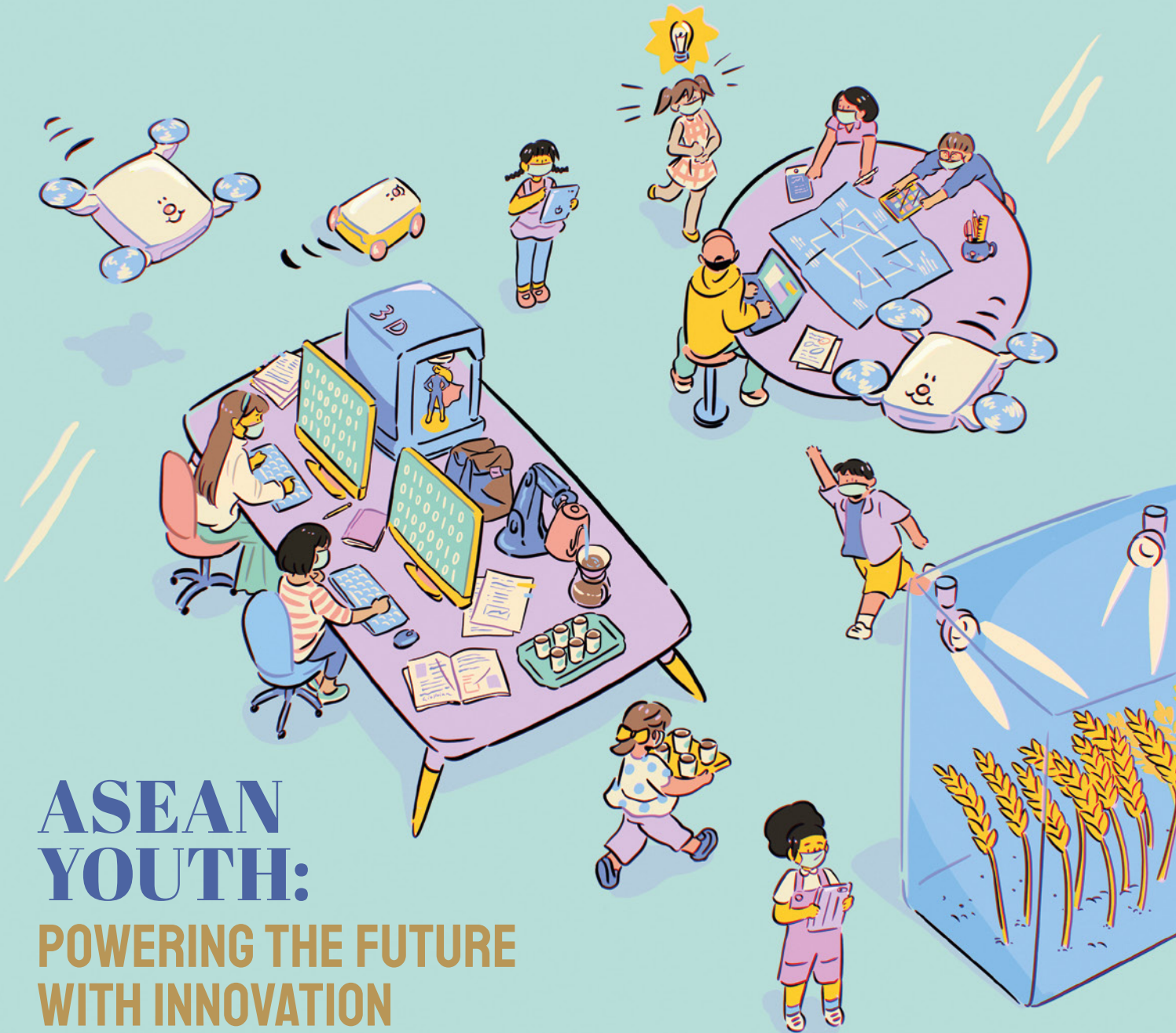


The ASEAN



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DOUBLE ISSUE
FEBRUARY–MARCH 2021



ASEAN YOUTH: POWERING THE FUTURE WITH INNOVATION

ISSN 2721-8058



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THE INSIDE VIEW
Nurturing Creative
Learners

SHIFTING CURRENTS
Mental Health Care
in a Pandemic

WOMEN'S MONTH
Women and Girls
Who Code



● Ministerial Bodies
 ● Sectoral Bodies
 * takes guidance from and reports to both AMCA and AMRI

AMRI-ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information
AMCA-ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts
AMMY-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Youth
ASED-ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting
AMMS-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Sports
AMRDPE-ASEAN Ministers on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication
AMMSWD-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development
AMMW-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women
ALMM-ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting
ACCSM-The Heads of Civil Service Meeting for ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters
AHMM-ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting

AMMDM-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management
COP-AADMER-Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response
AMME-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Environment
COP to AATHP-Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution
SOMCA-Senior Officials Meeting on Culture and Arts
COCI*-The ASEAN Committee for Culture and Information
SOMRI-Senior Officials Meeting Responsible for Information
SOMY-Senior Officials Meeting on Youth
SOMED-Senior Officials Meeting on Education
SOMS-Senior Officials Meeting on Sports

SOMRDE-Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication
SOMSWD-Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development
ACWC-ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children
ACW-ASEAN Committee on Women
SLOM-Senior Labour Officials Meeting
SOM-ACCSM-Senior Officials Meeting on ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters
SOMHD-Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development
ACDM-ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management
ASOEN-ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment
COM to AATHP-Committee under the Conference of Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution



The ASEAN

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Message from the Deputy Secretary-General



I am pleased to present this double issue of *The ASEAN* magazine, focusing on youth and innovation. This issue is a collaboration between *The ASEAN* magazine and the ASCC Department's Education, Youth, and Sports Division.

This month marks one year since the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 a global pandemic. The past year was said to be a lost year for our youth, with many unable to celebrate rites of passage and milestones in their life. As several surveys show, the truth is that many young people have lost opportunities for education, training, and work.

However, the World Economic Forum's ASEAN Youth Survey 2020 shows considerable resilience among the youth during the pandemic. There has been a significant increase, among 16-34-year-olds, in the use of digital tools for online education, learning new skills, and finding new business models to improve their income.

The data underscores the importance of providing our youth with education and training responsive to these challenging times. Singapore leads innovation in our region, and Singapore Education

Minister Lawrence Wong shares how their education system nurtures creative and innovative learners. ASEAN TVET Council Chair Isidro Lapeña talks about the Council's plans to cultivate lifelong learning and build skills through technical, vocational education and training.

Building character and leadership skills in our youth are equally important. In the Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths or JENESYS project, ASEAN works with the Government of Japan to give ASEAN youth valuable cultural exchange experiences to build mutual trust and foster cooperation between the two regions. The ASEAN Youth Sport for Development, Peace, and Leadership (S4PDL) project trained youth leaders from across the region to implement sports projects in their communities.

In this issue, *The ASEAN* features young inventors, innovators, and social entrepreneurs who create digital and sustainable solutions to help their communities. The magazine also features two brothers who created an app that provides easier access to mental health care to those who need it.

ASEAN 2021 Chair, Brunei Darussalam, has made mental health care a priority under its "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper" agenda for this year. They emphasise the need to integrate mental health in ASEAN countries' COVID-19 response. We cannot discount the difficulties and uncertainties the youth face now.

The prolonged pandemic's socio-economic impact has been devastating for the young and other vulnerable groups. Nations are rolling out their COVID-19 vaccinations, but WHO and UNICEF continue to warn countries against vaccine nationalism. We cannot stress enough that it is

imperative to ensure the equitable distribution of vaccines to all countries if we want this pandemic to end soon.

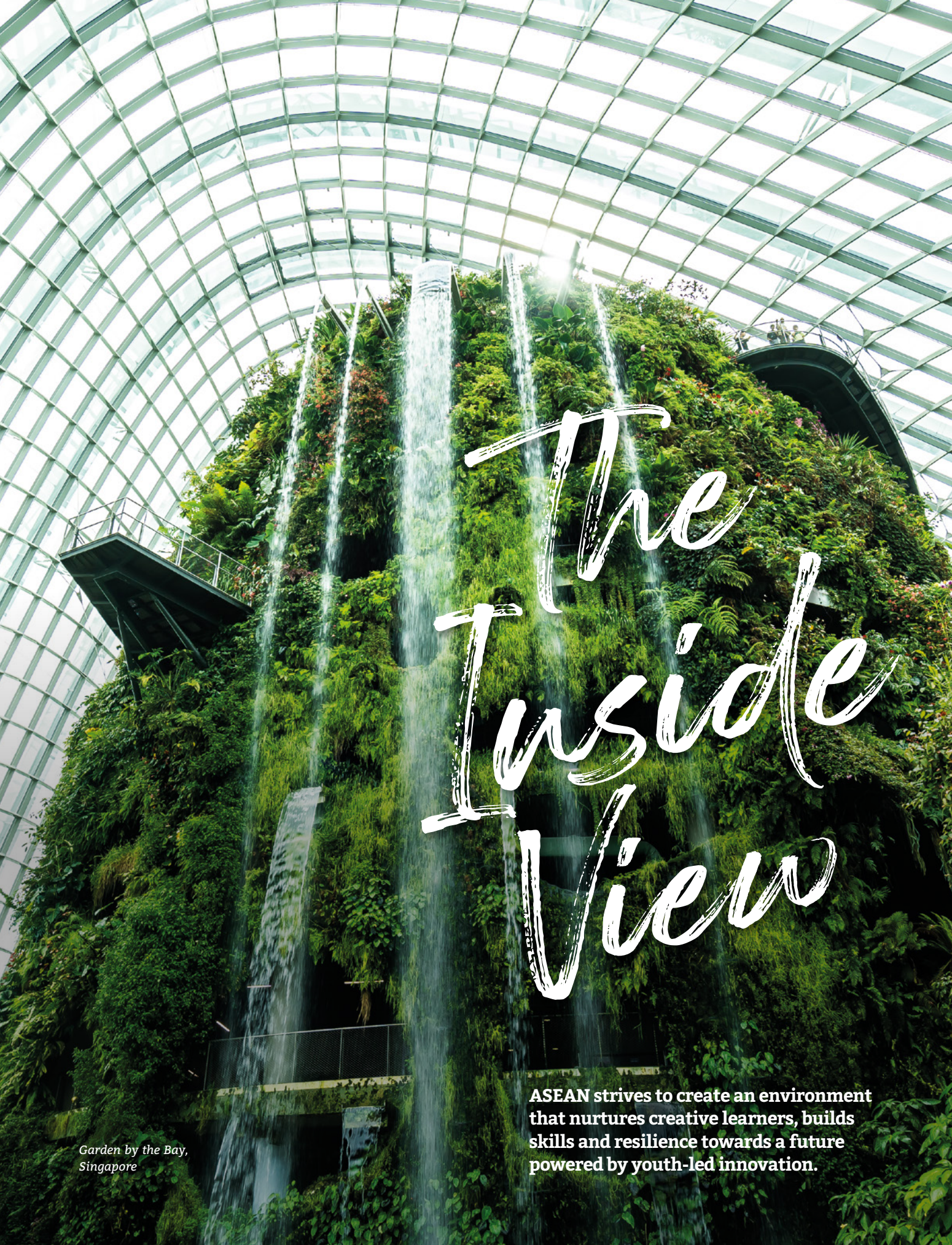
In March, we celebrate International Women's Month. We highlight the significant strides made to promote gender equality but recognise that much work still needs to be done. The ASEAN Secretariat just launched two landmark studies—the *ASEAN Gender Outlook: Achieving the SDGs for All and Leaving No Woman or Girl Behind* and the *ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security*—in collaboration with the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), UN Women and other partners. The studies provide invaluable data to help Member States formulate gender-responsive policies.

The magazine also spoke to a young indigenous leader who advocates for a stronger voice for the youth in biodiversity and conservation policymaking. Two young women who are making significant inroads in the tech world are also featured.

There will be other crises to come. ASEAN will serve our youth well if we provide them with an environment that allows for self-expression, creativity and innovation; and give them the tools and opportunities to create thoughtful, inclusive and sustainable solutions to the world's problems.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the invaluable assistance of the JENESYS project for this issue and the continued support of the Government of India for *The ASEAN*.

Kung Phoak
Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community



The Inside View

*Garden by the Bay,
Singapore*

ASEAN strives to create an environment that nurtures creative learners, builds skills and resilience towards a future powered by youth-led innovation.



Viewpoint:

Lawrence Wong

Minister of Education, Singapore



How do countries produce creative and innovative learners? With Singapore consistently on the Global Innovation Index's list of top 10 most innovative countries since 2013, *The ASEAN* asked Singapore Education Minister Lawrence Wong to share the country's strategies for creating a culture of innovation and facilitating innovative solutions to crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Global Innovation Index 2020 ranks Singapore 8th most innovative among 138 participating countries. Can you share with us your national strategies for nurturing creative and innovative learners?

Minister Wong: We recognise that education is much more than just about book knowledge and academic abilities. It's also instilling in our children key traits like communication and teamwork, as well as creative and innovative thinking.

These learning objectives are incorporated into the national curriculum and through signature programmes in our schools. We systematically identify learning opportunities to spark our students' curiosity and creativity by exposing them to novel and open-ended



We also complement classroom learning with Co-Curricular Activities, Values-in-Action programmes, and school-based programmes like the Applied Learning Programmes.

problems, which require them to appreciate different perspectives and apply learning in real-world contexts.

For example, the Programme for Active Learning or PAL in primary schools gives our young students exposure to non-routine problems, for example, through Mathematics, which will require them to think deeper, reason logically, and be creative in using strategies to solve problems.

We also complement classroom learning with Co-Curricular Activities, Values-in-Action programmes, and school-based programmes like the Applied Learning Programmes, that cover areas such as Innovation and Enterprise as well as STEM. These provide opportunities for our students

to apply themselves to real-life problems while honing their collaborative skills.

Through this holistic approach, we aim to develop in our students the dispositions and skill sets that will enable them to succeed and thrive in the real world.

What challenges did Singapore's education sector face during the COVID-19 pandemic? How were these challenges addressed?

Minister Wong: All countries faced similar challenges in education—whether to close schools, when to do it, and for how long.

Having gone through SARS nearly two decades ago, Singapore had put in place Standard Operating Procedures, which we

were able to adapt and evolve quickly as we learned more about COVID-19.

As the pandemic worsened, Singapore decided to put in place a Circuit Breaker in April 2020 to limit the transmission of the virus. In tandem with this, all schools shifted to full Home-Based Learning. There were, of course, concerns about whether teaching and learning could be done effectively and the impact on curriculum coverage. But the collective innovative spirit shown by all was remarkable.

Minister Wong visits Fuhua Secondary School to observe what a Classroom of the Future will look like, where students use technology in real world contexts to solve problems



Over the years, Singapore has built up a vibrant research and innovation ecosystem supported by our universities and research institutes that lead pioneering work in various areas.

The silver lining from all this is that we have been able to accelerate the use of technology in education. We have seen the benefits of doing so, as students become more self-directed and independent, and are able to learn at their own pace at home, enabled by technology. We are therefore locking in the gains from this experience by making Blended Learning part of our mainstream curriculum.

We also stepped up our support for students from vulnerable backgrounds as they are the hardest hit in a crisis like this. For example, these students were given extra financial support, as well as internet devices and wifi dongles.

Throughout this pandemic, our schools have remained safe spaces of learning. Our students and teachers have adapted admirably to mask-wearing and all the safety

measures put in place. Perhaps the greatest challenge moving ahead is staying vigilant and maintaining the discipline to keep up with these measures.

How do you think the COVID-19 pandemic has hampered or encouraged innovation among Singaporeans, especially the youth sector? How important is innovation in a country's post-COVID economic recovery and long-term development?

Minister Wong: It was very heartening to see many ground-up youth initiatives spring up last year during the pandemic. This is a testament of our youths' innovative spirit, creativity, and resourcefulness. For example, a group of young people started a "Mindful Minutes Podcast" in June last year. It aimed to raise awareness about mental wellness and encourage self-care among youths. It also

gave practical tips on how youths could cope with adjusting to new normal after the Circuit Breaker was lifted.

Innovation and the ability to innovate have always been critical to a small economy with no hinterland like Singapore to stay competitive and relevant. We see this even more starkly during this pandemic, with innovations in science and technology, and in other areas too, enabling us to combat the virus more effectively while adjusting to a new normal in the way we live, work, and play.

Over the years, Singapore has built up a vibrant research and innovation ecosystem supported by our universities and research institutes that lead pioneering work in various areas. We will continue to strengthen these capabilities, and develop inventive thinking and resourcefulness in our students, to better equip them for a more uncertain future. ■

Viewpoint:

Isidro S. Lapeña, PhD

Chair, ASEAN TVET Council and Director-General, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, Philippines

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is a vital cog in creating and maintaining a highly skilled workforce and cultivating lifelong learning. By establishing the ASEAN TVET Council (ATC) in 2020, ASEAN reinforces its commitment to developing the region's human resources to meet the future of work.

Director-General Isidro S. Lapeña of Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), as inaugural Chair of the ATC, discusses ATC's plans for expanding and raising the quality of TVET in the region.

Can you share with us the plans and priorities of the ASEAN TVET Council under the leadership of the Philippines?

Lapeña: Under the Philippine leadership, the ATC's first priority is the development of the medium-term work plan which will serve as the Council's guide in the development of policies and implementation of programmes and activities.

We shall also promote strategic collaboration mechanisms with other sectoral bodies and





Our immediate priority is to ensure the appropriate reskilling and upskilling of the affected workers for re-employment as economic activities are restarting and business confidence is being restored.



curriculum; pursuing futures thinking in TVET; and strengthening research and innovations in TVET.

iii. Institutionalisation of lifelong learning: As technology and labour market changes, our people will no longer be confined to delivering specific competencies but will require other allied competencies to work with other people and with intelligent machines to remain relevant. Given this, we need to institutionalise a system that will allow our people, especially those already in the labour force, to pursue continuous learning, re-skilling, and upskilling to remain competitive and relevant. This also highlights the need to incorporate 21st century skills or transversal skills in the TVET curriculum.

iv. Building the capacities of TVET trainers and personnel: Along with improvements in the infrastructure, curriculum, and processes in TVET systems, it is also critical to continuously improve the capacities of TVET trainers to ensure the quality of our training. This can be supported by the promotion of industry exposure for TVET trainers and assessors, encouraging industry experts to work as (at least) part-time TVET trainers and assessors, and pursuing TVET teachers exchange programmes.

Moreover, we recognise that Member States have different levels of institutional capacities, their own approaches to implementing training, and varying criteria for recognising competencies and qualifications, among others. Considering this, it is also a good starting point for the ATC to conduct an assessment of the TVET systems of all Member States with a view to harmonising TVET systems and qualifications across the region.

b. What measures will be carried out to aid the post-pandemic recovery?

Lapeña: With the encouraging developments in the vaccine roll-outs globally, we can see that more and more countries are already gradually shifting

external partners. This will be an integral part of the work plan to ensure that we will meet our objectives knowing that the active engagement of all key stakeholders, especially our industry partners, remains a crucial element in the success of skills development in any country.

We discussed the zero draft ATC Work Plan with the focal points during the 1st meeting of the Council on 10 March 2021. After this meeting, the Philippines plans to proceed with the finalisation of the work plan through further consultations and validation with all the ASEAN Member States.

a. How does the ATC intend to help the technical and vocational education and training systems in the region become future-ready?

Lapeña: The Roadmap of the ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work, ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework, and relevant sectoral plans have already laid out important programmes and activities in terms of enhancing the TVET systems for the future of work. These provide a good starting point for

the ATC. We just need to build upon and complement these existing programmes and activities as we move forward.

But just to highlight some, I believe the ATC will need to focus and provide actionable policy recommendations on the following areas to ensure the readiness of TVET systems in the changing world of work:

- i. Institutionalisation of industry-led and demand-driven TVET: The ATC must establish strategies or cooperation models that will strengthen industry leadership in the development of TVET policies, training curricula, assessment and certification standards, quality assurance systems, as well as industry's participation in the delivery of training. These must also be supported by skills needs anticipation initiatives and an active labour market information system.
- ii. Promotion of ICT-based models/ approaches in TVET: These include establishing flexible modes of TVET delivery, including competency assessment; increasing investments for the learning systems of the future; developing and incorporating digital skills or transversal skills in the

to the recovery phase. Our schools, universities, and training institutions are also expected to reopen.

For TVET, targeted approaches and sound policy reforms must be employed. Our immediate priority is to ensure the appropriate reskilling and upskilling of the affected workers for re-employment as economic activities are restarting and business confidence is being restored.

To do so, TVET curriculum must be updated and aligned with the requirements of the post-COVID-19 future of work. This is to sustain the growth of least affected and emerging sectors. It is also needed in order for the hardest hit sectors such as service, tourism, and hospitality to recover and adapt to the new normal realities.

