

1998 ASEAN ACTION PLAN ON SOCIAL SAFETY NETS

Adopted in Jakarta, Indonesia on 8 December 1998

INTRODUCTION

1. As the regional financial and economic crisis persists in the ASEAN region, social problems have loomed larger as many workers face unemployment and vulnerable and disadvantaged communities experience greater hardship and poverty. Since much of the region is affected, the combined potential of social problems from desperate unemployed workers and the new poor pose a threat to national, as well as regional, stability.
2. It is generally recognised that social safety net programmes cannot be sustained without the resumption of socioeconomic development programmes. While efforts to promote economic recovery must be emphasised both at the national and regional levels, through, among others, intensifying intra-regional trade and investment, it is nonetheless important to give equal attention to the social impacts of the financial and economic crisis, and to mitigate the immediate impact on the incidence of poverty and social well-being, particularly of the rural areas in the ASEAN region.
3. In this regard, the 2nd Meeting of the ASEAN Senior Officials on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication held in Kuala Lumpur from 29-30 October 1998, agreed that an ASEAN Task Force on Social Safety Nets be established with the objective of developing and implementing an action plan to ameliorate the impact of the crisis. In implementing the action plan, the Task Force would ensure that gender and environmental concerns are taken into account.

OBJECTIVES

4. The primary objective of the Action Plan is to build capacity in participating countries on the following:
 - a. assessing and monitoring the social and economic impact of the crisis and identifying the target groups affected and their needs;
 - b. developing and implementing social safety net programmes for the disadvantaged and vulnerable;
 - c. monitoring and improving the effectiveness of economic and social services delivery; and
 - d. promote public awareness of the impact of the crisis particularly on the poor.

I. ASSESS AND MONITOR THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

5. In view of the importance of data for the planning of programmes and the targeting of sub-populations affected by the crisis, the Task Force will develop and implement projects on the following, among others:
 - a. methodology for identifying target groups affected by the crisis and their needs;

- b. capacity building for social impact assessments to obtain information for designing social safety net programmes; and
- c. assessing the micro impact of macroeconomic and structural adjustment policies.

II. DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT SOCIAL SAFETY NET PROGRAMMES

- 6. As the economies of the region are affected by negative economic growth and inflation, unemployment and poverty rates are expected to increase. Since several countries are already implementing social safety net programmes for vulnerable and disadvantaged persons as part of their structural adjustment programmes to address the impact of unemployment and poverty, the task force will consider developing projects to share experience and best practice on the design and implementation of the following, among others:
 - a. social security systems for persons working in the informal sector,
 - b. services for school dropouts and street children,
 - c. workfare (emergency work relief) programmes,
 - d. micro-finance and self-employment programmes,
 - e. maternal and child health services,
 - f. psycho-social care for affected families;
 - g. disaster victims/displaced communities; and
 - h. assistance for the elderly and disabled.

III. MONITOR AND IMPROVE THE DELIVERY OF SOCIAL SAFETY NET SERVICES

- 7. There may be a need to strengthen the delivery of social safety net services in times of crisis when such services are in great demand. Of particular importance is to ensure that social services delivery is decentralised and aided by non-governmental/peoples' organisations and the private and business sectors. Accordingly, the task force will develop projects to address:
 - a. capacity building for non-governmental and people's organisations to improve delivery of emergency services to affected populations;
 - b. sharing of experience and best practices on effective delivery of social safety net services;
 - c. training of facilitators to carry out community-based rural development;
 - d. forging of partnerships with private sector/business to develop anti-poverty programmes; and
 - e. monitoring and evaluating social safety net programmes.

IV. PROMOTE PUBLIC AWARENESS ON THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE CRISIS

8. Information and motivational campaigns need to be launched in ASEAN to support individual Member Country campaigns and support current ASEAN programmes which are designed to address the social impact of the crisis. Disinformation must be replaced with clarity of direction and accurate facts. A set of communication messages will be crafted to support the campaign. The ASEAN information and motivation campaigns in support of the Task Force are expected to last for two years. These will:
 - a. deliver accurate and timely information to create greater understanding and encourage targeted action among ASEAN governments and their civil society on how to deal with the impact of the Asian crisis, using information releases over mass media and targeted publications (i.e. ASEAN Poverty Watch – a print publication and Web Site);
 - b. develop and implement an audio-visual campaign to be broadcast in ASEAN countries promoting ASEAN Unity and Resolve to deal with the impact of the crisis; and
 - c. build the capability of ASEAN journalists and media to accurately report on the crisis, particularly its impact on disadvantaged sectors.
9. The ASEAN Secretariat is requested to seek funding assistance from the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the UNDP and other international donor agencies and ASEAN's Dialogue Partners to develop and implement the action plan.
10. The Task Force on Social Safety Nets will meet regularly to develop and review the progress of the implementation of the action plan. The Senior Officials on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (SOMRDPE) and the ASEAN Ministers on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (AMRDPE) will provide guidance on the implementation of the action plan.