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Transforming ASEAN's Rural Landscape

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SHIFTING CURRENTS

Beyond COP26
ASEAN's Climate
Change Agenda

THE INSIDE VIEW

Empowering
Rural Women

CONVERSATIONS

Literacy
and Sustainability
in Rural ASEAN



Ministerial 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

SOMRDPE-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

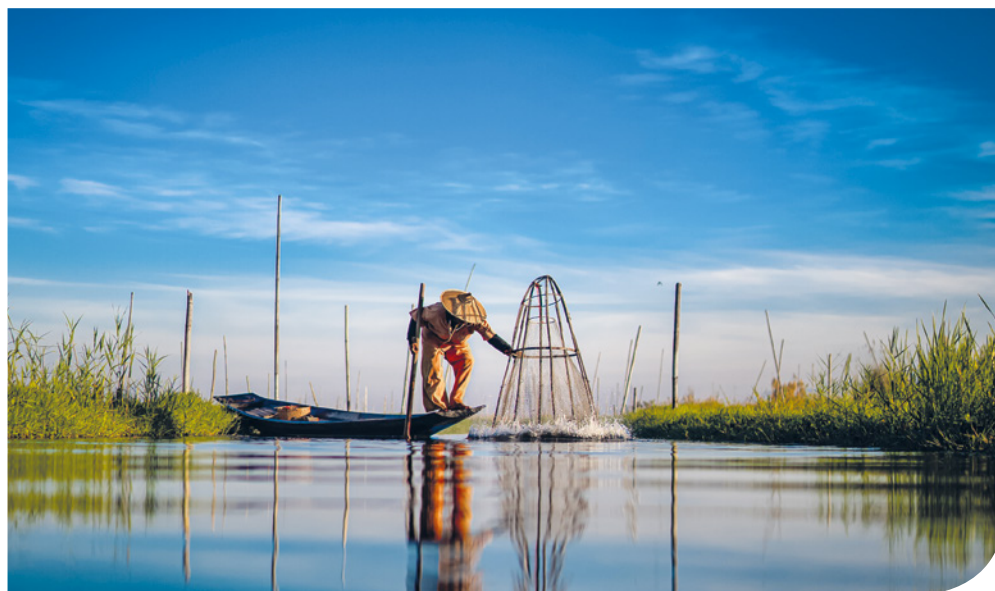
SLOM-Senior Labour Officials Meeting

SOM-ACCSM-Senior Officials Meeting on ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters

SOMHD-Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development

ASOEN-ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment

COM to AATHP-Committee under the Conference of Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution



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Composed by **Kramakata**



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Note from the Editorial Team

More than half of ASEAN's population live in rural areas, and poverty is twice as prevalent in rural towns and villages than in urban centres. As the pandemic continues to wreak havoc on economies and livelihoods, these gaps and inequalities are widening.

Rural development and poverty eradication have always been one of ASEAN's top priorities. However, with the pandemic's impact on the poor, on women and other vulnerable groups, ASEAN addresses these issues with even more urgency.

We delve into ASEAN's multi-sectoral initiatives towards transformative rural development. The ASCC Poverty Eradication and Gender Division gives an overview of ASEAN's action plan and its objectives to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth, eliminate barriers to inequality and alleviate poverty.

In an interview with Indonesia's Minister for National Development and Chairman of the National Development Agency (BAPPENAS) Suharso Monoarfa, we learn about Indonesia's push to promote strategic rural areas

and implement an integrated rural development plan. Dr. Wasana Techavijitsarn, ASEAN Unit Director at the Thailand Ministry of Interior, writes about the significant impact of the country's new agriculture approach that helps mitigate disaster risks and the creation of special economic zones that spur growth.

We also get the view from China's Director-General of International Poverty Reduction Center Liu Junwen, on the country's long-running rural development initiatives that have helped alleviate poverty. Asia DHRRA (Asia Partnership for the Development of Human Resource in Asia) points to increased urban to rural migration during the pandemic, with job losses forcing workers back to their rural hometowns. According to Assistant Secretary-General Mags Catindig-Reyes, the current crisis provides opportunities to implement more holistic and multi-sectoral approaches to rural development.

Former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also shares his valuable insights on the importance of multilateral cooperation in addressing global challenges.

In our Conversations section, we highlight the work of individuals who empower rural communities. These champions bring books and libraries to small villages, discover and promote lost local cuisines, and preserve coastal mangroves for sustainable fishing. We also feature the Mekong Institute, ASEAN Prize Winner for 2021.

It is a fact that poorer communities in our region bear the brunt of the climate crisis. In this issue's Shifting Currents section, we give a particular focus on ASEAN's Climate Change Agenda post-COP-26, the roles of peatland and biodiversity conservation in the battle against global warming.

We round up this issue with a look at how the youth identify with ASEAN from a study launched by the ASEAN Youth Ministers in August 2021. Results show that young people who identify strongly with ASEAN appreciate the common values of community-building and cultural diversity.

This kinship and diversity are celebrated at the ASEAN Pavilion in World Expo 2020, which runs in Dubai from October 2021 to March 2022. We should all take pride in what ASEAN brings to the world. ■

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THE INSIDE VIEW

- Indonesia's Minister of National Development Planning on rural development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- ASEAN's plan of action for transforming the rural areas
- Supporting rural communities in their post-pandemic recovery
- Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the SDGs, COVID-19 pandemic, and multilateralism



Suharso Monoarfa

Minister, National Development Planning/
Chairman, National Development Planning Agency
The Republic of Indonesia

Minister Suharso Monoarfa discusses Indonesia's rural development strategy, including policies and programmes that aim to contribute to SDG targets relevant to rural communities. He also shares his insights on regional cooperation in rural development and poverty alleviation.

Before assuming his current post, Minister Suharso actively participated in numerous development projects in the country. Those experiences have shaped his career and honed his expertise.

Minister Suharso contributed to public service in various capacities. He was entrusted with the role of the Minister of Public Housing and later became a member of the Presidential Advisory Council. He now serves as the Minister of National Development Planning/Chairman of the National Development Planning Agency.

The World Social Report 2021 explored the concept of in situ urbanisation as an approach to rural development, creating jobs, improving living standards, and reducing rural to urban migration. Is this part of Indonesia's overall rural development strategy? Can you share your major policies and programmes for advancing rural development with us?

Suharso Monoarfa: We are aware of this in-situ urbanisation. Indeed, our urbanisation is driven mainly by this process. A recent study (Indonesia Urbanization Report, 2018) based on the population censuses and survey of Village Potential suggests that Indonesian urbanisation is 43.5 per cent driven by reclassification (in-situ), 37.6 per cent by natural population growth, and 18.8 per cent by migration.

Even though it is not explicitly stated, the underlying idea of our long-term rural development plan, in fact, resembles the concept of in-situ urbanisation. The long-term development plan 2005-2025 (RPJPN) lays out two main strategies for rural development. The first is the strategy to promote rural-urban linkages. In strengthening the rural-



urban linkages, we attempt to expand and diversify the rural economic activities as well as to promote non-agriculture trade from rural areas to markets in urban areas.

The second strategy is to improve rural productivity and livelihood itself. In doing so, we set up some policies that endorse the development of labour-intensive agroindustry (called Estates), improve the capacity of human and social capital in our rural areas, provide basic services and physical infrastructures that would boost up rural production, and open up wider access to information, market, financial institutions, and technology.

Just last year, we enacted the fourth National Medium-Term Development Plan for the 2020-2024 period (RPJMN). The RPJMN serves twofold objectives. It translates the RPJPN as well as the President's vision into seven national priorities and achievable development programmes. The second national priority of the RPJMN specifically addresses regional development in which the plan for urban and rural development is set up.

In the RPJMN, major policies for advancing rural development revolve around two programmes that elaborate the two strategies in the RPJPN. The first programme is promoting National Strategic Rural Areas. There are 62 strategic rural areas widely spread throughout the nation that are projected to become new local growth epicentres in rural areas. These strategic rural areas are expected to facilitate a stronger linkage between rural and urban areas, as suggested in the RPJPN. We expect an in-situ process of urbanisation to take place as these areas develop.

The second approach is Integrated Rural Development. This is a programme that is specifically designed to promote the overall level of a village's development. A quarter of 74,961 villages in our country are categorised as lagged villages (based on Village Index in the RPJMN 2020-2024). The rural poverty rate is still high and consistently higher than the rates in urban areas, particularly in the eastern part of the country. Some strategic rural projects are set to address these issues, such as adopting digital technology to most villages and promoting rural economies through community-based ecotourism, establishing village enterprises, capacity building for rural-community and village apparatus, and thousands of professional facilitators to support villages. Those strategic rural projects are driven mainly by the villages themselves, using their own Village Funds.

Several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) goals and targets also address rural development challenges. A few examples are SDG 1.2, to reduce the proportion of people living in poverty by at least half; SDG 2.3 to double agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, and SDG 13.1.3 to improve the capacity of local communities to manage climate-related hazards and natural disasters. Can you share with us Indonesia's progress in meeting these and other relevant SDG targets in the context of rural communities?

Suharso Monoarfa: Multidimensional poverty (SDG 1.2) measures various dimensions of poverty other than the lack of income, including access to basic needs such as housing, sanitation, clean water, health care, education, and basic assets to survive properly. For the health dimension, the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) showed an improving trend, decreasing from 8.23 per cent (2017) to 7.63 per cent (2019). However, in 2020 this figure rose again to 8.34 per cent. Moreover, the morbidity indicator showed a moderate decrease

in the percentage of the population suffering from illnesses within the last month, from 15.38 per cent in 2019 to 14.64 per cent in 2020 (BPS, 2020).

SDG 2.3 is measured by the agricultural value-added per farmer. During the 2015-2019 period, agricultural value-added per worker (Farmer's Term of Trade) showed a significant increase from 41.20 million Indonesian rupiah to 56.78 million Indonesian rupiah (BPS, 2020), with an average annual increase of 8.5 per cent. However, in 2020, although the agricultural sector managed to grow positively during the COVID-19 pandemic, labour productivity in the agricultural sector suffered a slight decline (by 2.54 per cent, to be precise). Nevertheless, despite the decline, this achievement was still higher than our target in the RPJMN 2020-2024.

The capacity of local communities to manage hazards and natural disasters (SDG 13.13) has shown some improvement. The death toll and missing persons due to natural disasters during the 2019-2020 period decreased from 0.22 to 0.16 per 100,000 people. This number was lower than the 2020 target of 0.20 per 100,000 people (BPS, 2020).

How has the COVID-19 impacted rural communities in Indonesia? What are the most urgent issues the country needs to address in its response and post-pandemic recovery efforts?

Suharso Monoarfa: COVID-19 has been affecting every single inch of our planet. Nevertheless, cities are the places that hurt the most. With restricted mobilities and limited activities, the economic propellers within cities are barely working. Not only have formal jobs been significantly affected, but the informal sectors have also been devastated. As a result, people were rushing out of the cities and returning to their home villages. There was a significant increase in workforces in the agricultural sector (2.7 million workers) between 2019 and 2020. Other sectors signified a decline in urban activities in the same period, such as manufacturing (-1.72 million workers), and wholesale and retail sectors (-0.5 million workers) (BPS, 2020).

Back at home, in the rural areas, they could rely temporarily on their families for food and shelter. The main problem with rural areas has always been inadequate basic services compared to their urban counterparts. Having a consistent flow of people from urban areas would further crowd out public facilities in rural areas.

Economic recovery and social (security) reforms are our main priorities at the moment, not only at the national level but also at the provincial and village levels. In responding to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been relaxing some regulations to allowing cash transfers using the Village Fund, which is a block grant that is transferred directly from the national budget to every village, at an average amount of one billion Indonesian rupiah. Furthermore, we have directed the use of the Village



Fund to focus on mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 and focusing its spending on health support (e.g., medicines, masks, etc.), food security, and labour-intensive rural projects as rural anti-unemployment measures.

Can you share with us the successful outcomes of your rural development initiatives and/or share best practices that can be replicated elsewhere? Are there any notable milestones involving the participation of rural women and rural youth in SDGs' localisation?

Suharso Monoarfa: I would say the National Programme of Rural Community Empowerment (Rural-PNPM) is one of the most successful rural development programmes in Indonesia. It was the largest longitudinal programme that had been implemented for more than a decade. The objectives were to achieve poverty alleviation and improve local-level governance in rural areas by provisioning resources to support productive proposals developed by communities, including rural women and rural youth, through an inclusive, participatory approach.

The project was carried out by providing Block Grants to the communities that were pooled at the sub-district level. The resources could be used for implementing several developmental and empowerment activities as defined by the communities themselves. District governments were strongly encouraged to share some of their resources with the project in order to raise their sense of belonging over the project.

Perhaps the biggest outcome of the Rural-PNPM programme was the total transformation of rural areas. Rural-PNPM could be claimed as the foundation of the renowned Village Law (Law 6/2014). The experiences from Rural-PNPM familiarised rural communities with the dynamic of a self-governing community. They were trained to identify their own problems and to think about necessary

responses to be implemented through a proposal-based mechanism. These empowerment processes were managed by professional facilitators. The facilitators from Rural-PNPM were also institutionalised as Village Facilitators to further empower the community in rural development.

Furthermore, the idea of a proposal-based Grant was then institutionalised as a Village Fund under the Village Law. Today, the Village Fund has become the fuel of Indonesia's rural development. From 2015 to 2019, thousands of rural facilities have been built by using the Village Fund, including 230,709 Km of roads, 10,480 local markets, 565,626 irrigation facilities, 339,909 spot clean water facilities, 36 million Km of drainage infrastructures, 11,599 health facilities, 25,022 local sports halls, 1.3 million Km of bridges, and other facilities (MoF, 2020).

What should be the main areas of regional cooperation in rural development and poverty alleviation?

Suharso Monoarfa: Rural social innovation is an emerging concept in rural development. The innovation itself depends on the distribution of prior knowledge and the capacity of rural communities to recombine the knowledge, which they have already possessed, to come up with new ideas, as well as to learn new knowledge from others beyond their communities. Therefore, it would be a huge benefit for rural communities if they are exposed to insights and best practices from neighbouring ASEAN countries, so those rural communities would have access to various references and create their own ideas in solving their own challenges. The topics for knowledge sharing on rural development between countries could be on technical aspects, village-owned enterprises (*BUM Desa*), local unions (*Koperasi Desa*), and resilience against climate change and ecological loss in rural areas. ■

Transformative Rural Development Towards Poverty Eradication in ASEAN



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DEPARTMENT

Reducing poverty and promoting rural development remain high on ASEAN's agenda, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Around 140 to 160 million people are estimated to have fallen into poverty in 2021 due to the pandemic, and people living in rural areas are the hardest-hit. In the Asia and the Pacific region, an estimated 89 million more have been pushed back into extreme poverty.

A 2021 report by the UN ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia-Pacific) says the total headcount would double if the higher income criteria of 3.20 or 5.50 US dollars per day are considered (UN ESCAP, 2021a). Beyond income poverty, there are 640 million multidimensionally poor people in Asia and the Pacific region (UN ESCAP, 2021b). These are people who are deprived of at least one of three weighted indicators—health, education, and standard of living.

In the ASEAN region, rural areas experience poverty twice as much as urban areas, and the pandemic has exacerbated this. Rural areas, in general, are characterised by inadequate public infrastructure for basic public services and social protection, as well as information and communications technology (ICT) systems even before the pandemic. The labour market in rural areas is largely informal and seasonal. Family farming is at the centre of agricultural production, with small holder producers tilling lands that are less than five hectares. Additionally, rural and older women carry most of the burden and remain largely at risk. They continue to undertake unpaid care and domestic work and are engaged mostly in informal employment.

A study by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a more significant impact on inequality compared to previous global pandemics (IMF, 2021). According to the IMF's 2021 World Economic Outlook, the pandemic has triggered multiple forms of inequality, hitting certain groups the hardest—lower-income households, workers with lower education, minorities, immigrants, and women. Consequently, a rise in inequality triggers an increase in the incidence of poverty. It is estimated that a 1 per cent increase in the Gini Index in each country increases the number of additional poor by around 15 per cent or roughly 152 million people.

Turning the tide against poverty and inequality would necessitate a comprehensive and integrated whole-of-ASEAN approach. Pursuing transformative rural development is critical in ensuring the region's economic, social, and environmental viability. And to reach ASEAN's poverty reduction targets, poverty in rural areas must be reduced.

Rural Development: A Comprehensive and Integrated Strategy

As a strategy, rural development is undertaken to improve economic and social living conditions, focusing on groups

“Turning the tide against poverty and inequality would necessitate a comprehensive and integrated whole-of-ASEAN approach.

of poor people in rural areas. The aim is to enable and engage them to benefit from development. Moreover, rural development pursues inclusive and sustainable approaches that balance investments, which spur local economic production and growth, with preserving the environment and securing the overall people's welfare and well-being. Underlying this intersection is the recognition of the dynamic links between rural and urban spaces.

ASEAN's cooperation on rural development and poverty eradication is overseen by the ASEAN Ministers Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (AMRDPE). The AMRDPE provides strategic guidance and policy direction on regional development cooperation to uplift the lives of poor and vulnerable people from poverty and invigorate inclusive and sustainable growth in rural areas. The Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (SOMRDPE) is a subsidiary body of the AMRDPE. The SOMRDPE supports AMRDPE by recommending regional policies, developing, implementing and reporting the progress of the five-year regional work plan, and engaging stakeholders and managing partnerships.

At the 18th SOMRDPE Meeting held in November 2021, SOMRDPE concluded implementing the ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2016-2020. During this period, regional development cooperation projects were implemented, ranging from promoting rural economic growth and providing social protection and safety nets, to developing linkages between rural and peri-urban areas and building the resilience of the poor and vulnerable groups to economic and environmental risks.

