

The ASEAN



one vision
one identity
one community

ISSUE 27
2023



The Faces of Resilience

How Women Help Build a Stronger ASEAN

ISSN 2721-8058



9 772721 805271

VIEWPOINT

I Gusti Ayu Bintang
Darmawati

THE INSIDE VIEW

ASEAN Broadens
Cooperation on Gender
Equality and Empowerment

CONVERSATIONS

Stories of Resilience in
Extraordinary Times



○ Ministerial Bodies

*) takes guidance from and reports to both AMCA and AMRI

AMRI-ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information

AMCA-ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts

AMMY-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Youth

ASED-ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting

AMMS-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Sports

AMRDPE-ASEAN Ministers on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

AMMSWD-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development

AMMW-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women

ALMM-ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting

ACCSM-The Heads of Civil Service Meeting for ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters

AHMM-ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting

AMMDM-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management

COP-AADMER-Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response

AMME-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Environment

COP to AATHP-Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution

SOMCA-Senior Officials Meeting on Culture and Arts

COCI*-The ASEAN Committee for Culture and Information

SOMRI-Senior Officials Meeting Responsible for Information

SOMY-Senior Officials Meeting on Youth

SOMED-Senior Officials Meeting on Education

SOMS-Senior Officials Meeting on Sports

SOMRDPE-Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

SOMSWD-Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development

ACWC-ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children

ACW-ASEAN Committee on Women

SLOM-Senior Labour Officials Meeting

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

SOMHD-Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development

ASOEN-ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment

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

Secretary-General of ASEAN
Dr. Kao Kim Hourn

Deputy Secretary-General
of ASEAN for ASEAN Socio-
Cultural Community (ASCC)
Ekkaphab Phanthavong

EDITORIAL BOARD

Directors of ASCC
Directorates
Rodora T. Babaran,
Ky-Anh Nguyen

Assistant Directors of ASCC
Divisions
**Ferdinal Fernando, Jonathan
Tan, Mega Irena, Miguel
Musngi, Riyanti Djalante,**
Roger Yap Chao Jr., Vong Sok

EDITORIAL TEAM

Executive Editor
Assistant Director, ASCC
Monitoring Division
Benjamin Loh

Editor-in-Chief
Mary Kathleen Quiano-Castro

Associate Editor
Joanne B. Agbisit

Staff Writer
Ixora Tri Devi

Senior Officer, ASCC Analysis
Division
Erica Paula Sioson


Officer, Analysis Division
Pricilia Putri Nirmala Sari


EDITORIAL ADDRESS


The ASEAN Secretariat
ASEAN Socio-Cultural
Community Department
Jalan Sisingamangaraja 70A
Jakarta 12110, Indonesia
Tel: 62-21-7262991
E-mail: ASCCAD@asean.org

ISSN 2721-8058

Cover and layout by Foxidia
Digital Media

 [@theaseanmagazine](https://www.facebook.com/theaseanmagazine)

 [@theaseanmagaz](https://twitter.com/theaseanmagaz)

 [@theaseanmagazine](https://www.instagram.com/theaseanmagazine)

www.theaseanmagazine.asean.org
www.asean.org



one vision
one identity
one community

The Inside View

9 | Strategic Cooperation
on Gender Equality,
Empowerment and
Resilience
Miguel Rafael V. Musngi,
*ASEAN Socio-Cultural
Community Department*

12 | Gender Development and
Equality Indicators

16 | Advancing Sustainable
Development through
Gender-Sensitive
Governance
*Elbinsar Purba, ASEAN
Socio-Cultural Community
Department*

19 | Gender Barriers in
Education and Health:
A Story from East Nusa
Tenggara, Indonesia
Ajeng Purnama Pratiwi,
*ASEAN Socio-Cultural
Community Department*

22 | Measures of Women's
Economic Empowerment

24 | ASEAN Care Economy:
Putting More Value on
Care Work
*Miguel Rafael V. Musngi and
Jacel Javier-Paguio, ASEAN
Socio-Cultural Community
Department*

28 | ASEAN Publications on
Women

32 | ASEAN-US Science Prize
for Women 2022
*Ixora Tri Devi, The ASEAN
and Pricilia Putri Nirmala
Sari, ASEAN Socio-Cultural
Community Department*

Viewpoints

6 | I Gusti Ayu Bintang
Darmawati
*Minister of Women
Empowerment and Child
Protection of Indonesia and
Chair of the ASEAN Ministerial
Meeting on Women (AMMW)*

14 | Women in ASEAN in the
Era of Digitalisation:
Facing Challenges and
Seizing Opportunities
*Ambassador Hjayceelyn M.
Quintana, Permanent
Representative of the Republic
of the Philippines
to ASEAN*

29 | Why Strengthening
Mental Fitness and
Resilience is Crucial for
Older Women
*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Khadijah
Alavi, Universiti Kebangsaan
Malaysia*

59 | 50 Years of ASEAN-
Japan Friendship and
Cooperation
*Kiya Masahiko, Ambassador
of Japan to ASEAN*

Conversations

37 | Shiela May Pansoy
Police Captain

42 | Tra My Nguyen
*Director of a Non-profit for
Children*

46 | Noemi Obrero Abainza
Working Mother

40 | Shinta Puspa Dewi
*Live-in Caregiver and
Trainer*

44 | Nwat Derli Zaw
Agri-business Entrepreneur

48 | Voice of Baceprot:
Breaking Barriers with
Heavy Metal
Ixora Tri Devi, The ASEAN

Shifting Currents

52 | ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
Policy Brief #7
Building Health System Resilience in
ASEAN by Resilience Development
Initiative and Aly Diana
Joanne B. Agbisit, The ASEAN

54 | Financing Loss and Damage from
Climate Change: Challenges and
Opportunities
*Dr. Vong Sok, Natalia Derodofa, and
Tri S. Saputro, ASEAN Socio-Cultural
Community Department*

Snapshots

57 | The 2nd ASEAN Youth Dialogue:
Accelerating Digital Transformation
for SDGs
*Pricilia Putri Nirmala Sari, ASEAN Socio-
Cultural Community Department*

62 | ASEAN-Japan 50th Year of Friendship
and Cooperation Pre-Event: A Taste of
the Golden Jubilee
Ixora Tri Devi, The ASEAN

Note from the Editorial Team

What makes you resilient? For this issue, we posed this question to several women who overcome challenges in their daily lives, juggle multiple roles at work and home, excel in their fields, and strive to make a difference in their communities. Their answers reflect pragmatic and varied responses to the problems of daily life, as well as to the challenges across societies today. Indeed, these are stories of ordinary women living in extraordinary times.

There is no doubt that the pandemic increased the burden on society's most vulnerable groups, including women and girls. Women played a considerable role in the response to the crisis, yet studies show the disproportionate impacts on their health, well-being, safety, and economic conditions. For example, domestic and unpaid work still largely fall on women's shoulders.

The next question we try to answer in this edition is: What is ASEAN doing to make women more resilient? As

ASEAN forges ahead on the road to a post-pandemic recovery, it is committed to advancing women's empowerment, gender equality, and inclusion in all its work.

Indonesia's Minister of Women Empowerment and Protection of Children, I Gusti Ayu Bintang Darmawati, and Chair of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women (AMMW) discusses ASEAN's regional strategies to empower women and improve their well-being. Minister Bintang also shares Indonesia's "Women- and Children-Friendly City" initiative to integrate the gender perspective and children's rights in city planning and governance. The goal is to provide safer living spaces for women and children, especially in urban areas.

The head of the ASEAN Secretariat's Poverty Eradication and Gender Division, Miguel Musngi, writes about using the gender lens for a whole-of-ASEAN approach to institutionalising gender inclusion and empowerment. The ASEAN Leaders adopted the

ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework in November 2022. It outlines the interlocking strategies that will include women in peace and security decision-making processes, address violence against women, and promote entrepreneurship and economic empowerment.

The challenge for ASEAN now is how to help women stay resilient and enable them to contribute even more towards community building the ASEAN Community.

In this issue, we continue the ASCC research and development series by previewing the "Building Health System Resilience in ASEAN" policy brief. In addition, the Environment Division contributes an article on how new funding arrangements can help build resilience in the region against climate change-induced loss and damage.

This year marks 50 years of ASEAN-Japan Relations, and Japan's Ambassador to ASEAN, Kiya Masahiko, shares his insights on this significant partnership.

Related Issues:



Issue 12-13 | 2021

https://bit.ly/TheASEAN_Gender_Equality



Issue 03 | 2020

https://bit.ly/TheASEAN_Social_Protection





THE INSIDE VIEW

On the road to post-pandemic recovery,
ASEAN advances cooperation in equality
and empowerment for women and girls

A portrait of I Gusti Ayu Bintang Darmawati, Minister of Women Empowerment and Child Protection of Indonesia. She is a woman with short dark hair, smiling, wearing a bright pink blazer. She is also wearing small gold earrings, a red and white beaded bracelet on her right wrist, and a blue ring on her left hand. The background is a light pink color with white line-art floral patterns.

I Gusti Ayu Bintang Darmawati

Minister of Women Empowerment
and Child Protection of Indonesia

Chair of the ASEAN Ministerial
Meeting on Women (AMMW)

Minister I Gusti Ayu Bintang Darmawati talks to *The ASEAN* about the regional frameworks and plans that embody ASEAN's strategies for empowering and improving the well-being of women and girls in the region. She also talks about why Indonesia is encouraging countries to adopt the Women- and Children-Friendly City initiative.

What are the goals and priorities of ASEAN for women and girls under the current regional frameworks, such as the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) Work Plan 2021-2025 and the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework?

Minister Bintang:

The **ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework (AGSMF) 2021-2025** contains the groundwork for developing a four-year Implementation Plan, which is envisaged as a step in a long-term strategy to promote gender mainstreaming at the ASEAN and national levels.

The AGSMF 2021-2025 will focus on four goals towards building greater commitment and capacity across the three ASEAN Community Pillars (Political and Security, Economic and Socio-Cultural) to start adopting gender mainstreaming in their policies, and begin transforming the way ASEAN works. While Goal 1 focuses on strengthening ASEAN's institutional commitments and human resources (HR) approaches, Goal 2 addresses individual and collective capacities in attitudes and norms towards gender issues, and access to data and technical and operational skills for gender mainstreaming. Goal 3 supports strengthening sectoral body initiatives, with an emphasis on engagement with civil society organisations (CSOs) as a way of prioritising women's needs. Finally, Goal 4 supports strengthening support to ASEAN Member States and intergovernmental processes.

In addition, to support the acceleration of AGSMF implementation across ASEAN Sectoral Bodies during Indonesia's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2023, Indonesia proposes a rapid assessment or survey and focus group discussions (FGDs) to capture a snapshot of the implementation and progress to date. The survey will involve all sectoral bodies to map the level of engagement and discussion of AGSMF and its implementation plan within the respective sectoral bodies. FGDs will be conducted for selected sectoral bodies that have undertaken and implemented AGSMF in their work to explore their lessons learned and best practices. Indonesia will present the survey and FGD results during the

2nd ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Steering Committee Meeting and the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Conference.

The ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Conference aims to discuss concrete AGSMF implementation actions, discuss and reach an agreement on actions and support needs for the effective mobilisation of the conference, and reach an agreement on the process for developing individual action and development of implementation plans within the sectoral bodies.

Ultimately, ASEAN's work will include evidence-based and well-managed approaches to gender and social inclusion that aim to change the lives of women and girls—not just in terms of reducing their vulnerability, but also by valuing their knowledge and skills, as well as recognising, respecting, and supporting their agency.

What specific measures in the ACW Work Plan 2021-2025 will enhance the resilience of ASEAN women?

Minister Bintang:

The specific measures outlined in the ACW Work Plan 2021-2025 include a number of Regional Plan of Actions (RPAs): RPA on the Elimination of Violence against Children, RPA on the Elimination of Violence against Women, RPA on Trafficking, RPA to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism, RPA on Women, Peace and Security, as well as the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework. These RPAs are designed to enhance ASEAN women's resilience in particular sectors. Similarly, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 has also been launched to enhance gender mainstreaming through institutional capacity building in the three ASEAN Community pillars' policies, programmes and budgets.

The indicators for the AGSMF will need to be continuously monitored and evaluated by ACW representatives to reflect the framework's focus on establishing the building blocks—including the commitment, capacity, and institutional mechanisms and relationships for gender and inclusion considerations to become an integral

part of the design, implementation, monitoring, and learning of all programmes going forward.

Furthermore, advancing commitments and collective efforts between the AMMW and ACW towards the implementation of the ACW Work Plan 2021-2025, especially in pursuing a high-level commitment from ASEAN Leaders, is necessary. The goal is to ensure that ASEAN is consistently prioritising the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment in the region. I am happy to report that the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security, and also the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework, have been adopted at the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits.

What is the Women- and Children-Friendly City initiative and why is Indonesia keen on implementing it?

Minister Bintang:

Women and children are considered the most vulnerable groups in society. Women and children cover approximately 70 per cent of Indonesia's population. Based on the 2020 Population Census on the total population of Indonesia, around 49.42 per cent were women, and 31.60 per cent were children.

Women and children need special and specific approaches to ensure their quality of life. Gender equality, as well as women empowerment and protection are important factors to ensure women get equal benefits in their involvement in ASEAN's development. Meanwhile, the fulfilment of children's specific rights and protection is very important to ensure that children can grow and develop optimally, and are protected from all forms of violence, exploitation, and discrimination.

Based on these, the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection of Indonesia developed the concept of a Women- and Children-Friendly City that integrates a gender perspective and children's rights in planned, comprehensive, and sustainable city's governance, development and empowerment. City governments must be able to provide a sense of security,

“ Gender equality, as well as women empowerment and protection are important factors to ensure women get equal benefits in their involvement in development.

fulfil its citizens' rights, and provide protection from all forms of violence and discrimination. It also needs to provide public infrastructure, which is friendly to vulnerable groups (older persons, people with disabilities, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, disaster survivors, survivors of violence and trafficking in persons), so as to create a city that is safe and inclusive for women and children.

What constitutes a women- and children-friendly city?

Minister Bintang:

A city can be categorised a women- and children-friendly city if it meets certain indicators, such as:

- i. Empowers women in entrepreneurship
- ii. Provides quality parenting
- iii. Protects women and children from threats and potential violence
- iv. Ensures children development and protects children from child marriage
- v. Protects children from child labour practices

To meet such indicators, a city should:

- i. Ensure the availability of gender-disaggregated data
- ii. Allow women and children to voice their opinions, and respect their right to unionise towards the city's development
- iii. Ensure women's progress and the fulfilment of children's rights through specific policy-making and budgeting
- iv. Allow major women representation in policy-making process

- v. Provide women- and children-friendly infrastructure

How do you intend to promote this initiative across ASEAN?

Minister Bintang:

The way to promote this initiative is to introduce the concept of a Women- and Children-Friendly City as an inclusive city; a place that can provide a sense of security for women and children, as well as prioritise women and children as development subjects who play a potential role in urban development.

ASEAN Member States have strong cultural similarities that build the basis of their solidarity. However, ASEAN has been facing gender inequality in various development sectors. In 2022, the Gender Inequality Index, which measures the dimensions of health, empowerment and labour market, was at 0.645. Most ASEAN Member States have gained index scores that were higher than world's average. Yet, there were ASEAN Member States that reached below that number, including Indonesia, ranked 110th in the world at 0.444.

Against this backdrop, we need to achieve SDG targets to fulfil goals number 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 10, namely eradicating poverty, improving health, providing quality education, ensuring gender equality, providing decent work, and reducing inequality.

In this spirit, Women- and Children-Friendly Cities can be a joint strategy to contribute to the improvement of the ASEAN countries' Gender Inequality Index scores. We can achieve sustainable development goals together.

Apart from being considered vulnerable to various forms of violence

and discrimination, women and children actually have a great potential to contribute solutions to a city's problems.

The word “city” should be the starting point of the Women and Children-Friendly City initiative since cities in ASEAN countries share these similar problems:

- The city serves as the center of economic growth in ASEAN;
- Urbanisation occurs in almost all cities in ASEAN countries, forcing women from rural areas to migrate to cities; and
- Urbanisation spurs new problems in ASEAN, such as human trafficking, violations against migrant workers' rights, low quality of childcare due to the loss of kinship and community, massive digital exposure to young children, poor air and water quality which has negative health impacts to women and children, and the growth of slum areas that impacts the welfare and capabilities women and children.

The Women- and Children-Friendly city initiative will serve as a strategy for ASEAN Member States to provide a joint response to demographic changes, especially those affecting women and children in the urban areas throughout Southeast Asia. It also facilitates the sharing of best practices for all ASEAN Member States to build cities that are friendly to women and children.

However, this idea needs to be explored further through numerous meetings and discussions, particularly when it comes to developing the indicators, to be more in line with the circumstances of ASEAN countries.

Strategic Cooperation on Gender Equality, Empowerment and Resilience



Miguel Rafael V. Musngi

*Head, Poverty Eradication and Gender Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department*

ASEAN's cooperation on advancing gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls sits squarely within the region's ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and intersects with current and emerging challenges, such as demographic shifts, digitalisation of the region, and security issues, among others. With ASEAN asserting its central and strategic role in the Indo-Pacific region, there are widening spaces for women and girls to amplify their voices and for robust, substantive and meaningful representation in building a gender-transformative and resilient ASEAN Community.

Gender mainstreaming in the ASEAN Community

ASEAN uses a whole-of-ASEAN approach to introduce and institutionalise gender perspectives in its work. Such an approach is guided by the principle that addressing fundamental gender gaps is a moral imperative and a sound economic proposition: one that leads to reducing poverty and inequality and promotes inclusion and resilience in the long run.

The ASEAN Leaders officially adopted the **ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework (AGMSF)** during the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits held in November 2022 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The journey to develop the framework started in 2015 when the 2nd ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women or AMMW mandated the

ASEAN Committee on Women or ACW to develop a gender mainstreaming strategy and introduce gender perspectives in the ASEAN Community. The ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children or ACWC subsequently joined the ACW and is now co-leading the initiative.

To accelerate the AGMSF's implementation, the Special ACWC-ACW Consultation Meeting on Gender Mainstreaming in ASEAN Community was held in November 2022 in Ha Noi, Viet Nam. During this meeting, the roles of ACW and ACWC were defined clearly as co-leads in coordinating the implementation of the AGMSF. They will also provide technical and providers of technical support to other ASEAN

The AGMSF has two visions in mainstreaming gender perspectives across the three ASEAN Community pillars:

By 2025, “ASEAN will have a clearly articulated, coordinated, and accountable approach to gender equality and inclusion, and the individual and collective attitudes of Member State’s officials and ASEAN staff toward the importance of gender and inclusion will be transformed and reflected in behaviours and selected work. All Sectoral Bodies and Secretariat staff will have increased knowledge about the gender and inclusion dimensions of their sectors, and these will be increasingly discussed across the organisations and at senior levels.”