Likewise, ICT-based and flexible modes of TVET delivery (e.g. blended learning, offline e-learning, internet-based learning) must be implemented to ensure the continuity of training in times of disruptions. To ensure that no one is left behind as we move forward with this flexible TVET delivery, we will put in place corresponding measures to address resources and accessibility constraints in remote areas and for people of different socio-economic classes.

More importantly, as technology and labour markets continue to evolve, an enabling environment to pursue lifelong

learning will play a key role to achieving a competitive and dynamic workforce amidst disruptions. In support of this, 21st century skills, digital skills, and even socio-emotional skills (empathy and resilience skills) must be included in the TVET curricula and programmes.

What do you think are the barriers to expanding the reach of TVET in ASEAN Member States? What strategies can the ASEAN TVET Council and Member States pursue to address these barriers and increase TVET access for marginalised groups such as persons with disability, out of school youth, etc.

Lapeña: I believe, in most ASEAN Member States, low investment in TVET remains one of the major challenges to expanding the accessibility of TVET, particularly in the countryside. This problem has become more obvious under new realities with the lack of modern TVET facilities to keep up with the demands of emerging technologies and ensure the quality of TVET offerings. For instance, in the Philippines, community-based training activities are being conducted in the rural areas but most of these trainings do not respond to the current and future trends due to limited resources and facilities of the training provider in the area.

This can be addressed or be compensated by exploring effective models of TVET financing or by strengthening government

and private sector collaboration in TVET delivery, such as through enterprise-based training modality, apprenticeship, or dual-training system.

In terms of improving access of TVET to marginalised groups such as persons with disability (PWDs) and out of school youth (OSYs), the following measures can be further explored:

For PWDs

- Development and implementation of customised training programmes, including the necessary devices and technology, that meet their special needs and would allow them to participate in mainstream employment and be economically productive and sustainable.
- Incentivising companies that hire PWDs.

For OSYs

- Provision of scholarship programmes to encourage participation to training
- Career guidance and counselling
- Job bridging after training
- Improve the image and public perception of TVET
- Encourage the participation of companies through apprenticeship
- Build networks with youth organisations, youth councils and other similar entities to build confidence and increase youth participation in TVET

At the regional level, the ATC can serve as a venue to share experiences/best practices and explore promising initiatives that would address the needs of the marginalised sectors.

Can you share some of the Philippines' key accomplishments in improving access to and quality of technical and vocational education and training?

Lapeña: As the authority on TVET in the Philippines, TESDA holds a crucial position as a provider of quality skills.

Guided by the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022; the National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan 2018-2022; and the TESDA Operational Plan: TVET towards the New Normal, TESDA's continuity plan during this pandemic, TESDA is committed to pursue and implement the following programmes



and strategies to provide relevant, efficient, accessible and high quality technical education and skills development:

i. Constant pursuit of a quality-assured TVET system: TESDA's establishment in 1994 paved the way for major reforms in the country's TVET system. It led to the institutionalisation of the Quality Assured Technical Education and Skills Development System where industry consultation is a key component. This is to ensure that we are equipping our people with the necessary competencies in line with requirements of the labour market.

It is also worthy to note that TESDA's core processes are ISO certified, such as its Standards Development, Program Registration, Assessment and Certification, and Support Services.

More importantly, we have strengthened our adherence to the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF). In fact, the PQF was referenced against the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQR), with the Philippine Referencing Report accepted as aligned to the AQR Referencing Criteria and endorsed by the AQR Committee to the ASEAN Ministers of Economy, Education and Labour in 2019. This feat allows the Philippines to reference its education standards and competencies with ASEAN Member States that have also referenced their national qualifications framework with the AQR, thereby easing learner and workforce mobility to and from these countries.

ii. Transforming the Philippines' TVET to be 4IR-ready: TESDA developed the TVETPH 4.0 Framework which lays down the specific strategies in which we shall be addressing the 4th industrial revolution requirements and how we will cope with the better (new) normal and beyond. As part of this, we are actively pursuing innovation-related initiatives to truly transform TVET in the Philippines. We are constructing innovation centres nationwide to facilitate research and development initiatives in TVET as well as harness the potential of learners to develop innovative products and services. We are also integrating research and research-related competencies within TESDA as well as in our training programmes to



cultivate a culture of innovation in our learners, as well as our teaching and non-teaching staff.

We are also working on developing higher-level training programmes that can produce TVET graduates who are critical thinkers and have the ability to innovate and engage in entrepreneurial activities.

iii. Moving towards an area-based and demand-driven TVET in the age of 4IR: We are also putting emphasis on our area-based and demand-driven TVET framework as a guide in all our programmes and services. From consultations with industry, to the development of training regulations, as well as the actual delivery of TVET programmes, we make sure that we are guided by this framework. We understand that different parts of the country have differing skills needs, and having this in place allows us to adjust our programmes accordingly to fit any setting.

iv. Continuous provision of scholarship programmes: To promote equity and access to quality TVET programmes, TESDA has been providing scholarships to its beneficiaries. These assistance programmes were further expanded with the passage of milestone legislative agenda of the government such as the *Universal Access to Quality Education* and *Tulong Trabaho* laws that made education and training in the Philippines more accessible.

For TESDA, our priorities and policy directions are aligned with our guiding principle, *TESDA Abot Lahat* (to reach everyone), a commitment to serve

everyone while providing special attention and intervention to people in the lower strata of the society, including the marginalised, excluded, disadvantaged, and vulnerable.

v. Establishment of provincial training centres nationwide: To ensure that a bigger number of the population get access to TVET, the agency strived to establish additional training centres across the country, especially in the provinces. TESDA's objective is to provide at least one provincial training centre per province. To date, 59 new training centres were established in different parts of the country with the support of various local government units.

vi. Convergence with other partners in the government and private sector: With TESDA leading the national Poverty Reduction, Livelihood and Employment Cluster which pursues the whole-of-nation approach to building developed and sustainable communities, the Philippines has brought access to TVET to far-flung areas. Residents of geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas and members of indigenous communities are given skills training appropriate to their needs and locations.

The private sector provides necessary marketing linkages. In the Davao region for example, a convergence project continues to achieve success. After indigenous communities are trained in banana cardava production, a private partner is tapped to ensure an available and existing market for their produce. ■

Viewpoint:

Shigeru Aoyagi

Director, UNESCO Bangkok



The UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific, and UNESCO as a whole, and the UN system worldwide, have taken comprehensive action to address the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts on education systems while acknowledging continuing challenges in addressing learning loss, potential dropouts, and the disproportionate effect on the most vulnerable learners.

As exemplified by the Global Coalition for Education, these efforts have brought together Member States, education stakeholders, and learners, teachers, and communities at the local level to formulate policy, good practices, and initiatives on the ground.

In line with the UN goal to build back better and more equally, these partnerships are transforming not only the response to the pandemic but also supporting and sustaining more inclusive quality education to progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In times of crisis, UNESCO's mandate to build peace in the minds of people through Education, the Sciences, Culture, and Communication is all the more important for our region.



The COVID-19 pandemic has kept school-age children out of regular classrooms. Many children in Asia are still learning remotely via online or mixed-media platforms, and those who have gone back to schools have had to deal with intermittent closures due to sporadic outbreaks.

Has there been an effort to assess the impact of remote and online learning on students and teachers? If so, what

are the salient findings, and what should be the key takeaways of education administrators?

Aoyagi: Analysis from a joint UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank survey indicated that while most countries have provided some form of remote education and policies during COVID-19, 80 million or 20 per cent of students in the East Asia and Pacific region were not reached by digital and broadcast remote learning programmes (UNICEF, 2020, COVID-19: Are Children

Able to Continue Learning During School Closures?). For many of these students, remote learning was inaccessible due to the digital divide, a lack of devices, limited access to electricity and the internet, and low digital literacy. To mitigate this, low-income countries preferred utilising radio-based instruction, while middle-income countries relied primarily on TV and digital media. The digital divide intersects with other aspects of marginalisation like gender, poverty, language, disability, and ethnicity. For example, country surveys have found that the number of girls not reached by remote learning was likely higher than that of their male peers due to a lack of access to digital technologies.

Beyond the digital divide, marginalised students were less likely to benefit from remote learning as the content was not always adapted to their needs. In this regard, less than 30 per cent of low- and lower-middle-income countries have designed distance learning materials in minority languages. Overall, this strongly predicts that gaps in remote learning have exacerbated existing learning inequities.

When students have been able to access distance learning programmes, many have struggled to learn due to skills gaps among their teachers or a lack of parental support, as more than one in three countries has not provided training for teachers to use remote learning platforms. This has an impact on children's learning, especially those living in rural and/or poor households (UNICEF, 2020, COVID-19: Are Children Able to Continue Learning During School Closures?). An ILO study found that 69 per cent of female respondents in the East Asia and Pacific region reported that they learned less than usual (UNICEF, 2020, Issue Brief: COVID-19 and Girls' Education in East Asia and Pacific).

While we have an understanding of the impact of remote learning, the full effects will not be known for some time. That being said, evolving education responses have revealed lessons in how to implement effective remote or hybrid learning programmes. Many presentations made by policymakers and practitioners from across the Asia-Pacific region at UNESCO-organised virtual meetings have highlighted the importance of the following key aspects:



- *Blended learning in a broadened sense:* classroom learning, home-based learning, community learning, distance digital learning, formal and non-formal learning;
- *Holistic support for teachers' wellbeing* (job security, salary, working conditions, etc.), motivation and mental health, pre-service and in-service training, etc.;
- *Government support and school support for an enabling environment:* well-informed guidelines and targeted intervention, tools, and materials for distance teaching and learning, budget, etc.;
- *Engagement with the community,* especially parents and caregivers;
- *Comprehensive and continuous cooperation* of different sectors and various public and private partners;
- *A new mindset* focusing on a culture of innovation, adoption of technology, student-centred learning, teachers' role evolved into a facilitator, etc.;
- *Continuing professional development for teachers* is particularly important to equip teachers with updated pedagogical, digital, socio-psychological, community engagement, and leadership skills.

Additionally, based on a UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank survey, remote learning will likely continue to be important in the near future. Policies should focus on infrastructure development and also producing resources in line with national curricula. Teachers, school leaders, and parents should be trained to support virtual and remote learning. The quality of remote learning should be supported through various assessments, and children in remote and rural areas should be prioritised.

Therefore, there is great value in ICT in Education goals, policies, and digital citizenship skills and competencies. UNESCO

supports Member States in developing holistic ICT in Education Master Plans, as well as competency-based teacher training reforms through the development and implementation of ICT Competency Standards for Teachers. Additionally, UNESCO Bangkok has developed the Digital Kids Asia-Pacific (DKAP) research toolkit to better understand how children engage with technologies, and which competencies they possess or lack across five digital citizenship domains.

Given the large gaps in technology and connectivity access within countries, what can governments and development organisations do to bridge the digital divide?

Aoyagi: Most countries recognise the seriousness of digital divides and have taken action. One important step is that policymakers in ministries should seek to understand the situation on the ground, after which they can reflect this information and the voices of communities affected by digital divides in national policies.

Bridging the digital divide not only means physical access to connectivity and devices, but also development of the appropriate digital skills to unlock the benefits of technology, including more effective use of emerging technologies and ensuring that individuals stay safe, ethical, and responsible online. Developing digital skills needs to be tailored to individual and national circumstances. Given the differences within and among countries and regions, there is no one-size-fits-all approach, and better understandings based on evidence will help to guide capacity-building approaches to be more effective by considering the social, cultural, and economic contexts.



The digital divide intersects with other aspects of marginalisation like gender, poverty, language, disability, and ethnicity.

Schools and teachers play critical roles as points of entry for digital access as they are often the first place where students engage with ICT and build foundational skills. The results of a recent UNESCO study showed that schools can do more in closing gaps in access to the internet, as significant percentages of students in five Southeast Asian countries did not have access at school: 15 per cent in Indonesia, 38 per cent in Lao PDR, 37 per cent in Philippines, 6 per cent in Thailand, and 24 per cent in Viet Nam (Digital Kids Asia-Pacific National Country Research Reports). Likewise, capacity building for teachers needs to be conducted to support the necessary skills and competencies to teach digital literacy and model appropriate usage and behaviours.

To strategically reduce the digital divides in education, governments can develop ICT in Education Master Plans that explicitly focus on solving related issues and developing programmes to address them. In most cases, closing the digital divides is already aligned with the country's stated educational goals. As part of UNESCO's mandate for Member States in the region and globally, the organisation provides technical support for the master plan development process.

Where improving digital infrastructure is unfeasible, it is important for countries to prioritise vulnerable students for receiving in-person learning. These students include those at a high risk for dropping out and those who cannot access remote learning due to a lack of technology or other reasons (UNESCO, 2020, COVID-19 Response Tool-kit: Hybrid Learning). For example, in Lao PDR, face-to-face learning continues to be the main learning modality for students in remote areas and for vulnerable groups (Interview Message of Madam Seangdeane Lachanthaboune, Minister of Education and Sports, Lao PDR on ICT-based Education Responses to COVID-19).

UNESCO recently celebrated the third International Day of Education, which has the theme "Recover and Revitalize Education for the COVID-19 Generation."

Can you share with us some of the significant initiatives undertaken by the countries to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on their education sector?

Aoyagi: In collaboration with and technical support from UNESCO and other development partners, Member States have responded in varying degrees to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in education while preparing for a 'new normal' and building back a better and resilient education system.

There are many initiatives undertaken by Member States in accordance with countries' local contexts. Some of the activities supported by UNESCO at global and regional levels are available online:

- At the the global level: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/support>
- At the regional level (Asia and the Pacific): <https://apa.sdg4education2030.org/covid19>

Across the region, countries have adapted and employed strategies to support education sectors and ensure learning continuity. Indonesia launched a website for teachers to connect, support each other, and share lesson plans and best practices. The website reached 1.5 million users and provided teachers much-needed support as they navigated education disruptions. To support parents during remote learning, Singapore sent kits to help prepare them to supervise children's education at home. Supporting parents and families is an important strategy as they are key to ensuring learning continuity (UNESCO, 2020, COVID-19 Response Tool-kit: Remote Learning Strategy).

As the Philippines looked towards bringing students back to school, the government rolled out an ambitious re-enrollment strategy, offering flexibility on deadlines, providing support to vulnerable populations, and lowering barriers to access. For example, they created an enrollment form available digitally and physically in kiosks near schools

where students were at a high risk of not returning (UNESCO, 2020, COVID-19 Response Tool-kit: Re-enrollment).

What are the concrete commitments of countries, organisations, and other relevant actors to recover from the pandemic and revitalise the education sector?

Aoyagi: The Global Education Coalition was created in response to the pandemic to ensure that learning never stops, made up of over 140 members, including SEAMEO. From tracking school closures to collecting student and teacher stories, it has become an important hub for resources and data. UNESCO and members of the Global Education Coalition's Gender Flagship launched the Keeping Girls in the Picture campaign to ensure that girls continue to learn through the pandemic and that they return to school.

The Save Our Future Campaign was launched last year, led by major education partners in partnership with civil society organisations, including many from the Asia-Pacific region. As COVID-19 places education budgets at risk, the campaigns call for governments to protect them and prioritise those left furthest behind.

Furthermore, efforts have been made to examine the impact of COVID-19 in education in Asia, in particular East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia sub-regions. UNESCO and UNICEF commissioned Cambridge Education to undertake a rapid situation analysis from April 2020 to February 2021 to assess the impact of the pandemic on the education sector and examine its implications on progress towards SDG 4 (Education 2030). Two sub-regional webinars will be held in March to provide opportunities for government officials, development partners, and other education stakeholders to discuss key findings; lessons learned, and recommendations from the situation analysis. This will also be an opportunity for exchanges and learning between countries. ■



Building Bridges Through the **JENESYS Project**



JOANNE B. AGBISIT
ASSOCIATE EDITOR, *THE ASEAN*

In the wake of the First World War, a group called the Confédération Internationale des Étudiants pioneered the first systematic and extensive student exchanges with the noble intention of improving international relations and laying down the foundations of peace and stability.

A century hence, student and youth exchanges remain the cornerstone of people-to-people contact and cultural diplomacy.

The **JENESYS (Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths) Project**, promoted by Japanese Government

and ASEAN Secretariat, carries the same ideals of its antecedents—promoting cultural understanding and peace-building. The JENESYS project specifically aims to give young ASEAN nationals an opportunity to learn about Japanese society and culture through an immersive study tour of Japan.

A Brief History

The JENESYS project was launched in 2007 following a commitment made by then Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the 10th ASEAN-Japan Summit and the 2nd East Asia Summit to fund and support a youth exchange project in the East Asia region. It “aims to promote mutual trust and understanding among the peoples of Japan and the Asia-Pacific region including ASEAN, and to build a basis for future friendship and cooperation.”

The project is intended for youth in ASEAN and Timor-Leste who are keen to experience Japanese culture first-hand and engage in meaningful interactions with local companies, organisations, and communities. A separate component aims to send Japanese students to the different ASEAN Member States to expose them as well to Southeast Asian people and cultures.

Top

Tran Mai Khanh Ngoc with the 2016 batch from Viet Nam

Bottom

Participants visit a Japanese company

The JENESYS project initially ran for a period of five years, from 2007 to 2012, with several agencies including the Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE) as implementors. It has since been extended under different programmes and with additional purposes—*Kizuna (Bond) Project* (2012- 2013, to support recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake); *JENESYS 2.0* (2013-2015, to revitalise the Japanese economy); and *Japan's Friendship Ties Programs "JENESYS"* (2015-2020, ongoing, to promote the "charms" of Japan). JICE is currently involved in the implementation of JENESYS 2020.

Throughout the different iterations of the projects, the main purpose stayed the same. Shionoya Tsuyoshi, Managing Director of JICE's International Exchange Department, said that it is "designed to help ASEAN people get to know Japan better towards mutual understanding and to create a strong partnership according to the vision statement of the Japan-ASEAN Friendship Cooperation."

The youth exchange projects have also been scrutinised and evaluated to improve their duration and content, towards enriching the overall experience of the participants.

To date, over 37,000 youth from ASEAN Member States and Japan have participated and benefited from the JENESYS project.

Miyazawa Takeshi, First Secretary of the Mission of Japan to ASEAN, noted, "Since the ASEAN connects the Indian Ocean with the Pacific Ocean, it is no exaggeration to say that the stability and growth of this region influences the peace and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, we assume that maintaining a rules-based order



in an open and free environment is extremely important for ASEAN to unite and prosper as 'One.' This importance is referred to in the 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)' announced in 2019. Japan will support the principles of the 'ASEAN Way' and 'ASEAN One' as a friend of ASEAN. JENESYS contributes to one of the pillars of cooperation of the AOIP, people-to-people connectivity."

How the JENESYS Works

After setting the annual plan of JENESYS, the JENESYS implementing agency recruits

and selects participants with the cooperation of related parties, such as the Embassy of Japan in ASEAN Member States, the Senior Officials Meeting on Youth (SOMY) country focal points, ASEAN Secretariat, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Participants are selected with fairness and transparency. Participants who are highly motivated to learn about Japan or a different culture, have leadership qualities with an ability to disseminate their exchange experience, and match the theme or specialty of the programme, among others, are eligible.



It is designed to help ASEAN people get to know Japan better towards mutual understanding and to create a strong partnership according to the vision statement of the Japan-ASEAN Friendship Cooperation.

Once the participants arrive in Japan, they follow a fixed schedule of activities that typically involves lectures, site visits, courtesy calls, school exchanges, homestays, workshops, and a final reporting session lasting for a maximum of 10 days. The line-up of cities and sites and the types of lectures or workshops are customised by the implementing agency according to the theme.

At the end of the 10-day visit, the participants present an “action plan,” based on their experience, at the final reporting session. After returning to their home country, they are expected to implement this action plan that outlines how they intend to share their JENESYS experience and apply their new-found knowledge and insights to strengthen ties between Japan and their country.

A Slice of Japanese Home Life

By far, the most popular and anticipated segment of the exchange programme is the homestay experience.

Homestay allows a group of participants to live with a host family for a period of two to three days to immerse in local life. Participants get to observe and participate in daily household routines and rituals, learn proper etiquette and behaviour, taste authentic Japanese cooking, and engage in discussions about Japanese history, customs, and traditions.

Mutita Ariyavutikul, an alumna from JENESYS 2016, recalled that she and three other group members—a fellow Thai and two Singaporean participants—were placed with a host family in Sendai City in December. The timing allowed them to take part in the family’s winter routines, such as decorating the house for the New Year and building a snowman.

Ariyavutikul said she remembered enjoying the sumptuous fare prepared by the host-parents during their stay. She added that the group members gladly reciprocated their host’s generosity by preparing Thai and Singaporean soup and a special omelet for the host family.

