

The ASEAN



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Digital Transformation

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THE INSIDE VIEW

Building a modern, agile, and efficient civil service

SPECIAL SECTION

A salute to a steadfast leader: ASEAN Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi

SHIFTING CURRENTS

Unboxing the region's shipping container crisis



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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THE INSIDE VIEW

A hand from the left side of the frame points its index finger towards a bright, glowing node in a complex network of white lines and dots. The network is set against a dark blue background with a subtle bokeh effect. The glowing node creates a lens flare effect, illuminating the surrounding network lines.

ASEAN's digital transformation
towards inclusive and
sustainable growth

Inside:

- Towards a modern, agile, and citizen-centric civil sector
- Education: Digital skills for the jobs of the future
- Digital infrastructure for healthcare
- ASEAN's digital economy landscape
- Narrowing the divide, one entrepreneur at a time

Driving Inclusive and Sustainable Digital Transformation in ASEAN

At the height of the COVID-19 outbreak, my homeland the Lao PDR, like many other nations, closed its schools. Over 1.7 million children in the Lao PDR suffered from learning loss during this period. In ASEAN, school closure resulted in an unprecedented and sudden disruption of education for around 152 million children and youth in 2020. The Lao PDR and all other ASEAN countries carried out online learning. We soon found out, however, that the requisite infrastructure for online education was far from sufficient.

There is a significant disparity in access to technology in Southeast Asia. Our *ASEAN Rapid Assessment: The Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods Across ASEAN (2020)* reveals that only 53 per cent of rural children and adolescents have an internet connection at home as opposed to 72 per cent of urban kids. Moreover, in countries like Cambodia, the Lao PDR, and Myanmar, only a small portion of homes have access to broadband internet. And while mobile penetration is high in most ASEAN countries, many still do not have access to unlimited internet on their mobile devices. The prices to access digital networks are also too high, thus, limiting internet use.



**Ekkaphab
Phanthavong**

*Deputy Secretary-General of
ASEAN for the ASEAN Socio-
Cultural Community*

Unleashing the power of digital transformation

The COVID-19 pandemic is a catalyst for accelerating ASEAN's development agenda. The crisis pushed the region's digital initiatives forward, incorporating the Fourth Industrial Revolution into its recovery strategy. In the wake of the crisis, ASEAN developed the **Consolidated Strategy on the Fourth Industrial Revolution for ASEAN** (2021), which provides policy guidance in building an ASEAN digital community across the three pillars and maximising the benefits of this digital transformation.

In his statement at the 28th ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council Meeting, ASEAN Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi affirmed that the ASEAN Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) Task Force Group will provide cross-pillar coordination in implementing the priority initiatives under the 4IR Consolidated Strategy. He stressed that ASCC must continue to harness the opportunities of digital transformation to support regional recovery and improve the lives of our people.

ASEAN cannot downplay the urgency to adapt to this new era. Both the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) and the Ha Noi Declaration on the ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision recognise that accelerating inclusive digital transformation is necessary to create social and economic opportunities for people and reduce social disparity.

Digital transformation efforts in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community

Several initiatives of the ASCC sectors are consistent with the 4IR Consolidated Strategy. On education, the 12th ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting held in October 2022 endorsed the **Declaration on the Digital Transformation of Education Systems in ASEAN**, which sets a clear agenda to optimise digital technology for teaching and learning and develop a safe and secure digital education ecosystem. ASEAN Leaders adopted the declaration during the 40th and 41st Summits in November.

Digital health and health information systems are key components of the ASEAN Post-2015 Health Development Agenda (2021-2025) that can strengthen health systems and improve public access to care. The ASEAN health sector's immediate and collective response to the pandemic was implemented through existing mechanisms like the ASEAN Emergency Operation Centre Network for Public Health Emergencies and the ASEAN BioDiaspora Virtual Centre, and the ASEAN Portal for Public Health Emergencies. These platforms enabled the health sector to share situational

updates, real-time data, and technical exchanges that were crucial to the response.

With ASEAN's partners, the health sector is scaling up capabilities to prepare for, detect and respond to health emergencies and emerging diseases. For example, the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED) has been launched and will soon be operational. Information sharing, data management and analytics are some of its key functions in disease surveillance, detection and risk assessment. Also established is the ASEAN Public Health Emergency Coordination System (APHECS) to implement a more unified regional response to future crises.

On poverty eradication, the ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2021-2025 offers workshops on optimising digital and smart villages to revitalise the village economy. Meanwhile, the ASEAN Declaration on Promoting Competitiveness, Resilience, and Agility of Workers for the Future of Work reaffirms ASEAN's commitment to developing a human-centred approach in preparing ASEAN workers' ability to adapt to the transformative changes, such as technological advances, demographic transitions, and the rise of the green economy. These are all stipulated in the ASEAN Labour Ministers' Joint Statement on the Future of Work: Embracing Technology for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth, as well as the ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development in the Changing World of Work.

The *ASEAN Disaster Resilience Outlook*, published in 2021, recommends technological innovations in disaster management, including an Information, Communication, and Technology Roadmap on Disaster Management; artificial intelligence for anticipatory humanitarian action; regional framework for data governance; and information-sharing platforms. It also points out the importance of increased digital literacy to strengthen response mechanisms and build people's resilience during disasters and crises.

On culture, the ASEAN Cultural Heritage Digital Archive (ACHDA) was launched in 2020 as the first digital repository for the valuable historical and cultural heritage of ASEAN Member States. The web-based archive allows visitors to have an in-depth look into the collections of museums, galleries, and libraries through three-dimensional models, images, audio recordings and valuable videos of cultural heritage.

In the information sector, several initiatives and activities focus on the digital readiness of ASEAN citizens including digital and media literacy, digital accessibility, and digital communications. For example, Member States encouraged citizens to uphold the five Core Values on Digital Literacy for ASEAN—responsibility, empathy, authenticity, discernment, and integrity—highlighting the

elements necessary to create a safe online environment and promote socially responsible online behaviour. Several policy initiatives, meanwhile, focus on digital transformation. One is the Framework for Developing Digital Readiness Among ASEAN Citizens adopted in 2021, which underscores the need to expand digital access, improve digital literacy, and increase digital participation of all segments of the ASEAN population. Another is the Framework for Promoting Accessibility for All in ASEAN Digital Broadcasting which seeks to promote equitable access to broadcasting services for all groups of people, especially the vulnerable population. In addition, to advance ASEAN collaboration on minimising the harmful effects of fake news and misinformation, the ASEAN Task Force on Fake News was established in 2022 to develop a common frame of reference for such concepts as fake news and disinformation, and to facilitate exchanges on strategies to address these issues.

The Senior Officials Meeting on Education launched a comprehensive Training-of-Trainers Program to Counter Disinformation and Promote Media Literacy in early 2022. The training toolkit provides educators and trainers with the resources to help students critically analyse the onslaught of information and messages from various media platforms.

Preparing ASEAN and our people for the digital future

We must prepare the ASEAN Community and our people for the future as we transition to a digital economy and society. ASEAN must make progress on four fronts to prepare for the digital future.

First, skills. The changing world of work and the 4th and future industrial revolutions will require our people to reskill, upskill and learn new skills to remain relevant. Lifelong learning is also becoming essential to the future of work. The ASEAN Declaration on Human Resource Development for the Changing World of Work is our steadfast commitment to equip our workforce with competence that will enable them to be relevant and resilient in the future.

Second, we need to strengthen digital infrastructures. An excellent telecommunications infrastructure is the bedrock of any digital transformation. The ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 indicates the interventions necessary to ensure that telecommunication and digital infrastructures, such as broadband coverage, are upgraded and that coverage is extended to rural areas.

Third, we need to ensure the digital transformation of businesses. The Masterplan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 promotes the adoption of digital technology by micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to enhance their

participation in the digital economy. We also signed the ASEAN Agreement on Electronic Commerce to promote the growth of e-commerce in the region and to strengthen the national capacity to implement them. Implementing the e-commerce agreement is instrumental for economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

And fourth, digital public services. We need to harness digitalisation and promote a high-quality public service delivery system that is agile, responsive, and people-centred. Access to electronic health records and other essential government services can leverage technological advances to improve service delivery and enable governments to better accommodate individual needs and public expectations. This area is looked into by the ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matter Work Plan 2021-2025.

Collective action

At the 28th ASCC Council Meeting, ASEAN Member States solidified their commitment to build resilience and prepare for future challenges in the new era. At the meeting, the ASCC Council Chair and Minister of Education, Youth, and Sport, Dr. Hang Chuon Naron, called for a more significant push in promoting the digital transformation of the education system. In line with Dr. Naron's call, Thailand, the incoming ASEAN education sector chair, announced its chairmanship theme in 2024: "Transforming Education to Fit the Digital Era."

Echoing the importance of inclusive education, Indonesia emphasised ASCC's strong commitment to accessibility and the future of education, underlining the gravity of digital transformation in equipping our people with relevant skills in the changing world of work.

Meanwhile, Malaysia mentioned various national policies to kickstart a journey towards greater digitalisation, including the National Digital Economy Blueprint. Brunei underlined the importance of digital transformation in uplifting the livelihood of cultural and creative workers, mostly youth, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. At the same time, the Philippines reminds us to capitalise on global technological and rapid digital transformation to create a high-performing, people-centred civil service while promoting good governance.

In the coming years, the ASCC will work with other pillars and Member States to ensure that all digital policies and initiatives will fully benefit and create a safe environment for the ASEAN population, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, and economic status. With all hands on deck, we can take advantage of digital transformation for a stronger ASEAN.

Viewpoint

Ajman Meludin

Permanent Secretary
Civil Service Governance
Prime Minister's Office
Brunei Darussalam

Chair of the 22nd ASEAN Cooperation
on Civil Service Matters (ACCSM)

ACCSM Chair Ajman Meludin shares ASEAN's goals and plans for the civil service sector, following the increased demand for online public services as a result of the pandemic. He discusses the challenges of improving the digital infrastructure and building the capacity of civil servants to deliver digital services efficiently.

What are the goals of the ACCSM for the civil service sector, and how would you assess the progress in achieving these goals?

ACCSM Chair Ajman Meludin:
ACCSM was established to provide a platform for knowledge-sharing for civil servants, innovations, and best practices in ASEAN public service management and development to build and sustain a high-performing, dynamic, and citizen-centric civil service for the people of ASEAN.

Now, more than ever, it is crucial to rethink the mechanisms for enhancing the abilities and thinking of the civil service community in order to keep up with these transformative changes. The community must take on new innovative approaches in to be more robust, flexible, and suited to address more complexities in the future. In this context, the theme for Brunei Darussalam's ACCSM Chairmanship, "Strengthening ASEAN Public Sector: Fit for the Future", is in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that has



affected the majority of ASEAN and global citizens. As we try to regain normalcy in our lives, we need to bolster the resilience of an ASEAN Public Sector that is future-ready, capable of mitigating future threats and responding to them appropriately and speedily.

The ACCSM has provided means for gauging the progress of the ASEAN Member State-initiated projects in the ACCSM Work Plan. All the projects are discussed and decided through the Senior Officials and Heads of Civil Service Meetings prior to their inclusion in the ACCSM Work Plan. Furthermore, a monitoring and evaluation strategy, which includes baseline data, targets, and indicators is also embedded in the ACCSM Work Plan to track the progress of the ASEAN Member States' respective projects. The ACCSM continues to foster effective cooperation and mutual assistance among ASEAN Member States in various key areas, including capacity building that contributes to the narrowing of the development gap.

One of the priorities in the civil service sector is the effective, conducive and efficient delivery of public service through digitalisation. How do ongoing digital trends and developments factor into the sector's work plan?

ACCSM Chair Ajman Meludin: Brunei Darussalam has developed the Digital Economy Masterplan Brunei 2025 that outlines strategies for Brunei to achieve a digital economy and to become a smart nation with a digital and future-ready society, a vibrant and sustainable economy, as well as a conducive efficient public service delivery digital ecosystem.

Supporting digital transformation requires a whole-of-nation approach, with government leadership, to strategically execute the developments of the digital economy master plan.

In order to accomplish Brunei's vision and mission for this digital transformation, the Government of Brunei has identified six focus areas that must be taken into consideration

and various initiatives that can be used to address them:

- Service innovation
- Collaboration and integration
- Capability and mindset
- Optimisation
- Security
- Enterprise information management

In which services are digital transformation most needed?

ACCSM Chair Ajman Meludin: The foundation for transforming Brunei Darussalam digitally through the Digital Economy Masterplan Brunei 2025 involves three key flagship projects to support seamless service delivery among government agencies, businesses, and citizens:

- i. The National Information Hub (NIH): vital to secure sharing of data within the government. The storage capacity and functionality of this hub will be further improved with the current implementation of the National Centralized Database (NCDB) infrastructure
- ii. Digital Payments: will make it possible for the integration between multiple payments systems, thus, enabling consumers to make instant payments
- iii. Digital Identity: to facilitate an individual's access to different government services, including mobile applications and government apps. The use of blockchain technology as the infrastructure for digital identity and the backbone for future public services

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a surge in demand for digital or online public services. Can you cite examples from Brunei Darussalam of public agencies creating new systems or processes for accessing government services online? How will ACCSM help the Member States sustain the momentum for digital services to benefit ordinary citizens and the business sector?

ACCSM Chair Ajman Meludin:

- i. **BruHealth mobileapp:** provides citizens and residents updates on COVID-19 developments and related policy measures, monitors health conditions of residents of Brunei through the self-assessment feature, and tracks risk exposure of residents in Brunei, using Bluetooth and GPS tracking features. It also links to patients' medical data (BruHims)
- ii. **TransportBN:** online application for renewal of driving license; and vehicle license
- iii. **Sistem Kebajikan Negara (SKN):** online platform to facilitate the public to apply for welfare assistance online provided by a number of agencies
- iv. **eZakat:** the Syariah-compliant eZakat digital platform systems or processes for accessing government service online

There will be continuous sharing of best practices across ASEAN Member States through training, workshops, conferences, and research/studies, which can be used by the Member States as a guide based on their specific abilities and resources. This will provide the Member States with a sense of confidence in delivering services to the public while tackling the challenges of digital change.

What challenges or barriers must be addressed to assist the region's post-pandemic recovery?

ACCSM Chair Ajman Meludin:

These are the challenges and barriers that need to be addressed to assist the region's post-pandemic recovery:

- i. Changing mindsets: the public sector's culture needs to achieve e-readiness and support the government's agenda on digital transformation
- ii. Improving Infrastructure: the government's digital transformation agenda must be supported by a capable and sustainable infrastructure recovery
- iii. Remedy the lack of government policies that are in line with government initiatives, which impacts the effectiveness of government digitalisation

- iv. Aligning the government's digital transformation strategy with diverse customer/ stakeholder requirements and expectations to realise the government's digital transformation objectives

How is ACCSM addressing the challenges of improving digital infrastructure and building the capacity of civil servants to accelerate the digital delivery of services?

ACCSM Chair Ajman Meludin:

Enhancing the competencies and standards of the public sector's employees is one of ACCSM's priority areas. A competent workforce is required to provide efficient public services for the greatest benefit of the ASEAN people. ACCSM acknowledges that our workforce's infrastructure and building competencies must be bolstered for all Member States to adapt to impending changes. Enhancing the mindset, skill sets, and capacity of civil servants is fundamental to the performance of public service in the context of rapid expansion. In addition, it is imperative that each public sector adopts best practices and attempts to standardise its processes. This would help the public sector more effectively provide reliable services to the ASEAN people.

One of the main areas is transformative leadership, which involves selecting and developing leaders to accelerate the delivery of digital services. ACCSM offers a variety of leadership themes that encourage the each country's public sector leaders to cooperate and learn.

Another priority area of ACCSM is the strengthening of ASEAN Resource Centres (ARCs). This is another avenue of opportunities that can be used to address the challenges of improving digital infrastructure and building the capacity of civil servants to accelerate the digital delivery of services. Each ASEAN Member States has one area of expertise, which they contribute to the ARCs for all Member States to utilise.