And beyond 2025, “ASEAN will be an example of change-focused inter-governmental leadership on gender and inclusion issues in the region. With a clearly defined agenda on gender equality that provides strategic, evidence-based support to inter-governmental processes. ASEAN will act as a forum for knowledge, dialogue and ideas; facilitate an effective interface between women’s organisations and movements and national governments; deliver gender-transformative programming; act as an authoritative voice championing the issues of the poorest and most vulnerable women and girls in the region; shape donor priorities; and contribute to the international conversation.”

Sectoral Bodies on matters related to gender equality and women’s empowerment. The two bodies will act as advocates of gender mainstreaming at the national level, especially in connecting national gender mainstreaming initiatives with those of the AGMSF.

Subsequently, the First ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Steering Committee (AGMSC) Meeting was held in February 2023 in Vientiane, the Lao PDR. The representatives from various ASEAN Sectoral Bodies and ASEAN Entities emphasised that mainstreaming gender perspectives is an urgent concern of all sectoral bodies, ASEAN’s partners, and relevant stakeholders. It was evident that there is a promising trend in the region, where more ASEAN Sectoral Bodies are working with partners to surface and articulate the gender dimensions of their sectoral work. Some concrete examples of sectoral gender-related initiatives include:

- ASEAN Guideline on Gender Mainstreaming into Labour and Employment Policies Towards Decent Work for All, led by the Senior Labour Officials Meeting
- Guidelines for Operationalising the ASEAN Regional Framework on Protection, Gender, and Inclusion in Disaster Management, led by

the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management

- Gender mainstreaming in the Science, Technology and Innovation: Sensitization and Socialization of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment, and the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework, co-organised by the Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation (COSTI) with ACW
- AMAF’s Approach to Gender Mainstreaming in the Food, Agriculture, and Forestry Sectors, developed by the ASEAN Ministers Meeting on Agriculture and Forestry
- Roadmap on Accelerating ASEAN Renewable Energy Deployment through Gender-Responsive Energy Policy, being implemented by the ASEAN Centre for Energy (ACE)
- Integration of gender perspectives in the work plans of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro-, Small-, and Medium-Enterprises (ACCMSME), and Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2021-2025.

Moving forward, Indonesia, as the ASEAN Chair in 2023, is preparing to convene the Second AGMSC Meeting and the Conference on Gender Mainstreaming in ASEAN Community.

In line with the theme: “ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth,” the meeting and conference will provide space to support the priority initiatives of relevant ASEAN sectoral work plans that advance gender equality and women empowerment.

Women, peace, and security

As part of its mainstreaming initiative, ASEAN seeks to involve women in peace and security processes and decisions. This is articulated in the Joint Statement on Women, Peace and Security (2017) and a key recommendation of the *ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace, and Security* (2021). To implement this vision, the ASEAN Leaders adopted the **ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security (ASEAN RPA WPS)** during the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits.

The ASEAN RPA WPS is a landmark regional framework within ASEAN and outside the region that expands the understanding of the WPS agenda and moves beyond conflict settings. It covers the four pillars of the WPS, namely, protection, prevention, participation, and relief and recovery. In addition, the ASEAN RPA WPS looks into non-traditional security issues such as cybersecurity, disaster risk reduction and resilience, and women economic empowerment, among others. Similar to the AGMSF, a whole-of-ASEAN approach is at play to bring the WPS agenda into fruition. This approach will strengthen the role of women in peacebuilding in the region and institutionalise engagements with civil society organisations, specifically women’s groups, and stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of the regional plan of action.

The ASEAN RPA WPS was launched in December 2022 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, simultaneously with its website: <https://wps.asean.org>. Its implementation is currently being overseen by the Advisory Group on Women, Peace and Security, composed of relevant ASEAN Sectoral Bodies and ASEAN Entities across the ASEAN Community.

Indonesia, as ASEAN Chair in 2023, is preparing to convene the High-level Conference on Women, Peace

and Security in ASEAN in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The conference will provide a venue to affirm the high-level of political commitment towards implementing the ASEAN RPA WPS. It will be an occasion to showcase the progress of developing national action plans on WPS in ASEAN Member States, as well as discuss the localisation of the ASEAN RPA WPS. Also, the conference will highlight the role of civil society and women's organisations in its implementation and deepen the analysis on the links between WPS and other initiatives, such as preventing violent extremism, recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, and addressing the impact of climate change.

Addressing gender-based violence

Removing barriers that prevent women from realising their full potential and participating in society continues to be a priority for ASEAN. Hence, it sustained the implementation of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action to Eliminate Violence Against Women (2015). The ACWC and ACW, in partnership with UN Women, carried out and launched in 2022 the Mid-Term Review of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women. The report indicated that the ASEAN Member States have dedicated national policies addressing violence against women, as well as national action plans on eliminating violence against women complemented by multi-sectoral coordinating response mechanisms. Studies on the prevalence of violence against women have been conducted alongside the collection and analysis of administrative data on violence against women across the region. Also, the ASEAN Member States continue to develop law enforcement capacity to respond to violence against women, and prevent it through community-based interventions, such as awareness campaigns.

At the ASEAN level, the ACWC, in partnership with ACW, has been spearheading the regional campaign to end violence against women. Launched in 2018, the initial phase resulted in a massive information campaign targeting women migrant workers

who are being trafficked or face the threat of it. The current phase of the campaign centers on creating safe workplaces for women and women migrant workers by engaging the private sector. Specifically, the ASEAN/WE STRIVE (<https://www.aseanwestrive.org>) is a pledging platform that offers resources and tools for self-assessment tools and guidelines.

Promoting women's economic empowerment

As ASEAN economies continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, opportunities abound for women to regain their livelihood or enter the labour market. However, these working women are not a homogenous group. There are women in the rural and urban areas who are involved in the value chain, women in formal and informal economic sectors, and women in at-risk and vulnerable situations, among others.

ASEAN seeks to ensure their economic inclusion. In October 2022, it convened the 2nd ASEAN Women Leaders' Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on the theme "Building a More Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Future: Unlocking Women's Entrepreneurship in ASEAN." The summit served as a strategic platform for ASEAN Leaders, women leaders from ASEAN Member States, and heads of relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies to exchange and deliberate on the challenges and opportunities for women's entrepreneurship development and for promoting transformative change towards a robust recovery of women-led and owned MSMEs from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The summit was followed by the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Conference and Awards Ceremony, which underscored the immense contribution of women entrepreneurs and women, in general, in the economy and labour force in ensuring inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

The preceding events ushered in the adoption of the **Declaration on Building a more Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Future: Unlocking Women's Entrepreneurship** in ASEAN

in November 2022, which guides how to grow women-owned and led enterprises.

The road ahead

With the Lao PDR as the current ACW Chair, the spotlight is cast on the connections between addressing unpaid care and domestic work and promoting social protection. In March 2023, the High-level Learning Exchange on Care Economy and Social Protection between the Royal Government of Cambodia and the Lao PDR was convened to facilitate an exchange of knowledge and good practices between the Ministry of Women Affairs of Cambodia and the Lao Women's Union of the Lao PDR in the areas of unpaid care and domestic work and strengthening social protection in ASEAN.

The Lao PDR is likewise moving forward with the recommendations from the *State of Gender Equality and Climate Change Report in ASEAN*. A cross-sectoral consultation will be conducted to engage relevant sectoral bodies and inform future cross-sectoral collaboration on gender equality and climate change. This is in line with the implementation of the Vientiane Declaration on Enhancing Gender Perspective and ASEAN Women's Partnership for Environmental Sustainability (2012).

Download:

ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework:



<https://asean.org/book/asean-gender-mainstreaming-strategic-framework-2021-2025/>

ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on WPS:



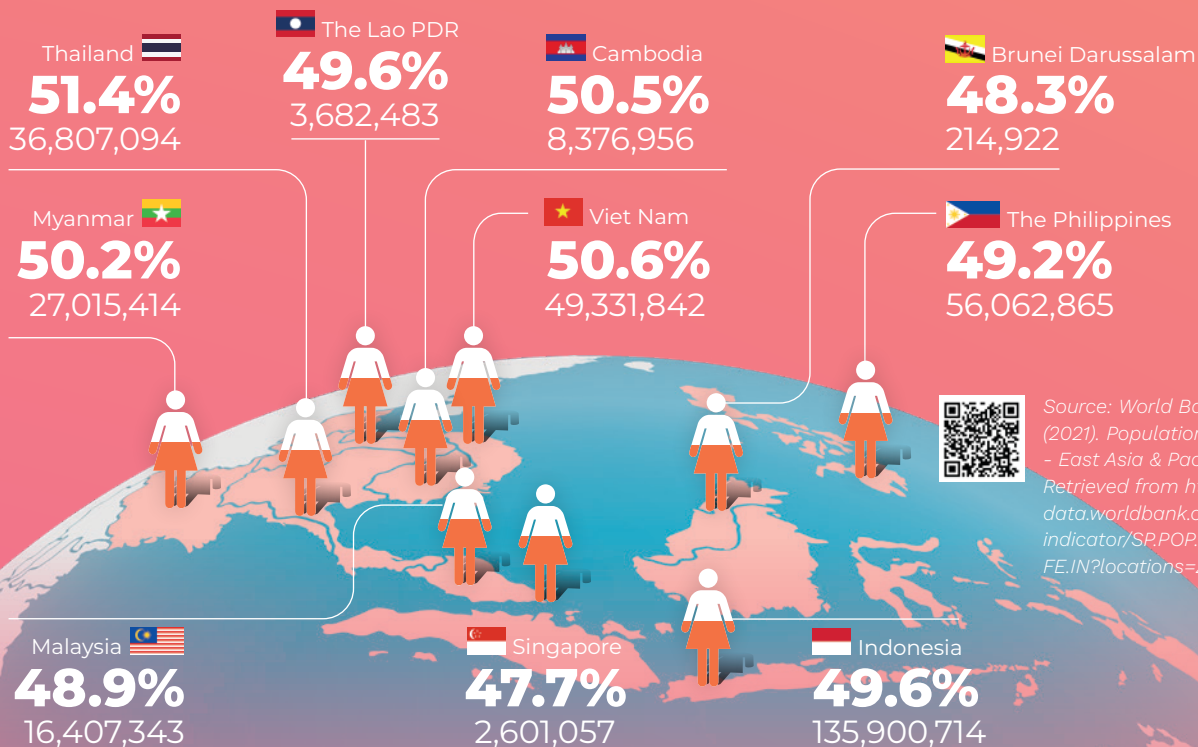
<https://asean.org/asean-regional-plan-of-action-on-women-peace-and-security/>

Declaration on Building a more Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Future: Unlocking Women's Entrepreneurship:



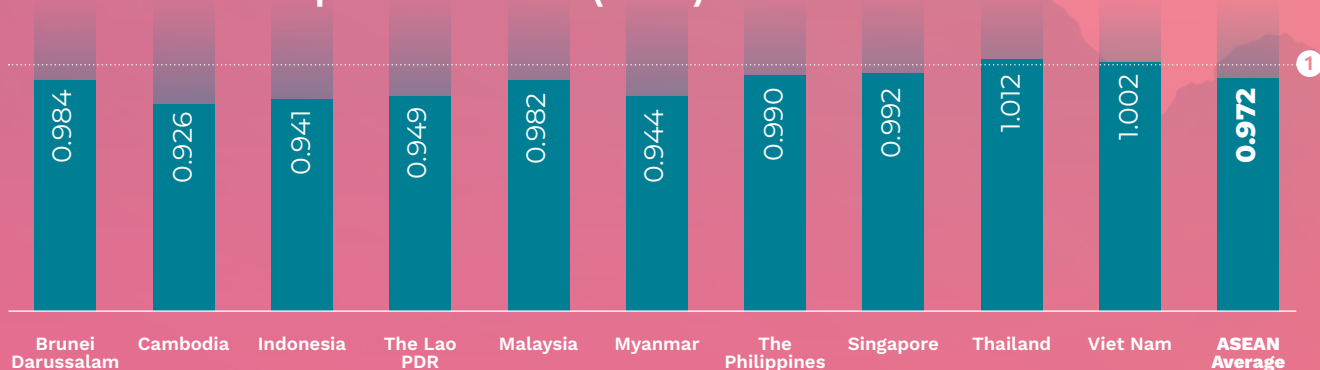
<https://asean.org/declaration-on-building-a-more-sustainable-inclusive-and-resilient-future-unlocking-womens-entrepreneurship-in-asean/>

Female Population in ASEAN



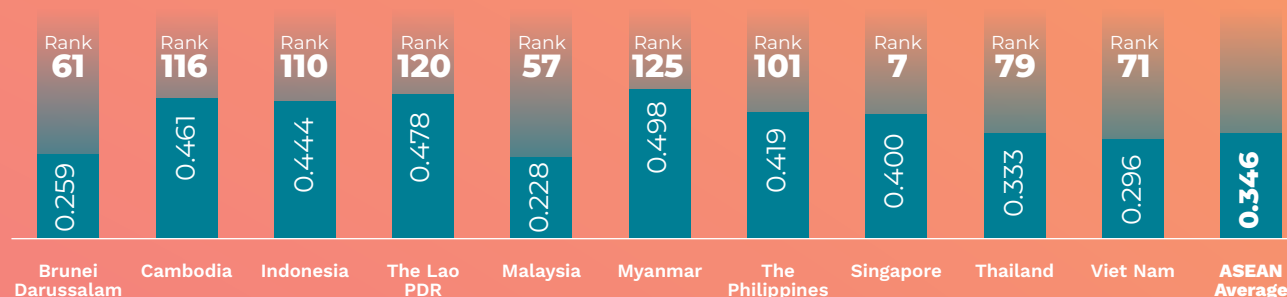
Women and Development in ASEAN

Gender Development Index (2021)



Note: The Gender Development Index measures gender gaps in human development achievements by accounting for disparities between men and women in three basic dimensions of human development: health, education, and income. A value equal to 1 indicates development equality between genders, while values further from 1 indicate less equality between genders. Source: UNDP Human Development Report Data Centre, <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/composite-indices>

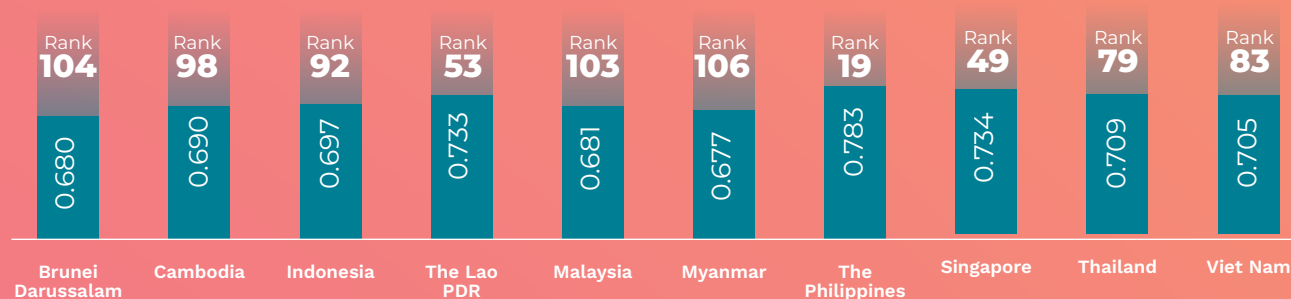
Gender Inequality Index (2021)



Note: The Gender Inequality Index is a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievements between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market. The value indicates the loss in potential human development due to gender inequality.

Source: UNDP Human Development Report Data Centre, <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/composite-indices>

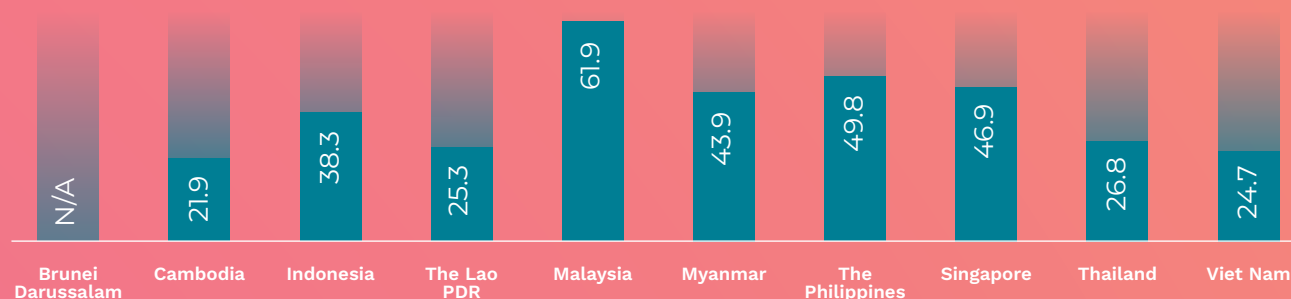
Global Gender Gap Index (2022)



Note: The Global Gender Gap Index tracks countries' progress towards closing the gender divide across four dimensions: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. The value range of 0 to 1 indicates the distance covered towards parity (i.e., the percentage of the gender gap that has been closed), where 1 reflects full gender parity and 0 reflects complete parity.

Source: World Economic Forum. (2022). The Global Gender Gap Report 2022. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf

Social Institutions and Gender Index (2023)



Note: The Social Institutions and Gender Index measures discrimination against women, taking into account legislation, social norms, and practices that lead to women's discrimination in the family, and restrict their physical integrity, access to productive and financial resources, and civil liberties. The scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination.

Source: OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index, <https://www.oecd.org/stories/gender/social-norms-and-gender-discrimination/sigi>

Viewpoint

Women in ASEAN in the Era of Digitalisation

Facing Challenges and
Seizing Opportunities

Ambassador Hjayceelyn M. Quintana

Permanent Representative of
the Republic of the Philippines
to ASEAN

The celebration of Women's Month this year resonated deeply with the priorities and commitments of ASEAN to forge ahead with gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. In the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to ASEAN, we celebrated Women's Month by citing that parity has been achieved with 50 per cent of current membership now being women.

Representation of women in ASEAN is increasing in many other fields, such as in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). For example, in Southeast Asia, women representation in the technology sector is higher than global figures. Also, there is an increasing number of women researchers commissioned to undertake research in a variety of fields in STEM.

ASEAN is fast becoming a digitalised region. The digital economy is expanding exponentially, with 400 million internet users ushering more trade and investment opportunities, creating jobs, and triggering innovation. By 2030, up to 80 per cent of jobs in ASEAN will require workers with basic digital literacy as well as applied skills in information and communications technology (ASEAN-USAID IGNITE, 2022). The theme “DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality” centres on the power of technology and innovation to bridge gender gaps and empower women and girls in the region.

Looking through the gender lens reveals that if gender gaps are closed, the value of the Southeast Asian e-commerce market between 2025 and 2030 would gain an additional 280 billion US dollars. The returns represent an opportunity to put nearly USD 300 billion into the hands of women entrepreneurs (IFC, n.d.).

Leveraging advances in technology and innovation to promote women’s empowerment also contributes immensely to security and peace in ASEAN. For example, rural women fulfil a significant role in ensuring food security at the household and community levels as well as strengthening agricultural value chains. It is estimated that if rural women had equal access to resources given to their male counterparts, there would be a significant reduction in hunger. The Food and Agriculture Organization reported that the number of hungry people worldwide could be reduced by

up to 150 million people if rural women were given equal access to resources as men (ADB, 2022).