The sense of hospitality and caring attitude of the host family—values that are reminiscent of Southeast Asian cultures—were also something that Ariyavutikul said she would



never forget. “It was so cold at night, so the grandma would boil water for us and put a hot water bag on the blanket to keep us warm throughout the night. I appreciated it,” she shared.

Kobayashi Hikari of JICE’s Youth Exchange Division said that the homestay arrangement is mutually beneficial. “We think that the direct exchange is very important to Japanese citizens, and the participants always say that it’s the highlight of the programme too,” she said. “Due to the duration of the programme or regional circumstances, sometimes, we conduct just a one-day home visit, instead of (having participants) stay for two or three days.”

Exposure to New Perspectives and Solutions

Field visits allow JENESYS participants to view issues from other lenses and expose them to new systems, ideas, and solutions.

For Tran Mai Khanh Ngoc, a participant from the JENESYS 2016 batch, the highlight of her Japan visit was the trip to Aito Eco Plaza Nanohana-Kan in Higashiomi City which she said is a model for sustainable community development.

“In this community, the locals plant rape blossom (*nanohana*), sell the rapeseed oil as a typical product of the community, and use the rest as cooking oil,” Tran said.

Mutita Ariyavutikul with her host family in Sendai City, Japan

“After using the cooking oil, they thought, how could we recycle this used oil? And they turned it into energy—the biodiesel fuel. This is then used to run the farming machinery.” She said that this practice reflects the local community’s maxim, “what’s from earth must return to earth.”

Tran found the waste-to-energy project quite impressive. “I think that there are so many things we can learn from the Japanese, including how to develop a good community,” she said. “From the lectures, you could feel the community spirit, the passion that the locals have for everything they do.”

Tran said that she is trying to do her job as an employee of the Ho Chi Minh City Department of External Relations with the same kind of resourcefulness, energy, and passion. “I feel like I need to also contribute something more to my community,” she said. “If you do something with a passion, you will constantly think about how to improve it.”

Ariyavutikul’s field visits were also eye-opening for her. “Before, I was focused solely on technology and thought that it’s the answer for everything, but from



Field visits allow JENESYS participants to view issues from other lenses and expose them to new systems, ideas, and solutions.

the programme I learned that more than technology, a strong collaboration between government, private organisations, universities, and the local people is important," she said. She said that the value of public-private sector partnership is a key takeaway that has informed her work as an economist at the Bank of Thailand.

Like Tran, she also appreciated Japan's concern for the environment and commitment to sustainable development through clean energy technology. "Global warming and sustainable development goals are issues that ASEAN should pay more attention to, to attain long-term growth," she said.

Lessons in Punctuality and Minimalism

Dr. Yuhanis Binti Mhd Bakri, an alumna from the JENESYS 2017 batch, said that the programme's structure alone served as an introduction to Japanese culture. The schedule of activities, she said, was tight, well-curated, and expected to run like clockwork.

Yuhanis Binti Mhd Bakri with the 2017 batch from Malaysia

Yuhanis said this reflects the value placed by the Japanese on their time. "Japan is really appreciative of punctuality," she said. "I took this attitude back home. Now, if the meeting starts at 9 am, I have to be there no later than 8:50 am, regardless."

Yuhanis said that it also speaks to the strong work ethic and discipline of the Japanese, which she believes account for their technological achievements and societal progress. She said that she carries this influence with her, helping her become a better member of the faculty of the Department of Chemistry of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris.

Tran came to appreciate the importance of punctuality as well. "The coordinators were very kind, explaining to us and helping us understand that we need to show up on time because a small delay can affect the entire schedule," she said. Tran noted that it is very different in Viet Nam where there is more flexibility.

Yuhanis also observed the cleanliness of the environment and the absence of frilly décor during the site visits. "Everything was there for a purpose

and in the right place," she said. The minimalist aesthetic, she said, inspired her to declutter her home and workspace, and reduce her trash.

Aspirations for Advanced Studies

Tran and Ariyavutikul said that their participation in the JENESYS programme led them to seek further studies in Japan.

"My experience with the JENESYS programme may be considered one of the main factors that pushed me to apply for a scholarship to pursue my master's degree in public policy at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies in Tokyo, Japan," Ariyavutikul said. She said that studying in Japan allows her to learn about Japan's and ASEAN's monetary, fiscal, and structural policies from a pool of international experts.

She is set to graduate in September 2022 and plans to apply the knowledge that she gained from the academic programme and her whole Japan experience to shape economic policies in Thailand and help it rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tran said she was so impressed by the JENESYS activities, especially the study trips to the prefectures, that she was eager for more. "From 2017 to 2019, I pursued a master's degree in public policy at Meiji University under the JDS scholarship," she said. Tran noted that the academic programme had the same hands-on approach as the JENESYS project, which she found highly effective.

After completing her degree in 2019, she went back to Ho Chi Minh City Department of External Relations, where she was assigned to handle the sister city relationships between Ho Chi Minh and foreign cities. This assignment has given her an opportunity to be at the forefront of efforts to enhance ties with Japan, an important partner of the city in the areas of trade and investment.



Long-lasting Connections

The JENESYS project gave rise to lasting personal connections among the participants. After their study visit, alumni groups created web or social media pages to post photos and stories of their exchange experience. Many have maintained these pages to keep in touch and share relevant information.

Alumni activities, such as conferences, meetings, and gatherings, are occasions to rekindle these bonds and generate awareness and interest about the project.

Yuhanis shared, "In Malaysia, the JENESYS alumni had a reunion in 2019 where different batches participated. About five or six of us from the group joined. There were students that came from Japan, and they were in a similar exchange project."

The JENESYS 2016 Student Conference was a particularly momentous event since its youth delegates founded the ASEAN University Student Council Union. The union seeks to amplify youth voices and

Japan-ASEAN Student Conference



We acknowledge the contribution of the following to this article: Mr. Miyazawa Takeshi, First Secretary of the Mission of Japan to ASEAN; Mr. Shionoya Tsuyoshi, Ms. Aika Fukuda, and Ms. Hikari Kobayashi of Japan International Cooperation Center; and Ms. Mary Anne Therese Manuson, former Assistant Director of the ASEAN Secretariat's Education, Youth and Sports Division.



For more information about the JENESYS Project, please visit the following links:
<https://jaif.asean.org/jaif-component/japan-east-asia-network-of-exchange-for-students-and-youths-jenesys/>
<https://www.jice.org/exchange/en/index.html>

keep them engaged. It held its first conference in 2017 and has been holding regular conferences since.

Fukuda Aika of JICE's Youth Exchange Division added that the exchange project also connects the youth in ASEAN Member States to Japan. "Some participants are even in contact with their host families in Japan. I hope they keep this connection going," she said.

Implementing JENESYS amid a Global Pandemic

Border closures and international movement restrictions to contain the COVID-19 pandemic have placed the JENESYS project in a difficult spot. Nonetheless, Miyazawa said that the government of Japan and JICE are rising to the challenge. "The worldwide spread of COVID-19 has disrupted international movement of persons. Under these circumstances, youth exchange projects have been suspended. We decided to continue JENESYS utilising online platforms since it is important to continue human resource development for the international community," he said.

Along this line, JICE has been organising webinars and online school exchanges since December 2020. The online activities, said Shionoya, have been useful and informative to participants pending actual field visits.

Bridging Cultural Divides

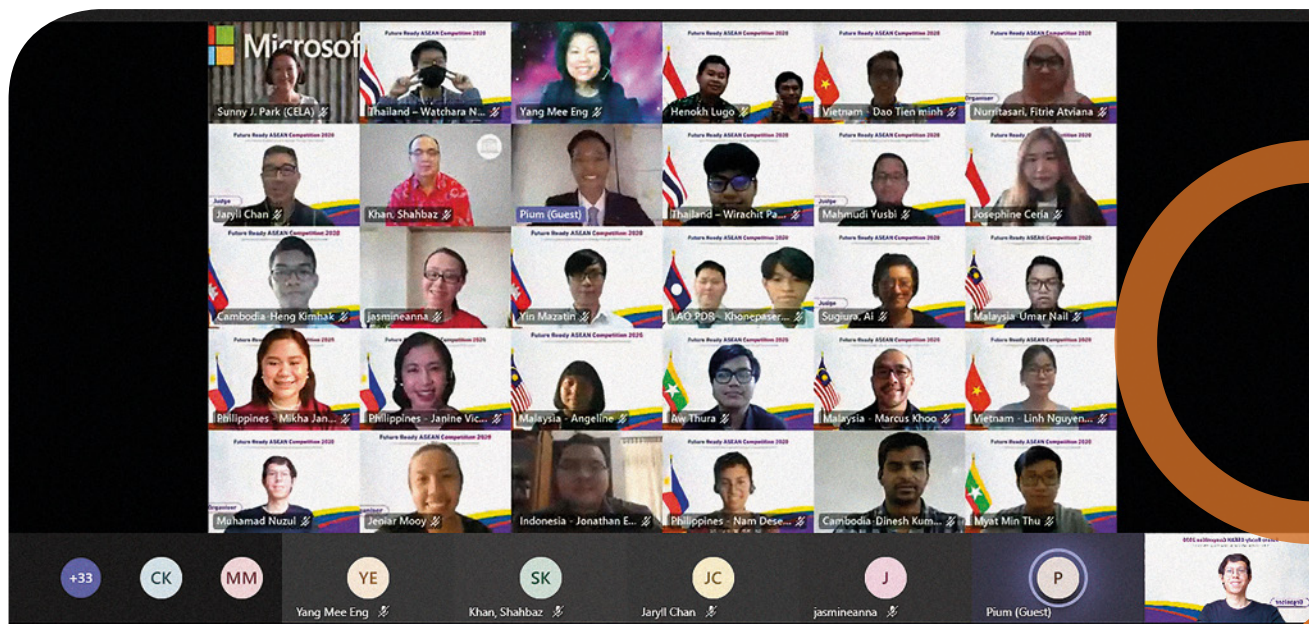
The task of bridging socio-cultural divides to maintain peace and harmony is a never-ending one—and the role that exchange projects like JENESYS plays in this process cannot be taken lightly.

Having benefited from positive cross-cultural experiences, the vast network of JENESYS alumni across the region can help dispel pre-existing biases, promote goodwill, and create spaces for intercultural dialogue and cooperation.

Miyazawa noted, "As JENESYS alumni know, JENESYS is not only a meaningful project to participate in, but also provides a basis for taking action, based on the JENESYS experience after returning home and the network that is established between ASEAN and Japan. The JENESYS experience is the first step to becoming a leader."

He added, "Finding and fostering young leaders, tackling the challenges facing the world, and building a global network of young leaders are important goals for youth exchange projects such as the JENESYS project. To achieve these goals, we will continue to support the young generation. In addition, in Japan, there are various scholarship programmes, fellowships, and training programmes. Embassies and consulates in ASEAN Member States can help youth to find additional opportunities."

With Japan and ASEAN set to celebrate the 50th anniversary of their relationship in 2023, the government of Japan expressed hope that JENESYS alumni activities will continue and the circle of friendship facilitated by JENESYS will expand for peace and prosperity. ■



Nurturing Innovation

among ASEAN Youth during a Pandemic



ANTHONI OCTAVIANO
HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS, ASEAN FOUNDATION

The COVID-19 pandemic has forcibly accelerated digitalisation in almost all aspects of human life in ways we never imagined. Physical distancing measures require a shift to digital technologies, with the amount of time we spend online surging to new heights. Nearly nine out of 10 youth in ASEAN reported increased reliance on digital tools in the past year, while almost half (42 per cent) have picked up at least one new device.

This situation has given rise to virtual events in a relatively short time. Many organisations, realising the greater access of young people to the internet and their hunger to improve themselves from the comfort of their home, are churning out webinars that focus on skills development on a daily basis and for free.

In an era where access-friendly virtual events have become the norm, it is

important to find novel, out-of-the-box ways to bring youth together to share experiences while inciting their curiosity and galvanising their innovative potential at the same time.

Embracing the New Online Era

For Nguyen Ngo Hoai Linh, a young arts and culture enthusiast from Viet Nam, her country's cultural heritage is something that she holds very dearly.

"When I was little, my grandmother was a big fan of the traditional performing arts of Viet Nam. I grew up loving to watch it as well. Whenever I have free time, I use it to participate in cultural projects and volunteer at a local art centre," she said.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced Linh to limit her activities, but it did not stop her from finding other ways to realise her passion. It was early in the pandemic when she found out about the Future Ready ASEAN Competition. The competition invited young people from across the region to come up with data-driven solutions on how to promote the richness of ASEAN's cultural heritage.

Together with her friend, Nguyen Hoang Lam, and a mentor, Dao Tien Minh, Linh developed an application that can identify various dance movements and inform users about the origins of the traditional dances in each ASEAN country. The innovative idea behind the app and the massive potential of its practical use became the judges'

deciding factor for selecting Linh and her team as the winner of the 2020 Future Ready ASEAN Competition.

For Linh, this is just the first step. She intends to further develop this app so that it can help people learn to perform ASEAN's traditional dances from the comfort of their home.

The Future Ready ASEAN Competition is part of the **ASEAN Digital Innovation Programme (ADIP)**, a regional initiative that was organised from March 2019 to December 2020 by ASEAN Foundation in partnership with Microsoft. ADIP aims to provide access to quality computer science education for the marginalised and underserved. ADIP is one of ASEAN Foundation's regional initiatives with activities that have shifted from in-person format to virtual engagement due to the pandemic. All key activities of the programme, such as the capacity building sessions and the data science competition, have since been implemented virtually.

The pandemic has forced us to rethink our approach in implementing our programmes more engagingly. With in-person activities restricted to control the spread of COVID-19, we have had to rely on digital technology to continue providing a platform for ASEAN youth to grow and realise their potential.

"In the time of pandemic, digitalisation is no longer an exclusivity, but a necessity. Our ability to adapt quickly in this fast-changing world is essential in ensuring that we are able to continue supporting youth development in the region," said Dr. Yang Mee Eng, the Executive Director of ASEAN Foundation.

ASEAN Data Science Explorers (ASEAN DSE), a programme that was initiated in 2017 in partnership with SAP, has also fully embraced this new direction, transitioning its data analytics competition into a virtual competition to continue building digital literacy and 21st-century skills for youth in the region amidst the pandemic.

The challenge for us was to make the 2020 competition interesting and appealing to prospective participants. Changes were made to ensure that the participants were motivated to deliver innovative, data-driven proposals that can help tackle

ASEAN's most pressing issues, including live-streaming all 10 national finals and the regional final of the competition on ASEAN Foundation's Facebook.

The ASEAN DSE Regional Finals in October 2020 saw three teams from Viet Nam, Singapore, and Malaysia emerge as winners due to their remarkable presentations and proposals. The proposal from the Singapore team, which consisted of Koay Tze Min and Ng Yi Ming, highlighted a relevant and serious issue: the rising number and root causes of domestic violence against women during COVID-19. The team's proposal raised a promising solution, which is the establishment of local community networks that strengthen women's rights and economic participation.

Protecting Youth from Lurking Danger

As one of the regional entities that helps promote virtual engagement as a norm among ASEAN youth, the ASEAN Foundation also recognises the danger that lurks behind the rise of digitalisation and the need to do something about it.

With young people now having greater access to the internet, are staying connected, and exploring their interests, they are now more vulnerable to online threats, such as cyberbullying, misinformation, security risks, and identity fraud. Indeed, we have not only witnessed an unprecedented crisis in the health and socio-economic sectors during this outbreak, but also the rise of infodemic and cybercrime.

With the support of Google, the ASEAN Foundation organised the Online Safety Webinar Series for Youth to prepare youth to confront these concerns. The webinar's goals are to promote safe and positive online experience for youth in ASEAN and advocate the value of digital citizenship. The ASEAN Online Safety Academy website has also been launched, with valuable resources for more people to continue learning about online safety.

The post-pandemic era will likely bring about new challenges that the world has never seen before. For our youth to take on these challenges and transform them into opportunities, they need to be equipped with the right skills. As the most tech-savvy generation, they have an amazing adaptability that allows them to quickly learn and maximise the benefits of digital technology.

Additional knowledge about online internet safety will also enable them to be creative and innovative while exploring the unlimited potential of the internet. Supporting their growth and providing them with relevant and engaging online experiences will help our youth reach their full potential. Proof of that are young people like Nguyen Ngo Hoai Linh, Koay Tze Min, and Ng Yi Ming who aspire to be innovators and drivers for positive change in their communities. ■

Country representatives at the Regional Finals of Future Ready ASEAN Competition 2020



Viewpoint:

The Power of Sports and Play

The ASEAN S4DPL Project



PHUNYANUCH PATTANOTAI
COUNTRY DIRECTOR
RIGHT TO PLAY THAILAND FOUNDATION

“The ASEAN S4DPL Project is very effective for the youth in the community and it made me become open-minded. I call this the most precious experience of my life,” says Wai Yan Thant Zin, Myanmar youth leader, reflecting on her experience being part of the ASEAN S4DPL Project.



Southeast Asia is a fast-growing and vibrant region, where more than 30 per cent of the over 655 million population are youth. By 2038, it is projected that the youth population will reach 220 million in total.

Towards the end of 2020, 58 change agents from ASEAN Member States, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Senior Official Meeting on Sports, and Right To Play gathered to celebrate the achievement of the **ASEAN Youth Sport for Development, Peace, and Leadership (ASEAN S4DPL) Project**. Through this Project, 44 project outreach initiatives are implemented in nine ASEAN Member States and Norway by youth leaders, which further empower 530 local youth leaders and positively impact about 6,500 children, youth, and adults in their local communities.

Can you describe the work that Right To Play Foundation has been doing since 2000? How does the power of play protect, educate and empower the youth? Endorsed as an official partner associated with ASEAN since 2016, Right To Play shares the same notion that sports is the key to sustainable development and a tool for

Top
ASEAN S4DPL leadership training

Bottom
"Operation Broken Wings," Singapore





Sports and play can be a great tool for all of us to stay healthy and mentally strong.

peace and social cohesion. We both believe that sports and physical activity can lead to crime prevention and minimisation of risky behaviours for at risk youth. For more than 20 years, Right To Play has relentlessly worked to protect, educate, and empower children and youth to rise above adversity through sports and play. Right To Play is the global organisation that uses the transformative power of play through different types of play (sports, games, creative play, and free play). With its headquarters in Toronto, Canada, Right To Play Thailand Foundation has been operational in Thailand since 2007 and implemented programmes for the most marginalised communities, including youth-at-risks in schools, refugees, migrants, and young people in detention and rehabilitation centres using sports and play as an innovative and dynamic learning tool within a comprehensive and holistic approach to education and life skills development.

What were the objectives of the ASEAN S4DPL project, and how were they achieved?

The ASEAN S4DPL Project's goal is to develop life skills and leadership for ASEAN youth leaders so that they can promote a sense of ASEAN Community, promote a healthy lifestyle, and improve crime prevention through Sports for Development and Peace. What we were expecting from this Project are three main things: (i) improved facilitation and leadership skills among ASEAN youth through sports and games; (ii) increased technical skills in regular sports; and (iii) outreach project initiatives implemented in local communities by youth leaders using sports. We would like to see "by youth and for youth movement" in the Southeast Asian region and beyond.

In line with the aforementioned, the design of overall training programme focuses on increasing leadership and facilitation skills through sports

activities while equipping Right To Play unique learning methodology of Reflect-Connect-Apply (RCA) questions to develop life skills such as leadership, self-confidence, empathy, decision-making, and communication through sports and play. Meanwhile, besides technical training on traditional and regular sports, the project trained youth leaders in the essential skills of project management, such as project proposal development, reporting financial expenses, and communication via photography. As a result, youth leaders can successfully develop and implement their outreach project initiatives employing sports and play to address a wide array of social issues in their local communities, including inclusion of persons with disabilities, education on gender equality, prevention of body shaming, promoting a healthy lifestyle, and peacebuilding.

How would you describe the Youth Leaders and the initiatives they chose for their communities?

The ASEAN S4DPL participating youth leaders are diverse in experiences and background. Some of them already work for particular NGOs or organisations with clear objectives and target groups. Some of them are professional athletes, and some of them are young people with potential and aspiration to make a positive change to societies.

Thus, the training programme provides knowledge of the sports and play for development that allows youth leaders to explore the roles of sports and its creative ways to address different issues in the ASEAN Community. They learned how sports and play could contribute to individual and social change from real-life stories, and exchanged knowledge of social issues/concern of local communities with other youths from ASEAN member countries and Norway before developing project proposals.

Upon returning to their respective home countries, youth leaders have a few months to develop project proposals involving local communities, with remote coaching from Right To Play staff so that they can finalise their project initiatives. The initiatives that were subsequently chosen are based on the socio-cultural context of their home communities, their interests and related work experiences, or their capacity to acquire resources and to reach target beneficiaries.

