The ASEAN

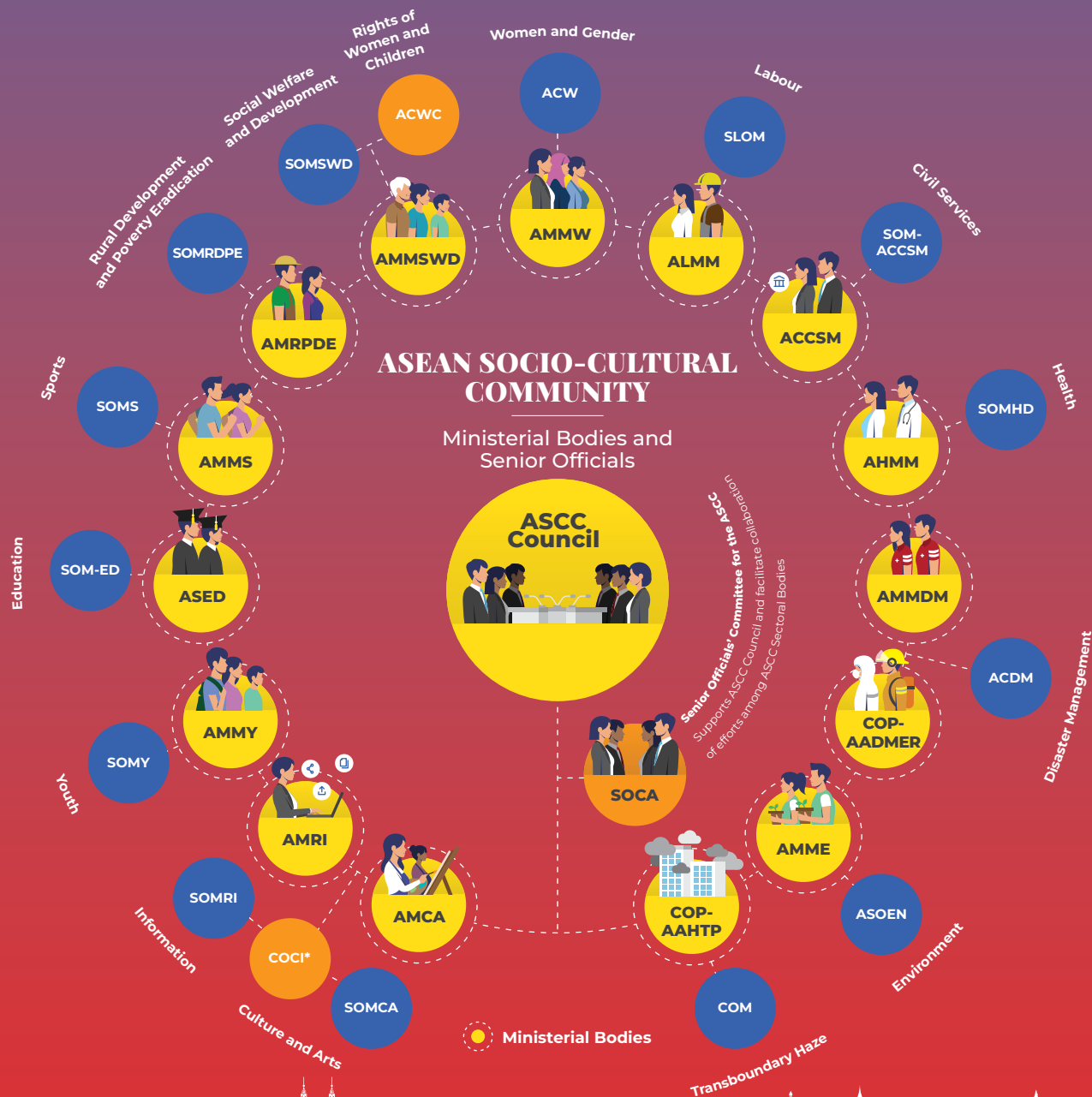## Reducing Poverty, UPLIFTING LIVES

THE INSIDE VIEW
Old Age Poverty and
Active Ageing in ASEAN

SHIFTING CURRENTS
Mapping the ASCC's
Vision for the Future

CONVERSATIONS
Breaking the Cycle
of Poverty

ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY

Ministerial Bodies and Senior Officials

ASCC Council

Senior Officials' Committee for the ASCC — Supports ASCC Council and facilitate collaboration of efforts among ASCC Sectoral Bodies

Labels around the diagram:

- Rights of Women and Children — ACWC
- Women and Gender — ACW, AMMW
- Labour — SLOM, ALMM
- Civil Services — SOM-ACCSM, ACCSM
- Health — SOMHD, AHMM
- Social Welfare and Development — SOMSWD, AMMSWD
- Rural Development and Poverty Eradication — SOMRDPE, AMRPDE
- Sports — SOMS, AMMS
- Education — SOM-ED, ASED
- Youth — SOMY, AMMY
- Information — SOMRI, AMRI
- Culture and Arts — COCI*, AMCA, SOMCA
- Disaster Management — AMMDM, ACDM, COP-AADMER
- Environment — AMME, ASOEN
- Transboundary Haze — COP-AAHTP, COM
- SOCA

Ministerial Bodies (indicated by dashed yellow circle)

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: ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters

AHMM: ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting

AMMDM: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management

COP to 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

takes guidance from and reports to both AMCA and AMRI

In This Issue
March 2024

Reducing Poverty, Uplifting Lives

The Inside View

Conversations

Shifting Currents

Snapshots

Bridges

11 ASEAN Village Network: A Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Strategy to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the ASEAN Region

19 Old Age Poverty and Active Ageing in ASEAN: Trends and Opportunities

one vision
one identity
one community

Note from the
EDITORIAL
TEAM

Poverty remains a persistent challenge in the ASEAN region despite significant strides in economic development and poverty reduction efforts over the past few decades. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fragility of these gains, pushing many vulnerable populations back into poverty.

Singapore's Minister for Social and Family Development, Masagos Zulkifli, as the Chair of the ASEAN Ministers Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (AMRDPE), illuminates ASEAN's ongoing efforts to tackle poverty head-on. The region's leaders recognise the urgency of this issue and are committed to implementing strategies that address its multifaceted nature.

Director General Sugito of Indonesia's Village and Rural Development Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration discusses the pivotal role of rural development in poverty alleviation. He writes about the ASEAN Village Network as an innovative strategy to localise efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Miguel Musngi, Head of the Poverty Eradication and Gender Division, gives us an overview of ASEAN's cooperation mechanisms to support Member States' initiatives to curb extreme poverty.

As ASEAN continues its journey towards sustainable development and prosperity, prioritising poverty eradication remains imperative.

In this issue, we highlight the diverse needs of vulnerable populations, including women and children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. By adopting a holistic approach to poverty reduction, ASEAN can build a more inclusive and equitable future for all its citizens.

In our Conversations section, we get a glimpse of how strengthening social safety nets and inclusivity can empower some of the most vulnerable members of our community to break the cycle of poverty.

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council Meeting was held on 24 March 2024 in Luang Prabang, the Lao PDR. The Council discussed the ASCC's strategic directions towards the ASEAN 2045 vision. It also launched the ASCC Database for Monitoring and Evaluation (ADME) System, a robust mechanism that will support the ASCC as it sets out its future direction.

In this edition, we introduce the ASEAN Economic Community or AEC Digest. This section will feature regular articles on crucial issues that cut across the Economic and Socio-Cultural pillars of ASEAN.

We wrap it up with an interesting article on our region's naming traditions. "What's in a Name?" might help us get to know our neighbours better.

Related Issues:

https://bit.ly/TheASEAN_Social_Protection

Issue 03 | 2020

https://bit.ly/TheASEAN_Rural_Development
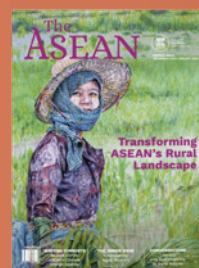
Issue 19-20 | 2022

https://bit.ly/TheASEAN_Women_Empowerment

Issue 27 | 2023

https://bit.ly/TheASEAN_ASEAN_2045

Issue 34-35 | 2024

VIEWPOINT

Masagos Zulkifli

Minister for Social and Family Development, Singapore

Chair of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (AMRDPE)

Minister Zulkifli highlights ASEAN's achievements in poverty reduction and emphasises the need for continued cooperation to ensure a stable and prosperous region. He says that Singapore has focused on the role of families and communities in tackling poverty and promoting social inclusion, particularly among vulnerable groups.
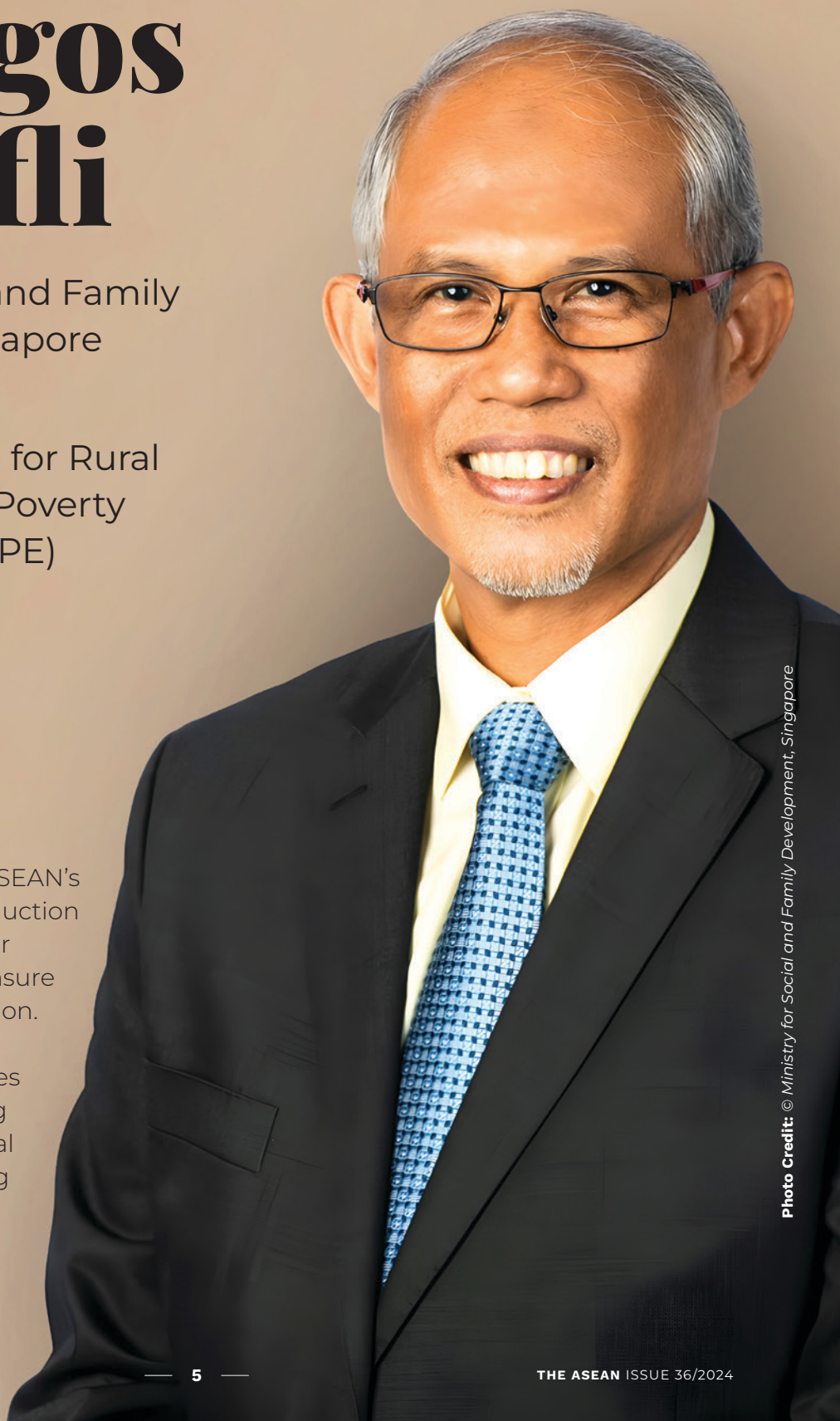
Photo Credit: © Ministry for Social and Family Development, Singapore

The ASEAN: How do you see ASEAN's cooperation in the coming years?

Minister Zulkifli:
I envision ASEAN's cooperation in the coming years to continue to be deeply rooted in our shared outlook and collective resolve to strengthen economic integration and uplift the lives of all our citizens. Since its inception, ASEAN has made significant progress in reducing poverty, demonstrating our united efforts and shared commitment towards poverty alleviation. However, even as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the global outlook remains troubled, with significant geopolitical headwinds and uncertainties which have disproportionately affected the most vulnerable segments of our societies.

Given these challenges, it is critical that ASEAN Member States continue to uphold our commitment to ASEAN's fundamental principles and step up our cooperation within the region as well as with our external partners to ensure that our region remains peaceful, stable, and prosperous. ASEAN can only remain credible and relevant if we pursue a positive agenda, including poverty eradication and social protection.

Additionally, there are two key areas that ASEAN should focus on for its next bound of integration: the digital and green economies. For example, we are negotiating a Digital Economy Framework Agreement and are working towards the realisation of an ASEAN Power Grid. These initiatives will generate inclusive growth opportunities and benefits for everyone across the region.

TA: How can ASEAN's cooperation on poverty eradication become more meaningful and impactful to the lives and well-being of the people in the region?