- i. Brunei Darussalam: Managing Civil Service Competencies
- ii. Cambodia: Public Service Delivery
- iii. Indonesia: ASEAN Pool of Experts on Civil Service (A-EXPECS)
- iv. The Lao PDR: Civil Service Performance Appraisal
- v. Malaysia: Innovation in the Civil Service through Strategic Collaboration
- vi. Myanmar: Public Service Motivation

- vii. The Philippines: Assessment and Organization Development (OD)
- viii. Singapore: Leaders in Strategic Human Resource Programme – Building a Future-Ready Public Service
- ix. Thailand: Human Resource Innovation
- x. Viet Nam: Centre for Personnel Management

Another priority area is enhancing the workforce competencies and standards in the public sector by leveraging on the projects/ programmes/initiatives of Member States, with a common goal of enhancing the public sector's capacity and capability. Just to name a few projects/programmes/initiatives in the current work plan that supports building the capacity of civil servants to accelerate the digital delivery of services such as:

- i. Digitalisation in Public Service Delivery and Workshop on Effective e-Training Methodology by the Lao PDR
- ii. Digital Government Competency and Capability Readiness by Malaysia
- iii. Service Delivery Benchmarking Study, ACCSM Leaders in Strategic HR Innovations to Build a Future Ready Public Service by Singapore

ACCSM Work Plan 2021–2025 related to Digital Trends

- 1 Management on the Integrated Information System: Seminar
- 2 Digitalisation in Public Service Delivery
- 3 Workshop on the Effective e-Training Methodology
- 4 Digital Government Competency and Capability Readiness
- 5 The ASEAN Conference on “Leadership and HR Operations in a Digitally Transformed World”
- 6 Information Technology Application in Civil Service Modernisation
- 7 Study on Civil Service Modernisation in ASEAN: Towards a Future-Ready Civil Service
- 8 Development of a Framework for Strategic Partnerships with Relevant ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, Plus Three Countries, ASEAN Dialogue Partners, International Organisations and Other Stakeholders to Promote Good Governance and Accelerate an Agile Civil Service in the Digital Era

ACCSM Plus Three Work Plan 2021–2025 related to Digital trends

- 1 Workshop on Digitalisation in Public Administration
- 2 ASEAN+3 Centre for Civil Service Research and Innovation
- 3 Towards One Data State Civil Apparatus through Big Data: Benchmark/Training/Short Course
- 4 Global Service Delivery Benchmarking Study
- 5 ACCSM Leaders in Strategic HR Innovations to Build a Future-Ready Public Service
- 6 ACCSM Leaders in Service Delivery Innovations
- 7 Human Resource Management Practices in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic
- 8 ASEAN Civil Service Development Program for HR Innovations (HR in the Age of Disruptions)
- 9 Digital Civil Service for Better Service Delivery
- 10 Digital Transformation in Civil Service
- 11 Building e-Government: Platforms for Developing Digital Government

Designing the Future of ASEAN: Towards a modern, agile, and citizen-centric civil service



Mega Irena

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Madyah Rahmi Lukri

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As part of the global community, ASEAN is also experiencing the mega trends of digitalisation and technological advancement. It is an irreversible process, albeit at different paces across Member States. Therefore, adaptation is not an option but a necessity across public and private spheres, including in the civil service. ASEAN Member States are in the midst of modernising their civil service, and the COVID-19 pandemic provided an impetus to accelerate it. Amidst lockdown and movement restrictions, as part of public health measures, the digitalisation of public services improved the accessibility and timeliness of responses to citizens' needs.

ASEAN civil services have accelerated the adoption of digital technologies and online platforms to ensure the government's effective and efficient delivery of public services despite movement restrictions during the pandemic. For example, the Ministry of Health of Indonesia launched a super app called *PeduliLindungi*, a one-stop online platform that provides pandemic-related information and services. In

partnership with the private sector, it is linked to several local health apps to facilitate the wider distribution of free COVID-19 vaccines and medicines and better access to doctors and healthcare for those infected by the coronavirus.

According to the United Nations, seven ASEAN Member States were ranked in the top 100 of the world's e-government development index this

year: Singapore (12), Malaysia (53), Thailand (55), Brunei Darussalam (68), Indonesia (77), Viet Nam (86), and the Philippines (89). This is in line with the people's desire for a more modern approach to the services delivered to them. A World Economic Forum-Sea Ltd. survey in 2021 showed that most of the public wanted to digitalise different aspects of their lives further. In the survey, the respondents said they believe in the crucial



role of digitalisation for economic resilience and recovery. Undoubtedly, governments and the public wish the accelerated modernisation of civil service.

A 2021 report titled *Civil Service Modernisation in ASEAN* showed that various measures had been taken by ASEAN Member States to modernise their civil services. In the area of *capacity and capability of civil service*, Viet Nam approved an up-skilling programme for civil servants to equip them with skills necessary for the future. The programme includes foreign language, information technology, communication, teamwork, creative thinking, and other core competencies. Towards inclusiveness and transformative leadership, Thailand implemented policies to enable diversity in civil service recruitment and the workforce, particularly in relation to people with disabilities and the older population. Thailand also provided assistive technologies and procedures to support these groups in their roles.

Brunei Darussalam promotes the delivery of an *effective and efficient digital service* through their Digital Government Strategy 2015-2020, which transforms service delivery, business processes and policymaking in the civil service sector. ICT systems, data management and usage, and staff capabilities were improved. Commitment at all levels to implement the strategy has resulted in the success of Brunei Darussalam in elevating its E-government Development Index from 86 in 2014 to 68 in 2022. Working towards an *effective bureaucracy*, the Philippines' Government introduced the Anti-Red Tape Act to improve frontline government services. The objectives

are for citizens to enjoy streamlined government processes and significantly reduce waiting times for government services to be delivered.

In the area of promoting *citizen participation* in policymaking, Malaysia implemented a digital government with over 80 per cent of the services provided online. The civil service is proactive in ensuring that those with lower digital literacy can access these services through the Digital Government Transformation Action Plan that aims to bridge the digital divide in the country. Programmes under this plan include ICT literacy training for vulnerable groups, wider distribution of information to isolated and vulnerable groups, and teaming up with the private sector to expand WiFi coverage and to create more affordable broadband packages for vulnerable groups.

These are some in-country good practices across the ASEAN region that showcase commitment and pathways towards modern and agile civil services. Those commitments are also echoed at the regional level.

Our leaders adopted the **ASEAN Declaration on the Role of Civil Service as a Catalyst for Achieving the ASEAN Community Vision 2025**, which cemented the joint commitment to raising professional standards and capabilities of civil servants, ensuring good governance principles, and strengthening government institutions. The **ASEAN Statement on Promotion of Good Governance and Acceleration of an Agile Civil Service in a Digital Economy** calls for engaging and responsive civil services. Towards this end, regional initiatives were planned and implemented to promote transformative leadership,

continuous skills development of civil servants, efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery and digital government, among others.

Recognising the need to realise future-ready civil services, a regional study was commissioned in 2021 to look into ways and challenges of modernising civil services in ASEAN. Gaps in the availability and accessibility of digital infrastructure and digital skills of many civil servants are fundamental issues and should be the first and topmost priority. Narrowing the digital divide across countries and urban-rural areas is also one of the top agendas in the ASEAN Community building.

Furthermore, the study recommends citizen engagement to ensure inclusive and responsive public services. It further recommends developing effective mechanisms that allow citizens to contribute to decision-making processes that affect their daily lives. It posits that a whole-of-government approach is not a jargon but a culture that needs to be promoted in delivering public services. Amidst digitalisation, the principles of integrity and accountability should remain intact and at the core. As the data-driven public sector becomes the foundation of a digital government, it is also imperative for ASEAN civil services to improve public data processing, management and protection capacities, and build their digital skills.

Ultimately, we all want to enjoy high-standard public services responsive to our needs. In this regard, ASEAN is on track to take steps towards modern, agile and citizen-centric civil services in the post-pandemic digital era.

ASEAN Community-building through Digital Transformation of Education Systems



Roger Y. Chao Jr., PhD

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ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

Since the establishment of ASEAN in 1967, education has been one of the key areas for collaboration. However, the focus on education collaboration in ASEAN has shifted from cooperation to collaboration in relation to human resource development and eventually in support of the ASEAN Community-building project.

ASEAN is envisioned to be a peaceful, stable, and resilient community with enhanced capacity to respond effectively to challenges, and an outward-looking region within a global community of nations.

Within the ASEAN Community-building project, the core focus on regional economic integration remains, and human resource development as the mainspring of economic development and enhanced participation is a key aspect of this regional community-building project. However, the recent decade has seen significant challenges to ASEAN human resource development and ASEAN integration, such as the 4th Industrial Revolution, the changing world of work, and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic. Socio-economic-cultural shifts have also occurred with the advancement of information and communications technology and the digitalisation of the world including ASEAN.



Digital ASEAN

To address the above-mentioned challenges, ASEAN focused on four fronts namely: skills, digital infrastructure, digital transformation of business, and digital public services. Some of the key ASEAN initiatives addressing these areas include the following: ASEAN Declaration on Human Resource Development for the Changing World of Work, ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework, Consolidated Strategy on the Fourth Industrial Revolution for ASEAN, Masterplan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, and the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025. These declarations and initiatives support ASEAN Community building including the utilisation of digital technologies in initiating digital transformation in ASEAN and its various sectors, including human resource development and education.

In 2021, the ASEAN Leaders' statement on advancing digital transformation recognised the benefits

of transforming ASEAN into a leading digital community, and that digital transformation is a cross-cutting issue that requires coordinated actions from multiple stakeholders across all ASEAN sectoral bodies, including education.

Digital transformation of education systems in ASEAN

Education is central to socio-economic-cultural development in ASEAN and its people. As ASEAN lays out its digital transformation strategies for addressing the above-mentioned key challenges, it is crucial also to address education and how it contributes to skills and human resource development, and economic growth in ASEAN.

It should be highlighted that people need to continuously reskill, upskill and learn new skills to remain relevant

and marketable. Digital transformation presents an opportunity to address the learning crisis, which was exacerbated by the pandemic, and reach marginalised populations. Equal access to quality and relevant education within a lifelong learning framework must be provided for all.

The ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 aims to have ASEAN as a leading digital community and economic bloc, powered by secure and transformative digital services, technologies, and ecosystem. However, there is a need to ensure that the people of ASEAN have the skills and competencies required to participate and contribute to a digital ASEAN, which requires digital transformation to be undertaken across key sectors. These include strengthening the ASEAN education sector and the region's digital infrastructure. There is a need to foster digital literacy, develop transferable skills, promote access to safe digital learning opportunities, and engage and collaborate with the private sector and multiple



stakeholders to develop and deliver innovative digital learning solutions. These needs drove the development of the Declaration on the Digital Transformation of Education Systems in ASEAN, which was led by the Philippines and supported by UNICEF EAPRO and the ASEAN Secretariat.

The process of developing the **Declaration on the Digital Transformation of Education Systems in ASEAN** was a tedious multistakeholder process, which included consultations at the national level with education stakeholders, students, parents, teachers, digital education providers and experts; and regional consultations with participants from all ASEAN Member States, international and regional organisations, and experts on education, digital technology, and digital education. The declaration considers various relevant issues including inclusion and equity, the digital divide, the need for digital pedagogies and capacity building for teachers, digital infrastructure,

sustainable funding, intellectual property rights, and ensuring a safe digital learning environment. The ASEAN Leaders adopted the declaration at the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits on 11 November. It clearly signifies the importance of education, from early childhood to higher education, and even within the framework of lifelong learning, in the ongoing ASEAN Community-building project.

People are the heart of any community, and education empowers people to participate and contribute to any community-building project. The Declaration on the Digital Transformation of Education Systems in ASEAN articulates the political will and ASEAN Leaders' commitments. The next step is operationalising the declaration with the development of a Strategic Plan of Action or Roadmap, and its eventual implementation towards the digital transformation of ASEAN education systems and ultimately, towards a stronger and more resilient ASEAN Community.

Digital Infrastructure for Universal Health Care in ASEAN



Alvin B. Marcelo, MD

Asia eHealth Information Network

After experiencing the ravages of a global pandemic, ASEAN Member States are now sharing knowledge to mitigate similar catastrophic events in the future. They are also realising that everyone needs to be protected and as such, are now embracing universal health care as a shared key capability consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals of 2030. We propose a simple and easy to remember strategy to build digital health capability within and between countries in the ASEAN. Gleaned from over ten years of learning as peers at the Asia eHealth Information Network (AeHIN), the Mind the GAPS, Fill the GAPS framework aims to bring stakeholders inside and outside of the health sector to work together in building their digital health capabilities towards the vision of health for all.

The health sector is very complex

In most countries, health systems are very complex because of the many stakeholders involved and the numerous transactions between them. The individual peculiarities of the contractual arrangements between stakeholders just adds to the muddle. Often, rules vary even with similar partners, such as contracts of a hospital with different health maintenance organisations. This variability of rules and arrangements makes the health system very hard to navigate.

And this complexity exists beyond the clinical aspects of health. A complicated health system impacts the financial, economic, and even innovation capabilities of the stakeholders. This results in an environment that lacks trusted standards, hence impeding the ability of stakeholders to collaborate with each other with confidence and with consistency. If the ultimate goal is universal health coverage, these stakeholders must work together and coordinate for the benefit of their patients. But as long as health information systems are fragmented, patients will be unable to reap the benefits of data portability as they traverse the complex landscape of healthcare.

Fortunately, information and communications technology (ICT)

has emerged as an accepted means of communication. Electronic mail, instant messaging, and the internet have become reliable modes of communication between providers and their patients during the height of the lockdowns. If used properly, this electronic form of communication can provide tremendous value to patients and the health systems that they rely on.

Mind the GAPS, fill the GAPS

To use ICT within this complex health system, AeHIN recommends the **Mind the GAPS, Fill the GAPS** framework. GAPS is an acronym for Governance, Architecture, People and Program Management, and Standards and Interoperability. It is an easy-to-remember mnemonic to quickly run through the major components of national digital health development. Mind the GAPS assesses the current capabilities of Ministries of Health (MOH) while Fill the GAPS recommends possible interventions based on the findings of the assessment.

Mind the GAPS begins with a convergence workshop. A convergence workshop is an MOH-led multisector workshop where non-health sectors are invited to understand the overall health strategy of the government and see how their own ICT projects contribute to digital health development. The workshop elicits

partnerships and alignment with the digital transformation activities of the other groups. It is a show of multi-sectoral support to the leadership of the Ministries of Health in developing and leading their national digital health strategies. These may include registering projects that address the range of needs of universal health coverage (UHC) even if these are being implemented by non-health sectors, such as client registration by the civil registration authority. It also includes infrastructure projects such as free wireless and broadband connectivity in far-flung areas by the ICT agency. As the de facto leader of the health sector, the Ministry of Health should ensure coordination of these ICT-related projects managed by other sectors as well as aptly manage its own. A multi-sectoral coordination mechanism therefore is key to successful implementation of these projects which form the foundation of ICT in support for UHC.

To help MOHs with their digital health, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) jointly published the National eHealth Strategy Toolkit. The toolkit lists seven mandatory components of a robust digital health strategy beginning with leadership and governance at the top, supported by other components, such as strategy and investment; legislation, policy and compliance; workforce; and a vertical stack of infrastructure; standards and interoperability; and services and applications (Figure 1).

Figure 1. National eHealth Strategy Toolkit



Of importance under leadership and governance is the prescribed structure placing the leadership with the health sector supported by a steering committee composed of leaders from other sectors. This steering committee is further supported by a core eHealth strategy project team. Other stakeholders are the reference and expert advisory groups and the public as the broader stakeholders group (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Leadership and Governance Structure



On architecture, AeHIN realises that complex systems are difficult to navigate and recommends that the MOH build and maintain a blueprint (or architecture) that is shared to all stakeholders. This blueprint must contain three elements: 1) the current state architecture (where we are now), 2) the target state architecture (where we want to be), and 3) the sequence plan or roadmap that details the transition from the current to the target architecture (how to get there). Because the process of creating blueprints for complex systems is tedious and time-consuming, AeHIN recommends designating an enterprise architect within the MOH to oversee this exercise with the assistance of experienced professional and certified enterprise architects. The earlier stakeholders are engaged in the architecture development, the better will be their participation in the build-up of the architectural components.

On people and programme management, AeHIN recommends

developing a pool of competent people in the public and private sector who can understand the blueprint and comply with its standards. This starts with the creation of a national digital health program management team or office (PMO). The PMO will coordinate with the other sectors who are working on projects related to digital health. We encourage the Ministry of Health and the whole government as well to establish a pool of certified project managers supervising their flagship digital transformation projects ensuring that these projects are being delivered within scope, in budget, and on time.

For standards and interoperability, AeHIN recognises that many countries still do not know how to create nor adopt standards and how those contribute to interoperability. Thus at the AeHIN General Meeting in Colombo in 2018, countries volunteered to set up their own interoperability labs and begin the work of building capacity for their local teams. Several countries

signed up and are now undergoing capacity-building with the help of development partners. Together they have called themselves the Community of Interoperability Labs or COIL. In ASEAN, the Philippines, Indonesia, the Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam have joined the COIL.

The promise of information and communications technology in healthcare is alluring. But the complex health system environment poses a huge challenge for ICT adoption in all countries. To simplify, AeHIN promotes the Mind the GAPS, Fill the GAPS framework to guide countries in their transformation.



Learn more about the Asian eHealth Information Network at <https://www.asiaehealthinformationnetwork.org/>

The views expressed here are of the author, not those of ASEAN or its members.

ASEAN goes full throttle on digital transition



Satvinder Singh

Deputy Secretary-General of
ASEAN for the ASEAN Economic
Community

In a worldwide race towards digital economy transition, ASEAN is set to pull ahead of the throng.

The conditions are ripe for digital transformation to happen. As of 2022, ASEAN has 460 million Internet users, 100 million of whom joined in the last three years alone, based on the *e-Economy SEA 2022* study led by Google, Temasek, and Bain & Co. By end of 2022, 370 million of these Internet users will become digital consumers, i.e. those who buy products and services through digital channels.

Ninety per cent of the digital merchants in the Google-commissioned *Dynata SEA-6 Digital Merchant Survey 2021* say they are now accepting digital payments. About 35 per cent of them attribute their businesses' survival to digital transactions, and 82 per cent of them expect more than half of their earnings to come from digital sales in the next five years.