Addressing cross-cutting issues is a prominent feature of SOMRDPE's work in promoting rural development in the past five years. SOMRDPE

Figure 1: Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2021-25

Key Result Area	Strategic Objectives
Economic	Fastrack rural transformation to enable participation in socio-economic opportunities
Human	Ensure access to education, social services and healthcare towards enhanced welfare and healthy lifestyle in rural communities
Protective	Institutionalise disaster preparedness programmes to environment and climate change risks towards resilient communities and households
Political	Ensure good governance, institutionalise mechanisms and processes to strengthen convergence of rural development and poverty eradication initiatives
Inclusivity	Institutionalise multi-stakeholder rural development mechanisms, especially for rural women and youth participation, and other vulnerable sectors

has been engaged in knowledge generation and in establishing consultative stakeholder platforms on achieving the SDGs, addressing the impacts of climate change, and contributing to the implementation of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and other ASEAN frameworks. SOMRDPE has also given importance to gender mainstreaming and women empowerment in rural development. It has emphasised the role of women in rural value chains, the strength of women's leadership in local villages and committees, and their invaluable contribution to rural revitalisation.

Recently, the AMRDPE adopted the new **ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2021-2025**. The overall goal of the new work plan is to improve the economic and social living conditions of poor people in rural areas and help the poorest of them benefit from development. The work plan covers five (5) outcome areas (Figure 1).

A hallmark of SOMRDPE's work promoting rural development is stakeholder engagements and partnership. The annual conduct of the **ASEAN Public-Private-People Partnership Forum on Rural Development and Poverty**

Eradiation has served as an effective platform to bring together governments, civil society organisations, farmers organisations, the private sector, international organisations and other stakeholders to deliberate on issues affecting the region. SOMRDPE also recognises the contributions of civil society organisations and the private sector through the ASEAN Leadership Award on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication. Given bi-annually, the award features best practices and innovative approaches in promoting rural development and poverty alleviation.

In addition, the goal of achieving the SDGs figures prominently in SOMRDPE's new work plan. Through the years, SOMRDPE has pioneered the establishment of knowledge-sharing platforms that would accelerate actions to achieve the SDGs. Recently, SOMRDPE convened the 6th ASEAN-China-UNDP Symposium on SDGs: Reducing Inequality in the Decade of Action to Achieve the SDGs and Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Inequality is a barrier to human development as individuals and groups face disadvantages based on their attributes and circumstances. During the forum, a specific focus was





placed on bridging the rural and urban divide, particularly by promoting integrated development to eradicate poverty. There was also an emphasis on bridging the digital divide through quality education and access to technology, particularly for the youth, small farmers, and women.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the AMRDPE Ministers convened a **Special Meeting on Reducing Poverty and Building Resilience: Towards COVID-19 Recovery**. The AMRDPE underscored the importance of protecting the poor and vulnerable from the impacts of the pandemic. Ensuring this requires adopting a pro-poor, gender-inclusive, and climate-responsive approach to recovery. Undertaking recovery initiatives need to invigorate rural livelihoods and ensure that local rural economies and the food systems are moving without disruption, which entails empowerment of small-scale farmers and diversification of agriculture supported by innovation and technology. Specifically, such initiatives need to address the specific constraints faced by rural women and rural youth and unleash their potentials. In addition, inclusive and sustainable

recovery from the pandemic would promote investment in rural infrastructure, including physical and economic infrastructure and human development. Equally important is strengthening integrated policy frameworks to address governance gaps in the rural-urban continuum at all levels and cross-sectoral and inter-sectoral cooperation at the ASEAN level.

ASEAN Master Plan on Rural Development

Rural development is a cross-cutting issue. It occupies a space where issues converge, such as agricultural production, disaster and climate resiliency, gender equality and women empowerment, social protection, labour and migration, technology, and urbanisation, among others. Understandably, these issues require focused attention to avoid fragmented policy approaches. Such siloed processes can be observed at the national and regional level across the ASEAN Community pillars.

SOMRDPE's initiative to develop a master plan on rural development intends to provide a cohesive guiding framework for ASEAN's rural development and poverty eradication agenda. In particular, it dissects the nexus

between food security, agriculture development, and rural development, as they are shaped and informed by underlying factors such as those mentioned above, taking into account the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The master plan aims to inform and potentially steer public and private investments towards transformative rural development. The plan includes building an efficient agriculture sector that meets the food needs of the people, securing food security in a region that is increasingly becoming urban and non-agricultural, and uplifting the lives of poor and vulnerable groups in rural areas in ASEAN. The master plan is expected to be finalised in 2022. ■

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Dimensions of Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

The ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2021-2025



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ASEAN and Cooperation in Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

In the realm of rural development and poverty eradication under the ASEAN Cooperation Framework on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, two levels of concrete cooperation mechanisms have been established. One is the ASEAN Ministers Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (AMRDPE) that is responsible for defining the framework of the cooperation plan to implement rural development and poverty eradication. The other is the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (SOMRDPE) that serves as a planning mechanism, coordinates follow-up, and implements the policies approved by the ministerial meeting. It is also tasked to monitor the projects and activities included in the **ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication**, developed every five years. In 2021, the ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2021-2025 was adopted, articulating its intention to undertake rural development and poverty eradication. It will serve as a development guideline for the integration and cooperation in the ASEAN region.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has severely and continuously impacted countries and economies, spreads widely among people of all groups, ages, and socio-economic statuses. The disease control measures that all countries had enforced caused disruptions in the economy, trade, production, and

tourism, leading to unemployment and forcing some to migrate back to the countryside. Moreover, people in poverty are more severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The numbers of poor people are increasing, as living conditions become more difficult. In addition, people are grappling with emerging diseases that affect their lives and with the impact of climate change that threatens the region's ecosystems. The ASEAN Member States, aware of the severe impacts of climate change, have focused on strengthening collaboration among ASEAN Member States. The current ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2021-2025 outlines and formulates other comprehensive strategies in all areas critical to sustainable development.

Therefore, the ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication was formulated as a guideline for regional cooperation and the integration of development initiatives towards the comprehensive practice and work direction. The goals are to improve the region's socio-economic development, uplift the quality of life for people living in poverty, and ensure that people in the rural areas benefit from universal development under five strategies:

1. *Economic Development:* Promote the adaptation of rural people to economic opportunities by (i) strengthening rural institutions in planning the development of rural-urban linkages that will lead to a stable rural economy and to reduce poverty as targeted; (ii) adjusting the role of rural business organisations to participate in



development with easier access to services by people in the community; and (iii) increasing financial support and investment in micro-infrastructure development; and coordinating cooperation between borders and supporting participation in the activities of smallholder farmers.

2. *Human Development:* Ensure that the poor have access to education, social welfare, and health services by (i) improving access to education, training, and human resource capacity development; (ii) laying the foundation for appropriate and sustainable management of the community's financial mechanisms; (iii) investing in health service businesses, basic infrastructure and services, especially in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic; and (iv) improving

access to technology and financing to enhance the quality of life, including comprehensive and income equality, among women and the youth.

3. *Social Protection:* Prepare agencies and organisations to respond to emergencies resulting from environmental and climate change that may occur by (i) managing natural resource knowledge and adapting to climate change for rural development and poverty eradication; and (ii) improving natural resource management, consulting services, disaster risk reduction, and climate change measures for the benefit of smallholder farmers and community enterprises.

4. *Political Development:* Strengthen the operational capacity of personnel and

initiatives that drive rural development and poverty eradication by (i) building a rural development network with various sectors; (ii) strengthening the capacity of rural development and poverty alleviation of relevant administrators; and (3) giving the ASEAN Award to organisations for their contributions towards effective and sustainable rural development and poverty eradication.

5. *Inclusivity:* Create a mechanism for integrating all sectors involved in government, the private sector and civil society in effective rural development and poverty eradication by implementing (i) sustainable development by raising awareness and integration for rural development and poverty eradication; (ii) promoting the rights of women and children for

implementing rural development and poverty eradication under the ASEAN Mechanism; and (iii) knowledge management in rural development and poverty eradication with a focus on sustainability.

As the Chair of the 2020 ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, Thailand was responsible for convening the ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2021-2025 and preparing comprehensive strategies with all ASEAN Member States on all aspects. Thailand has emphasised the development dimensions that will lead to the sustainable eradication of all forms of poverty and environmental management for sustainable development.

Consequently, Thailand has included projects that promote effective poverty management, economic and human resource development, which are contained in three Strategies of the ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2021-2025:

1. *Economics*: Thailand aims to spur growth by strengthening connections and increasing efficiency in all aspects to improve development in the district and sub-district levels; build a list of people whose land have been encroached on and help enhance their livelihoods, establish fairness and reduce people's poverty; and organise a campaign to compete in a 90-day food security competition.
2. *Human Resources*: Thailand aims to increase its competitiveness and ensure that people have a decent quality of life and have access to education. In the context of human resource development, it is promoting education within schools, developing informal education, encouraging volunteers to educate the community. It is also creating modelling or areas of development using a new agricultural theory.
3. *Climate Change Protection*: Thailand has placed emphasis on environmental

protection and management by, for example, encouraging the use of hydraulic cement, a cement formed by reacting with water, in building government infrastructure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Rural Development and Poverty Eradication in Thailand

Various crises that hit Thailand in the past two years, especially the COVID-19 pandemic, have severely affected the country's economy, social condition, natural resources, and environment. As a result, Thailand's GDP fell to a negative 6.2 per cent.

Thailand has adopted a new theory on agriculture and the Sufficiency Economic Philosophy under the royal initiative of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. For example, this theory has been applied to the development of the Khok Nong Na model to restore soil, water, forest, and food security. The model divides land into four parts: 30 per cent for irrigation water storage, 30 per cent for growing rice, 30 per cent for growing a mixture of plants, and the remaining 10 per cent reserved for residential and livestock areas. As a result, there is no longer repeated flooding in the area.

The model's success has resulted in the creation of the Sufficiency Economy Development Zones (SEDZ) policy that enables the SEDZ committee to designate Sufficiency Economy Development Zones in the provinces. This process falls under the authority of the Center for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development of People of All Ages. In accordance with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, the state will support employment, infrastructure, basic materials, tax rights, investment privileges, which are necessary to contribute to the distribution of prosperity to the region, especially in areas that are experiencing repeated disasters.

The skilled and competent workers who were laid off due to the COVID-19 situation and who returned to their hometowns in the countryside create

an important force in the development of rural areas. Through the Sufficiency Economic Royal Initiative, the government can provide these displaced workers with education and the right tools, including technological knowledge, appropriated technology, and smart innovation. This will solve problems regarding space and social landscape. Developing Sufficiency Economy Zones with a new economic model (BCG Economy Model) will eliminate poverty, reduce income inequality, enhance the quality of life of people throughout their lives, increase the potential of Thailand's disaster management in the future and strengthen economic, social and environmental stability in the area. The goal of developing Sufficiency Economy Zones with the New Economic Model (BCG Economy Model) represents the commitment of Thailand to pledge to jointly achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Conclusion

Climate change has destroyed ecosystems and increased pollution, bringing about various diseases. The outbreak of COVID-19 and its resulting crisis have affected the economies of ASEAN Member States. As a result, the problems of poverty and inequality are rising in these countries. ASEAN Member States have reduced poverty and inequality over the past decade, contributing to a better overall outlook for poverty and inequality in the ASEAN region through mechanisms at the national level and under the ASEAN Cooperation Mechanism on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication. However, in 2020, the ASEAN region faced obstacles from the COVID-19 pandemic, causing increased poverty and deprivation among ASEAN people. This challenges ASEAN and its Member States to find mechanisms to prevent future crises and create social protection for the poor. It is crucial to include strengthening human resources at all levels to help the ASEAN region attain poverty eradication and sustainable growth. ■

Post-Pandemic Rural Transformation



MAGS CATINDIG-REYES

ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL
ASIAN PARTNERSHIP FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
IN RURAL ASIA (ASIADHRRA)

In the past 20 months, we have seen the impact of COVID-19 on rural communities and the policies and programmes undertaken by our governments to respond to this pandemic. Pre-pandemic, the number of job and production losses and rates of hunger, malnutrition, violence, and poverty were already alarming. The pandemic has only doubled, even tripled these figures. Unfortunately, rural communities were unprepared for these impacts and are likely to endure them longer. Let me discuss some of the now-established impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2018, AsiaDHRRA documented that rural communities in our region continued to face food and livelihood insecurity, brought about by worsening climate risks, economic shocks, and land and water grabbing threats. Before this pandemic, rural areas were at a disadvantage with inadequate infrastructure and social services such as health and sanitation facilities, transportation and communications systems, access to social protection, scarce formal employment and livelihoods, and high risk to climate change and natural disasters, among others. The pandemic further aggravated these challenges due to interruption of remittances; mobility restrictions affecting production, transportation, and marketing of produce; and suspension or cessation of livelihood and labour opportunities, among many other things, according to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (2020).

The FAO's *State of Food and Agriculture in Asia and the Pacific* 2020 report stated that the region experienced a substantial decline in poverty and rapid economic growth in recent years. In South and Southeast Asia sub-regions, this decline in poverty was attributed to increased rural outmigration and rise in the proportion of non-poor in rural areas. The report emphasised the need to further improve rural farms and rural non-farm economies for these positive trends to continue.

Unfortunately, the onslaught of the pandemic reversed these trends. In 2020, stringent movement restrictions derailed the processing, marketing, and transportation of agricultural products, severely affecting rural workers and

producers, particularly the casual, informal, and self-employed. Reports showed that informal rural and agricultural workers, especially women workers, suffered the most loss of income since they had no access to insurance and other forms of social protection. We also saw a rise in unemployment and underemployment rates since last year.

This pandemic also reversed the rural-to-urban population movement. In 2020, we witnessed a large-scale urban-to-rural or reverse migration due to, among others, loss of employment and livelihood opportunities in urban areas, strict mobility restrictions, and fear of rapid virus transmission due to spatial congestion. Cliffe, Zamore, and Noel (2020) noted that this phenomenon is not new and had been observed in past epidemic and pandemic outbreaks, such as the cholera outbreak in 1832, the Spanish Flu in 1918, and the recent Ebola virus outbreak in the mid-2010s. This urban-to-rural migration is overloading the capacities of rural areas, resources, and services and is exacerbating COVID-19 risks.

Another issue magnified by the pandemic is the structural barriers confronting rural women and youth. Stay at home orders took a toll on rural women and girls in charge of managing their households and, at the same time, processing and marketing their produce. The UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and UN Environment Programme (2020) said that the rate of women's unpaid care and domestic work has almost doubled. Cases





of gender-based violence also increased. Due to the socio-legal status of rural women, their access to social protection and services has long been wanting. During this pandemic, their access to social protection and amelioration programmes, such as cash transfers, further weakened. In the case of rural youth and children, their access to formal education and employment and informal ones has also been disrupted, further undermining their future income, according to a study by Abiad, Gayares, and Thomas (2021). AsiaDHRRA also noted that school closures increased the incidences of child labour, especially in the agriculture sector.

The shift in the public and private sectors to digital platforms for rendering services and programmes also left out rural communities that lack or have weak digital connectivity. This resulted in a further decrease in enrollment of rural children and youth; and disinformation or misinformation among rural women providing care to their households.

Indeed, this pandemic and its impact are unprecedented. Rural communities are not the only ones hit, but they will bear the pandemic's socio-economic and socio-ecological aftereffects disproportionately.

Partnerships for Response and Recovery

While the challenges are daunting, we have also seen many rural communities adjust and adapt quickly even at the early onset of the pandemic. Many rural peoples' organisations (RPOs) quickly pivoted and responded to the call of the times, especially in providing food and supplies to neighbouring urban centres despite inadequate transportation and logistics.

The pandemic hit many smallholders badly, but this did not deter them from proving that they are indeed capable development actors. Our partner farmers' organisations in Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines have focused on invigorating their participation in local agricultural value chains. They shifted to producing crops and commodities with high local or domestic demands; they produced needed supplies for governments' assistance programmes, food banks and feeding programmes, and isolation facilities. They have also intensified the promotion, use, and exchange of traditional seed varieties and natural and diversified farming practices, upholding balance in social, economic, and ecological community growth and development.

We take note of the value of the territorial approach in development planning and disaster response, and management. This reality also compels us to amplify our efforts to raise awareness and promote the localisation of the **ASEAN Guidelines on Responsible Agriculture Investments (AGRAI)**. AGRAI is an important policy instrument for ensuring that smallholders, rural women, and rural youth are recognised, engaged, respected, and protected in agri-value chain developments.

Likewise, we again see the benefit of investing in organising rural communities. Through these rural people's organisations, individual households could access information on the coronavirus, information on safety measures and protocols, food packs and hygiene kits, emergency assistance (for production and non-production), inputs and wage subsidies, and other public programmes.

We also responded quickly to some immediate needs on the ground, within the network, even with our limited resources. It has been possible with the support of our donor partners, such as the European Union, International Fund for Agriculture Development, and the Food and Agriculture Organization,

that allowed us to reorient our on-ground cooperation and be in line with the needs and realities of our members and partners. Some of our member-DHRRAs have recalibrated their initiatives to provide psychosocial and legal services to their partner communities, capacity building on alternative livelihood, and capital resources for such activities, among others. Our forthcoming cooperation with farmers' organisations will allow them to recalibrate their business plans, revive previous and improved current productions, and strengthen their capacities as players in their respective local agri-value chains and as development actors in their localities.

These responses—local value chain development (Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs 1, 2, and 10), responsible natural resource-based food production (SDGs 12, 13, 14, and 15), and responsive partnerships and investments (SDG-17)—are some of the critical factors that must be carried over and enlarged as we shift to the recovery phase. We believe these will aid in building rural communities' transformative resilience (bounce forward) more than in usual persistence (bounce back).

Onward to Recovery

Based on our experiences in post-Tropical Storm Haiyan programmes, we have learned that the recovery and rebuilding of rural communities

differ greatly from that of the cities and urban areas. In rural areas, reinvigorating the local economies to boost recovery necessitates the integration of farm-based and non-farm alternatives. Likewise, we cannot overemphasise the importance of social solidarity in rural areas. Our previous experiences have shown that investing in organisational development, which includes organising, capacity building, leadership programmes, in all phases of recovery and rebuilding, has proven to help strengthen communities' resiliencies to future disasters or crises.