Minister Zulkifli:
To make ASEAN's cooperation on poverty eradication more meaningful and impactful, we should continue to build upon the solid foundation established by the Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication and the ASEAN Master Plan on Rural Development. ASEAN has experienced a steady decline in poverty over the last decades, and we must ensure that we continue to move ahead and tackle the challenges in this area.

The rural-urban divide, increasing inequality, the impact of climate change, and entrenched gender stereotypes are cross-cutting

issues that exacerbate poverty and hinder social progress. To address these challenges, ASEAN must foster greater collaboration and exchange among member states, supporting one another through capacity-building projects and shared learning. By nurturing a spirit of cooperation and solidarity, we can ensure that our efforts are not only impactful but also sustainable, paving the way for a future where prosperity is shared by all.

TA: As AMRDPE Chair, Singapore highlights the role of communities in alleviating poverty and promoting social protection and inclusion, particularly for vulnerable groups. How can ASEAN harness and empower communities to help reduce poverty and promote people's well-being?

Minister Zulkifli:
Singapore recognises the vital role of families and communities in alleviating poverty and promoting social protection and inclusion, particularly for vulnerable groups. In my discussions with my counterpart Ministers in ASEAN, I am heartened that we are fully aligned on this.

The ASEAN Declaration on Gender Equality and Family Development,

Singapore recognises the vital role of families and communities in alleviating poverty and promoting social protection and inclusion, particularly for vulnerable groups

Photo Credit: *© Ministry for Social and Family Development, Singapore*

> "Under ComLink+, each family is assigned a dedicated family coach who will work with them to co-develop action plans and coach and motivate them towards achieving their goals. Family coaches will take the leading coordinating support across multiple programmes to help families better navigate social support services.

adopted at the 41st ASEAN Summit, is a testament to ASEAN's collective commitment to promoting gender equality and empowering families. By doing so, we can create a more inclusive and prosperous region where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

In addition, the 13th ASEAN Ministers Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication was held in Singapore on the theme "Strengthening Community-based Approaches and Social Protection for Poverty Alleviation."

Poverty has significant impacts on families and has far-reaching consequences not just on the current generation, but also on the development of the next generation. To address the multifaceted nature of poverty, Singapore advocates for a family-centric approach, delivered in partnership with the community. This approach is exemplified through our initiative, Community Link+ (or ComLink+ for short), which aims to uplift lower-income families with children towards stability, self-reliance, and social mobility.

Under ComLink+, each family is assigned a dedicated family coach who will work with them to co-develop action plans and coach and motivate them towards achieving their goals. Family coaches will take

the leading coordinating support across multiple programmes to help families better navigate social support services. ComLink+ families can also receive additional financial support through ComLink+ Progress Packages if they take active steps to improve their life outcomes in the areas of preschool education, employment, financial stability, and saving for home ownership.

To deliver ComLink+, we harness and empower communities to partner the Government to support ComLink+ families. As at end December 2023, we have recruited and trained about 1,600 volunteer befrienders, who work alongside our family coaches to support our ComLink+ families.

The Government also rallies the community to contribute financially or offer other forms of programme-based support to ComLink+ families. For example, major banks and corporations in Singapore made generous donations to fund some of the ComLink+ Progress Packages. As at end November 2023, we have partnered approximately 170 organisations and individuals to support ComLink+ families. Community partners have contributed programmes to support families in areas ranging from debt counselling to homework supervision, and sports programmes.

TA: What is the AMRDPE Leadership Awards and how does it advance the sector's broader agenda?

Minister Zulkifli:
The AMRDPE Leadership Awards aims to recognise the roles, outstanding achievements and contributions of non-governmental organisations (NGOs/CSOs and the private sector) in rural/community development and the livelihood and poverty reduction of local communities of ASEAN Member States.

The AMRDPE Leadership Awards is an excellent opportunity for ASEAN Member States to identify key non-governmental organisations and partners and profile the good work they have done in improving the lives of the citizens and communities in the region. The Leadership Awards also attracts and inspires more non-governmental organisations and partners to work with and support respective government ministries and agencies in their efforts in rural development and poverty eradication. Through the award ceremony and sharing of experiences, we have the opportunity to learn from each other and exchange information on best practices, further strengthening ASEAN's cooperation on poverty alleviation and inclusion.

Prosperity for All

Reducing Poverty and Promoting Inclusive Growth in ASEAN

Miguel Rafael V. Musngi
Head, Poverty Eradication and Gender Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

ASEAN has made great strides in reducing extreme poverty. The region's prospects for growth signal that the tide is turning after the COVID-19 pandemic. The International Monetary Fund forecasted that economies in ASEAN will see growth of 4.2 per cent in 2023 and 4.6 per cent in 2024.

On the other hand, poverty reduction in the ASEAN Member States remains uneven, with some countries experiencing slower reduction than others. In countries with larger rural populations and ethnic minorities, many are still being left behind.

ASEAN aims to reduce extreme poverty and protect people from falling back. Regional cooperation on poverty alleviation also seeks to foster an enabling policy environment that addresses the multiple dimensions of poverty and ensures that the region's economic growth uplifts the people's overall well-being.

Poverty and rural development

ASEAN's cooperation on rural development and poverty eradication commenced in 1997 by adopting the Ministerial Understanding on ASEAN Cooperation in Rural Development and Poverty Eradication on 23 October 1997. Such cooperation builds on Article 1 of the ASEAN Charter, which states that one of ASEAN's purposes is to "alleviate poverty and narrow the development gaps within ASEAN through mutual assistance and cooperation." Since then, the cooperation has been guided further by the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the ASCC Blueprint 2025, with the

latter aiming to establish "an inclusive ASEAN Community" that improves people's quality of life and addresses the barriers to it.

The ASEAN Ministers' Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (AMRDPE) oversees regional cooperation on poverty alleviation. It is composed of ministers responsible for rural development and poverty eradication in all ASEAN Member States. The meeting is supported by a subsidiary body, the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (SOMRDPE).

During the pandemic, the AMRPDE issued a Joint Statement during the Special Meeting on Reducing Poverty and Building Resilience: Towards COVID-19 Recovery held on 19 August 2020 via video conference. The ministers underscored that in the ASEAN region, "the poor primarily reside in rural areas where access to health services, social protection, education, infrastructure is limited while the poor in urban settings mostly live in congested informal settlements with precarious socio-economic conditions and limited protection."

As such, the AMRDPE resolved to protect the poor and vulnerable from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This commitment included undertaking initiatives to invigorate rural livelihoods, ensuring that local rural economies and food systems are moving without disruption, and ensuring a pro-poor, inclusive, gender-responsive, and climate-responsive approach to recovery.

At the 12th AMRDPE on 26 November 2021, the ministers endeavoured to "review and assess relevant policies and programmes towards improving the economic and social living conditions of poor people in all settings, and empowering the poorest of people living in rural areas to benefit from development." The virtual meeting was guided by the theme, "Accelerating Recovery and Strengthening Resiliency of ASEAN for Sustainable Rural Development and Poverty Eradication."

On 22 November 2023, the 13th AMRDPE convened in Singapore with the theme "Strengthening Community-based Approaches and Social Protection for Poverty Alleviation." Significantly, the AMRDPE agreed to further strengthen community-based approaches in rural and urban communities "in the design, implementation and assessment of social protection measures that target the poor and vulnerable, as well as empowering measures that enliven local enterprise development in rural and urban areas including nano-, micro-, and small enterprises."

The SOMRDPE developed the ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2021-2025 to operationalise ASEAN's rural development and poverty eradication agenda. The work plan recognises that "sustainable rural development is vital to the economic, social and environmental viability of nations, the same way that it is essential for poverty eradication as global poverty is overwhelmingly rural." It recognises that poverty reduction targets will be met if poverty in rural areas is reduced, and calls for "rural transformation" as essential to poverty reduction.

The implementation of the work plan intends to contribute to the overall goal of improving the economic and social living conditions of people experiencing poverty in rural areas. It is also designed to assist the poorest groups in gaining benefits from development. The work plan has identified five key results areas and five strategic objectives.

ASEAN strives to highlight the gender aspects of rural development and poverty alleviation efforts. This involves identifying the presence of women and their roles in local community development and agricultural value chains and promoting women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship. Central to this strategy is acknowledging, reducing, and redistributing the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, which frequently result in time poverty for many women.

Key Result Area — Strategic Objectives

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

Milestones

During Indonesia's term as ASEAN Chair in 2024, the ASEAN Leaders adopted the Joint Statement on the Establishment of an ASEAN Villages Network at the 42nd ASEAN Summit held in May 2023 in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia. The network aims to provide a platform for a whole-of-community approach to ensure inclusive participation. Through the network, voices from villages are heard and can contribute to and benefit from development. The network likewise facilitates collaboration and cooperation among villages to enable villages to fast-track rural transformation. The network held its first meeting on 25-26 July 2023 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Another landmark framework is the ASEAN Master Plan on Rural Development adopted by the AMRPDPE. The master plan underscores the critical linkages between poverty and the state of development in rural areas. Observing that poverty persists in rural areas vis-à-vis fast-changing development contexts, the master plan advocates for inclusive and innovative approaches towards promoting sustainable and equitable development, where "no one is left behind." The master plan unpacks the nexus between poverty, agriculture, agroecology, food and nutrition, and rural development and recommends Territorial Rural Development.

A key strategy to ensure effective stakeholder engagement is the annual conduct of the ASEAN Public-Private-People Partnership Forum on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication. Annually organised by the SOMRDPE, the forum provides a platform for learning how to strengthen community approaches that contribute to inclusive rural development to reduce poverty. The recommendations arising from the forum are submitted to the annual SOMRDPE Meeting for adoption.

The AMRDPE biennially organises the ASEAN Leadership Awards on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication to recognise the efforts and contributions of civil society organisations, social enterprises, and the private sector to rural development and poverty eradication. The 6th Awards were held on 21 November 2023 in Singapore and given to 21 awardees from all ASEAN Member States.

Partnership and stakeholder engagement have been a critical feature of ASEAN's cooperation on rural development and poverty eradication. Through the abovementioned platforms, SOMRDPE continues to engage small farmers cooperatives, rural people's organisations, rural women, and civil society organisations. The SOMRDPE's long-standing partner and ASEAN-affiliated entity, the Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia or AsiaDHRRA, facilitates these grassroots engagements.

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

The ASEAN Ministerial Dialogue on Accelerating Actions to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been regularly convened through the efforts of the SOMRDPE. The ministers and heads of agencies in charge of national development planning and SDGs implementation have an opportunity to discuss cooperation on achieving the SDGs and the roles of national development planning agencies in supporting the work of ASEAN.

The 2nd ministerial dialogue was held on 31 March 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand. The dialogue underscored the cross-section between poverty and climate change and how it impinges on the lives and livelihoods of women, persons with disabilities, older persons, vulnerable groups, local communities, children, and the youth. The dialogue resolved to accelerate actions at the national and ASEAN levels to address, among others, megatrends that impact the attainment of the SDGs, including Goal 1 on poverty. The dialogue also agreed to enhance regional cooperation and partnership to ensure no one or no country is left behind.

The SOMRDPE is also instrumental in convening the ASEAN Forum on SDGs with National Development Planning Agencies, which was inaugurated on 8 July 2019 at the ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, Indonesia. The forum provides an avenue for representatives from national development planning agencies or SDG coordinating agencies, ministries in charge of rural development and poverty eradication, and other stakeholders to exchange views and discuss strategies for accelerating actions towards the attainment of the SDGs.

Lastly, the SOMRDPE also initiated the convening of the ASEAN-China-UNDP Symposium on SDGs. The symposium provides a platform for ASEAN, China and the UNDP to deliberate on priority action points in advancing the poverty agenda of the ASEAN Vision 2025 and the SDGs. The 6th symposium produced the policy brief entitled "Reducing Inequality in the Decade of Action to Achieve the SDGs and Accelerate Post-Pandemic Recovery".

Improving people's well-being

As ASEAN embarks on landmark initiatives—the completion of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the development of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045—it is imperative to fully articulate the regional agenda on eradicating extreme poverty in the region in the next twenty years. This agenda finds solid footing in ASEAN's ongoing cooperation on rural development and poverty eradication. Moving forward, ASEAN is steadfastly committed to ensuring that prosperity is equitably shared among all its peoples, which necessitates translating the region's economic growth into tangible improvements in the well-being of every individual.

Key documents on poverty alleviation and rural development may be accessed at the following:

Joint Statement of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication: https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/AMRDPE-Joint-Statement-on-COVID-19_adopted_9Nov2020.pdf

ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2021-2205: https://asean.org/book/asean-framework-action-plan-on-rural-development-and-poverty-eradication-2021-2025/

Joint Statement on the Establishment of an ASEAN Villages Network: https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/12-ASEAN-Leaders-JS-on-ASEAN-Villages-Network_adopted.pdf

ASEAN Master Plan on Rural Development: https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/34-ASEAN-Master-Plan-on-Rural-Development-2022-2026.pdf

ASEAN VILLAGES NETWORK

A Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Strategy to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the ASEAN Region

Sugito, MH

Director General of Village and Rural Development, Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration, Republic of Indonesia

Rural development is a top priority in the Southeast Asian region, where more than 60 per cent of the ASEAN population resides in rural areas. Recognising rural development's pivotal role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Indonesia, with its expansive rural landscapes, champions the ASEAN Village Network (AVN) as an innovative strategy.