In total, merchandise sold via digital channels—also referred to as gross merchandise value (GMV)—will reach 194 billion US dollars by end of 2022, according to *e-Conomy SEA 2022*. The region's GMV is expected to soar to 363 billion US dollars by 2025. And by 2030, it is projected to reach 1 trillion US dollars, with e-commerce activities contributing the lion's share.

But despite these promising projections, several challenges may set back the region's digital transformation.

The ASEAN Digital Integration Index, which indicates how ASEAN Member States fare against other Asia-Pacific countries in terms of digital integration, flagged some of these challenges.

The shortage of digital skills was cited as the most pressing problem for ASEAN. Demand for a digital-savvy workforce is growing among businesses across economic sectors, but the talent pool remains limited. This skills mismatch impedes businesses' ability to grow, innovate, and be highly competitive.

Support for innovation and entrepreneurship is also lagging. In most Member States, the proportion of GDP spent on research and

development remains inadequate, venture capital is scarce, and intellectual property protection frameworks are flawed. These can discourage businesses from developing new products and services, improving processes, and securing patents.

Meanwhile, the application of digital technologies to ease cross-border trade of goods and services—delivered either digitally or physically—and automate logistics movement is still in the early stages. More needs to be done in terms of using electronic documents for pre-arrival processing, e-payments facilities, and IT-enabled single window system, among other digital solutions.

Cyber threats are likewise outpacing data protection and cybersecurity measures of ASEAN Member States. While policies are in place, technical and institutional capabilities are lacking to parry cyber attacks and data breaches. They can erode business and consumer trust and deter the use of digital solutions. The top 1,000 companies in the region could lose as much as 750 billion US dollars in market capitalisation due to cyber threats, according to a 2018 study by A.T. Kearney.

For segments of the ASEAN population, digital banking and other financial

transactions remain elusive. Cross-border digital financial services, in particular, have not gained a foothold. Without digital finance, transactions are slower, costlier, and less transparent for individuals, businesses, and governments.

These challenges were top of mind when the ASEAN Economic Community was formulating its goals, priorities, and plans for attaining digital transformation and integration. The overall plan of action is contained in the **Bandar Seri Begawan Roadmap: An ASEAN Digital Transformation Agenda to Accelerate ASEAN's Economic Recovery and Digital Economy Integration** (2021).

The Roadmap synthesises and builds from the initiatives laid out in existing instruments, such as the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025, the ASEAN Digital Integration Framework Action Plan 2019-2025, the ASEAN Agreement on Electronic Commerce, and the Consolidated Strategy on the Fourth Industrial Revolution for ASEAN. It also complements the national digitalisation plans of each Member State.

One set of priority measures in the Roadmap pertains to the electronic facilitation of intra-ASEAN trade and harmonisation of digital trade



standards. For example, ASEAN is working towards a faster and more efficient border clearance of goods, including agricultural products, through Member States' use of digital rather than paper documents, such as the ASEAN customs declaration document, e-phytosanitary certificate, and e-animal health certificate, under the ASEAN Single Window system. ASEAN is also looking to extend the same digital document exchange arrangement with its dialogue partners in the foreseeable future.

An interlinked digital payment and identity system is another priority measure. The central banks of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand recently signed a cooperation agreement to develop an interoperable system that will allow instant digital payments and financial transactions across ASEAN without costly intermediaries. The rest of the Member States are expected to join in the next two years. To improve businesses' access to cross-border financing, ASEAN is also working towards the widespread use and interoperability of the unique business identification (UBIN) of micro- and small-sized businesses within ASEAN.

Closing the digital skills and talent gap is an urgent measure under the Roadmap. For this reason, ASEAN

intends to add more digital-related content to the ASEAN SME Academy. This e-learning platform offers finance and accounting, management, marketing, operations, technology, and trade and logistics courses to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in the region. It also recently completed the first phase of the Go Digital ASEAN initiative, a digital skills training programme launched in 2020 to increase economic activity and soften the pandemic's impact, particularly for vulnerable groups. It benefitted 225,778 individuals, many of them women entrepreneurs, youth, and people with disabilities from all 10 Member States. More beneficiaries will be reached when the programme launches its second phase in 2023.

Interventions to improve cybersecurity and data protection are also a priority. ASEAN aims to carry out a periodic review of the ASEAN Framework on Digital Data Governance which provides Member States with policy and regulatory guidance on governing digital data in the digital economy. It is also pursuing the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Computer Emergency Response Team to ensure the speedy information exchange and coordinated response of Member States in cases of transboundary cyber threats and attacks. ASEAN is also fully committed to using the ASEAN Cybersecurity

Resilience and Information Sharing Platform to facilitate sharing of best practices and information on cyber threats.

Finally, the ASEAN Economic Community saw the need to develop an ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement that sets ASEAN's unified strategy to turn the region into a digital economic powerhouse. To support the preparation of the agreement, ASEAN has commissioned a study to take stock of ASEAN's progress, including opportunities available, in the different areas of the digital economy, including digital infrastructure, digital trade, electronic banking and payment, data governance, and cybersecurity. The study will be completed in 2023, and negotiations for the Agreement are set to start in 2024.



Download the Bandar Seri Begawan Roadmap from *Bandar-Seri-Begawan-Roadmap-on-ASEAN-Digital-Transformation-Agenda_Endorsed.pdf*

DIGITAL ECONOMY

Facts & Figures

TOTAL INTERNET USERS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

**360
million**



2019

**400
million**



2020

**440
million**



2021

**460
million**



2022



Southeast Asia's digital economy is on track to reach USD 200 Billion of Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) by end of 2022—three years earlier than expected.



E-commerce (composed of marketplaces, direct-to-consumer, groceries) is one of the five leading sectors in the digital economy. The other four are transport and food, online travel, online media, and digital financial services.

IMPACT OF SOUTHEAST ASIA'S DIGITAL ECONOMY ON BUSINESS, JOBS, AND REGIONAL ECONOMY (AS OF 2022)



20-25 million

unique e-commerce merchants (composed of marketplaces, direct-to-consumer, groceries) transact on e-commerce platforms



6-7 million

small-to medium-sized restaurants are on food delivery platforms



160,000

direct jobs were created across the digital economy



30 million

indirect jobs (as a result of the digital platform business) were created across the digital economy



5 to 10%

penetration of Southeast Asia's GDP in 2022

DIGITAL ECONOMY AND THE ENVIRONMENT



By 2030, emissions are projected to reach about 20 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent as the digital economy grows.

To reduce carbon footprint:



Logistics providers can deploy electric vehicles (EV) to handle last-mile deliveries, consolidate operations into satellite distribution centres, and further reduce and recycle packaging materials. This can reduce e-commerce footprint by 30-40%.



Online transport sector can help drivers reduce wait times, optimise driving. This can lower the sector's footprint by 20-30%.



Source: Google, Temasek, and Bain & Co. (2022). e-Conomy SEA 2022 Report: Through the waves, towards a sea of opportunity. https://services.google.com/fh/files/misc/e_conomy_sea_2022_report.pdf

Digital Skills for Inclusive Growth

Reaching the Hard-to-Reach in Southeast Asia



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Across Southeast Asia, the digital landscape has become a contested arena, as governments and private companies seek to both drive economic growth and protect and control data flows. This fragmented regional environment tends to widen the digital divide, as only large tech companies have the resources to be effective private-sector players. Meanwhile, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), the drivers of most economies in the region, are left without the skills needed to reap the dividends of the digital economy. Governments and private companies have embraced skills training and digitisation to boost growth and recover from the economic damage of COVID-19, but there is a difference between recognising the importance of including underserved populations and effectively reaching those groups with resources they can use.

The Asia Foundation has addressed these challenges head-on for the past two years. With grant support from Google.org, Google's philanthropic arm, the ASEAN-endorsed **Go Digital ASEAN** initiative obtained the necessary funding that successfully trained over 225,000 underemployed youth and small-business owners, including

people with disabilities and indigenous entrepreneurs, in basic digital skills, with a special emphasis on women. So how have we reached those with the most to gain from digital literacy, and what have we learned along the way?

Eighty million new internet users came online in Southeast Asia in the past two years, but many of the small-business owners we worked with were using the internet only for entertainment or to connect with friends. They knew that tools like social media and online banking existed, but they either did not see how these could help their businesses, or did not trust online services.

When the pandemic hit Asia, digital literacy surged in importance. With lockdowns, online skills often meant the difference between keeping your shop doors open or closing down for good. The pandemic was a crisis for female entrepreneurs in particular, as women were forced to shoulder a sharp increase in demand for unpaid care and domestic work.

During the Go Digital ASEAN training, we met female entrepreneurs like Ekawati, in Banten, Indonesia, who started a small business in the early stages of the pandemic to help support her family. She began

producing an instant ginger-drink powder in her home, selling to customers in her neighbourhood and making a modest income. But with no way to expand and reach a broader market, she could not earn enough to meet her family's needs.

We also met Silinphone in Vientiane, the Lao PDR, who had put her career on hold when she had children but had never lost her entrepreneurial drive. She had opened a small convenience store in her house, which allowed her to earn money while taking care of her growing family. But during the second wave of the pandemic in the Lao PDR, when only essential workers were permitted to leave their homes, her sales plummeted. Customers began calling her directly to ask for a delivery option, but Silinphone had never used map applications before and was not sure how to share a location pin with delivery drivers instead of giving directions over the phone.

For female entrepreneurs like Ekawati and Silinphone, the barriers to accessing training are significant. In addition to COVID-19 restrictions and the lack of options for entrepreneurs in rural areas, they face the loss of income from closing the shop for a day of training, and they typically



must juggle household and child- or eldercare responsibilities. But while the challenges they face are clear, we also know that underserved groups like women have the most to gain from digital skills training.

Through Go Digital ASEAN, Ekawati learned to promote her ginger drink on social media and e-commerce platforms so she could sell it beyond her immediate neighbourhood. Without leaving home, she now earns twice as much and can still perform her household tasks.

Similarly, after completing the digital maps training module, Silinphone was able to search and pinpoint locations and share them with delivery drivers through the new social media site she created for her business. Not only did she restart her business and begin a rebound towards her pre-pandemic sales, but she is proud to have broken the stereotype that women her age are too old to learn digital skills. “When it comes to technology,” she said, “I used to depend on my family for help. But now, I can go online by myself and I am confident to conduct business online.”

At a time when so many people lost their jobs or were forced to shutter their businesses, it was a thrill to see the positive results of the Go Digital

ASEAN programme, as experienced by Ekawati and Silinphone and shown by the 2021 impact assessment. Ninety-five per cent of trainees in all 10 ASEAN countries reported increased ability to use ICT tools to support their livelihoods, and nearly four out of five MSMEs were able to move their businesses online as a result of the training. More than one-quarter of MSMEs trained across ASEAN and nearly one-third of MSMEs trained in Indonesia reported increased sales or revenue. Importantly, our assessment also revealed that female participants responded particularly well to the training, with 33 per cent of them starting or expanding their businesses online as a result of the course.

Implementing a programme for 225,000 individuals across 10 different countries requires a delicate balance between regional and local strategies. A key to creating access to training for more MSMEs is to design for the intersecting needs of rural entrepreneurs in particular, with special attention to how gender, culture, and (dis)ability relate to those needs. Through effective partnerships with local organisations, we can meet these needs by adopting simple and relevant curricula, scheduling training at accessible times and locations, and getting local trainers to offer direct, follow-on support.

We are now looking forward to the next phase. Go Digital ASEAN 2 will extend our basic digital literacy training to MSMEs not yet reached by the first phase of programming and design, while offering next-level training for growth-oriented entrepreneurs and phase-one graduates who are ready to take their businesses further. We see a huge opportunity to drive inclusive and green growth in ASEAN, and we will be offering training on topics like financial literacy and planning, e-commerce, cybersecurity, and carbon-footprint reduction to 200,000 MSMEs across the region.

The views and opinions expressed here are those of the authors, not those of The Asia Foundation.

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To learn more about Go Digital ASEAN, visit the following link:



<https://asiafoundation.org/emerging-issues/go-digital-asean/>

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Go Digital ASEAN Initiative Narrowing the Digital Divide, One Entrepreneur at a Time



Ixora Tri Devi
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The ASEAN

In cities, it is common to see people, young and old, glued to their cellphones and reaping the benefits of various apps in the market. It is not always the case for small and micro-entrepreneurs living on the outskirts of the cities.

Although these entrepreneurs may use social media, they do so for connection and entertainment and not as a platform to grow their businesses. With digitalisation becoming the new normal, these entrepreneurs need to catch up. The Go Digital ASEAN programme was launched precisely to bridge the skills gap.

The programme sought to help small business owners overcome their fear and mistrust of the technology, craft a brand-new way to market their products, and establish their strong presence in the digital realm. *The ASEAN* interviewed two of the over 130,000 women trainees under the programme.

Hensona Anak Munah

Mendaram Besar Longhouse, Brunei Darussalam

As a little girl, 43-year-old Hensona Anak Munah was always mesmerised by her mother's and grandmother's laser-focused concentration while weaving. They crafted bamboo and rattan strands with seemingly magical hands into useful and beautiful household items like trays, mats, and baskets.

In Mendaram Besar Longhouse, Brunei Darussalam, Hensona's hometown, hand weaving is a long-held tradition passed on to the women of the family. Hensona and her three sisters wholeheartedly learned about this treasured heritage since childhood. As she grew older, Hensona made it a habit to practice weaving after her to-do list around the house.

In 2008, at 29, Hensona established her business, Sonna Craft. Mixing rattan, bamboo, plastic, and fabric, the mother of two gives a modern take on the traditional basket, *Bakul*, and moulds them into elegant handbags priced from 10 to 150 US dollars.

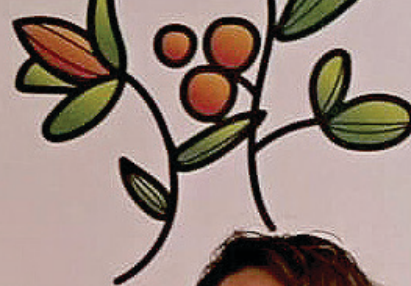
"My store is at my house. My customers usually heard about me by word of mouth. It is small and traditional. In 2020, I created an Instagram account for my business.

Part of it is because of the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, people stayed at home and did not go out shopping. There was also no bazaar or exhibition. Thus, I created the account to promote my crafts," she says.

Although Hensona was already familiar with Instagram when she received training from Go Digital ASEAN in 2021, she admits that fear still shadows her every move.

"Even though I have never been a victim of digital fraud or internet scam, I am still cautious when it comes to the internet. I know that digitalisation can make our life easier. We can order anything at the tip of our fingers! However, I deeply understand that this technology comes with its own risks. All of this frightened me. Thus, this training helped boost my confidence," she says.

Producing up to 20 *bakul* [basket] a month, weaved by her own hands, Hensona admits she likes to keep her business small and manageable. Thus, she opts out of e-commerce platforms and only chooses to promote her business via Instagram, which she thinks is Brunei's most popular social media.



MEN
W O V
By Sonna

Nevertheless, Hensona, who is also the Head of the Women Bureau of Mendaram Besar Longhouse, already reaps profits from showcasing her beautiful crafts online.

“There are many benefits in using social media to promote our business. We do not need to go to other countries to promote our crafts. My customers from all over the world

can just click and send me a message through direct message,” she says.

“To all my fellow entrepreneurs, do not be afraid of digital transformation. Please do not be shy to promote your product through social media like Instagram and TikTok. I have seen it myself, that we can take advantage of this technology. So, let’s not wait to seize the call to ‘Go Digital!’”

While many COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, Hensona is expecting more opportunities to promote her craft in various exhibitions. At the same time, she keeps working on her grit in the digital world so she can pass on her flourishing business and skills to her future grandchildren.

Kamalia Anum Zainal

Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia

Thirty-six-year-old Kamalia Anum Zainal juggles many roles: mother of two; employee of a local authority in Padawan, Sarawak; Zumba instructor; entrepreneur; and most recently, trainer for the Go Digital ASEAN programme. Starting as a trainee in late 2020, she became one of the programme’s star trainers, instructing up to 600 participants in just a year.

Kamalia overcame many hurdles to achieve her latest accomplishment. She wrote to the local Palace, asking for its blessing to train students from various institutions. Once the government relaxed COVID-19 restrictions, she also went to numerous rural digital centres to train street vendors.

In her job as a trainer, Kamalia reveals that the infrastructure made available by the local government was paramount to the success of the training.

“Sarawak has excellent infrastructure. Not only in terms of electricity, water, or road but also digital infrastructure. It makes my job easier. We can go to a digital centre, like *Perpusakaan Desa*, a village library, and provide participants with training. It is a lot better compared to years ago,” she asserts.

Although she has trained hundreds to adapt to digital transformation, the University Utara Malaysia graduate confesses that she only became familiar with Google Meet and Zoom at the pandemic’s peak. Alas, her experience as an online business owner only increased her confidence to inspire other aspiring entrepreneurs in the programme.

Kamalia runs a drop shipping business that offers “viral” products on social media, such as magnetic fake lashes, crispy crab sticks, and salted-egg cornflakes. Her first-hand experience has benefited her trainees, primarily stay-at-home mothers selling local cuisine and delicacies. Some of them are store owners forced to close their businesses during the pandemic. “This condition pushes them to move their businesses 100 per cent to online platforms,” Kamalia explains.