How did the youth leaders successfully implement their tasks despite the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

As the situation with COVID-19 continues to develop through the year, ASEAN S4DPL project adapted, by using online tools to continue rolling out activities with youth leaders, and keeping a strong network of future change makers and supporting them to successfully organise projects at their home countries.

For the youth to roll out their project initiatives despite the COVID-19 pandemic, modifications to project activities have been made depending on each country's situation, including arranging activities in small groups with social distancing practice, utilising online tools to complement actual activities, or designing virtual activities to complete project implementation. Some of the young participants brought what they learned to adapt their project to the current situation. Examples are as follows: "Move it Move it with Yoga" initiative by Selva Raju S/O Arumugam, a Singaporean youth leader who shifted his project online for participants to relieve stress, improve memory, help to sleep better, and boost overall mood through yoga; "Bright Health Media (Stay tune for your evolution)" initiative by Wai Yan Thant Zin, our youth leader from Myanmar to ensure a happy and healthy time at home during the 2nd wave of COVID-19 among university students with virtual platform, and deliver essential knowledge of physical and mental fitness.

For Right To Play, since physical gathering is limited, we continued to deliver our mentoring/coaching remotely using WhatsApp, LINE, and Facebook Messenger.

ASEAN S4DPL Facebook Group was created to maintain people-to-people connectivity and harmonisation of ASEAN youth. Online sessions were conducted on different aspects, such as non-violent communication, photography, COVID-19 programme modification, Digital Communication and Advocacy Campaign, and Sport & Play in ASEAN Community to ensure the success of youth-led initiatives implementation.

With the prolonged pandemic and limitations in mobility, play, and physical interaction, how can governments, communities, and youth continue developing skills through sports and play?

Building community resilience is key for ASEAN to thrive through the prolonged pandemic. COVID-19 kept children and youth away from schools and universities, and the uncertainties it has brought only added to their stress and anxiety. Sports and play can be a great tool for all of us to stay healthy and mentally strong. The success of ASEAN S4DPL shows that even with limitations caused by the pandemic, youth in the community can come together to arrange online sports activities, such as yoga at home or advocating the use of sport and play to maintain health.

Local communities can encourage youth activities using free spaces in communities. They can schedule different activities for small groups, for example, aerobic classes on Monday-Tuesday, football on Wednesday-Friday evening, drawing/painting on Saturday afternoon, and knitting on Sunday, and so on.

Governments or local authorities can support the youth and local communities by ensuring safe spaces for sports and play, and giving them access to hygiene and sanitation facilities and personal protective equipment (i.e. hand gels and face masks). It may also be useful to tap local TV channels, radio channels, YouTube, and other available media outlets to ramp up ideas or support for community-led activities that encourage people to stay active at home. ■

Building Fields of Dreams and Safe Places to Play

Right To Play Thailand Foundation Country Director Phunyanuch Pattanotai says it was not easy for the youth leaders to plan and implement projects in their communities. "We are proud of all the youth who continued to utilise what they learned to create a greater change in their communities despite the challenge caused by the COVID-19," she adds.



The ASEAN talked to three youth leaders who spearheaded sports projects in their respective communities after participating in the ASEAN S4DPL project.

**"Autism Friendly Sports"
Nguyen Tu Uyen and Tran Van Ninh,
Ho Chi Minh, Viet Nam**

This initiative strengthened, empowered, and promoted the active participation of children with autism (CWA) in adapted sports and sport-friendly competitions. Nguyen Tu Uyen and Tran Van Ninh held a seminar for parents and teachers about the importance of sports for kids with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

"Almost all Vietnamese still don't really understand autism, so they don't have the right insights for these children. And because of this reason, children with autism don't have many places to learn and play, although there are some

Nguyen Tu Uyen, one of the youth leaders behind "Autism Friendly Sports"

organisations, not many parents know about them," says Nguyen Tu Uyen.

"At first, both the children and the parents are still a little reserved with us. We tried to approach them by encouraging them while playing, high-five with them after each small exercise with the coach. And after a while, the children started to respond to us with their real smiles and hugs; some of them are still not speaking clearly but trying their best to say "Thank you" to us, and that was the most memorable moment for me.

"It was a journey of emotion when I was working with this project. At first, it was stress and worry because of COVID-19 we have to delay the date a few times and because we are afraid of not doing



Migrant children play on the sports ground built by Yadanar Oo

and preparing well enough for the children. Next is feeling grateful because of all the support from many places.

“With the “Autism Friendly Sport Funshop” I hope that we can introduce many more adapted sports to the children, more professional sports coaches I can connect to help the autism children learn and play sports in a professional way to create more playgrounds for them.”

“Sports Field”

Yadanar Oo, Mesot, Thailand

Twenty-two-year-old Yadanar Oo was born in Thailand to parents who were originally from Myanmar. Her adoptive parents founded a migrant learning centre in Mesot, Thailand. Yadanar has lived all her life in the boarding school, where she always wished there could be a playground. After joining an ASEAN S4PDL workshop, she raised more funds and enlisted other students and a teacher to build a sports field. In December 2020, she took on another project and built a playground for her school and community. Yadanar has bigger dreams of getting a university degree in economics and politics and working to uplift her migrant community.

“My migrant school is inside the town, so they cannot go out. We didn’t have a ground for football or basketball, so we don’t have that kind of activity.

“In government or private schools, they have playgrounds, sports fields. I know very well that migrant students want to do those activities because when I was young, I also imagined I wanted a school like this, so, I wanted to do this for them. Now the school has become more attractive for them to come and learn.



“When I got support from ASEAN, I started to build a sports field. On that sports field, we can play volleyball, basketball, football and many other activities.

“Right To Play does not only teach sports but also give life skills, leadership skills. So, through the workshop, we also give them the same. Even in our community, when we do a presentation, no one will be interested if we do not put some play in it. That’s why sports and play are very important.”

“I built a playground with a lot of different materials. I built it at the school, so students who live around here, at night they can always come and play. I feel that what I did affects them, and that makes me feel happy. Even if they’re kids, they can also feel stress from the COVID-19 pandemic. So, if they come to play and they feel happy, they can release their stress, at least just for a little bit.”

“Boys Peace Camp”

Chin Kok Soon, Harsimar Kuar, Tan Xin Guan, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Chin Kok Soon, Harsimar Kuar and Tan Xin Guan wanted to create a safe place to play for migrant children living in Malaysia. The concept of Boys Peace Camp was to instil peace education in underprivileged youth. Our focus was to improve their sportsmanship, teach them about promoting peace, understanding cultural differences, and breaking racial barriers.

“To fulfil this objective, our first objective was to instil decent character in them. This is important to educate the youth to think rationally and critically in the heat of the moment.

“We want to educate them that winning is not everything. There is more than that. The main thing is what they learn and do during the game. We use sports to educate them with values like; build patience,

increase awareness of surroundings, building trust, learning to communicate, respecting each other, working together, building self-confidence, and have them reflect on themselves.

“All of these values do not apply only in sports but throughout their lifetime. These values are essential for the youth to survive in this modern society. Hence, we decide to use sports to educate the youth with various activities about instilling a decent character.

“Sadly, during the project, Malaysia was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Malaysian Government has announced all outdoor activities to be halted immediately. Despite ending Peace Camp earlier but we managed to cover the main objective we had set.

“No child wants to be born poor. Our greatest concerns are children without education and their childhood being robbed from them due to poverty. We have seen children and families who are victims of wars, racial and political persecution. They flee from their homeland to seek refuge in another unfamiliar country and unfortunately, they have very little privilege and rights while residing in another country. Globally, there are still the underprivileged and marginalised. They are the ones left behind and it saddens us seeing children not being school at the age of early years, primary or secondary. With the Boys Peace Camp and Faisal Cup, we will continue to raise funds, bring in more partners and initiate more collaboration to ensure the activity is sustainable.

“What was most memorable throughout the project was seeing the youth participating eagerly, enjoying the activities and learning valuable skills. That really put smiles on our faces.” ■

Interviewed by Mary Kathleen Quiaño-Castro. Interviews were condensed and edited for clarity.

ASEAN Youth

Crucial for ASEAN's Recovery



THUY NGUYEN
PROJECT LEAD
ASIA-PACIFIC WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM



JOO-OK LEE
HEAD OF REGIONAL AGENDA
ASIA-PACIFIC WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

ASEAN youths are a tech-savvy demographic equipped with a growth mindset and blessed with abundant opportunities. Thus, they bear the important responsibility of making sure the regional digital economy continues to thrive. Their success may also be a key factor in the region's recovery. But the right policies must be in place to provide them with the most up-to-date skills, reliable digital infrastructure, and enabling ecosystems if this is to be the case.

Since 2017, the World Economic Forum has surveyed some 60,000 youths aged between 16 and 35 from across the ASEAN region annually. The survey, a collaboration between the Forum and Sea, a Singapore-based global consumer internet company, aims to gain statistical insights into the views, priorities, and concerns of the region's young population and thereby contribute to promoting data-driven policy-making processes in ASEAN.

Last year, the survey focused on examining the challenges that ASEAN youths faced while social distancing and exploring ways of coping with the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Their adaptability and resilience stand out among the key findings

As governments imposed travel restrictions and social distancing throughout the region, youths in ASEAN did not just stay home.

They stayed home and went online to continue studying, working, learning new skills, and even starting new businesses and new ways of doing business. Eighty-seven per cent of youths surveyed confirmed their increased use of at least one digital tool during the pandemic; 42 per cent picked up at least one

new digital tool. Thirty-three per cent of the entrepreneurs surveyed have used e-commerce selling more actively during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of those, one in four was using it for the first time. Many have observed that these changes would have required years to achieve in a world without the pandemic. What is more, ASEAN youths confirmed that these changes are not temporary; they will permanently transform lives and livelihoods beyond the pandemic.

These youths have not only adapted to the new normal imposed by the pandemic, but many have also exhibited signs of a growth mindset, resilience, and nimbleness. When asked in 2019 about the relevancy of their skills, 66.6 per cent of respondents shared that their skills at the time needed to be updated constantly, either immediately or after five years; 9.2 per cent of them confessed that their skills were already out of date. Many of them also reported that the number one reason they would change jobs would be to learn new skills, showing their willingness to prioritise skills over salary. Stemming from this growth mindset, ASEAN youths took the opportunity during the pandemic to focus on improving both their hard and soft skills. In fact, 41 per cent reported having learned new skills. Reskilling and





It is more urgent than ever now to undertake a whole-of-society approach to address talent shortages and equip ASEAN youths with the skills the digital economy demands most.

upskilling are popular among both students (with 64 per cent of full-time students surveyed saying they used online education tools more actively during COVID-19) and among workers (38 per cent of workers surveyed also confirmed their active use of online education during the pandemic), embracing the concept of lifelong learning.

The 2019 survey revealed that ASEAN youths were very confident about three sets of skills: resilience and adaptability, technology use, and creativity and innovation. The pandemic seems to have enhanced youths' confidence in these skills even more: 38 per cent reported having learned to think creatively; 48 per cent confirmed having learned to be more resilient and prepared for future pandemics; notably, 31 per cent found new business models and new ways to increase income.

The survey also exposed significant challenges youths have been facing during the pandemic.

Most (69 per cent) found it difficult to work or study remotely, with 7 per cent saying it was impossible. A lack of digital skills and the inadequacy/unavailability of quality and affordable internet connections were the greatest constraints, with 84 per cent of those not comfortable with using digital tools to do their job finding it difficult to work remotely.

The pandemic and the popularity of online education have created opportunities to build bridges between learners and trainers, but the overall situation is not that simple. Imagine a scenario where online learning sessions have been set up and all participants are ready and eager to start the session at the scheduled time. Yet, at that moment, the wi-fi signal of either or both parties affects the connection, causing continued disruptions during the hour and a half session. After weeks of experiencing

such discomfort, the students or trainers feel the need to upgrade their internet package but cannot do so after finding out the cost is prohibitive. This is unfortunately, a very common scenario. The survey shows that many youths from Viet Nam and Indonesia identified with such difficulties: 88 per cent of respondents in Viet Nam said their internet connection was affordable, but only 17 per cent were happy with the quality; while in Indonesia, 29 per cent found the internet expensive and only 43 per cent reported satisfaction with the quality.

Furthermore, the pandemic has also imposed funding constraints on ASEAN youths in the gig economy and on young entrepreneurs: 33 per cent of those who faced funding constraints said they relied more on bank loans. In comparison, 31 per cent relied on government support and 23 per cent turned to online financing. Some 14 per cent had to turn to informal financing.

Even before the pandemic, ASEAN stood out as the fastest growing online market in the world, with 125,000 new users daily. Its internet economy surpassed the 100 billion US dollar-mark in 2019. Despite the pandemic and its detrimental impact on certain segments, the overall regional internet economy continued to grow in 2020 and is still poised to grow to over 300 billion US dollars in gross merchandise volume by 2025. ASEAN member states identified e-commerce and the digital economy as the key drivers of the region's recovery in its recently endorsed [ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework](#). Several ASEAN countries aim to drive more than 20 per cent of their GDP from the digital economy by around 2025.

ASEAN youths are a tech-savvy demographic equipped with a precious growth mindset and blessed with abundant opportunities. Thus, they bear the important responsibility

of making sure the regional digital economy continues to thrive. Their success may also be a key factor in the region's recovery.

ASEAN as a region has seen its share of challenges and hardships over the years. However, throughout political and economic crises, conflict, and natural disasters, its people have maintained a keen sense of optimism and resilience and a strong will to move forward. Owning that nature, ASEAN youths will likely be able to turn this pandemic into a blessing in disguise, fostering innovation, prosperity, and inclusive and sustainable growth. Companies following the likes of Grab, Sea, and Tokopedia will grow and thrive in the region, particularly if the right policies are in place.

First and foremost, it takes the right skills to make anything happen. Talent has been reported for many years as a key block in the regional digital economy. *It is more urgent than ever now to undertake a whole-of-society approach to address talent shortages and equip ASEAN youths with the skills the digital economy demands most.* The World Economic Forum's [ASEAN Digital Skills Vision 2020](#), for example, has gathered pledges from 23 organisations to train more than 16 million people in the region with digital skills by the end of last year. The Forum is also exploring partnerships with several governments and businesses in the region to establish national Closing the Skills Gap Accelerators. Stakeholders in and outside the region should promote similar initiatives to boost the quality of the region's talent pool. Investing in the skills of ASEAN youths would also contribute to promoting inclusiveness. This is because youth also play a positive role in spreading digital skills to other segments of the population, particularly to older (perhaps less tech-savvy) demographics, and play a pioneering role in seeding tech adaptation in populations who are at greater risk of being marginalised because they are in remote, rural areas.



Secondly, *the region should invest intensively in improving its digital infrastructure.* It is not possible to unleash the full potential of online education, e-commerce, other digital services, and the digital economy as a whole without quality and affordable internet access. The region's digital infrastructure must accommodate the increasing bandwidth demand of the 40 million additional internet users who joined in 2020 and the many more who will join in the years to come, also noting that once they have joined, they will remain online and continue to connect, interact, learn, do business, and generate value for the economy.

Thirdly, *the region should put in place a facilitating and enabling ecosystem to empower young entrepreneurs in ASEAN.* The 2019 survey revealed that ASEAN youths strongly aspire to become entrepreneurs. Youths, in general, are full of innovative ideas and have a constant growth mindset. Still, they need agile and facilitating regulatory frameworks

and funding to commercialise their ideas, to scale and expand their businesses, and ultimately to generate more jobs and more income. Yet, many young entrepreneurs are not ordinarily able to access bank loans. As governments are mainly allocating resources to respond to the impacts of the pandemic, regional entrepreneurs have only limited access to government funding. Alternative funding from the private sector could be a solution, but enabling regulatory frameworks must be put in place to pave the way for new funding models while also protecting the legitimate rights of young entrepreneurs. Similarly, cutting red-tape and simplifying relevant administrative procedures is also within reach of ASEAN governments and would enable young entrepreneurs to start and restart (if needed) their businesses quickly.

Agile governance is particularly crucial to creating the space for innovative ideas to flourish. The Agile 50, a joint initiative

between the World Economic Forum Global Future Council on Agile Governance and Apolitical, honours the world's 50 most influential people revolutionising governance. Six of the 50 individuals awarded are from the ASEAN region. The region needs more people like them to pioneer novel approaches to governance. It will transform government responses to rapid technological change in a way that promotes innovation and nurtures entrepreneurship for the public good.

ASEAN youths are full of potential. They are set to be the key contributor to ASEAN's recovery, particularly by driving the region's digital economy. But to unleash their full potential, they require support to gain the right skills and access quality and affordable digital infrastructure. They need to feel empowered by systems that enable and facilitate their endeavours. ■



Shifting Currents

The COVID-19 Pandemic: A Year On

Protecting and Revitalising Key Health Services for Children

MARCOLUIGI CORSI
DEPUTY REGIONAL DIRECTOR
UNICEF REGIONAL OFFICE IN EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



The world as we know it has changed. COVID-19 unleashed itself with alarming speed, leaving no continent or country untouched. While children are not the face of the pandemic, they are among the hardest hit.

In countries across ASEAN, home to over 655 million people, the pandemic has badly hit families already struggling to put food on the table and educate their children. People have lost jobs and income security, further increasing inequalities. It has piled new layers of hardship on a region highly prone to natural disasters and buffeted by climate change.

Health systems have been put to the test by COVID-19. Whether sufficiently or under-resourced, most countries have witnessed the disruption of essential health services, such as antenatal care, maternal and newborn care, and immunisation programmes. Our most vulnerable and most marginalised communities find themselves with limited or no access to basic services.

In many cases, health service providers, including those who also engage in vaccination programmes have been caring for COVID-19 patients, creating pressures on staffing. But even where routine health services were provided, many people have been too scared to use them for fear of contracting the virus.

Immunisation campaigns have been postponed because of travel restrictions, lack of health workers, and personal protective measures. As a result, children are missing out on critical vaccines. There are indications that routine immunisation coverage is decreasing, putting some countries at risk of outbreaks of extremely contagious diseases like measles. The region suffered from huge outbreaks of measles in 2018 and 2019, as well as polio outbreaks, and fortunately, these were brought under control.

There are three main ways in which children have been affected. First, by direct infection with the disease itself or the infection of a caregiver; second, by the immediate consequences of actions to contain the pandemic, such as school closures and the disruption

of essential health and immunisation services; and third, by the socio-economic crisis that threatens to erase long-term development gains. Every victory painstakingly won for children's rights and dignity over the years, if not decades, is at risk of unravelling.

Immunisation Saves Lives

The pandemic is a stark reminder of how fast an outbreak can spread without a vaccine to protect us. The science is clear. Vaccines are safe and effective. They give us the best protection from infectious diseases and protect our society from various outbreaks.

Thanks to vaccines, many of us have been fortunate to grow up without seeing family or friends die or suffer life-long disability from diseases like measles or polio. Evidence has shown that immunisation saves up to two to three million lives each year.

COVID-19 is a Global Problem—Fair and Equitable Distribution of Vaccines is the Only Solution

The Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator is a global collaboration to speed up the development, production, and equal access to COVID-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines. COVAX (the vaccines pillar of the ACT-Accelerator) aims to accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines and make sure that they reach the poorest countries in the world.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently shared its concerns of “vaccine nationalism,” which may further increase the risk of COVID-19 muting. If fair and equitable distribution of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines to low and middle-income countries fails, we could see a profound setback to child rights. UNICEF is working with the COVAX Facility to support countries equitably access COVID-19 vaccines and prepare safe and quality immunisation programmes for targeted risk populations.

Through the COVAX Facility—together with Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (Gavi), the Vaccine Alliance; WHO; and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI)—UNICEF, in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), is leveraging its unique experience as the largest single vaccine buyer in the world to procure COVID-19 vaccine doses, and manage freight, logistics, and storage.

UNICEF is also bringing the full weight of its strength in communication and community engagement and expansive social mobilisation network to build demand and acceptance for immunisation.

The existence of a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine alone will not end the pandemic. We need a diverse set of tools to help slow the spread of COVID-19, including diagnostics and treatments, and a continuance of preventive measures such as hand washing, physical distancing, and mask-wearing.



Vaccinating Priority Groups

Once the current COVID-19 vaccine candidates have successfully undergone clinical trials, are proven to be both safe and effective, and have received regulatory approval, available doses will be allocated to all countries participating in the COVAX Facility using a standardised allocation formula proportional to their total population size.

Massive global demand will mean that not everyone will be able to get the vaccine at the same time. It will take months—or even years—to create enough vaccines for everyone around the world.

The first priority will be getting vaccines to frontline health workers. The next portion of vaccine doses will allow participating countries to vaccinate high-risk groups, including the elderly and those with medical conditions that put them at greater risk of serious illness and death following COVID-19 infection.