Support for the establishment of the ASEAN Village Network

Amidst rapid economic and urban transformation, rural development is crucial to ensure that economic growth occurs evenly across the region. The AVN emerges as a response to the challenges rural communities face in the ASEAN region. This initiative was born out of the ASEAN Leaders Joint Statement on the Establishment of the ASEAN Village Network with the Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (SOMRDPE) Indonesia as the focal point. It was adopted at the 42nd ASEAN Summit on 10 May 2023 in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia.

The AVN aims to enhance cooperation, knowledge-sharing, and mutual support among ASEAN Member States in advancing rural development agendas. Ultimately, the AVN's primary goals is to enhance the quality of life of ASEAN citizens through this learning and collaborative forum. Sharing best practices and mutually beneficial knowledge, and promoting the development of innovative, sustainable, progressive, and self-reliant rural communities will contribute towards creating a caring society among ASEAN Member States. Villages networked across ASEAN will also enhance cross-cultural understanding and strengthen the ASEAN identity.

To achieve these objectives, the ASEAN Village Network Framework outlines key programmes and activities: (1) Knowledge Sharing Platform: The AVN provides a forum for Member States to share best practices, development strategies, and successful experiences in advancing rural development; (2) Capacity Enhancement Initiatives: Training programmes and workshops are conducted to enhance the skills, knowledge, and capacities of rural communities in various fields, including agriculture, environmental sustainability, and entrepreneurship; (3) Partnership Development: The AVN facilitates cooperation among governments, the private sector, NGOs, and academia to mobilise resources and support for

Photo Credit: © Ovnigraphic / Shutterstock

Photo Credit: © Fehmiu Roffytavare / Shutterstock

sustainable rural development; and (4) Policy Advocacy: The AVN plays a role in advocating for policies that support rural development, including access to essential services and poverty alleviation.

Accelerating the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals

Rural development aligns with the goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. In this regard, the AVN empowers member villages to form partnerships for goals and adapt SDGs at the village level, according to each village's local and cultural context—ensuring no one is left behind. Therefore, the AVN plays a key role in advancing the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the local level.

Through targeted interventions and collaborative initiatives, the initiation phase of the AVN focuses on three key areas: (1) Village Tourism, as a platform for discussion, exchange of best practices and management, and potential collaboration among villages, such as joint tourism promotion packages; (2) Digital Village, to encourage villages to effectively utilise technology for village development that is

accessible to all, including women and people with disabilities; and (3) One Village One Product (OVOP), serving as a platform to improve, develop, and promote products that reflect ASEAN identity. It is also a driving force for rural communities to be independent, creative, and innovative in identifying and utilising local resources.

With a focus on poverty alleviation, gender equality, environmental sustainability, and inclusive economic growth, the AVN contributes to achieving SDGs at the local level. These initiatives encourage rural communities to play an active role in development, enhance their well-being, and create sustainable environments for future generations.

A collaboration to alleviate poverty in rural communities

As an initial step, ASEAN Member States nominate villages with potential in the focus areas of the ASEAN Village Network. They become AVN member villages, and are subsequently designated as AVN Pilot Project Villages. At this stage, the involvement of stakeholders is crucial, including the various levels of government, from the villages

to regions. These range from the district, province, and central government in each ASEAN Member State. The support can take the shape of mentoring, training, and facilitating access to resources and opportunities needed, including access to permits or policies required to improve living standards and reduce socio-economic disparities.

The support of the AVN is outlined in the AVN Framework, serving as a collaborative and learning forum where each member village can exchange best practices, which mutually benefit each other, and promote innovative, sustainable, fair, inclusive, progressive, and self-reliant rural development. The AVN can also function as a counterpart programme linking each member village with ASEAN partners or the private sector.

Under the SOMRDPE of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Pillar, the AVN can potentially involve other Pillars, particularly the ASEAN Economic Community. The collaboration can promote rural economic development through trade promotion and investment in relevant economic sectors. These include developing local products, joint marketing, and increased market access for rural products. Thus, the AVN can help create new economic opportunities and improve the welfare of rural communities across ASEAN. This cross-pillar integration will develop a comprehensive and sustainable approach to promoting rural development and enhancing the well-being of communities across the region.

As an open platform, the AVN exemplifies the ASEAN Member States' commitment to sustainable and inclusive rural development. Through solid cooperation and close collaboration, the AVN offers hope for rural communities to enhance people's quality of life and prosperity. This initiative underscores the pivotal role of rural communities as primary agents to attain sustainable development goals.

6th ASEAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ERADICATION LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Every two years, ASEAN hands out the ASEAN Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Leadership Awards to outstanding private sector and non-government or civil society actors in each ASEAN Member State. Winners are chosen for their impact on rural communities and poverty reduction; innovative approaches to addressing rural development challenges; sustainability, scalability, and replicability of anti-poverty initiatives; and partnership with government and other institutions.

"The outstanding practices we celebrate feature practical approaches and solutions that enable and empower people in local communities. Such approaches feature dynamic collaboration that strengthens resilience to demographic shifts and challenges that converge at the community level. These efforts uplift people from poverty and transform their lives for the better," said Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN, during the awarding ceremony on 21 November 2023 in Singapore.

On its sixth cycle, the ASEAN Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Leadership Awards were conferred to 20 organisations in 2023 as follows:

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM
- Brunei Darussalam Council on Social Welfare
- Brunei Shell Petroleum

CAMBODIA
- Cambodia Buddhism for Development
- Farmer and Nature Net Association

INDONESIA
- Bumkal Sambimulyo
- PT Bank Pembangunan Daerah, Daerah Istimewa, Yogyakarta

LAO PDR
- Association for Rural Mobilisation and Improvement
- Coopérative des Producteurs de Café du Plateau des Bolovens

MALAYSIA
- Malaysia Global Peace Foundation
- Langit Collective (M) Sdn Bhd

MYANMAR
- U Naing Entrance Schools Myanmar (UNEC MM)
- ZLT Super Electrical Co., Ltd.

PHILIPPINES
- Kapunungan sa Gagmayng Mangingisda sa Concepcion (Association of Small Fisherfolk of Concepcion)
- Davao Light and Power Company

SINGAPORE
- Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities Limited
- DBS Bank Ltd

THAILAND
- Pracharath Rak Samakkee Social Enterprise (Thailand) Company Limited
- TVA Institute Association

VIET NAM
- Vietnam Rural Industry Research and Development Institute (VIRI)
- Vinh Hiep Co., Ltd

POVERTY IN ASEAN

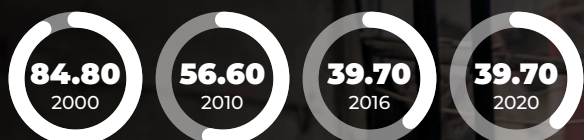**Data show declining poverty rates across ASEAN since the 1990s.**

CAMBODIA

Proportion of the population below the National Poverty Line*

1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
39	39	37	33	26	13.5	17.8

Population living in slums (% of urban population)**

84.80	56.60	39.70	39.70
2000	2010	2016	2020

INDONESIA

Proportion of the population below the National Poverty Line*

1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2022
15	11	19	16	13	10.9	9.54

Population living in slums (% of urban population)**

35.13	26.85	21.89	19.41
2000	2010	2016	2020

LAO PDR

Proportion of the population below the National Poverty Line*

1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2018
49	43	36	30	24	18.3

Population living in slums (% of urban population)**

54.40	37.30	27.00	21.80
2000	2010	2016	2020

MALAYSIA

Proportion of the population below the National Poverty Line*

1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2022
16.5	8.7	8.5	5.7	3.8	6.2
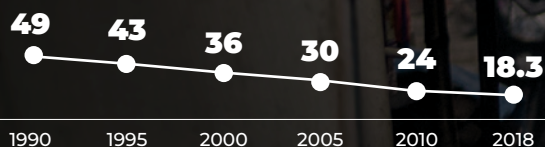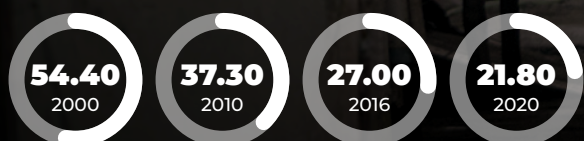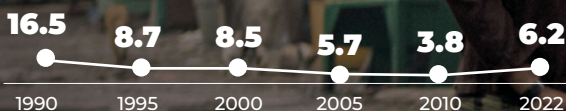
Notes:

*Data from 1990 to 2010 were derived from the 2011 ASEAN Statistical Report on the Millenium Development Goals, while data from 2015 onwards were taken from the ASEANStats data portal.

**Population living in slums is the proportion of the urban population living in slum households. A slum household is defined as a group of individuals living under the same roof lacking one or more of the following conditions: access to improved water, access to improved sanitation, sufficient living area, housing durability, and security of tenure.

***Brunei Darussalam and Singapore have no official national poverty lines.

MYANMAR

Proportion of the population below the National Poverty Line*

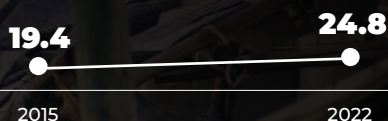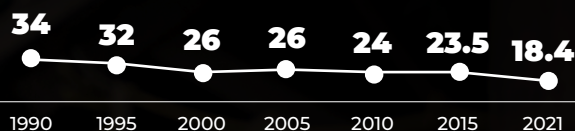| 19.4	24.8
2015	2022

Population living in slums (% of urban population)**

29.40	45.44	55.07	58.28
2000	2010	2016	2020

PHILIPPINES

Proportion of the population below the National Poverty Line*

34	32	26	26	24	23.5	18.4
1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2021

Population living in slums (% of urban population)**

49.97	42.94	38.72	36.62
2000	2010	2016	2020

THAILAND

Proportion of the population below the National Poverty Line*

34	17	21	10	7	7.2	6.84
1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020

Population living in slums (% of urban population)**

15.61	11.98	8.87	6.79
2000	2010	2016	2020

VIET NAM

Proportion of the population below the National Poverty Line*

72	52	35	19	13	7	4.2
1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2022

Population living in slums (% of urban population)**

45.32	20.60	5.77	5.77
2000	2010	2016	2020
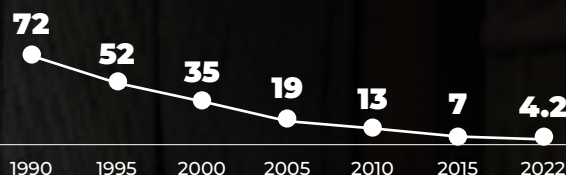
Sources:

The World Bank Data. Population living in slums (% of urban population). Retrieved on 27 February 2024 from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.SLUM.UR.ZS?end=2020&start=2000&view=chart

ASEAN. (2012). 2011 ASEAN Statistical Report on the Millenium Development Goals. https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ASEAN-Statistical-Report-in-MDG-2012.pdf

ASEANStats DataPortal. SDG Indicators (Proportion of population below national poverty line, per country, 2013-2022). Retrieved on 27 February 2024 from https://data.aseanstats.org/sdg

Photo Credit: *© Eko Susanto / Shutterstock*

From Local to Global
Malaysia and ASEAN Address Poverty in the 21st Century

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While we often describe or ascribe income values when discussing poverty, there is a recognition that poverty is a multidimensional concept (Saidatulakmal Mohd et al, 2018). Income can be useful as an indicator to capture general trends. In Malaysia, the income-based categories of wealth, such as the T20, M40, or B40, are also useful for locating one's household income. These categories represent the top 20 per cent (T20), middle 40 per cent (M40), or lower 40 per cent (B40) of all household incomes.

Malaysia is often reported as having successfully reduced poverty from 52.4 per cent to 5.1 per cent from the 1970s to the new millennium (T.Y. Mok et al, 2007). Saidatulakmal Mohd et al (2018) likewise reports a substantial decrease in the incidence of poverty from 49.3 per cent in 1970 to 1.7 per cent in 2012. These figures indicate the remarkable success of national development initiatives. The country has also successfully transitioned from an agrarian society to what can be described as a post-industrial society.

However, this downward trend in addressing poverty halted in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nurhani et al (2023) reports that in 2020 the poverty rate increased from 5.6 per cent in 2019 to 8.4 per cent. *Malaysiakini* (2023) notes that based on the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the absolute poverty rate reached 6.2 per cent in 2022. Meanwhile, the average poverty line income in 2022 was 2,589 Malaysian Ringgit (approximately 546 US dollars).

Today, as poverty reduction policies are framed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we must ask ourselves if an income-based definition of poverty is a good indicator of the challenges faced in the 21st century. What should policymakers and civil society consider when framing the question of poverty intervention? This article highlights three examples of exploring poverty as a multidisciplinary concept. These examples are (i) ageing, (ii) the alienation of local communities from natural resources, and (iii) undocumented children and access to formal education.

An overview: Development paradigms and Malaysia

From the 1950s through the 1980s, the preoccupation with poverty alleviation initiatives has progressively shifted towards social transformation to address rural poverty and inter-ethnic disparity and increase overall household income. Over the years, the modernisation paradigm was refined to include a gender lens in poverty intervention programmes. In the 1980s, the focus was on structural adjustments, financial restructuring, the retreat of big state initiatives, as well as increasing private sector and civil society participation in poverty alleviation, with international funding translating the challenges of addressing poverty from framing development as national interests to one of global significance.