But before Kamalia could get through the main course of her training, she had to reinforce the use of digital payment methods to the participants, as many of them come from bankless communities. “They already know how to use Instagram and TikTok. However, when it comes to payment, they need help,” she says.

Kamalia helped them sign up for the government-made digital payment app Sarawak Pay to receive and transfer funds. She also introduced the “Cash on Delivery” method offered by various e-commerce platforms.

After a lesson on the payment method, Kamalia adds, they tackled the most challenging part: marketing. “They are clueless on how to market their products. I always told them to be creative and think out of the box,” she says.

“For example, if they cannot afford models, they should wear their products themselves. It is quite complicated because we also need to respect their boundaries. Some participants do not want to show their faces because of low self-esteem. We can inspire them by giving examples of what they can do within their boundaries,” she continues.

Kamalia is grateful for the opportunity to share her knowledge, especially as she sees the programme’s commitment to continuously train participants. Soon, Kamalia plans to collaborate with agencies from out of state to reach and inspire even more entrepreneurs.



Photo Credit: ©Kamalia Anum Zainal

Cultural Digital Ambassadors: Towards Promoting Regional Unity in ASEAN



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*Project Director for ASEAN Cultural Digital Ambassador
Transformation Programme 2022: Unity in Bytes*

*Cultural digital ambassadors visit
a wet market for their “Sambal
Story” activity at Selangor*

The Global Data latest report, Tourism Destination Market Insight: ASEAN (2021), forecast intra-regional tourism in ASEAN to grow by 5 per cent, from 2019 to 2024, to reach 56.6 million visitors. Now more than ever, it is a time for ASEAN countries to be united, turning challenges into opportunities, leveraging digital connectivity by coming together, by bits and bytes.

The region's post-pandemic recovery is an opportunity to create a stronger network of shared interests, economic cooperation, and arts and culture sustainability in the region and beyond its borders. While we often hear the use of social media as a promotional tool in the tourism and culture sectors; the concept of Culture Digital Ambassador might be a unique thought to explore, encapsulating that ethos of ASEAN spirit of unity, cooperation and collaboration as evident in its anthem “The ASEAN Way.”

The ASEAN region with its 10 Member States showed its support and solidarity towards the timely creation of its inaugural Cultural Digital Ambassadors’ network by participating in the **ASEAN Cultural Digital Ambassador Transformation Programme 2022: Unity in Bytes** held in Selangor and Melaka, Malaysia from 17 to 22 June 2022. The project was supported by the ASEAN Cultural Fund and was endorsed by the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information. It was initiated by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture (MOTAC) Malaysia with Universiti Teknologi MARA as the project’s implementing agency. The organisers hosted 20 ASEAN delegates and one ASEAN Secretariat-representative, in a 6-day programme of cultural immersion and activities that were in line with the ASEAN Strategic for Culture and Arts 2016-2025.

The objectives of Unity in Bytes 2022 were simple—to establish a

regional network of Culture Digital Ambassadors that can build a sustainable edu-culture ecosystem, empower youth as future leaders, and foster cultural enthusiasts through social media. The delegates involved were asked to update their social media accounts with creative content that could spread Unity in Bytes’ digital footprint across the globe. They kept the social media abuzz with the usage of hashtags such as #UnityinBytes, #TranscendingCultures, #BeyondBorders as well as MOTAC hashtags #comingbackstronger and #ASEAN. The use of hashtags is an effective social media strategy that increases audience awareness, reach, and engagement—all necessary to help boost ASEAN’s profile and keep its spirit alive among its citizens.

The delegates were in high spirits as this was their first overseas trip post-pandemic after international travel restrictions were lifted in April 2022.



A group photo during the closing ceremony of Unity in Bytes 2022 in Melaka

Photo Credit: ©Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Malaysia

In the first part of the programme, held in Selangor, delegates visited a community of the Mahmeri aborigines. The Cultural Digital Ambassadors were introduced to local cultures, arts, and crafts. The highlight of their gastronomic adventure was sampling the local *sambal* or chilli paste, a food tradition shared among many ASEAN states. Culinary traditions are recognised as part of a community's intangible cultural heritage. The delegates were effervescent in sharing their local *sambal* dishes. For example, the Malaysia delegates presented *sambal petai ikan bilis* or chilli with bitter peas and anchovies, and the Myanmar delegates presented Myanmar sambal with mohinga, which uses dry chilli powder for heat.

The Universiti Teknologi MARA also conducted an ASEAN Seminar on History, Heritage and Resilience on 20 June 2022 in Melaka, a state in Malaysia famous for its cultural heritage attractions. The city, inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site,

offered the digital ambassadors a glimpse of Malaysia's deep history that goes as far back as the 14th century under the Malay Sultanate.

At the seminar, the delegates had to present creative content, showcasing their experiences in the host country, and strategies to increase their digital footprints. Their digital contributions signify their roles as Cultural Digital Ambassadors, which the programme hopes to establish.

ASEAN may have its first batch of Cultural Digital Ambassadors, but Unity in Bytes ought to be nurtured as a programme that cultivates agents of change in the industries known to be essential for ASEAN—tourism, the arts, and culture.

Cultural understanding cannot be advanced through discussions and academic discourses alone. Moving forward, by 2025, a digital revolution may have completely changed ASEAN society. With a sizable and young

population using smartphones, at 35 per cent penetration of users and growing rapidly, ASEAN has the chance to be a leader in the creation of new digital services and producing digital leaders. It is evident that concerted efforts such as the designation of 20 Cultural Digital Ambassadors could foster digital innovation even on a small scale. It is essential for such a programme to be emulated by the other ASEAN Member States to achieve a universal and meaningful digital connectivity that would last through generations.

The views and opinions expressed here are those of the author, not those of ASEAN or its members.

ASEAN Cultural Digital Ambassador
Transformation Programme 2022: Unity in
Bytes Full Video Report



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGbazIA8s5I>

A Salute to a Steadfast Leader

Dato Lim Jock Hoi

14th ASEAN Secretary-General
2018-2022

When Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi took on the mantle of leadership in 2018, his goals for the ASEAN Secretariat were clear: to be proactive, provide better support to Member States, and move along the implementation of the ASEAN Community blueprints.

He ends his 5-year tenure with these goals fulfilled.

“

Beyond these achievements, Dato Lim has left an indelible imprint on ASEAN. His clarity of thought, precision in communication, and the discharge of his duties with thoroughness, distinction, and quiet dignity are hallmarks of his leadership and contributions, which will remain with us for many years to come.

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council Chair Hang Chuon Naron said, “Dato Lim Jock Hoi’s tenure as Secretary-General of ASEAN coincided with an exceptional and challenging time for ASEAN and the world as countries navigate difficult internal conditions, major geopolitical shifts, demographic challenges, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These developments presented opportunities for ASEAN to foster dialogue and to lay out solutions to prepare for a strong post-pandemic emergence and a more stable ASEAN socio-cultural future. Dato Lim’s interventions and guidance have shaped the development of many important ASCC outcomes.”

Secretary-General Dato Lim’s skilful management of ASEAN during the COVID-19 pandemic—and the unprecedented challenges it caused—has been particularly noteworthy. He mobilised resources, supported the rapid and coordinated response, and helped prepare for the post-pandemic recovery of Member States without compromising the safety of the ASEAN Secretariat.

Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASCC Ekkaphab Phanthavong noted, “While the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives and work, Secretary-General Dato has been an anchor for ASEAN and the ASEAN Secretariat. He ensured that our work remained effective in supporting our Member States. At the same time, he also showed the utmost care and support to ensure that our families and all of us remain safe and healthy.”

Secretary-General Dato Lim also provided a steady hand in dealing with crises affecting the ASEAN population. As the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator, he steered the emergency and humanitarian response to Member States devastated by climate-related and other natural disasters, led efforts to support the repatriation of Rohingya Communities in Rakhine State since 2018, and coordinated humanitarian aid to Myanmar since 2021.

Through Secretary-General Dato Lim’s guidance, the ASCC is also closer to achieving its vision of a people-centred, socially responsible, inclusive, and resilient community. He attended meetings in all ASCC sectors, and he has been instrumental in creating more responsive regional health mechanisms, improving cooperation on climate and environmental challenges, prioritising future of work readiness, promoting quality and inclusive education, supporting women and youth empowerment, and stronger awareness of ASEAN identity.

Deputy Secretary-General Phanthavong said, “Beyond these achievements, Dato Lim has left an indelible imprint on ASEAN. His clarity of thought, precision in communication, and the discharge of his duties with thoroughness, distinction and quiet dignity are hallmarks of his leadership and contributions, which will remain with us for many years to come.”



CONVERSATIONS

**Accelerated Digital
Adoption in ASEAN**
Meet some of the region's
enterprising start-ups,
innovators, and entrepreneurs

Photo Credit: © DigineeringCreations / Shutterstock



Platform-based Work

Rusda Salaeh

Professional Translator

Rusda Salaeh, a 29-year-old mother of three, is a freelance translator based in Thailand. She has been working as a professional linguist-translator for eight years, since graduating with a Master's degree in Linguistics from Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia. Rusda uses the Thai-based digital freelance platform, Fastwork, and various social media channels to market her skills and services, which include translating Thai text into Indonesian, Malaysian, or English, and vice versa. She believes that freelance or gig work comes with many advantages, but also has a downside, and that the pandemic gave many people a taste of what it's like to do freelance work.

"I started to offer my services as a freelance translator in 2014 through Facebook and other social media platforms. I joined the Fastwork platform in 2018.

"I began my career as a freelancer and continue to grow my own brand, Rusda Linguistics Professional. I think that if you work under other companies, you will not be able to grow your entrepreneurial skills and especially, grow your own assets.

“

Sometimes work is not available, which means no cash flow. So as a freelancer, I have months where I got many projects and got paid, and some months with no project at all. But I use those times to improve my system and work on my branding and self-promoting.

"I can say that working as an independent contractor gives me the ability to grow fast, to build my own brand and company. Everything I do really matters and I do my best all the time because it is my own 'baby'.

"I love to work from anywhere. Mostly, I work from home. The valuable thing about freelancers like me is that I can spend time with my family, my children. I do not want to lose every second (of my time with them).

"I have clients from several countries, from outside Thailand. There are clients from the United States, Dubai and Saudi Arabia; and from Asia, there are clients from Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, and China. I worked with big companies in Thailand and abroad, in various industries such as gaming, finance, education, and government.

"Digital platforms play an important role for freelance workers like me. Many platforms help to deal with issues between freelancers and customers, such as conditions and payment. It helps to protect the rights of both sides fairly.

"Working freelance, it means you do everything on your own, including setting your own salary rate, setting aside a health care budget, and doing branding, promoting, and marketing. Because of this, you have to learn a lot. It is good for me, but may not be for others.

"Sometimes work is not available, which means no cash flow. So as a freelancer, I have months where I got many projects and got paid, and some months with no project at all. But I

use those times to improve my system and work on my branding and self-promoting.

"Thai nationals who are freelancers are able to apply for basic social security and health insurance from the government. For my retirement, first, this basic social security provides you with a retirement plan, whether you are receiving a monthly income or through an investment plus bonus plan. Second, I am also investing in cooperative business and it earns a yearly dividend. I invest in local businesses, such as a mini-mart.

"COVID-19 crisis opened (people's eyes) to the world of freelancers. People now get a better understanding of what it means to 'work from home' since it has become a normal thing now.

"The Thai government should support people who work as professional freelancers and the growth of the freelance community. (One, by) helping to create a culture where people recognise freelance work as a real job, not just a hobby. (Two), the government should provide infrastructure support for professional freelancers. (For example), the most expensive things that I have to pay monthly or yearly are software licenses, such as OS, MS Office, Trados, Google cloud system, slack, and so on."

Interviewed by Joanne B. Agbisit. 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.



E-Commerce

Gary Evano Daniel

Partner and
Managing Director,
Puyo Group

After completing high school in Singapore as an ASEAN Scholarship awardee, Gary Evano Daniel headed home to Jakarta to continue his education. With a penchant for business and good food, he dived into Jakarta's food scene with his friends. Gary is now the managing director of Puyo Group, an F&B brand aggregator with brands like Puyo Desserts and HAKA Dimsum Shop.

Gary put his experience in business operations and marketing to good use by quickly adapting to the use of digital technologies during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, which helped his businesses stay afloat and even grow. The 29-year-old entrepreneur is now keen on helping other businesses to seize the opportunities provided by digital technologies to similarly expand their business. Gary shares his experience with *The ASEAN*.

"When we started Puyo, there was no top of mind brand for pudding. We saw the gap in the market and tried to sell it to our friends and family. We opened stalls in bazaars and events. We also sold it online through Instagram and the feedback was really good. Now we have 130 stores around Java over the span of nine years. It's a slow and organic growth because we don't have investors or franchisees.

Expansion has been a bit slow due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but we're looking to expand to Sumatra and Bali next year.

"We pushed our digital ads during COVID-19, especially as all the (advertisement) budget was pushed into digital. From the sales perspective, COVID-19 hit us quite heavily. We were left with only 10 per cent of the stores open because most of our stores were in shopping malls. Only the ones near supermarkets or inside hospitals were open.

"Before COVID-19, our online sales were only about 20 per cent or less, but during COVID-19, it's almost 100 per cent. We needed to enlarge the size of our online sales. We really leveraged the use of online platforms, and we made sure that the stores that were still open could become a hub to deliver to a broader area.

"We shifted our narrative to become a stay-at-home snack and care package, something that you can easily consume at home or send to a relative who is down with COVID-19. The success of the campaign could already be seen during the Omicron wave earlier this year. While some malls were closed and the operating hours were cut short, our sales actually went higher than before.



“The digital approach has been very important for us. Instagram was the only communication channel between us and the customer. Whenever we have a new product or a new store, we announce it through social media. Instagram was very helpful for us during the six years before the pandemic, and even more important after the pandemic. Now, we added TikTok as our second focus on social media platforms.

“Digital technology really helps restaurants as well. During 2021, probably most of our sales came from online but now it’s back to offline. I think the operation inside the business is also affected by that change. We also use digital tools to help our operations. We use QR codes for ordering, we use ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) system which is integrated from end-to-end. The billing and everything are integrated in one system.

“(Without the help of digital technology) It’s impossible if you want to expand. With the help of digital tools, I can have the visibility of all the outlets without needing to be there. It’s not 100 per cent the same as being there in person, but 75 per cent is better than 25 or 0 per cent.

“HAKA Dimsum only accepts digital payment. We have reduced accepting cash because it is not safe. If the customer only has cash, our staff can assist in the transaction too. We had incidents in Puyo before where we were mugged and had a burglar stealing the cash register.

“For the future, we need to strengthen our internal organisation, because a strong team, a strong financial standing, and strong operational procedures are the keys to face another pandemic, if there’s any. Then we need to think about expansion, new cities, new brands, and even new countries. And that’s where ASEAN can come in.

“In 2015, I was an ASEAN Youth Festival delegate from Indonesia and the ASEAN Economic Community was so highlighted. But I think the realisation for small businesses like us is not there yet. We haven’t seen Filipino brands in Indonesia or the other way around. I think we need to have that because it will broaden the market. We can bring ASEAN to the world because they already have ASEAN as a training ground for businesses. The government needs to support local brands to go abroad, and ASEAN can facilitate that.”

Interviewed by Mary Kathleen Quiaño-Castro and Pricilia Putri Nirmala Sari. 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.



Transportation and Connectivity

Langda Chea

Founder, BookMeBus

Soaking in the stunning views of Koh Rong Samloem’s pristine beaches while feasting on fresh seafood are some of Langda Chea’s most cherished memories. The 33-year-old travels whenever he needs to recharge from work. However, the ardent traveller recalls that getting to Cambodia’s gorgeous white sands and scuba diving spots was once a challenge. Growing up in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Langda has had some unpleasant experiences during his intercity trips.

Taking a *larn* taxi (វ៉ែយន្តតាក់ស៊ី), operated by drivers everyone calls “uncles,” was the fastest and the most convenient option to get from Phnom Penh to his parent’s hometown in Battambang City. Larn is a shared taxi, which usually accommodates 4–5 passengers at a time. Langda struggled with uncles at crowded terminals where they would fight tooth and nail for potential customers. Langda says the ordeal made him feel like prey hunted by vultures.

As much as securing taxi rides were always unpleasant for him, Langda would dutifully make the trip home every Khmer New Year, Pchum Ben and other special occasions. After making countless intercity trips, he finally realised: he could do something to make his journey more enjoyable.

While on a five-hour larn ride to Battambang City, he got the inspiration to build an online platform, BookMeBus, so customers can book seats on a bus or shared taxi ahead of time. This way, he thought, the customers would fight for their seats, not the other way around. During the 253-kilometre excursion, Langda convinced the uncle, who was driving him, that it was a feasible idea.

In 2015, his idea came to fruition, and both drivers and passengers hopped on the BookMeBus platform. Since then, many Cambodian travellers have been enjoying safer and more comfortable trips by bus, ferry, and

taxi. The booking service is now also available for trips to Viet Nam, Thailand, and the Lao PDR. Two years after it launched, BookMeBus won a gold medal in the start-up category of the ASEAN Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Awards.