Like other crises we have dealt with in the past, we try to find opportunities in this pandemic. The opportunity is to shift the paradigm towards a holistic, multi-scalar, multi-sectoral rural development and transformation approach. As such, our 2021-2025 Strategic Action Plan underscores the territorial development strategy, which is "anchored on sustainable development that recognizes endogenous capacities, employs localised approaches in pursuing growth and competitiveness, and respects participation and representation of various stakeholders, especially local peoples." It has long been part of our strategies, but this time we intend to institutionalise it as our central approach. In the next five years, our network will E-LE-VATE (Empower-Lead-Innovate) our work and be responsive to the post-pandemic

development and growth of RPOs. We will enable them to engage in territorial-based governance mechanisms upholding climate-smart and agroecological practices while navigating towards digital agriculture; support our member-DHRRAs and partner-RPOs in engaging with the public sector and the private sector, recognising that both are equally important partners in territorial-based rural transformation. We likewise recognise the importance of building stronger relations with local authorities. Thus, embedded in our central strategy of territorial approach is our renewed commitment to engage them and help build their capacities towards the collaborative creation of spaces and mechanisms for working together to develop the local community.

We are also happy to note that the **ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2021-2025** upholds the same territorial-based RDPE approach. We are also humbled that the ASEAN, through the SOMRDPE, has entrusted us to collaborate in developing the ASEAN Rural Development Master Plan. This proposed master plan would set common strategic directions for the community pillars yet would have differentiated priorities and actions at the ASEAN Member States level. The initiative came from recognising that policies and programmes remain fragmented at the regional and national levels in ASEAN. This requires reconfiguring and rethinking development initiatives: cohesive regional policies and programs that consider context and locale-specific implementation. In this master plan, the territorial development approach is once again seen as central to post-pandemic recovery, especially strengthening community resilience and accelerating SDG localisation.

AsiaDHRA is committed to continuing, working with ASEAN, especially in bringing in rural peoples' participation, ensuring that their voices are heard; their realities are recognised; their rights and welfare are protected, and their needs are responsibly responded to. ■





The View From China Strategies in Rural Development and Poverty Reduction



LIU JUNWEN
DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL
POVERTY REDUCTION CENTER IN CHINA

Poverty is a chronic affliction of human society, and a common challenge faced by the whole world. China is the world's largest developing country, with a population of 1.4 billion. In addition to its weak foundations and uneven development, the nation had long been plagued by poverty.

Since it began to reform and open up in 1978, China has adopted a two-tier management system in rural areas that integrated cooperative management with household contract management, clarified the most basic production relations and inspired the farmers' enthusiasm, and brought about rapid economic development in rural areas. With the implementation of the Priority Poverty Alleviation Program (1994-2000), the Outline of Development-driven Poverty Alleviation in Rural Areas (2001-2010), and the Outline of Development-driven Poverty Alleviation in Rural Areas (2010-2020), China saw a sharp decline in the population of the rural poor. Since the 18th Communist Party of China National Congress in 2012, China has fought a decisive battle against poverty that is unprecedented in scale and intensity and has benefited the largest number of people in human history. Through eight years of hard work, China has secured a

“ China developed a long-term monitoring mechanism to detect any trends that indicate a return to poverty for those who have just emerged from it, whose positions are far from secure, and who are on the verge of falling into poverty again.

complete victory in the battle against extreme poverty and achieved the poverty alleviation goal set in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 10 years ahead of schedule.

China has brought about a historic resolution to the problem of absolute poverty. At the end of 2020, the 98.99 million people in rural areas who were living below the current poverty threshold are no longer considered poor. All the 128,000 impoverished

villages and 832 designated poor counties have gotten rid of poverty. China has eliminated poverty over entire regions and eradicated extreme poverty. The per capita disposable income of the rural poor increased from 6,079 Chinese yuan renminbi in 2013 to 12,588 Chinese yuan renminbi in 2020, up by 11.6 per cent per annum on average. Those who were poor now have adequate food and clothing and are comprehensively guaranteed access to compulsory education, basic medical services,

and safe housing. The fight against poverty also rekindled the people's desire to seek a better life. They have been inspired to seek prosperity through self-reliance and frugality and have a deeper understanding of markets, technology and innovation.

The strategy of targeted poverty alleviation is China's strongest weapon in its final battle to secure victory against poverty. We carried out poverty registration to know whom to help; selected and appointed officials on resident working teams to know whom to offer help. Based on the causes of poverty, we applied targeted measures for different groups to know how to help; established a poverty exit mechanism

An aerial photo of Dragon Fruit Planting Base in Longan County of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.





and strictly enforced the criteria to know when and how to deregister those who have emerged from poverty. In addition, China developed a long-term monitoring mechanism to detect any trends that indicate a return to poverty for those who have just emerged from it, whose positions are far from secure, and who are on the verge of falling into poverty again. Effective monitoring helps ensure people stay out of poverty.

In 2020, the sudden onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with several disasters in parts of China, brought many challenges to economic and social development and poverty alleviation programmes. The Chinese government is coordinating epidemic prevention and control measures with socioeconomic

development. While taking the lead in economic recovery and returning to positive growth, the government is, at the same time, strengthening efforts to improve stable employment and carrying out measures including poverty alleviation through consumption. Through these, China is effectively overcoming the impacts of the pandemic and natural disasters on poverty alleviation.

China will continue to consolidate the results of poverty elimination and advance rural revitalisation across the board. In line with the unified deployment of the 14th Five-Year Plan, China will establish a support mechanism for rural low-income populations and underdeveloped areas and continue to promote the development of areas liberated from poverty. Following the general requirements for industry prosperity, ecological livability, civilised rural customs, effective governance, and

affluent life, China will take stronger measures and gather more powerful forces to advance rural revitalisation.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the China-ASEAN dialogue relationship. On 26 October, 2021, at the 24th China-ASEAN Summit, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang proposed that China continues to hold the China-ASEAN Forum on Social Development and Poverty Reduction, share experiences and best practices in poverty reduction and rural revitalisation, and help narrow the development gap. In addition, the International Poverty Reduction Center in China will continuously strengthen cooperation with ASEAN countries in poverty reduction experience sharing, capacity building, knowledge and product development, pilot projects and so on, thus pushing forward the development of a new China-ASEAN cooperation in poverty reduction and rural development. ■

Local farmer enjoys a good harvest of dragon fruits

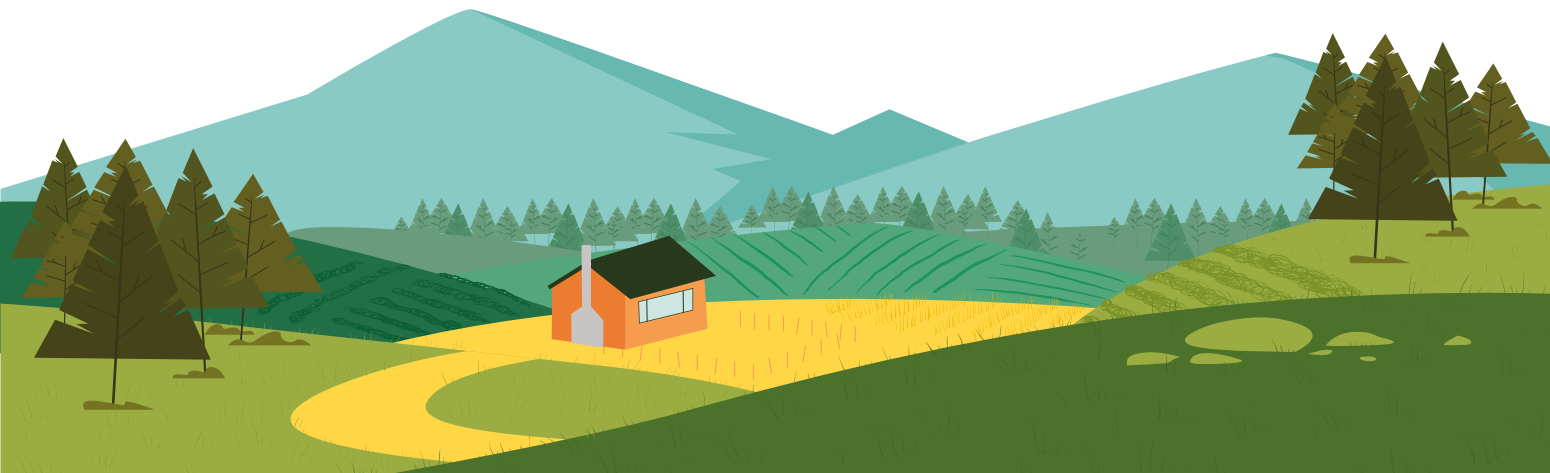
The ASEAN Rural Landscape



Rural Population (% of total population)

Country	2000	2010	2020
 Brunei Darussalam	29	25	22
 Indonesia	58	50	43
 Cambodia	81	80	76
 Lao PDR	78	70	64
 Myanmar	73	71	69
 Malaysia	38	29	23
 Philippines	54	55	53
 Singapore	0	0	0
 Thailand	69	56	49
 Vietnam	76	70	63

Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator?tab=all>>



Employment in Agriculture

(% of total employment) (modeled ILO estimate)



	Country	2000	2010	2019
	Brunei Darussalam	1,21	0,69	1,95
	Indonesia	45,28	39,13	28,50
	Cambodia	73,48	57,31	34,53
	Lao PDR	81,87	71,46	61,44
	Myanmar	61,10	53,14	48,85
	Malaysia	18,36	13,30	10,28
	Philippines	37,11	32,92	22,86
	Singapore	0,16	0,11	0,03
	Thailand	48,79	38,25	31,43
	Vietnam	65,25	48,71	37,22

Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator?tab=all>>

% of Rural Population with Access to Electricity



	Country	1990	2000	2010	2019
	Brunei Darussalam	100,00	100,00	100,00	100,00
	Indonesia	data not available	79,65	89,36	97,53
	Cambodia	data not available	6,56	15,77	90,91
	Lao PDR	data not available	27,39	58,50	100,00
	Myanmar	data not available	data not available	32,47	57,51
	Malaysia	data not available	data not available	98,11	100,00
	Philippines	data not available	61,67	78,32	93,55
	Singapore	100,00	100,00	100,00	100,00
	Thailand	data not available	73,96	99,47	99,90
	Vietnam	data not available	84,18	96,36	99,05

Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator?tab=all>>

% of Rural Population Using at Least Basic Sanitation Services













Country	2000	2010	2020
 Brunei Darussalam	data not available	data not available	data not available
 Indonesia	23,19	48,34	79,72
 Cambodia	data not available	29,02	61,00
 Lao PDR	17,43	44,87	69,13
 Myanmar	57,62	64,22	71,02
 Malaysia	94,38	97,45	data not available
 Philippines	52,46	63,19	82,20
 Singapore	data not available	data not available	data not available
 Thailand	93,60	96,12	98,29
 Vietnam	42,70	63,93	85,21

Note: This indicator encompasses both people using basic sanitation services as well as those using safely managed sanitation services. Improved sanitation facilities include flush/pour flush to piped sewer systems, septic tanks or pit latrines; ventilated improved pit latrines, composting toilets or pit latrines with slabs.

Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator?tab=all>>

% of Rural Population Using at Least Basic Drinking Water Services

Country	2000	2010	2020
 Brunei Darussalam	data not available	99,05	data not available
 Indonesia	65,36	75,61	85,67
 Cambodia	46,82	59,31	65,07
 Lao PDR	37,55	59,66	78,47
 Myanmar	38,84	56,93	78,42
 Malaysia	92,94	91,64	90,20
 Philippines	79,64	85,35	91,06
 Singapore	data not available	data not available	data not available
 Thailand	91,97	96,57	100,00
 Vietnam	75,85	85,50	95,51

Note: This indicator encompasses both people using basic water services as well as those using safely managed water services. Basic drinking water services is defined as drinking water from an improved source, provided collection time is not more than 30 minutes for a round trip. Improved water sources include piped water, boreholes or tubewells, protected dug wells, protected springs, and packaged or delivered water.

Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator?tab=all>>

Empowering Rural Women

A Story from a Small Village in Java



AJENG PURNAMA PRATIWI

OFFICER, POVERTY ERADICATION AND GENDER DIVISION
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After stints as a domestic worker in Malaysia and a business owner in East Kalimantan on the island of Borneo, Mrs. Sani returned to her hometown Karangrejo Village in the mountainous region of Kendal, Ngawi, East Java, Indonesia. There, she established a community radio station to channel her passion for music and broadcasting. She also wanted to provide useful information to the village's residents.

In its early years, the radio station collaborated with the local family planning bureau sharing information on child protection and family planning issues. Now, the station airs varied content like music and helpful tips on where to access liquid organic fertiliser for rural farming. The radio station also rebroadcasts information from other community radio networks on matters related to rural development. Despite the challenges of maintaining a not-for-profit radio station, such as funding for programmes, Mrs. Sani has been committed to realising her dream, to ensure that the community radio station plays an impactful role in disseminating information and empowering the community.



Running the radio station has given Mrs. Sani a panoramic view of the affairs and events in her village, particularly social and women's issues. She shares that women in her village are very resilient and adaptive despite the village's high level of poverty.

Most, if not all the women in Karangrejo Village work to support their families financially. Aside from taking care of domestic responsibilities, these women—young and old, single and married—are working as farm or non-farm labourers; as entrepreneurs,

selling, for example, foods, snacks, woven bamboo or fire woods; or are self-employed.

Poverty and Women Labour Participation

The plight of women in Karangrejo Village is all too common in rural villages. Women assume responsibility in at least three spheres: productive, reproductive, and social. It means they take care of their families' well-being and help their husbands in agricultural and non-agricultural jobs. This validates studies indicating that rural women significantly

contribute at many different levels to augment their families' income and the growth of their communities.

A combination of a high prevalence of poverty in rural areas and the lack of appropriate social security or sufficient savings make it necessary for women in rural areas to work—even when working conditions are less than desirable, harmful and mostly informal in nature. Relevant studies show that women are over-represented in the informal sector worldwide primarily because the informal sector is women's primary source of employment in most developing countries. Existing data suggest that most economically active women in developing countries are engaged in the informal sector (ILO, 2020; FAO, 2016).

Working in an informal economy leaves women often without any protection under labour laws and lesser access to social benefits—a condition that makes women more prone to shocks compared to men. Moreover, because of the lack of social protection, women are unable to break the cycle of poverty. As a result, older women might still need to work to contribute to their family's income.

Access to Financial Services

Despite the enormous contribution of women to agricultural output and family food security, some studies indicate that rural women are more likely to be credit-constrained than their male counterparts (Fletschner, 2009).

“Despite the enormous contribution of women to agricultural output and family food security, some studies indicate that rural women are more likely to be credit-constrained than their male counterparts.



Similar to the constraints faced by women in Mrs. Sani's village, legal regulations and customary rules often restrict rural women's access to and control over assets that can be accepted by formal financial institutions as conventional forms of collateral, such as land, house or livestock. At the same time, financial institutions also face constraints when extending services to rural women, partly due to a lack of understanding of the rural and agricultural sector, including the gender dynamics both in rural areas and within the agricultural sector (CGAP, 2003; ILO, n.d.). The non-ownership of collateral contributes to women's difficulties in securing loans and limits their access to other financial services.

As a result, women are unable to procure resources and equipment needed for their agricultural and rural-off farm activities.

In her own small way, Mrs. Sani is helping to bridge this gap. She notes that most women in her village have relatively low financial literacy, having only finished elementary school. So, she has taken the initiative of helping provide more opportunities for women to fund their businesses. Over the past six years, Mrs. Sani has been collaborating with a telecommunications company that provides soft loans for small businesses. Using her house title as collateral, she took out loans and used the funds to help out

a small group of women who needed financial support to run or maintain their small businesses.

Climate Change and Pandemic

Additionally, the impacts of climate change and the current COVID-19 pandemic exacerbate gender inequalities in rural areas. Rural women have become more vulnerable during the pandemic, largely due to the economic slowdown that has affected their income.

The livelihoods and well-being of women and men are affected differently in terms of, among others, agricultural production, food security, health, water and energy resources. For example, in most disasters, mortality among women is significantly





Mrs. Sani empowers women in her village by helping them get access to credit and using her radio station as a platform to discuss issues impacting rural women

higher than among men. Poverty among women also increases more in disaster-prone areas. Climate change and disaster impacts on women are compounded mainly by their limited mobility and decision-making power in households and communities.

Key Takeaways

When women are economically and socially empowered, they become a powerful force for change. For rural women to fulfil their potential and increase their chances of rising from poverty, several key points need to be considered.

Addressing inequitable gender power relations is key to ensuring rural women's empowerment and eradicating poverty. Policy guidance to promote gender equality in the labour market, for example, has to consider the dynamics of rural areas.

Enhancing women's economic security is important. The full participation of rural women in the labour force is crucial to ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth, enhancing productivity, and promoting innovations. Economic opportunities for women could be unlocked by equal access to education, employment, and entrepreneurship (RSIS, 2019).

Improving rural women's access to financial services has been identified as one of the important strategies contributing to rural women's social and economic empowerment, and improving the livelihoods of rural households and communities.

Providing equal provision of rural services and infrastructure is possible to facilitate women's access to education, productive resources, and build on their knowledge, skills and abilities. There is an urgent need to address the widespread barriers that women face in rural labour markets so that they are no longer trapped in informal, low-status, low-skilled and poorly paid jobs without legal or social protection. ■

VIEWPOINT Ban Ki-moon

Former Secretary-General, United Nations

Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reflects on his 10-year tenure as chief diplomat and development advocate, and the role that multilateralism plays in addressing ongoing and emerging global challenges. After leaving his UN post, Mr. Ban founded and now co-chairs the Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens (with former Austrian President Heinz Fischer) whose mission is to "use its expertise and network to work for peace, poverty eradication, empowerment of youth and women, justice, and human rights worldwide."

You headed the largest global organisation for a decade. Having had the benefit of hindsight and some distance after your stint with the UN, what insights can you share about: What does it take to make an intergovernmental organisation be continuously relevant and responsive to the needs of its community of nations?

Ban Ki-moon: I believe trust is key when it comes to the relevance of intergovernmental and multilateral organisations. Always keeping the common goal first, for a better future for all, embodying a cooperative mindset—that is essential for working together across nations.