In response to the pandemic, school closures resulted in the unprecedented and sudden disruption of children's education, affecting millions of children in the ASEAN Member States. UNICEF is also calling for teachers to be prioritised to receive the COVID-19 vaccine once frontline health personnel and high-risk populations are vaccinated. This will help protect teachers from the virus, allow them to teach in person, and ultimately keep schools open.

Misinformation has undermined trust in vaccines, causing some people to delay or refuse vaccination. The circulation of misinformation has increased and become more complex during the pandemic.



If fair and equitable distribution of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines to low and middle-income countries fails, we could see a profound setback to child rights.



Disseminating accurate information and stopping the spread of misinformation is important to ensure that everyone is protected with life-saving vaccines.

COVID-19 Vaccines in ASEAN Member States

In February, UNICEF and its partners announced the indicative distribution plan by the COVAX Facility. This will help countries continue their preparations for vaccine distribution by providing them with details of the type of vaccine each country will receive in the first and second quarters of 2021. This is just an initial tranche of COVAX vaccines. More will follow.

Of the ASEAN Member States, Cambodia was one of the first countries to receive COVID-19 vaccines from the COVAX Facility—324,000 doses of the AstraZeneca licensed to Serum Institute of India (SII) on 2 March 2021. These 324,000 doses are the first of a total of 1.1 million doses that will be provided in batches by the COVAX Facility by the end of May. Cambodia is expected to receive doses for 20 per cent of the total population (an estimated 7 million doses) from COVAX, with further batches continuing to arrive throughout the year. A couple of days later, the Philippines received more than 480,000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccines on 4 March 2021. Other countries in the region, Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam are in the pipeline.

In preparation, UNICEF has been stockpiling half a billion syringes, along with safety boxes to dispose of them. This is critical to any vaccination programme. We have worked closely with airlines and other partners to ensure that all the necessary logistical and planning arrangements are in place. And we are supporting governments and partners in developing national plans to assess their logistics. This includes helping plan, coordinate, budget, and prepare their health facilities

and cold chain ahead of vaccine delivery. Along with WHO and Gavi, we are also advising countries to help improve their vaccine roll-out plans.

ASEAN's Global Leadership on Equitable Distributions and Vaccine Security

In November 2019, ASEAN Leaders adopted the declaration on **ASEAN Vaccine Security and Self-Reliance** to prevent the outbreak of vaccine-preventable diseases in the region. The declaration represents the ASEAN Leaders' decisiveness to avoid incidental vaccine shortage and improve the supply of affordable, quality vaccines for both normal and emergency situations for the benefit of children and people in the ASEAN Member States.

As well as ensuring equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics, UNICEF will redouble its efforts to protect and revitalise key health services for children. To prevent the rapid reversal of years of progress on child survival, we must ensure the continuity of and investment in routine vaccination and other essential health services.

Now is the time for the ASEAN community to demonstrate its vision and solidarity against vaccine nationalism not only for the sake of the current pandemic but also to realise a safe and sustainable world for its most vulnerable.

Working together, we can reimagine a fairer world, where all children realise their right to good health. ■



For further information, please contact Shima Islam, Regional Communication Specialist, ssislam@unicef.org

Learn more about UNICEF's work in East Asia and Pacific at <https://www.unicef.org/eap/>



Mental Health Care Admire the Pandemic



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The new normal is a term that has reverberated around the world in the hopes of bringing back some semblance of normalcy in everyday life. The COVID-19 pandemic is a catastrophic event that has infected 120 million people, claimed at least 2.7 million lives, and brought operations and businesses to a standstill. It has been likened to the 1918 Flu Pandemic, which infected a third of the world population and left a death toll of at least 50 million worldwide.

To curb the spread of the virus, most countries implemented lockdowns and border closure. But, in a bid to control the contagion, fundamental issues may have been overlooked. A recent WHO survey revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted or halted critical mental health services in 93 per cent of countries worldwide, affecting persons suffering from mental and psychological challenges. Different countries have different approaches in containing or mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic, including social distancing and self-isolation/quarantine, forcing physical interactions to a bare minimum. Mental health issues can emanate due to these situations:

- i. **In the period of self-isolation/quarantine:**
For those in quarantine, regardless of whether it is home-based or in dedicated facilities, mental well-being may

be affected negatively due to limited social and physical interaction as well as the absence of normal daily routine.

- ii. **Aftermath of self-isolation/quarantine:**
Stigmatisation by the general public especially in the workplace and community settings may cause the person to be rejected or isolated, which in turn, may cause further anxiety and depression.
- iii. **Post COVID-19 treatment:**
There have been reported cases in other countries that COVID-19 causes long-term negative health effects that need further medical treatment and care (long COVID). This limitation in patients' physical abilities may also impact negatively their mental health.

- iv. **Socioeconomic impacts:**
In most parts of the world, many have lost their jobs and have taken a hit on their incomes, lost friends and families. All these inevitably cause a toll on social and mental health.



ASEAN's 2035 vision addresses mental health issues appropriately through its theme this year, "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper."

The enforcement of strategies to curtail COVID-19 transmission is proving to have adverse effects on people suffering from mental health issues and those with disabilities. Movement limitations, which have disrupted their day to day routine, have exacerbated their condition. The Kaiser Family Foundation, for example, reported an increase in the number of adults reporting symptoms of anxiety disorder, from 11 per cent in January 2019 to 41.1 per cent in January 2021.

Experts note that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on the world population's mental health, particularly the youth, elderly and vulnerable. Brunei Darussalam is no exception to this phenomenon. The number of calls received through the mental health helpline, set up by the Ministry of Health of Brunei Darussalam "Talian Harapan 145" (TH145), almost doubled when COVID-19 struck with 352 calls in March 2020 compared to 199 calls in March 2019. As such, Brunei Darussalam considers it crucial to address issues of mental health since it not only affects people's wellbeing but also impacts the economic growth and development of any country. A mentally healthy population contributes to productivity and prosperity, and is imperative for economic sustainability.

ASEAN's 2035 vision addresses mental health issues appropriately through its theme this year, "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper." Some of the planned initiatives and programmes to support this endeavour at the regional level are through existing ASEAN mechanisms and platforms, such as those in the ASEAN Health Sector is through the ASEAN Health Cluster 1: Promoting Healthy Lifestyles. Its key initiatives are embodied in the Work Programme 2016-2020. They include sharing effective models and practices on mental health programmes and interventions among ASEAN countries

and scaling up the integration of mental health programmes into primary and secondary levels of care. A continuation of that is integrated in the Work Programme 2021-2025, where planned activities on mental health are intended to be more cross-sectoral oriented with more involvement from relevant ASEAN dialogue partners.

State authorities in ASEAN will serve their country well by ensuring that mental health and psychosocial support services are equally prioritised in times of pandemic. This means engaging the services of available certified psychotherapists to provide psychosocial care for the general public. They can be tapped to operate helplines, conduct virtual counselling, participate in interactive websites, and be available via other means of communication.

At the ASEAN level, exchange of experiences, best practices and lessons learned from the activities mentioned above will allow everyone to work towards minimum standards of mental health response and support. Additionally, support from relevant dialogue partners and international bodies at the regional level can be explored. This can be in terms of providing technical expertise for capacity building and direct support on alleviating and mitigating mental health crisis in the future.

ASEAN needs to prioritise and strengthen its mental health programmes as part of its current response initiatives to COVID-19. It must take advantage of this period to assess and address, where relevant, the underlying effects of the pandemic on mental health. The regional bloc can also explore ways to improve and maximise existing programmes by leveraging its active engagements with ASEAN's dialogue partners; ASEAN needs to develop action plans, guidelines or mechanisms designed to mitigate any pandemic-related impact on mental health.

For this to work, there is also a need to invest in primary health care as an approach to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC). An effective, efficient, and equitable UHC will benefit all people in our community, particularly the vulnerable groups. Member States must persevere to reach UHC while enhancing quality health care and promoting good physical and mental health and well-being for all. As ASEAN, we should strive to care, as we together prepare, for only together, we will prosper. ■

Conversations

Imagination, love of country, and interest in technology and solutions drive young ASEAN nationals to innovate and succeed.



Audrey Maximillian Herli

CEO, Mental Health App Co-founder, 28

Brothers Audrey Maximillian Herli and Audy Christopher Herli co-founded Riliv in 2015 to help improve mental health services in Indonesia. The application allows people struggling with mental health issues to talk to licensed mental health professionals online. Riliv also provides other digital therapies that are designed for people seeking wellness and peace of mind.

So far, Riliv has attracted more than 300,000 users and over 100,000 people have used its online counselling service. Maxi, who studied information systems at the University of Airlangga in Surabaya, Indonesia, and his brother made it to the Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia 2020 List. In 2017, Riliv was named the best sustainable start-up by a national newspaper and won in the Google Business Group Stories Search.

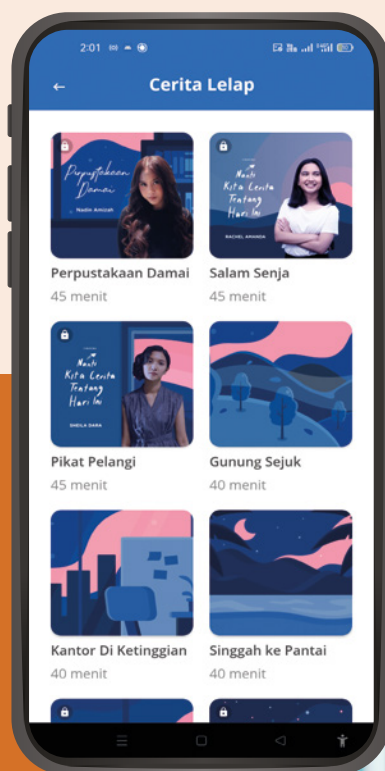
"Before we started Riliv, I saw many people struggling with their personal problems. They expressed their feelings and their stories about their lives on social media, but no one could really help them address their issues. This reflects a bitter truth, especially when we learned from data released by WHO that around the world, one person dies every second from suicide because of depression caused by their personal problems.

"This became our starting point to build Riliv because we want to become a bridge that connects people with licensed psychologists to receive professional counseling. Through the app, users can talk about their stories with our psychologists privately and securely, without fear of being judged by others. Riliv is collaborating with the Indonesian Psychology Association (HIMPSI), and we are so lucky because HIMPSI has been incredibly supportive and open-minded in promoting online counselling. Hence, it's easier to find licensed psychologists to be our partners.

"We did some research to assess what kind of facilities people need the most to help improve their mental health, and I believe the services that we have now can help address the issues in the society. The Riliv application has three services. For users who want to



Maxi (left) and Audy (right) built Riliv application to provide online mental health counselling service and various digital therapies



“During the pandemic, especially from March to May 2020, we recorded an increased number of people registering for our services.”



meditate, we have a meditation feature with an online audio guide to help people relax their minds and bodies, and more people are using this feature now. The online counselling feature is our most popular service. Users can find the best psychologists to talk about their mental health issues by accessing the app. We also have Riliv for Company service that is designed to assist organisations seeking to improve the quality of life and mental health of their employees.

“Our biggest challenge is to spread awareness on mental health, to promote the importance of looking after our mental health. Even until now, many people are still reluctant to get professional help from psychologists because they’re afraid of being judged, of being labelled ‘crazy’, lack of faith, or other bad labels attached to mental health. We want to wipe out this social stigma and change the mindset that it’s really okay to see psychologists, and they will not become less of a human if they go to psychologists.

“There are many ways to eliminate the stigma, and technology definitely plays a great part in it. Thanks to technology, we can also be here to help raise awareness on mental health. Apart from the application, we post content on our social media to educate people on mental health. We have over 280,000 followers on Instagram, and the number keeps increasing. With this, we hope more people can be more aware of mental health issues. Collaborating with government and non-governmental organisations, private companies, and other parties is also important to improve awareness.

“The pandemic also brings many new challenges to many people. During the pandemic, especially from March to May 2020, we recorded an increased number of people registering for our services. I think they saw Riliv as a breath of fresh air that could help them address their problems during difficult times. And at that time, it was difficult for people to go outside so they found it easier to do online counselling. The issues were mostly

related to the pandemic, such as their careers, relationships, making peace with an unpleasant situation, and moving forward.

“Six years on, we’re glad to see that Riliv has been able to help so many people address their personal problems. According to our data, many of our users had their first interaction with a psychologist through Riliv. This shows that Riliv has become a platform for those who need to see psychologists but are reluctant to do so because of the stigma that still comes with mental health. Our goal is to continue working to help more people struggling with mental health issues in Indonesia and other countries in Southeast Asia, while at the same time eliminating the social stigma attached to it, with our digital solutions.” ■

Interviewed by Novia D. Rulistia. The conversation has been edited and condensed for clarity. The views and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the interviewee and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

Seng Rothsethamony

Digital Content Creator, 18

Like many teenagers who grew up with technology, Seng Rothsethamony, or Mony, finds her passion in the digital world. Mony majors in Global Affairs at the University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia but she is pursuing her interest in digital technology. Mony has participated in several coding and IT training programmes, including the ASEAN Digital Innovation Programme (ADIP), to better equip herself in the digital era.

In March 2020, Mony and her college friends established Bannang Creative Innovation, a digital marketing company aiming to help business owners in Cambodia go digital.

"I'm always keen on technology and business. With two of my university friends, Ngov Menghieng and Visith Visal, we shared this idea to build a digital marketing company. Although we didn't have any experience in tech, I'm studying global affairs and they are studying business and graphic design, we decided to give it a try because we believe that it will become a significant industry in the near future. Digital marketing is much better than traditional marketing because it's easy, more effective, and has a huge impact as it can reach a large number of people. With this, we can help business owners in Cambodia to grow their business digitally.

"In the beginning, we had to work without being paid because we didn't ask for any funding to help us run the company. We did everything ourselves based on our limited knowledge as we couldn't recruit anyone yet. But we were finally able to find a team member with a solid technology background to join us onboard.

"Our biggest challenge was to explain to business owners who have no idea about what digital marketing is. We explained

Through Bannang Creative Innovation, Mony helps business owners in Cambodia embrace the digital era



Photo Credit: © Seng Rothsethamony

to them it's not like traditional marketing where you give leaflets to people, but it's promoting the products digitally on the Internet. It was also difficult to get clients in the beginning because we were new to this industry. And during the pandemic, it was even harder to find clients because of the lockdown.

But we didn't give up. We kept working on finding clients, telling them about the benefits of digital marketing, and how to sell their products online. We also kept researching and studying to improve our team's abilities in all fields, including sales and marketing, graphic design, media production, human resource management, financial management, and operation as well.

"Now, our company has a total of 18 people, and we have also worked with big companies, SMEs, international institutions, and international NGOs. We promote our digital marketing agency to the public through our social media platform and collaborate with influencers from various sectors, like education, entertainment, and travel.

Mony (back row, third right) and her team at Bamnang Creative Innovation

"If we compare it to five years ago, I can say that digital marketing in Cambodia is growing significantly, especially after the pandemic."

"The competition in digital marketing is quite tight now, but we are ready for it because we have our own unique points. We are focusing mainly on the art, design, and the quality of the production, not the quantity. If we already have too many companies to handle, we will not take a new one as we want to focus on the quality. In the next five years, we hope we can go fully digital where we will also provide services for website development, Google SEO, and Google Ads.

"As the business grows, I have to divide my time carefully between school and work. Apart from Bamnang, I'm also the co-president of the Beautiful Learning Cambodia branch, an NGO that is based in Seoul. I'm in charge of external communication and partnership in Cambodia. But I set my priorities: I put Bamnang at the top, my studies second, and then Beautiful Learning. I'm very lucky that my parents are really supportive of what I do.

"If we compare it to five years ago, I can say that digital marketing in Cambodia is growing significantly, especially after the pandemic. Because this is a free market system, the companies can pop up anytime, and there are more digital marketing companies in Cambodia right now; some were just established a few months ago. Some ministries and many institutions have also started to shift to digital marketing, and I think that's good.

"Technology is growing in ASEAN, and young people in the region are quite tech-savvy. Unfortunately, most are still using it for entertainment only. I really hope ASEAN and other entities can help improve the digital literacy of the youth on how to use technology for other purposes, like education and business." ■

Interviewed by Novia D. Rulistia. The conversation has been edited and condensed for clarity. The views and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the interviewee and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.



Angelo Casimiro

Budding Engineer and Inventor, 22

At four years old, Angelo Casimiro constructed his first light bulb switch. At 14, he built a “fighting” robot that won first place in a national robotics competition.

At 15 years old, he developed an electricity generating footwear that became a local winner and a regional finalist at the 2014 Google Science Fair—a prestigious international competition for promising young scientists.

Now at 22 years old, Angelo has over a hundred science and engineering projects under his belt, ranging from water-powered calculator to portable solar powerbank. Many of these are posted as do-it-yourself tutorials on Instructables, YouTube, and TikTok, designed to inspire creativity and resourcefulness in other people.

On the verge of completing an engineering degree at the De La Salle University, Angelo dreams of contributing to the Philippines’ technological progress by forming his own research and development (R&D) company and developing cutting-edge technologies in the fields of renewable energy and transportation.

“I used to stay with my maternal grandparents after school. I got to spend a lot of time with my grandfather who was a retired mechanical engineer. He was fond of tinkering with stuff around the house and working on projects. His ideas for projects would come from *Popular Mechanics* since at that time, Internet use was not yet widespread, and do-it-yourself content was nonexistent.

“My interest in technology was nurtured by my family, especially my grandfather who was my earliest mentor. I was an inquisitive child, and would always ask



about how things work. One time, I saw my grandfather trying to fix my cousin’s remote control car. I pestered him with a lot of questions which he answered very patiently. Since then, doing projects became our pastime. We began with simple projects like making light bulbs work and building a wind turbine. Our dream was to eventually make an electric car. We were talking about it before he passed away when I was nine.

“I owe a lot to my parents too. When I was little, my parents would buy me toys and not even a week later, they would be in pieces. Instead of getting mad, they would just take it in stride. That gave me the courage to explore more. Scolding me would have prevented me from learning. When my grandfather and I began doing our homemade projects, my parents would bring

Angelo hopes to motivate other technology enthusiasts and aspiring engineers to start their own projects by posting his own on various media platforms

me to hardware and electronics stores where you wouldn’t normally bring a kid. Looking back, I think I spent more time in these shops than I did in toy stores.

“I mostly learned through hands-on experience. I supplemented this by watching YouTube tutorials. I first learned about the basics, such as electrical switches, and then I moved on to electronics, analog and digital. I gradually accumulated all these knowledge until one day, I would look at a product and would have a clear idea what’s inside of it and how it works, much like an x-ray vision.



Angelo plans to continue working on technologies that will advance renewable energy production and sustainable transportation

"Ideas for my projects come from what I observe are problems that can be fixed with simple engineering solutions. Occasionally, ideas pop up during random conversations with friends. For example, just last year, contact-free devices became necessary to avoid getting COVID-19, so I developed a low-cost, hands-free alcohol dispenser that people can make on their own. A few years ago, I also developed a portable solar powerbank that can be used for emergency. It can charge appliances like an electric fan for two hours.

"My favorite project is still the electricity-generating footwear, my entry to the 2014 Google Science Fair. In a nutshell, it involves putting a device between the sole and insole of your shoes so that when you take a step, a certain amount of electricity is generated. This can be used for charging phones, etc. I think I was the first Filipino to become a finalist. The project was featured not only in the local media, but the international media as well, such as the *HuffPost*, *The Verge*, and *Gizmodo*. It was even mentioned in an episode of the *Big Bang Theory* (Season 8). I also started to gain a following on my channels. I guess this jumpstarted public recognition and so now, every time I make an interesting project, it gets noticed by the news media.

"But, the most meaningful projects for me are the mini-projects involving renewable energy. Even when I was a kid, I gravitated towards solar and wind power. Right now I have this mini-series on YouTube on using different renewable energy sources for contraptions, such as high-powered electric bikes that contain a lot of smart devices. I'm also going to build a motorbike from scratch with some high efficiency technology inside.

"I want to create a smart, automated home, which I want to run on purely renewable energy. A few months ago, I made my room automated. The remote control box I made, which communicates through wifi, serves as the main power switch and allows you to select whether you're going to use power from the grid or from the solar panel. Next, I need to make a programme that will connect this to Amazon's Echo Dot. Right now, my small solar panel is generating 500 watt-hours per day. That translates to savings of about 4.50 Philippine pesos per day (.092 US dollars per day). The bigger panels I plan to install will produce 14 times more energy.

"It's actually hard to sustain this 'hobby' if you don't have funding. You have to save and supplement what you have with another

source of income; otherwise, you'll end up lacking the parts that you need for bigger, more complex projects.