“I think my entrepreneurship DNA came from my father. My father was a car dealer. He always took me to his workplace. There, I observed how he worked and convinced his customers to buy his cars. I continued to go with my father to his workplace, even during high school. Back then, I convinced the uncles who worked with my father to try and sell their cars through online classified ads. At that time, Cambodia had no Facebook, so I wanted to help them get the best benefit from digital platforms. Eventually, many of these uncles asked me to do their listing for them.

“It was around 2014, and I had already abandoned BookMeBus’s initial concept for two years before I decided to quit cold turkey from my job. At that time, no one in Cambodia understood start-ups yet. I joined a hackathon to explore more about my plan. After it kicked off, I asked for support from my family and friends. I told them other than solving the intercity transportation issues, this concept

also has a huge potential because we have a lot of local passengers and tourists in the country. Somehow, I convinced them. Some of them quit their jobs to join me full-time. One of them is my older brother, the co-founder. BookMeBus has what we have today because of their trust and their teamwork.

“Our journey is not without hurdles. In 2019, we tried to expand our office to Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam. We had already signed up several bus operators in our system. But then the pandemic came. We couldn’t convince our investors to put in more money, so we had to lay off a lot of staff. In 2021, we pivoted the business. I said, ‘we can’t grow tall, so we need to get fat.’ At that time, we could not expand our business to other countries, so we needed to leverage our market in Cambodia. Eventually, we did a joint venture with a big logistics company and entered the e-commerce business. Now, we have two children: BookMeBus and VTenh, an e-commerce platform.

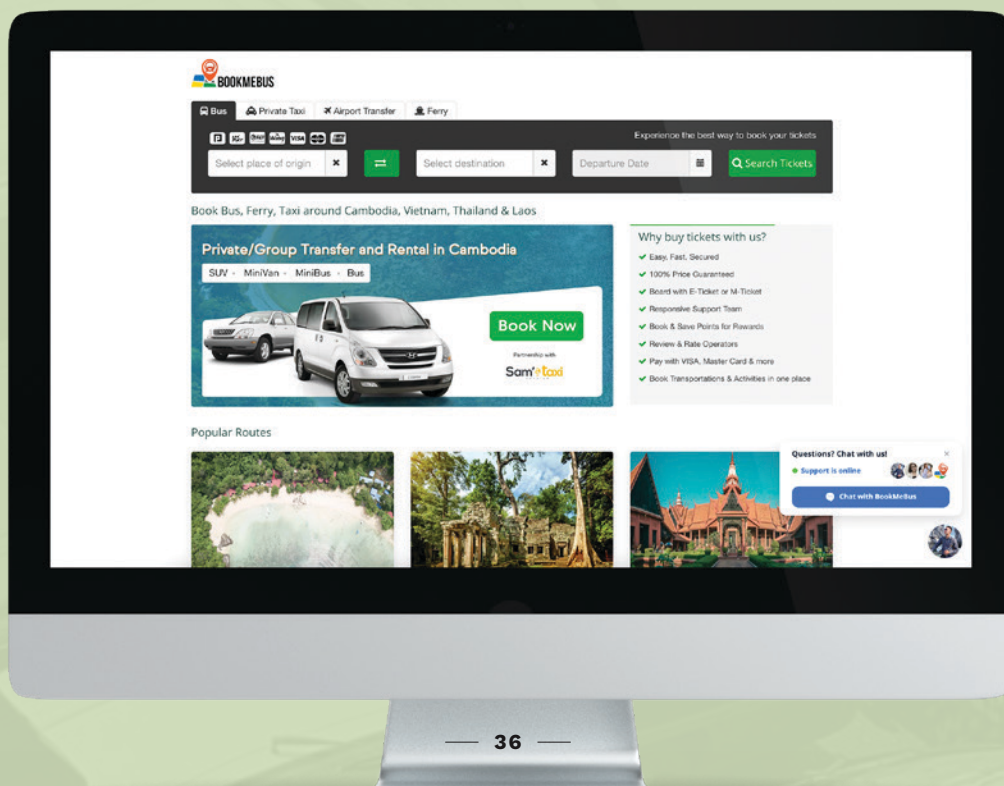
“Unlike in 2014, it is easier for a young start-up to build a company right now. The tech adaptation is already happening. The market is ready, and locals are more adaptive to technology. Recently, the government also set a plan for growing the digital

economy in the next 10-20 years. They have started to build the ecosystem.

“What ASEAN can do to accelerate digital transformation across the region, I believe, is by connecting the dots. For example, BookMeBus has found an innovative solution for border crossing and intercity transportation. So how can we scale the business to a regional level? Maybe Indonesia also faces the same problem? Or the Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam? ASEAN can play the role of helping us expand beyond our country. For us especially, it is such a struggle because our market in Cambodia is pretty small.

“We have witnessed how start-ups can positively impact the country. In my case, we generate jobs for drivers and bus companies while also attracting more tourists to visit. It opens more opportunities. We need to work together among ASEAN members. Innovative ideas can have more impact on creating more jobs. They can also make our lives a lot easier.”

Interviewed by Ixora Tri Devi. 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.





Artificial Intelligence

Chai Kok Chin, PhD

Founding Member
and CEO, NEUON AI

When we travel, it is almost inevitable to hit some potholes on the road. As passengers, bumpy rides that jolt us out of sleep can be quite unpleasant and even hazardous.

Thirty-three-year-old Chai Kok Chin says this is a problem in his hometown in Sarawak, Malaysia, so he sought to remedy it for the sake of comfort and safety.

Chai and his team at NEUON developed RoadPlus, which uses artificial intelligence (AI) to detect and report potholes. This technology makes it easier for authorities to monitor road conditions and dispatch repair crews, especially under the Zero Potholes Initiative. RoadPlus is also designed to reduce traffic congestion and improve connectivity. Chai believes that better and safer roads can lead to higher productivity.

The team introduced the technology at MyHackathon 2020, a Malaysian Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation competition to look for innovative ideas and solutions that would benefit Malaysians. RoadPlus became one of the winners.

Now, Chai and his team continue to work with municipalities across Sarawak to mainstream the initiative. They participated in the ASEAN-India Start-Up Festival in Cibinong, Indonesia, in October 2022 to promote

the use of this technology beyond Sarawak.

“Sarawak is one of the biggest states in Malaysia. Looking at the road network, we can see that it is huge and scattered. Under the Zero Pothole Initiative, they need to be fixed within 24 hours. How do you ensure the trackability of zero potholes? It is difficult for the local authorities to do the monitoring.

“By talking to the authorities, we understand this problem statement and where we can leverage our AI computer vision technology to solve this problem. We devise a solution where we can track the initiative’s implementation.

“All we need is for a person to mount their cell phone in their car, turn on our app, and then it will scan the road condition as they ride. After that, we systematically record all data in our log, which everybody can monitor easily. All this data is now consolidated in a cloud platform accessible anywhere at any time.

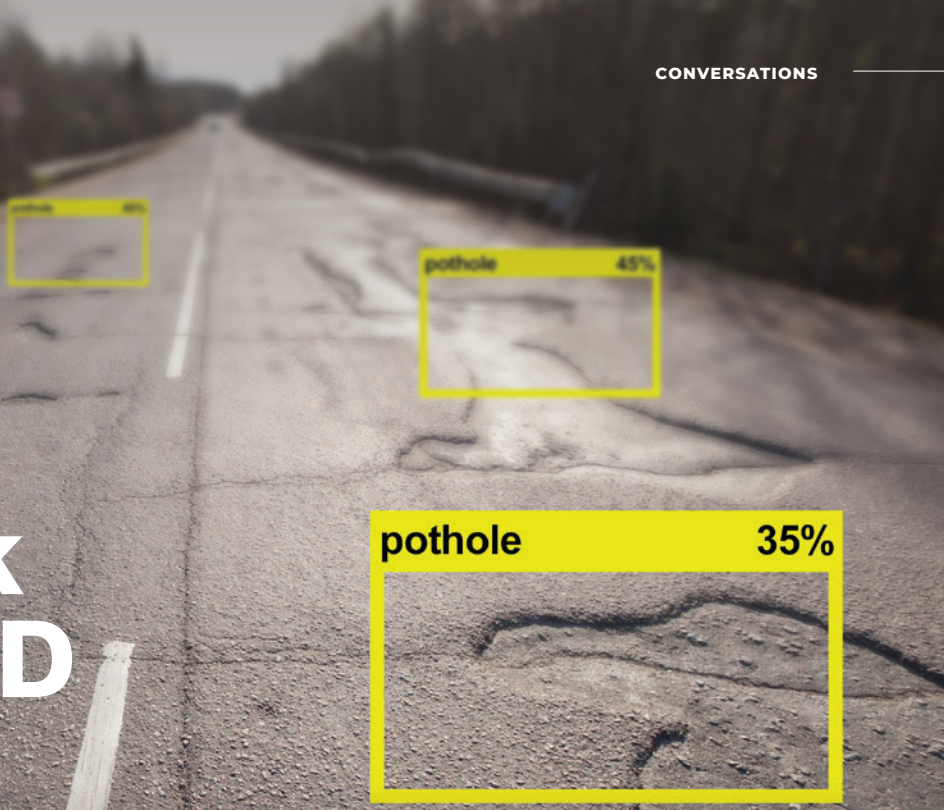
“We are passionate about this mobility issue. We want to keep the road safe for everyone. It is not only the government’s responsibility. All stakeholders need to work together. As technology providers, we serve as the middle person to connect the government, which requires a solution,

and the *rakyat* (citizens) who want to be listened to. In this exhibition, we want to get more exposure and get people to know about us.

“Now RoadPlus has been scaled to other applications. For example, we have a camera that records and processes traffic conditions for the traffic impact assessment. Of course, they have had an automated system before. However, the solution offered by international companies is relatively expensive. In contrast, we can bring down the cost and make more customisation.

“Next, we want RoadPlus to make actionable road data. Not only to preview but to help us take action. For example, future RoadPlus could tell you if the road ahead is damaged and you need to act. We hope to achieve that soon, but for now, we are focusing on working with the Zero Pothole Initiative, managing the traffic flow, and helping the municipalities.”

Interviewed by Joanne B. Agbisit and Ixora Tri Devi. 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.



Digital Solutions

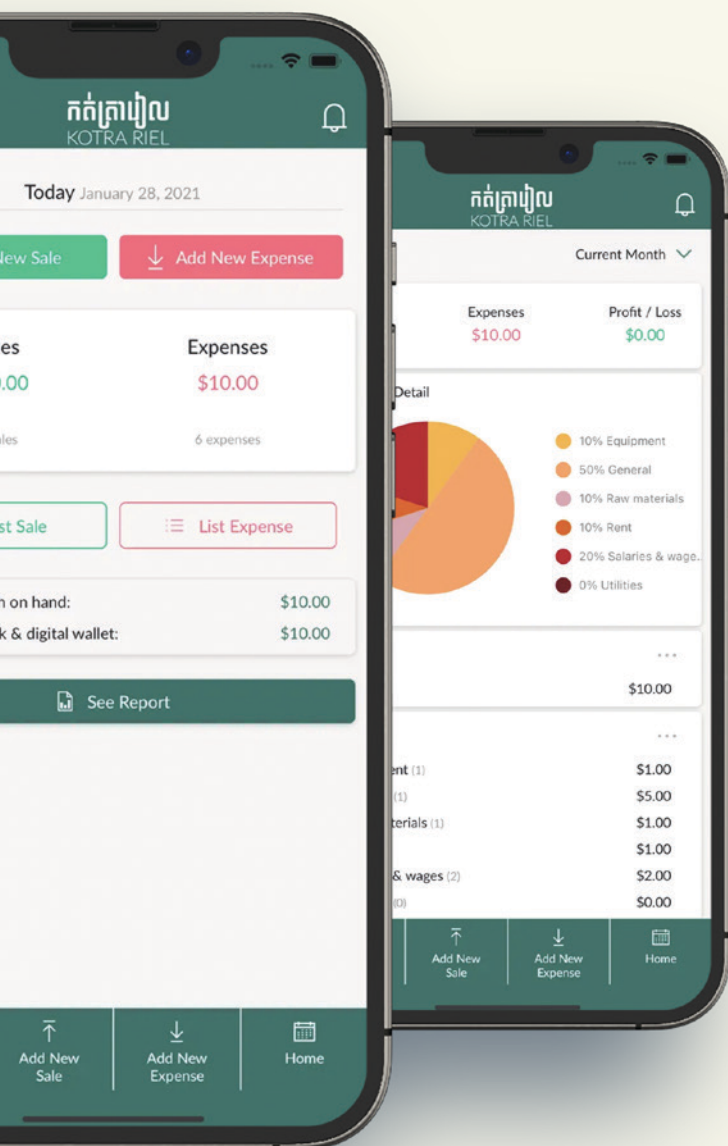
Fintech Unlocks Financing for Women Entrepreneurs



Joanne B. Agbisit

Associate Editor, *The ASEAN*

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
Department



Women-led micro and small-sized enterprises in Cambodia can now keep track of their finances through an easy-to-use bookkeeping app, Kotra Riel.

Kotra Riel is a mobile app that lets business owners with little to no accounting background record their daily sales and expenses and produce basic financial reports in two currencies, Rial and US dollars. The app runs on iOS and Android platforms and is in both Khmer and English.

The app was developed by SHE (Support Her Enterprise) Investments, a social enterprise based in Cambodia whose mission is to “support women micro-small entrepreneurs to scale up and create long-term social, environmental and economic impact for people and communities.” Support comes mainly in the form of training programmes on a range of entrepreneurial skills, such as financial literacy and management, marketing, and basic business operations.

Kotra Riel was developed to supplement the financial literacy training SHE Investments provides to neophyte entrepreneurs. “We saw the need for this kind of app because there are a lot of bookkeeping apps in the market, but most are quite advanced and not tailored to women-led businesses that are starting as micro-sized and informal,” explains Keisha Ghani, SHE Investments’ acting country manager and head of operations.

Ghani says the app could be used online and offline, an essential feature since many enterprises are operating in rural areas or outside the city centre. She notes, “For some apps, you need to have an internet connection to be able to sync. We made sure that this was a key feature that we

could use (in the app). Part of that means the interface has to be super simple—what are my expenses, what is my income, and then at the end, it generates a report that you can compare with your bank account.”

Ghani adds that the app could be downloaded for free and has no hidden subscription costs for its features. SHE Investments could offer the app for free because it was developed with the support of the UN Capital Development Fund and Khmer Enterprise in Cambodia. “They helped provide funding for staff time, ongoing maintenance of the app to make sure it works,” she says.

Kotra Riel targets the heart of the problem for women in business—lack of access to financing. Women own 62 per cent of micro-enterprises and 26 per cent of small and medium-sized enterprises in Cambodia. Yet, only 3 per cent have access to formal credit, and even fewer have received funding from a private investor or venture capital, according to a 2019 study by the International Finance Corporation. This is partly due to poor accounting systems and a lack of financial records, the study points out.

By keeping a record of their business income and expenses through the Kotra Riel app, Cambodian women can manage their cash flow better, create a proper budget, plan for future expenses, and apply for a business loan or raise

funding from investors. These, in turn, will allow them to grow their business.

SHE Investments is seeing early successes. Since the app’s release in February 2021, 8,000 individuals have registered as users, of whom 3,000 are women. Ghani says, “We are seeing the excitement of women entrepreneurs when they see it and how it changes their understanding of financial management...And at the same time, (we’re) getting good feedback on how we can improve it. This is probably everything that we could’ve asked for.”

As its next step, SHE Investments intends to partner with micro-financing institutions to facilitate loans for women. “We partnered with a micro-financing institution called AMK here in Cambodia to pilot test a loan feature,” Ghani says. “We signed a memorandum of understanding with them so that they could use the financial records from the Kotra Riel app to consider women for loans. At least 25 loan applications went into AMK.”

Ghani says that SHE Investments wants women to have the confidence to utilise digital tools in their business. “We want to improve women’s agency overall as key decision-makers, (for women) to make final decisions about the management of their business. So, if Kotra Riel is a tool that enables them to do that, then that itself is a great success.”

Digital Solutions

Financial Literacy Made Easy



Ixora Tri Devi

Staff Writer, The ASEAN

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

Managing personal finances could seem like solving a complex equation—from figuring out how to save money without losing your social life or cutting down on meal expenses, to dealing with your parents’ poor financial choices. Looking for solutions to your everyday money problems? Online resources like The Simple Sum are offering informed answers.