But women do continue to face barriers and challenges. Although in ASEAN, more girls perform better in mathematics and science in primary and secondary education, this does not automatically translate into girls pursuing STEM education or choosing STEM-related careers. And a closer look at the STEM disciplines reveals that, on average, there are fewer women graduates who obtained STEM degrees compared with their male counterparts.

After earning their degrees, women in STEM do not automatically pursue careers in STEM-related fields. This has been observed for women holding doctoral degrees who do not continue in their doctoral field of study and in the technology sector. Moreover, women engaged in various STEM fields earn, on average, as little as 68 per cent of men’s earnings (ASEAN-USAID IGNITE, 2022).

Facing these challenges head-on requires strong cooperation and partnership among the ASEAN Member States and their partners. Currently, concrete programmatic steps are being undertaken towards this end.

The implementation of the ASEAN Plan of Action on Science, Technology and Innovation (APASTI) 2016-2025 guides the Committee on Science, Technology, and Innovation (COSTI) in developing policies and mechanisms in science, technology and innovation cooperation. One of the work plan’s goals is to achieve “an innovation-driven economy with a deep science, technology, and innovation (STI) enculturation and a system of seeding and sustaining STI by leveraging ICT and the resources of our talented young, women and private sectors.” Through ASEAN’s partnership in the science, technology and innovation sector, systems and mechanisms are being established that will increase the engagement of women and youth in STI to promote entrepreneurship.

Empowering women with advances in technology and innovation enables them to play a key role in ensuring peace and security in the region. To achieve a transformative role, the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security was adopted by the ASEAN Leaders during the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summit in November 2022 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Women’s roles in security contribute to the implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. Such an outlook envisions an Indo-Pacific region of development and prosperity for all. The Outlook aims to help promote “an enabling environment for peace, stability and prosperity in the region in addressing common challenges, upholding the rules-based regional architecture, and promoting closer economic cooperation, and thus strengthen confidence and trust.”

Significantly, the Outlook identified key areas of cooperation that present opportunities for women. These refer to the digital economy, micro, small and medium enterprises, science, technology, research and development, among others.

Looking ahead, there is much enthusiasm in Indonesia’s leadership as Chair of ASEAN. Espousing the theme, “ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth,” Indonesia is setting the scene to realise ASEAN’s commitment for women to be fully engaged in recovery efforts and participate in and benefit from economic growth, including the digital economy.

References may be downloaded from the following link:



<https://shorturl.at/fcQU2>

Advancing Sustainable Development through Gender-sensitive Governance



Elbinsar Purba

*Officer, Poverty Eradication and Gender Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department*

The 2022 ASEAN SDG Snapshot Report highlighted ASEAN's progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) despite the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, due to the pandemic, the region is likely to fall short on Goal 1 on ending poverty and Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth.



“
Women play
crucial roles
in achieving
the SDGs and
ensuring no one
is left behind.”

To accelerate the progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the next seven years, the 3rd ASEAN Forum on SDG with National Development Planning Agencies and the 2nd ASEAN Ministerial Dialogue in Accelerating Actions to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals were held in Bangkok on 30–31 March 2023. Participants in these two events discussed strategies for designing impactful interventions. They noted that the stakeholders, including women, must be actively involved if ASEAN is to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Women play crucial roles in achieving the SDGs and ensuring no one is left behind. At the same time, without addressing the needs of women, it is hard to achieve all 17 goals, as highlighted by the *ASEAN Gender Outlook: Achieving the SDGs for All and Leaving No Woman or Girl Behind*. Therefore, ASEAN countries have engaged women's organisations, including in the preparation of their SDG voluntary national review. For example, when Indonesia prepared its first voluntary national review in 2017, various women groups were involved, such as the Women's Health Foundation (YKP), Mothers and Children's Health Movement (GKIA), Kapal Perempuan, Women Research

Institute (WRI), Indonesian Women Coalition, and Women's Crisis Center.

Analysis of the voluntary national review reports of ASEAN Member States revealed that they have set up institutional arrangements to oversee the implementation, coordination and monitoring of the SDGs. In most cases, SDG governance was created as a multi-stakeholder platform for different ministries and stakeholders. In some countries, the head of government's office directly hosts or manages the platform. For example, the Special Committee for the National Coordination of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Brunei Darussalam, which oversees the implementation and monitoring process of SDGs in the country, is hosted by the Prime Minister's office. Likewise, the National SDG Council of Malaysia, which guides Malaysia's efforts to achieve the SDGs, is supported by a national steering committee chaired by the economic planning unit at the Prime Minister's department.

In other cases, a multi-stakeholder platform is under the auspices of a government agency or ministry. For example, Indonesia established the SDGs National Coordination Team under a steering committee led by the President of Indonesia

5 GENDER
EQUALITY



More women are now participating in decision-making, but parity has not been reached.

20%

of **parliament seats are occupied by WOMEN.**

In the ASEAN region, child marriage rates are among the lowest in the world but efforts are needed to fully eliminate violence and harmful practices.

WOMEN make up **24%**

of **middle and senior managers** in the private sector.



16%

OF GIRLS still **marry before turning 18**

Source: ASEAN and UN Women. (2021). *ASEAN Gender Outlook: Achieving the SDGs for All and Leaving No Woman or Girl Behind*. https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/ASEAN/ASEAN%20Gender%20Outlook_final.pdf

and coordinated by the Ministry of National Development Planning. Similarly, in the Lao PDR, its National Steering Committee for SDG has a National SDG Secretariat under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the Philippines, its Sub-Committee on the SDGs' secretariat is under the National Economic and Development Authority. In the same vein, Thailand's National Committee for Sustainable Development, which serves as the main mechanism to advance SDG policies at the national level, has the National Economic and Social Development Council as the coordinating focal point. Finally, Singapore's Inter-Ministry Committee on SDGs coordinates the SDG progress and is co-led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In some other cases, coordinating SDG implementation is assigned to a specific ministry, such as the Ministry of Planning in Cambodia and the Ministry of Planning and Finance in Myanmar. Likewise, supported by the Inter-Sectoral Working Group on SDGs, the Ministry of Planning and Investment of Viet Nam coordinates the implementation of the SDGs in the country while the National Council on Sustainable Development and Competitiveness Enhancement advises the government of Viet Nam on sustainable development issues.

These platforms for SDG governance present a huge opportunity to draw the active participation of women. Adequate and continuous representation of women on these platforms can help ensure that their voices are heard. Still, more than mere representation in SDG governing bodies is needed. Member States should ensure that women have meaningful participation, influence, and strategic roles so that policies, programmes, budgets, and monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs reflect the needs and concerns of women.

Furthermore, governments should strengthen the participation and leadership of women in the broader arena of public governance and decision-making. Despite some progress in the past few years, women's political empowerment is an area that needs special attention. The *ASEAN Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Baseline Report 2020* found that, on average, the share of women in national parliaments in ASEAN was only 19.6 per cent in 2018.

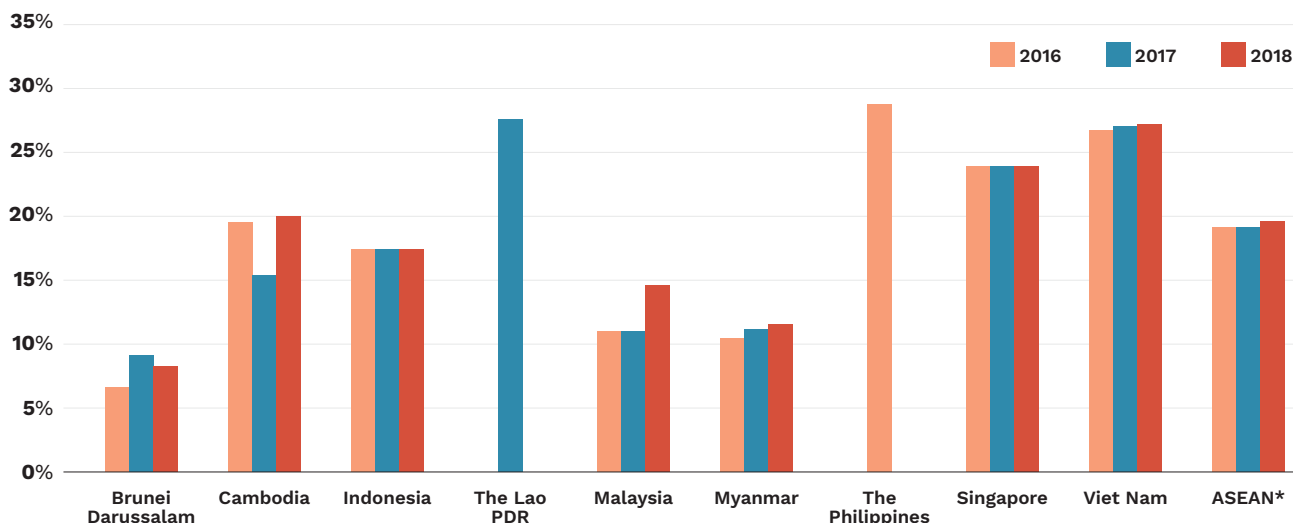
Engaging women in SDG work and public governance is in line with ASEAN's efforts at the regional level. In 2017, the regional group issued the ASEAN Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and Sustainable Development Goals.

Among others, the declaration called for women's equal access to and full participation in decision-making bodies and mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, including in the areas of policy, plan and programme formulation, implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation.

Moving forward, it is crucial to ensure meaningful involvement and participation of women in the remaining seven years to achieve the SDGs. They should be involved throughout the process, not just in certain aspects, such as preparing voluntary national reports. These opportunities should be available to various women's groups, including disadvantaged women in rural areas, women with disabilities, migrant women, and women in poor households. To this end, it is essential to increase investment to enhance their capacities.

At the same time, policymakers should continue strengthening women's participation and leadership in public governance. The ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025 guides how policies, institutions, and practices can better advocate the needs of women and girls.

Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments in ASEAN, 2016–2018



Source: ASEAN. (2020). *ASEAN Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Baseline Report 2020*. <https://asean.org/book/asean-sustainable-development-goals-indicators-baseline-report-2020/>

Gender Barriers in Education and Health

A Story from East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia



Ajeng Purnama Pratiwi

Senior Officer

Poverty Eradication and Gender Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

The ASEAN region has made progress in many sectors, but challenges remain, especially in the area of girls' and women's access to health and education.

Meryana (not her real name) is a 12-year old girl from Noinbila, a small village in South Central Timor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. This year, she had to give up on her dream of going to junior high school. Due to economic hardships exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, her parents could only send one of their children to school, Meryana's older brother, Ronald (not his real name).

East Nusa Tenggara's harsh geographic conditions have forced many families, like Meryana's, to seek other sources of income. Most people in the area rely on natural resources for their livelihood, like farming. However, some villages in South Central Timor Regency often experience water shortages due to the long dry season, which then limits the harvest period to just once a year. Villagers would store their crops for the following year's stock or until the next harvest season. Agricultural production would only be sufficient for household consumption.

To survive these harsh conditions, Meryana is expected to augment her family income by doing domestic work, such as fetching clean water up the hills or helping her parents in the corn fields. Like most girls from her village, she is also expected to take on jobs like waitressing in Kupang, the capital of East Nusa Tenggara Province.

Meryana's case shows that the burden of the pandemic is bearing down more heavily on vulnerable groups, including women and girls in East Nusa Tenggara. In addition, the

pandemic has made long-existing economic and social inequities more evident.

The gender barriers in education experienced by Meryana are also evident in some ASEAN countries. Studies indicate that girls are more likely to drop out of school early or miss school days than boys. In many cases, girls are forced to stay at home and perform household chores instead of attending school. Moreover, some communities believe investing in boys' education is more worthwhile than investing in girls', as they see boys as the future breadwinners or community leaders. These barriers deny girls' right to education, and also limit their opportunities for economic empowerment and personal development. This cultural bias against girls' education is particularly evident in rural areas, where girls are more likely to be excluded from school.

Another issue is the lack of access to educational resources. In many ASEAN countries, some schools are located far away from students' homes, and transportation is not readily available. This lack of access can disproportionately affect girls, who may face safety concerns and cultural barriers to travelling and attending school.

It has therefore become imperative to develop and implement policies and programmes at the regional level that ensure equal access to education for all regardless of gender. These include investing in girls' education and supporting programmes that address the root causes of gender inequality, such as early marriage and discrimination. The ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW), in partnership with the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Education (SOM-ED), will develop and implement guidelines on the elimination of gender stereotypes and prejudices in the education system by next year. In addition, the private sector can also play a role by investing in education and training programmes that target girls and women, providing them with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the workforce.

In addition to education, gender barriers that affect women's access to healthcare is still apparent in the region. Women in rural and remote areas often face limited access to

“

I want to be a teacher, a role model for children in Noibila [Village] to look up to. There are not many teachers here in this village. To become a teacher, I have to continue my study, at least until senior high school. If my parents allow me to work in Kupang, I will use my savings to cover the tuition fees. I will be teaching in Noinbila. I want to inspire children in my village – I want them to be brave, and dream big.

healthcare facilities and services due to geographic, economic, and cultural obstacles. They also face discrimination from healthcare providers who may not take their health concerns seriously or who may hold negative attitudes towards women's reproductive health.

Moreover, cultural beliefs and practices around reproductive health also impact girls' and women's access to healthcare and education. Access to reproductive healthcare, including maternal and family planning services, is often limited due to cultural and religious beliefs, which could lead to unintended pregnancies and maternal mortality.

To address these challenges, investment in health infrastructure and services that are accessible and responsive to the needs of women and girls, is necessary. This includes allocating resources to expand access to family planning and maternal healthcare services, and address the social and cultural norms that limit women's access to healthcare. Women's groups and civil society organisations can also play a critical role in advocating for women's rights and raising awareness about the importance of gender equality in healthcare.

Ultimately, eliminating gender barriers to education and healthcare requires a holistic approach that starts with addressing the root causes of gender inequality. These include breaking down the social norms and stereotypes that perpetuate gender-based discrimination, and investing in policies and programmes that promote gender equality and empower girls and women.

While gender barriers in education and health remain significant challenges in the region, it is important to acknowledge ASEAN's notable progress towards achieving gender equality and promoting inclusive development. One of the key initiatives undertaken by ASEAN in this regard is the adoption of the ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Children. It includes provisions for education and awareness-raising programmes to prevent violence and access for healthcare and social services for victims. In addition, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint signifies ASEAN's commitment to promote gender equality and empower women and girls in the ASEAN region. It includes targets for increasing women's access to education and healthcare, and measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

The development of quality gender data and robust evidence is critical to informed decision-making. It will ensure that policy responses are effective and responsive to the needs of women and girls in the region's most vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Breaking barriers to health and education will allow many girls like Meryana to pursue their dreams. “I want to be a teacher, a role model for children in Noibila [Village] to look up to. There are not many teachers here in this village. To become a teacher, I have to continue my studies, at least until senior high school. If my parents allow me to work in Kupang, I will use my savings to cover the tuition fees. I will be teaching in Noinbila. I want to inspire children in my village. I want them to be brave, and dream big.”

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON GIRLS' EDUCATION, SAFETY

The global survey on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, undertaken by Save the Children, revealed the following:

While many countries offered internet-based distance learning options during the pandemic, girls, displaced children, and the poorest children are often unable to access the internet or the necessary technology to access online learning platforms.



63%

of girl respondents said their household chores increased,



while

52%

said they spent more time caring for siblings and others since the pandemic began. Girls reported that this stopped them from being able to study, at twice the rate of boys.

Violence at home doubled when schools were closed. The reported rate was

17% compared to **8%**

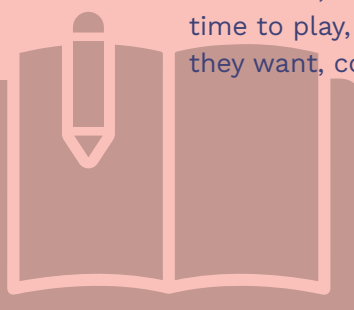
when schools were open.

Schools provide a safe haven for children, especially girls, as they are protected from domestic violence, early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and child labour.



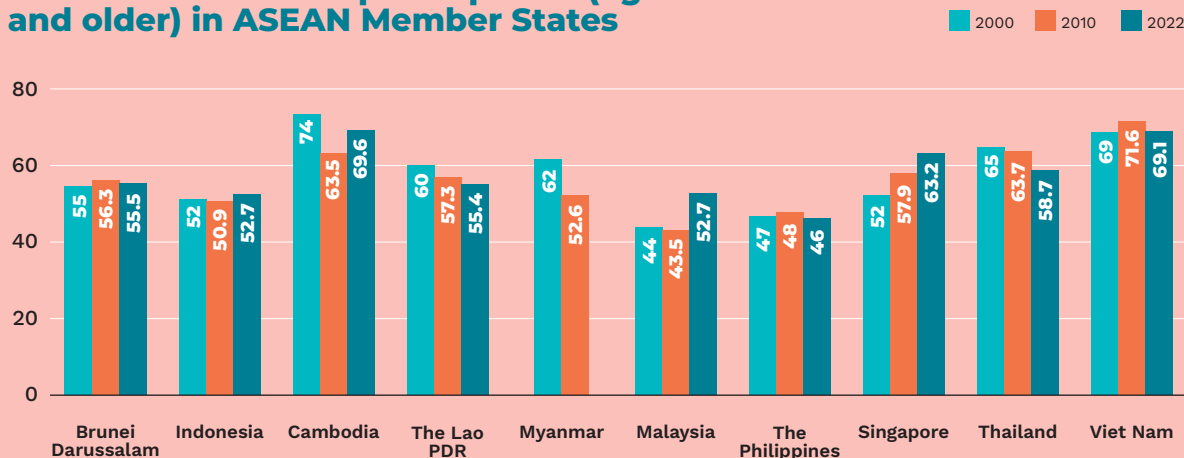
20%

of girls said they have too many chores to do to be able to learn. Because of the longer hours that they spend on chores, they have less time to play, study or do what they want, compared to boys.



Economic Participation of Women

Female labour force participation (aged 15 and older) in ASEAN Member States

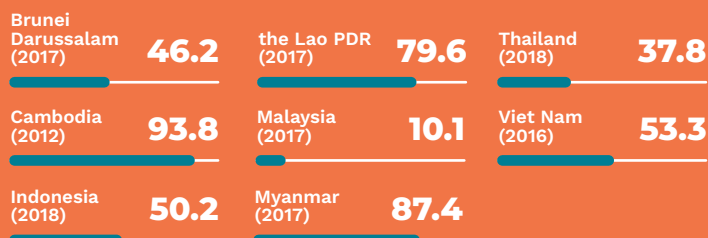


Note: ILO modelled estimates



Source: ILOSTAT Explorer, https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer37/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=EAP_2WAP_SEX_AGE_RT_A

Rate of informal employment of women, excluding agriculture

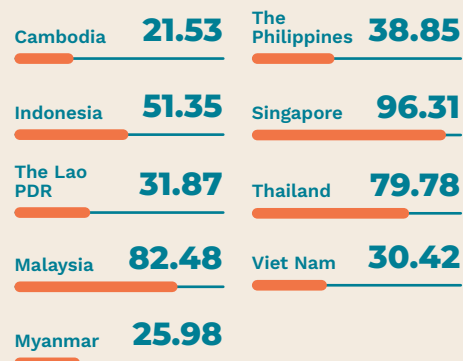


Note: The rate of informal employment is defined as the number of informally employed females divided by the number of females employed. In the case of Malaysia, informal employment is counted only for those in the informal sector and includes only workers up to 64 years of age, so figures for Malaysia are not straightforwardly comparable to those in other countries.