"At the moment, I really lean towards open sourcing the projects so everyone can build—that's the beauty in open source. Instead of people paying a lot of money, they can just build anything and tweak it the way they want to. Even though I have learned how patenting works and I'm now more conscious about intellectual property for the projects I develop, I don't think I'm ready for it just yet. Getting patents—not just at the national level, but also at the regional and international levels—is expensive and so you have to make sure that you at least breakeven from the mass manufacturing of your product. Patents expire after 20 years so you have a short window to make your product commercially viable. I have two projects that may be feasible for patenting in the future.

"My ultimate dream is to one day improve the R&D capability of the Philippines. I want to start a company that focuses on R&D to help advance technology in the country. The Philippines is really a good place to put up an R&D centre since semiconductor manufacturers are here in Asia and cost of doing business in the country is much lower.

"In the future, I would like to work on renewable energy production and sustainable transportation in the Philippines. My thesis proposal will likely focus on this topic—establishing a system where households can share their excess solar energy with one another. We have to push the boundaries of what can be done to make electricity consumption efficient and affordable even if there is initial resistance. It will definitely bring technological disruption, but it has worked well for many industries like telecommunications." ■

Interviewed by Joanne Agbisit. The conversation has been edited and condensed for clarity. The views and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the interviewee and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

Gibran Huzaifah

Aquaculture Tech Entrepreneur, 32

In 2013, Gibran Huzaifah introduced eFishery, a smart-feeding technology that modernised the feeding method for fish and shrimps, and in the process, transformed the lives of fish and shrimp farmers in Indonesia.

Once a fish farmer himself, Gibran says that feeding management is an essential factor in the aquaculture industry. With the help of technology, the farmers can ensure an efficient and effective feeding management.

For his innovation, Gibran, who studied biology at the Bandung Institute of Technology in Indonesia, has received numerous recognition, including the Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia 2017, Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year (innovation category) 2018, and MIT Technology Review's 2020 Innovators Under 35.

"I started my catfish farming business when I was still in college. During that time, I realised that feeding management was crucial because 80 per cent of the total cost production is allocated for feeding, yet many farmers still do hand feeding that is not effective and efficient. With hand feeding, the feed can't be evenly spread out, so not all fish can get the same amount of feed which will make the size of the fish uneven. This becomes a problem since buyers usually have specific sizes they would like to purchase. The feeding dose is also a problem; if you underfeed, the fish will be malnourished, and if you overfeed, the nutrient runoff will pollute the water.

"Before I started eFishery, I saw how technology disrupted sectors like commerce, financial services, and media to strive and achieve more targets, significantly changing the way people transact, communicate, and study. But fish farming practice never changed in the last 30 years. I found it quite ironic that many innovations are developed to solve issues for urban citizens, like online shopping and food deliveries, but the essential sectors, such as agriculture and aquaculture, see almost zero



digital innovation. This was necessary to do, and the problems needed to be solved.

"Moreover, Indonesia's potential in the aquaculture sector is huge. We are the second largest aquaculture producer in the world, just behind China, and

Gibran believes that digital innovation plays a crucial role in advancing the aquaculture industry



“I regularly visit our farmers to know first-hand if they have anything to complain about. The insights from the farmers are useful to improve our products.”

we’ve only utilised 7-9 per cent of the total aquaculture potential. Technology is the only way for us to realise that potential.

“Introducing the technology to the farmers was our biggest challenge. It took me months to convince them to try and use my product. They finally wanted to try, not because they believed in the technology but because they pitied me. Introducing our IoT (Internet of Things) technology to them was challenging because they were not regular users of the internet. I remember we had this Internet 101 with the farmers; we showed them how to create an email, use Facebook, get information from YouTube, and other stuff. I can proudly say that eFishery has played a crucial role in introducing the internet to the farmers.

“More importantly, we also improve the livelihoods of the fish and shrimp farmers in Indonesia using our technology. In the

longer term, we would like to create an aquaculture ecosystem that is inclusive, profitable, and sustainable.

“We have grown so much. We have reached more than 180 cities across Indonesia and our eFisheryPoint (like a hub or satellite office of eFishery) is present in more than 85 cities. The farmers’ income has improved by 45 per cent, feed efficiency is up to 20 per cent, and their production capacity is up to 26 per cent. More than 55 billion Indonesian rupiah of loan has been disbursed and more than 800 farmers now have access to financing, enabling them to grow their business and provide better life for their families. We hope to bring the adaptation of our technology to other islands too, like Sulawesi and Kalimantan, to level the field so every farmer across Indonesia has the same access to the technology,

Since 2013, eFishery has enabled hundreds of aquaculture farmers across Indonesia to sustainably improve their business

financing, and markets. Our team also has quadrupled; they’re living across the country.

“We are continuously making improvements so farmers can get the best experience when using our technology. I regularly visit our farmers to know first-hand if they have anything to complain about. The insights from the farmers are useful to improve our products. We would like to focus on strengthening our core operations in Indonesia because the potential here is huge. We have done some pilot projects in Bangladesh, Thailand, and Viet Nam, and we’re looking forward to expanding there in the near future.

“About the recognition that I have received, they are more like a collective achievement rather than a personal achievement. I wouldn’t receive those awards if my co-founder and the whole team did not help me build eFishery, if my wife and family did not believe in me and support me. This serves as a reminder that I have been enabled by so many people, and in return, I would have to help and enable others, too.

“I think it’s important to give more space and opportunity for youth to explore and identify the potentials and challenges in this region and give them a platform to realise their ideas to overcome those challenges. For example, ASEAN has been a major producer of fish and other fisheries products. Combined, the 10 ASEAN countries account for a quarter of global fish production. Imagine if we can disrupt the aquaculture ecosystem throughout ASEAN with technology. We are really looking forward to being the super-app in the aquaculture industry.” ■

Interviewed by Novia D. Rulistia. The conversation has been edited and condensed for clarity. The views and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the interviewee and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

Women's Month

In celebration of Women's Month, ASEAN launched two milestone regional studies that aim to inform Member States' gender policies and interventions

Young female leaders speak on their trailblazing work in the areas of technology and biodiversity conservation



ASEAN Leaves No Woman and Girl Behind



KWINRAJ CHAND
ASSOCIATE OFFICER, POVERTY ERADICATION AND GENDER DIVISION
ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT

***The ASEAN Gender Outlook: Achieving the SDGs for All and Leaving No Woman or Girl Behind* is a regional flagship publication jointly produced by the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW), the ASEAN Secretariat, and UN Women. Launched on 1 March 2021, the study provides new data that shows the need to continue investing in vulnerable women and girls to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).**

Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They are cross-cutting issues for the realisation of the SDGs. Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls must be addressed as building blocks and accelerators for progress across the SDGs, especially in the context of ASEAN. Sustainable development calls for integrated and comprehensive responses to today's social, economic, and environmental challenges.

ASEAN and UNDP's *Report of the ASEAN Regional Assessment of MDG Achievement and Post-2015 Development Priorities* published in 2015 shows that ASEAN Member States have made remarkable progress towards sustainable development in the past two decades through coordinated regional efforts and national policies. There have been notable gains in reducing extreme poverty, eliminating barriers to education, and improving health outcomes. Nevertheless, addressing gender inequality remains a key challenge.

ASEAN can only realise the promise of leaving no one behind if the SDGs are achieved for all women, girls, men, and boys. In the pandemic response, updated data is even more critical to ensure a better understanding of its impact, particularly on women and girls. It is pivotal to building resilience among all ASEAN populations. Identifying

disadvantaged groups, responding to their needs, and strengthening their agency are shared aspirations of the [ASEAN Community Vision 2025](#) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Analysis of existing data in ASEAN shows that women and girls living in poor households and rural areas often face multiple deprivations and social, economic, and environmental disadvantages. Many of these women and girls have lower incomes, less decision-making power, and limited access to essential services and infrastructures. These characteristics often make them targets of discrimination, abuse and exploitation, resulting in deprivation for sustainable development outcomes. When two or more forms of discrimination overlap, the barriers women face tend to increase. The *ASEAN Gender Outlook: Achieving the SDGs for All and Leaving No Woman or Girl Behind* looks at each of the Sustainable Development Goals through this multiple deprivation lens and is dedicated to tracking progress towards gender equality and SDGs in the ASEAN region.

Findings of the study include a recommendation to accelerate action on SDG 1 in closing the gender pay gap since 58 per cent of women still earn less than their partners. On SDG 3, the study revealed the impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, one of which is as that 30 per cent of women

had indicated taking on more intensified domestic work. On SDG 5, although women are now actively participating in decision-making processes, it was noted that only 20 per cent of parliament seats in the region are occupied by women.

The availability and quality of data determine the levels of inequalities inferred in the ASEAN Member States. Therefore, it is necessary to generate high-quality data with multi-level disaggregation to assess who is being left behind. The *ASEAN Gender Outlook: Achieving the SDGs for All and Leaving No Woman or Girl Behind* calls for increased investment in gender data and statistics. It is crucial to inform decision-making and ensure policy responses are inclusive and effective in responding to the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised women and girls in the region.

The findings of this publication are meant to guide the ASEAN Member States in formulating policy and programme interventions for increased public investments and cross-sectoral development cooperation to advance inclusivity and sustainable development and promote gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls in the region. ■

Josefa Cariño Tauli

Youth, Biodiversity, and Indigenous Peoples Advocate, 26

Josefa is a member of the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN) Steering Committee, representing indigenous and local youth. GYBN is the official youth constituency to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). She was named a National Geographic Youth Explorer (Fall 2020 Cohort) and awarded a grant for youth-led activities and materials on biodiversity and indigenous people's rights. She majored in Biology and is working on her Master's Degree in Wildlife Science.

Josefa talks to *The ASEAN* about finding her voice as a woman, youth leader, and indigenous person.

Josefa: I was born and raised in Baguio City in the Cordilleras, the Philippines, to an Ibaloi mother from Baguio and Kankanaey father from Besao, Mountain Province. I think being born and raised in the city brings some difficulties for many Indigenous youths to connect to our roots and cultures, but I thankfully got many chances to grow into my identity as an Igorot and learn about what this means, as my parents and many aunts and uncles have been long-time activists for Indigenous Peoples' rights. I had many opportunities to learn about my culture, about the struggles of being an indigenous person in the Philippines, through gatherings, concerts, forums that I'm glad to have tagged along to as a child through the work my parents do.

I have always just loved nature, and conserving nature has been something that I had wanted to pursue, which I did through my studies. It wasn't until later in life that I realised that my identity as an Igorot and my passion for biodiversity went very well together, given absolutely critical roles that Indigenous Peoples play in safeguarding nature worldwide. And so it was in this interface that I really found my niche in advocacy as well as research.

This is something that has taken me a long time to unpack, but I've come to realise that being young, being a woman, and being indigenous is a special combination. It is



definitely, on the one hand, a huge challenge: current systems too often marginalise and exclude young people, and women, and Indigenous Peoples. More than that, it's something I face day to day both externally in terms of how I and others like me are treated, and internally in terms of how I see myself. It's difficult to feel empowered when so many things in this world are deeply unequal and unfair, and you're on the losing end. But I think through the years, as I interact and learn from so many passionate and powerful women, youth, and indigenous persons, it has really solidified in my mind that there's such a unique strength that comes from being all three. It's difficult to describe, but knowing that you have the energy of youth, the strength of a woman, and recognising that you can play even a small role in forwarding the Indigenous Peoples movement—one of the strongest social movements of our

time—this is extremely empowering as well. And this really helped me find my voice in what I do in terms of advocacy.

Describe to us your work as a member of the Steering Committee of the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN). Why is it important to recognise the rights of Indigenous Peoples in biodiversity and environment policies and initiatives?

Josefa: In 2018, I joined the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN), which is an amazing global community of youth who are active on biodiversity and is mobilising so that we can achieve the future we want, one where we live in harmony with and within nature. GYBN also plays a key role in biodiversity decision-making spaces, particularly in the Convention Biological Diversity, wherein GYBN advocates for the voices of young people so that our priorities



are heard, amplified, and taken into consideration. Being in GYBN has provided me and many others an amazing platform for engagement in policy, for learning from each other, for developing capacities of ourselves and others, and for making our voices heard. It's also been very valuable to find a safe space with young people who share the same values, which I think is the most important thing.

Globally, there is growing recognition of the indispensable role that Indigenous Peoples play as stewards of a very significant portion of the world's biodiversity. Evidence is showing that biodiversity is declining less rapidly in indigenous territories than other areas of the world, and our territories are being described as "islands of nature in a sea of decline." This is under no coincidence: it's because many Indigenous Peoples have, since time immemorial, governed, managed, sustainably used, and conserved their territories and natural resources through indigenous and local knowledge and practices, rooted in our connectedness and reciprocity to our lands and waters that sustain us, protect us, are entrusted to us by our ancestors. There is therefore a crucial need for our policies and initiatives to respect, recognise and learn from indigenous knowledge and to urgently secure Indigenous Peoples' rights to lands and territories. This is something that will not just benefit Indigenous Peoples, but really the whole of society, who all rely on biodiversity.

Why is there a need for the youth to be involved? Do you see more awareness and participation from them?

Josefa: Young people need to be involved because decisions made today will affect our future; we will be living the aftermath of decisions and actions being made today and we will be among those who will be hardest hit. We also bring such an important perspective, one that does not lie in vested interests but rather really with just the best in mind for our future. We are saying that we will no longer settle for business as usual, which has gotten us nowhere in terms of solving our social-ecological crisis. We demand true transformative change and we demand accountability from those in power.

I do believe young people are becoming more engaged and I see it firsthand everyday as I get to know the really cool things that

young people are doing on the ground for a more equitable and more sustainable planet. I also think that younger generations are becoming more empathetic and more open to diversity, which is so inspiring to see. All of this is a very good foundation to building a fairer, more respectful society that can change the course of our current unsustainable and unjust systems.

You work with many other young people like yourself, what impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are you seeing on the youth now? Has your work been affected?

Josefa: The pandemic is taking a huge toll on everyone physically, mentally, and economically, but it's especially impacting the poor and those that bear the brunt of structural inequality including youth, women, Indigenous Peoples. The pandemic has been severely impacting education worldwide as well, and I can't imagine how difficult it must be to continue to study under these circumstances. With GYBN being a global network, many of us connect online and we've been seeing the impact of digital inequality making itself apparent as well – accessing the internet is more difficult in some countries than others.

What have been the greatest challenges you have encountered in your advocacy work so far? What are the most significant gains and impacts on your community?

Josefa: I think one challenge has been dealing with youth tokenism. With the growing youth movement globally, there has come a lot of interest and attention by different actors to involve youth in their programmes and projects. However, even with good intentions, many actors still don't know how to or make an effort to engage youth *meaningfully* in ways that are accessible, safe, empowering and respectful. Engaging young people is not a PR stunt, and is not just something you do just so you can feel good—it should develop true opportunities for youth to impact decision-making. For young people, these tokenistic ways of involving us—for

Josefa at a Convention on Biological Diversity meeting in Montreal, Canada, December 2019

instance, involving one young person and thinking they can represent youth at large, or planning youth-targeted projects without involving us at all in the planning—can be belittling and frustrating.

There have been a lot of gains. I'm really proud of my involvement in many capacity building workshops both online and offline to develop skills and capacities of diverse youth leaders around the world to think critically, to understand the world's problems more deeply, and to think with intersectionality and equity in mind. I'd also like to think that we are slowly making progress in gaining recognition for issues like youth participation, indigenous knowledge, Indigenous Peoples' rights, human rights, and intergenerational equity more strongly within the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and beyond through continued policy advocacy. It is our hope that the progress made in global policy will translate into national-level commitments and obligations, and will make lasting difference on the ground.

The future is changing, with technological disruptions and the pandemic's impact. What kind of youth-led innovations are needed to build a better future for everyone?

Josefa: I truly believe in the innovative power of indigenous youth. I think many indigenous youth have the potential to innovate culture-rooted and culturally appropriate solutions to the world's biggest problems, given how many of us find ourselves somehow caught between a changing and modernising world but are still guided by our indigenous values that are kind to the Earth and to each other. So I think supporting indigenous youth to lead the way can have a truly significant impact in building a better future for everyone. ■

Interviewed by Mary Kathleen Quiano-Castro

Women Coding Their Way into Tech Leadership



NOVIA D. RULISTIA
STAFF WRITER, THE ASEAN

In an era where every aspect of our lives is driven by technology, coding is a highly-valued skill. The strings of words, characters, and numbers form a language that powers the digital world and unlocks innovation and future job opportunities.

In the 1940s, American Grace Hopper pioneered the development of accessible computer programming language in English. Joan Clarke, an English cryptanalyst, was one of the few women codebreakers at Bletchley Park. The codebreakers' intelligence work helped the Allies win the Second World War. Hopper and Clarke were just some of the earliest female figures who broke the glass ceiling in the world of science and technology.

Today, Asian-Australian Melanie Perkins is one of the prominent women leaders in tech after co-founding the online graphic design platform Canva in 2012. With over 30 million active users across 190 countries, it is now the largest unicorn company in Australia.

Yet, many women in tech are still invisible. Additionally, girls are missing out on opportunities to learn the language and launch lucrative careers in tech.

The World Economic Forum points out that around the world, only 24 per cent of people working in ICT are women, and in the field of computing and mathematics, only 23 per cent of employees are women.

In Southeast Asia, the recently launched *ASEAN Gender Outlook* highlights that women's access to jobs in engineering, technology, and information services is still lower than men's. However, ASEAN is the world's fastest-growing internet market, with 125,000 new users joining the market every day.

Young coders Audrey Pe from the Philippines and Amanda Simandjuntak from Indonesia are all too aware of these gaps and are committed to narrowing them. In their own countries, they set up initiatives that encourage young people, especially girls, to learn more about science and technology.





Simandjuntak set up Markoding to introduce coding and computer science to equip Indonesians with digital skills needed in the tech industry

Pe is the founder of WiTech (Women in Technology), a non-profit organisation based in the Philippines that aims to educate, inspire, and empower youth to break gender barriers and use tech to make a difference in society.

She first learned about coding in high school when her teacher showed her a coding game. Interested to learn more, she taught herself how to code through available online sources as her school did not offer a coding curriculum.

"I started telling people that I wanted to major in something that has to do with technology and pursue that career path, and only to be told that I wasn't a good fit for it. Lots of people were surprised with my choice because they didn't see many girls in technology," said Pe, who is currently in her first year at Stanford University in the US.

"Then I realised the big figures in tech that I could think of were Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk. I couldn't name a single woman in technology."

In 2016, she set up WiTech as her vehicle to shed light on female protagonists and their roles in tech, hoping to inspire girls to pursue a career path in tech.



Now, WiTech has 19 chapters across 10 countries and organises annual conferences and talks that gather influential speakers from tech companies, allowing young participants a peek into the tech industry. Pe and her team also regularly go to underprivileged communities in the Philippines to teach and engage young Filipinos on various facets of technology through Wi-Teach programme.

In Indonesia, Simandjuntak set up Markoding in 2017 to introduce coding and computer science to Indonesian youth and equip them with digital skills needed in the tech industry.

"I used to be a tech consultant. The demand for qualified ICT workers is high in line with the fast-growing ICT sector, but there is a shortage of qualified workers in Indonesia who are ready to work. Many programmers that I interviewed couldn't code, so they needed more time to take coding training," Simandjuntak said. "The outdated curriculum that could not keep up with the industry's rapid growth was a factor that caused this shortage."

Simandjuntak also noticed during her volunteer work that many young

people living in disadvantaged areas in Jakarta were quite tech-savvy, but had no opportunities to hone their skills.

"Taking opportunity from the digital momentum, I built Markoding with the vision to address the skills mismatch by preparing the young with skills for their future."

Markoding provides free coding classes for youth in marginalised areas in Indonesia by engaging professional programmers and senior IT university students as mentors and volunteers. Simandjuntak also set up Impact Byte, which offers certified intensive courses for those who want to pursue a career path as professional tech developers.

In 2020, Simandjuntak launched Skilvul, an online vocational training and certification platform for digital skills, to reach a wider audience, just as the pandemic pushed most sectors to move online.

Reaching Parity in Tech

Despite the increasing number of young people, including girls, participating in their programmes, Pe and Simandjuntak agreed that the gender gap still exists in the field.

Companies with more women in their workforce and leadership teams perform better, helping build more vibrant technology sectors that can boost economic growth.

Pe believes that the lack of access of women to higher education and the cultural norms ingrained in society have contributed to the limited number of female figures in tech today.

"Growing up in the Philippines, a lot of stereotypes are around like boys go to science clubs and girls go to humanities. Many girls around the world also face cultures with similar stereotypes and mindsets," she said.

Simandjuntak said that extra work is needed to ensure equal participation between boys and girls in her programmes. When she organised training in vocational schools, many girls were reluctant to join the coding program because they were not familiar with the tech industry.