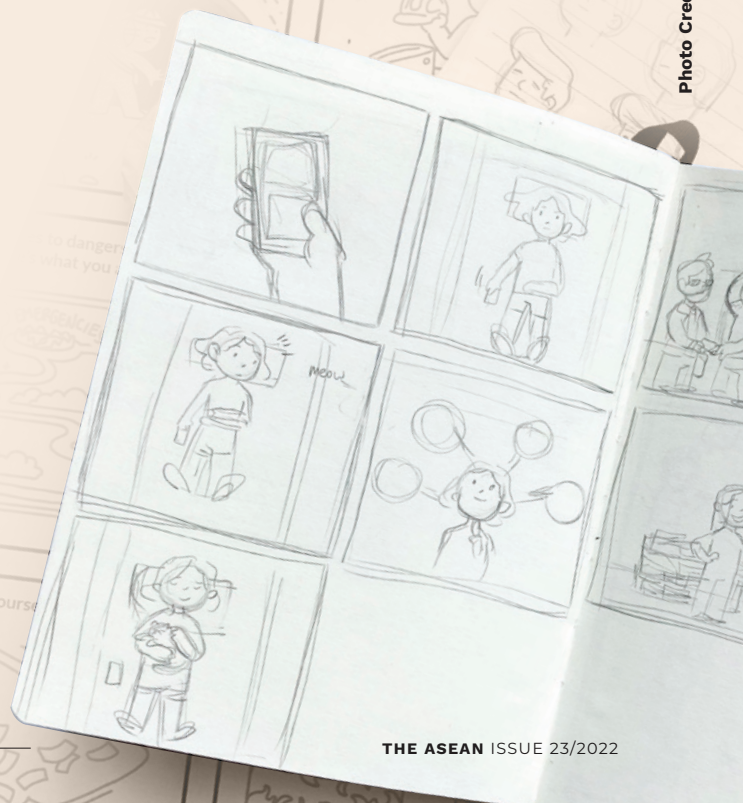


Photo Credit: ©The Simple Sum

Founder Shirley Crystal Chua says the platform was created to improve financial literacy among young adults and help them create a better future for themselves. Since 2018, **The Simple Sum** has been creating relatable social media content on personal finance and investments, subjects that people often ignore or overlook.

“One of the reasons is because personal finance is still not a subject taught in school. For many young adults, this is something they still have to learn on their own. Often, when they start getting into it, the complex terms and jargon could be overwhelming,” she reveals.

The Simple Sum sees social media as an anchor to get young people interested in learning more about personal finance. Once they are hooked, they are directed to the website, which provides comprehensive information, a wider range of topics, and easy-to-use financial tools.

The scenarios presented in their social media accounts are common but can be confusing for most people. Questions can be as simple as “Should you lend money to your friend?”—a dilemma that can be costly to one’s personal finances and relationships. Managing Editor Seow Kai Lun believes this dilemma occurs because most adults, young and old, consider financial management as either dull or difficult to understand and thus choose to avoid the topic.

“The approach that we take at The Simple Sum is to break down these concepts into bite-sized pieces while throwing in our unique brand of humour to make it more interesting for our audience,” Lun adds.

Lun says that Simple Sum strives to create interesting, refreshing, and relatable hooks to their narratives and sometimes uses pop culture references to make people take a second look. “The topics and content that we come up with are also informed by our readers, who engage with us via comments or direct messages. With their permission, we sometimes share them as comics with our audience for them to benefit too.”

From its origins in Singapore, The Simple Sum expanded to Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and the Philippines over the past few years. Chua says that regional expansion has

always been part of their plans and became more apparent after seeing the region’s low levels of financial literacy.

“According to an S&P Global Finlit survey, Southeast Asia has one of the lowest financial literacy rates in the world. Only 30 per cent of adults in most countries are financially literate. The condition leads to many making poor financial decisions for their daily lives and life milestones,” Chua explains.

Although personal finance principles are generally the same, Chua asserts that their application sometimes differs for each country. “This is why we have local teams in all the countries that we have a presence in, to create content that works and is relatable for their specific audience,” she adds.

Lun adds that financial concerns are different in every country. For example, audiences in Singapore look at ways to make their money work harder. In countries like Malaysia and the Philippines, audiences tend to focus more on building up their savings.

Still, Lun says countries in the region share some similar concerns, “like feeling pressured to spend and have a grand wedding or buy a big house even though it may go beyond their financial means.” She adds, “usually, when we talk about such social pressures, many readers can relate strongly. We get a similar reception for the career-related content we create as well.”

“We also organise webinars and online workshops with a hands-on approach to help our audience apply this knowledge and concepts in their everyday lives. What we do at The Simple Sum to empower young adults to manage their finances is facilitated by the digitalisation that has taken place in the region and allowed us to reach a wide audience in Southeast Asia,” Lun states.

As the world gradually relaxes COVID-19 restrictions, The Simple Sum hopes to engage more audiences on a more personal level through events and in-person workshops. While looking for the right opportunity to expand regional markets, Chua reveals that the platform is also starting to share more learnings about Web3 with its audiences and plans to go deeper on this front.



Empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more



*The Social Technology Institute, ASEAN
Cybersecurity Skilling Programme's
local implementing partner in Thailand,
with Supahrat Juramongkol of Microsoft
Philanthropies Asia-Pacific*



Ziarla Mae Malabanan
Project Specialist for ASEAN
Cybersecurity Skilling Programme

But, such rapid digital disruption has triggered unprecedented cyberattacks in the form of malicious email, identity theft, and malware, that violate

Cybercrime is on the rise. Cybercriminals have become more organised as they share their resources and expertise. With increasing numbers of cyberattacks and an alarming shortage of cybersecurity professionals, it is essential for different sectors to band together to address the issue.

In response, the ASEAN Foundation, in collaboration with Microsoft, launched the **ASEAN Cybersecurity Skilling Programme** in February 2022. The programme is committed to combatting cybercrimes in the region by raising awareness, increasing knowledge, and upskilling the ASEAN youth on cybersecurity. To achieve these objectives, ASEAN Foundation has partnered with eleven local implementing partners in seven ASEAN-Member States, namely, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, and Viet Nam. The programme supports

the ASEAN ICT Masterplan 2020 and the ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021-2025.

“As digital technologies become more interwoven with study and leisure, the youth are exposed into different types of cyberattacks. Therefore, having a secure cyberspace should be a priority and necessity for all of us,” said Dr. Yang Mee Eng, Executive Director of the ASEAN Foundation.

The programme aims to train educators, non-profit trainers, fresh graduates, career shifters, and the youth across ASEAN to deliver cybersecurity knowledge to 30,000 end-beneficiaries in the region.

The programme has four major activities; a baseline research, development of a learning module, training of trainers, and empowerment sessions.

Research and module development

From March to April 2022, the ASEAN Foundation conducted a series of focus group discussions (FGD). The FGDs solicited the points of view of cybersecurity experts and practitioners, relevant government officials, researchers, members of the academia, and the youth on cybersecurity issues in ASEAN and emphasised the importance of upskilling the ASEAN youth on cybersecurity. ASEAN Foundation also conducted a cybersecurity survey participated in by ASEAN youth which revealed their level of awareness and knowledge, attitude, and practices about cybersecurity.

FutureReadyASEAN is an online learning platform that offers courses and resources on digital literacy, programming, data science, and Microsoft applications. It was jointly developed by the ASEAN Foundation, Empire Code and Microsoft and was launched in March 2019. The platform is part of the ASEAN Digital Innovation Programme of the ASEAN Foundation.



(Source: <https://futurereadyasean.org/>)



ASEAN FOUNDATION



Microsoft

The rangers of Girl Guides Association Malaysia at the launch of the Empowerment Sessions in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



Following this successful baseline research, the ASEAN Foundation worked with ASSIST Creativelab and Microsoft to create the learning module “Introduction to Cybersecurity.” The learning module’s content capitalises on Microsoft’s resources and is grounded on the results of the baseline research. The learning module will be added to the Future Ready ASEAN Platform (futurereadyasean.org) and will be localised into different ASEAN national languages. It will be free and accessible to ASEAN youth who want to start their cybersecurity learning journey.

Training of trainers

One of the main projects of the ASEAN Cybersecurity Skilling Programme is the training of trainers, a training workshop designed to increase knowledge and raise awareness of ASEAN youth so that they can protect themselves from cyberattacks. It also aims to equip the participants with basic cybersecurity skills needed to pursue further studies and careers in cybersecurity. The participants of this type of training are called master trainers because they will be cascading the knowledge they have learned to the underserved youth in their local communities. Justin Pineda, President of Pineda Cybersecurity Specialists, is in-charge of training the master trainers in the participating countries.

The ASEAN Foundation is working with local implementing partners, which are composed of non-profit organisations, non-government organisations, and academic institutions, in the seven ASEAN Member States to roll out these workshops.

The 11 civil society organisations and social enterprises that are helping the ASEAN Foundation combat cybercrimes are the following: ASEAN Youth Organisation, Bullyid Indonesia, Indonesia Mengajar, Girl Guides Association Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia, CyberGuardiansPH, YGOAL, Inc., Girl Guides Singapore, Social Technology Institute, Ai Vet Social Enterprise, and TUX Global Institute.

“Right from the start when ASEAN Foundation invited us to apply for ASEAN Cybersecurity Skilling Programme, we knew that this programme will be one of the avenues

that will allow us to set up the mechanism and the structure for the sustainable implementation of our Cyber Safe Schools programmes in the Philippines,” said Ma. Concepcion T. Sangil, Executive Director of CyberGuardiansPH.

A master trainer from CyberGuardiansPH noted, “As an IT practitioner myself, I felt that it is my obligation to help the youth through education.”

The programme also takes into account inclusivity by making sure that there is a gender balance in identifying and selecting master trainers and end-beneficiaries. “I think it is important for girls to empower themselves by learning new skills so that they know they can be anything they want to be. Girls are no exception to cyberattacks. We are also users of the internet so we need to learn these things so we can take an active role in this era of new technology,” said Hei Yi Jing, a master trainer from Girl Guides Association Malaysia.

Empowerment sessions

After the training of trainers workshops, each local implementing partner is tasked to host empowerment sessions in the local community. The objective of these sessions is to reach out to underserved communities, such as youth who are living in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, with disabilities, from ethnic communities, and from gender minorities, to educate them on how to be safe in cyberspace and the importance of learning about cybersecurity. Since October 2022, several empowerment sessions led by master trainers have been conducted in different cities in the region. Some of the VIPs who attended the empowerment sessions include local government officials in Indonesia, national government officials in Thailand, a member of the royal family in Malaysia, and directors from Microsoft.

Most of the attendees appreciated the cybersecurity hacks and prevention tips that ASEAN Foundation has shared. “What I like about the empowerment session is that it was relevant and useful even for those who

did not have adequate background knowledge on the subject matter,” says one of the end-beneficiaries from Pampanga, the Philippines.

Programme impact

The ASEAN Foundation is elated to see that the programme has successfully made cybersecurity knowledge accessible to ASEAN Youth.

“The ASEAN Cybersecurity Skilling Programme has allowed the youth to appreciate cybersecurity as a tool to protect themselves online. We have master trainers with no IT or STEM backgrounds who realised that cybersecurity is not as intimidating as it sounds,” says Sangil. She added that there are master trainers who found a calling to further pursue a career in cybersecurity. This feedback has been echoed by different participants across all seven countries.

For Michael Nugraha Budiarto, Vice President of External Affairs of ASEAN Youth Organisation, raising awareness about cybersecurity is a prerequisite for the youth to understand what is to come, allowing them to stay relevant in the vast and rapidly developing digital world.

“Through the programme, we see improvement in the youth’s understanding of controlling their data privacy and levelling up their knowledge of stalkerware and spyware. They feel more confident navigating their behaviour online and understand better what could trigger cybersecurity issues within the organisation,” adds Agita Pasaribu, CEO of Bullyid Indonesia.

Moving forward—The path to creating a safe cyberspace for youth

The ASEAN Foundation and Microsoft’s Learning Module on Cybersecurity will be launched in November 2022. ASEAN Foundation will also continue its public awareness campaign to promote the ASEAN Cybersecurity Skilling Programme and the cybersecurity course across the 10 ASEAN Member States. The foundation hopes to continue creating a safe cyberspace for ASEAN youth through this initiative.

Viewpoint

A portrait of Greg Hands, Minister of State for Trade Policy, United Kingdom. He is a middle-aged man with dark hair, smiling, wearing a dark blue checkered suit jacket over a pink shirt and a blue tie. The background is a solid light blue.

HOW DIGITAL TRADE CAN POWER THE FUTURE OF ASEAN

There has never been a better time to trade with thriving Southeast Asia.

I had the pleasure of seeing this first hand on my recent visit to Phnom Penh for the ASEAN Business and Investment Summit and the first in-person trade meeting between ASEAN and the UK, where I was joined by our fantastic Trade Commissioner Natalie Black to promote the UK interests in the region.

I spoke to counterparts from countries like Cambodia, the Philippines and Brunei, as well as UK companies based here—from Arup to KPMG and Prudential—about growing their footprint in the region.

By 2027, the IMF forecasts ASEAN's economy will be the 4th largest economy in the world behind only India, the US and China. By 2030, the region's digital economy is projected to top \$1 trillion. Last year alone, 25 new unicorns—companies valued at over 1 billion US dollars—were created in the region.

Greg Hands

*Minister of State for Trade
Policy, United Kingdom*

Meanwhile, the UK tech sector is valued at 1 trillion US dollars, only the third country in the world to achieve this. It has 130 unicorns, more than France and Germany combined, and the third largest number of decacorns—businesses valued over 10 billion US dollars—in the world.

But there is still so much more that we can do to work with ASEAN partners to build the digital economies of the future.

The ASEAN-UK partnership

The UK is the first new ASEAN Dialogue Partner in 25 years, and we have put digital trade at the heart of our relationship.

Digital trade ranges from the sale of goods and services online, such as food delivery or insurance, to the use of high-tech sensors in factories that monitor manufacturing quality.

Research from Bain & Company and Facebook shows that ASEAN now has over 350 million digital consumers, with 70 million of them coming online during the pandemic.

The UK wants to knock down trade barriers in the digital sector to enable companies from the UK and ASEAN to take advantage of the opportunities this vast digital consumer base provides.

Last September, we worked with our partners across ASEAN to launch our new ASEAN-UK Digital Innovation Partnership, which will bring Ministers, policy makers and tech executives together to discuss how we can unlock the vast potential of our digital economies. We also launched a Digital Business Challenge for UK start-ups to address ASEAN's priority challenges.

This year our Asia Pacific Digital Trade Network will connect hundreds of fast-growing UK businesses with partners across the region.

Over 40 companies are receiving help to expand into Southeast Asia from our partners in Tech Nation, ranging from cutting-edge AI to apps that cut food waste.

In June, we welcomed our largest-ever delegation from Asia Pacific to London Tech Week, Europe's largest technology festival.

More than 350 business and industry figures joined to explore the benefits of expanding into the UK, as well as to seek out investment and partnership opportunities across the nation. I am excited by the response so far and look forward to welcoming even more businesses next year.

We are also building closer ties with individual nations in the region.

We have digital trade experts on the ground in Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand to provide market intelligence, and policy insights, and nurture the next generation of tech companies.

Our new UK-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement is a historic first digital trade deal between a European and an Asian nation. It sets the rules for digital trade and enables two leading tech powerhouses to work closely together as the tech sector evolves.

Our new UK-Indonesia Roadmap will boost trade, investment, tech and security ties as we deepen our partnership in the years to come. It will create more jobs, and a more prosperous and more secure region.

We also held our first Joint Economic and Trade Committee with Thailand last month and discussed reducing trade barriers with South East Asia's second-largest economy.

Future agreements

But this is only the beginning. Our vision is for the UK to be a global leader in digital trade, with a network of international agreements that drive productivity, jobs, and growth.

There are five objectives for these agreements.

First, we want to create open digital markets with fair regulatory principles. These include removing customs duties on electronic transmissions and measures that inhibit the use of electronic authentication.

Second, we are championing the free flow of data internationally across borders. We are seeking to minimise data localisation so that businesses can expand into new markets without having to invest in costly storage systems before they even have any customers.

Third, we will safeguard businesses and consumers alike. For businesses, we are advocating to prevent unreasonable requests such as the disclosure of source code to operate in a certain market. For consumers, we encourage good data protection and privacy standards and want to reduce unsolicited electronic communications ("spam").

Fourth, we will work with partners to create digital trading systems that make global commerce run smoothly, including electronic contracts, paperless trading, and electronic authentication. This will cut costs and paperwork, and encourage growth as we emerge from the pandemic.

Fifth, we will work with forward-leaning partners to ensure that global governance keeps up with the pace of technology. As last year's G7 chair, we secured assent for the G7 Trade Ministers' Digital Trade Principles. These included our commitment to empowering a full range of businesses to participate in the global economy, including female entrepreneurs and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

These principles are encapsulated in our UK-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement—the first, we hope, of many similar agreements.

We are clear we want to do much more in the Asia Pacific—my recent visit to the region is a testament to this—and be a vibrant partner that supports innovation, creativity, and opportunity, building mutual prosperity through digital collaboration.

The UK stands ready to put the Digital Innovation Partnership in motion. Doing so will bring our businesses closer together, shape digital trade policy to open markets and ensure inclusion for all of ASEAN.



UK business looking for advice on how to export or expand to Southeast Asia can get in touch with DIT here: dit.apac@fcdo.gov.uk

The views and opinions expressed here are those of the author, not those of ASEAN or its members.