In the wake of the United Nations' 75th anniversary, Glocalities conducted a study on trusting multilateral entities covering people from 26 different countries. The results reflected two very important notions. Firstly, the study revealed that the ongoing challenges of our time, including the pandemic, climate change, discrimination, and human rights violations, are significant concerns of local, national, and international communities. Secondly, it revealed that people who trust the United Nations recognise it as a multilateral entity which unites the values of human rights, human dignity, peace, and education.

When I assumed office as the Secretary-General of the UN, I looked into the work ahead and my agenda for the next few years and I defined the institutional problems I needed to tackle as "financial, physical, political, and environmental." Previous agendas had addressed the symptoms of these issues but not the causes. I wanted to create a culture of transparency and fairness that would address the needs of the world. I have always had confidence in reform as it signifies our belief in the future of the organisation.



How can the UN get governments to act on matters of global importance and great urgency, such as climate change, peace and security, and other big issues?

Ban Ki-moon: I am grateful that during my tenure as United Nations Secretary-General, we witnessed two major moments of unanimous international action: The signing of the Paris Climate Agreement and the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, both taking place in 2015.

These two agreements are the very essence of collective action. We must realise and not forget that global issues need global collaborative solutions. No country is on its own. We have seen this clearly with COVID-19. The current pandemic has tragically exacerbated humanitarian crises and the impact of climate change. It also caused further economic disparity around the globe.

“ All countries can only respond to contemporary challenges through effective multilateralism. Frankly speaking, when leaders forget about unity and collaboration, everyone loses out.

Governments need to act and make a sustained commitment, rather than be caught up in election cycles and quick wins. Meaningful action towards the Agenda 2030 is possible when governments have popular support. Recent trends show that by using the positive potential of social media and digital citizenship, peaceful campaigns started by youth activists are influencing governments and changing the discourse. We need such inspiring leadership and creativity to raise public awareness and mobilise political action for a world where no one is left behind.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, there seemed to be a global trend towards nationalist and protectionist policies. Do you think that has changed? Does the current crisis make a stronger case for multilateralism?

Ban Ki-moon: The COVID-19 pandemic has raised complex questions for global leaders and reminded us of humanity's common vulnerabilities and challenges. There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities. Women and youth, in particular, have been disproportionately affected in all countries, however prosperous they may be. This shows that a pandemic does not recognise geographical, political, or social borders.

We have to remain hopeful that we are able to learn from our mistakes. We need to strengthen international cooperation, coordination, and solidarity. We must learn together and not shy away from sharing experiences and solutions. This is the only way that we can create a more resilient world.

All countries can only respond to contemporary challenges through effective multilateralism. Frankly speaking, when leaders forget about unity and collaboration, everyone loses out. Thinking in terms of “humanity as a whole” and acting as “global citizens” are crucial to overcoming the current global crisis and forging the way forward to our one common goal: the formation of an equal, just, and sustainable future for all.

I am hopeful that global leaders will learn from the pandemic and embrace their obligation to improve the quality of life for all and not just their own people. Only when we are together can we hope to achieve a better world for all.

What more can be done multilaterally to put pressure on countries to meet their targets? How can the world best address this in the midst of this pandemic?

Ban Ki-moon: I am deeply troubled by the COVID-19 pandemic, the sputtering economy, failing food security,

and the so-called vaccine nationalism of developed countries. I hope that the UN remains unified and reminds global leaders that they have an obligation to protect the dignity and well-being of all citizens.

Countries and their leaders must continue to pursue anti-corruption efforts, peacekeeping, women empowerment and investing in young people. In the current situation the world is in, leaders must ensure cross-border cooperation for effective collective action which will allow equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development.

Every country must be accountable on the part it plays. I always say we must use less, think long term, look beyond borders, build communities, foster empathy, and work for peace. I believe humanity has the power and motivation to save itself.

In your view, what trends and developments today will shape the global community in the next 20 years? Can you give us your most optimistic global scenario 20 years hence?

Ban Ki-moon: Youth-driven responses give me hope for our own future as well as the planet.

Climate action, gender equality, ending poverty, ending hunger, caring for good health and well-being are goals for people and the planet and will lead to prosperity. The most optimistic scenario would be to see the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement fulfilled and implemented in 20 years' time.

However, as of today, I am worried about the world young people will inherit. Climate conditions are changing rapidly, the global economy has weakened dramatically, and multilateralism is often disregarded. We cannot ignore thinning ice, rising sea levels, the degradation of nature, and loss of biodiversity. All of this comes down to one thing: Climate change is evidently the ultimate threat to global peace, harmony, and security.

I believe we can work past these calamities to achieve better lives. I remain focused on the SDGs, the Paris Climate Agreement, and the empowerment of women and young people. I am convinced that these two framework agreements can be the engines for peace and prosperity.

Some progress has been made on climate change mitigation, *but more needs to be done especially when it comes to climate change adaptation*. I will follow the discussions and outcomes of COP26, this year's biggest climate meeting, hosted in Glasgow at the UN Climate Conference in November.

Now, more than ever we need to invest in our collective efforts. It is in our power to make *2021 a turning point for increased political and financial commitment to sustainability and climate action towards a better future for all, leaving no one behind.* ■

CONVERSATIONS

- Revitalising coastal communities through mangrove replanting
- Initiatives to promote literacy and reading in the rural areas
- A culinary journey through Southeast Asia
- Developing capacities in the Greater Mekong Sub-region





Roberto “Ka Dodoy” Ballon

Environmental Champion

Long before experts sounded the alarm bells on depleting mangrove forests, Roberto Ballon, fondly called “Ka Dodoy,” and his fledgling group of fishermen were already knee-deep planting mangrove trees in their coastal community of Concepcion in the Municipality of Kabasalan, Province of Zamboanga Sibugay. Ka Dodoy recognised early on that the mangrove ecosystem must be preserved for marine life to flourish and serve as a constant source of food and livelihood for his community. It drove him to organise the *Kapunungan sa Gabay nga Mangingisda sa Concepcion* (KGMC) [Association of Small Fisherfolk of Concepcion] in 1986 and form partnerships with government agencies and nongovernment organisations. His decades-long leadership and efforts to restore and manage the mangrove cover and protect the coastal resources of his community earned him the prestigious 2021 Ramon Magsaysay Awards (Asia’s version of the Nobel Prize).

“Before the 1980s, our environment was idyllic and unspoiled. Fish was plentiful and easy to catch. Our fishing grounds were close to shore, and so we did not have to spend hours paddling into the sea or spending too much on fuel. Our parents, grandparents settled here because of this natural abundance. But by the mid-80s, we were venturing farther out into the sea to get a good catch. Our mangrove cover was shrinking. Illegal fishing was rampant. Dynamite fishing was poisoning our fishing grounds. The use of fine-mesh fishing nets was also common. Mangrove areas were getting converted into fishponds. The rest were being cut down and sold or turned into coal. Without mangroves, fish stocks and other marine life lose their shelter and cannot lay eggs or feed. As our mangrove cover diminished, so did our marine resources, such as crabs, prawns, and fingerlings. We were losing our food and livelihood sources. So most of us had to move farther offshore to catch fish, costing us a lot of money, gasoline, and time.

“These issues pushed other fishermen and me to form KGMC. We wanted to protest against these illegal activities and bring them to the attention of the authorities. The organisation that

helped us form KGMC, called the Catholic Church Social Action Ministry, taught us how to approach and seek help from the government. That is what we did. We approached the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and our local government unit. But instead of helping us, we ended up shelling out money to secure legal documents. We were losing so much money but going nowhere so many were discouraged. Our members dwindled from 30 when we first started to just five in 1997-1998. We decided to just act on our own. And so we started planting mangrove trees. I thought maybe when the government sees our efforts and how committed we are, it will eventually extend help.

“Even with dwindling membership, the organisation was able to restore about 50 hectares of mangrove cover. This was based on DENR’s assessment in 2000. In the reforested areas, we started laying fish traps (gillnet, *baklad*, *bubo*) and we were harvesting a good amount of crabs, fish and oysters again. I was the first to go into oyster farming in the 90s. Then later, with loans, I started *lapu-lapu* (grouper) culture. Our former members started to notice that our efforts were bearing fruit and they wanted to join the association again. They wanted to go into aquaculture as well, but the problem was that they wanted access to capital without the proper preparation or doing the hard work. I told them they could do this as well, but they had to put in the work. They thought the government just gave money and that’s it, but the local government advised them to continue protecting the mangroves and look at what I’ve done as a ‘model’ for fish farming.

“We were able to enter into a co-management agreement with the DENR and the local government unit, covering 47 hectares of mangrove areas in Kabasalan Municipality. We actually initiated the process with the help of the Forest Foundation Philippines and Xavier Agriculture Extension Services. We drafted the resolution and wrote a letter of intent. We have demonstrated that we could protect our mangroves even without government support, but we wanted an instrument that would make it official and strengthen our position so we can fully protect our coastal environment.

“What is the impact of all our initiatives and advocacies? We always hear the terms poverty reduction and inclusive growth, but how are they really measured? For me, change should be visible. In our case, it is very plain to see. Before, our members used paddle-driven boats, but since they’re now earning good income from fishing, they have been able to replace these with motorised fishing boats. They now have appliances at home, and their houses, including their bathrooms, are now made of sturdier materials. Their children all go to school, and they have gadgets for online schooling. Most importantly, our members are able to save, so even if they were unable to fish for three days or even a week, they would not starve.

“We have introduced KGMC’s initiatives to the rest of Zamboanga Sibugay, and even in other areas like Palawan province, Quezon province, Bicol region. We shared our experiences and taught them what we know. We want other coastal communities to do what we do and thrive as well.

“The three most important lessons we try to impart are, first, focus on environmental protection and management, especially, the restoration of mangroves. Second is livelihood and enterprise development. They should develop their potential and enhance their marketing, aquaculture, and farming skills. Third, they should embrace the spirit of *bayanihan* and strengthen their organisation or cooperative. No one wins if each goes his/her own way. It is also easier to get government support if a group is well-organised. Government agencies are more willing to provide assistance for initiatives that will benefit the whole organisation.

“Other than mangrove restoration and protection, KGMC is implementing or involved in other activities as well. For example, we conduct *bantay-dagat* (sea patrol). We also provide regular training on marketing and fish farming in cooperation with government agencies.

“Our women and youth members have a savings club. Our youth members are part of the Youth’s Involvement in Enterprise and Learning Development or YIELD program. They post online and sell our products, such as crabs, oysters and other seafood, usually after school hours, after their online study. They earn while they use their gadgets. They earn while studying.

“We also implement a ‘trash for cash’ initiative. Before, trash was everywhere, but because of our program, people became obsessed with collecting trash. Each sack of trash collected is equivalent to a raffle ticket.

“When the Ramon Magsaysay Foundation called me to say I won (the Ramon Magsaysay Award), I thought it was a prank. It wasn’t until I did some research that I learned who the past winners were. I could hardly believe that I was chosen for this award since I’m not a doctor or a scientist. But, once it sank in that I won, my entire family and community were grateful and honoured. It was a recognition of our work, which some people have questioned. They would say, ‘what will you get out of planting mangroves?’ I’m happy that the



KGMC's mangrove replanting project with nongovernment partners

Foundation is willing to recognise the good work of ordinary people. I am inspired by this award, and I will make sure that it will not go to waste. It validates the work of other fishermen in the country and elsewhere in Asia who are doing the same thing. Through this award, the fishing profession has also regained the respect of other people.

“Our work is not yet done. We still need to help a lot of fishermen in our community. We need to give them training, organise them, or strengthen their organisation. The government should fully support mangrove reforestation and coastal protection initiatives all over the country. There should be a law that mandates the government to invest in environmental protection and set up programs for small fishermen, programs that will organise, capacitate, and give capital to organisations and cooperatives. The Philippines has the fifth longest coastline, yet we don’t have a Department of Fisheries, unlike our neighbouring countries like Viet Nam and Indonesia. We are also supposed to be the center of marine biodiversity, but we don’t have concrete programs to take care of it and our fishermen. There are talks about importing fish. We have not even maximised our potential for aquaculture, especially in Mindanao. Government should invest in hatcheries, post-harvest services, aquaculture training, feeds industry, *bangus* (milkfish) production, multispecies fishery. We will end up exporting fish if the government invests in these.

“In the past, fishermen would tell their children, ‘study hard so that you won’t end up becoming a fisherman or farmer.’ This message is wrong. We should be telling our children, ‘study hard so you can become a professional fisherman or farmer so that someday, we have the capacity to export rice and fish.’” ■

Interviewed by Joanne Agbisit. The conversation has been translated, condensed, and edited 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.

Bringing Literacy to Rural Areas



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As technology advances, the library is no longer only a place where people can read and borrow books. It also serves as a community hub, providing people with the space to develop themselves and come together as a community. But access to books and libraries is still limited for many who live in rural areas.

The ASEAN talks to two literacy champions who use creative ways to bring books and libraries to rural areas and help transform lives and entire communities.

Peter Sy, eLibraries in a Box

Peter Sy is a professor at the University of the Philippines who, on the side, created the Tambayayong eLibrary project. With this project, he provides eLibrary boxes to schools across the Philippines, especially to those in the farthest corners of the country with limited access to infrastructure development.

“I come from a rural area myself, and education has always been at the heart of my personal journey. So, when I graduated and became a professor, I always had the passion to pay back and help the people back in my hometown.”

The first eLibrary prototype was rather bulky and difficult to carry around. After exchanging ideas with another similar project in Sarawak, Malaysia, he decided to use the Raspberry Pi technology to make the device more portable and self-sufficient.

Peter wants others to reproduce his eLibrary boxes. He has recommended content for those who need it but encourages teachers to create their own. “The technology is open source. Everyone can build their eLibrary box with the framework and tailor the content for their teaching use.”

The project implementation at the grass-root level is supported mainly by various donors, from governments to religious groups and NGOs. Currently, the project has been implemented in seven areas across the Philippines, with 31 communities or schools as the project beneficiaries,

including the floating classroom of Claret Samal-Bajau School (which caters to indigenous children). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, it has been difficult for Peter to visit the sites personally. Nevertheless, he is glad to know that some teachers are using the eLibrary to implement long-distance learning and social distancing in their classrooms.



As an educator, Peter Sy hopes that his eLibrary project can help improve digital literacy and digital skills in remote areas of the Philippines, such as the Claret Samal-Bajau School (photo below)



The eLibrary is a platform of engagement, for getting together to help improve K-12 instruction, share educational resources, and enhance the overall experience of teaching and learning. The eLibrary box is a stand-alone, browser-accessible repository of digital resources.

Users can use a wifi access point (“Tambayayong eLibrary”), open the browser, and point it to an offline address to access the repository (“library.ph” or 172.24.1.1). No internet connection is needed. Learn more about the eLibrary Box and Tambayayong eLibrary project here: <https://library.ph>

Ridwan Sururi, A Horse-powered library

In Mount Slamet, Central Java, Indonesia, horse caretaker Ridwan Sururi started Kuda Pustaka, a horse library project. With his horse “Luna,” Ridwan has been visiting schools and Quran reading classes to bring books closer to the children since 2014.

“I started with 136 books donated by the owner of the horse that I took care of. I took them with my horse to schools and asked the principals’ permission to set up my horse library during recess.”

Ridwan’s strategy to bring the books directly to children has been so successful, the horse library quickly gained popularity and started to run out of books to lend. He then went to social media to ask for book donations and his project garnered interest from book-lover communities. Ridwan’s collection has grown to more than 5,000 books. A donor also gave him another horse, Jermanis, adding some horsepower to his library.

Ridwan’s horse library model is also being replicated in other remote areas like Papua and East Nusa Tenggara in eastern Indonesia. Now, Ridwan travels between 10 schools and two Islamic Education Centers (TPI)—where the children learn to read the Quran—every weekday while running a horse-riding stall on the weekend.

Challenges like bad weather and the COVID-19 pandemic halted Ridwan’s horse library activities. Since schools have switched to distance learning methods, the horse library only commutes to TPI for now. He cannot wait for the situation to get better so he can travel to schools and greet the children with his horse library again.

Despite his socio-economic condition, Ridwan is passionate about his horse library project as a way to contribute to society and educate the children in his area. The children’s smiles,

and enthusiasm when they see his horse library encourages him. He hopes that he can have his library building one day too. “The most important thing is to be sincere and to have a strong intention to help others in doing this. Otherwise, this kind of project won’t be sustainable.”

Project's Ripple Effects

For Peter and Ridwan, the impact of their rural library projects extends way beyond sparking the joy of reading in children.

When eLibrary is introduced in schools, teachers who are the main facilitator of their students’ learning process eventually become students themselves. To incorporate the digital materials and new technology, the teachers need to update their skills and knowledge before they can teach their students.

“I hope that we can develop pedagogy around tech. Technology can become obsolete but the idea of advancing technology can enhance education. There’s so much to be done. My vision is ultimately to see the necessary connection in terms of learning outcomes to truly transform the learners,” Peter says.

Since the eLibrary can also store multimedia content, Peter hopes that it can equip students in rural areas with digital skills and increase their competitiveness to enter the job market. In addition, with the shift to digital media, he sees that students’ interest is also shifting to more visually interactive content and hopes that his eLibrary can help to facilitate this.

The same can be said for Ridwan, whose horse library has evolved from just a moving library to a learning space for his community. Due to the support from various donors, his living room has transformed into a small library, complete with several computers, from where he runs free courses on computer literacy for local youth.

Youth from rural areas are often disadvantaged due to inadequate access to digital skills essential for the current job market. Libraries can play an important role to fill this gap, providing a platform for youth in rural areas to develop their skills.

The impact of rural libraries reaches far beyond just increasing the digital literacy rate among youth. It also contributes to improving the community’s welfare and empowering its members. As his collection grows, Ridwan’s horse library patrons also include mothers who are accompanying their children in Quran classes. “Since we live in a tourist area, the women here often make little handicrafts to sell and gain some additional income. Arts and crafts, as well as DIY-creation books that use everyday material, are very popular,” Ridwan says.