Today, we continue to see both the State and civil society, facilitated by international actors, as important partners in addressing poverty issues nationally. International actors offer financial and technical support as well as paradigmatic

shifts in how we frame poverty. If poverty in the 1950s was framed as a technology and capital deficit, today, we frame poverty within the context of social equality, climate crisis and sustainability. The more recent global development initiative by the United Nations, the SDGs, set to be implemented between 2016 and 2030, has outlined 17 global goals. These goals include: 1. No Poverty, 2. Zero Hunger, 3. Good Health and Wellbeing, 4. Quality Education, 10. Reduced Inequalities, and much more. According to Morton et al (2017), "The Sustainable Development Goals, otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a set of objectives within a universal agreement to end poverty, protect all that makes the planet habitable, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity, now and in the future."

In 2015, all UN member states adopted the SDGs (Morton et al, 2017). Malaysia is one of these member states, incorporating the SDGs into its national development framework.

More recently, social equitability, climate crisis, and sustainability have become important in understanding how the State conceptualises and frames poverty. This raises the question: how are people framed within this new conceptualisation of poverty? This also suggests that poverty extends beyond mere income levels and can be reinterpreted as a local issue with global repercussions. It likewise suggests that the solution to the climate crisis rests with addressing social equitability. We must consider the following: What are the right questions to ask to understand poverty within the context of social equitability? How can we better use our resources and capacities to develop effective interventions that mitigate the adverse consequences experienced by those living in poverty? A good starting point involves exploring the tangible and intangible experiences of people living in poverty, which prevent them from maximising their full potential and leading fulfilling lives.

Setting the stage: Malaysia and poverty in the 21st century

Malaysia is a nation blessed with agreeable weather and abundant natural resources. It is also politically and administratively stable. These conditions promise families the opportunity to grow and prosper, ensuring overall well-being. The bureaucratic system, inherited from the British colonial era, has entrenched a service aimed at providing for the needs of Malaysian society as it has evolved over six decades.

However, as Malaysia enters the 21st century, new challenges emerge. With improved healthcare, transportation, and connectivity throughout the country, these emerging challenges include the need to face an increasingly ageing population. Another issue is the rapid transformation of the idyllic rural landscape into urban and suburban areas. In this rush for national growth, the environment, in some ways, has suffered from pollution, with local residents caught in a pinch between the increasing demand for space by industries and the ever-expanding cities. Newfound potential wealth in natural resources and the extractive industry also threatens to create internally displaced peoples. A third issue caused by a combination of tradition, geopolitical instability, and the success of our development policies, is the influx of undocumented migration from within and beyond Southeast Asia.

These are just a few of the emerging social categories of people living in poverty, which state and civil society actors need to acknowledge when formulating effective public policies and social intervention in mitigating poverty. However, their experience of living in poverty goes beyond simply lacking money. Thus, correctly identifying the definition of poverty will enable us to restructure our intervention qualifies the strategies, both the formal structures and the informal services, to address these gaps properly. The question, thus, is less an economic question and one of aspiration: What do we aspire

for Malaysia as we progress into the 21st century? How can we realise this aspiration for all residents in Malaysia?

An ageing population

By 2030, Malaysia is expected to have 15 per cent of the population above 60 years old (Nik Norliati Fitri Md Nor and Suriati Ghazali, 2021). Ageing in poverty is concerning due to the increasing isolation from the facilities and services that enable older people to age with grace and dignity. Although the number of the elderly is low, and the government has policies for older people, more attention is needed to ensure they are not neglected (Saidatulakmal Mohd et al, 2018).

As Malaysia's population ages, there is a need to learn from other countries on how to ensure both rural and urban areas have facilities that enable independent and integrated living for older adults. Family support remains an essential crutch for older people, and Malaysia does not have laws requiring children to care for their ageing parents. This has led some scholars to call for reforms to make children legally accountable for the well-being of their parents (Norliati Fitri Md Nor and Suriati Ghazali, 2021).

In the current context, a minority of the older population—who may not have the support of family, relies on meagre pension or savings, and is heavily reliant on the public system—face a harrowing and lonely experience of growing old. Thus, significant work is needed to better understand the impact of social isolation and loneliness. Foong H.F et al (2023) found in their study that it is important for older people to remain engaged in social activities. Initiatives need to be taken to ensure older adults have access to social programmes that create meaningful relationships. They explain, "social engagement in older people is important for wellbeing in later life. Older persons should continue participating in age-appropriate activities because social interaction can help them stay motivated, realise their full

potential, and ultimately find more life satisfaction. Therefore, community programs such as special aids and befriending programs for older people are needed to promote life satisfaction" (Foong H.F, et al, 2023).

Alienating local communities from the natural environment

Pockets of poverty are emerging in rapidly industrialising and urbanising areas, where land is quickly being swallowed up for physical development. Villages that were once idyllic now face a much smaller expanse of nature, affecting their ability to complement their income and create sources of livelihood and sustenance. Furthermore, local communities' access to natural resources is constantly threatened by pollution and targeted for development.

The importance of seemingly insignificant swaths of natural landscapes is best described by Afiqah Dharwisyah's research work (2024) with coastal communities and their heavy reliance on coastal fisheries to provide sustenance and an alternative source of livelihood. She explains, "(gleaning) consequently… represents a significant income-generating activity that empowers women economically. Hence, gleaning provides an essential economic lifeline for marginalised communities by offering opportunities for income generation, as well as supporting subsistence."

Such reliance on natural resources is not unique to suburban and rural communities in industrial landscapes; the urban poor also rely on these resources for income generation and sustenance for the household. Public policies protecting these small but rich natural resource landscapes, and ensuring access for the lower income to harvest renewable natural resources are important localised solutions in addressing food security and poverty. Recognising the different scales of governance in public policy for the poor potentially also helps to mitigate environmental degradation.

The relationship between localised solutions for poverty alleviation by reconnecting local communities with the natural environment is an understudied field within Malaysia that requires further investigation.

Undocumented children and the lack of access to formal education

The third point for discussion is the lack of access to formal education among children without proper documentation. Due to the complex Malaysian social fabric, undocumented children become stateless through no fault of their own, despite being born and raised in Malaysia. These children are vulnerable due to their lack of residence status. For example, UNHCR estimates around 50,000 stateless children in Malaysia, while the Asia Foundation estimates 52,000 stateless children in just the state of Sabah. The absence of official documentation makes it difficult for children to access formal education.

Conclusion

The three examples discussed within the context of Malaysia explore poverty in the 21st century as a multidimensional concept. These examples include (i) ageing, (ii) alienating local communities from the natural environment, and (iii) undocumented children and the lack of access to formal education.

The aim is to highlight the need to move away from a purely income-based definition of poverty in order to appreciate its broader implications and how corrective policies based on new social, economic, and political lenses

can help address the questions of social equity and environmental sustainability. In short, it will help us think through solutions to the climate crisis and social development issues.

In line with the SDGs, we must rethink how we approach poverty for the next generation. Is poverty reduction solely about increasing wealth, or is it about implementing a system for social equitability, environmental sustainability, and universal rights? How do we plan and manage for sustainability amidst a rising population, shrinking natural resource base, and the breakdown of borders within the region?

Agreeing on a critical framing of how poverty is defined will allow us to address current and future challenges. The challenge now is no longer just about wealth creation. For Malaysia and ASEAN to thrive in the 21st century, the following questions must be answered: What quality of life do we want for our society? How do we promote an effective inclusive society? And, how do we formulate policies which create a more equitable and sustainable future for all residents within our countries and the region. These questions place the responsibility of addressing poverty within the framework of the national welfare policies and emphasise the need to align national goals with regional challenges, framed within global aspirations.

References can be downloaded from this link: https://bit.ly/ Issue36_Ref

STUDY

OLD AGE POVERTY AND ACTIVE AGEING IN ASEAN
TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Highlights of a study published in December 2023 by the **Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD)** and the **ASEAN Secretariat**

Poverty in Old Age

The current method of tracking old-age poverty involves disaggregating the current poverty measure according to age. However, poverty in later life is not the same as it is in youth and early adulthood. Older people are less likely to emerge from long-term poverty because of receding capability, deteriorating health, and limited access to financial resources. Thus, research on poverty must analyse old-age poverty within a context-specific framework.

Incidence of Old-Age Poverty in ASEAN

- In general, older persons in the ASEAN Member States have been living marginally above the poverty line and remain vulnerable to falling into poverty.

- In countries with younger populations like the Philippines, the Lao PDR, and Cambodia, older people are less likely to become impoverished than the general population. In countries with a more mature population like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, the poverty headcount rate of older people is higher than that of the general population or even non-older people.

Poverty Profile of Older Persons in the ASEAN Member States

GENERAL

In most ASEAN Member States, older women have a higher poverty rate than older men, and they also face more severe conditions. Women's domestic responsibilities prevent them from having paid full-time jobs. Those who work are still expected to fulfill caregiving duties at home. Many engage in low-wage, unstable, and informal jobs. These leave women with limited social protection and financially dependent on their spouses. Hence, they become more vulnerable to poverty in their later years.

More older people live in rural areas. They also typically reside with their family, particularly their adult children, showing that filial obligation is still observed. However, they usually live with family members who are also impoverished.

Poverty is the primary factor driving older people in ASEAN to remain in the labour force. Many of them work in agriculture. Older women are typically employed in informal and unstable jobs.

Photo Credit: © Le Manh Thang / Shutterstock

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC

🇰🇭 CAMBODIA

Who are the aged poor?

- More women than men experience poverty and for more extended periods
- They have low educational achievement and suffer from poor health
- 70 per cent live in rural areas

Living arrangements

- They live in large households, most with no basic facilities
- 78 per cent live with their children
- They raise orphaned grandchildren, some living with HIV

Employment

- Most work in the agriculture sector
- They depend on their children but also generate their own income

🇮🇩 INDONESIA

Who are the aged poor?

- Poverty rate for persons aged 60 and above was 11.96% (2012 data)
- There is no gender difference in poverty rates among older men and women
- Most only have primary education, and most have low literacy levels
- 17 per cent live in rural areas, while 10.5 per cent live in urban areas

Living arrangements

- They are more likely to live with at least one child (in a poor household)

Employment

- Indigent older people work the most, but their labour participation declines as they age
- Only 28.7 per cent of older women work for pay, and majority do domestic work
- 65 per cent of older adults rely on their children for income

🇱🇦 LAO PDR

Who are the aged poor?

- Poverty among older persons aged 60-64 was at 16.8% (2019 data)
- Most have no education or have high levels of illiteracy
- Most are malnourished and have poor health
- Most are in the rural areas

Living arrangements

- 89.6 per cent live with their family

Employment

- Most work in agriculture but are food insecure
- Work is their primary source of income

🇲🇲 MYANMAR

Who are the aged poor?

- 24% of older persons lived in poverty (2017 data)
- 40.5 per cent are females
- They have low levels of education
- They live in rural areas

Living arrangements

- 40 per cent live with families who are extremely poor
- 33.3 per cent live in a house with no water and electricity

Employment

- 52 per cent are farmers in rural areas
- 60 per cent rely on their children, while 20 per cent earn an income

🇲🇾 MALAYSIA

Who are the aged poor?

- 5.7% of households headed by an older person aged 65 years and above lived in absolute poverty (2019 data)
- Older women are poorer than their male counterparts and have limited capacities
- Most have low levels of education and usually suffer from chronic health conditions
- They live in rural areas

Living arrangements

- Most live with their family
- 30 per cent have dependents still in school

Employment

- Majority no longer work; those who do are in the informal and agricultural sectors
- Their sources of income are work and remittance from children

🇵🇭 PHILIPPINES

Who are the aged poor?

- 9.1 per cent of the total older population were members of households classified as income poor; 2.2 per cent belonged to households considered subsistence poor (2018 data)

- Older population in the bottom income decile has the lowest percentage of access to social protection programmes

Employment

- Older people are less economically active; 67 per cent of older men and 45.3 per cent of older women in the labour force are from the poorest segment

🇸🇬 SINGAPORE

Who are the aged poor?

- More older women are poor; women are also more likely to slip into poverty

- 88.2 per cent have low levels of education

- They suffer from chronic ailments

Living arrangements

- 74.2 per cent are in public housing, living with their family

Employment

- 9.8 per cent still work, 26.3 per cent receive pocket money from family

🇹🇭 THAILAND

Who are the aged poor?

- Poverty is higher among males, especially those 70 years and older

- They have low levels of education and are in poor health

- They live in rural areas

Living arrangements

- They live in unfavourable neighbourhoods

Employment

- They engage in farm or informal work

- 28.9 per cent generate income from work, while 52.3 per cent are dependent on their children

🇻🇳 VIET NAM

Who are the aged poor?

- 8.6% of older persons were poor (2016 data)

- Older women experience higher levels of poverty

- They have low educational attainment

- Most live in rural areas

- 65.1 per cent does not receive social security

Living arrangements

- They typically live with their family

Employment

- 34.8 per cent either receive remittances directly or is married to a recipient

Determinants of Old Age Poverty and Vulnerability

- Diseases such as COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, and malaria worsen the condition of disadvantaged older people

- Macroeconomic shocks lead to unemployment and food insecurity, leaving the poor vulnerable

- Environmental emergencies and natural disasters affect impoverished communities since they live in hazard-prone areas and have less financial resources to invest in risk-reduction measures

- Conflict and warfare destroy infrastructure and social services, leading to severe poverty in affected communities

- Social inequality and exclusion prevent older people from participating in economic, social, and political activities

- Access to essential services, social pensions, and informal assistance networks will be increasingly difficult as the population ages

- Life trajectory and experiences, such as the onset of disability or death of a spouse, can disrupt livelihood and necessitate costly long-term care

- Illiteracy and gender inequality also make older people susceptible to poverty

CONVERSATIONS

On how strengthening safety nets and empowering the community's most vulnerable are critical to alleviating poverty

Cash for Hope
A Story from Cambodia

Ixora Tri Devi
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Community Department*

Cambodia's Cash Transfer Program for Poor and Vulnerable Households during COVID-19

Benefits per months	Urban Households in Phnom Penh (Riel)*		Urban Households Outside Phnom Penh (Riel)*		Rural Households (Riel)*	
Family with Poor ID	120.000	120.000	120.000	120.000	40.000	40.000
Each family member	42.000	36.000	40.000	28.000	24.000	16.000
Children, 0-5 years old (per child)	40.000	28.000	40.000	28.000	24.000	16.000
Person with Disability (per person)	40.000	28.000	40.000	28.000	24.000	16.000
Person aged above 60 years (per person)	40.000	28.000	40.000	28.000	24.000	16.000
Family member with HIV (per person)	40.000	28.000	40.000	28.000	24.000	16.000

*1 US dollar = 4,029 Cambodian riels

● Poor 1 ● Poor 2

Source: Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, Cambodia.