SHIFTING CURRENTS

ASEAN in Motion

Moving goods and people, and unlocking the region's growth potential

- ASEAN tackles supply chain disruptions and the shipping container crisis
- ASEAN advances the rights of migrant workers in the changing world of work

Unboxing: Tackling ASEAN's Container Crisis



Partnerships for
INFRASTRUCTURE

Dr. Jonathan Beard, Simon Quail, Dr. Persa Paflioti,
Andrea Lam, Maria Pham, Claire Sharp

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted supply chains and exposed longstanding structural issues in the container industry. Addressing these problems will be crucial to unlocking the growth and potential of the ASEAN region and advancing economic integration. As a response to record high container freight rates, shortage of empty containers and congestion at ports due to COVID-19-related disruptions, the ASEAN Secretariat (Transport Division) and Thailand, with support from the Australian Government through Partnerships for Infrastructure (P4I), initiated a practical study to promote container circulation in the ASEAN region. This initiative is a Priority Economic Deliverable for Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022.

On 16 October 2022, the 28th ASEAN Transport Ministers (ATM) Meeting adopted the Implementation Framework on Enhancing Container Processing and Circulation in the ASEAN Member States, including its Action Plan, which is based on the empirical findings of the study and provides practical strategies and measures to assist the ASEAN Member States in enhancing container circulation. Implementing these agreed actions is expected to promote the resilience of regional container shipping, maritime transport logistics and multimodal transport, which in turn, would bolster intra-ASEAN and international trade flows in the region.

Maritime transport and container shipping are key engines of the global economy. Around 80 per cent of the volume of international trade in goods is carried by sea. Maritime trade is vital to Southeast Asia's economic growth. The industry, however, has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with repercussions for households, businesses and industries.

While the principal products transported by sea in volume terms are bulk commodities, higher-value container freight accounts for about 60 per cent of the total value of seaborne trade. However, the pandemic has tested the resilience and adaptability of this trade. Initial shutdowns and a subsequent unexpected demand rebound have resulted in supply and demand shocks, leading to knock-on effects on global supply chains.

At the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020, economies worldwide slowed. Fiscal stimulus responses generated massive demand for consumer goods, while spending on services was artificially constrained. In addition, the high demand for other goods, such as pandemic-related medical supplies, drove a rapid recovery in cargo demand.

By mid-2020, the swift economic rebound was impacting shipping and supply chains worldwide. As a result, ports became bottlenecks due to labour shortages and intermittent shutdowns, leading to port and hinterland congestion, long vessel wait

times, and slow ship and container circulation.

With demand soaring and supply constrained, freight rates surged. By the end of 2020, key container freight indices, such as the Shanghai Containerised Freight Index, were over five times 2019 levels and only began to ease in mid-2022.

Container shipping services in the ASEAN region became unreliable, in part because vessels were redeployed to more lucrative Asia-US or Asia-Europe routes. Slow container circulation left the region's exporters with a shortage of empty containers. These issues rippled through port and hinterland operations, causing delays throughout supply chains.

High freight rates have squeezed importers' margins or were passed on to consumers through higher prices. Moreover, in regions facing service delays and a lack of empty containers, exporters have suffered delivery delays and even cancelled orders.

A dynamic response from ASEAN

In response to the pandemic, ASEAN Member States undertook initiatives including moving customs services online; working to ease port congestion; sharing inter-terminal resources; collaborating with terminals for the periodic release of non-essential cargoes; improving digitalisation of workflows; expanding

working hours; and implementing more efficient customs examinations (either off-dock or through more effective use of X-ray machines).

Looking forward

Container supply chain disruptions should ease over the short to medium term as demand softens and supply improves, with many new container vessels entering the market in 2023 and 2024.

This would have flow-on impacts for freight rates, which are already falling and could decline further. However, these may remain above pre-pandemic levels if shipping lines focus on maintaining rates rather than chasing market share as they have done in previous recoveries.

Such improvements are, however, by no means guaranteed. Visible headwinds include conflict in Europe, continued COVID disruptions in China, and labour shortages in many economies—all of which continue to impact global supply chains.

All of these reinforce the need for governments to think very carefully about any short-term market interventions. One consideration is the timing of any fiscal support to develop domestic shipping lines as an insurance against temporary service removal by international lines. Such intervention could, over the medium-term, prove both costly and reactive. With many new vessels due to be delivered and freight rates easing, a wait and see approach to domestic fleet expansion would be prudent and help already struggling domestic economies and government balance sheets.

Market intervention to control prices may also be counterproductive. Measures, such as capping shipping rates, would likely cause shipping lines to divert services to more commercially viable routes. However, as market concentration becomes more visible, ASEAN could work with international partners to increase coordination against further consolidation in the liner shipping industry.

As the current disruptions are unpredictable, it is important to focus

on addressing the more structural local issues impacting container circulation. Resolving these will improve supply chain performance, irrespective of short to medium-term market dynamics, and prepare the ASEAN region to better deal with any future supply chain shocks.

Structural issues

COVID-19 has exposed some of the structural issues within the logistics sector in ASEAN.

- Planning and delivery of port capacity and hinterland connectivity vary across Member States. In some locations, infrastructure has been delayed or developed in a fragmented fashion, with limited economies of scale. This impedes the enhancement of maritime connectivity and exacerbates container circulation issues.
- Many Member States have struggled to access empty containers throughout the pandemic. ASEAN does not currently have any shipping container manufacturing capabilities.
- Allowing international vessels to move empty containers has helped facilitate their repositioning, but this still requires one-off licences in some Member States.

Despite the many improvements in trade facilitation across ASEAN, container circulation issues are being compounded by limited coordination and could be addressed by enhanced coordination between different customs regions within Member States.

The current crises present an opportunity to address some of the region's structural issues and position ASEAN for future success. Member States could:

- **Improve port capacity and hinterland connectivity.** Congested transshipment hubs across Asia have provided an opportunity for ASEAN mid-tier ports to attract more direct calls. To capitalise on this, ports must provide connected and competitive port capacity ahead of time. Better hinterland connectivity would assist in moderating container circulation issues during periods of high demand or service disruption. Additionally, improved

coordination and digital connectivity between supply chain stakeholders could enhance container circulation outside the port gate.

- **Investigate the potential for container manufacturing in ASEAN.** Due to the concentration of the container manufacturing industry in China, there could be a case for developing a regional container production hub. Recent announcements of new facilities in Viet Nam suggest these could be commercially viable in suitable locations where production costs are low and there is high export demand that requires empty containers.
- **Enhance customs process resiliency.** In most countries, customs offices have a role in tariff collection and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) around revenue generation. Governments could consider reviewing customs KPIs, with a greater focus on driving container movements and improving operational efficiency. Member States that have provincial customs offices could benefit from this, as revenue recognition between provinces is often a hindrance to efficient cargo movements.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had considerable impact on supply chains within the ASEAN region and around the world, and has brought long-standing structural issues within the industry to the forefront of policy decision-making. Successfully addressing these issues and increasing the resilience of ASEAN's trade infrastructure will be central to unlocking the region's future growth and economic potential and advancing economic integration.

Partnerships for Infrastructure (P4I) is an Australian Government initiative partnering with Southeast Asia to drive sustainable, inclusive, and resilient growth through quality infrastructure. P4I partners with Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Vietnam and the ASEAN. Delivered through a single team, P4I is led by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in collaboration with EY, Adam Smith International, The Asia Foundation and Ninti One.

ASEAN Advances Migrant Workers' Rights in the Changing World of Work



Mega Irena

*Head, Labour and Civil Service Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
Department*

Labour migration is a global phenomenon. Every year, millions of workers migrate outside their home countries in search of better opportunities for higher-paying jobs in the face of limited productive employment in their home countries. This is an enduring narrative amidst regional integration, digital and greening transformations, demographic transitions, and climate change.

As of 2020, ASEAN is home to a total of 10 million migrant workers, with more than seven million being from the region. Women constitute 48 per cent of intra-ASEAN migrant workers, an increase of 2 per cent since three decades ago.

Labour migration has a far-reaching impact on the socio-economic development of both countries of origin and destination. Labour market pressures are lessened as migrant workers fill up labour market demands in countries of employment while reducing unemployment rates in home countries. At the household level, remittances of migrants elevate their families' quality of life.

As the people pillar, it is the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community's (ASCC) role to realise the shared vision of an



Carl Rookie O. Daquio

*Senior Officer, Labour and Civil
Service Division*

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Department*

ASEAN community that is socially responsible and has the well-being and livelihood of the people, including migrant workers and their families, as a priority.

ASEAN's commitment to place the well-being of migrant workers high in its development policy agenda was solidified in the **ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers** signed by the ASEAN Leaders in 2017. The ASEAN Consensus sets forth the shared and balanced responsibilities of both sending and receiving states in the entire migration process. It also stipulates the fundamental rights of migrant workers and their family members and the specific rights of migrant workers.

Over the years, ASEAN has taken regional actions in the areas of education/information, protection, enforcement, legal recourse, and reintegration. At the national level, each Member State has also instituted its own policies and initiatives. A standard self-assessment tool has been developed to evaluate these initiatives. The second self-assessment is ongoing and expected to identify areas of mutual learning and improvement.

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As women migrants are disproportionately represented in lower-paid service sectors, such as domestic and care work, their contribution to ASEAN’s regional development is often not recognised.

Photo Credit: ©Dani Daniar / EyeEm / Getty Images

Initiatives to improve migration policies and governance

Under the coordination of Viet Nam, ASEAN carried out the *Comparative Study on Laws and Policies in the Management of Migrant Workers in ASEAN* in 2021 to assess the configuration of immigration policies and related laws in the region pertaining to the entry, stay, and exit of migrant workers across all skill levels. It identified gaps in the regulatory frameworks and provided recommendations for improving the governance of labour migration in the region.

As women migrants are disproportionately represented in lower-paid service sectors, such as domestic and care work, their contribution to ASEAN’s regional development is often not recognised. ASEAN conducted the *Regional Study on Women Migrant Workers in the Laws and Policies of ASEAN Member States* analysing the legal protections available to women migrant workers. The study revealed promising practices on gender-responsive migration laws and policies.

Under the coordination of Indonesia, the *Regional Study on Migrant Workers’ Right-Based Standard Employment Contract for Domestic Work in ASEAN* is ongoing. The study examines the conditions and existing employment contracts of migrant domestic workers across the region. Findings and recommendations aim to strengthen the overall labour migration governance systems by protecting migrant domestic workers in employment contracts and harmonising national migration-related legal frameworks.

Recognising the different immigration, labour, and other related laws in the countries of employment prior to departure, multimedia educational materials have been developed under the Public Campaign on Safe and Fair Migration in ASEAN project. Under the coordination of

the Philippines, the project aims to curate and translate information from across the ASEAN Member States into several national languages for the benefit of migrant workers.

Increasing migrant workers’ resilience to crises

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic slowdown since 2020 have brought health risks, insecurity, declining work conditions, income loss, and unemployment. Migrant workers are among the least protected and most at-risk workers. ASEAN is not new to such crises. The region has experienced various wide-scale public health emergencies, economic downturns, and natural disasters in the past decades. While each crisis is unique in scale and impact, several lessons can be learned from past responses to ensure a safe and orderly migration.

ASEAN’s economic growth is forecasted by the Asian Development Bank in April 2022 to bring about a strong recovery by 5.2 per cent next year, so the demand for migrant workers is also expected to increase in the near future. Therefore, safe and regular migration with effective and coherent governance are crucial in the face of these adversities. Guided by this commitment, the 15th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour in October 2022 brought together governments, trade unions, employers’ organisations, and civil societies to discuss innovations to better protect and support migrant workers in the much-anticipated resumption of labour migration in our region.

In this context, the ASEAN Secretariat also initiated the *ASEAN Migration Outlook* to provide an analysis of recent migration movements and the prospects for rehabilitating labour migration, and enhance our preparedness and



resilience for future shocks and crises. Launched in July 2022, the Outlook contains recommendations to establish a common procedure or protocol on the return and reintegration of migrant workers, and improve migrant workers' access to social security benefits.

In alignment with the Outlook's recommendations, an ASEAN Guideline on the Protection of Migrant Workers in Crisis Situations will be developed under Indonesia's ASEAN Chairmanship next year. Such a rights-based and gender-sensitive Guideline is expected to enhance the capacity of duty bearers in responding to future crises and promote a whole-of-government approach in mitigating their impact on migrant workers. It will be built upon the principles and international standards set in the **ASEAN Guidelines on Effective Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers**.

As migrants' ability to recover and rebuild after personal or societal crises hinges on their access to adequate social security benefits, ASEAN has conducted a *Study on Portability of Social Security Rights of Migrant Workers between ASEAN Member States* led by Thailand. The study findings guided the crafting of the **ASEAN Declaration on Portability of Social Security Benefits for Migrant Workers in ASEAN** led by Cambodia as ASEAN Chair this year. The Declaration will pave the way for Member States to work towards bilateral or multilateral agreements for the cross-border transferability of social security benefits that migrant workers are entitled to. The principles and practical steps to develop such agreements will be laid out next year.

Overall, reaping the benefits and opportunities presented by disruptions in this changing world of work will not happen overnight. It requires a continuing process of self-evaluation and improvement that should involve all stakeholders for effective results.

As the world of work evolves, the existing approaches and mechanisms governing labour migration need adaptation to sustain effectiveness. Much has been done at the ASEAN level and yet, the future brings with it uncertainties that challenge us to gear up. We learned from this pandemic, and many lessons strengthened us in building a resilient, responsive, and inclusive ASEAN Community.

The various studies may be downloaded from the following links:



ASEAN Guidelines on Effective Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers: <https://asean.org/book/asean-guidelines-on-effective-return-and-reintegration-of-migrant-workers/>



ASEAN Migration Outlook: <https://asean.org/book/asean-migration-outlook/>



Comparative Study on Laws and Policies in the Management of Migrant Workers in ASEAN : <https://asean.org/book/comparative-study-on-law-and-policies-in-the-management-of-migrant-workers-in-asean/>



Study on Portability of Social Security Rights of Migrant Workers between ASEAN Member States: <https://asean.org/book/study-report-on-the-portability-of-social-security-rights-between-asean-member-states/>

SNAPSHOTS

- The 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits
- ASEAN A.C.T. (Addressing Challenges Together): Cambodia's Chairmanship concludes
- Celebrating 45 years of ASEAN-EU Dialogue Partnership
- The ASEAN Artists Residency Programme in Dubai: Finding Home Away from Home

Photo Credit: ©Mega Bintang / Shutterstock

Chairman's Statement of the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits



ASEAN A.C.T.: Addressing Challenges Together

OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 40TH AND 41ST ASEAN SUMMITS AND RELATED SUMMITS

11 November 2022 | Phnom Penh, Cambodia



We, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), gathered for the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits on 11 November 2022 under the Chairmanship of the Kingdom of Cambodia. The Summits were chaired by Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia and convened in accordance with the ASEAN Charter.

We reiterated our support for Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship and welcomed ASEAN's commendable efforts in achieving "ASEAN A.C.T.: Addressing Challenges Together", the theme of ASEAN for 2022. We were encouraged by the progress made in the realisation of ASEAN's priorities in 2022. We affirmed that ASEAN's unity and solidarity were strengthened, ASEAN

Centrality consolidated, and ASEAN's active contribution to regional peace and stability duly recognised in accordance with ASEAN's values and principles as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. We also acknowledged the steady progress in ASEAN's economic integration and regional connectivity with the enhanced capacity of ASEAN to adapt to the changing regional and global dynamics. We commended active efforts to promote ASEAN awareness, identity and visibility. We were gratified by the achievements of ASEAN in contributing to the global cause for peace, stability and sustainable development. We welcomed and encouraged ASEAN's continued efforts in enhancing its institutional capacity and effectiveness to better respond to changing circumstances.



The full statement is available at <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/01-Chairmans-Statement-of-the-40th-and-41st-ASEAN-Summits-rev.pdf>

The 28th ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Council Meeting

Productive Year in Addressing Challenges Together



Opening
The 28th ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Meeting
13 October 2022



Dinita Setyawati

Senior Officer, ASCC Analysis Division

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
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Pricilia Putri Nirmala Sari

Officer, ASCC Analysis Division

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
Department

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council held the 28th ASCC Council meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on 13 October 2022—its first in-person meeting in two years. The meeting discussed the strategic direction for ASCC and its cross-pillar and cross-sectoral work.

The meeting was chaired by Dr. Hang Chuon Naron, the ASCC Council Chair and Cambodia's Minister of Education, Youth, and Sports. ASCC Council Ministers, ASEAN Member States representatives, and ASEAN Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi were in attendance.

Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Techno Hun Sen, in his opening remarks, stated that to strengthen resilience and sustainable socio-economic development and recovery, ASEAN must intensify cooperation and pay greater attention to the protection and development of human capital. According to him, this could be achieved through wider adoption

of digital technology, the development of crisis-ready public health and social protection systems, and the strengthening of the education sector and skills development.

The council commended the broad range of ASCC outcome documents that would be endorsed to the ASEAN Leaders at the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits in November. It was emphasised that the ASCC outcome documents under Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship 2022 theme "ASEAN A.C.T.: Addressing Challenges Together" were timely, as ASEAN is doubling its efforts to secure a strong, sustainable, and inclusive post-pandemic recovery.

ASEAN A.C.T.:
Addressing Challenges Together



The key topics and recommendations discussed at the meeting were the need for the ASCC to intensify efforts to enhance social, human and sustainable development, strengthen AMS' collective efforts to build resilience and preparedness for future challenges, innovate institutional effectiveness, and strengthen cross-sectoral and cross-pillar coordination.

