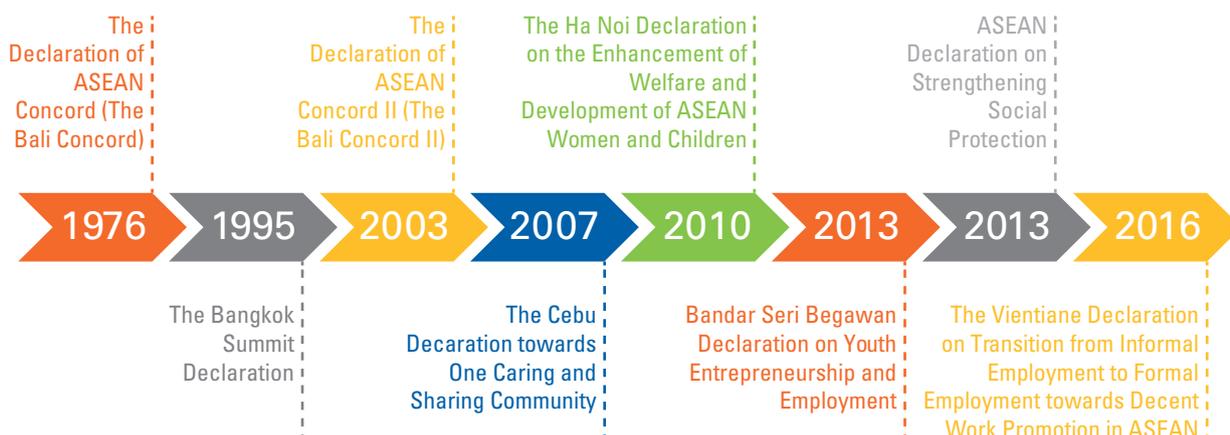
A regional study on food security and price spikes is being planned. Focus is being given to develop youth employability and entrepreneurship through

skills training and workshops. Attention is also being given to the economic empowerment of older women.

As stipulated in the Article 1 of the ASEAN Charter: **“To alleviate poverty and narrow the development gap within ASEAN through mutual assistance and cooperation”**, ASEAN remains committed to its agenda of reducing poverty and addressing inequality.

## ASEAN’s Commitment towards Poverty Reduction

### Major ASEAN Declarations Relevant to Poverty Eradication



Since the early establishment of ASEAN, steps to address poverty and inequality has been a key focus for ASEAN Member States. This collective commitment at the regional level is well reflected in the various statements issued and declarations adopted<sup>4</sup>.

The Declaration of the ASEAN Concord 1976 recognised the need to eliminate poverty, hunger, disease and illiteracy. It provided for intensifying cooperation in the areas of economic and social development, with emphasis on the promotion of social justice to improve the living standards of the people of ASEAN.

The Bangkok Summit Declaration 1995 affirmed ASEAN’s dedication to improve the quality of life of its people. This will be done through increasing access to social services and reducing poverty.

Between 2003-2010, ASEAN adopted four declarations with focus on poverty reduction, addressing the various dimensions of poverty. The ASEAN Concord II adopted in 2003 recognises social and human development as key factors in reducing poverty and addressing socio-economic disparities. The Cebu Declaration Towards One Sharing and Caring Community affirms ASEAN’s commitments towards reducing poverty and inequality and in improving the standard and quality of life of the people of ASEAN. The Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children recognises that poverty is a major challenge in the pursuit of gender equality.

The Bandar Seri Begawan Declaration on Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment was adopted in 2013. This declaration focuses on intensifying efforts to strengthen entrepreneurial skills and volunteerism among the youth as a means towards addressing high youth unemployment rates in the

<sup>4</sup> Related ASEAN Declarations addressing the multi dimensions of poverty under the ASCC Pillar can be viewed at <http://asean.org/asean-socio-cultural/>

region. The ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection, also adopted in 2013 is committed to the provision of social protection as a means to reduce hardship and poverty.

Most recently adopted is the Vientiane Declaration on Transition from Informal Employment to Formal Employment towards Decent Work Promotion in ASEAN. This declaration recognizes the necessity for a process to manage the transition from informal to formal employment. Steps to be taken include promoting wider access to decent jobs, promoting opportunities for entrepreneurship and skills development. Focus is also given to promoting access to Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and lifelong learning, especially for those in rural areas.

ASEAN continues to remain committed to addressing the various dimensions of poverty. The ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Ending All Forms of Malnutrition is expected to be adopted by the

end of 2017. This Declaration seeks to accelerate actions to reduce and end all forms of malnutrition, particularly among young children, women, and other disadvantaged groups in ASEAN.

ASEAN's commitment towards poverty reduction and addressing inequality is well enshrined within the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint. This blueprint was adopted in November 2015 and serves to create a community that engages and benefits the people, is inclusive, sustainable, resilient and dynamic. The ASCC Blueprint heavily emphasizes enhancing ASEAN's regional mechanism as a way towards reducing poverty and addressing inequality.

A monitoring tool has been developed to better understand the progress of the implementation of the declarations at the national level and also at the regional level.