These rural library advocates hope that libraries can be embraced as drivers for advancing education in rural areas. People-to-people connections can also become valuable assets for developing rural libraries in the region. “The seeds of ASEAN cooperation are already there. We have friends in Southeast Asia who can learn and support each other,” says Peter. “We should at the very least understand the rural areas better.” ■



Top to bottom:
Kuda Pustaka travels to schools during recess, allowing students to borrow books for free; Ridwan and his horse, Luna.



You can learn more and donate books to Kuda Pustaka horse library through their social media: Facebook: Ridwan Sururi (Kuda Pustaka); Instagram: kuda.pustaka



Bryan Koh

Entrepreneur. Researcher. Author.

Bryan Koh's love for Southeast Asian cuisine has led him on an intense food trail to record the lesser-known cuisines of the region that may soon be forgotten.

The recipes and stories behind the cuisines of the Philippines, Myanmar, East Coast Malaysia, and the Borneo islands, are now safely preserved in his four books. He shares with *The ASEAN* his purpose in undertaking this valuable initiative and gives us a taste of his fascinating culinary discoveries.

"My books have happened quite spontaneously. I have always been interested in cooking since a young age. While in the Philippines on assignment, I enjoyed excellent food, which went beyond the *adobo* and *sinigang* I had as a child. I realised how much I didn't know about food and made the decision to explore and write about Filipino food. This culminated in my first book, *Milkier Pigs and Violet Gold: Philippine Food Stories*.

"As I began to explore Filipino cooking, I began to realise how connected we were in the Southeast Asian region. To really see that there were shared foods coming from a shared history excited me. I was informed that if I was interested in Southeast Asian food, especially traditions

uncorrupted by foreign influence, I should consider going to Myanmar. This was in 2012. I went and fell in love with the place, eventually travelling to nearly every region. This resulted in my second book, *0451 Mornings are for Mont Hin Gar: Burmese Food Stories*.

"For my latest book, *Tamu, A Guest at the Bornean Table*, I was first introduced to Sarawakian food. Kalimantan and Brunei entered the picture because there are so many shared traditions. They share the same ecosystem, so it made sense to feature the whole island.

"I have enjoyed the wealth of 'market wisdom' which I encounter at local markets visited. For example, in the Philippines, with *tulingan* (mackerel tuna), they always pull out a bit of flesh near the tail. This is because that part contains histamine and people tend to get an allergic reaction to it.

"My guide in Brunei clearly knew her way around the kitchen and the forest. She practically knew every plant and could tell you stories related to them. There is this yellow fruit called *sulang*, that the Kedayan

community uses for their *kelupis* (rice cake). She informed me that you never pair it with chicken as it could upset your stomach.

“Throughout my fieldwork, I found that there are so much of plants that we don’t utilise, different kinds of palms, ferns, and fruit. There are also a lot of fruits from the sea and fruits from the river. At the same time, I found that deforestation has affected these food sources.

“In the countries that I visited in Southeast Asia, you do find dishes that are fading away. Sometimes there is a particular fruit or plant is hard to find. There are dishes the younger generation do not have the palate for. There are dishes that are now only found in homes, never for sale outside, and in this case it is up to the households to keep the traditions alive.

“Rural to urban migration has also resulted in a loss of skills and knowledge, especially those held by women.

“If you do a search on food of Sabah, you are going to get *ayam masak pansuh*, *hinavan*, *umai*, Sarawak *laksa*, *belacan beehoon*. In order to learn about the food of, say, the Bidayuh community, you have to go into homes and meet the families who will teach you.

“I love border towns as that is where the food and the people are most colourful. You get to see multiple cultures collide and get very interesting food. There is an exchange of ingredients and knowledge which I find very valuable.

“ASEAN can create awareness of its rich heritage of cuisines by beginning from the bottom up. It really begins with education. Share with the youth what it takes to grow rice, what does it mean, how back-breaking it is. If you want people to understand, they really need to begin at the source. What fish exists in your rivers, and what fish comes from the sea not so far away. What vegetables does your forests have so as to develop this curiosity for local produce.

“Food is closely related to identity. How you cook, where the produce comes from, the technique that goes into the preparation of the dish say a lot. It is possible to tell the lineage or ancestry of the person based on how the food looks like. For example, in Terengganu, one of the states featured in my third book, *Bekwoh: Stories & Recipes from Peninsular Malaysia’s East Coast*, I got a recipe from someone who identifies as Terengganu Peranakan. However, the dish felt Indonesian for some reason. I later found out that his grandmother came from Sumatra.

“The food that we have is a product of our ancestors. Food evolves. I am often asked this – what do you feel about the people who are determined to preserve their



Bryan shares the recipe for *Hinava Sada Tongii*, a dish found among the Dusun community in Penampang, Sabah, Malaysia.

Bambangan is a rare, savoury and odorous mango that is found only on the island of Borneo.

HINAVA SADA TONGII

Serves 4-6

Ingredients:

- 1 *bambangan* seed, prepared as above
- 250g Spanish mackerel fillet, skinned and boned
- 4 tbsp calamansi lime juice
- 125g bittergourd, deseeded and thinly sliced
- 4 shallots, peeled and cut into thin half-moons
- 2cm ginger, peeled and cut into thin slivers
- 3 red bird's eye chillies, finely sliced
- ¼ tsp salt, plus more to taste
- Pinch of sugar
- Freshly ground black pepper

How to cook:

1. Finely grate the dried *bambangan* seed and place this in a bowl. Cut the Spanish mackerel fillet into thin slivers. Add to the bowl, then mix in the calamansi juice. Leave for a couple of minutes, or until the fish just crosses over to opacity.
2. Mix in the remaining ingredients and plate up. Taste and adjust seasoning with salt and black pepper.

traditions and dishes, and wanting the younger generation to learn them? I think it's a bit of a paradox. If you want the dishes to live on, you have got to let the younger generation cook and experiment with it. You may not agree with what they are doing, but at least the recipe remains and will live on. Welcome the younger generation into the kitchen. Let them try it, taste it, and allow them to alter it as they feel right. I think this is important.” ■

Interviewed by Kiran Sagoo. The conversation has been condensed and edited 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.

Mekong Institute

Bridging Policy and Implementation



JOANNE B. AGBISIT
ASSOCIATE EDITOR, *THE ASEAN*

In 2021, the Mekong Institute won the ASEAN Prize; a prestigious regional award conferred annually to a citizen or an organisation that has significantly contributed towards ASEAN community-building efforts. Mekong Institute Executive Director Suriyan Vichitlekarn sat down with *The ASEAN* to provide a brief overview of the institute's 25-year history, ongoing work, and future challenges.

Early Years

The idea for a Mekong sub-regional economic grouping was introduced by the Asian Development Bank in 1992 with its launch of the Greater Mekong Sub-region Economic Cooperation Program. At the time, the countries within the sub-region were just emerging from the social, economic, and political unrest of the previous decade. The initial stage of this programme, Suriyan says, aimed to develop the connection among the five mainland Southeast Asian countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam) and China's two provinces, Yunnan and Guangxi, which comprise the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS).

From this initiative, the governments of Thailand and New Zealand and Khon Kaen University conceived the idea of a training centre to build human capacities in the sub-region, which was necessary to support the sub-region's accelerated development. "Behind that thought, (a training centre) could provide a platform where people from GMS countries could come together and better understand each other, create an atmosphere of collaboration," he explains. "If they were not connected, not equipped with a proper mindset, how could there be cooperation between countries? It would be limited and difficult." This led to the establishment of the Mekong Institute in 1996.

The early years of the institute were focused on training government officials. "We organised a series of training for middle-level government officials to start with and then started to expand to other stakeholders like the private sector and others," says Suriyan.

But by the 2000s, he says, there was a growing recognition that developing human capacity was not enough. Suriyan

notes, "We really needed to create an open economy because infrastructure, connectivity without it will not yield so much benefit." The institute's capacity development services thus shifted to supporting a free-market economic system.

Meantime, the institute went through its own organisational transition in the 2000s. From a training centre within the auspices of Khon Kaen University, the institute became an international organisation with its own charter in 2003. In 2009, it transformed into an intergovernmental organisation and was accorded a legal personality by the Thai government.

The Work

The Mekong Institute plays the role of intermediary, bridging the divide between high-level policy and translation of that policy on the ground.

"We look at implementation issues, particularly cross-border issues, transboundary matters related to economic cooperation and integration," Suriyan notes. "We do not set up our own broad policy. Policy has been given and a bigger map of what is supposed to happen in the sub-region. The issue is how we can bring this into operation, address implementation issues, and demonstrate the joint benefits. We also provide feedback to policymaking bodies on what issues and experiences (we encounter) so policy can be refined."

The institute brings this intermediary role in three of its current priority areas—agricultural development and commercialisation, trade and investment facilitation, and sustainable energy and environment—and cross-cutting issues of labour mobility, social inclusion, and digitalisation. Its services range from capacity building to advisory services, research studies, policy dialogues, and partnerships and linkages.

Suriyan cites its recently completed project in one of the GMS economic corridors, the Regional and Local Economic Development in East-West Economic Corridor Project, to further demonstrate the institute's work on the ground.

"The idea is that we have an economic corridor, and we want to promote agricultural products; but agricultural development should not only focus at the production level," says Suriyan. "They (farmers) need to link to a market, have a business model. They need to know how they can prepare the produce in such a way that they meet the requirements of the market. And if the produce needs to be transported to other countries for processing, they need to understand cross-border mechanisms."

This is where the Mekong Institute comes in. "For example, in Viet Nam, we helped farmers in Quang Tri province with their coffee production," Suriyan says. The institute organised a series of activities, he says, to help farmers work out "how coffee will



As Executive Director, Suriyan Vichitlekarn takes the lead in promoting cooperation and integration in the GMS through capacity development, dialogue, and advocacy

be processed, linked to a market,” and decide “whether the farmers should produce coffee or send the beans to another area, across to Thailand, to make some sort of coffee products.”

If there were hiccups along the way, for example, in the cross-border arrangement, the institute would step in to determine what was stopping the transit of the products. Suriyan notes, “There are policies, but sometimes there are implementation issues. So, we work on them and see the process through until the final product arrives in the other country.”

Under the same project, the institute also assisted rice producers in Lao PDR. “Lao has a good variety of rice, but they don’t have good milling facilities,” Suriyan notes. “We helped them understand how to produce good rice that meets the requirements not only of food safety but also of quality. Often times, rice is locally-milled and because of low technology, there is a high percentage of broken rice and humidity is not properly maintained. Then when you enter the market, the price (of rice) becomes very low.”

Suriyan says Mekong Institute’s work boils down to particular commodities in particular economic corridors. The institute brings to bear its set of knowledge to help farmers improve their agricultural products and facilitate their integration into cross-border value chains.

In addition to economic corridors, Suriyan says city development is the other entry point for the Mekong Institute to do its work. “We ensure that all economic cooperation and integration measures are incorporated into city development (plans),” he notes. “If you look at the sub-region as a human body, cities are important organs and help link the economic corridors, which are the bloodlines.”

Impact on the Sub-region

“It’s not the training or the activity we do, but the alumni,” says Suriyan, when asked about the most significant contribution of the Mekong Institute. The institute has trained about 10,000 individuals over its 25-year history.

“By one or two training, you cannot expect to change the world, but you can expect that a network of like-minded people will be established and last longer,” he says.

He adds that the alumni, many of whom are now high-level government officials or industry leaders, understand the value

of cross-border cooperation. “With this understanding and willingness to work together, gradually we can build a stronger subregion,” he says.

Threats and the Work Ahead

Mekong Institute is looking at even more complex challenges in the horizon. Suriyan cites two pressing threats to the sub-region that need to be addressed. “One is the Mekong River itself and the unpredictability of the water level,” he says. “It’s not only about the amount of water but the timing.”

He explains that wet season patterns have become unpredictable, and droughts are lasting longer. In fact, scientists report that in 2019, water levels in the Mekong River dropped to their lowest in more than 100 years.

“Imagine the Mekong subregion without a reliable Mekong River. We are not able to grow. (The) economy will malfunction,” Suriyan says. “I don’t think people want to see that coming. And therefore, (we need to figure out) how we can collectively work to prevent this from happening.”

Second, the Mekong sub-region is becoming a geopolitical minefield, Suriyan notes. While interest in the sub-region is good and investments from outside the region are growing, and welcome, he says that it is important that the sub-region does not become a battleground for superpower countries.

“It creates an environment not conducive to cooperation and pressures countries in the Mekong sub-region to deal with multiple directions of development,” he says. The competition for influence may end up costing Mekong countries, he adds.

Significance of the ASEAN Prize

The ASEAN Prize, Suriyan says, is a reminder that one does not have to work in ASEAN to contribute to community-building. He adds that the Mekong Institute has always strived to contribute to this community-building aspiration of ASEAN.

Second, the prize is an affirmation that implementing high-level policies is just as important as setting these policies, Suriyan says. “We feel that our work has been recognised because ASEAN sees that setting the policy is not a complete strategy. We need organisations like the Mekong Institute to help communicate and create understanding on the policy, build capacity so that the policy is translated on the ground, and show people how they can benefit (from it),” he says.

Finally, Suriyan says the prize is an encouragement to other sub-regional cooperation programmes, such as BIMP-EAGA, IMT-GT, to work towards ASEAN’s aspirations as well. “If they do things that take (the region) one step to progress, the ASEAN people will benefit, directly or indirectly,” he says. ■

Note: The ASEAN Prize 2022 is open for nominations from 4 February- 25 April. For more information, visit: <https://asean.org/asean-prize/>

*"Boys Underwater", boys swimming
off a coast in eastern Indonesia*

SHIFTING CURRENTS

- Beyond COP 26: ASEAN's climate change agenda
- A mid-term review of the ASCC Blueprint 2025
- ASEAN identity, the youth perspective
- ASEAN and FIFA partner to raise mental health awareness



ASEAN: COP26 and Beyond

In the Face of the Global Climate Change Agenda



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Climate change remains one of the most challenging environmental issues of our generation and is an ongoing threat to global security. Its adverse impacts are manifested across communities around the world including in the Southeast Asian region. Significant research has uncovered notable changes in climate variables and climate related hazards in the region, including intensified extreme weather events.



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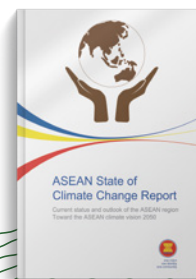
Aiming to put this climate crisis to an end, world leaders gathered at the 26th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP26) from 31 October to 12 November 2021 in Glasgow, the United Kingdom. The UNFCCC COPs have served as a pivotal platform for countries to deliberate about transformational changes in global climate policy and action. Last year, the UNFCCC COP26 discussed various climate change aspects under ongoing negotiation, such as matters related to climate finance, adaptation, loss and damage, climate technology, and gender. ASEAN Member States certainly did not miss this pivotal momentum.

Even prior to the COP26, ASEAN has been contributing to the advancement of global climate action through UNFCCC processes and carrying out its own climate initiatives as part of ASEAN Community Vision 2025. All ASEAN Member States have committed to substantially reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the coming years as reflected in the official submission of their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to the UNFCCC. In the energy sector, for example, ASEAN continues to balance the interrelated goals of achieving energy security, accessibility, affordability, and sustainability. As a result, ASEAN is halfway to reaching the 2025 aspirational energy renewables target, and is making its way to achieving 32 per cent of its energy intensity reduction targets. (Figure 1)

In line with the Paris Agreement that encourages all Parties to formulate and communicate long-term low GHG emission development strategies, ASEAN

has been paving the way to build preparedness and capacity towards this long-term vision. The *ASEAN State of Climate Change Report* was recently launched to provide an overall outlook on the state of play of climate change in Southeast Asia and identify priority actions by 2030. Adding to that, the *Scoping Study on Strengthening Science and Policy Interface in Climate Change related Decision-Making Process: Laying the Groundwork for the Development of Long-term Strategies in ASEAN* was conducted to identify priorities, direction and the extent of ASEAN interventions related to these long-term strategies and lay out the specific stepping stones to advance this regional agenda.

Further, as part of Brunei Darussalam's ASEAN Chairmanship initiatives in 2021, under the theme "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper," ASEAN reiterated its commitment to advancing science and policy interface and empowering the youth. The ASEAN Centre for Climate



The ASEAN State of Climate Change Report and the Scoping Study on Strengthening Science and Policy Interface in Climate Change related Decision-Making Process may be downloaded from the following link: <https://asean.org/category/library/books/>

Figure 1: ASEAN Climate Mitigation Pledges in NDCs

Country	Mitigation type	Mitigation target	Reference point	Target year
Brunei Darussalam	Relative emission reduction	20%	BAU	2030
Cambodia	Relative emission reduction	41.7% with forestry and other land use (FOLU)	BAU	2030
Indonesia	Relative emission reduction	29% unconditional, 41% conditional	BAU	2030
Lao PDR	Relative emission reduction	40% unconditional and 50% conditional (50% is based on the NDC's information on BAU emission in 2020 and 2030 and reduced emissions during 2020-2030)	BAU	2030
Malaysia	Carbon intensity reduction	35% unconditional plus 10% conditional	2005	2030
Myanmar	Relative emission reduction	To be updated	BAU	2030
The Philippines	Relative emission reduction	2.71% unconditional, 75% conditional	BAU (during 2020-2030)	2020-2030
Singapore	Absolute emission peaking	Peak emissions at no higher than 65 MtCO ₂ eq around 2030	-	2030
Thailand	Relative emission reduction	20% unconditional, 25% conditional	BAU	2030
Viet Nam	Relative emission reduction	9% unconditional, 27% conditional	BAU	2030

Change is envisioned to act as a regional centre for excellence and a think-tank in generating analyses and insights which can lead to innovative solutions and policy recommendations to ASEAN's climate challenges. The ASEAN Youth Climate Action Initiative (ASEANyouCAN) is intended to serve as a platform for the youth in the ASEAN Member States to share ideas and contribute to regional policy dialogue on climate strategies for ASEAN. Under the latter initiative, the ASEAN youth issued the **Bandar Seri Begawan Declaration on ASEAN Youth for Climate Action**, calling for collaborative and integrative approaches in combating climate change with the meaningful involvement of young people and other relevant stakeholders. A youth representative from ASEANyouCAN also participated in an interactive webinar hosted by the ASEAN Secretariat to commemorate the **ASEAN Youth in Climate Action and Disaster Resilience Day** on 25 November 2021, under the theme "Teaming Up with You(th) for a Disaster Resilient and Climate-friendly ASEAN."