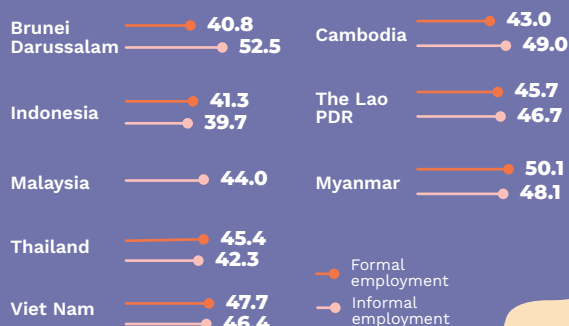
Source: ASEAN. (2020). *Regional Study on Informal employment Statistics to Support Decent Work Promotion in ASEAN*. <https://asean.org/book/regional-study-on-informal-employment-statistics-to-support-decent-work-promotion-in-asean/>

Proportion of females (15 years old and above) with an account in a financial institution or mobile-money service provider



Source: UN Women. (2020). *Regional Study on Informal employment Statistics to Support Decent Work Promotion in ASEAN*. <https://asean.org/book/regional-study-on-informal-employment-statistics-to-support-decent-work-promotion-in-asean/>

Total hours worked in a week in formal/informal employment, excluding agriculture

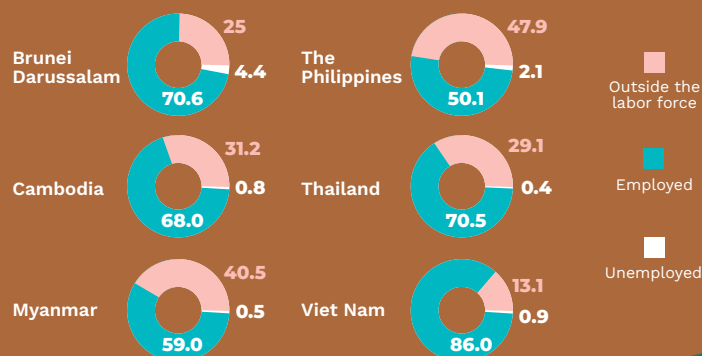


Note: The labour force surveys of ASEAN Member States typically use the "previous week" as reference period, referring to the past seven days preceding the date of the interviewer's visit to the respondent; the number of hours per week considered full-time differs across AMS, and is 40 hours for most but only 35 for Lao PDR and Thailand; in the case of Malaysia, the informal employment is counted only for those in the informal sector and includes only workers up to 64 years of age, so figures for Malaysia are not straightforwardly comparable to those in other countries.



Source: ASEAN. (2020). Regional Study on Informal employment Statistics to Support Decent Work Promotion in ASEAN. <https://asean.org/book/regional-study-on-informal-employment-statistics-to-support-decent-work-promotion-in-asean/>

Labour status of unpaid female carers in select ASEAN countries (%)



Note: Unpaid carers refer to persons living with dependents or care recipients. Persons outside of the labour force are those not actively seeking work (neither employed nor unemployed).



Source: ILO. (2018). Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf

Gender differences in paid work and unpaid care work (hours per day)

♀ Women

4:25 3:03 7:28

♂ Men

1:23 5:21 6:44

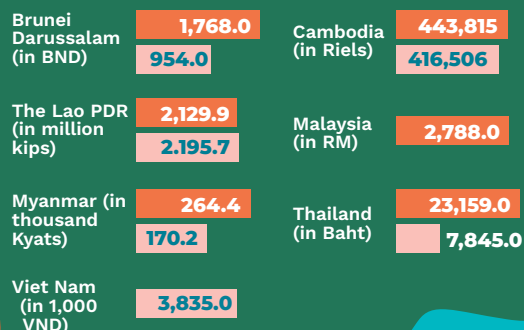
Unpaid Care Work Paid Work

Note: Based on a global study covering 64 countries representing 67 per cent of the world's working-age population.



Source: ILO. (2018). Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf

Average earnings by formal/informal employment, excluding agriculture



Note: In the case of Malaysia, data refers to salaries and wages of citizens age 15 to 64 years who were employed either as full-time employees, employees who did not work during the reference month but received salaries and wages and will definitely be called for work, employees who worked for at least 6 hours a day or at least 20 days a month for the usual occupation done every month, or contract workers in the government sector.



Source: ASEAN. (2020). Regional Study on Informal employment Statistics to Support Decent Work Promotion in ASEAN. <https://asean.org/book/regional-study-on-informal-employment-statistics-to-support-decent-work-promotion-in-asean/>

ASEAN's Care Economy

Putting More Value on Care Work



Miguel Rafael V. Musngi

*Head, Poverty Eradication and Gender Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department*



Jacel Javier-Paguio

*Senior Officer, Poverty Eradication and Gender Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department*



Unpacking unpaid care and domestic work

The provision of care work that is largely unremunerated continues to fall on the shoulders of women and girls. Globally, women spend an average of over 250 minutes each day performing unpaid care work. This is thrice the amount of time men spend (UN DESA, 2023). It is estimated that 21.7 per cent of working-age women, or around 606 million, perform unpaid care work on a full-time basis, in contrast to 1.5 per cent of men or 41 million (ILO, 2019; ASEAN and UNESCAP, 2021).

The world is facing rapid population ageing, with some of the fastest ones found in ASEAN. Globally, by 2050, the number of persons aged 65 years or older is expected to double, exceeding 1.6 billion. While longevity is a huge development gain, the provision of long-term care remains unpaid and falls on family members. A closer look at the data reveals that women live longer lives than their male counterparts. In their old age, women provide more care for family members: they play critical roles in providing long-term care, and “bear the brunt of deficiencies as they comprise the majority of both care recipients and paid and unpaid care givers,” especially those with disabilities. Current estimates indicate that globally, women contribute 71 per cent of the estimated time allotted to unpaid care for people with dementia. And such allocation increases to 80 per cent in low-income countries (Alzheimer’s Disease International, 2018; UN DESA, 2023).

External shocks such as disasters and pandemics increase the amount of unpaid care and domestic work assumed by women and girls. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 30 per cent of women noted an increase in domestic work, compared with 16 per cent for men, in the ASEAN Member States (UN Women and ASEAN, 2021).

Rural women, in particular, rely more on natural resources for their livelihoods than men do. Climate change-related disasters, such as storms, floods, droughts, and earthquakes, adversely affect women’s productive work—agricultural

production and off-farm productive activities—and unpaid work such as collecting water and firewood.

The provision of care, including unpaid care and domestic work, affect the caregivers themselves. Like paid workers, they experience significant physical and mental stress. For example, older women providing care may face more challenges when caring for older relatives and other family members (UN DESA, 2023).

Social inequality is also observed in care work. Women and girls living in poverty are more vulnerable because they spend more time on unpaid care and domestic work than their wealthier counterparts. They have little or no capacity to pay for domestic help or to buy time- and labour-saving devices.

Rural women spend more time in unpaid care and domestic work than women in urban areas. And in developing countries, large portions of the urban population live in slums with limited or no access to safe water and decent housing. These cause women and girls in urban slums “to be especially vulnerable as they struggle with water collection and cooking with harmful fuels” (UN Women and ASEAN, 2021).

The value of unpaid care work is substantial. UN DESA estimates that around 16.4 billion hours spent on unpaid care work every day is equivalent to 2 billion people working eight hours per day with no remuneration (Scheil-Adlung, 2015; UN DESA, 2023). On the other hand, Oxfam (2020) estimates that unpaid care and domestic work contribute at least 10.8 trillion US dollars a year to the global economy.

The study, *Addressing Unpaid Care Work in ASEAN*, indicates that due to the region’s economic growth, care infrastructure, such as safe water, sanitation, transportation, and food, is now more available, especially in urban areas. However, countries with large rural populations still have inadequate access to care infrastructure compared with their urban counterparts.

The study observed progress in certain countries on the coverage of basic benefits in the formal sector. But,

since women are overrepresented in the informal sector, there is a need to shift the provision of care policies to benefit the informal sector workforce. And although the region has social protection measures, a closer look reveals that countries can better address the care-differentiated needs of women in care-related social protection programmes. Moreover, population ageing and the resulting intensification of women's care work make it essential to revisit policies and programmes on care services for both paid and unpaid provisions of care.

Unpaid carers have limited access to social protection that can lift them out of poverty and emergencies. This lack of protection reinforces the idea that unpaid care work can be invisible. It is an urgent problem that must be addressed as it leaves vulnerable and at-risk people, like unpaid carers, grappling with poverty and economic dependence. With an average social protection expenditure at 5.3 per cent of aggregate GDP and an average expenditure per intended beneficiary

of 4.0 per cent of GDP per capita in 2015 across Asia (ADB, 2019), there is still much work to do as the social protection landscape has changed dramatically post-COVID-19.

ASEAN Comprehensive Framework on Care Economy

Adopted by the ASEAN Leaders in October 2021, the framework places “care” at the centre of public policy, with initiatives on care and care work contributing to “sustaining, continuing and repairing the world we live in.” It utilises a whole-of-ASEAN approach to promote care economy in the region as it outlines strategic priorities and relevant sectoral initiatives to realise an ASEAN Care Economy.

A key feature of the framework is its recognition that care work permeates various settings and formal and informal economies. It looks at care

work and the economy across ASEAN labour markets and their increasing demand for child care, care for the older persons, and the concomitant reforms in care policies, infrastructure and services. More importantly, the framework broadens the scope of the “care economy” to encompass care work—both paid and unpaid—and other related areas. For instance, “paid care work” includes public services, elder care, and domestic work, while “unpaid care work” covers care in “familial, community, or other types of relationships.” The other related areas cover “reskilling and upskilling employability in sectors that are crucial in the context of a care economy, embracing of new technologies towards lifelong learning; hospitality (tourism) in terms of the changing demographic; development of creative industry and encouraging social entrepreneurship especially for the benefit of the vulnerable groups; as well as smart cities to smart homes, etc.”

Strategic Priorities of the ASEAN Comprehensive Framework on Care Economy



Strategic Priority 1
Promoting Healthy Ageing
and Leveraging Opportunities
in Ageing Societies in
Southeast Asia



Strategic Priority 2
Enhancing the Role of the
Care Economy in Building a
Disaster Resilient ASEAN



Strategic Priority 3
Accelerating Technology
Innovations and Digital
Transformation of the Care
Economy in ASEAN



Strategic Priority 4
Building Stronger and
Resilient Families as the
Foundation as the foundation
of the Care Economy



Strategic Priority 5
Enhancing Social Protection/
Leaving No One Behind



Strategic Priority 6
Resilience and Care for the
Environment

“

A key feature of the framework is its recognition that care work permeates various settings and formal and informal economies.

In sum, valuing care work, particularly unpaid care and domestic work, towards building an ASEAN Care Economy, needs to be guided by the 4R approach: Recognise, Reduce, Redistribute, and Represent.

- Recognise unpaid care work as work that has value and raise the visibility of its contributions to the economy and society as a whole. Such recognition needs to be reflected in government policies and budgetary allocations, and through the generation and collection of statistical data to inform policies and programmes.
- Reduce the number of hours spent on unpaid care work by ensuring and enhancing access to care support infrastructures and services.
- Redistribute unpaid care work equitably within the household and, broadly, in the community, public institutions and the private sector.

- Represent providers of care, particularly women and girls, and amplify their voices in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes on care work through meaningful and substantive participation in decision-making processes.

An enabling environment that lets women and girls thrive and prosper and empowers the most vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities and older persons, is essential to building a resilient care economy. It also requires strengthening human capacities, especially the social service workforce, to implement strategic and catalytic interventions for these groups. The interventions include effective social welfare and social protection measures that go beyond charity to reach the people who need them most for decent living.

References may be downloaded from the following link:




https://docs.google.com/document/d/1pC4Hvtf1VYtXdSLAeOZF_0j3A3y-qvhK/edit



ASEAN Publications on Women


Strengthening Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Disaster Responsive Social Protection and Anticipatory Action in ASEAN (2023)

The policy brief aims to help ASEAN Member States, sectoral bodies, and partners implement the ASEAN Guidelines on Disaster Responsive Social Protection to Increase Resilience and the ASEAN Framework on Anticipatory Action in Disaster Management. It discusses the current situation in the region, including the factors that enable or hinder gender equality and social inclusion in disaster-responsive social protection and anticipatory action of Member States. It identifies areas of action and key recommendations.

 <https://asean.org/book/strengthening-gender-equality-and-social-inclusion-in-disaster-responsive-social-protection-and-anticipatory-action-in-asean/>


Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in Agriculture in ASEAN Countries (2021)

This report explores ways to improve the employment and business opportunities of rural women in ASEAN countries. It examines policy options for reducing barriers (e.g. gender discrimination, unpaid work, lack of training, lack of credit access) that limit women's economic prospects in agriculture and farming. It reviews the impact of COVID-19 on rural women and the responses of ASEAN governments. (co-published with the OECD)

 <https://asean.org/book/strengthening-womens-entrepreneurship-in-agriculture-in-asean-countries/>


ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace, and Security (2021)

The study examines the frameworks and institutional mechanisms for WPS at the regional and national levels; the participation and representation of women in peace processes and decision-making; the protection and prevention of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations; and the relief and recovery efforts for women and girls affected by conflict and humanitarian crises. It cites a number of recommendations for enhancing WPS implementation in the ASEAN region, including strengthening coordination and collaboration among stakeholders, increasing funding and capacity-building, and enhancing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. (co-published with UN Women and USAID)

 <https://asean.org/book/asean-regional-study-on-women-peace-and-security/>


Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in National Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) Policies and Action Plans (2022)

The publication provides an overview of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the region and the impact of COVID-19 on their businesses. It also gives examples of good practices and policy innovations from Member States. It includes a self-assessment tool that aims to help ASEAN policymakers and administrators responsible for MSME development design more gender-responsive MSME policies and projects, and make the MSME sector more gender-inclusive. (co-published with UN ESCAP, with support from the government of Canada)

 <https://asean.org/book/strengthening-womens-entrepreneurship-in-national-micro-small-and-medium-enterprise-policies-and-action-plans/>

The ASEAN magazine (April-May 2021) "Gender Equality: Bridge to Progress"

The magazine issue includes interviews with key stakeholders on ASEAN's progress towards achieving gender equality and efforts to address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women. It showcases inspiring stories of women and the journeys they took to pursue their passions and advocacies.

 <https://asean.org/serial/the-asean-magazine-gender-equality-bridge-to-progress/>



Viewpoint

Why Strengthening Mental Fitness and Resilience is Crucial for Older Women



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Khadijah Alavi
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

A 72-year-old woman sells roti canai to stay active and continue earning an income

For over 60 years, rapid development has taken place in the ASEAN and Malaysian communities. Six decades is a long time, and a variety of social changes have taken place during that period. Development is aimed at upgrading or elevating the life status of communities towards that of developed countries in the aspects of health, economy, urbanisation, and formal education. However, behind this developmental progress is the impact of the changes on the lives and well-being of older people.

One of the most significant factors for women is their longer lifespan than men. By 2020, the average life expectancy of ASEAN's women was 73.2 years, based on data from 11 countries. The highest life expectancy was in Singapore (83.7 years), followed by Thailand (79.3), Malaysia (75.9), and the lowest age was in Myanmar at 66.8 years (World Bank, 2021).

An increase in life expectancy tends to cause changes in women's life events. For example, Shobhit et al. (2021) found that an estimated 350 million people lost their spouses by 2020, and 80 per cent of them are women. The increase in mortality among older men is higher than in women, due to biological and social factors like marriage age gaps, less healthy lifestyles, high-risk jobs, and prohibited substance intake among men. However, women over 60 are less likely to remarry than men. Losing a partner among older women can also cause prolonged depression, loneliness, loss of appetite, sleep disorders, and a fear of dealing with society, which disrupt their daily routines and quality of life.

Changes that occur in the everyday life of an older woman can impact her well-being. These life changing events refer to the loss of family members, retirement, illness, and death. Among older women, these changes have serious implications for socioeconomic status, community engagement, health status, and emotional well-being.

One of these socioeconomic implications for older women in Southeast Asia is not having a job or a steady income. In Malaysia, in the 55- to 75-year-old age group, there is a significant difference in resources and total income between older men and older women. Older men with pensionable income report a higher mean income than older women (Hamid et al., 2004; Jariah et al., 2008; Norlaila et al., 2008). Thus, older women depend more on their children for financial and social support. In other cases, they may have little savings or meagre income after retirement, which are insufficient to support living costs in the long term. Savings in the Employee Provident

Fund (EPF) are also used for various purposes until there is nothing left to support life after retirement (Suraiya, 2007). This situation becomes more critical when the majority of respondents do not have health insurance to cover their health needs (Khadijah & Fazni, 2022).

Southeast Asia faces an ageing population. A shrinking youth population gives rise to societal implications for older women who are often considered the family's guardians and care providers. In almost all of the ASEAN region and Malaysia, older women 60 years old and older voluntarily care for their elderly parents in their 90s. The types of care provided by daughters include practical care (e.g. laundry, food preparation, child care, and house cleaning); personal help (e.g. talking about problems and giving advice); material help (e.g. money and gifts); and health care (e.g. medical costs, dementia care, stroke). Most of these older women report high levels of psychological stress due to the burdens from caregiving tasks, consequently putting their own health at risk.

In addition, the increase in cases of divorce, drug addiction, pregnancy out of wedlock, and cases of rape among younger generations have resulted in many children living or returning to their grandparents. This phenomenon causes older women to deal with multiple challenges, pressures, and constant burdens near the end of their lives (Doris & Khadijah, 2021).

Living longer also has implications for the health status and mobility of older women. They are more prone to diseases, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and gout. Most are lifestyle diseases related to poor nutrition, lack of movement/physical activity/leisure, and stress. The ageing process and health status affect women's ability to manage themselves (Nur Syakiran 2017; Khadijah & Fazni, 2022).

The increased prevalence of chronic diseases among older people has also led to disability sickness requiring intensive care. Long-term care facilities and services are essential for chronic patients. This



dependence has caused overcrowding in wards and long periods of care in hospitals, resulting in many cases of older neglect due to the absence of informal caregivers (Siti Zaila & Khadijah, 2016). The increased life expectancy of more senior women also affects mental health. The mental health issue of the older adults starts with loneliness, depression, anxiety, emotional disturbances, dementia, and Alzheimer's. There is a complex relationship between loneliness, social isolation, and dementia diagnosis (Hartigan, 2019). The majority of older people, especially in cities, live in solitary environments. Families and society often take for granted, belittle, and make fun of the mental health symptoms of older adults, which impact their physical health and lead to death (Siti Marziah et al., 2013). How a person internalises the coping strategy through emotional, cognitive, physiological, or social support determines a person's perception of the quality of life.