Fifty-two-year-old Touch Phalla dropped out of school when she was 12, just after finishing primary school. It was in the 1980s when her father had abandoned the family, leaving her mother to fend for Touch and her sister. Young Touch needed to become the family's breadwinner. She baked traditional Khmer cakes and sold them on foot in the streets around her neighbourhood in Phnom Penh. Growing up as a cake vendor, she set aside her dream of becoming a doctor.

"All I do is work to provide for my family, to provide the essentials," she told *The ASEAN*.

She has owned a small store in front of her house for about ten years. Currently, four people live with Touch Phalla: her mother, her sister, her niece, and herself. After learning about the cash transfer programme from the Ministry of Social Affairs through her community leader, she has been participating in the programme since 2019. Touch Phalla is eligible to benefit from the Cash Transfer Programme for Poor Households in the "Poor 2" category (see chart).

"Cash from this programme helped me to ease my family's burden. In the first two months, we received 320,000 Cambodian riels (80 US dollars) and then 290,000 Cambodian riels (72.5 US dollars). Later on, it was 140,000 Cambodian riels (35 US dollars). I have received it regularly since 2019. From my business, I earn 40,000 to 50,000 Cambodian riels (10-12.5 US dollars), with around a 4,000-5,000 Cambodian riels (around 1 US dollar) profit per day. I use the cash transfer to pay for electricity and medicine for my mom, who suffers from diabetes and high blood pressure.

"I would like to thank the government for providing this programme to me for a long time now. I hope the programme will continue and that I can be a beneficiary. My dream is to have an adequate livelihood. As women, we need to work hard, be patient, and persevere. Although I can't pursue my dream of becoming a doctor, I hope that my niece can be one in the future."

Insight from the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation

Talking with *The ASEAN* magazine, Nhep Chane, Director of the Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, shared insights into Cambodia's commitment to social welfare and assistance.

"Our ministry is in charge of the social protection and social assistance programmes, with a targeted approach to aid those in need. It's a government priority to offer social services and welfare through these initiatives," Chane explained.

Detailing the array of programmes, he highlighted that "the cash transfer programme for pregnant women and children under two was in place even before the COVID-19 pandemic, serving as a permanent fixture. Additionally, we have introduced social assistance during lockdowns, support for those affected by COVID-19, aid for families hit by severe flooding, and help for those impacted by inflation. With the pandemic behind us, we've phased out COVID-related assistance."

Looking ahead, Chane elaborated on forthcoming initiatives. "We're preparing to phase out the assistance for flooding and inflation before launching new projects in April. The Family Package Programme and the Shock Responsive Programme are set to be implemented, continuing our permanent support schemes. The Family Package Programme, in particular, will aim at assisting impoverished families, individuals with disabilities, people over 60 years old, and those living with HIV/AIDS. It's a nationwide endeavour, building on the foundation of assisting over 700,000 households in previous programmes."

Chane also touched upon ASEAN's role in enhancing social protection strategies. "Through ASEAN, we've adopted regulations, recommendations, and action plans that reflect a collective effort in social protection. The exchange of best practices and declarations within ASEAN has significantly contributed to shaping our national action plans and programmes," he concluded.

Associate Editor Joanne B. Agbisit contributed to this article.

Photo Credit: *©Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, Cambodia*

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

Joanne B. Agbisit
Associate Editor, The ASEAN
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Gemma Ambuyoc, 38, did not have an easy life growing up. Born out of wedlock, Gemma was raised by her grandmother, who struggled to support her. "I would not have been able to finish high school without my teacher, who gave me a job and a place to live," Gemma recalled.

Kim Inde conducts outreach immunisation for children in remote highland communities in Brooke's Point, Palawan

Her hopes for a better life dimmed after marrying young. She became a stay-at-home wife and mother with a husband who had no stable job. "We could barely make ends meet. We were living in a small hut with no furnishings, no electricity," Gemma recounted. "We often didn't have enough for food or our child's school expenses. Isn't it heartbreaking when your child goes hungry or when they see other children eating food you can't afford to buy?"

The Pantawid Pamilya Pilipino Program or 4Ps was a lifeline for Gemma. Introduced by the Philippine government in 2008, 4Ps is a conditional cash transfer programme that assists low-income households. It provides a monthly health and nutrition grant and rice subsidy to each household, and educational allowance for each child (not exceeding 18 years old) in the household. In turn, the parents must ensure that their children attend school and receive regular health check-ups. Family beneficiaries must also attend the monthly family development sessions covering various topics, such as responsible parenting, health and nutrition, and women's rights. Over four million households are currently enrolled in the programme.

Stories of success

Gemma's family was a recipient of the programme from 2012 to 2020. She told *The ASEAN*, "I'm grateful for the programme. It made a huge difference in our lives. We could afford food, pay our bills, and buy school supplies. It helped us take care of our health. Without the programme, my children would have been malnourished."

Kim Kim Inde, 23, was also a recipient of the 4Ps beginning in 2014 when he was in 7th grade until he graduated from high school. He is the youngest of five siblings and belongs to the Palaw'an indigenous community.

"I was able to finish high school with 4Ps financial assistance. I credit my parents for spending the assistance wisely. They used it to support my school needs and for our family's daily expenses," Kim narrated. "My older siblings—a brother and three sisters—were unable to continue schooling because we were financially strapped. Without help, I would not have been able to complete high school, let alone enter college."

Although critics have raised concerns over the creation of dependency among beneficiaries of conditional cash transfer programmes like the 4Ps, Gemma and Kim's experiences prove otherwise.

Four years after graduating from the programme, Gemma's two children are thriving in school. "My eldest, Jimmy, is in grade 12 and hopes to study criminology. My daughter, Precious, is in grade 7 and wants to be a nurse," Gemma said.

Gemma Ambuyoc sees her work in the local government as an opportunity to pay forward the support her family has received

After topping the Midwifery Licensure Exam, Kim Inde returned to his hometown to serve as a rural health worker

Gemma herself went back to school in 2017 while selling clothes and beauty products to earn additional income. She said that the 4Ps family development sessions were a huge help, opening her eyes to a different world. "I became empowered and learned about my rights and responsibilities. Before, my whole world revolved around taking care of my family. But through the sessions, I learned that even though you're a mother, your life isn't over," she recounted.

Gemma has since completed her bachelor's degree in Agricultural Technology from the Southern Leyte State University. She now works in the agricultural department of the local government unit of Bontoc, Southern Leyte. "I worked hard for my degree, and so I treasure it. I also love the job I have now because it's what I want to do, and I can now take care of my family financially," Gemma said.

Kim also continued his education after graduating from high school and from the 4Ps. He got into the midwife programme offered by the University of the Philippines Manila School of Health Sciences in Leyte and received a scholarship from the Department of Health to complete the programme.

"I got my diploma, and thankfully, I was also able to pass the board exam in 2023," Kim narrated. Kim is now employed at Brooke's Point Rural Health Unit of the Department of Health. Eventually, he plans to continue his studies to realise his dream of becoming a doctor.

Challenges in implementation

Implementing the Pantawid Pamilya Pilipino Program has not been without its challenges.

Monitoring compliance with the programme's conditions can be difficult, requiring significant administrative resources. One innovative approach to managing the vast number of beneficiaries, especially in communities with a high enrollment in the programme, involves organising the beneficiaries and assigning parent-leaders like Gemma, according to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). "This set-up allows the DSWD 4Ps staff to relay vital information about the programme, coordinate family development sessions, and reach out to beneficiaries when needed," DSWD's Jonna Marie Marquez told *The ASEAN*.

Ensuring that the 4Ps programme reaches and addresses the needs of the country's poorest and most vulnerable households also requires refining the targeting system through regular data collection and analysis. According to recent pronouncements by DSWD, a community-based survey will be undertaken to update its list of beneficiaries. It is also looking into the possibility of increasing the cash grants to offset the impact of inflation.

Impact on poverty reduction

Several studies have highlighted the effects of the 4Ps on decreasing poverty levels in the Philippines. A 2017 impact assessment carried out by a team from the World Bank showed that the programme led to a decrease of 1.3 percentage points in poverty rates and contributed to a 0.6 point reduction in income inequality.

Previous assessments conducted by both DSWD and the World Bank also demonstrated results: an increase in school enrollment and attendance among school children; higher rates of vitamin supplementation and deworming pill uptake for children; favourable changes in behaviour related to seeking healthcare and attending school; and no disincentive effects on adults' labour participation.

Smaller scale studies also showed that the 4Ps helped beneficiaries start businesses, increased their average monthly incomes, and improved the academic performance of children.

These research findings underscore the value of 4Ps as a poverty alleviation tool and validate the government's continuing investment in the programme. Gemma and Kim's stories show that targeted interventions that foster self-reliance and empowerment can break the cycle of poverty, providing hope and creating opportunities for the most vulnerable families.

Staff Writer Ixora Tri Devi contributed to this article.

Uma Oma Café
Serving Up Equal Opportunities

Ixora Tri Devi
Staff Writer, The ASEAN
ASEAN Socio-Cultural
Community Department

Imagine going to your grandma's home for a good meal and a warm hug. This appeal made Uma Oma (Grandmother's House) Cafe the talk of the town when it first opened in September 2023 in Jakarta. Social media posts about the cafe went viral. Within six months, framed articles about the business and its employees adorned the cafe's walls.

66 We hire active older persons as part of our intergenerational team," said 40-year-old Junaedi Salat, or Juna, the co-founder and CEO of Uma Oma café, to *The ASEAN*.

Located just a kilometre from the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, the cosy café serves traditional home-cooked meals. Its interiors, designed to resemble an old house, offering a slice of nostalgia and warmth, much like a grandmother's loving embrace. It's the secret ingredient to the cafe's success.

"When we were conceiving this café, we wanted this business to bring value to our customers. We didn't figure it out back then; we only wanted to have a good business that could benefit many. After my visit to a retirement house, the concept of Uma Oma was born," Juna recalled.

"We also thought that it is relevant in Jakarta since many come here away from their homes and families. So, this will be a great venue for them to release their longing for their grandma or their mother. I also grew up living with my grandmother; it was a happy memory that I wish I could relive," he added.

Juna, who previously worked in corporate communications, regularly engaged with charitable organisations, including Yayasan Amal Mulia. During one visit, he was moved by conversations with senior citizens who expressed a deep desire for more active roles and opportunities to return to work. "Their stories and wishes were eye-opening," he shared.

Older residents from the foundation were eager to join the venture, many of them asking a poignant question: could they find a place in Oma Uma, too?

Although it was just the beginning, with only one outlet, Juna saw immense potential. "This is our pilot project, an example of how generations can coexist and thrive together," he stated. "There are many things that the senior workers are capable of doing. We do not want to over-promise that we are trying to 'inspire others to do the same', but at least the public can see that this can be done."

Wasinah

A young couple was reaching for the door handle when Wasinah rose from her bench right behind the door and greeted them, "Welcome to Uma Oma."

Wasinah, a seventy-nine-year-old woman, is one of the grandmothers working at the café. Born and raised in Yogyakarta, Central Java, she harboured dreams of moving to the capital city. However, at the age of 14, she had to abandon those dreams when she was forced into marriage. "I was crying on the wedding dais. I didn't want to be married!"

Years later, after having seven children, Wasinah divorced her husband and moved to Jakarta for a new beginning. "I arrived here in 1982," she recalled. "A friend asked me to join them at a soy sauce factory, but I refused. I chose to sell vegetables at the traditional market with just 1,500 rupiah (10 cents) as my starting capital."

Later, Wasinah began making *rempeyek*, a traditional cracker with anchovies or peanuts. Her rempeyek was so good that she managed to work as a supplier in various restaurants across Jakarta. She continues to make rempeyek even 41 years later. From the delicious crackers, she has saved enough to buy land and gradually build her house.

Wasinah's family has grown significantly; she now has 25 grandchildren from her seven children. Only one of her children lives with her, residing upstairs of her house, which gives her a sense of independent living yet with the comfort of family closeness.

"I work here to fulfil a lifelong dream," Wasinah shares. "I wish to go on the Umrah pilgrimage. The government provides older adults with a monthly stipend of 300,000 rupiahs (20 US dollars), which, along with my rempeyek sales, is enough to bring food to my table. However, my entire life has been dedicated to my children, but now, with my earnings from the café, I'm saving for my Umrah pilgrimage. I pray for health and time to achieve this dream."

Rustina

Working alongside Wasinah at Uma Oma Café is 81-year-old Rustina, who shares her workspace with Wasinah and her college student granddaughter, Karina. Rustina's journey to Jakarta began in the 1960s when she moved from Yogyakarta with her parents. In 1981, Rustina's husband passed away, transforming her role from a homemaker to the family's sole provider.