Also in line with the UNFCCC COP26, ASEAN collaborated with the United Kingdom, as the COP26 President, to undertake a series of regional activities to mobilise support for the climate agenda. Throughout 2020 and 2021, ASEAN and the UK organised dialogues with various stakeholders on key thematic issues of climate change, notably on

private sector engagement, nature-based solutions, and long-term strategies.

To showcase ASEAN's presence at COP26 and reiterate its commitment towards global climate action, ASEAN collectively voiced its commitment and aspirations at the COP26, delivering the **ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change to the UNFCCC COP26** before an assembly of world leaders. The Statement calls for strengthened cooperation and partnership to achieve these climate ambitions, including through the enhancement of national NDCs, advancement of adaptation measures, nature-based solutions, and gender-responsive climate actions.

ASEAN also organised and participated in various COP26 side events. Organised under the leadership of Indonesia, a regional side event focusing on *ASEAN NDC Partnership: Showcasing Regional Ambition Through Updated NDC* was held at the Indonesian Pavilion, where countries shared experiences and lessons learnt on the NDC updating processes. An ASEAN event to showcase the *Importance of ASEAN Peatlands in Contributing to Global Climate Change Mitigation* was also successfully organised at the ASEAN Peatland Pavilion. Additionally, the ASEAN Secretariat was involved in several side events coordinated by relevant dialogue and development partners, such as the *ASEAN Green Recovery Platform* events of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the *Zero Carbon Partnerships between Japan and Asia for a New Age* initiated

by the Government of Japan. At these events, ASEAN re-emphasised its commitment to ramping up regional climate actions, as indicated in the inaugural *ASEAN State of Climate Change Report*.

Despite the dual challenges of climate change and COVID-19 pandemic, the UNFCCC COP26 managed to provide some grounds for optimism towards enhanced international cooperation to create a more sustainable and prosperous world. The participants adopted the **Glasgow Climate Pact**, among other key decisions, which aims to assist countries in addressing climate change and promoting regional and international cooperation to strengthen climate action in the context of sustainable development. The Pact stresses the urgency of enhancing ambition and action in relation to mitigation adaptation and finance, which particularly aligns with the current ASEAN's climate action priorities stated in the ASEAN Joint Statements on Climate Change and outlined in the ASEAN Working Group on Climate Change (AWGCC) Action Plan.

Following the adoption of the Glasgow Climate Pact, ASEAN will continue to steadfastly support ASEAN Member States to identify and bridge both current and emerging capacity-building gaps towards a more ambitious climate mitigation and adaptation action. It will also be a catalyst for climate solutions by facilitating climate financing and technologies transfer, to name a few. ASEAN is also keen to explore and strengthen partnerships with developed countries, funding agencies, technical organisations, and civil society on minimising climate-related losses and damages as well as promoting climate resilience. Cross-sectoral cooperation with the private sector, educational institutions, and the youth, is also continuously prioritised by ASEAN to effectively reflect and integrate climate change issues into national and regional climate policies and actions. Moving forward post-COP26, ASEAN will continue to fight against climate change collaboratively with partners and the international community toward COP27 and beyond. ■

ASEAN event at the Indonesia Pavilion, UNFCCC COP26 in Glasgow, the UK





Building a Community with a Shared Future

ASEAN's Stake in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework



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The ASEAN Member States joined the global call for “urgent and integrated action” to protect biodiversity at the first part of the 15th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP 15) held on 11–15 October 2021 in Kunming, China.

With the theme “Ecological Civilisation: Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth,” the landmark UN Biodiversity Conference saw the active participation of many countries as they renewed their national commitments to put biodiversity “on a path to recovery by 2030 at the latest.”

In the spirit of regional cooperation, the ASEAN Member States drafted the **ASEAN Joint Statement on Biodiversity Conservation**, rallying behind a realistic post-2020 global biodiversity framework that will help the region protect

*Wild elephant in Khao Yai National Park,
World Heritage Forest*



its mega-diverse ecosystems and achieve its 2050 vision of living in harmony with nature.

Protecting the Region's Natural Treasures

The ASEAN region has over 200 protected areas, covering more than 800,000 km², according to the ASEAN Clearing House Mechanism. With a wide diversity of flora and fauna, the region is also home to species found nowhere else in the world. Of the known 24,889 species assessed in the region by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), about 9,199 or 37 per cent are endemic species.

However, this richness in biodiversity also makes the region vulnerable to wildlife diseases, at times spilling over to domestic animals and even to humans. The rise of new and emerging infectious diseases has underscored the nexus between biodiversity conservation and protecting human health. The recent UN Climate Change

"Inlay" by Wai Yan



The rise of new and emerging infectious diseases has underscored the nexus between biodiversity conservation and protecting human health.

Conference in Glasgow also highlighted the link between confronting the climate crisis and battling biodiversity loss.

As parties to both the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and CBD, the ASEAN Member States have emphasised the importance of protecting, conserving, and restoring ecosystems to combat climate change and protect biodiversity. To achieve these renewed global goals, adopting nature-based solutions was deemed a priority, which IUCN defines as actions to protect and restore ecosystems while promoting societal well-being.

Charting ASEAN's post-2020 Biodiversity Targets

At the High-Level Segment of the CBD COP 15 in October 2021, Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Ali bin Apang, Minister of

Primary Resources and Tourism of Brunei Darussalam, virtually delivered a brief overview of the ASEAN Joint Statement on Biodiversity Conservation, which was developed in time for the important international gathering.

The joint statement captured the region's shared aspirations and commitments to preserve and protect ASEAN's biodiversity. In the joint statement, the regional bloc agreed to "intensify regional efforts on protected areas, in particular, improve the management effectiveness of ASEAN Heritage Parks Programme, through research, technology transfer, innovation, capacity enhancement, and the adoption of sustainable financing strategies."

Through the leadership of the Philippines, as Chair of the ASEAN Working Group on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity

(AWGNCB), and facilitation of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), the joint statement addressed some of the key issues in COP 15's agenda and outlined the region's contribution in shaping the post-2020 biodiversity targets, which are set to be fully adopted at COP 15's second session in April 2022. The joint statement also provided targeted actions to be undertaken by each Member State in response to the global and regional biodiversity targets.

Prioritising Biodiversity

Discussion and negotiations at the COP 15 largely focused on mainstreaming biodiversity across all decision-making processes in various sectors and levels. This was also one of the key elements highlighted in the Declaration from the High-Level Segment of the UN Biodiversity Conference 2020, otherwise known as the Kunming Declaration.

The ASEAN Member States reaffirmed the priorities set under this declaration, with the joint statement underscoring the importance of integrating biodiversity across related development sectors, including agriculture, energy, industry, and tourism. With the ongoing global health crisis, special focus was also given on mainstreaming biodiversity into the health and infrastructure sectors, highlighting the need to establish mechanisms to effectively respond to zoonotic diseases and minimise risks of future pandemics through the "One Health" approach.

As the region continues to recover from COVID-19, the adopted **ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework** and its Implementation Plan also set a consolidated strategy that underlines the importance of conserving habitats and strengthening measures to address illegal wildlife trade and the local consumption of wildlife.

Championing Nature-based Solutions

The UNFCCC COP 26's Glasgow Climate Pact called for more substantial global commitments to sustainably manage ecosystems serving as crucial carbon sinks that

minimise the severe consequences of climate change. At the COP 26 sidelines, several ASEAN Member States also committed to "work collectively to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030" under the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forest and Land Use.

In line with this COP 26, ASEAN organised the ASEAN-UK COP 26: Framing the Future for Nature and Climate, with the support of the UK and the ACB, which put a spotlight on the linkages between the climate and biodiversity crises. Further, the decision of UNFCCC COP 26 Glasgow Climate Pact provides an avenue for ASEAN Member States to strengthen their partnerships with developed countries, dialogue and development partners, as well as technical and funding agencies on ways to address emerging capacity needs and catalyse sustainable climate actions.

The growing traction of multilateral environmental agreements that prioritise biodiversity, including CBD COP 15 and UNFCCC COP 26, highlight the need to harmonise, prioritise, and scale-up cooperation on nature-based solutions in future climate and biodiversity actions.

At the recently held 16th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the Environment, ASEAN ministers noted the region's united stance in promoting the sustainable management of the region's biological resources. The ministers also looked forward to ASEAN's stronger commitment to lay down strategic local actions post-COP 15, including promoting biodiversity conservation as part of the regional post-pandemic recovery efforts.

The cross-sectoral work led by the AWGNCB and other relevant ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, and supported by the ACB, brings to the fore the region's valuable contribution to global efforts, not just in protecting biodiversity but also in building climate resilience and ensuring greener recovery. National and local governments, the business sector, civil society, and local communities all have crucial roles in these important endeavours. The ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Member States, ASEAN entities, and partners are working together under a whole-of-community approach to building a more inclusive and resilient future for all. ■



"Stay at Home" by Daniel Ocampo

COP26

Peatlands for a Better Climate Future



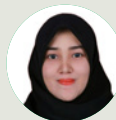
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The effects of climate change have been felt in every aspect by every country in every region of the world. However, the impacts are felt mainly by vulnerable communities.

Addressing climate change requires concerted and immediate global efforts. The recently held COP26 in Glasgow concluded with all countries agreeing to keep the 1.5 °C goal alive and finalising the outstanding elements of the Paris Agreement. The Glasgow Climate Pact stresses the importance of scaling up action on dealing with climate impacts, recognises the crucial role of science in the decision-making process, steps up action to reduce vulnerability, strengthens resilience and increases the



Peatlands are highly space-effective carbon stocks: they cover only 3 per cent of the land, but contain more carbon than the entire forest biomass of the world.

contributed two sessions, the “Importance of ASEAN Peatlands in Contributing to Global Climate Change Mitigation” on 2 November 2021 and “Towards a Climate Adapted Southeast Asia Through Integrated Peatland Management” on 3 November 2021. The protection and restoration of peatlands were cited by the ASEAN Member States as critical to combating haze pollution and climate change. Peatlands and their rich biodiversity play an essential role in reducing carbon emissions, climate change adaptation, and providing sustainable livelihoods to local communities. Therefore, it is crucial to highlight the peatland ecosystem services under various policy and management scenarios and practices, specifically peatland restoration and management policies and implementation progress, scientific knowledge and practical lessons learned, and experiences with best practices for sustainable peatland management.

Realising the importance of peatland, haze pollution and climate change issues, the ASEAN Member States adopted the **ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP)** [ASEAN, 2019] and the **ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy (APMS) 2006-2020** as guidelines to manage peatland and haze pollution in the region. In particular, APMS guided actions to support the sustainable management of peatlands in the region. The APMS’s overarching goals were to: (i) raise awareness and capacity about peatlands; (ii) address transboundary haze pollution and environmental degradation; (iii) promote sustainable peatland management; and (iv) promote regional cooperation.

capacity of people and the planet to adapt to the impacts of climate change, and increases the financing for developing countries. The Pact includes the agreement of countries on a series of climate mitigation actions, some of which concern the “phase-down of unabated coal power” and “inefficient fossil fuel subsidies,” as well as “mid-century net zero.”

Peatlands are highly space-effective carbon stocks: they cover only 3 per cent of the land, but contain more carbon than the entire forest biomass of the world. Southeast Asia has a

peat area of 23 million hectares (ASEAN, 2021), accounting for 40 per cent of all tropical peatlands worldwide. It is estimated that ASEAN peatlands store approximately 68 billion tons of carbon, i.e., 14 per cent of carbon stored in peatlands globally (Lo & Parish, 2013). Human interventions such as logging, slash and burn practices, deforestation, and agricultural drainage, result in increasing wildfires (see for example, Leng, L.Y., Ahmed, O.H., Jalloh, M.B. 2019) and degraded ecosystems that have transformed ASEAN’s carbon-rich peatlands into massive carbon emitters over the last few decades.

A series of discussions was organised at the Peatland Pavilion during COP26, where the ASEAN Peatland Partners

Aerial view of Sekatetang hamlet, Ribangkadeng village in Kalis, Kapuas Hulu District, West Kalimantan

At the Peatland Pavilion side event of COP26, ASEAN highlighted the importance for enhanced regional cooperation on sustainable forest management. Indonesia is home to more than 80 per cent of the region's peatlands (ASEAN, 2021a). As the largest peatland country in Southeast Asia, Indonesia experiences forest and land fires almost every year and contributes to haze for neighboring countries (See for example Sze, J. S., et al. (2019). In recent years, Indonesia has made efforts to reduce the number and magnitude of forest and land fires by using a combination of policies, agencies, best practices and technologies (Watts, et al., 2019). As a result, Indonesia has successfully reduced deforestation (See for example Wijaya and Samadhi, 2019) in the last several years and restored degraded peatlands for a cumulative area of 835,300 ha between 2016 and 2020 (Badan Restorasi Gambut, 2020).

In Malaysia, the government kept the promise it made at the 1992 Rio Convention to devote half of the nation's land area to forest. Peatland has long since featured in national plans, with substantial achievements. Yet challenges remained. Fire was an ever-present threat despite decreasing in scale and impact, thanks to effective

management. Rapid development of urban areas put pressure on peat land but the high-level commitment from federal and state levels governments has allowed Malaysia to maintain peat extent as planned (Dato' Dr. Hj. Mohd Puat bin Dahalan, 2021).

Meanwhile, the government of the Philippines has been working with communities to protect the

peatland landscapes and improve local livelihoods. Learning from Indonesia and Thailand, it ensured the direct participation of communities in land-use planning, ecotourism and restoration which is key to success. Together with the communities, the

Aerial view of Belayan river in Buluq Sen village, Kutai Kertanegara District, East Kalimantan

 The new ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy and National Action Plans will be more streamlined to address climate change issues, particularly focusing on improving climate mitigation and adaptation, including resource mobilisation and support for peatland management and restoration.



government developed biodiversity-friendly livelihoods that are already contributing to local resilience to extreme weather events (Tagtag, 2021).

According to the *ASEAN State of Climate Change Report* published in October 2021, ASEAN Member States will work collaboratively towards achieving the ASEAN 2050 net-zero transition targets (ASEAN, 2021b). Many ASEAN Member

States have yet to set any specific target for net zero-emission, but several are working hard to redesign their policies to meet the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) targets (ASEAN Centre for Energy, 2021; UNFCCC NDC Registry, n.d.). Singapore (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.), Viet Nam (World Bank, 2021; East Asia Forum, 2021). and Malaysia (Argus, 2021) have announced an ambitious

plan to achieve carbon neutrality as early as 2050, while Indonesia plans to achieve net-zero emissions (NZE) by 2060 or sooner (Climate Action Tracker, 2021). In addition, Lao PDR also shared a conditional greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction target reaching net-zero in 2050 (Lao PDR NDC, 2021), Cambodia gave an aspirational official emission reduction scenario reaching net-negative by 2030. Brunei Darussalam set a target of a 20 per cent reduction of GHG emissions by 2030, and Thailand aims to achieve carbon neutrality in 2050 and net-zero emissions “in or before 2065” (The Secretariat of the Prime Minister, Government House, Thailand, n.d.). Indonesia highlighted its efforts to decrease deforestation and forest fire and rehabilitate mangrove areas so its abundant natural resources can be used as a net carbon sink by 2030. Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration on Forest and Land Use signed by Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Viet Nam aims to contribute to regional efforts to halt biodiversity loss, reverse land degradation, and enhance climate change mitigation and adaptation (UK COP26, 2021).

Sustainable peatland management is a low-hanging fruit strategy in mitigating climate change. With peatlands acting as natural carbon storage, it is important to strengthen climate action through peatland management. The new ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy and National Action Plans will be more streamlined to address climate change issues, particularly focusing on improving climate mitigation and adaptation, including resource mobilisation and support for peatland management and restoration.

Maintaining the peat ecosystem as a place to absorb and store carbon reserves is a future challenge. Several ASEAN countries and partners have an opportunity to pursue peatland management and restoration beyond the common practices of peatland conservation or haze mitigation to include addressing climate change issues locally, national and globally. ■



Tracking Our Progress

Towards the Realisation of the ASCC Blueprint 2025



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The ASEAN Socio Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2016-2025 is a statement of commitment and a guideline for ASEAN in building a community that engages and benefits ASEAN's peoples; one that is inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and dynamic.

2020 was a pivotal year and the halfway mark of the Blueprint, ASCC Monitoring Division (AMD), through the support of the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF), conducted the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the implementation of ASCC Blueprint 2025 and a series of capacity building activities on the development of monitoring and evaluation system of the ASCC Sectoral Bodies work programmes in the ASEAN Member States. Both projects generated lessons learned for ASCC to keep the Blueprint relevant for Member States and the people of ASEAN.

Balancing Comprehensiveness and Agility

From a planning perspective, the first and fundamental lesson learned from conducting the mid-term review processes is achieving a balance between comprehensiveness and agility. The Blueprint, by design, is a comprehensive planning effort that covers five characteristics and objectives, 18 key result areas, and 109 strategic measures. It is intended to be achieved by implementing 977 activities at regional and national levels by 15 sectoral bodies under the ASCC during the 10-year timespan. However, while its comprehensiveness is promising, it is also challenging for several reasons, such as resources, coordination, and institutional capacity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need for the ASCC to be agile in responding to the challenges of the health crisis. Organisations that can absorb and adapt to major crises can be considered resilient. Over the past 20 months, financial and human resources in most ASEAN Member States had to be shifted towards fighting the pandemic, which meant

delaying or reducing the allocation of resources for other projects. Constrained physical movement and gathering were also felt on most project implementation and coordination.

The positive news is that the latest update of the ASCC Blueprint Monitoring—conducted a year after the mid-term review report—shows that the ASCC has withstood the agility test by adapting strategies and methods in delivering their activities. For example, activities introduced by the 2021-2025 work plans during the second half of the Blueprint were characterised by keywords such as “online,” “web-based,” “digital platform,” and “technology”.