Resilience is the ability to use survival experience, adaptation, and coping systems to deal with any circumstances and emerge stronger. It is the ability to recover from a difficult life experience. These traits can be learned and can have an effect on successful and healthy ageing.



An older woman receives appreciation from the community for her care work

Resilience is a dynamic process that facilitates an individual's ability to overcome challenges at different points throughout their life course. Resilience refers to the psychological, emotional, and physical resilience of a person in the face of stress and crisis in the flow of life. It is also the ability of women to rise from a variety of problems, challenges, and crises.

Older women can maintain their mental fitness and psychological well-being despite the biological, physical, and mental challenges associated with ageing. Some of these challenges include the difficulty of learning or adjusting to new technologies. Older women must enhance their self-esteem and resilience by using power strategies and skills. This will help them cope with both positive and negative changes and improve their emotional and psychological well-being.

Drastic and sudden changes in life pose difficult challenges for older women. However, life goes on. Resilience helps them cope with difficult life experiences. Resilience can be developed by focusing on one's mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Social support from family members also helps older women manage themselves and the environment.

Previous studies suggest that older women need six levels of strength to face the challenges of increasingly complex life events (Khadijah et al., 2021; Shobhit et al., 2021; Hasani, 2017).

1. Older women frequently avoid or distance themselves from some life crises. Developing positive attachment to adult children and the community can help older women face their daily life crisis and increase resilience.
2. Most older women have trouble sleeping (acute insomnia). Sleep is medicine and has beneficial effects, emphasising the importance of maintaining a pattern of naps as beneficial for increasing energy and stamina for the older woman.
3. Physical movement such as bathing, dressing, and grooming all contribute to keeping the muscles, body, and soul moving, which improves resilience and mental fitness.
4. Emotional resilience is about learning positive and healthy thoughts, self-talk, behaviours, mental strength, mental fitness, and actions as women age.
5. Belief systems give women hope. Older persons say that faith in God is important in their life, along with reading the scriptures, and praying.
6. Role reversal or learning new roles after life-altering events like loss of a loved one, being entrusted with child care or education, managing finances or inheritance, health problems, and so on.



The references may be downloaded from the following link: <https://shorturl.at/fCQU2>

This article was contributed through the Chair of the Senior Officials Meeting for

Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD). The ASEAN would like to thank SOMSWD Malaysia for its contribution to this issue.

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

ASEAN-US Science Prize for Women 2022



Ixora Tri Devi

Staff Writer, The ASEAN

*ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
Department*



Pricilia Putri Nirmala Sari

Officer, ASCC Analysis Division

*ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
Department*

For 2022, the Underwriters Laboratories-ASEAN-US Science Prize for Women was awarded to four outstanding women scientists in the field of artificial intelligence in health and safety.

Dr. Sok Ching Cheong, Head of the Digital Health Research Unit of Cancer Research Malaysia, and Dr. Supiya Charoensiriwath, principal researcher at Thai National Electronics and Computer Technology Center, took the top honours and received 12,500 US dollars each.

Also recognised were Dr. Siriwan Suebnukarn of Thailand and Dr. Maxine Tan of Malaysia, who garnered honourable mentions and a 5,000-US-dollar prize each.

According to the UN, only 33 per cent of the world's scientific researchers are women. Only a fifth (22 per cent) of professionals in cutting-edge fields like artificial intelligence represent women.

The annual ASEAN-US Science Prize for Women aims to narrow the gap, strengthen women's capacity in science and technology, and promote gender equality. Since 2014, it has provided a space for women scientists in the region to showcase their academic and professional achievements.

The prize is organised by the ASEAN Committee on Science, Technology, and Innovation (COSTI) in partnership with the US Government through the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and UL Research Institutes.

Last year, the prize received at least 64 impressive submissions from all over the region—from early oral cancer detection to promoting well-being and improving nutritional

health in children. Women scientists from Southeast Asia have once again raised the bar for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

In his congratulatory message, ASEAN COSTI Chair Bui The Duy conveyed that AI innovations will benefit and inspire the next generation from all over the region and beyond. "Maximising the use of artificial intelligence in providing access and care the way these women have, not only empowers people, but saves lives in the ASEAN Community," he said.

This year, the award will focus on the theme of electrification. It aims to emphasise the role of female scientists who are working to develop a sustainable society and inspiring more women to pursue careers in STEM.

The 2022 ASEAN-US Prize for Women Awardees

Dr. Sok Ching Cheong

Head of the Digital Health Research Unit of Cancer Research Malaysia

Professor Sok Ching Cheong has devoted her entire life's work to fighting cancer in her homeland. Working with Cancer Research Malaysia, an independent non-profit research organisation based in Malaysia, she focuses on utilising digital health and artificial intelligence for the early detection of oral cancer.

In her introduction video for ASEAN-US Science Prize for Women 2022, Dr. Cheong presented MeMoSa, Mobile Mouth Screening Anywhere. The digital health platform uses artificial intelligence to classify oral lesions and helps patients with oral cancer and those at risk.

The technology uses data to develop deep learning algorithms using convolutional neural networks for disease classification. Therefore, this technology can reduce reliance on specialists. In most places in Asia

and ASEAN, oral cancer detection requires an examination by a specialist. Dependence on specialists is a challenge in low and middle-income countries where specialists are limited, and they are tough to access in remote settings.

According to Dr. Cheong's colleague and associate professor at the University of Malaya, Prof. Dr Siti Mazlipah Binti Ismail, MeMoSa is becoming more urgent as 74 per cent of oral cancer deaths occur in Asia. Moreover, among ASEAN countries, oral cancer is the 5th most common cancer, and survival is poor due to late disease presentation. "MeMoSa benefits oral cancer patients not only in Malaysia but also in other Asian countries where the oral cancer burden is very high," said Prof. Ismail.

Echoing Prof. Ismail, Dr. Senthilmani Rajendran, a research associate at

Cancer Research Malaysia, said that she could see how MeMoSa would pave the way to better patient care and survival. "Being a clinician, I saw firsthand how oral cancer patients suffered due to late disease detection. I believe that technological advancements like artificial intelligence and digital health can improve accessibility to care for patients and streamline the use of healthcare resources."

Dr. Cheong added that they plan to test MeMoSa in three countries soon. "MeMoSa will enable anyone with a smartphone to participate in the early detection process, thus empowering the individual to take responsibility for their health," she concluded.



Photo Credit: ©Dr. Sok Ching Cheong



Dr. Supiya Charoensiriwath

Principal Researcher at Thai National Electronics and Computer Technology Center

of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation to promote health and well-being.

In cooperation with the agency, Dr. Charoensiriwath and her team produced various innovative apps, namely MyHealth Thailand, FoodiEat, and FoodChoice. These apps have generated a vast amount of data supporting the nation's non-communicable diseases prevention policies.

Dr. Charoensiriwath, who is both a leading scientist and a mother, drew inspiration from these dual roles to build her next nutrition app, KidDiary. "When I became a parent, I then realised that my expertise in AI could also be applied to improve children's health and nutrition."

In 2012, KidDiary was launched as a data-sharing platform for parents, schools, and hospitals to monitor child growth and development. A plug-in framework allows external child-

related health assessment tools to connect and exchange data. This way, she said, a complete health record for each child can be constructed to make full use of various AI techniques to detect possible health issues automatically.

KidDiary and another app her team made, Thai School Lunch, are now national digital platforms being used by over 45,000 schools, covering approximately 8 million children. The health of these children is assessed and monitored through the apps.

"For some children, having lunch at school may be the only meal they have that day," she said. "I still have the same passion for wanting to drive new initiatives to improve the quality of life for all children regardless of their social background. I would like to inspire other women, especially the younger generation, to come up with new innovations to make a difference to our future society."

Photo Credit: ©Dr. Supiya Charoensiriwath

Dr. Supiya Charoensiriwath has worked on health and nutrition for 17 years. Her first project was Size Thailand, where they used 3D body scanning technology to construct the national body size charts. In her introduction video for ASEAN-US Science Prize for Women 2022, Dr. Charoensiriwath explained how Size Thailand led to the discovery that a third of the Thai population was overweight or obese.

After Size Thailand, Dr. Charoensiriwath continued working with the Thai National Science and Technology Development Agency under the Ministry

Professor Siriwan Suebnukarn, DDS, Ph.D.

Vice Rector for Research and Innovation, Thammasat University, Thailand
(Honourable Mention – Senior Scientist Category)

Professor Siriwan Suebnukarn's unique background in dentistry and informatics has led her to pursue research on applying artificial intelligence to oral and maxillofacial diseases. With her team of surgeons and data scientists at Thammasat University, Thailand, she created the VisionMarker server, using cutting-edge technology for oral cancer detection.

"Cancer of the oral cavity is one of the ten most common cancers in the world. It caused 170,000 deaths in 2021, and two-thirds of them occurred in low- to middle-income countries, especially in Southeast Asia, where healthcare resources are



Photo Credit: ©Siriwan Suebnukarn

limited. We developed an intelligent oral cancer screening system to assist clinicians in detecting suspected cancer lesions,” explained Prof. Suebnukarn.

The VisionMarker allows for oral cancer images to be uploaded for image annotation. Experts would then mark the lesion boundaries and feed them to the machine for deep learning

model training so that the model would be able to detect cancer lesions in the images. This model has shown promising results in early cancer detection.

Combined with the use of intra-oral cameras and fluorescent aids, this system would allow for telemedicine and screening of potentially malignant oral disorders, saving patients’ lives

and reducing overall treatment costs. In collaboration with WHO, Thailand implemented this system for mobile cancer screening in remote areas during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For Prof. Suebnukarn, her life is about learning, living, and leading. “We must adapt ourselves to become a leader in driving social change and bringing benefits to society,” she said.

Dr. Maxine Tan

Senior Lecturer, School of Engineering, Monash University, Malaysia Campus

AI and Deep Learning Expert, Deep Learning Research Lab

(Honorable Mention – Mid-career Scientist Category)

Dr. Maxine Tan has been in the forefront of cancer early detection research, using her knowledge in medical imaging to develop computer-aided diagnosis for breast, ovarian, lung, and brain cancer.

Aside from her research in cancer detection, Dr. Tan is also passionate about supporting fellow women in pursuing their careers in STEM.

Along with her students, she won the first prize in epidemiologist Prof. John Hopper’s The Measurement Challenge. “For the past twenty years, we have been trying to find out how best to predict breast cancer risk in mammographic images. I set up an international challenge so that we can try different methods from different people across the world, and we found that Maxine Tan from Malaysia topped the bill. Her methods

were better than everyone else’s at predicting breast cancer risk. It is an incredible breakthrough for breast cancer control. Using artificial intelligence and digital mammograms could revolutionise breast cancer screening globally,” shared Prof. Hopper.

For Dr. Tan, developing this early screening method means more than just winning a competition. “What we are developing are new methods that not only detect breast cancer in current images but also in prior (much earlier) images. If we can detect any signs of breast cancer, and that would ultimately help women, and help doctors to find and detect breast cancers earlier.”



Read more about ASEAN-US Science Prize for Women at:



<https://asean.usmission.gov/underwriters-laboratories-asean-u-s-science-prize-for-women-2022-winners-announced/>



<https://asean.org/underwriters-laboratories-asean-u-s-science-prize-for-women-2022-winners-announced/>



Registration for the ASEAN Science Prize for Women 2023 is now open: <https://scienceprize4women.asean.org/>

CONVERSATIONS

Stories of Resilience: How Ordinary Women
Thrive in Extraordinary Times



Shiela May Pansoy

Police Captain



Joanne B. Agbisit

Associate Editor, The ASEAN

*ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
Department*

Shiela May Pansoy, a 39-year-old native of Davao del Sur, is one of the 37,000 women in the Philippine police force.

Shiela May dreamt of becoming a policewoman at an early age. Having experienced abuse first-hand as a child, she wanted to break the cycle of violence in her family and help others in a similar situation.

She recalled asking the police for help after a particularly violent incident but not being taken seriously.

“I ran all the way to the police station, terrified and desperate for help. But when I got there, none of the police officers gave me the time of day,” she said.

“Maybe it’s because I was a kid, or maybe because the laws protecting women and children were not available then. At that moment, I told myself, when I become a police officer, all children who set foot in the station will be given the attention they deserve.”

Shiela May said she wanted to be the kind of police officer that she needed when she was a child.

“My father’s way of disciplining us went too far. He had a vicious temper,” she recalled. “If I had an advocate when I was a child, my family’s suffering wouldn’t have been prolonged.”

Shiela May said learning about her father’s own brutal upbringing helped her gain empathy towards her father. Her training in psychology and her father’s transformation later in life also helped her come to terms with her difficult childhood.

Photo Credit: ©Shiela May Pansoy



Shiela May spearheads efforts to bring the police closer to the local community

Photo Credit: ©Shiela May Pansoy

In 2006, Shiela May fulfilled her dream of becoming a police officer after completing police training in Mintal, Davao City. As a young police officer, she was assigned to the women and children's protection desk, where she investigated cases of violence against women and children.

With her past experience, Shiela May said it was agonising to hear the stories of victim-survivors. "I struggled for a year or two because I absorbed and brought home their traumas. Sometimes I couldn't sleep thinking about the survivors, especially those who were raped. But it also motivated me, made me rush to the station to complete my work and help bring the perpetrators to justice," she said.

Shiela May realised that women- and children-survivors need holistic intervention. Thus, she activated the inter-agency referral system and worked in tandem with the municipality's social welfare and health units and *barangay* [village] officials for the quick and coordinated provision of services.

She also mentored and strengthened the capacities of women and children's protection desk officers to ensure the continuity of support. As a result, by the time Shiela May left her post, hundreds of cases had been filed, compared to only a few when she first started.

Shiela May's exceptional efforts to keep women and children in the community safe earned her a Metrobank Outstanding Filipino Award in 2017. The award is a prestigious and highly competitive award conferred to Filipino teachers, soldiers, and police officers who have made a profound and lasting impact on their community.

"The Metrobank award opened so many doors for me. I was not only promoted, but people respected and trusted me more. It is a constant reminder that I have to keep my reputation and integrity intact and to always give my best," she said.

For Shiela May, being female is not a hindrance to being a good police officer. In fact, she said women have unique traits that add value to police work.

"I think women handle cases differently," she observed. "We are more meticulous and detail-oriented. We conduct more interviews and don't leave out any person who can back up our case. For example, in a child abuse case, we dig more deeply—not just the what, when, and where. We ask about how the child felt during the abuse, how it impacted them. Some men tend to skim over these details.

"I also put myself in their (survivors') shoes. What if the crime happened to

me or to my child? So, when I receive a complaint, I immediately act on it. I do not put it off. Even on times I was on leave, I would respond when duty calls. Otherwise, I'd be disappointed in myself and feel like I'm letting others down."

She noted that the police force has welcomed more women to its ranks and recognises their distinct contributions and needs.

"There are now more women in my police station compared to a decade ago," she said. "They are assigned in the women and children's protection desk; community relations desk; and family, gender and development sections. I don't see any discrimination because the tasks the women officers are assigned to correspond to their expertise. And these tasks are more convenient for them, time-wise.

"Women are not necessarily kept from other tasks like patrolling and intelligence, but they have to be able to endure the lack of sleep and days of not being able to go home. Some women police officers cannot afford to do that because they have children."

Moving up the ladder is also not an issue. Shiela May was recently promoted to police captain, and she said promotions in the force are merit-based. Female police officers have as

“

I think women handle cases differently. We are more meticulous and detail-oriented. We conduct more interviews and don't leave out any person who can back up our case.

much chance of advancing as their male counterparts as long as they perform well.

Meantime, she said most members of the community welcome the presence of female police officers.

“I think some people in the community see policewomen as more approachable, as motherly, so they tend to speak more freely,” she observed. “They know we are very accommodating and we listen more intently to their problems. They see women as ‘experts’ when it comes to laws on the protection of women and children, including the anti-rape law.”

But there are a few holdouts. Shiela May recalled an occasion when a community leader was openly sceptical.

She related, “I was included in the Revitalized *Pulis sa Barangay* programme. I was assigned to a geographically distant and remote area. Law enforcement officers were sent there to find out what the community needs, so we can link them to government agencies that can help them.

“During our meeting with the barangay chairman and councillors of that community, when I introduced myself as the team leader, there was one person who scoffed, “*ay, babae man* [oh, it's a woman]. Maybe he thought I

was incapable of doing the work. I just shrugged it off and told myself I would prove to them that I'm competent.

“Eventually, our team established a daycare centre in one *purok* [zone] and a children's mini-library in another *purok* in the community. We also helped community members start income-generating activities. For example, since the community is situated along a mountain trail and gets a lot of foot traffic from hikers and tourists, we helped them build three buildings of ‘pay toilets’ situated in different areas, and a tourist hub with three huge rooms that can accommodate 10 visitors. With the help of the stakeholders, we were also able to install numerous solar lights in areas with no electricity and those nearby dangerous cliffs. We helped them form a people's organisation, registered it with the Department of Labor and Employment and the Bureau of Internal Revenue, and linked it to the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority. Because of these, many livelihood opportunities opened for them.”

Shiela May said that she eventually earned the trust of the community, including the sceptics, “because they saw the quality and impact of our service.”

Her exemplary police service has some trade-offs. Sheila May said balancing work and home life is challenging, with her three young children, ages 14, 13 and 8 at home with her. Sheila May's husband, also a police officer, is posted in another part of the country.

“It is a struggle to give a hundred per cent of yourself to your job because I am also a mother. I also need to give time to my children. There were times when they said, ‘I wish you're a teacher so we're always together,’” Sheila shared.

“To spend time with my children, I would sometimes swap schedules with other police officers. Whenever I'm off duty, I devote all my attention to them.

“Police officers do not have a fixed schedule, so I taught my children early on how to manage the household without me. They know how to prepare meals, do the laundry, how to care for their youngest sibling, and who to

contact during emergency. I also talk to them, tell them that there are times I cannot be with them or attend to their needs right away.”

Sheila May has taken a pragmatic approach to managing stress. To nip possible stressors in the bud, she plans ahead and manages her time well.

Having a sounding board is also necessary to cope with stress. “My husband is the one I turn to for all my problems,” she said.

Still, she believes that psychologists should be on hand to help police officers deal with their problems.

She noted, “I think it would help if the police officers' mental wellness is prioritised. Many of them experience burnout. They need someone to talk to. In our province, we don't have available psychologists.

“Male police officers, especially, rarely divulge what's troubling them. There are incidences of suicide among police officers. Police officers should have a professional they can talk to for advice so they don't resort to suicide.”

Shiela May also believes that police officers will be better off if they can be allowed to work in stations near their residence. “It will lessen the amount of time and money spent on travel. It will enable them to take care of their family and work at the same time,” she said.

After overcoming various adversities in life, Shiela May feels ready to tackle any challenge that comes her way head-on.

“Quitting is not in my vocabulary. If there was a time in my life that would've pushed me to the limit, it would've been during my childhood. But I didn't give up. Nothing will surpass that kind of pain, so I can't think of anything now that will make me want to quit.”