Through WiTech, Pe hopes to inspire girls to pursue a career path in tech

"It becomes our homework. We usually start with a motivation session to introduce what the tech industry is like, what they can do with coding, even how much they can earn if they have the skills, before we start teaching the technical part of coding," said Simandjuntak, who studied computer science at the Curtin University of Technology in Australia

Simandjuntak said initially, some of the girls found that coding was puzzling, but were ecstatic when they could finish the tasks. For example, a group of girls from a vocational beauty school managed to develop an app to help address mental health issues, landing them on the top 10 of a Markoding's coding boot camp.

"We asked the participants to develop a digital solution to solve the problems around them. This group realised that many of their friends have mental

health problems, some even have suicidal tendencies, so they developed an app to help their friends," she said.

The exercise, Simandjuntak added, showed the importance of giving equal chances to boys and girls and provide more expansive room for them to design innovative solutions to society's problems.

A 2020 report by Boston Consulting Group, partnered with Singapore's Infocomm Media Development Authority and SG Women in Tech, titled *Boosting Women in Technology in Southeast Asia*, reveals that tech companies in Southeast Asia have a better track record of hiring women than in many developed countries. The research also found that companies with more women in their workforce and leadership teams perform better, helping build more vibrant technology sectors that can boost economic growth.

Pe said that for technology to be able to serve everyone, it must be optimised to include diverse stakeholders from all economic classes and genders.

"This makes me think that the work that we're doing in WiTech is important, and this is why I should keep doing what I'm doing, ensuring that all have access to tech until the gender gap no longer exists," she said. ■



ASEAN Launches Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security



DESIANA NATALIA SAGITA
OFFICER, POVERTY ERADICATION AND GENDER DIVISION
ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT

ASEAN launched its first *Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)* on International Women's Day, 8 March 2021. The study presents evidence-based findings and recommendations to support Member States' efforts to enhance women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict processes. These efforts align with regional and international commitments, notably the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and the [Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN](#).

The study and its launching were the product of collaboration among ASEAN through the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC); the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through PROSPECT project; UN Women; and the ASEAN Secretariat. Relevant sectors across ASEAN Community pillars, including defense, transnational crime, human rights, disaster management and humanitarian assistance, were consulted to develop the study.

The main objective of the study was to shift from "recognition" of the importance of women's participation in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and conflict resolution to "realisation" in the region, where conflict and security challenges vary widely across the Member States. Further, the study takes stock of progress and challenges, consolidates lessons learned, and proposes a common understanding and concrete recommendations for ASEAN stakeholders on WPS. The initiative builds on ASEAN's first [Regional Symposium on Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda](#), the first meeting of the [ASEAN Women for Peace Registry \(AWPR\)](#) in August 2019, and the [ASEAN Ministerial Dialogue on Strengthening Women's Role for Sustainable Peace and Security](#) in September 2020.

Localisation of the WPS agenda is occurring in the ASEAN Member States, but there is potential to scale-up these grassroots initiatives. The study highlights innovative, evidence-based initiatives involving women's participation and leadership, such as the peace villages in Indonesia and the community early warning crisis prevention in the Philippines. It also highlights noteworthy examples from both countries, such as the Philippines' first iteration of the WPS National Action Plan (NAP) based on comprehensive nationwide civil society organisations (CSOs) consultation, and Indonesia's localisation of various NAPs in partnership with sub-national governments and the integration of WPS in Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) NAPs. These experiences of Member States demonstrated the process that allowed CSOs to jointly develop actions, policies, and implementation mechanisms to further the WPS agenda.

The core tenets of the WPS agenda are even more relevant now than before the COVID-19 pandemic. The importance of implementing existing policy commitments, such as UNSCR 2242, is also more evident, since they explicitly call for an increased role of women in formal and informal aspects of global health crises. COVID-19 has reaffirmed a lesson known from other crises: to seek and achieve sustainable solutions to intractable social issues, it is critical to apply a gender lens to understand the impact and create inclusive responses for recovery and resilience of communities and nations.

Advancing the WPS agenda in each of the pillars, namely, prevention, participation, and recovery, is expected to result in women being treated equitably throughout the process of crises management, policy development, and implementation. Increasing women leadership in government programmes and policymaking processes has tremendous potential to ensure that

peace and security efforts are more inclusive, efficient, resilient, and effective to address the needs of the people.

In his remarks at the launch ceremony, the Secretary General of ASEAN, H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi, emphasised that the study reaffirms ASEAN's commitment to gender equality, women's leadership, and its integration into the [ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework](#) and the [ASEAN Community Vision Post-2025](#). He announced that the Regional Plan of Action (RPA) on Advancing Women, Peace and Security is being planned for 2021-2022.

In formulating and adopting the RPA, ASEAN can re-imagine ways to engage male counterparts as champions of the WPS agenda and identify points of intersection to work with Member States on barriers and challenges. The RPA is expected to inform and accelerate the development of more NAPs by the Member States. Advocating for the RPA and Member States' NAPs must be data-driven using robust monitoring and evaluation systems and include opportunities to share best-fit practices across ASEAN.

The UN and ASEAN Dialogue Partners, including Australia, Canada, and the United States, support the RPA and have committed to assist ASEAN with future coordination and capacity building initiatives.

Advancing the WPS agenda in ASEAN requires strong cross-sectoral and multilateral partnership and strengthened regional collaboration to sustain long-lasting peace and ensure effective and comprehensive COVID-19 recovery. ■



Read more about the ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) at:
https://asean.org/?static_post=asean-regional-study-women-peace-security

Snapshots

TACKLING DISINFORMATION

ASEAN SECRETARIAT AND ERIA HOLD “ASEAN ON POINT” PUBLIC FORUM ON FAKE NEWS



ERICA PAULA S. SIOSON PH.D
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LYDIA RUDDY
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
ECONOMIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR ASEAN AND EAST ASIA (ERIA)

Co-hosted by the ASEAN Secretariat and the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), the “ASEAN on Point” Public Forum on Fake News: Tackling Disinformation in ASEAN webinar was held on 20 January 2021. It was attended by over 200 participants from academia, non-government, government and international organisations, think tanks, and media.

The growing risk of fake news and misinformation comes on the heels of a rapidly increasing access to the internet and digital media among ASEAN citizens. According to We Are Social's *Digital 2021: Global Overview Report*, in the ASEAN region, 69 per cent of the region's 655 million citizens are internet users, and 69 per cent are active social media users. Meanwhile Google, Temasek, Bain & Company's *E-Economy's SEA 2020 report* notes that in 2020, 40 million ASEAN citizens went online for the first time. With the region steadily pivoting towards digital transformation and with an unconnected audience of 208 million, these numbers are projected to continuously, if not exponentially, increase.

The webinar panelists included Marites Vitug, Editor-at-Large of *Rappler*, Philippines; Donny Eryastha, Head of Public Policy, ByteDance (Tik Tok); and Trieu Minh Long, Director-General, Ministry of Information



There is a need to update laws and regulations on disinformation at the government level and enhance public awareness of disinformation laws.

and Communications and Senior Officials Meeting Responsible for Information (SOMRI) Vietnam. ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Deputy Secretary-General Kung Phoak delivered the opening remarks and outlined ASEAN's efforts in tackling fake news.

The webinar discussions underscored the power of digital technologies in influencing the opinions and behaviours of its users, noting, in particular, that and the speed at which societies change due to these technological disruptions are rendering many public and private institutions unable to adapt quickly. The speakers highlighted the need for a whole-of-society approach to countering fake news and misinformation. Involving all stakeholders, including governments, academics, citizens and users, tech platforms, and professional groups for fact-checking initiatives, public digital media and information literacy campaigns, and other preventive and educative measures are necessary prerequisites to safe space online, especially for the youth and vulnerable populations. There is a need to update laws and regulations on disinformation at the government level and enhance public awareness of disinformation laws. Tech platforms need to better enforce their community guidelines and ensure online safety. Media literacy campaigns and the incorporation of digital media literacy programmes in educating the user base at an early age are necessary preventive measures.

The webinar builds on the region's ongoing efforts to address and minimise the harmful effects of disinformation. In 2017, ASEAN adopted the **ASEAN Declaration of Culture of Prevention (CoP) for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy, and Harmonious Society** which calls for concerted actions to promote a culture of moderation against deliberate falsehoods. In the same year, the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (AMRI) convened a Roundtable Discussion on Fake News and Communicating the Right Information. In 2018, the AMRI adopted the **Framework and Joint**



Declaration to Minimise the Harmful Effects of Fake News and launched the Core Values on Digital Literacy for ASEAN, which aims to promote greater cybersecurity as part of the efforts to counter online falsehoods. The Core Values— Responsibility, Empathy, Authenticity, Discernment, and Integrity (READI)—aim to create a safe and conducive online environment while also respecting the freedom of expression.

Most recently, in 2020, the AMRI adopted the **Joint Statement to Minimise the Negative Effects of COVID-19**, which stresses the critical role of the media and information in ensuring effective public communication, countering fake news and misinformation, and supporting the free flow of accurate and timely information during the pandemic. It demonstrates the region's resolve to

encourage regular exchanges of official updates and information, develop regional guidelines and a common platform to facilitate timely sharing of information, and further strengthen media and information cooperation.

The webinar is part of a series of public forums, ASEAN on Point, being organised by the ASEAN Secretariat and ERIA to act as a platform to bring together representatives of diverse stakeholders to share the latest research, knowledge, and insights on topics related to post-pandemic recovery. Through these forums, the ASEAN Secretariat and ERIA hope to inform the policy discourse, contribute to different sectoral work in ASEAN, and support efforts to “build back better” towards a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable region. ■



COPING WITH THE PANDEMIC THROUGH MUSIC

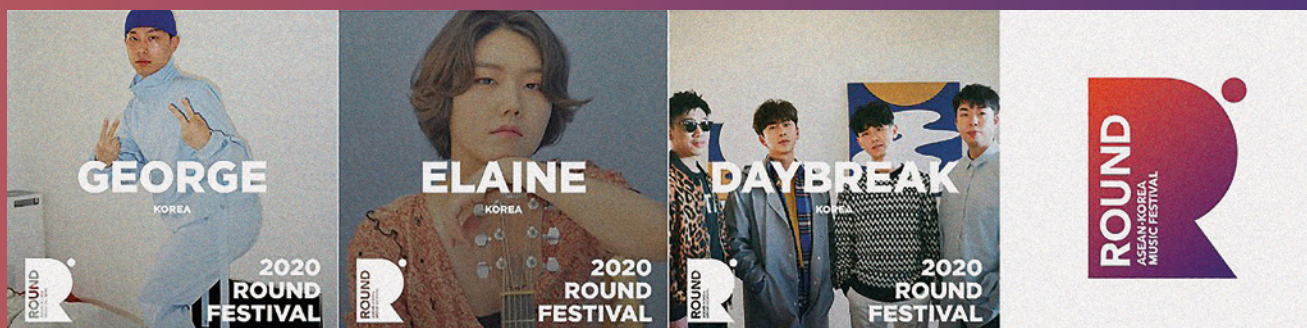


WIDIA LIBRIANTI
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Staging large music festivals seemed an impossibility during the pandemic. Thanks to technological advancements, the ROUND 2020 Festival, featuring musicians of various genres from the ASEAN region and the Republic of Korea (ROK), was successfully held online on 6 December 2020. The Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) streamed the six-hour-long concert live on its Kpop YouTube channel.

ROUND stands for “equal ASEAN countries and Korea.” The Festival, which is supported by the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund, aims to connect ASEAN and ROK through music. The goal is to foster a more dynamic exchange of cultures and strengthen mutual solidarity between the two regions.

Rolled out as part of the *ASEAN-Korea Music Festival* project under the ASEAN-ROK cooperation, the Festival was initially planned as an offline event. Artists from the 10 ASEAN countries were to join their Korean counterparts on one stage and have their performances broadcast live by KBS.



The holding of the Festival demonstrates the commitment of ASEAN and ROK to continuously support the creative and cultural industries in both regions amidst these challenging times.

The pandemic outbreak compelled the organiser to innovate and develop a new format, “OnTact” (Online-conTact), that combines online and offline performances in a streaming event. It was designed to simulate offline concerts and festivals, where participants can interact with the artists and other audiences around the world in real-time.

There were live performances by well-known Korean artists like *Jamie*, *DAYBREAK*, *Sunwoojunga*, *SORAN*, *Song So Hee with 2nd Moon*, *Hoppipolla*, *Leenalchi*, *10cm*, *George*, and *Elaine*.

The concert also featured acts by some of the ASEAN region’s most popular singers and bands: *Dila Junaidi* (Brunei Darussalam), *Small World Small Band* (Cambodia), *Isyana Sarasvati* (Indonesia), *Aluna Thavonsouk* (Lao PDR), *Zamaera* (Malaysia), *Thar Dee Lu* (Myanmar), *Ben&Ben* (Philippines), *Charlie Lim* (Singapore), *Gam Wichayanee* (Thailand) and *Vũ. & Skylines Beyond Our Reach* (Viet Nam).

The Festival aimed to lift people’s spirits through music during the COVID-19 pandemic. After the live stream and broadcast replay, many viewers raved

about the concert. Comments included “it’s the best,” “the next level of music”, “can’t imagine I can view this free”. One happy fan posted, “it feels like a concert stage.” The positive reviews show the huge success of the online Festival.

The holding of the Festival demonstrated the commitment of ASEAN and ROK to continuously support the creative and cultural industries in both regions amidst these challenging times. The Festival also builds on the history of strong cultural exchange between ASEAN and ROK. There are millions of K-pop music fans in the ASEAN region. They have contributed to the Korean Wave, or *Hallyu*, a global phenomenon in pop culture, entertainment, music, television, and film.

The ROUND Forums were also conducted as part of the ROUND 2020 Festival. The forums endeavoured to address the question: “How does the music business survive in the pandemic era?” In the pre-recorded lecture-type videos, influential music industry figures from ASEAN and ROK discussed the pandemic’s impact in their countries. Creative industries and artists have been hit hard by cancelled performances and the lack of regular gigs.

With some innovation, the ROUND Festival gave artists a regional stage to put on a mesmerising show for music fans in ASEAN and the ROK. The pandemic may have changed the way people experience concerts, but it cannot silence the music. ■



More details on the ROUND 2020 Festival, including the forum videos, can be found at <http://roundfestival.net/>



The Round 2020 Festival combines online and offline performances in a streaming event

THE ASEAN QUIZ:

COMPETITION, CULTURE, CAMARADERIE



ANINDYA PUTRI MELATI
ASSOCIATE OFFICER, CULTURE AND INFORMATION DIVISION
ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT

Singapore hosted the 9th Regional ASEAN Quiz on 17 December 2020, with participants from ASEAN Member States competing virtually from their home countries.

The knowledge-based competition saw nine teams of three students competing for the title. There were three tense rounds of 18 questions each and a nail-biting finale. Team Singapore answered the final question correctly but it was not enough to beat the reigning champion. Team Indonesia emerged victorious and clinched its second consecutive win. Singapore and Brunei Darussalam finished 1st and 2nd runners-up, respectively.

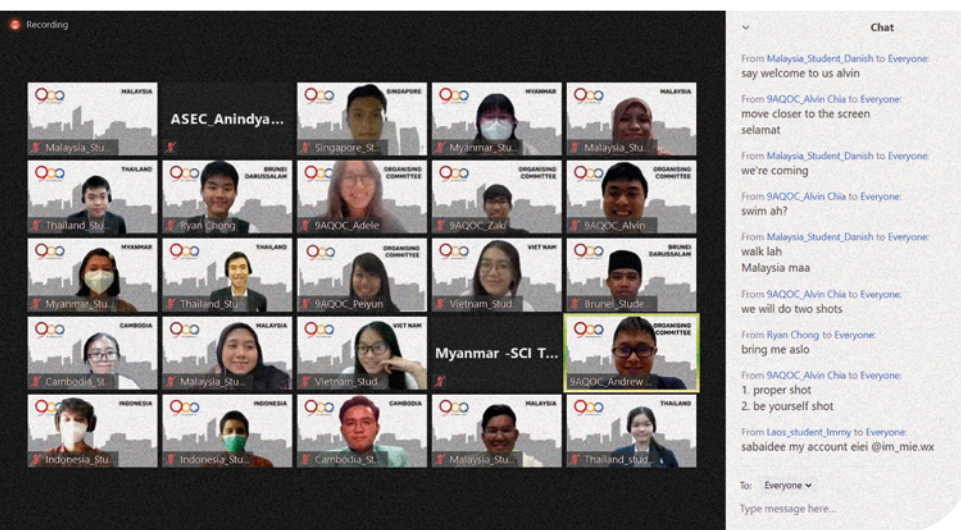
2020 delegates from nine participating countries in ASEAN

Every two years, students across the ASEAN region have the exciting opportunity to take part in the Regional ASEAN Quiz, challenging their knowledge about ASEAN in political, economic, and socio-cultural contexts. The competition has been held since 2002 for 15- to 18-year-old students from ASEAN Member States. Initiated by the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (COCI) and funded by the ASEAN Cultural Fund (ACF), the competition provides a platform for ASEAN youth to understand the region and develop their knowledge of ASEAN as an organisation. The ASEAN Quiz comprises two stages: national

and regional levels. Before qualifying for the regional level, students must first compete at the national-level quiz held in their respective countries. The winning team of three students from each Member State will move on to the regional-level quiz.

The Regional ASEAN Quiz is a biennial event with the first competition hosted by Thailand back in 2002, followed by Brunei Darussalam (2004), Malaysia (2006), the Philippines (2009), Cambodia (2012), Viet Nam (2014), Lao PDR (2016), Indonesia (2018), and more recently, Singapore (2020).

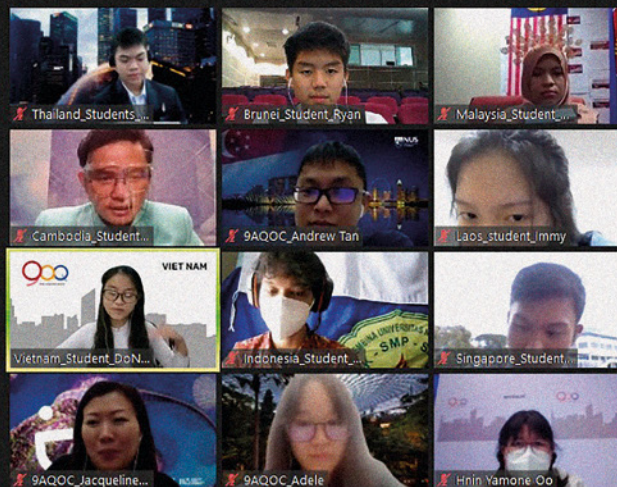
Every ASEAN Quiz iteration has been complemented by other interesting activities. The 9th Regional ASEAN Quiz was held together with a symposium on the history of ASEAN and its development as a regional organisation. The featured speakers include Singapore's Permanent Representative to ASEAN, H.E. Kok Li Peng, and from the National University of Singapore, Associate Prof. Dr. Bruce Lockhart.



Result Table

#	Country	Score
1	Indonesia	1,900
2	Singapore	1,800
3	Brunei Darussalam	900
4	Lao DPR	800
5	Cambodia	700
6	Thailand	600
7	Myanmar	300
8	Viet Nam	200
9	Malaysia	100

Share with us one memorable experience you had.



Top

Delegates get to know each other through the Regional Quiz’s social programme component

Bottom

One of the quiz questions at the 9th Regional ASEAN Quiz

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community - 4



In which year was the first ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women (AMMW) held?

7Mt5n



“The quiz enables its participants to learn and discover each other’s culture and to embrace ASEAN’s diversity.”

When Indonesia hosted and won the 8th Regional ASEAN Quiz in 2018, it conducted a friendly quiz with the theme “The Spirit of Togetherness.” Students from the different Member States were mixed and asked to form their teams. The fun spilled over to Bali’s famous beaches, where they played more friendly games. A cultural tour of the famous resort island capped the biennial event.

At the 6th National ASEAN Quiz held in the Philippines, the participants and their coaches were invited to do live interviews for radio and national TV shows to promote the event. The eventual top three winners did another round of media appearances after the quiz. An educational trip was organised where all students experienced some of Metro Manila’s most famous cultural sites.

Despite the pandemic, there was no lack of social and cultural interaction at the 9th National ASEAN Quiz in Singapore. The students interacted and got to know each other through fun-filled virtual games. Since participants could not physically travel and explore the city, the organisers presented a “virtual tour,” displaying photos and videos of the city’s sights, food, people; and sharing stories to bring Singapore to them instead.