A pertinent example of a multi-sectoral effort to understand and address the pandemic's impact is the protection of vulnerable groups. The ASEAN Senior Labour Officials Meeting (SLOM) will carry out activities to address the health risk of migrant workers including those affected by emerging infectious diseases. Within the gender context, the work plan of the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) investigated the quality of data and evidence to measure the impact of the pandemic on women and girls. These findings were then published in the *ASEAN Gender Outlook*, launched in March 2021. Other activities aim to transform policies that are ready for the post-pandemic era. The ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation on Civil Service Matters (ACCSM+3) is geared towards improving the leadership skills of civil servants so they can better respond to future uncertainties. The Senior Official Meeting of Social Welfare and Development (SOMSOD) is incorporating activities to strengthen and promote a more resilient and inclusive society during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

These work plans have also been aligned with the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF). Twelve of fifteen sectoral bodies are involved in no less than 73 of 185 initiatives under the ACRF across all five broad strategies, namely enhancing health systems, strengthening human security, maximizing the potential of the intra-ASEAN market and broader economic

integration, accelerating inclusive digital transformation, and advancing toward a more sustainable and resilient future. The agility demonstrated across these developments promises that ASEAN can remain on its course to deliver people-oriented and people centred initiatives despite challenging times.

Ensuring Adequate Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity

The second lesson emerged from a series of capacity building activities on monitoring and evaluation. Before undertaking capacity building, stocktaking and needs assessments were conducted to figure out the level of capacity of sectoral bodies in developing their monitoring and evaluation framework, analysing progress indicators (outputs and outcomes), and developing evidence-based reports based on the said analysis. Based on the needs assessments, as well as interactions during the capacity building activities, it was found that there is a general lack of understanding, knowledge, and practical experience in monitoring and evaluation. It was further revealed that staff turnover and limited financial investment or resources for monitoring and evaluation are key reasons for the deficit.

It will be a daunting task to ensure the Blueprint's effective implementation if the sectoral bodies' monitoring and evaluation capacity remains lacking. To tackle this problem, the ASEAN Secretariat organised an online training series on monitoring and evaluation with the support of JAIF. Over 320 participants from 15 ASCC Sectoral Bodies and the Senior Official committee of the ASCC (SOCA) across the ASEAN Member States participated in these training events. Post-evaluation surveys and tests revealed that the online training had successfully increased the knowledge score of participants from 44.3 per cent (pre-test) to 68 per cent (post-test).

Based on the demand from participants, the online training was followed up by online technical assistance for selected sectoral bodies from six Member States. During the sessions, monitoring and evaluation and data analysis experts from the ASCC Monitoring Division reviewed the sectoral bodies' work plans and assisted them with specific data analysis. It is hoped that participants of the online training and technical assistance will apply their acquired skills and knowledge in their daily post-training work and transfer their practical skills in developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks to their colleagues. The feedback from the ASEAN Member States has been encouraging. Positive comments include "the training is very useful for all sectoral bodies under ASEAN Member States" and "it is a very effective programme for all of us."

Pressing on with Data Availability

Finally, the third lesson focused on the the importance of data availability to measure the progress of implementation. While data completeness is satisfactory for the Blueprint's execution, the mid-term review faced challenges in measuring the overall progress of implementation, mainly due to insufficient data points of several key performance indicators or KPIs, as stipulated in the Blueprint's Result Framework.



On measuring the progress of 32 KPIs (45 in total including sub-KPIs), 19 lack sufficient data points against the 2016 baseline rendering these unmeasurable. Of 26 KPIs with sufficient data points, 21 have clear evidence of progress. The data availability problem is pervasive to such extent that even during the online technical assistance, data for main outcome indicators were often not available and, hence, replaced by proxy indicators.

Based on this situation, the mid-term review recommended that, towards the end term of the ASCC Blueprint 2025, a monitoring and evaluation system must be regularly maintained with special efforts to further improve the ASEAN socio-cultural data management system at both national and regional levels.

There are several initiatives to further improve on the collection and measurement of the socio-cultural indicators that will enable Member States to perform more comprehensive and regular monitoring and evaluation of the ASCC Blueprint 2025 (and beyond) and its implementation progress. An ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Database for Monitoring and Evaluation System (ADME) has been conceptualized. In addition, a web-based data management framework has been drafted for consultation with sectoral divisions and sectoral bodies of ASEAN Member States and presented at a regional workshop held on 6 October 2021. The workshop participants agreed on the importance and urgency to overcome the data availability problem through the proposed ADME framework. It is imperative to improve access to data and avoid the roadblocks encountered during the mid-term review to guarantee a successful and comprehensive evaluation of the overall achievement of the Blueprint 2025 in its End Term Review.

Notwithstanding the progress we have achieved so far, the ASCC will need to continue looking at ways and means to further improve the effectiveness in implementing sectoral activities and the ASEAN Leaders' commitment and Declarations in relation to the ASCC Blueprint. A more robust monitoring and evaluation system will be important to facilitate corrective actions and decisions. It must therefore be integrated into the design of ASCC strategies, plans, programmes, and projects to advance the realisation of the ASCC Blueprint 2025. ■

A Search for Identity: Reflecting on how young people see ASEAN



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On 30 August 2021, the ASEAN youth ministers launched a report on “Understanding How Young People See ASEAN.” The study aims to fill in the missing puzzle piece of the ASEAN Youth Development Index launched in 2017: its fifth domain, the **ASEAN Awareness, Values and Identity**.

The ASEAN Youth Development Index Task Force, under the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Youth (or SOMY), engaged a team of experts led by Dr. Eric C. Thompson to define and operationalise the concepts of “awareness,” “values,” and “identity” and determine the best data collection method. The team was informed by preceding studies on ASEAN awareness, such as those conducted by the ASEAN Foundation in 2007 and jointly by the ASEAN Foundation and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (now ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute) in 2014.

The ASEAN Youth Development Index Task Force conducted a questionnaire-based survey in 2020 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, covering over 2,000 university students from ASEAN’s 10 Member States.

The quest to find out how young people view ASEAN ties up with the effort of the ASEAN culture and arts sector to establish a Narrative of the ASEAN Identity. An interesting study finding is that awareness alone does not guarantee positive affinity towards ASEAN. This is worth exploring through open dialogues and follow up study.

? What does it mean to be a citizen of ASEAN?

When asked if they felt themselves to be citizens of ASEAN, **84.4% of students from across the region** answered in the affirmative. But **what does it mean for them to be a citizen of ASEAN?**



#1 When asked to explain, **the most common response was to equate national citizenship to ASEAN citizenship.**

“I am a Bruneian and since Brunei is one of the ASEAN countries, therefore I am a citizen of ASEAN. (Brunei Darussalam)

“ASEAN citizens are people who are citizens of ASEAN countries. (Indonesia)

“Singapore is part of ASEAN hence, I am a citizen of ASEAN as well. (Singapore)

“Because I am a Vietnamese citizen and Viet Nam is a member of ASEAN, I feel that I am an ASEAN citizen. (Viet Nam)

#2 The second most common theme were references to the benefits and efficacy of ASEAN. For some respondents, **the benefits of ASEAN were couched in terms of personal benefits they receive.**

“I am a citizen of ASEAN, I have more opportunities to study and work in ASEAN countries. (Cambodia)

“As a Singaporean, I benefit from all the exchanges amongst the countries, which gives me a sense of identity due to cooperation and mutual agreements as compared to Non-ASEAN countries. (Singapore)

#3 A number of respondents expressed **pride in being part of ASEAN.**

“I am proud to be part of ASEAN. (Cambodia)

“I think ASEAN countries are the best and unique countries. (Indonesia)

“I am really happy to be a citizen of ASEAN. (Lao PDR)

“It is best to be a citizen of ASEAN. (Myanmar)

#4 Several respondents also referred to **friendships as basis of feeling they are ASEAN citizens.**

“I feel that I'm a citizen of ASEAN because I normally engaged with friends from ASEAN and I travelled to these countries most.” (Singapore)

“Because I have ASEAN friends and we are good friends (sense of belonging). (Indonesia)

**Excerpts from Understanding How Young People see ASEAN: Awareness, Values and Identity (pp. 28-31)*

In designing ASEAN's youth development programmes, the study recommends emphasising the following: acknowledgement of the nature of the ASEAN Community as a diverse group of populations, celebration of socio-economic-cultural diversity, and deeper appreciation towards common values. These points are particularly significant in the Southeast Asian context, where relationships between different peoples are not always built upon similarity and assimilation but on mutual respect and understanding of their differences.

The study also highlighted the need to understand further the relationship between values and identity in the ASEAN context. Modern notions of identity—be they national, ethnic,

regional, religious, gender or other sorts—typically consider people of the same type. But this idea of sameness does not work in Southeast Asia, a region marked by diversity. According to the research team, a values-oriented identity rather than a typological identity may be a better basis for understanding and measuring the ASEAN identity. In the study, students who felt a strong sense of ASEAN citizenship also shared core values of ASEAN, such as a people-oriented community and seeing cultural diversity as an asset. In sum, the study suggests that the ASEAN youth can identify with and share ASEAN values but still respect and maintain their distinctive national, ethnic, and other identities.

An open panel discussion was held soon after the launch, involving speakers from youth organisations and a team of experts to hear the youth's perspective on the findings of the study. Agatha Lydia Natania of the ASEAN Youth Organisation moderated the webinar. Joining the panel were Jufitri Joha of the Committee of ASEAN Youth Council (CAYC); Fatimah Zahrah of the ASEAN Youth Forum (AYF); Mohd. Harith Ramzi, Senior Research Associate, Owl and Badger Research and Alumni of ASEAN University Student Council Union (AUSCU); and Horea Salajan, Media Specialist of ASEAN-USAID PROSPECT.

Youth leaders and experts exchanged views and perspectives on the report findings, including how stakeholders



Do you have friends from other ASEAN countries? (in percentage)



	Yes, 3 or more countries	Yes, from 2 countries	Yes, from 1 country	No
University Brunei Darussalam	32,9	23,1	25,9	18,2
Royal University of Phnom Penh	6,7	6,0	10,0	77,3
University of Indonesia	5,3	7,3	22,0	65,3
National University of Laos	11,3	16,2	23,2	49,3
University of Malaya	12,8	19,7	26,1	41,5
University of Yangon	25,3	9,7	18,8	46,1
University of Philippines	9,4	10,1	22,8	57,7
National University of Singapore	28,4	30,3	23,9	17,4
Chulalongkorn University	11,3	12,0	20,0	56,7
Vietnam National University	9,2	9,9	18,4	62,5
Total	15,6	15,0	21,3	48,1

Source: Understanding How Young People see ASEAN: Awareness, Values and Identity, p. 43

can benefit from the findings and recommendations of the report, particularly in designing policies, programmes, and message formulation. Conversations among speakers revolved around expanding the study sampling in its next iteration to ensure inclusivity, new ideas on content creation, and exploring ways to channel information and communicate better with the youth and engage them amid various challenging circumstances. The breadth and diversity of Southeast Asia itself make representative sampling of such a survey challenging. But participants were able to discuss ways in which strategic sampling could generate insights from a much wider group of youth beyond the initial coverage of the survey. This 2020 survey is a valuable first step since team members, and other stakeholders were able to develop the methodology and obtain baseline data to develop the Values and Identity components of the ASEAN Youth Development Index going forward.

An interesting point raised during the dialogue is the importance of translating ASEAN messages into the local languages spoken by young people. Findings show

that most university students learned about ASEAN from school, rather than the internet and social media, which appear second on the list, followed by television. Localisation of ASEAN information and messages is important to reach the region's linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse population.

The development of varied activities is needed to build ASEAN awareness and affinity. For some youth, educational and cultural exchanges should take the highest priority. Economic opportunities, regional cooperation on health and disease control, or poverty reduction should take precedence, others said. The survey results will help identify which ASEAN activities are most desirable in particular countries.

In a nutshell, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to reaching out to the people of ASEAN, especially the millennials, gen-z and younger generations. By not diversifying, we may be privileging the youth who can communicate in English and have access to digital technologies. This was evident during the pandemic. ASEAN stands to miss out on the opportunity

to get its message across and engage young people from regional or provincial universities. The study found them to be more enthusiastic and interested in ASEAN than those from higher profile universities in capital cities.

A common identity is a source of creativity and innovation and also serves as an inspiration for young people to contribute to ASEAN community building. Securing the support of the people of ASEAN from all walks of life is necessary for ASEAN to achieve its goal of inclusive region-wide development. We are hopeful that the findings of this study will elevate our understanding of ASEAN identity and values and will help us and other stakeholders engage ASEAN youth from a wide range of cultural, educational, and socio-economic backgrounds. ■

Download the full report "Understanding How Young People see ASEAN: Awareness, Values and Identity" from this link: <https://asean.org/book/understanding-how-young-people-see-asean-awareness-values-and-identity-full-version/>

#REACHOUT:

Breaking Mental Health Barriers Through Diversity and Football



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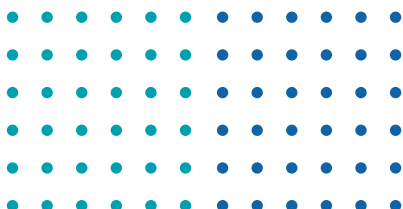


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FIFA and ASEAN proudly joined forces to launch #ReachOut on 2 August 2021. #Reachout is a “campaign designed to promote healthy lifestyles to help combat the symptoms of mental health conditions, and to encourage people to seek help when they need it.” Football players from all 10 ASEAN Member States lent their positive influence to spread one key message—all good habits keep our minds and bodies healthy and well.

ASEAN, a dynamic and harmonious community that is aware and proud of its identity, culture, and heritage, keeps exploring ways to innovate and proactively contribute to the global community. Along this line, ASEAN, in the next five years, will strengthen cooperation in sports. It will work to promote an active community that engages in sports, protects integrity in sports, and values sports as an essential means of advancing socio-cultural development and promoting peace. It will be guided by the ASEAN Work Plan on Sports 2021-2025.

Into the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, many still struggle to maintain healthy lifestyles— exercising regularly, eating a healthy and balanced diet, getting enough sleep, and connecting with friends and family. The #Reachout campaign, developed based on the recommendations of the World Health Organization, conveys the healthy lifestyle message in various languages to reach the ASEAN public. The campaign comes at a time when everyone in the ASEAN Community is prioritising mental, emotional and physical well-being.





ASEAN and FIFA rolled out the #ReachOut campaign as part of the implementation of ASEAN-FIFA Collaboration Plan 2021-2022, a framework adopted by ASEAN sports ministers following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between ASEAN and FIFA in 2019. In 2020, ASEAN and FIFA also launched the #BeActive and #FiveSteps campaigns, focusing on the importance of physical activity and sanitation and hygiene.

During the launch of the #ReachOut campaign, FIFA President Gianni Infantino said FIFA is proud to have partnered with ASEAN on the campaign with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO). “Looking after your mental health is as important as taking care of your physical health. A listening ear could make a huge difference to someone who may be struggling,” he said. Infantino also said that #ReachOut encourages those who suffer from symptoms to talk to friends, family or a healthcare professional, and to seek support from national helplines. It also urges individuals to look out for people close to them who may need help and offer practical advice on how to support those who do.

Secretary-General of ASEAN Dato Lim Jock Hoi similarly emphasised the importance of mental health and well-being. He said that under the Chairmanship of Brunei Darussalam in 2021, ASEAN took steps to advance cooperation with external partners on mental health, in order to provide the ASEAN community with the necessary and appropriate mental health and psychosocial support services.

In addition to promoting mental health, sports has been instrumental in raising ASEAN awareness, especially among the youth. A study on ASEAN Awareness, Values and Identity, which forms part of the ASEAN Youth Development Index, revealed that 20 per cent of over 2,000 university students surveyed from the 10 Member States gained awareness of ASEAN through sports. This finding affirms



FIFA®

#ReachOut



the ASEAN sports sector's endeavour to cultivate ASEAN awareness and culture through regional sports initiatives and major sports events in the next five years.

#ReachOut messages have gone far and wide, transcending cultural and language barriers across the region, through the support of the football personalities, ASEAN's networks, the ASEAN Football Confederation, and football federations throughout ASEAN. The messages and the delivery channels were tailored to resonate with the football- and sports-loving ASEAN public.

ASEAN tapped sports ambassadors to deliver friendly and easy-to-digest messages that speak to people from different educational, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The region's football personalities and #ASEANPride, Shah Razen Said, Soeuy Visal, Kurniawan Dwi Yulianto, Soukaphone Vongchiengkham, Safawi Rasid, Maung Maung Lwin, Neil Etheridge,

Gabriel Quak, Chantip Songkrasin, Nguyen Quang Hai helped us produce a set of videos that can be played constantly to promote mental health across the region.

Beyond this, messages from women's football legends and players, such as Sun Wen from China, Mana Iwabuchi from Japan, and Cho So Hyun from South Korea, have elevated the diversity level of the ASEAN-FIFA #ReachOut campaign. The campaign has also evolved to become global with the involvement of FIFA legends, Aline, Vero Boquete, Cafu, Laura Georges, Luis García, Shabani Nonda, Patrizia Panico, Fara Williams, and Walter Zenga. Former English Premier League striker Marvin Sordell, and Sonny Pike, who was labelled the "next big thing" at 14, talked about their experiences with depression. Teresa Enke also discussed the pain of losing a loved one, German goalkeeper Robert Enke, to suicide, and the work with the Robert Enke Foundation to bring awareness to this illness.

On 23 September, an interview with the Belgium national team head coach, Roberto Martinez, was published to coincide with the European Commission's annual Week of Sport, while gamers from the FIFA community also took part in raising awareness.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, said, "As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, it is as important as ever to look after our mental and physical health." He said that WHO is delighted to support the #ReachOut campaign, spearheaded by FIFA and the ASEAN sports sector, to encourage people to talk about their mental health and to provide practical advice for good mental health.