The views and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the interviewee and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

Shinta Puspa Dewi

Live-in Caregiver
and Trainer



Ixora Tri Devi

Staff Writer, The ASEAN

*ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
Department*

One night in 2019, Shinta Puspa Dewi found herself hiding under the bed as her patient yelled, “Hide, or they will shoot you!”. Her patient, who has dementia, believed they were in the middle of a war.

On another day, Shinta’s face splattered with food after a lady she was feeding threw up on her.

These are typical work days for Shinta, a 35-year-old caregiver from Dieng, Central Java. Her patients are primarily senior citizens, 70 years old and older, suffering from dementia or cancer and living in palliative care.

After working as a full-time nurse for nine years, in 2019, Shinta opted out of hospital life and started to work as a live-in caregiver. She works with an on-demand care provider app, LoveCare.id, which is gaining popularity in Indonesia.

Working as a live-in caregiver, Shinta is glad to give her undivided attention to her patients. But dealing with the patients’ families is sometimes an added ordeal.

“There were times when the patient’s family only gave me a spoonful of green beans as a side dish. Or a piece of fritter as lunch. There was also a patient’s family who gave me a list of chores on the first day of work, which included cleaning the whole house and washing the patient’s clothes. Thankfully, LoveCare talked with the family and told them that these kinds of chores are not part of my responsibilities as a caregiver.

“In contrast, there were also families who were really appreciative of our help. One of them invited me to my patient’s funeral ceremony

Shinta Puspa Dewi works as a trainer for aspiring live-in caregivers at LoveCare

and wanted me to be there for the whole ritual. They saw me as part of the family. I cared for their *Opa* (grandfather) from the day he could eat and walk, down until his very last day when he couldn't do anything by himself anymore. It touches my heart that they let me be there to see him go."

Shinta strives to keep her emotions in check when taking care of patients. Still, she said it could be emotionally taxing.

"I feel an enormous grief every time. We take care of the patient every single day. We feel close to each other. But as a professional, we need to set our boundaries. If the families are crying and I let my feelings get the best of me, I cannot care for the patients. So, despite my feelings, I still finish my job.

"When working as a live-in caregiver, I am obliged to work for 28 days straight, and then I have two days off. Clients can renew our contract after that. The most I work for the same family is six months."

As a live-in caregiver, Shinta has to make adjustments to make sure her own children are cared for.

"I have three children, a 2-year-old girl, a 10-year-old boy, and an 11-year-old boy. When I am working, I leave them in the care of my mother-in-law. I also have my neighbour help watch them. We all rely on each other— mothers and women.

"Of course, I miss my own family, but just like any other job, there is a risk that we must face. Whenever I miss home, I mingle with patients' families. When I work happily, that longing and feeling of isolation will eventually fade.

"Communication is essential. From the start, we must communicate our job to our husbands and children. We also need to stay committed to what we have said."

Caregiving is a difficult enough job, so Shinta hopes that governments and companies value the service that they give by providing them with minimum social protection.

"I believe what we need the most as caregivers is health insurance. We take care of other people, but, on the other hand, we are not insured. Most live-in caregivers are freelancers with no social protection or health insurance. I am lucky that they gave me BPJS Ketenagakerjaan (social security) where I work. But it is not the norm yet.

"Other than insurance, daycare is also vital to help working parents. If there is a daycare, we can be rest assured that our kids have the nutrition they need, unlike when we let them in the care of neighbours, for example.

Treating caregivers with kindness also helps, she said. "My message for families who hire a live-in caregiver is, please remember that we want to be treated as professionals. Respect our profession. And please provide acceptable accommodation and food."

Despite the difficulties, Shinta loves what she's doing. She is a natural-born caregiver and wants others to succeed in this profession.

"I grew up in Dieng, Wonosobo, Central Java. After high school, I wanted to choose chemical engineering as my major. But my parents said that the major is for boys. Instead, they want me to be a teacher or a nurse. I went to study in a nursing school near my grandfather's place in Pekalongan. I instantly fell in love with nursing. While doing my training, I also took care of my grandfather.

"In the near future, I plan to keep working as a live-in caregiver and as a trainer at LoveCare. Currently, my parents are healthy. If one day I was in that position where I needed to choose whether to care for my parents or another patient, I would positively choose to go home to Dieng and take care of my own.

"To my fellow aspiring caregivers, you must have a strong mentality. Good ethics and honesty are paramount. Stay professional, and never let your feelings get the best of you."

The views and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the interviewee and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

Tra My Nguyen

Director of a Non-profit for Children



Ixora Tri Devi

Staff Writer, The ASEAN

*ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
Department*

Tra My Nguyen was a model student all her life, but felt unfulfilled even after landing what she thought was her dream job: an engineer in advanced materials. It did not take long for Tra My to realise she did not want to spend the rest of her life surrounded by cold machines in a laboratory. She decided to quit.

Although Tra My was a model student, she had always struggled to find joy and meaning in learning. Fortunately, she found a silver lining when she joined Kidspire, a not-for-profit organisation that helps orphaned children transition into adulthood.

With Kidspire, Tra My found her true calling: providing an equitable education to children, making learning fun, giving them choices, and igniting their hopes and dreams.

Thirty-six-year-old Tra My says, looking back at her childhood, it was plain to see why her sudden decision to shift careers was completely rational.

Growing up in Kontum, Viet Nam, little Tra My was raised by two extraordinary women, her mother and her grandmother. She grew up hearing stories about how her grandmother became an orphan at an early age due to the war. The school was a luxury they could not afford; her grandmother could only peek through the classroom windows while practising writing on sand or banana leaves. Meanwhile, her mother's school journey was cut short in 7th grade. Instead of doing homework, Tra My's mother needed to sell fruit on the street to help support her family with nine siblings.





Tra My teaches programming skills to girls from orphanage



Kidspire Vietnam conducts Summer STEM Camp for children in the orphanage

These lessons from her family's history are deeply ingrained in Tra My. She has been in this field before becoming a mother herself. Tra My finds joy and learns from the children and wants to build inner strength together with them. So, she thrives in helping as many children as possible, giving them access to education and opportunities that her grandmother and mother never had.

"I do not want to choose between 'going to work' or 'staying at home with my daughter'. Every woman should be free to choose her career and family life without feeling ashamed or judged. As a mother and a leader, I have learned to accept that it is impossible to be perfect in both roles simultaneously. Instead, I try my best in each role and focus on being present at the moment. I learned to communicate my needs and efforts with my daughter, husband, family, and colleagues. When I need support, I am not afraid to ask for help from my community. By pouring my heart into what I choose to do, I can minimise any feelings of regret.

"I want to inspire underserved children who face similar situations with my grandma, my mom, and myself, to learn and empower them to unleash their core values and become the best versions of themselves every day.

"Underserved children, particularly those who are orphaned, face several challenges, including dropping out of school; lacking in confidence, care, love, and a sense of belonging to any community. Moreover, they often tend to refuse opportunities that come their way.

"I have worked with orphaned children since 2011, more than 11 years. The biggest takeaway from my

experience: every child has value, and we need to build the right educational environment so they can flourish.

"Creating a learning environment that fosters confidence and support is vital. By providing caring teachers, a safe space to fail, and opportunities to self-understand, they can better identify their passions and develop the necessary skills to pursue their aspirations. We use STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) education as a powerful tool to achieve this.

"Kidspire started with computer and internet classes. After that, we had other programmes designed and developed based on the needs of students with some success that we are proud of, including Maker Academy, Girl Empowerment Program, and Leadership Program.

"In Maker Academy, children can develop their growth mindset, creativity, and skills related to STEAM and robotics. In addition, the Girl Empowerment Program empowers girls in technology, entrepreneurship and leadership with empathy. Meanwhile, in our Leadership Program, we provide underserved youth from 19 to 23 years old with training in essential skills to perform well in academic and professional working environments, such as understanding themselves, building habits, soft skills, basic English, and job-preparation skills, connect them with internship and job opportunities.

"We feel well-prepared to expand our programme to reach more than 170,000 orphans in Viet Nam if we could identify partners who would be interested in helping us scale to reach all 64 provinces of Viet Nam. We want to use the network from ASEAN to

get funding and resources to expand our current effective programs and to develop a free AI platform tailored to underserved children's needs. This platform would provide a personalised learning experience that considers the unique circumstances and challenges these children face.

"With the support of ASEAN, we can create a more equitable and inclusive education system that empowers every child to reach their full potential. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of these children and build a brighter future for Southeast Asia.

"I, personally, and Kidspire do not support orphanage models, but we commit to supporting the children in need as much as we can. We want to offer them the best education programmes so they can get more inspiration to continue their education, identify their passions and be well-equipped to pursue their aspirational careers and have a happier life.

"The biggest challenge is seeing these children with so much potential to have a better future, yet they often have to quit school to do low-paying jobs or refuse the opportunity coming their way. What keeps me going is my inner motivation and witnessing the joy and pride in their bright eyes and smiles when they achieve something in the classroom. It is also heartwarming to see them grow up, leave the orphanages, and make strong efforts towards their definition of success and happy life."

The views and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the interviewee and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

Nwat Derli Zaw

Agri-business Entrepreneur



Ixora Tri Devi

Staff Writer, The ASEAN

*ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
Department*

Shwegyin Town in Bago District, Myanmar, is reputed to be one of the country's best places to get gold. The town lives up to its name, "Shwegyin," which means "making gold" in English. However, the precious mineral is not what keeps bringing 27-year-old Nwat Derli Zaw back to the town.

While pursuing her bachelor's degree at Bago University, Nwat Derli Zaw, or Derli, spent one and a half months in the forest of Shwegyin. It was 2012, and the university mandated students to teach the Myanmar language to people living in the woods.

Derli grew up in a rural town, so the programme touched a special place in her heart. Derli's relations with the villagers would continue for years after college. She stayed connected and would go on a six-hour trip from Yangon to Shwegyin at least once a year.

In 2020, at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic uncertainty, Derli quit her job. She made a career pivot from a corporate secretary to an entrepreneur. She started to build a company with the people of the land of gold.

What inspired her? How does her business help empower other women in Myanmar? Derli shares her journey with *The ASEAN*.

"My father inspired me a lot. He died three years ago, but his memory remains cherished in our neighbourhood. The street at our place is named after him. He made the road. For a long time, it was messy and full of shrubs. He submitted many documents to the government and worked hard to build them. So, people in our neighbourhood requested to name the street after his name.

"My father's experience made me think that supporting people can make people recognise you. I don't want to be an influencer, but I want to be recognised as someone who helps others.

"I always try to help the people of Shwegyin Town. I conducted English training so they could start to look for jobs in Yangon. However, they have been asking me for a job opportunity so they can stay there and can help their family. That is why I planned to do business with them after I quit my job.

"In places like Shwegyin, many depend on our traditional medicine. Lemon is mainly used as medicine: lemon oil to improve your bones and lemon flakes for digestion. For seniors, they take lemon flakes as medicine after eating.

"At first, our target market was just seniors because they like the bitter taste. I tried to reduce the bitterness, so it became like a snack. Even kids can enjoy it because it is sweet—but the sugar level is still very low. Our products are now available across the country. You can get it from big retailers and also through e-commerce.

"We have 36 people working in the factory, and we work with 25 families as suppliers. Eighty-five per cent of our employees are women. In the factory, they are all mothers with more than two kids. Whenever I visit them, I educate them. Not only about working in the factory but also about creating. Like creating their recipes. In the future, I want to encourage more innovative food from this place.



Swehgyin Town is famous as a gold and lemon producing area



Eighty-five per cent of Citrus Myanmar's employees are women and mothers



Nwat Derli Zaw and Citrus Myanmar transformed lemon flakes into a healthy snack that everybody can enjoy

"In my country, women are very shy. I want to encourage them to be better at public speaking. Women leaders are still significantly less because the men are supposedly the leaders, the breadwinners. But it is slightly changing now. However, women only have a little support from society and the environment. I hope ASEAN can encourage more women to start a business and to show up.

"ASEAN-India Start-Up Festival was the first time I joined an ASEAN-organised event. I am still in touch with fellow business owners from that event. Connection from India and other countries inspired me to expand my products. After the event, I also got selected to learn deeper about food safety standards in Thailand, organised by Mekong Institute.

"I want to remind my fellow countrymen that the crisis is not good, but we cannot just sit. Opportunity is everywhere. Think of what you can do right now, and do your best.

Maybe your home business, your mom's recipe, or something you can cook? Perhaps something that you are good at. You can come up as a business owner right away. So many communities and programmes can help you if you intend to grab the opportunity.

"Regarding the current political situation in Myanmar, I don't think I need to answer with my personal feelings, which is the same as other civilians. As a small business owner, the way I feel about this situation is that we get more attention from the world and more chances to get support from NGOs such as USAID, UN etc. We cannot just sit and (be) depressed about what we had lost. We need to grab any chance to survive as much as possible.

"For me, because of the support of international organisations, I could improve my skills and develop the necessary technologies at my business, and easier to get access to the local market.

"Every crisis gives us some lessons to develop new ideas for new businesses. For me, I just think of what I can do for my country and the people. So what I do is to expand my business, full of CSR activities and local revitalisation, and solve the social problems of the people, such as unemployment.

"Right now, I am also an executive member of the Myanmar Women Entrepreneur Network. Our community helps train young people in English and marketing. We help them for free. Anyone who wants to reach out to me can do it anytime."

The views and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the interviewee and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

Noemi Obrero Abainza

Accounting Officer and Mother



**Mary Kathleen
Quiano-Castro**

Editor-in-Chief, The ASEAN

Noemi Obrero Abainza is a working mother and sole parent to her two children while her husband works overseas.



One morning in 2013, Noemi took a call that all mothers dread: her young son had been in an accident in school that severely injured his finger. She was at work, so she frantically rushed to the school. Noemi was wracked with guilt and self-recriminations.

“So many questions were going through my head. If I were at home, maybe I could’ve rushed him to the hospital, and they could’ve saved his finger,” she said. “My husband was working overseas, so I couldn’t tell him right away, and I didn’t know how to, so I alone had to bear the pain of watching our child going through that. It came to a point where I wished I didn’t have to work. So, I took a leave instead to think things through.”

Noemi decided to keep her job as an accounting officer at a research and training institution in Quezon City in the Philippines. Her husband still works on a cruise ship and is home only at 6 to 7-month intervals. So, for the most part, Noemi single-handedly manages the household and cares for their sons, who are now 16 and 10 years old.

“I had a breakdown during the accident. I couldn’t eat and stayed in my room crying all the time. My mother talked some sense into me, and my son also reassured me that he was ok. I realised that I also needed my co-workers’ support and companionship.”

The family also relies on the second income to pay for much-needed household help and tutors for her children. Noemi adds, “the extra costs

take half of my monthly salary, but I still need them. I need other people’s help to take care of my children.”

“It is very hard to be a full-time working mom while my husband is away because I need to focus on my two jobs—work and taking care of our children. If you don’t have household help, you need good time management and a lot of patience to fulfil both jobs. I wake up at 4 am in the morning to do household chores, prepare what the children need for school, and what I need for work.” Noemi’s parents and siblings live in another city, so she has no other family or support network to rely on.

Before the pandemic, Noemi says she spent at least 40 hours a week at work, not counting the long commute to the office. “I used to take three rides on public transportation to get to the office. It would take one to two hours, depending on the traffic congestion. But thanks to my husband, we decided to invest in a car after seeing how much I struggled every day with public transportation.”

So, during the pandemic, the 45-year-old mom welcomed her company’s work-from-home arrangement. “Since March 2020 up to the present, our company has been very generous in setting up a hybrid arrangement. Our flexible schedule allows employees to work from home as long as it doesn’t affect the company’s operations. Even though I am in the administration and finance section, I can work effectively, thanks to modern technology.”

“I think I am more productive and flexible now; rather than reporting

to the office, I can work as early as 5 am and as late as 10 pm. I have a better work-life balance—no more stress from the traffic going to and from work. I even discovered more development opportunities. My mental health and energy levels improved. With this set-up, you can work and at the same time attend the kids’ school events, attend to their medical needs, and other important occasions in their lives. Working moms like me enjoy this kind of set-up because it allows us for more quality time with family.”

Noemi says her sons love having her at home and being available whenever they need attention. While they now enjoy quality family time, Noemi understands that the work-from-home arrangement may not be sustainable. However, she hopes companies continue to allow flexible schedules and focus on employees’ work output rather than hours spent in the office.

What the pandemic has taught her, Noemi says, is that working mothers can achieve a work-life balance if they have the support of their employers. “What I realised with this arrangement is that I don’t have to spend all my time at work because my family needs me too. You can pour all your efforts into your work but you are not indispensable. If you give time to your family, they will never forget that because you’ve created memories that will last a lifetime.”

The views and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the interviewee and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

“ I think I am more productive and flexible now; rather than reporting to the office, I can work as early as 5 am and as late as 10 pm. I have a better work-life balance—no more stress from the traffic going to and from work. I even discovered more development opportunities.

Voice of Baceprot

Breaking Barriers with Heavy Metal



Ixora Tri Devi

Staff Writer, *The ASEAN*

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

In 2014, three teenage girls rocked their way to fame from a small village in Garut, West Java, Indonesia. Firda ‘Marsya’ Kurnia (lead vocal, guitar), Euis Sitti Aisyah (drums), and Widi Rahmawati (bass) formed a band, Voice of Baceprot (pronounced ba-chey-PROT, means “noise” in a West Java dialect). Fans saw them as female artists who were challenging gender stereotypes and religious norms. The brave, talented teens, all wore the hijab or Islamic headscarves and played rock music. But the band’s performances and garb courted controversy and harsh criticisms too.

The girls say all they wanted was to play music and express themselves. Nine years after they burst into the music scene, Marsya, Sitti, and Widi reflect on how they have found meaning, and their voices in the noise around them.

Photo Credit: © Damas Priyottama

Voice of Baceprot at 12 Wired's office, Jakarta (20/3/2023)

It was 2014, and as a typical teenager living in Singajaya, Garut, West Java, Marsya started her day hours before sunrise. At 2:30 am, she would wake up and cite the holy Quran between her *Tahajjud* (night prayer) and *Subuh* (dawn prayer). Then, with her shoes secured inside her backpack, she would go on an hour-long walk, cutting through paddy fields to her school, Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Baqiyatussholihat. “I didn’t want my shoes to get dirty,” she recalled.

In the afternoon, right after school, she and her schoolmates, including Sitti and Widi, would go straight to a madrasah, a Quran school. In the madrasah, they would teach younger kids to read Arabic before starting their sessions with a teacher, lasting until 9 pm.

After years of doing the same routine, the then-14-year-olds started to get listless. They began to rebel and became regulars at their school’s counsellor’s office. Their misdemeanour crime? Playing percussion on their desks, singing loudly, writing criticisms on the school’s bulletin board, and falling asleep during class.

In Indonesia, the counsellor’s office is seen as a place for correcting and punishing the “bad apples.” However, for the rebellious teens, it was where their unexpected journey began.

The counsellor, Cep Ersya Eka Susila Satia, whom they called Abah Erza, channelled the students’ rebellious energy into forming a drama club. But the three best friends did not fit in. So, Erza put the trio in a band to support the club.

Erza introduced Marsya to the guitar, Widi to the bass, and Sitti to a makeshift drum built from the school’s marching band’s instruments. Soon, Voice of Baceprot was born and started to cover top 40 hits for school events.