"My first job was at a doll factory focused on exports," Rustina recalled. "Subsequently, I found employment at a garment factory, where I remained until all my three daughters had finished high school. In the 1990s, they persuaded me to retire, promising to take care of me thereafter."

Despite the loving care from her family, Rustina often found herself lonely during the day, with the house empty as everyone was out working or at school. Her enthusiasm was palpable when the opportunity to work at Uma Oma arose, especially in an environment that values the contributions of older women.

"It was amusing to me because usually, they look for someone young and good-looking to work in a café. But this one, they are looking for ageing women," she said, chuckling.

"In the past six months, I've found a lot of joy working here," Rustina shared. "I've been welcomed with open arms, engaging in conversations with customers who see in me a figure reminiscent of their own grandmothers or mothers."

In her role as host, Rustina ensures customers feel at home, guiding them through their dining experience with genuine care. Thanks to her active lifestyle, Rustina can adapt quickly to the café environment.

"Although I spend most of my time at home, I stay active. That's why, when I resumed work here, I adapted well. At home, I'm always busy with chores like laundry, ironing, and cooking, not to mention taking care of my great-granddaughter. On weekends, I even participate in aerobics classes. As a result, I don't feel tired at all."

Rustina is committed to fulfilling her one-year contract with the café, saving part of her earnings for an Umrah pilgrimage.

"I hope Indonesia will create more opportunities for older citizens to remain active and employed. I've seen on TV that people in their 90s are still working in other countries. We, the older individuals, have much to contribute and should not be underestimated," she advocated.

Her peers at the foundation look on with a mix of admiration and longing, aware that only a few had the chance to be employed at the café.

"They often say, 'How wonderful it must be to earn your own keep and feel independent. I wish I could join you,'" Rustina added.

Rustina expressed gratitude for Indonesia's commitment to providing free healthcare to older people through BPJS (Social Health Insurance Administration Body). "I am thankful to the Lord for granting me the vigour to embrace these opportunities. I pray for continued strength to enjoy precious moments with my grandchildren and great-grandchildren for many more years."

Nguyễn Trần Thủy Tiên

Nothing about the Deaf without the Deaf

Ixora Tri Devi
Staff Writer, The ASEAN
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

Forty-year-old Nguyễn Trần Thủy Tiên's lifelong dream was to become a teacher. Shortly after completing her master's degree in Sign Language Education at Gallaudet University, United States, through the World Deaf Leadership Scholarship in 2016, she landed her dream job. Yet, upon returning to Viet Nam, she was confronted with the persistent barriers facing the Deaf community, leading her to pivot from her original dream.

Some of these barriers include the lack of sign language interpretation in public spaces, high unemployment rates within the Deaf community, and societal biases that contribute to the marginalisation of Deaf individuals.

"Observing these challenges, I decided to temporarily set aside my dream of being a teacher and co-founded the Psycho-Education and Applied Research Centre for the Deaf (PARD) Viet Nam. The vision driving PARD is one of a society where Deaf individuals have complete access to sign language and can actively participate in all aspects of life," Thủy Tiên shares with *The ASEAN*.

After two years of navigating bureaucratic complexities and engaging with stakeholders, PARD

Viet Nam became the first legalised Deaf-led NGO in the country in 2019. Today, they have worked with at least 1,461 individuals, produced 127 sign language news segments, empowered 30 Deaf clubs nationwide, and reached two million people on their social media. At the heart of this organisation is the motto: "Nothing about the Deaf without the Deaf." What does it mean?

"Our motto underscores the principle that policies and decisions directly impacting the Deaf community should involve the active participation of Deaf individuals. It emphasises the importance of their voices, experiences, and perspectives in shaping initiatives that aim to enhance their well-being and integration into society," Thủy Tiên elaborates.

Although Thủy Tiên and PARD aim to promote a more inclusive approach, involving the Deaf community in every decision-making process, they also recognise a significant challenge: the lack of human resources within the Deaf community. Therefore, the network of 30 Deaf clubs across Viet Nam plays a crucial role in driving positive changes. Their weekly gatherings serve as hubs for sharing relevant information, exchanging knowledge and skills, and fostering mutual support.

"It's been truly heartening to witness the creation of a sense of community among Deaf individuals who may have felt isolated due to geographical constraints. Moreover, the impact on confidence and leadership development has been remarkable. The regular interactions

> **Our motto underscores the principle that policies and decisions directly impacting the Deaf community should involve the active participation of Deaf individuals.**

Thủy Tiên has observed how regular interactions within Deaf clubs have empowered more leaders, giving them the self-confidence needed to assume influential roles

within these clubs have empowered Deaf leaders, giving them the self-assurance to take on influential roles. This not only contributes to their personal growth but also adds to the overall empowerment of the Deaf community," says Thủy Tiên.

This empowerment has led to increased Deaf representation in policy-making. "Seeing the Deaf community's needs integrated into decisions at various levels has been gratifying," she adds.

PARD's vision is for systemic change, educational empowerment, and a deeper societal understanding of the Deaf community in Viet Nam. For this, Thủy Tiên recommends ASEAN integration, including inclusive legislation, sign language support, employment opportunities, accessible education, community involvement, public awareness, and accessible healthcare.

"By adhering to the principle of 'Nothing About the Deaf Without the Deaf,' ASEAN leaders can ensure that policies are not only well-intentioned but also rooted in the genuine needs and aspirations of the Deaf and differently-abled communities they aim to serve."

Next on the agenda

Currently, PARD Viet Nam is also working on projects with Deaf schools to raise awareness about sexual abuse and violence prevention.

"One exciting upcoming project involves collaborating with Deaf schools to enhance knowledge among teachers and Deaf students on sexual abuse and violence prevention. This initiative also focuses on providing psychological approaches for teachers to support Deaf students in such challenging situations, addressing a critical aspect of the well-being of the community."

Additionally, PARD also introduced a groundbreaking programme named "Deaf Life." Launched a few months ago, this documentary series offers an intimate look into the daily lives of Deaf professionals working across various careers.

By showcasing the diverse experiences of Deaf individuals, "Deaf Life" goes beyond stereotypes, fostering a nuanced understanding and appreciation for the multifaceted contributions of the Deaf community," adds Thủy Tiên.

Closing the interview, Thủy Tiên urges individuals with disabilities in the ASEAN region: "Embrace your uniqueness and abilities, knowing that diversity enriches our societies. Your voice matters, shaping a narrative of strength and resilience.

Seize growth opportunities, connect with support networks, and be a force for positive change. Your journey is an inspiration; keep pushing boundaries and embracing the power within you."

And to the broader community, Thủy Tiên calls for support of sign language and Deaf culture, thus embracing diversity that leads to a more inclusive society.

"To everyone in our society, let's join the movement supporting sign language. Your efforts to understand and embrace Deaf culture have a profound impact. Let's unite in solidarity to appreciate and embrace diversity. Learning and respecting each other's unique languages and perspectives enrich our society with inclusion. Together, we can build a community that values every individual, fostering a culture of acceptance and appreciation."

Note: Persons who were born Deaf and those who identify as part of a cultural and linguistic community, regardless of the source of their deafness, commonly use the capital "D" in "Deaf." It expresses their sense of belonging to the Deaf community, which is based on shared experiences, language, and values.

Photo Credit: © Nguyễn Trần Thủy Tiên / PARD Viet Nam

SHIFTING CURRENTS

- The ASCC Council discusses Lao PDR's ASCC chairmanship priorities and strategic directions for the ASCC

- **Milestone:** Launching of the ASCC database for monitoring and evaluation system

- **Introducing:** The ASEAN Economic Community Digest

- **New:** ASCC Research and Development Platform Policy Brief No. 1 on Climate Financing Ecosystem

ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Charts Strategic Directions for ASCC Beyond 2025

Photo Credit: ©Senior Officials Committee for the ASCC Lao PDR

Benjamin Loh, PhD
Head, Monitoring Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

Jennifer L. Santos
Senior Officer, Monitoring Division
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The 31st ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council Meeting was convened on 24 March 2024 in Luang Prabang, the Lao PDR. It was attended by ministers and representatives from 10 ASEAN Member States, including Timor-Leste as Observer and the Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn. The meeting deliberated on the Lao PDR ASCC chairmanship priorities in 2024 and strategic directions for the ASCC, especially in light of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045.

ASCC Council Chair Suanesavanh Vignaket emphasised the relevance of the Lao PDR's ASEAN 2024 Chairmanship theme, 'ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience'

The 31st ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council Meeting in Luang Prabang, the Lao PDR, was attended by ministers and representatives from 10 ASEAN Member States, including Timor-Leste as an Observer, and the Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn (24/3/2024)

Photo Credit: ©Senior Officials Committee for the ASCC Lao PDR

Minister of Information, Culture, and Tourism of Lao PDR and the ASCC Council Chair, Suanesavanh Vignaket, highlighted the timeliness of the Lao PDR's ASEAN 2024 Chairmanship theme, "ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience," on promoting the role of culture and arts for inclusion and sustainability, promoting environmental cooperation and climate change resilience, promoting the role of women and children towards the transformation of behaviourism in ASEAN, and transforming ASEAN health resilience.

During the meeting, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn commended the establishment of the Ad Hoc Working Group to Develop the ASCC Post-2025 Strategic Plan. He underscored the importance of ensuring that ASEAN Pillars and ASEAN Connectivity strategic plans leverage past achievements, and their development follows a standard, systematic and synergised process. Dr. Kao also highlighted key ASCC matters that will need collective action from the ASCC in further advancing the well-being and quality of life of the people of ASEAN.

At the meeting, the ministers endorsed nine outcome documents for adoption and notation by the ASEAN Leaders at the 43rd and 44th ASEAN Summits in October 2024. Two outcome documents for adoption are the Vang Vieng Declaration on Promoting Small and Medium-sized Cultural Enterprises aligned with the Green Growth for Sustainable Development and the Framework on ASEAN Public Health Emergency Coordination System.

The ASCC Council Ministers also interfaced with the Ministers of the ASCC Sectoral Bodies of the Lao PDR. They exchanged views and recommendations on charting the ASCC's future beyond 2025 and identified ways and approaches to enhancing the ASCC's preparedness amidst emerging challenges, trends, and opportunities.

The ASCC Database for Monitoring and Evaluation (ADME) System was launched by the ASCC Chair and the Secretary-General of the ASEAN on the sidelines of the meeting. The ADME System is designed to improve the timely collection and measurement of socio-cultural indicators and enable the ASEAN Member States to conduct more comprehensive and regular monitoring and evaluation of the ASCC Blueprint 2025 and the ASCC Post-2025 Strategic Plan.

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The ASCC outcome documents under the Lao PDR's Chairmanship 2024 aim to build an ASEAN Community which is ready for opportunities and able to address current and future challenges effectively.

———— *ASCC Council Chair Suanesavanh Vignaket in her opening remarks at the 31st ASCC Council Meeting*

(official translation by the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, the Lao PDR)

Mapping the Vision
ASCC Launches a Robust Monitoring and Evaluation System

Merina Cahya Anggraeni
Officer, Monitoring Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

The ASEAN Socio-cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2025 is a comprehensive roadmap towards realising an ASEAN Community that engages and benefits the peoples and is inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and dynamic by 2025. It is guiding policy frameworks and institutions for ASEAN Member States, and enhancing and strengthening their commitments and activities to achieve their targets across the ASCC sectors.

To clearly measure progress and to understand social and cultural developments in the ASEAN Member States, the Blueprint outlined a Results Framework mechanism to monitor and assess development results. The Baseline Study and the Mid-Term Reports of the Blueprint were completed in October 2020 and concluded that the pace of implementation has been satisfactory. However, the reports also revealed critical issues: there was a need to address limited data availability and capacity for data collection to monitor the Blueprint's implementation and achievements. Recommendations were made to enhance the data collection and management system at both national and regional levels, which set the foundation for the development of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Database for Monitoring and Evaluation (ADME) System.

A prototype of the system was developed in 2021, and there have been several consultations with sectoral bodies, ASEAN Secretariat divisions, and international organisations to identify needs, requirements, and good practices that can go into an effective and

ASEAN Secretary-General Dr. Kao Kim Hourn and ASCC Council Chair, Minister Suanesavanh Vignaket, led the Launching Ceremony of the ADME System (24/3/3034)

The ADME System was launched at the 31st ASCC Council Meeting in Luang Prabang, the Lao PDR (24/3/2024)

Photo Credit: © Merina Cahya Anggraeni/ASCC Monitoring Division

THE ADME SYSTEM

The ADME system addresses the need for a comprehensive data management system that can enhance socio-cultural development and progress across the region.

Provide timely, comprehensive and accurate data of the Blueprint 2025 implementation

Strengthens the statistical capabilities of ASCC which will enable the effective monitoring and evaluation of ASCC initiatives

Facilitate enhanced coordination and collaboration among ASEAN Member States (AMS) and across different pillars and sectors

ADME DATABASE

Database A and C are accessible for registered users while Database B can be accessed publicly and by the general public

DATABASE A
Database A contains data from the Framework for Reporting on ASCC Sectoral Bodies' Implementation of the Sectoral Work Plans (Tool 1), Monitoring Matrix of the Follow-up Actions to Declarations (Tool 2), and the ASCC Blueprint 2025 Results Framework Monitoring Database (RFMD)

DATABASE B
Database B is a public repository containing relevant socio-cultural indicators sourced from reputable organisations like ASEANStats, the World Bank, the United Nations, the Asian Development Bank, and other international organisations

DATABASE C
Database C contains socio-cultural administrative records from ASCC Sectoral Bodies to support the ASCC Blueprint 2025 implementation

The ADME System is a web-based database system for reporting and data dissemination, with access roles tailored to users' responsibilities

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robust system. The system is designed to achieve three-fold objectives: to provide dependable data, strengthen the statistical capability of the ASEAN Member States, and facilitate cross-pillar and cross-sectoral coordination among ASEAN Member States. Aside from these three main objectives, the ADME System provides added value by promoting evidence-based research, analysis, and decision-making.