In the #ReachOut videos, ASEAN footballers echo this plea, "none of us are superhuman. If things are getting too much, ask for support from your friends, family, and even professional help." Through sports, ASEAN is committed to spreading this message far and wide. ■

SNAPSHOTS

- Strategies for post-pandemic recovery and resilience-building
- ASEAN at the World Expo 2020

Helix sculpture by B+C (Baby and Coco Anne), Philippine Pavilion, World Expo 2020

Rising from the Pandemic

A Culture of Prevention Approach



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The COVID-19 pandemic has been the worst crisis in living memory, with its impact falling on almost, if not all, aspects of people's lives. However, for some, especially the vulnerable, the effects feel disproportionately greater, both in terms of health and social-economic impact.

At the time of this writing, there are more than ten million reported COVID-19 cases in the ASEAN region. The pandemic is estimated to push an additional 5.4 million Southeast Asians into extreme poverty. At the same time, more than 150 million youth in ASEAN are affected by disruptions in education that could potentially lead to long-term learning losses or higher school dropout rates. The pandemic's complex and multifaceted impact requires comprehensive responses at all levels. It portends future crises and underscores the need to prevent them to mitigate risks.

ASEAN has exerted efforts to tackle the issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. One of them is the **Partnership Conference on Advancing the Implementation of ASEAN Culture of Prevention (CoP) Focusing on Post Pandemic Recovery**. The activity's aim was to learn from the best practices of others on how to grow a preventive mindset among ASEAN citizens to address challenges that hamper sustainable, human and social developments as the region moves towards a sustainable and resilient recovery.

The conference was held on 26 August 2021 and successfully gathered more than 130 experts, policy- and change-makers from various institutions including governments, ASEAN institutions, private sector, academic institutions and think tanks, civil society organisations (CSOs), UN, and international development agencies to find potential areas of collaboration.

At the 31st ASEAN Summit in 2017, the ASEAN Leaders adopted the **Declaration on the Culture of Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy and Harmonious Society** and put in place its Regional Plan of Action. The plan

laid out 20 key priorities across six strategic thrusts to inculcate the values of moderation, and promote a culture of peace and intercultural understanding, respect for all, good governance, resilience and care for the environment, as well as a healthy lifestyle. A total of 131 policy and project initiatives have been implemented, are ongoing, or upcoming.

ASEAN Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi highlighted at the conference that the CoP can provide a timely and comprehensive framework for regional interventions to address multiple issues.

First, the CoP advocates the importance of shifting from a mindset of reaction to one of prevention through the use of an evidence-based upstream approach (addressing the root cause of the problem), utilising data and trend analysis, risk assessment, forecasting, and early warning mechanisms, among other response methods. Second, the CoP promotes upstream and cross-sectoral interventions that can address a multitude of challenges while fostering coordination and a multidimensional approach. And third, it complements other regional efforts towards a post-pandemic recovery, including the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) and its implementation plan. The ACRF serves as a consolidated strategy for ASEAN sectoral bodies and stakeholders to identify and coordinate on the most relevant initiatives to support the region's recovery.

The implementation of the CoP has been streamlined through the work of 15 ASEAN sectoral bodies under the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community with seven sectoral bodies leading CoP's six strategic thrusts. At the conference, the CoP leads and co-leads have highlighted some potential areas for multi-stakeholders collaborations in response to the pandemic's impact. These areas include the creative industries, social protection responses and inclusive resilience plans, civil service's adaptability to the new challenges, youth leadership and resilient infrastructure in response to disaster risks, healthy lifestyles and enhancement of health systems, media literacy and access to accurate information, as well as addressing fake news through education.

The CoP is not solely the work of the ASEAN governments. In fact, “prevention” has been at heart of the work of multiple stakeholders who tackle prolonged social problems. As Hajah Nor Ashikin binti Haji Johari, the Senior Officials for Culture and Arts (SOCA) Chair of Brunei Darussalam and the ASEAN Chair of the Working Group on ASEAN Culture of Prevention emphasised, learning best practices from external entities will also support ASEAN find a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to develop effective upstream preventive policies and initiatives in the post-pandemic era.

According to the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2020, a lack of transparency in the allocation of resources weakens the efficiency of crisis responses. Dr. Torplus Yomnak, an assistant professor at the Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University and a fellow at the Rule of Law and Development Programme, Thailand Institute of Justice, illustrated how digital technology could be tapped to promote the value of good governance among young people in school. The “We the Students” platform allows students to crowdsource school data and improve the quality of the study environment, and increase efficiency and transparency in their schools.

Beyond the health crisis, the pandemic has given us a glimpse of future risks. Southeast Asia’s geography makes it prone to climate-induced disasters that can put a significant strain on the region’s resources, including food, water and energy security. Scarcity of much-needed resources may become a vector of social instability and violence. Kaveh Zahedi, Deputy Executive Secretary for Sustainable Development at the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, suggested these five entry points under the framework of the CoP: (i) building resilience through disaster risk reduction

system; (ii) moving beyond disaster response to a holistic approach of building resilience; (iii) promoting a comprehensive social protection system; (iv) building resilient and accessible healthcare systems; and (v) encouraging multilateral approach to implementing the CoP.

Ng Zhen Yi from the LEGO Group demonstrated how the private sector can also serve as an agent of change, in the realm of business and the development agenda. For example, the private sector can support social development by promoting responsible digital engagement with children, given the impact of COVID-19 on children’s digital exposure and usage. LEGO Group has done this through a number of current digital citizenship programmes, such as Online Heroes, Build & Talk, Captain Safety and the Online Heroes Crew, and #Boostup Campaign.

Former ASEAN Deputy Secretary-General for Socio-Cultural Community Kung Phoak pointed out that while some may perceive promoting a mindset of prevention as a high-cost proposition, the COVID-19 pandemic proves that responding to a crisis is costlier. The CoP could help minimise the impact of future crises if people become better prepared for unexpected challenges.

How can ASEAN help its people prevent a future crisis and mitigate its impact? The Partnership Conference on Advancing the Implementation of ASEAN CoP Focusing on Post Pandemic Recovery provided an excellent platform to seek answers and start the conversation. The challenge is to keep the discourse going and encourage further collaborations under the guiding principles of the Culture of Prevention. ■



Creative Sector-Led Economic Recovery Highlighted in Two Events



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Reeling from the economic devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, ASEAN Member States look to creative industries to revitalise their economies. Two consecutive events were held in November 2021 to bring together and connect the creative economy stakeholders in the region towards this common goal.

Conference on Creative Economy 2030: Imagining and Delivering a Robust, Inclusive, and Sustainable Recovery

On 8-10 November 2021, new, unpublished research papers on the creative economy were presented at the “Conference on Creative Economy 2030: Imagining and Delivering a Robust, Inclusive, and Sustainable Recovery.” The 23 policy papers were shortlisted from over 80 submissions for the open call for papers issued by the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI) and ASEAN Secretariat early this year.

The virtual conference allowed the authors to share the results of their study and elicit comments from industry stakeholders and the general public. Conference participants agreed on a number of key points. One, there is a need for consensus on the definition of a “creative economy,” including standards, norms and frameworks, to map the creative assets of ASEAN, assess their economic contributions, and develop regulations to protect cultural and intellectual property rights for products and derivative industries.

Two, technology is a crucial ingredient to push forward the growth of the creative economy. It can reduce costs and optimise production, allowing smaller players to penetrate the

market. More players in the market can foster innovation and creativity. Technology also allows a wider range of audiences to access and enjoy cultural resources and artisanship.

Three, the creative industries provide women and youth decent employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. Women are widely represented in a number of sectors in the creative economy, including crafts and handicrafts, textile, weaving, and fashion, but are underrepresented in others such as in film and music. Unfavourable policies, lack of resources, and cultural barriers are some of the factors that hamper their participation.

Fourth, creative hubs, districts, and clusters are essential entities in the discussion of a creative economy. Creative hubs facilitate information spillovers, local inputs, and local skilled-labour pools, which encourage production efficiency. Creative hubs also provide a support network for creatives, artisans, and entrepreneurs. Since investors typically shy away from investing in micro, small and medium cultural and creative industries (MSMCs), creative hubs and networks provide alternative sources of support to kickstart MSMCs and help them flourish.

Over 150 people participated in the event jointly organised by the ASEAN Secretariat, ADBI, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, Institute for Economic and Social Research of the University of Indonesia, and the British Council. The papers are expected to be published in 2022.



“ The business forum, which had the theme “Enhancing Digital Creative Economy: A Step Towards Regional Economic Recovery,” aimed to help the participants gain fresh ideas, share experiences, expand business connections, and explore investment possibilities.

ASEAN Creative Economy Business Forum 2021

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia gathered representatives of government agencies, business councils, trade associations, creative enterprises, the academe, think tank groups, ASEAN sectoral bodies, and international organisations for the ASEAN Creative Economy Business Forum 2021 held on 16 to 23 November 2021. The business forum was a hybrid event, with some in-person activities taking place in Bali, Indonesia.

The business forum, which had the theme “Enhancing Digital Creative Economy: A Step Towards Regional

Economic Recovery,” aimed to help the participants gain fresh ideas, share experiences, expand business connections, and explore investment possibilities. The areas of focus were fashion, arts and craft, animation, film, music, graphics and digital design, advertising, and game and software development.

The weeklong event included four main activities. The ASEAN Virtual Showcase of Products and Services gave micro, small, and medium enterprises a chance to exhibit their products and services and demonstrate their readiness for export. The ASEAN Creative Economy Business Forum Panel Discussion

facilitated an open discussion on the prospects for and challenges that hinder the development of the creative industries.

The ASEAN Virtual Business Matching helped creative entrepreneurs and professionals connect with potential investors or partners. In addition, the ASEAN Regional Workshop on Creative Economy convened ASEAN government officials and sectoral body representatives to facilitate discussions and reach a regional consensus on the definition and scope of a creative economy.

The business forum was organised in line with the goals of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework. It also helped mark the 2021 International Year on Creative Economy for Sustainable Development which the government of Indonesia endorsed. ■

**With contribution from Erica Paula Sioson of the Culture and Information Division, ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department*

Presenting ASEAN to the World

ASEAN @ World Expo 2020



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The World Expo, with its 170-year-long history, has become the birthplace of the world's greatest inventions and iconic structures. It is often dubbed the "world's greatest show" and is held only every five years.

World Expo 2020 was originally scheduled for October 2020 to April 2021 but was postponed due to the pandemic. The six-month event finally opened in Dubai, United Arab Emirates on 1 October 2021 and will run through 31 March 2022. With the theme "Connecting Minds, Creating the Future," World Expo 2020 aims to build partnerships and inspire ideas that will forge the world of tomorrow through three sub-themes: Opportunity, Mobility, and Sustainability.

The ASEAN Pavilion in Expo 2020 showcases how ASEAN cooperation is shaping the Southeast Asian region and beyond. The ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Centres and other stakeholders collaborated to mount the pavilion and picked the theme, "Creating Opportunities for the People of ASEAN."

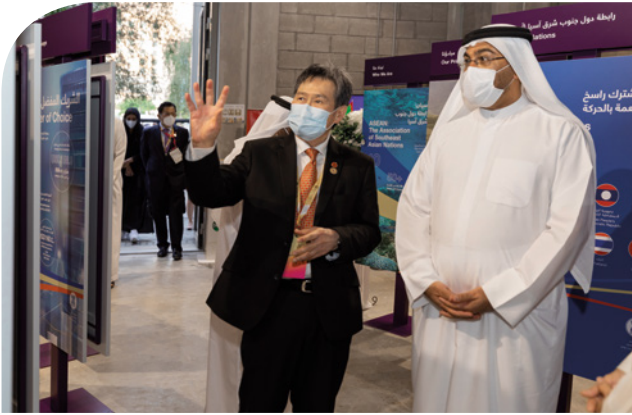


Top

ASEAN's biodiversity projected over the Al Wasl Plaza dome in Expo 2020 (ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity)

Bottom

ASEAN Member States and their colours at the ASEAN Honour Day Parade, 13 December 2021



Attracting visitors from around the world, the ASEAN Pavilion quickly gained popularity in the Expo through its interactive displays and engaging activities that highlight the region's beautiful landscapes and rich cultural heritage. Children and adults alike enjoy building the ASEAN House Challenge and testing their knowledge about the region with the ASEAN Treasure Game.

The Wonders of ASEAN in 360 Virtual Reality also gives visitors the chance to travel virtually to the UNESCO Heritage Sites in ASEAN. For many visitors, visiting the pavilion is their first encounter with ASEAN. They truly appreciate learning more about ASEAN and its role in uniting countries in Southeast Asia to achieve common goals.



There may be travel restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic but the ASEAN Trail Challenge provides visitors the chance to tour the ASEAN Member States within the Expo. To complete the challenge, visitors get a special passport to visit all ASEAN Member States' Pavilions,

From Top

ASEAN Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi presenting the exhibits in the ASEAN Pavilion; Visitors testing their knowledge of ASEAN with the ASEAN Treasure Game; The displays inside ASEAN Pavilion showcase the rich culture, tradition, and cooperation in ASEAN





Clockwise From Top

An ASEAN Pavilion photo backdrop; Special passports given to visitors touring ASEAN Member States pavilions; ASEAN Presents: Best of ASEAN Performing Arts, a collaboration of beautiful dance performances from all ASEAN countries. Performers rehearsed virtually and performed together for the first time at this event.

ACTIVITIES IN THE ASEAN PAVILION

- ASEAN Trail Challenge
- Build ASEAN House Challenge
- The ASEAN Treasure Game
- The Wonders of ASEAN in 360 Virtual Reality
- ASEAN Show 2021 Virtual Exhibition

UPCOMING EVENTS @ ASEAN PAVILION

- Artwork Exhibition by ASEAN Artists Residency Programme - February - March 2022
- ASEAN Presents: Thailand - March 2022



immersing themselves in the stunning displays, visuals and interactive activities of each pavilion. After visiting and receiving stamps from all 10 Member States' Pavilions, visitors can return to win a prize in the ASEAN Pavilion. Says a visitor from India, "My favourites are the Virtual Reality and the ASEAN Trail Challenge. I can learn about ASEAN and get to know its Member States too. I hope to visit ASEAN countries in the future." ■



Economic Recovery: Cooperation in Tourism Revival and Digital Technology



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The year 2022 has been declared as the ASEAN-India Friendship Year to celebrate the 30th anniversary of establishment of relations between ASEAN and India. Dialogue relations began in 1992 when India joined as a sectoral dialogue partner. It also marks 20 years since the first ASEAN-India Summit was held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia and ten years of the ASEAN-India strategic partnership. A series of commemorative events have been planned throughout the year.

Over the past 30 years, ASEAN-India dialogue relations have grown and strengthened, benefitting both the ASEAN Members States and India.

Substantive ASEAN-India cooperation in people-to-people exchanges, which includes leadership programmes for youth, artist and media exchanges and scholarship programmes for students, has contributed towards building social networks

between the people of ASEAN and India. This has been further strengthened with regular conferences on cultural and civilisational links, which deepen awareness of the long ties between ASEAN and India.

Other areas of cooperation include collaboration on maritime security, strengthening ASEAN-India cooperation in building sustainable infrastructure, increasing awareness on urban biodiversity, addressing climate change, and maintaining peace and security in the region.

Like rest of the world, ASEAN Member States and India faced challenges because of COVID-19 and have worked together on various fronts including medicines, testing and vaccines in a mutually beneficial way. Though the challenges related to COVID-19 persists, definitely, ASEAN and India are better prepared to tackle them now.

The hospitality sector is one of the worst hit sectors. As ASEAN and India move towards dealing with the pandemic, it is now exploring ways to reopen the tourism sector, while still keeping health safety measures in place.

Despite the challenges brought by the pandemic, the **2nd ASEAN-India Digital Ministers Meeting** noted that before the pandemic, the Southeast Asia region continued to be a major source market for inbound tourism into India in 2021.



33,864 visitors from ASEAN Member States travelled to India

1.34 million Indians travelled to the various ASEAN Member States

Digital technologies and communications, on the other hand, have gained more significance. Thus, the Digital and Tourism sectors can play a crucial role in the recovery. So, it was natural to kick start the year with cooperation in these sectors. Two ASEAN-India work plans related to tourism and digital technology have been endorsed in recently held ministerial meetings.

At the **9th ASEAN India Tourism Ministers Meeting** held in mid-January, the Meeting recognised the devastating impact of the pandemic on tourism. The Meeting endorsed the **ASEAN-India Tourism Work Plan 2021-2022** and discussed ways to accelerate tourism recovery and develop resiliency in the sector. Among the ways forward is sharing best practices to develop sustainable tourism.

In line with the ASEAN-India tourism workplan, the Meeting also discussed sharing resources and facilities to provide mutual assistance in tourism education and training for quality tourism development. Discussions were also held on developing quality tourism standards in ASEAN and India, focusing on a post COVID-19 outlook. The establishment of an ASEAN-India Crisis Communications Team can protect the reputation and credibility of the relevant tourism organisations and tourist destinations.



The **2nd ASEAN Digital Ministers Meeting** and related meetings with dialogue partners were held in late January. Digital transformation is key to economic growth. The Meeting endorsed the **2022 ASEAN-India Digital Work Plan**, which supports the **ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025**.

The Meeting discussed cooperation between ASEAN and India in addressing challenges and keeping abreast of the rapidly developing world of digital technology.

Digital challenges faced include the use of stolen and counterfeit mobile handset. The ASEAN-India workplan seeks to develop a system to combat this problem.

ASEAN and India will cooperate to build capacity and share knowledge in emerging areas, such as the Internet of Things (IoT), 5G, future trends in mobile communication and advanced satellite communication. Other areas of cooperation include the role of ICT in digital health and disaster management and improving wifi access for nationwide public internet.

The Meeting also acknowledged and conveyed appreciation to India for the progress made in the commissioning of Centres of Excellence in Software

Development and Training (CESDT) in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and similar ongoing activities in Viet Nam. In addition, India continues to cooperate with ASEAN in developing human resources in ICT through various knowledge sharing and capacity building programmes at reputable training centres in India.

This strong cooperation between ASEAN and India in digital transformation provides valuable support to the region in ensuring no one is left behind. ■



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The
ASEAN

Tuk tuk in Thailand

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