The trio explored music genres and listened to various rock bands. They fell in love with Rage Against the Machine, a Los Angeles band whose song ‘Take the Power Back’ resonated with how the girls felt about school. Under their counsellor’s guidance, they wrote their first hit, ‘School

Revolution,’ which they released years later, in 2018.

Sekolah pagi pasti ragaku ini berlari (I am sprinting to school every morning)

Paksa mimpi yang tak satupun ku mengerti (Forcing dreams that I do not understand, not at all)

Terlempar kepala dipaksa pintar (They are shoving my head, pushing it to get smarter)

Terdampar moral digoda bingar (Morallities stranded, seduced by commission)

Don’t try to judge us now!

School Revolution

The band found their voice and started singing their thoughts out loud. They have since composed and released songs about social inclusion, gender inequality, and climate crisis. Voice of Baceprot’s noise can now be heard beyond the mountains surrounding their hometown.

It’s all about the music

Nine years after their debut, Voice of Baceprot is busy touring many parts of the world. However, the trio still remember like yesterday the time they used to receive threats from the audience and had rocks thrown at them. They can now easily laugh it off, having gained more wisdom and maturity as adults.

“Who would not be shocked to see us?” said Marsya while Widi and Sitti nodded in agreement. “That rock-throwing was a sign that they cared,” said Widi, laughing.

The violence tapered off with time. However, they are no strangers to hateful and vulgar remarks on social media. Sitti recalled a commenter telling her to leave out her hijab since she wore a short-sleeved shirt once while playing the drums.

“They don’t know I had a bad experience hitting the drum with long loose sleeves. They got stuck! It can be dangerous for me. Those haters didn’t

think about what was best for me; they just wanted to say what they like,” Sitti said.

The same happened to Widi. While playing the bass, critics would ask, “why was she putting her feet on the amplifier?” and “why were her hands showing?”

“People think that we are angels. They think we should never make mistakes and that we cannot slip,” Marsya argued.

The obsession with their clothes did not stop at home. During their European trip in 2021, most interviews would talk about their appearance. But for Marsya, Widi and Sitti, wearing a hijab is just as mundane as putting on deodorant in the morning or wearing pants before leaving home.

“If there is a list of things we want to be asked about, hijab will be the hundredth (item) on the list. We do not want people to focus on that. We want to talk about our crafts. We trained day and night to hone our skills and compose great songs. Let’s talk about that!” urged Marsya.

Heavy metal music magazine *Metal Hammer* called the trio “the metal band the world needs right now,” however, due to uninvited fascination with their look, some are doubtful of their skills. “There are people who believe that we are only famous because of what we wear,” Marsya revealed.

Getting tired of comments about their bodies and choice of clothes, the rockstar trio came up with a song, ‘Not Public Property.’

Our body is not public property

We have no place for the sexist mind

This is how the fight will be remembered

And this is how the voice getting stronger and louder

Not Public Property

They also dedicated the song to help domestic and gender-based violence victims. Working with the Women of



Voice of Baceprot during their interview with The ASEAN

the World (WOW) foundation, they have been raising money to support these survivors.

“The song is our love letter to survivors of domestic violence. Most of them are children and women. Not only do they need to live with the trauma for the rest of their lives, but they also need to hear tone-deaf comments about their bodies. They are constantly being blamed. Then, people start to police how women should behave in public. It makes us feel like a woman’s body is public property. Nobody wants to be treated that way,” said the lead vocalist.

“We are aware that champions for this issue are multiplying. We are glad to live in an environment that is not homogenous. We need different perspectives. Women should always be involved,” Marsya added.

Breaking out into the world

From collaborating with the Indonesian legendary composer and orchestra Erwin Gutawa in 2017, having their own European tour in 2021, to rocking the stage of Wacken Open Air in 2022, the trio never failed to prove their force as charismatic performers.

“My favourite stage was in France. That was our first tour. The feedback was really satisfying, and I managed to give it all out,” said Marsya.

The metalhead trio admitted that despite rocking massive international stages, they still have stage fright, albeit never shows. They leave behind their nervousness by feeding the energy from the crowd.

In 2021, just before their European Tour, the trio had a chance to talk

with one of their all-time heroes, Tom Morello. “I am a very big fan of your band. Your very existence as a band is very inspirational for people around the world,” said Morello to the trio.

There is no stopping the Voice of Baceprot now. Voice of Baceprot is not planning to stop any time soon.

“We are working on our album. We are finalising it right now,” said Marsya. “We are also looking forward to our Indonesian tour,” added Widi. “Yes, also an American tour!” Sitti concluded.

As the name of their village indicates, *Singajaya* or “Glorious Lion”, it seems these lionesses’ voices will not be muted any time soon.

The views and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the interviewee and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

Photo Credit: ©Damas Priyottama

From left to right: Widi Rahmawati, Firda ‘Marsya’ Kurnia, and Euis Sitti Aisyah.





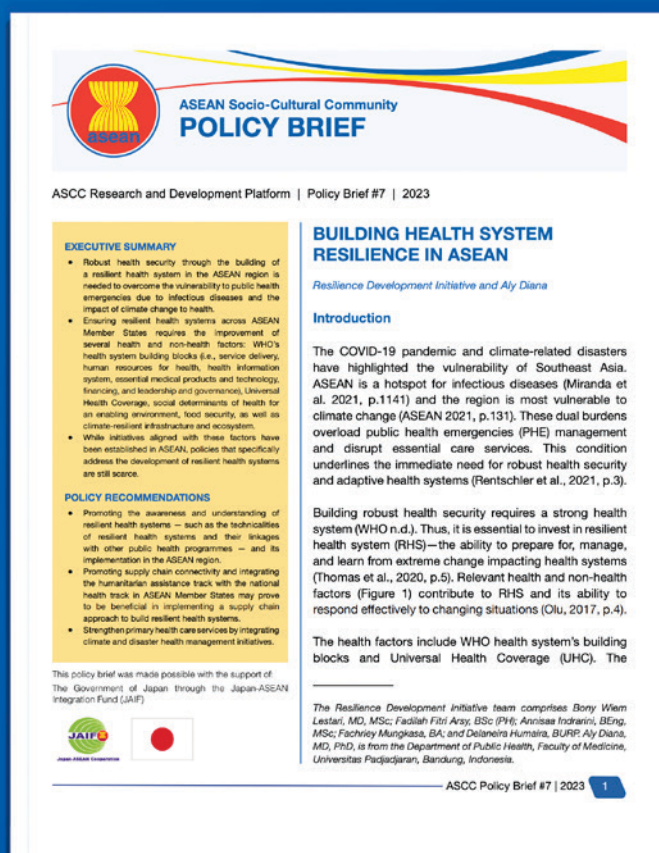
SHIFTING CURRENTS

- **ASCC Policy Brief Series:**
Building Health System Resilience in
ASEAN
- **Climate change-related disasters**
How ASEAN can benefit from the Loss
and Damage funding mechanism

Policies and Trends

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Policy Brief

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Policy Brief is a publication of the ASCC Department at the ASEAN Secretariat. It identifies trends and challenges that will impact ASEAN and ASCC sectors and propose policy-relevant solutions and recommendations to uplift the quality of lives of ASEAN people.



ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Policy Brief #7

BUILDING HEALTH SYSTEM RESILIENCE IN ASEAN

by Resilience Development Initiative and Aly Diana

This policy brief discusses ASEAN's progress in developing resilient health systems. It recommends more research and development, supply chain connectivity and resource pooling, and stronger primary health care to improve the ability of countries to deliver the health needs of their population at all times and withstand and respond to future emergencies.

Highlights of the Policy Brief



Joanne B. Agbisit

Associate Editor, *The ASEAN*

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
Department

The crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder that countries must build stronger and more resilient health systems that can meet the health needs of the population consistently, especially during public health emergencies.

In *ASCC Policy Brief No. 7 (2023)*, titled “Building Health System Resilience in ASEAN,” experts identified the hallmarks of a resilient health system:

- i. able to deliver safe, quality, and continuous healthcare services to all segments of the population;
- ii. has ample and skilled human resources for health;
- iii. has a health information system that yields timely and reliable data for efficient service delivery and prompt decision-making;
- iv. can access safe, efficacious, and inexpensive essential medical products and technology;
- v. has sufficient financing to cover the health needs of the population;
- vi. has strong leadership and governance, capable of setting strategic policies and acting quickly; and
- vii. offers universal healthcare coverage.

A robust health system is also reinforced by non-health factors, such as good environmental and social conditions, access to adequate and affordable food supplies, and resilient and environment-friendly health infrastructure.

The policy brief takes stock of the progress made by ASEAN in helping Member States improve their health system resilience based on these benchmarks.

The brief identified a number of bright spots. In the area of services delivery, ASEAN has set up the ASEAN Center for Public Health Emergency and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED) and implemented the ASEAN Regional Capacity on Disaster Health Management Project

to improve the capability of health systems to provide health services during public health emergencies, such as outbreaks, pandemics, and disaster events. The ASEAN Medical Device Directive was developed to ease access of countries to diagnostic and life-saving apparatus, machines, instruments, software, and other medical devices.

In terms of human resources for health, ASEAN established mutual recognition arrangements in the fields of medicine, nursing, and dentistry to facilitate the mobility of medical professionals and information exchange within the region.

With regard to governance, the ASEAN Health Ministers’ Meeting (AHMM) serves as a high-level platform for joint policy formulation and decision-making. At the same time, the ASEAN Coordinating Council Working Group on Public Health Emergencies ensures a coordinated and cross-sectoral ASEAN response in emergencies.

In the area of universal health coverage, some Member States have attained a hundred per cent coverage, while others have made substantial progress towards providing affordable healthcare to their population and are targeting universal or expansive coverage by 2030.

Nonetheless, challenges and shortcomings remain. The policy brief cited poor health information systems as one of them, due in part to the lack of digital infrastructure and low levels of digital literacy. Inadequate information systems can delay care delivery and diminish the quality of medical care.

Another setback is the limited investment in public health and the reliance on household health spending in many ASEAN Member States. This makes it difficult to close the gap in healthcare coverage.

ASEAN also needs to work on non-health factors, such as building modern and environment-friendly health facilities and carbon-neutral supply

chains, and addressing food insecurity as a result of urbanisation and climate-related disasters.

The policy brief has the following key recommendations:

1. Promote Understanding of Health System Resilience

More research and development (R&D) is needed to thoroughly assess the resilience of each Member State’s health system. ASEAN should look into using WHO’s Health Systems Resilience Toolkit, or carry out health systems “stress tests” for different public health emergency scenarios, to name a few.

2. Introduce Supply Chain Approach for Health System Resilience

ASEAN should consider supply chain connectivity and resource sharing among hospitals and countries as a practical approach to improving countries’ ability to meet health needs. It should also consider integrating humanitarian assistance and health emergency management efforts to respond to and recover from recurring and future shocks effectively.

3. Strengthen Primary Health Care Services

Primary health care improves the population’s access to health solutions at the community level and contributes to health system responsiveness. ASEAN should develop an operational framework to support primary health care’s role in public health emergencies and promote the use of telemedicine for primary care services, among others, to strengthen primary health care.

Download the policy brief from:



https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ASCC_Policy-Brief_Issue-7_Jan2023.pdf

Financing Loss and Damage from Climate Change: Challenges and Opportunities



Dr. Vong Sok

Head, Environment
Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural
Community Department



Natalia Derodofa

Senior Officer,
Environment Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural
Community Department



Tri S. Saputro

Officer, Environment
Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural
Community Department

The concept of loss and damage was first raised in the 1991 climate change negotiations by Vanuatu as a facility to compensate small island developing states for the devastating impacts of sea-level rise. Subsequently, the term “loss and damage” has come to be understood as any negative consequences of climate change on economic, social and environmental systems.

This concept was further elaborated at the Conference of Parties (COP-13) in Bali, Indonesia, in 2007. The Bali Action Plan emphasised the need for enhanced action on adaptation, including disaster risk reduction strategies and means to address loss and damage. Moreover, the COP-18 in Doha in 2012 agreed to establish institutional arrangements to address loss and damage under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate

Change (UNFCCC). The following summarises the progress and evolution of loss and damage in COPs of UNFCCC from 2007 through 2022.

The most recent COP-27 in Egypt's Sharm el-Sheikh reached a breakthrough agreement on the Loss and Damage Fund for vulnerable countries hit by climate change. The new pledge during the COP-27 was more than 230 million US dollars to help vulnerable communities through concrete adaptation solutions.

The COP-27 made two important decisions: Decisions 2/CP.27 and 2/CMA.4 established funding arrangements for responding to climate-induced loss and damage. These new funding arrangements will assist developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. The assistance includes providing and mobilising new and additional resources to complement existing funding support.

2007

First appearance of the term ‘loss and damage’ in an official UN document during COP-13

2010

Establishment of a work programme on loss and damage at COP-16

2013

Establishment of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM) at COP-19

2015

Inclusion of loss and damage in the Paris Agreement at COP-21

2019

Revision and strengthening of WIM

2022

Countries (including Denmark, Germany and Canada) announce financing of over EUR 200m to address loss and damage

2021

Scotland pledges GBP 1m to address loss and damage at COP-26

2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025

ASEAN leadership in climate action

ASEAN is one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change according to the assessment of the Climate Risk Index 2021 and other research (Yusuf and Francisco, 2009). The disaster experiences recorded in the ASEAN Disaster Information Network (ADINet) are shown in Figure 1.

The discourse around loss and damage associated with climate change has become particularly pertinent for the ASEAN region. Research studies have indicated the significant cost of climate loss and damage in the region. The Climate Risk Index 2021 estimated that Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand had lost around 12.41 million US dollars in PPP (purchasing power parity) due to extreme weather events from 2000 to 2019. The region's development ambitions risk being set back by the extensive losses due to climate impacts. Therefore, climate change is one of the region's top priorities. The ASEAN Member States are all parties of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement and are fully committed to enhancing global climate action. Collectively, ASEAN has taken proactive steps to prioritise this key issue in many of its initiatives and action programmes, such as in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASSC) Blueprint 2025, which outlines the key strategic measures toward a more climate-resilient region. ASEAN articulates these aspirations and commitments to the global community and the wider public through regular issuance of ASEAN Joint Statements on Climate Change to the Meetings of the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC.

Climate change has become a strong and powerful issue for political action in each succeeding year of ASEAN Chairmanship, for example, the Special ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Climate Action under Singapore's ASEAN chairmanship in 2018, the establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Climate Change and the launch of the ASEAN Youth Climate Action during Brunei Darussalam's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2021, and the promotion of community-based climate actions under 2023 ASEAN Chair Indonesia.

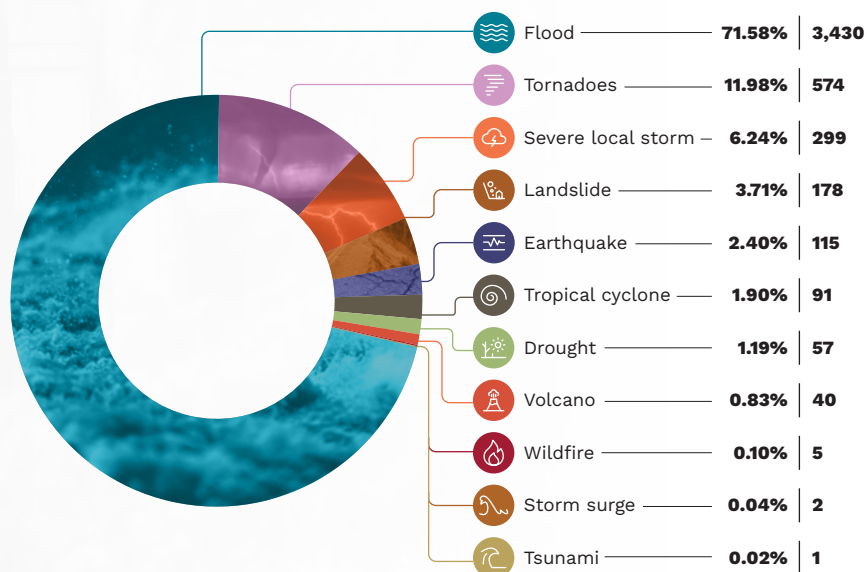


Figure 1: Disaster Events in Numbers in ASEAN, 2012-May 2023

ASEAN in COP-27

As in previous COPs, the ASEAN Member States spoke at the UNFCCC COP-27 in 2022 with a unified voice and reaffirmed their commitment to addressing global climate challenges. The pledge is articulated in the ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change to the UNFCCC COP-27, delivered by Minister Say Samal of the Cambodian Ministry of Environment on behalf of ASEAN, and harmonised in Cambodia's National Statement at the Resumed High-Level Segment of the COP-27. The statement highlights that the region must not lose sight of the urgent actions needed to address the climate crisis that already affects people's lives in ASEAN with increasing losses and damages every year. The minister stated that the inclusion of financing for loss and damage in the COP-27 agenda was a welcome development and expressed hope that this will allow rapid progress in delivering financing assistance for the most affected countries.

Through this pronouncement, ASEAN has reaffirmed its commitment to achieving a sustainable climate toward a net-zero community. ASEAN also urged parties to the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement to revisit and strengthen the 2030 targets in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), step up their adaptation efforts, enhance access to climate finance,

and advance an intergenerational approach to addressing climate change that is sensitive to the needs of vulnerable groups, women and all genders. Specifically, ASEAN called upon UNFCCC parties and developed country parties to:

- Fully engage in the Glasgow Dialogue to discuss the arrangements for the funding of activities to avert, minimise, and address loss and damage associated with the adverse impacts of climate change;
- Provide adequate and sustainable support to AMS to develop their plans related to adaptation and loss and damage and to consider the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

Aside from formal negotiations, Member States, in coordination with the ASEAN Secretariat and partners, organised side events on the fringes of the official meetings. These events allowed participants to engage dynamically with Parties and other stakeholders for networking, capacity building, knowledge exchange, and the exploration of workable solutions for advancing climate action. Participants from all around the world were enthusiastic about the wide range of issues discussed at the ASEAN Member States' Pavilion at the UNFCCC COP-27. The discussions

included financing and investment for haze-free sustainable land management in ASEAN (Malaysia's Pavilion), climate community-based action in Southeast Asia (Indonesia's Pavilion), and Strengthening transparency efforts in Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions in the ASEAN Region (Singapore's Pavilion).

Climate financing needs

Despite the new exciting and ground-breaking decision on the “loss and damage” fund, ASEAN countries continue to strive towards improving access to climate funds to fulfil their NDC targets. The amount of climate finance required for the region, as determined by the Member States' respective NDCs, is 422.16 billion US dollars up to 2030, with the majority going toward mitigation (293.01 billion US dollars) and the remainder going toward adaptation (129.15 billion US dollars). Only about 222 million US dollars have been approved by key climate-fund operating entities since for climate projects in ASEAN since 2010. Additionally, between 2013 and

2017, climate-related development finance flowed at a rate of about 3.2 billion US dollars per year from bilateral aid agencies, development finance institutions, and multilateral development banks (UNFCCC, 2021). This demonstrates a massive disparity between Member States' regional climate finance needs and international cooperation flows.