After a lengthy and careful development process, the ADME System is now ready for operation. It consists of protocols and a comprehensive web-based database containing indicators pertinent to the ASCC. Its key features include the three Databases:

◉ *Database A* facilitates the monitoring of ASCC Sectoral Bodies' Work Plan implementation, follow-up actions to ASCC Declarations, and the progress of ASCC Blueprint 2025 Key Performance Indicators.

◉ *Database B* contains socio-cultural indicators that are relevant to the ASCC, collected by reputable organisations such

as the ASEAN Secretariat, the World Bank, the United Nations, and others, to support more comprehensive decision-making.

◉ *Database C* houses administrative records collected and maintained by the ASCC Secotral Bodies in ASEAN Member States, which are converted into statistics, enabling regional comparison.

A good monitoring and evaluation system will only be possible with complete, accurate, and reliable data. The ADME System addressed this through measures, such as data validation, data verification, standardised data collection process, automated error detection, regular data audits, and feedback mechanisms.

Given the sensitive and confidential nature of the data housed within the ADME System, security has been an important consideration. The ADME System employs robust security features, including restricted server access within the ASEAN domain, advanced encryption, user activity tracking, periodic audits, and other preventive measures like firewalls and intrusion detection systems.

The launch of the long-awaited ADME System at the 31st ASCC Council Meeting in Luang Prabang, the Lao PDR was a momentous event, demonstrating ASEAN's commitment to advancing evidence-based policy-making to advance ASEAN people's wellbeing. The ADME System was launched by the ASCC Council Chair, Suanesavanh Vignaket, and the ASEAN Secretary-General, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn. It was witnessed by the ASCC Council Ministers, ASCC Sectoral Bodies' Chairs from Lao PDR, SOCA (Senior Officials' Committee for ASCC Council) Leaders, and members of the press.

To ensure that the ADME system achieves its objectives and brings tangible results in the current Blueprint and future editions of the plan, the 31st ASCC Council Meeting encouraged ASCC Sectoral Bodies to socialise the ADME System across relevant users of their agencies and organisations, and embed the system as a tool for their evidence-based planning and policy formulation. Such efforts will ensure a robust monitoring and evaluating system for years to come.

IN YOUR WORDS
ASEAN 2045

As the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community maps its vision to respond to trends and challenges in the next twenty years, *The ASEAN* continues the conversation on people's concerns and hopes for the future. The team aimed to involve various perspectives in this endeavour, reaching out extensively to gather insights. We received responses from our readers, social media followers, youth delegates in various ASEAN-related events, and members of youth organisations.

The collected responses give us a glimpse of ASEAN people's aspirations for the region.

Q | What concerns you the most about the future, and what keeps you up at night?

Eugene Wong Weng Soon, 54

Chief Executive Officer, Sustainable Finance Institute Asia Limited

Today, we are fighting a war with two battles. The first is against the damage caused by climate change, and the second is for sustainable and equitable development. If we lose either battle, we will lose the war. Both battles are difficult, and we need global co-operation to win. If we can't work together in an equitable manner to achieve a "win-win," we will find the divide between the Global North and Global South growing wider amid a crumbling ecosystem, leading to a disaster.

We also need to address the rapid advancement of technology. Technology is neutral. Its impact is dependent on what it is used for. As the region becomes more technologically connected, we need to be aware of the dangers that come with the benefits of technology. This includes security breaches that can cause financial losses and even endanger lives, such as when hospitals are hacked or when aircraft GPS is spoofed. Uncontrolled use of social media can be harmful, including through cyberbullying and misinformation. AI brings new hope together with a whole new set of challenges. What worries me most about AI is if we lose control of it, or the dreaded technological singularity where AI becomes more intelligent than humans. AI is estimated to partially automate two-thirds of today's occupations, leading to social dislocations if not planned for properly.

Ayu Hidayah Tulloh, 22

Student, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Jenderal Soedirman University Indonesia

The earth's condition is worsening due to global warming and climate change, which will certainly affect natural habitats. Economic competition is increasingly becoming difficult and will cause many inequalities in society. Current technology has replaced human labour, so humans are starting to compete with the technology they created themselves. Globalisation has occurred and penetrated the borders of countries worldwide so that the norms, culture, and original values of a society are very vulnerable to being lost. I fear a difficult future if things continue to go beyond this and humans cannot think clearly to live a sustainable, fair, and humane life.

Wisnoe Satrijono, 57

Director of Human Capital Management of PLN Indonesia Power

The impact of climate change has been very visible to us in recent years. The weather is increasingly difficult to predict, and we have less rain in the months when we used to have rain. I cannot imagine what catastrophe would take place if we do nothing to reduce our carbon emissions that would impact the pace of climate change.

Particularly in my capacity as the CHRO of PT PLN Indonesia Power, we are concerned about many issues, including climate change and our contribution to energy transition in Indonesia. This is why PLN IP is carrying out energy transition efforts, such as shifting our operation from fossil-fuel-powered generation to renewable generation, which is more environmentally friendly. However, this is not easy. Renewable energy has an intermittency issue, so fossil-powered generators are still needed to support electrical energy needs.

Nevertheless, while we recognise our transition to green energy is not an easy journey, it is also not impossible.

Raihan Zahirah Mauludy Ridwan, 25, Indonesia

Associate Account Manager, Google & Official Youth Representative at ASEAN 42nd Summit 2023

Economic and environmental security are the real elephants in the room, as the youth will be affected the most in the near future. In terms of economic security, digital transformation, including automation, is estimated to displace 85 million jobs within the next five years (WEF, 2020). In this context, the youth should be able to bite the bullet. Youth should be empowered and harnessed as digital talents to set a strong foundation for the region as the epicentre of the digital economy and innovation while mitigating the risk of automation.

The crux is that even the youth in this region still have inadequate access to basic ICT infrastructure and digital literacy materials. A study by UNICEF showed that six out of 10 ASEAN pupils do not receive digital literacy materials, four out of 10 students have a low to moderate level of digital literacy, and three out of 10 pupils have no direct access to tech devices.

Boravan Tann, 27

Vice-chief, ASEAN Bureau, Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, Kingdom of Cambodia

The most serious concern about the future is economic security. Everyone strives to have decent living conditions and the ability to cover the essential needs of oneself and loved ones and possibly have the means to do things they enjoy. However, with all the problems the world is facing right now, such as conflicts/wars, economic recess, worsening state of the environment, increasing population, among others, and unpredictable nature of the future, the world is prone to economic downturn, and it will become even harder for everyone to achieve decent living.
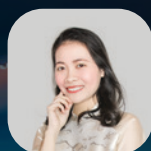
Minh Nguyễn Hồng, 25

Teacher, Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative alum and Volunteer Youth of the ASEAN Foundation from Viet Nam

The population of my hometown is nearly two million people, belonging to 20 ethnic minorities and eight religions, so different perspectives are inevitable.

In the undulating landscapes of Bac Giang, particularly its remote mountainous and ethnic minority zones, the surge of digital connectivity paints a complex picture. Digitalisation holds the potential to unlock vast avenues for growth, from e-commerce opportunities to better access to information. However, a lack of comprehensive digital literacy makes these regions particularly susceptible to online threats.

As digital tools become more integrated into daily life, many residents, especially those in remote areas, might unknowingly expose sensitive data. These digital footprints can easily become targets for cyber-attacks, identity thefts, or phishing scams. Moreover, misinformation can spread rapidly, leading to misconceptions and, in some cases, harmful practices. In a region where oral traditions and community trust are paramount, the potential for digital rumours to influence public opinion is high. Addressing these concerns necessitates a dual approach: introducing robust cybersecurity measures while also investing in extensive digital literacy campaigns tailored for these communities.

Sodanin Net, 24

Member, Young People's Action Team (YPAT) under Unicef EAPRO from Cambodia

As a woman, I believe that everyone has equal rights. I strongly believe everyone is entitled to the same rights despite their gender and background. People deserve to seek their potential and use their rights to the fullest as long as it's not harming anyone else. Inequality has a really deeply-rooted cause.

Even though there are several empowerment programmes, new issues keep emerging to oppose the positive changes, especially on the internet. There is always the backlash against online campaigns or educational posts related to gender equality. Women still find it hard to reach their full potential because of the limitations that the patriarchal society imposed on us. This is not just for women. Men also struggle to meet societal expectations of masculinity, such as a strong demeanour and role as breadwinners of the family. A lot of people have to hide themselves due to the discrimination of society.
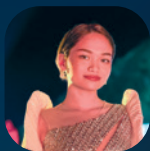
Tiffany M. Templonuevo, 23

Student, Université Catholique du Louvain - Extension School, Micromasters in International Law from the Philippines

Forecasting the future requires that we analyse the present. A quick browse of major news outlets suggests that contemporary global challenges include climate change, modern warfare, nuclear arms proliferation, trade wars, refugee crises, political instabilities, increased geopolitical contentions, economic crises, and AI control.

From a realist perspective, these difficulties will endure and possibly worsen due to the competitive character of nation-states, perpetuating the struggle for power and resources. It is the human costs of these issues that keep me up at night. At the end of the day, all efforts to solve global and underreported issues must always centre on the human aspect. From an academic perspective, it's hard to say that we can totally rid the world of insecurity, inequality and injustice. Just like yin and yang, it is the unfortunate equilibrium of good and unwanted fate—but I do believe that the world has a choice to challenge this nature.

Linthone Bouavanheung, 21

Economics Research Assistant at the National University of Laos, the Lao PDR

What concerns me the most about the future is the growing inequality and the lack of access to basic necessities such as clean water, healthcare, and education. I worry about the future of our society and the impact it will have on future generations.

Qhasdiba Refiza, 21

Member, Community of Practice UNFPA Indonesia

I have concerns about education because education is the foundation of success for a nation. I often think about proper access to education, especially in Indonesia, which has many islands, and progress that may not be evenly distributed in each region.

Serey Sambrathna, 20

Student, Institute For International Studies and Public Policy Cambodia

The future is uncertain and unpredictable. Some people live in fear, especially since conflicts have erupted in many parts of the world. I am personally concerned about many things, including climate change issues, the erosion of democracies, lack of transparency in the use of natural resources, the decrease and loss of biodiversity, hegemonic influences, and wars. We all have the right to protect ourselves and feel secure.

Jin Xuan, 22

Master of Science Candidate at University of Oxford, ASEAN observer to G20 Youth 2022 from Singapore

One of my primary concerns is the question of just transition. The actions that are undertaken at the state, industry, and local levels to work towards net zero will inevitably impact labour markets and livelihoods. One of the tools that policymakers may use to fund decarbonisation efforts may be taxation. How, then, do we ensure that these taxes do not fall disproportionately on the shoulders of the already disadvantaged? In a similar vein, how can we better align social policies to support individuals throughout the transition process? These include but are not limited to upskilling and reskilling programmes and the potential expansion of social assistance programmes.

Aijohn Santos, 23

Mental Health Worker at the National Center for Mental Health, the Philippines

As a mental health provider and advocate, what concerns me about the future is the rising mental health issues among the population and the shortage of mental health professionals to address them. I recently came across a Facebook group for individuals with mental health concerns. I noticed their practice of searching for advice from what their doctors had recommended to others in similar situations, hoping to apply those suggestions to themselves.

Although mental health resources are now available, this trend highlights the pressing need for more accessible mental health services and support. With the growing burden of mental health issues, it's clear that there are not enough mental health professionals available to meet the demand. As a result, people are turning to online communities and social platforms to share their experiences and seek guidance from peers who may have faced similar challenges.

We cannot blame these people since these online communities can provide a sense of belonging and understanding. However, it's important to remember that they cannot replace the expertise of trained mental health professionals. They can offer emotional support and a sense of community, but they should be viewed as complementary to, rather than a substitute for, professional care.

Min Thant Tun, 18

Student, University of Information and Technology, Myanmar

As an undergraduate in information technology and passionately learning about knowledge engineering,

the concerns about the rise of AI technology keep me thinking all night every week. AI has been getting to the point where it can fully replace human workers in some job positions, which can lead to worse cases of unemployment. The disruption in the workforce can make a big shift in the economy as it can add positive and negative value. Therefore, the workforce should be prepared for these outcomes. There is also a new high-risk concern about AI knowledge that it has been trying to (replace) not only physical labour, but also creativity, as AI art has also been recently popular. As technology grows, I am afraid that a situation like "I have no mouth, but I must scream" will come true, but I am sure that the brilliant people working in the industry are trying their best not to let that happen.

Vu Minh Anh, 21

Student at Gajah Mada University Indonesia, from Viet Nam

I am fortunate to wake up every day in the comfort of my home, the love of my family and the tranquillity of my country. However, I am aware that not everyone is as lucky as me. It saddens me to think about the struggles and hardships that people of all ages, young or old, go through just to survive and make ends meet. I am concerned about a future where freedom and democracy may be taken from the next generation and peace becomes more of an unaffordable privilege than a fundamental right. Difficult access to basic needs like food, water, education, and a clean environment are still ongoing and rarely addressed comprehensively.