Throughout the years, the ASEAN Quiz has become more than just a competition. It is a platform to nurture friendship, cooperation, and partnership amongst the ASEAN youth. The quiz enables its participants to learn and discover each other’s culture and to embrace ASEAN’s diversity. During these challenging times, it is more essential than ever that this sense of togetherness continues to flourish. ■

FRESH VOICES IN LITERATURE



JOANNE B. AGBISIT
ASSOCIATE EDITOR
THE ASEAN

For many of us who love the written word, books have become a source of joy, solace, enlightenment, and even inspiration during the pandemic. We may devour an entire book in a few hours or linger over its pages for days. In those moments, we are transported to other worlds and forget about the stresses of our daily responsibilities or the tedium of enforced solitude.

While our literary choices often lean towards Western-authored publications, it is worth diving into a treasure trove of literary works by talented young authors from ASEAN. Here are some of the books we have discovered, enjoyed, and highly recommend.



I Must Belong Somewhere,
by Dawn Lanuza

Dawn Lanuza's latest book, a collection of open-form poems and micro-stories, invites us to ponder the meaning of home. Is home the place where we hold our fondest memories? Is it tethered to the people we love and those who love us? Should we feel shame for wanting to leave the land of our

birth, a place that is no longer familiar and brings only misery? No matter how we define it, the notion of home as something we yearn for—"she flees because she can't help but sate her interest, but she always comes back home to the familiar"—resonates deeply.

The book also bravely tackles difficult themes like heartbreak, feelings of unworthiness, self-doubt, loneliness, and bullying and will likely strike a chord with people who have dealt with these tumultuous emotions. And while many verses may drip with longing, regret, and angst, they also offer words of comfort, affirmation, and hope: "But I am not sorry for taking my time, for weighing my options, for choosing what I like"/ "Give yourself the chance to look down at the labyrinth that you coursed through, not to tell yourself what you did wrong but to embrace what you've gone through."





There is perhaps no better time for these philosophical musings than at this moment when most people are stuck at home and are taking a step back to reflect on past choices and actions. The text will also resonate with migrants and travelers who are struggling to find a sense of belonging. Lanuza said she wrote *I Must Belong Somewhere* “during her year of rest and travel, speaking to the indescribable feelings of displacement and longing for the companionship left behind.”

I Must Belong Somewhere is the third poetry collection of Lanuza. Aside from poetry, she also writes contemporary romance and young adult fiction. Some of her published works include *The Last Time I'll Write About You*, *Stay a Little Longer*, *The Hometown Hazard*, and *Breakup Anniversary*.

I Must Belong Somewhere is published by Andrews McMeel Publishing and available for download at Amazon, iBooks, Barnes & Noble, and Google Play.

18 Walls,
by Teo Xue Shen

Teo Xue Shen's debut novel is a pulse-pounding science fiction adventure that will appeal to fans of *Deviant*, *Maze Runner*, and *X-Men*.

The story follows Ren, a teenage soldier recruited into the military after he was orphaned at eight. He is among the hundreds of teenage soldiers trained for a singular purpose: to vanquish the half-human, half-animal creatures

called the Savages that roam outside the 18 walls surrounding the city and pose an existential threat to its citizens. Owing to his superior combat skills and endurance, Ren becomes the leader of a five-person squad that includes surly Raine, playful Rick, sensitive Sean, and tech-savvy April. The squad endures months of grueling training and undergoes genetic modification to turn their bodies into lethal human-animal hybrids. Soon after, Ren and his squad members are deployed outside the walls to carry out a mission. As the squad fights for survival, Ren unravels not only the mystery surrounding his parents' death, but also the elaborate lies perpetuated by the military to advance its nefarious agenda.

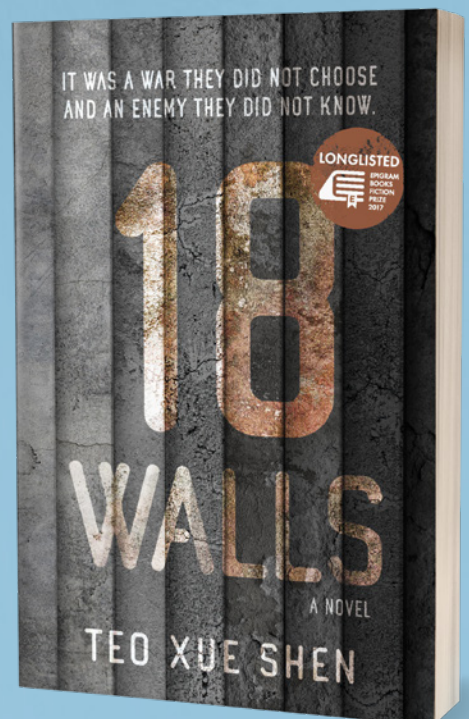
The novel will put readers on the edge of their seats, from its tension-filled prologue all the way through the final chapter. Its main characters are memorable, with convincing backstories and strong character arcs. The action

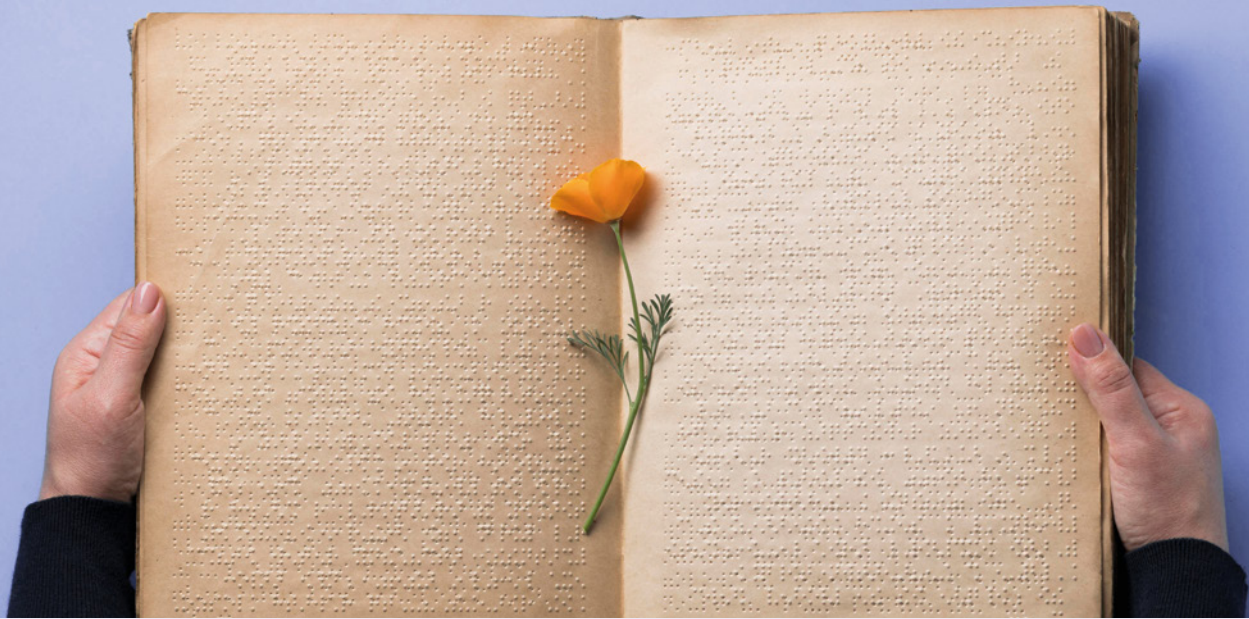
sequences are well-paced and richly detailed, while the lighter moments—especially the moments when the characters begin to forge emotional bonds—are authentic.

Teo Xue Shen told *The ASEAN* he wrote the manuscript for *18 Walls* when he was in Singapore's National Service. “Initially, the manuscript started out as a form of writing practice, but as I went through various experiences in the army, I became aware that these experiences could potentially be helpful in my manuscript, and I started to take a more serious angle on what I was writing. As the novel is set in a military setting, much of the inspiration for the fictional world was drawn from my time in the army,” he said.

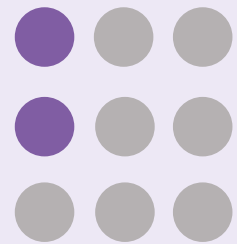
Teo Xue Shen recently released his second book, *Children of the Ark*. He is currently pursuing a graduate degree in Environmental Studies at the National University of Singapore and plans to “continue writing as a hobby and pastime” and as a “medium for discussion of topics that should get more attention.”

18 Walls is published by Epigram Books and is available for download at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Google Play. ■





READING THROUGH TOUCH: BRAILLE LITERACY



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In 1824, fifteen-year-old Louis Braille masterfully innovated a complicated tactile system designed for soldiers to send and receive messages at night, into a complete alphabet system to be used by people who are visually impaired. Two hundred years on, his innovation continues to be used as a literacy tool.

The six-dots system, from which young Louis created 63 different combinations, now incorporates many script forms ranging from the Perso-Arabic to Cyrillic scripts.

Though there was an initial struggle for acceptance, braille became the foundation for literacy for people who are visually impaired. It provides a tool to enable an individual to read, write, and comprehend information. While innovations in text-to-speech technology, such as audiobooks and screen-readers, have greatly expanded reading options, they have unfortunately caused a decline in braille literacy.

Proponents of braille literacy uphold that while audio learning may increase reading options, it remains vital for children to still be taught the braille system. Braille enables the development of reading, which stimulates a child's brain and develops imagination. More importantly, it teaches grammar, spelling, and writing skills. Writing allows note-taking, communication, and the development of ideas, which contribute to independence and access to equal opportunities. Studies have noted that those who know braille are better employed than those who do not.

In Southeast Asia, almost 6 million people are estimated to be blind. A further 28.8 million have severe or moderate vision impairment.

Source: Bourne, Rupert et al, Trends in Prevalence of Blindness and Distance and Near Vision Impairment Over 30 Years and Contribution to the Global Burden of Disease in 2020, The Lancet, August 2020, www.thelancet.com/lancetgh Vol 9 February 2021, p 134

The challenges to increasing braille literacy include a shortage of qualified teachers. Braille equipment, including Perkins brailers, embossers and papers, are also expensive. Books in braille are much thicker and way more costly than non-braille books. For example, the braille version of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* amounted to 13 volumes. Braille versions of books in the Harry Potter series range from 100-400 US dollars.

Nevertheless, innovations continue to make braille more accessible, with people with visual impairment leading this drive. In 2011, U Aung Lwin Oo, a computer programmer based at the Kyeemyindaing School for the Blind, Myanmar, developed software to transcribe Myanmar language text into braille (Disability educators hail new Braille software, *The Myanmar Times*, 28 February 2011).

Umashangari from Malaysia, a translator and editor of braille at the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB), recalls facing a shortage of braille books to read as a child. Determined to address this, she has now translated over ten books into braille since holding her post in 2018 (Braille book shortage: Is literacy for blind people in Malaysia under threat?, *The Star*, 6 January 2021).

Tan Guan Heng, former President of the Singapore Association for the Visually Handicapped, has written four books, with a fifth one, on the way. His books include *My Love is Blind*, *Night Butterfly*, *100 Inspiring Rafflesians 1823-2003* and *Pioneering Disabled and the Able*. Each book took about two years to write, which he did in braille (Commentary: What I learnt after escorting a blind guest from his home to our studios, CNA, 16 June 2019).

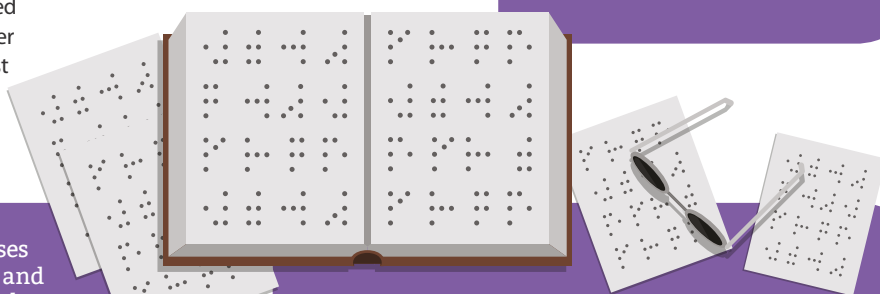
Braille usage goes beyond books. It is used on menus, elevator buttons, and signages. Braille has also proven to be a valuable tool to convey information to the visually impaired during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, much remains to be done and countries need to be supported to continue to promote braille literacy. Teaching braille is in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which calls for equal access to all levels of education for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities. ■



ASEAN commitments towards Braille Literacy

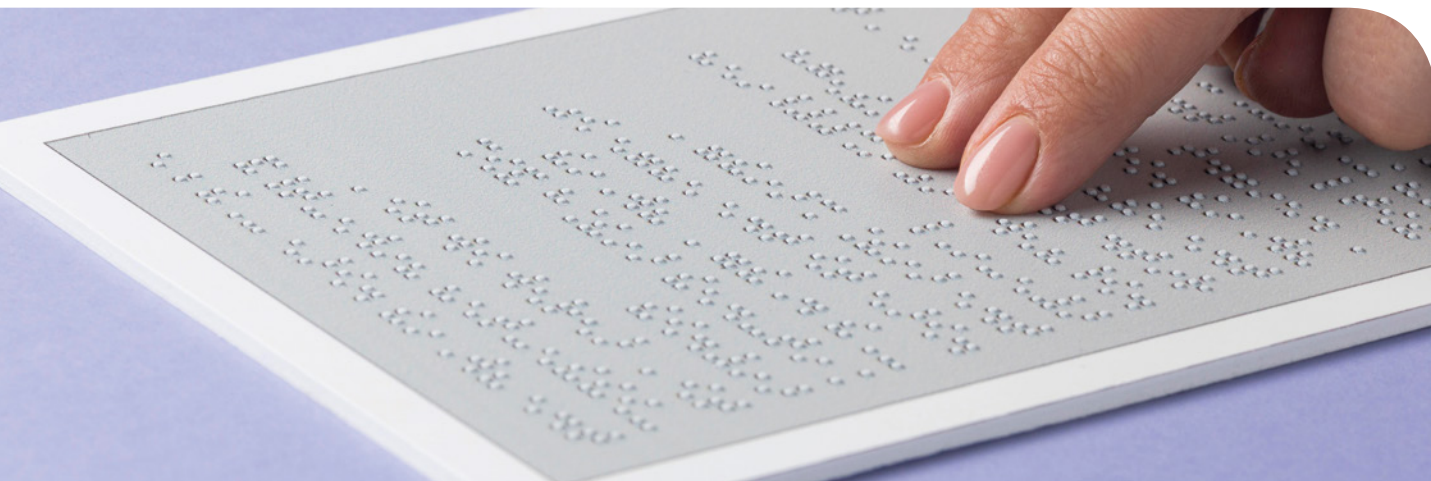
The ASEAN Enabling Masterplan encourages the use of braille, among others, to increase access to information from public and private sector websites on reasonable accommodation for court services, elections, accessible election and universal design polling stations, and other political processes. It also encourages ASEAN Member States to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty.

Bali Declaration on the Enhancement of the Role and Participation of Persons with Disabilities in ASEAN Community encourages equal opportunities in education for persons with disabilities, which includes the use of braille.



Braille is a reading system which uses six raised dots to represent letters and numbers. It also represents musical, mathematical, and scientific symbols. By touching these raised dots, a person who is visually or partially sighted is able to read. This writing system has developed to include 133 languages, which includes Khmer, Laotian, Burmese, Thai and Vietnamese, as noted in the World Braille Usage publication by UNESCO.

The Marrakesh Treaty aims to increase access to the production and international transfer of specially-adapted books for people with blindness or visual impairments. It does this by establishing a set of limitations and exceptions to traditional copyright law. It is administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization.



PAPER AND PENCIL

NON-DIGITAL OPTIONS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING



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Over 152 million students in the ASEAN region have been affected by school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While countries have tried to mitigate the loss of learning through online education, this unfortunately has widened the inequality gap, with students from lower income households facing difficulty in accessing online education. Challenges include the lack of access to computers, tablets or smartphones, high costs of mobile data plans and

reliable internet connectivity. In a household with a computer or smartphone, the computer will need to be shared by all children. This may result in older or male children being given more online access than female or younger children.

Various non-digital initiatives have been undertaken in the region to ensure that learning continues. Below are some of them:



Public announcement systems

Loudspeakers at mosques or community vans are used as teaching tools. Students are able to sit in front of their homes and learn through lessons broadcasted from the speakers.



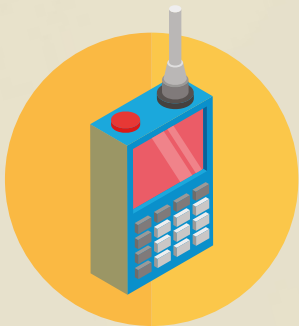
Radio and television programmes

Countries in the region utilise traditional media—radio and the television—as means of instruction. Cambodia developed specific radio and tv programmes for indigenous students in their native language.



Paper-based material

Schools in the region distribute printed material to students in their homes. Thailand distributes “Knowledge Delivering Kits” to villages to ensure that children keep learning. In Indonesia, there are teachers who walk about 20 kilometres every week to drop off and collect assignments from their students.



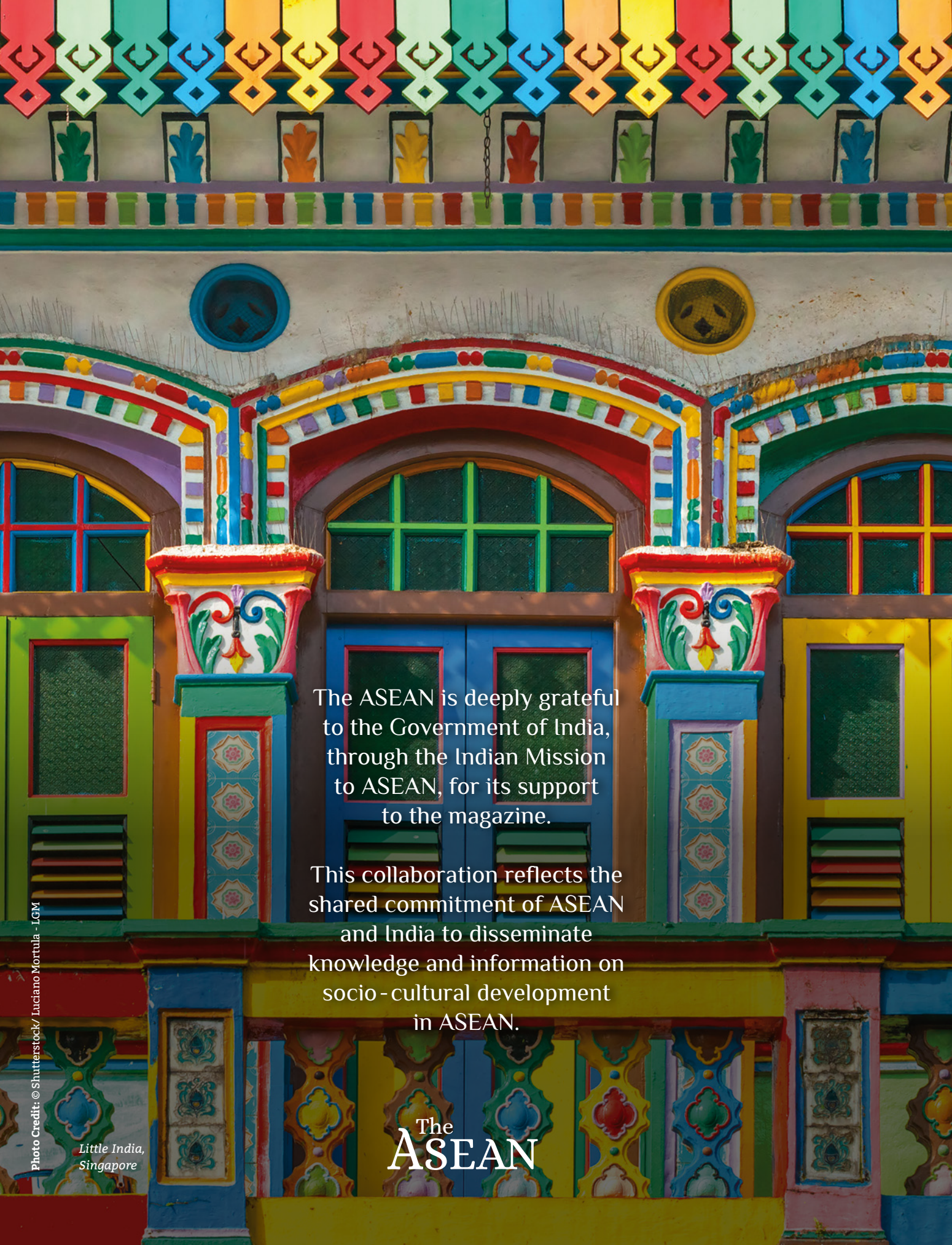
Walkie-talkies

Teachers in rural areas use hand-held radios to communicate with their students.



Outdoor learning

Classes with limited numbers of students are held outdoors to comply with social distancing requirements.



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This collaboration reflects the shared commitment of ASEAN and India to disseminate knowledge and information on socio-cultural development in ASEAN.

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