The new funding mechanism for loss and damage under the UNFCCC therefore provides a ray of hope for the Member States and other developing countries to narrow the climate finance gap for the operationalisation of climate change adaptation and mitigation programmes (Roberts & Pelling, 2019; Ghosh & Chhabra, 2023; Jackson, et al., 2023).

The ASEAN Climate Finance Strategy

To enhance and accelerate the flow of climate finance in the ASEAN region, ASEAN is jointly developing the **ASEAN Climate Finance Strategy/Climate Finance Access and Mobilization Strategy for ASEAN Member States** in collaboration with the UNFCCC Regional Collaboration Centre Bangkok. This strategy is being developed in

accordance with Article 9 of the Paris Agreement to improve ASEAN access to climate finance and catalyse climate finance and investment for the implementation of priority mitigation and adaptation actions based on needs identified by the Member States.

The ASEAN Climate Finance Strategy includes strategic areas of collaborative action among countries ranging from capacity building to diversification and innovation, policy harmonisation, and transparency and integrity. It is expected to result in lower GHG emissions and increased climate resilience of the ASEAN community through the production of bankable national and regional climate change projects. The strategy, which is ahead of its time, will enhance support to address loss and damage resulting from the adverse effects of climate change in the region through the new loss and damage fund.

From the standpoint of international negotiations on loss and damage and its breakthrough funding mechanism, ASEAN must seize the opportunity to advance its efforts toward fostering climate-resilient sustainable development and comply with recent developments in international climate



ASEAN Member States and partners gather in the Singapore Pavilion at UNFCC COP-27. On the screen is ASEAN Deputy Secretary-General Ekkaphab Phanthavong for the ASCC (Singapore, 2022)

agenda. The imminent release of the ASEAN Climate Finance Strategy is anticipated to be the primary avenue through which the Member States and their partners can increase regional access to climate funds, including for addressing the concerns of loss and damage associated with the adverse effect of climate change.

Through a coordinated implementation of the strategy, ASEAN could increase its capacity and understanding in the discussion of loss and damage. This could be achieved by (i) improving knowledge and understanding of comprehensive risk management approaches to address loss and damage; (ii) fostering communication, coordination, coherence, and synergies among relevant stakeholders; and (iii) fostering action and support, including financial, technological, and capacity-building resources, in line with the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage. The improved access to climate finance for ASEAN will then propel the region closer to meeting the countries' climate goals and strengthening Southeast Asian communities' resilience to climate change. ASEAN also continues to be dedicated to addressing issues pertaining to loss and damage

from the harmful effects of climate change through (i) the creation of regional initiatives, such as policy dialogues and negotiation trainings related to loss and damage, and (ii) the preparation of the ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change to UNFCCC COP-28 under Indonesia's ASEAN chairmanship, allowing ASEAN to engage in global discussions on loss and damage.

Prospects for ASEAN and Member States

In light of ongoing discussions on the establishment of the loss and damage financing mechanism for the timely and equitable distribution of funds to developing countries and ASEAN's vulnerable communities, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. At the regional level, ASEAN must continue to engage
 - a. ASEAN may recommend to the UNFCCC Committee on loss and damage to develop clear guidelines for identifying and quantifying loss and damage for local, cities, sector and national level.

- b. ASEAN may recommend to the UNFCCC Committee of the loss and damage to consider diversifying and decentralising the loss and damage mechanisms to local and regional organisations such as ASEAN to promptly respond to emergencies and loss and damage priorities in the region (e.g. ASEAN loss and damage funds).

- c. ASEAN shall develop manuals and tools for identifying and quantifying loss and damage, and prioritisation of regional and national assessment of vulnerability and loss and damage, as well as development of a database and capacities of relevant stakeholders on loss and damage.

- ii. Individual nation states must be prepared
 - a. They must join the discussion on the establishment of loss and damage fund disbursement mechanisms to enable affected communities access the loss and damage fund and non-economic support measures.
 - b. They must build the capacity of relevant agencies, local governments, cities and communities to identify, quantify, report, and communicate information on loss and damage at each respective scale for consolidation at the national level, and for loss-damage support (both market and non-market support).
 - c. They must design and establish a suitable platform for engagement and coordination of stakeholders for the exchange of knowledge, data and information on loss and damage.

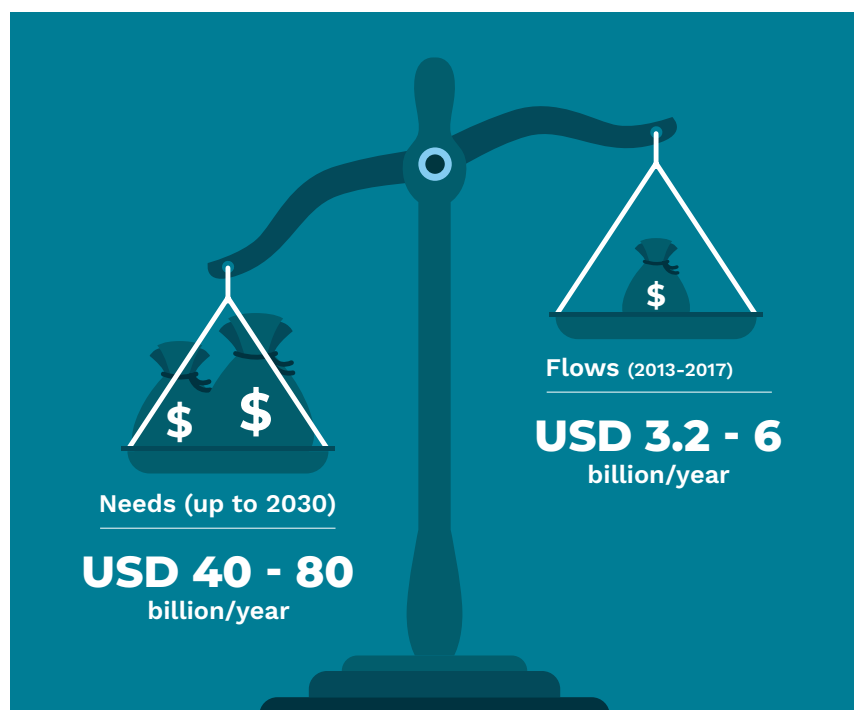


Figure 2. Climate finance flows in the ASEAN region



The references may be downloaded from the following link: <https://shorturl.at/fcQU2>



The 2nd ASEAN Youth Dialogue

Accelerating Digital Transformation for SDGs



Pricilia Putri Nirmala Sari

Officer, ASCC Analysis Division

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

Sixty youth representatives from the ASEAN Member States gathered in Jakarta on 10-14 April 2023, for the second ASEAN Youth Dialogue on Digital Development for SDGs. Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Youth and Sports hosted and organised the event.

This year's event follows the successful first ASEAN Youth Dialogue, held in Siem Reap, Cambodia, in April 2022. It was a flagship programme of the Year of ASEAN Youth under Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship.

The 2023 dialogue, under Indonesia's Chairmanship, brought together youth representatives from the 10 ASEAN Member States and Timor-Leste to deliberate policies on the role of the youth in the ASEAN Community and in digital development for SDGs. The topics they covered include digitalisation, partnerships for equal access to digital skills and literacy, and narrowing the development gaps through creativity and innovation.

As in the initial dialogue, it was an opportunity for the region's youth to engage with Ministers from the member states and have a say in the shaping of ASEAN's policies. The representatives of the ASEAN Youth Dialogue presented their recommendations directly to the ASEAN Leaders at the 42nd ASEAN Summit in Labuan Bajo on 10 May.

The policy recommendations covered four thematic areas: (i) Acceleration of digital transformation in Southeast Asia: How to be inclusive; (ii) Green economy in Southeast Asia through digital platform; (iii) How to anticipate challenges and embrace opportunities; and (iv) Strengthening the region's ecosystem for youth entrepreneurship: How stakeholders can support and ASEAN citizens' digital literacy.

The dialogue included panel discussions and workshops on various topics, such as inclusivity and youth participation in accelerating digital transformation, the dual role of the youth in SDG implementation, and avenues for strengthening the region's digital ecosystem for youth entrepreneurship. The participants also got a chance to experience how businesses operate in the digital economy during site visits to unicorn start-up, Traveloka, and energy and automation company, Schneider Electric Indonesia.

Side events, such as the ASEAN Halal Food Festival, ASEAN Youth Cultural Performance, and sharing sessions among students with disabilities from Jakarta, were also held during the dialogue.

Viewpoint

50 Years of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation

Kiya Masahiko

Ambassador of Japan to ASEAN



Golden Friendship Opportunities

輝ける友誼の機会



Photo Credit: @Japan Permanent Mission to ASEAN

This year marks 50 Years of ASEAN-JAPAN Friendship and Cooperation. Could you tell us the history of ASEAN-Japan relations?

Ambassador Kiya:

Upon this golden jubilee, it is my great honour to talk about the history of ASEAN-Japan relations in *The ASEAN* magazine, which has many readers in ASEAN countries. I would like to express my aspiration for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. The relationship between Japan and Southeast Asia has gone through a series of challenges during the course of its history. However, we both have made conscientious and steadfast efforts to strengthen our partnership.

Six years after ASEAN was established in 1967, the relationship between ASEAN and Japan started officially with the Forum on Synthetic Rubber in 1973. Japan's then Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo attended the first ASEAN-Japan Summit Meeting in Kuala Lumpur four years later. In the same year, during a visit to the Philippines, he made a historic announcement of the so-called "Fukuda Doctrine". In the Fukuda Doctrine, Japan's diplomatic principles for ASEAN are declared as follows: (1) Japan rejects the role of a military power; (2) Japan will do its best to consolidate the relationship of mutual confidence and trust based on "heart-to-heart"; (3) Japan will be an equal partner of ASEAN. All three fundamental principles remain relevant today.

Since the establishment of ASEAN-Japan official relations, Japan has worked closely with ASEAN for five decades to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in this region as a staunch supporter of ASEAN centrality and unity. After the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) was adopted in 2019, Japan expressed its support for the AOIP ahead of other dialogue partners. It has been continuously working with ASEAN through concrete projects. As many as 89 AOIP cooperation projects in line with its four priority areas, namely maritime cooperation, connectivity, SDGs, and the economy, demonstrate that we keep our word. Japan has also been

working to aid ASEAN's integration efforts through the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF) established in 2006. More than 550 projects that amount to 769 million US dollars have addressed issues such as disaster management, infectious diseases, and counter-terrorism, among others. As data shows, ASEAN and Japan are also valuable business partners, given their two-way trade that is valued at more than 179 billion US dollars per year in 2021.

Last month, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio made a speech, "The Future of the Indo-Pacific—Japan's New Plan for a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)'" in New Delhi, and he announced a new contribution of 100 million US dollars to JAIF for "multi-layered connectivity". Rather than relying solely on one country, countries need to stay connected in various aspects for overcoming vulnerabilities with more options and achieving economic growth.

Contributing to ASEAN's efforts to mainstream the AOIP—as Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa stated in a video message at the Commemorative Symposium for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation in Jakarta in February—Japan will (1) promote concrete cooperation projects in line with the four priority areas of the AOIP, (2) support the functions of the ASEAN Secretariat for the promotion and mainstreaming of the AOIP, and (3) support the human resource development of young government officials in ASEAN countries, with a focus on the AOIP.

What is Japan's new plan for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), and how does it compare to ASEAN's AOIP?

Ambassador Kiya:

At a time when the international community is at a turning point in history, we clarified the concept of FOIP and indicated "our FOIP" toward the goal of leading the international community in the direction of cooperation rather than division and confrontation. The fundamental concept of FOIP remains the same;

namely, enhancing the connectivity of the Indo-Pacific region, steering the region into a place that values freedom, upholding the rule of law, freedom from force or coercion, and making the region prosperous. With this backdrop, I would like to emphasise that Japan's FOIP defends "freedom" and "the rule of law," and respects "diversity," "inclusiveness," and "openness." In other words, we do not exclude anyone, we do not create camps, and we do not impose values.

ASEAN's AOIP and Japan's FOIP are visions that resonate with each other. The principles shared by the two initiatives, such as openness, transparency, inclusiveness, and respect for international law, are important ideas in this new era, and close cooperation between Japan and ASEAN based on these principles is becoming increasingly important. Therefore, ASEAN and Japan confirmed that both of them share fundamental principles, in the Joint Statement of the 23rd ASEAN-Japan Summit on Cooperation on ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific adopted in November 2020. Japan is the first country among dialogue partners to adopt the joint statement on AOIP cooperation.

Based on these fundamental concepts and principles shared with the AOIP, we set forth the four new pillars of cooperation for FOIP: (1) principles for peace and rules for prosperity; (2) addressing challenges in an Indo-Pacific Way; (3) multi-layered connectivity; (4) extending efforts for security and safe use of the "Sea" to the "Air".

The first pillar is the backbone of the FOIP. Japan will continue to proactively support the efforts of each country to build lasting peace and carry out reconstruction, based on the tenets of "dialogue" and "cooperation." For example, we have extended our support on resolving conflicts such as the Mindanao peace process. Japan will also provide support that caters to the needs of women, taking in the perspective of Women, Peace and Security. We will also create a free, fair and just economic order by maintaining the

“

Since the establishment of ASEAN-Japan official relations, Japan has worked closely with ASEAN for five decades to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in this region as a staunch supporter of ASEAN centrality and unity

World Trade Organization rules as a foundation and by promoting a higher level of liberalisation through such mechanisms as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. We will make rules to prevent opaque and unfair development finance so that nations can grow autonomously and sustainably.

The second pillar is the new focus of cooperation of FOIP. We will expand cooperation in addressing various challenges related to climate and environment, energy security, food security, global health, disaster management, and cyberspace in a realistic and practical Indo-Pacific way, thereby enhancing the resilience and sustainability of each society and achieving an “equal partnership” among autonomous nations.

The third pillar is a core element of FOIP cooperation. Besides the new contribution to the JAIF, we will jointly announce a new vision for cooperation for the next 50 years at a commemorative summit held in Tokyo in December 2023. We will also renew by December, the comprehensive Japan-ASEAN Connectivity Initiative, which will promote efforts to strengthen both hard and soft connectivity. In the area of soft connectivity, which focuses on people, we will strengthen the “knowledge” connectivity that helps “human resource development,” creates new innovations, and underpins the vitality of the region through exchange programs such as JENESYS and the Asia Kakehashi Project.

Last but not least, under the fourth pillar, we will ensure the security and safety of the entire public domain, having “marine routes” at the centre of FOIP and ensuring the safe and stable use of air domain. To protect free oceans, we will support the strengthening of maritime law enforcement capabilities of each country, enhance maritime security, and promote safe and stable use of the air space.

To achieve these goals under four pillars, Japan will respond robustly to the needs of each country with the

public and private sectors working in tandem, and we will mobilise a total of more than 75 billion US dollars in infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region by 2030.

What are the commemorative events planned for the 50th anniversary this year?

Ambassador Kiya:

In the run-up to the Commemorative Summit in Tokyo this December, various special meetings and events will be held at the sectoral level, such as ASEAN-Japan Business Week in June, ASEAN-Japan Special Meeting of Justice Ministers in July, and ASEAN-Japan Special Dialogue of Tourism Ministers in autumn. Moreover, many commemorative events are organised throughout the year in various formats, including online, offline and hybrid, to facilitate participation from across the region. You may see the list of the commemorative events on the ASEAN-Japan Centre’s special website: <https://asean-japan50.jp/en/>.

The Mission of Japan to ASEAN also wishes to organise a series of commemorative events, such as the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Panel Exhibition, Fun Run, and Scavenger Hunt in Jakarta. We would like to invite readers of *The ASEAN* magazine to those events held by both the public and private sectors.

To conclude, I would like to emphasise that Japan is taking this opportunity of the 50th commemorative year to enhance our cooperation in close dialogue with the ASEAN side and based on ASEAN’s needs.

“Golden Friendship, Golden Opportunities.” The catchphrase of the 50th Year accurately describes the ASEAN-Japan relations. Japan would like to move forward with the people of ASEAN so that we can lead a new era and grow together for the next 50 years, as we have done so in the last 50 years.

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

ASEAN-Japan 50th Year of Friendship and Cooperation Pre-Event

A Taste of the Golden Jubilee



Ixora Tri Devi

Staff Writer, The ASEAN

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
Department

Melody Laksani (ASEAN-Japan Goodwill Ambassador);
Ambassador of Japan to ASEAN Kiya Masahiko; Ambassador
of Thailand to ASEAN Urawadee Sriphiromya; ASEAN Deputy
Secretary General Tran Duc Binh; with the Soba Masters

To welcome the golden anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, the newly appointed Ambassador of Japan to ASEAN, Kiya Masahiko, hit the ground running by bringing eight soba masters from Miyagi prefecture to ASEAN. The artisans were in Jakarta on 22 December 2022, to treat the ASEAN Secretariat with delicious soba, a traditional Japanese buckwheat noodle dish.

Deputy Secretary General (DSG) of ASEAN for Community and Corporate Affairs Tran Duc Binh noted that Japanese food tasting events are always popular with the ASEAN Secretariat. After a three-year hiatus due to the pandemic, the event's return was received with enthusiasm.

DSG Binh shared, "My mama used to say, if you want to win over somebody, it is through one's stomach. The event is even more meaningful with the 50th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan friendship and cooperation next year (2023)."

Echoing DSG Binh, Ambassador Kiya Masahiko said that the culinary arts are essential in diplomacy. "Food is the most attractive aspect of Japan. When we promote tourism to Japan, the top reason is food," Ambassador Kiya Masahiko added.

While enjoying the authentic dish and demo by Soji Akahane, the winner of the 2007 Japanese Soba championship, Ambassador Kiya Masahiko reminded guests that this year is the perfect time to visit Japan as many commemorative events are going to be held.

"This is the prelaunch event of the celebration of the special 50th year of ASEAN-Japan friendship and cooperation in 2023. I sure hope you enjoy the great Japanese food for many years to come," Ambassador Kiya Masahiko concluded.

Meanwhile, the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Thailand to ASEAN Urawadee Sriphiromya highlighted how the love of noodles is shared across the region, from pad thai to pancit and mie goreng to laksa. "I believe the demonstration shares not only the story of the rich culture of Japan and gastronomic mastery but also food for

thought for ASEAN-Japan cooperation in the coming year."

Hand-made soba, made from buckwheat grown and harvested from the Miyagi prefecture, is a treat even in Japan. According to Soba Master Yasushi Kawabe, the traditional way of making noodles is undoubtedly taken over by the vast factory-made noodles. "We are the tradition-keeper," Kawabe explained.


Indeed, the delicious dish is a priceless heritage that should not only be protected but also savoured by many generations to come.



Soba Master Soji Akahane
demonstrates his soba-
making skills



ASEAN Secretariat employees
were thrilled to enjoy authentic
Japanese dishes, soba and
tempura (22/12/2022)



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.

The
ASEAN

Street market selling Deepavali merchandise in Singapore

The ASEAN Secretariat

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Department

Jalan Sisingamangaraja 70A,
Jakarta 12110, Indonesia

This publication was made possible with the support of:

The Government of India