The meeting also commended the notable progress made in the ASCC Blueprint 2025 implementation and ASCC's alignment of its activities and sectoral work plans with the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and Implementation Plan.

At the meeting, the council appreciated Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi for his service as he completes his five-year term of office at the end of 2022. The council highlighted the Secretary-General's firm commitment to the ASEAN Charter to mobilise resources and

actions in response to the COVID-19 crisis, prepare for a robust post-pandemic recovery, and prepare ASEAN people for the future of work.

Moreover, Dr. Hang Chuon Naron acknowledged the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) support to ASCC. The ASEAN Leadership Forum on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, and the second research on learning loss in reading and mathematics at the primary school level in Lower Mekong countries throughout the pandemic, were some of the activities and projects that benefitted from ERIA's support.

Several events were also held on the side of the meeting, including the inauguration of the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies in Phnom Penh, the 6th ASEAN Youth Video Contest, the 1st ASEAN Youth Photo Competition, and the 1st ASEAN Youth Debate.



Photo Credit: ©ASEAN Secretariat

Viewpoint

CELEBRATING THE PAST, PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Reflections Ahead
of the ASEAN-EU
Commemorative
Summit

Igor Driesmans

EU Ambassador to ASEAN

Throughout 2022, ASEAN and the European Union have held many great events in Jakarta, throughout Southeast Asia, and in the cyber sphere, including a joint photo exhibition, a bike ride, a cultural festival, a comic strip competition, a series of video reflections by eminent persons along with a Young Leaders' Forum. All of these events are connected by a common thread—celebrating the 45th anniversary of the establishment of our Dialogue Partnership that has, over the past decades, come to form a rich, colourful and multi-layered fabric.

These events are stepping stones and a symbolic countdown to the ASEAN-EU Commemorative Summit, which is due to take place in Brussels on 14 December. This meeting promises to be an event of an unprecedented scale, held at a time when our two regions—and indeed the whole world—are navigating an increasingly challenging landscape.

What is the significance of our upcoming Commemorative Summit, and what are we hoping to achieve?

Before answering this question, let us perhaps start by unrolling and peeking at some of the key features of the fabric of ASEAN-EU relations. First and foremost, we are the world's two most successful regional integration projects and, as such, natural partners for cooperation—based on our shared belief in multilateralism, international law, and a realisation that the absolute gains of ever-closer cooperation trump the relative gains of competition and confrontation. We have made the most out of these firm foundations, and the corresponding achievements are certainly too long to list. But to name a few, and in no particular order, we have been strategic partners since December 2020; we are each other's third largest trading partner; EU is ASEAN's second-largest source of FDI; we have some 20 regular policy dialogues that allow us to exchange experiences in a wide range of areas, and to pick a recent development, we signed the first region-to-region Comprehensive Air Transportation Agreement in October.

Our relations do not, however, exist in isolation, and this decade has proven to be particularly testing for all of us. The hopes of a smooth post-pandemic recovery were ruthlessly dashed by wars, and we have seen far too many

instances of blatant disregard for international law and humanitarian principles. These developments have been followed by food and energy insecurity and rising inflation affecting the whole world. Even worse, climate change has shown no signs of abating as it continues to pose a severe threat to our planet and our existence.

Leaders from member states of the EU, ASEAN, and our respective organisations—close to 40 people—will gather in Brussels against this daunting backdrop for a commemorative summit. Our Commemorative Summit will be a chance to celebrate our achievements—45 years of partnership in integration. More importantly, it will also serve as a unique opportunity to show and prove that ours is a partnership of strategic partners and responsible stakeholders who are committed to working together to address the most pressing challenges of today and tomorrow—and to do so in a sustainable manner. With our shared commitment to multilateralism, we will also send a strong message of support to the rules-based international order at a time when it is facing a plethora of challenges. We will also focus on the fundamentals of our cooperation: peace and security along with economic cooperation and trade, which form a long-standing pillar of our cooperation. We will also look into further developing the strong commonalities between the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, as peace and prosperity of this region, with ASEAN at its centre, remains of utmost importance.

Last but not least, our partnership recognises the need to be forward looking. With this in mind, we have identified connectivity and

sustainability as dominant features of our future engagement. From the EU side, the Global Gateway strategy will be used as the principle tool for enhancing cooperation on these two priorities. Connectivity in all shapes and forms—infrastructural, digital and people-to-people—will be enhanced and deepened. And initiatives such as the Green Team Europe Initiative in Partnership with ASEAN, our contribution to the ASEAN Catalytic Green Finance Facility, the launch of an EU-ASEAN Energy Dialogue, and the EU-funded Smart Green ASEAN Cities programme will ensure that sustainability will be at the core of cooperation between Europe and Southeast Asia.

In lieu of concluding, allow me to state that there is more to come. We have side-events, among others, in the run-up to the Commemorative Summit that will allow our businesses and youths to engage in person, a joint statement, and a series of concrete deliverables that will further enrich the fabric of our relations. As we approach the end of our commemorative year, we will definitely do so on a high note.

For more information about the Commemorative Summit, follow the EU Delegation to ASEAN social media channels:

Twitter: @EUinASEAN

Facebook: @EUinASEAN

Instagram: @EUinASEAN

YouTube: @EUinASEAN

Contact: delegation-asean-info@eeas.europa.eu

The views and opinions expressed here are those of the author, not those of ASEAN or its members.

CELEBRATING 45 YEARS OF
COOPERATION THROUGH
CULTURE

Building Understanding and Cooperation: The ASEAN-EU Cultural Festival

ASEAN-EU
CULTURAL
FESTIVAL

*The French trio playing at the
Festival's opening in Jakarta*



Katia Maronati

*Advancing the European Union's role in
multilateral fora in Asia*

To celebrate the milestone of 45 years of EU-ASEAN relations, the European Union Delegation to the ASEAN, together with the ASEAN Secretariat, organised the first-ever ASEAN-EU Cultural Festival. The festival highlights the value of culture as a vital element in international relations and its role in building and promoting understanding within and between societies.

The festival took place in the ASEAN cities of Bangkok, Jakarta, and Phnom Penh, as well as online, from 19 to 25 September 2022. As a flagship cultural brand, it explored the enormous potential and dynamic synergy of intercultural collaborations and artistic co-creations between the two continents.

With the theme **Youth Voices**, the one-week festival took a closer look at the youth and brought together young cultural activists from both regions. A new generation of artists shared their ideas and hopes for the future, learned from each other, and built connections, thereby contributing to a stronger ASEAN-EU relations.



*Opening of the Festival at the Institut
Français Indonesia in Jakarta*

Music overcomes language barriers

The festival opened in Jakarta with a jazz concert that conveyed the musicians' passion for new soundscapes and new sonorities, in which sounds and genres intertwined and crossed.

The French trio of Vincent Peirani, Émile Parisien, and Sébastien Surel, joined by one of the most brilliant musicians of the Indonesian archipelago, Sri Hanuraga, took the audience on a musical journey where traditional Southeast Asian melodies and European original compositions resonated and formed dialogues, overcoming language barriers.

In the words of Vincent Peirani: "With music, we can easily communicate, even if we don't speak the same language. This is a really good way to meet people and cultures and to be inspired by culture and people. Music—and art in general—helps to connect. We are just a family."

The music programme included an online concert which saw Joey Alexander, acclaimed pianist from Indonesia, playing with the French accordionist Vincent Peirani, a premiere duo which was recorded in France. It also included a jazz and a pop playlist, where musicians from different backgrounds created unexplored soundscapes, while revisiting traditional melodies.

Films highlighting the need to respect rights

The festival celebrated the diversity and depth of Asian and European cinema. The films, shown online in Phnom Penh and Bangkok, reflected the hopes of a rising generation that respects individual and collective rights: the right of women to be emancipated from the authority of men, the right of young people to live in a better world, the right of the

handicapped to be integrated into society, and the right of migrants to be treated as human beings.

As underlined by Emma Benestan, one of the film directors: "No matter our cultural belonging, who we are, where we come from, we all face the same problems, and this is what unites one another as human beings."

The partnership through visual arts

Visual arts were also part of the festival. The programme included two online exhibitions, a photo exhibition titled "45 Years of ASEAN-EU Dialogue Relations" that gave a historical perspective about the fruitful cooperation among the two organisations, and the virtual reality exhibition, "Butterflies count not months but moments and have enough time."

This last exhibition illustrated the artistic perspectives of a young generation of ASEAN and EU artists on the idea of nature as a site of environmental and philosophical imagination, and on the notion of sustainability: Is the environment simply the place we live in, or also the place we leave behind? Does the term "sustainability" resonate equally in different parts of the world, or do cultural and social beliefs and

behaviours tint it? Do we identify with our environment?

Featuring videos spanning from documentaries to animations and performances, the exhibition centred on shared social issues through the eyes of the youth: from the macro consequences of climate change to the micro impact of local governments on their communities, and from social action to cultural justice, with the objective of inspiring inclusive thinking across borders.

The festival showcased artistic excellence and collaborations between artists in the ASEAN and the EU. Through cross-regional exchanges in the cultural field, the festival strengthened people-to-people links and connectivity between Europe and Southeast Asia in line with the EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership.

In the words of Loredana Pazzini-Paracciani, curator of the virtual reality exhibition: "Culture—and the visual arts in particular—is key to creating connections between diverse cultures and to fostering reflection and mutual support for people to understand each other. I profoundly believe in art as a lingua franca, i.e. a language that has a wider and more profound reach than can be achieved just by words, a language with a unique ability to move people regardless of origin, gender, or affiliation."



David Daly, the Ambassador of the European Union to Thailand, and his wife attend the Festival in Bangkok



ASEAN Artists Residency Programme 2022

Finding Home Away from Home



Pricilia Putri Nirmala Sari

Officer, ASCC Analysis Division

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department



“

When I applied, I proposed a concept of *pugad* [nest] to reflect the longing for seeking home.

The 2022 edition of the ASEAN Artists Residency Programme (AARP) brought two ASEAN artists to the global stage, offering a month-long residency programme at the Sharjah Art Foundation in the United Arab Emirates.

Eunice Sanchez from the Philippines and Saiful Razman from Malaysia were selected as the resident artists of the programme's special edition. Their works of art, produced during the residency, were also exhibited at the ASEAN Pavilion during the World Expo 2020 in February 2022.

“I heard about the programme through social media,” Saiful says. “This is an opportunity for me to work with ASEAN alongside other artists from Southeast Asian counterparts. I believe this programme will benefit the artists in this region by introducing our arts and crafts to the bigger platform.”

Although Saiful has collaborated with artists from Indonesia and the Philippines before, this is his first time to work alongside other ASEAN artists on a regional platform. The AARP was Eunice's first opportunity to collaborate with another Southeast Asian artist.

During their stay, Eunice and Saiful were immersed in the heart of Sharjah's art scene as their studio was in the heritage house of Bait Obaid Al Shamsi. They also went desert camping at Mleiha Archeological Centre, which became the source of inspiration for their artwork.

Away from home for the first time since the pandemic broke out, Eunice says the residency turned into a journey of self-discovery. Before the pandemic, she almost gave up pursuing the arts, thinking it was not her calling. However, being locked up during the pandemic's early days rekindled her passion for the arts.

“When I applied, I proposed a concept of *pugad* [nest] to reflect the longing for seeking home. The concept is ingrained in human history of movement and migration as our ancestors used to be sailors, traders, and voyagers. Little did I know that I would later experience the longing for my own sense of home, from cooking Filipino food to trying out the only Jollibee in Sharjah. It's like a self-fulfilling prophecy,” Eunice muses.



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This is an opportunity for me to work with ASEAN alongside other artists from Southeast Asian counterparts.

For her piece, Eunice used the cyanotype photographic process, an alternative photographic process that utilises photo-sensitive iron salts and sunlight to create white prints on a cyan-blue background. The white pattern in her artwork depicts the paradox of home, a reflection on her journey—finding a home away from home—during her stay in Sharjah.

Saiful created his artwork as a homage to the Heart of Sharjah. “I was amazed at how this city takes care of the historical monuments and the old structures such as buildings and walls. The way they designed this area is fantastic,” explains Saiful.

Saiful used acrylic in the background of his artwork, combined with the collage technique using medical gauze and tissue paper rolls. He says the medical gauze symbolises healing and protection, while the tissue paper represents the preservation of fragility, reflecting his observation on how the historical buildings in Sharjah are reconstructed and preserved.

“I have been working on the subject of the landscape since 2017, and it has developed into many series of works in

the form of paintings, art installations and videos. ‘Home and Shelter’ is one of the sub-topics relating to the ideal landscape in my career.”

The art pieces were handed over to the Secretariat during the ASEAN Day 55 Celebration on 8 August 2022. “We are delighted to have worked with ASEAN on this important initiative that builds on the Foundation’s mandate to foster local, regional, and international development of contemporary art,” expressed Hoor Al Wasimi, President and Director of Sharjah Art Foundation. ASEAN Deputy Secretary-General for Corporate and Community Affairs Tran Duc Binh also expressed appreciation to the Maybank Foundation for its sponsorship of the programme.

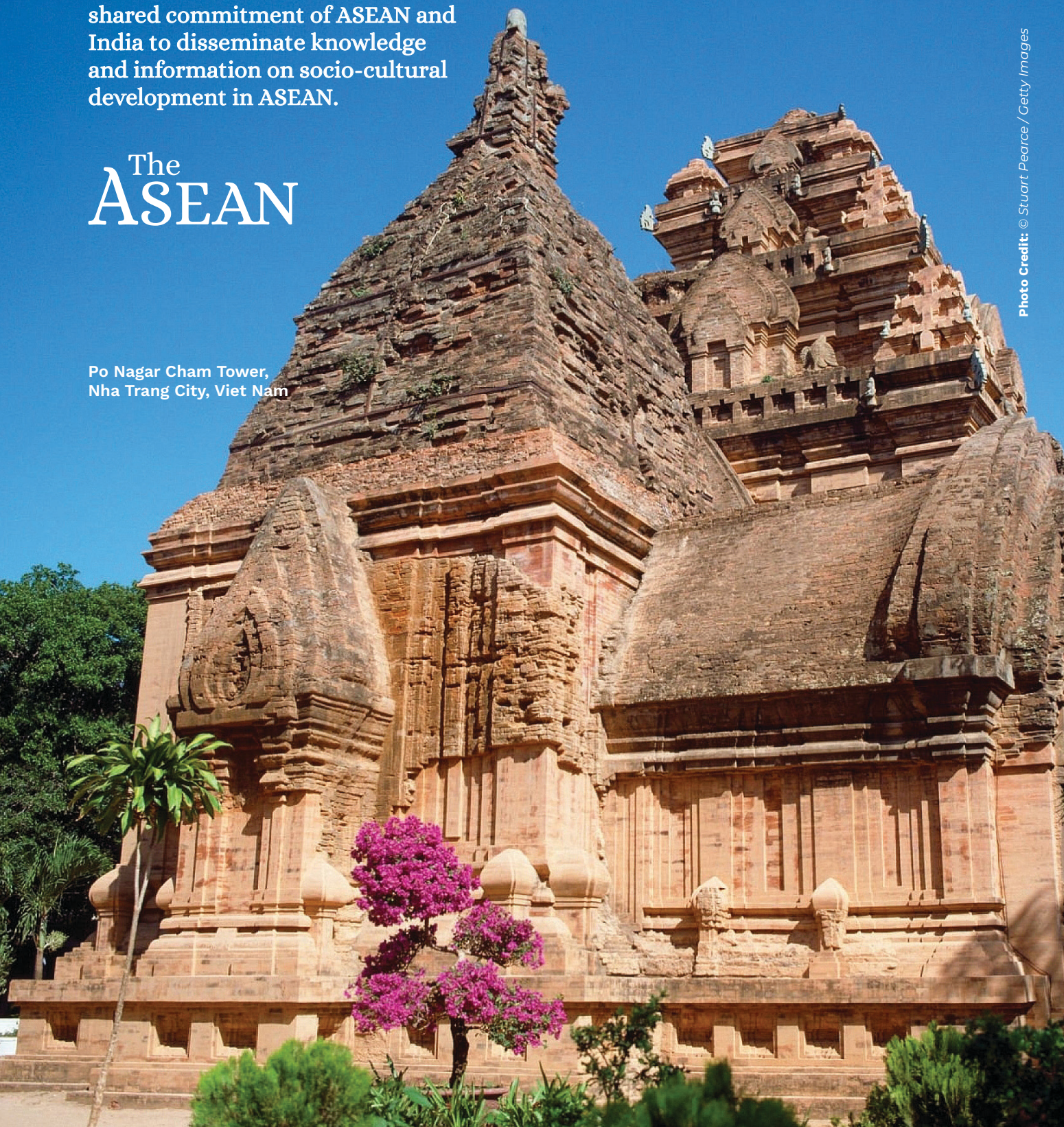
Eunice and Saiful share that this programme shows the importance of collaboration in creating art and they wish for the programme to live on to nurture more artists in the region. “Joining this programme, I realised that ASEAN artists have a lot to share. I hope we have our voice to tell stories for our audience first. And our history, politics and geography are much more connected in the past, and I hope to work together to create new arts,” explains Saiful.

The ASEAN is deeply grateful to the Government of India, through the Indian Mission to ASEAN, for its support to the magazine.

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

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