## The ASCC Blueprint 2025 and UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Mapping out Complementarities

The adoption of ASEAN Vision 2025 and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 demonstrates ASEAN's and the international community's commitment in improving the lives and well-being of the people of ASEAN and the rest of the world. The ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together contains the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 as well as the blueprints of the Political-Security, Economic and Socio-Cultural communities of ASEAN. A key defining feature of these Blueprints is a dynamic ASEAN that puts its people at the centre of its agenda.

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint has five objectives. It commits to developing a people-centred and people-oriented community that **engages and benefits the people**, and is **inclusive, sustainable, resilient** and **dynamic**<sup>5</sup>.

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encompasses the principles of universality<sup>6</sup>, integration<sup>7</sup> and leaving no one behind<sup>8</sup>. The agenda has seventeen sustainable development goals (SDGs) with 169 targets to achieve the aim of a sustainable world by 2030<sup>9</sup>. ASEAN's recognition of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its complements towards ASEAN community building effort is well documented in the preamble of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, no. 6, *"We underline the complementarity of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with ASEAN community building efforts to uplift the standards of living of our peoples."*

ASEAN and the UN have set clear goals to reduce poverty and inequality. With countries in the region being committed to both development agendas, it is useful to recognize the synergies between both agendas, enabling for complementarities. This section builds on the Thailand's Revised Information Paper/Matrix: Compilation of Possible Complementarities between the ASCC Blueprint and the UN 2030 Agenda.

5 ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 in ASEAN 2025 - Forging Ahead Together, The ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, 2016

6 The goals and targets are applicable to all nations

7 Includes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development

8 Everyone in society should benefit

9 Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, 70/1. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United National General Assembly, 21 October 2015

Poverty reduction and inequality are addressed most prominently in the ASCC Blueprint under the objective of “Inclusive”, with some mention under the other objectives.

The UN 2030 Agenda’s focus on poverty and inequality is specifically addressed under SDG Goal 1: No Poverty and SDG Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities. SDGs 2, 11, 15 and 17 also include components related to poverty reduction strategies.

ASCC Blueprint 2025	Sustainable Development Goals
<p><b>Inclusive and Resilient:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>B.1. Reducing Barriers</b></li> <li><b>B.2. Equitable Access for All</b></li> <li><b>B.3. Promotion and Protection of Human Rights</b></li> <li><b>D.1. A Disaster Resilient ASEAN</b></li> <li><b>D.4. Strengthened Social Protection in Times of Disasters and Environmental Changes</b></li> </ul>	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>1 NO POVERTY</b></p> </div> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>End poverty in all its forms everywhere</b></p>
<p>Encourages making social services and social protection more accessible and affordable, and for coverage to be extended. Also recognises the need for social protection in times of disasters or environmental changes.</p>	<p>SDG 1.3 – Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.</p>
<p>Promotes human capital development and economic self-reliance among the poor. Also recognises the need to promote inclusive growth at the national level to ensure equitable access to economic and other opportunities.</p>	<p>SDG 1.4 – Addressing inequality, which includes promoting equal rights to economic resources, basic services, ownership and control over land, and appropriate new technology and financial service, including microfinance.</p>
<p>In the area of climate change related crises, disaster management and other environmental changes, emphasis is placed on building resiliency among vulnerable groups.</p>	<p>SDG 1.5 – By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.</p>
<p>Provides for a multi-stakeholder approach to address poverty eradication. Also encourages the use of information and communication technologies to connect with regional and global communities.</p>	<p>SDG 1.5.1.a – Ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, in order to provide adequate and predictable means for developing countries, particular least development countries, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions.</p>
<p>Calls for developing regional strategies for gender mainstreaming in ASEAN policies and programmes. Also calls for the enhancement of regional platforms for promotion of equitable opportunities.</p>	<p>SDG 1.5.1.b – Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions.</p>

**Resilient:**

**D.5. Enhanced and Optimised Financing Systems, Food, Water, Energy Availability, and other Social Safety Nets in Times of Crises by Making Resources more Available, Accessible, Affordable and Sustainable**



**End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture**

Encourages specific focus on the poor and vulnerable in times of crises, with emphasis on improved coordination to ensure food adequacy.

SDG 2.1 – By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year around

**Inclusive:**

**B.1. Reducing Barriers**  
**B.2. Equitable Access for All**  
**B.3. Promotion and Protection of Human Rights**



**Reduce inequality within and among countries**

Provides for enhancing regional platforms to promote the participation of women, children, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups in the development and implementation of ASEAN policies and programmes.

SDG 10.2 – By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status

Advocates for the promotion of non-discriminatory laws, policies and practices through the development of effective and transparent institutions. Also encourages regional initiatives to promote the elimination of all forms of discrimination.

SDG 10.3 – Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard.

The social protection element of this target is addressed in the ASCC Blueprint, and mentioned above under SDG 1.3.

SDG 10.4 – Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality

Recognises that regional initiatives to protect and promote the rights of migrant workers need to be further enhanced, in accordance with the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers.

SDG 10.7 – Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies

**Sustainable:**

**C.1. Conservation and Sustainable Management of Biodiversity and Natural Resources**



**Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss**

Recognizes the need for good management practices and strong policies to address the impact of development projects on biodiversity and natural resources.

SDG 15.9 – By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967. The Member States are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. The ASEAN Secretariat is based in Jakarta, Indonesia.

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**ASEAN: A Community of Opportunities**

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