From what I can observe, although we generally pay attention to such issues, it is not enough. There should be a systematic change not only from the individual and national levels but also to regional and international ones to work on a shared mechanism that works efficiently under international law to help tackle matters of common. It is everyone's responsibility to invest time and resources in improving the livelihood and well-being of fellow humans at the moment, as well as

ensuring a peaceful and healthy future for years to come.

Arkar Min, 24

Youth Advocate, Youth Leaders of U-Report Myanmar

What concerns me the most about the future as a young person is the loss of empathy and sympathy among young people. As young individuals, we must take into account that there are still young people who do not have access to the same resources that we do. It is also critical that we communicate what we know and what we have learned with one another.

Furthermore, in the future, engaging youth resources in development activities is a positive promise for the nation's development. But if we can't teach and assist one another, we won't be doing our responsibility. This fact will set us apart from other young people in places where we establish policies and make crucial decisions, and we will truly be able to benefit the world.

Yvie Faye Nicolas, 24

Presidential Staff at the National Youth Commission and a Vice President for Public Relations at Toastmasters International - Metro Manila Club

How do you identify the truth from a million lies?

As a Filipino youth growing up in the age of fake news and misinformation online, I fear for the future where the line between fact and fake is not only blurred but concealed.

Technology, as much as it has significantly improved the lives of those privileged to access it, can be used for control and exploitation—and we have seen this happen. We have seen it influence shaping public opinion and one's personal belief. We have seen it alter history for political benefit. We have seen it assume someone else's identity. We've seen it obscure violence, if not justify it. We have seen it harm our environment, and yet we remain

blinded to how we can fight to protect ourselves from it.

Misinformation is not a problem we can fix overnight. It is a social condition that we must constantly correct and adjust. And with technology no longer being a preference but a way of life, we shall be steadfast in protecting what is fact. Otherwise, a disastrous environment of lies awaits our generation where even the definition of a fact can no longer be identified.

Krit Pachsuwan, 21

Member, UNICEF Thailand's Young People Advisor Board on Education and Employability 2023/2024

My biggest concern is education because I believe that our world has undergone significant changes, and it is crucial to adapt education to meet the needs of the youth today. I also strongly believe educational opportunities should be equally accessible to all young people.

When it comes to educational challenges, I have personally faced one. The problem I encountered was my uncertainty about what I wanted to study, which faculty to choose, and what career prospects awaited me after graduation. Dealing with these issues, I had to learn to adapt and seize opportunities to enhance my skills.

This led me to become a scholarship student under the CP programme, allowing me to study in the central part of the country and the wider Asian region. This experience helped me truly appreciate the importance of educational opportunities in shaping young individuals into quality contributors to society, responding to the need for sustainable employment in the region.

However, the school-to-work transition that I experienced inspired me to commit to providing opportunities for Thai youth. I am now a member of UNICEF's Young People Advisory Board, working on the EduGuide project, which aims to support educational opportunities for high school students in remote

areas of Thailand, including the South, North, and Northeast regions. The goal is to make young people more aware of their own values, emphasising that every life on this planet has intrinsic worth and the potential to grow into a quality individual. Seeding for a better place tomorrow!

'Ariff Amir Ali, 18

Awardee, Yayasan Khazanah Global Scholarship. Fellow, UNICEF Young Leaders Program from Malaysia

(My concern is) that home will no longer exist, because of existential threats like war or climate change. It is a reality that many young people like myself face. We face looming uncertainty if we continue to operate as we are now. I am worried that no matter how many warnings young people give, no one will listen.

`Aliaa Ramzani, 25

Fellow, UNICEF Malaysia Young Leaders; Tech Evangelist (community volunteer), Google Developer Group Cloud Kuala Lumpur and Women TechMakers Kuala Lumpur

What deeply troubles me is the challenge faced by the present and future generations: it is not and will not be the lack of information, but instead, its distortion—misinformation, misconceptions, and misunderstandings. Everyone views the world through their unique lens, influenced by whoever controls the narrative. It is up to us to think for ourselves.

As we demand more from technology, it, in turn, demands more from us. My concern is that amidst this progression, we might lose the essence of being truly human.

Nur Marsya Amani Binti Mohd. Jamil, 25

Perdana Fellow to the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform) of Malaysia

One of the questions that worries me the most is the sustainability of the progress we've made, particularly whether the children and youth will have the resources, education, and support to thrive and bring about positive change in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world. Human security is not just about safeguarding people from physical threats, it also encompasses the preservation of individuals' dignity and well-being. In this context, empowering young people is not only a moral imperative but a crucial aspect of human security. I believe a society that fails to provide its children and youth opportunities for growth, education, and participation undermines its stability.

The modern world presents unique challenges, from the growing impact of climate change to the complexities of global interconnectedness. The children and youth are the most vulnerable to these challenges and the most potent agents of change. Our ability to adapt, innovate, and drive positive transformations is vital for overall security and prosperity. Yet, the stark reality is that many young individuals still face barriers, including limited access to quality education, economic opportunities, and essential services. The resulting disparities hinder their well-being and contribute to broader societal and global issues.

Mohammad Zulhafiy, 24

Marketing and Communication Manager of ASEAN Youth Organization from Malaysia

One thing that keeps me awake at night is my role as a youth in driving change and addressing pressing issues. The challenges we face, such as climate change, social inequalities, political instability, and regional crises, require immediate attention.

As a grassroots advocate for ASEAN youth, I'm deeply concerned about the triple planetary crises: climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia, are vulnerable to these challenges, evidenced by annual floods and transboundary haze. This is why staying silent is not an option. It endangers our communities and threatens cultural and ecological diversity. We must collectively work on climate mitigation and adaptation to enhance regional climate resilience.

Socioeconomic inequalities are another concern; issues such as limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities still exist within my community. Drawing from my experience as a policy analyst, I call on policymakers to bridge these gaps by adopting evidence-based policies that prioritise social justice and equitable rights. This includes marginalised groups like indigenous peoples, individuals with disabilities, and children from disadvantaged backgrounds to ensure "no one is left behind" in the ASEAN community.

Political instability and conflicts also weigh heavily on our future. I hope for credible, transparent, and accountable leadership to promote peace, stability, and democracy. During every election, the anxiety of waiting for the results makes me lose sleep and to discover which leaders would govern my country. I believe this is an experience many can relate to. Moreover, how can we actively contribute to promoting dialogue, diplomacy, and human rights to address pressing issues? It's evident that this can only be accomplished by adhering to the principles of good governance, emphasising the voices of the public and preserving freedom of expression.

Despite these concerns, my commitment to driving positive change remains unwavering. I believe that through shared responsibility and collective action, we can transform these challenges into opportunities for growth and sustainability in our ASEAN region.

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

POLICIES AND TRENDS

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 No. 1 (2024)

STRENGTHENING THE CLIMATE FINANCING ECOSYSTEM IN ASEAN

by Gopi Krishnan (C&G Analytica), Sonia Kumari (Universiti Malaya), VGR Chandran Govindaraju (Universiti Malaya), and J.S. Keshminder (Universiti Teknologi MARA)

Climate change is an existential threat that poses catastrophic environmental impacts and exacerbates poverty, health issues, and social inequalities. A product of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Research and Development Platform on Climate Change, this policy brief offers critical insights and recommendations on the climate financing ecosystem in the ASEAN region.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE POLICY BRIEF

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Financial resources and sound investments are essential to reducing emissions, promoting adaptation, and building resilience. However, several ASEAN Member States heavily rely on public financing to meet their nationally determined contributions (NDC). Although private sector participation is gaining pace, it remains uneven across the region.

The ASCC Policy Brief No. 1 (2024) titled "Strengthening the Climate Financing Ecosystem in ASEAN" emphasises that while climate investment opportunities are rising, an integrated financial ecosystem is essential to ensure the smooth flow of finances for building a climate-resilient economy. However, the current lack of transparency and climate-related regulations pose a significant hurdle, hindering the scaling up of investments needed for an effective and efficient climate transition. The brief puts forward the following recommendations for a robust climate financing ecosystem:

i. *Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Framework*
    The brief suggests the development of an ESG Framework that aims to enable the effective integration of sustainable practices into investment decision-making processes, further strengthening the climate financing ecosystem. This framework attracts investments but also aligns with global sustainability goals.

ii. *Reinforcing the role of regulators* and infrastructure providers
    The policy brief underscores the importance of reinforcing the role of regulators and infrastructure providers. Climate change has two main impacts that directly affect financial systems: (i) physical risks, which arise from climate and weather-related events, and (ii) transition risks, which are consequences that can arise as societies move toward a low-carbon economy. In this regard, mainstreaming climate risks in financial sector assessments, promoting transparency through climate reporting, data, and verification, and harmonising regulations to facilitate capital mobility across borders should be among the strategies to ensure regulatory readiness.

iii. *Developing effective climate-related financial policies*
    The brief calls for developing effective climate-related financial policies and stresses the need to promote innovation in climate finance to attract domestic and international investments in climate change projects. Regulators must facilitate market innovation to expand the breadth and depth of climate finance instruments in ASEAN financial markets. In this sense, climate risk assessments, responsible investment regulations, and climate disclosures within financial stability frameworks are needed to encourage the financial sector to actively promote transition financing, adopt innovative climate financing instruments, and engage in the digitalisation of climate financing processes.

iv. *Collaboration among stakeholders*
    The policy brief stresses the significance of collaboration among stakeholders. It calls for coordinated efforts among civil society organisations, governments, academia, financial institutions, and businesses. The goal is to advocate for sustainable consumption and production practices that incentivise investments and close financial need gaps.

In conclusion, the challenges faced by ASEAN Member States in accessing and distributing climate finance involve multiple sources and mechanisms. The ecosystem of climate financing is complex, given how intertwined the different segments of stakeholders are. In this context, ASEAN's role is crucial. Therefore, solutions to improve climate finance delivery in the region include empowering relevant financial actors and leveraging ASEAN's collective efforts to reduce barriers associated with the existing climate finance architecture.

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THE ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY DIGEST

DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN A POST COVID-19 ASEAN

Photo Credit: ©Sakdawut Tangtongsap / Shutterstock

The tourism sector is a significant contributor to the ASEAN Economy. Before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the travel and tourism industry generated approximately 12 per cent of ASEAN's combined GDP and provided jobs to 42 million ASEAN people (ADB, 2022). Nonetheless, international tourist arrivals plummeted by more than 80 per cent, and tourism revenue dropped by 75 per cent during the pandemic (Lin, 2022). After the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the end of the pandemic in May 2023, the number of international tourists going to ASEAN has steadily increased. The region saw a 153.09 per cent year-on-year increase in international arrivals based on the preliminary figures of 2023 (ASEAN, 2024). According to the UN Tourism (formerly the United Nations World Tourism Organization or UNWTO), the Asia-Pacific region has witnessed a noteworthy recovery, reaching 65 per cent of its pre-pandemic tourism levels following the reopening of numerous markets and destinations (UN WTO, 2024). This recovery indicates the potential within the ASEAN region to cater to the changing demands of post-pandemic travellers.

As the tourism sector rebounds from the pandemic, ASEAN is determined to "build forward better," strengthen the industry's long-term resilience and make it more sustainable.

Sustainable tourism is a long-standing concept that has now emerged as a crucial factor in establishing or maintaining a destination's strong reputation and competitive brand. This approach ultimately strengthens relationships with local communities, visitors, and other stakeholders. Particularly during uncertain times, earning the stakeholders' trust is seen as a strategic imperative.

With this in mind, the ASEAN Tourism Ministers endorsed the ASEAN Framework on Sustainable Tourism Development (hereafter the framework) in January 2023. This multi-sectoral framework outlines focus areas towards achieving the vision of sustainable tourism in ASEAN. It seeks to capitalise on the work that the sector is already undertaking, along with other relevant sectors in the ASEAN Community, that has direct implications for the pursuit of sustainable tourism development.

Vision and strategic goals

The framework states the ultimate vision in the long-term is to realise "An ASEAN region that is recognised as a quality sustainable tourism destination, which promotes the economic prosperity, welfare, and engagement of the local community; protects and develops its natural environment and culture; and provides a high-quality experience to responsible and sustainable-minded visitors/tourists." The overarching operational goal is to continue promoting the tourism sector's growth and development as a critical contributor to overall economic growth and development, but with a stronger awareness and focus on tourism activities' environmental and socio-cultural impacts. This approach entails undertaking initiatives to reduce tourism's adverse footprint on the environment and communities and ensuring their well-being.

ASEAN FRAMEWORK ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Strategic Goals

Visitor satisfaction and engagement

Industry profitability/ viability

Community prosperity and engagement

Environment protection and enhancement

The framework's guiding principles

Holistic
Applies to all forms of tourism, fits within the broader sustainability planning

Flexible
Policies and approches adapted to local condition - not 'one-size-fits-all'

Inclusive
Involves all stakeholders; government, private sector, local communities, tourist, among others

Dynamic
Adapts to changing conditions, technologies, and best practices

Measureable
Monitoring and evaluation are key to assessing success

Regional
Involves cooperation across pillars and sectors for effective planning and implementation

The framework also defined five key pillars with the identified strategic priorities under each pillar:

ASEAN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
KEY PILLARS

Sustainable economic growth	Social inclusiveness employment, and poverty reduction	Resource efficiency, environmental protection, and climate change	Cultural values diversity, and heritage	Mutual understanding and peace, health, safety, and security

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Sustainable tourism policy, regulatory environment, and strategy	More quality jobs in the tourism sector	Low carbon, efficient use of resources	Promote and enhance diverse cultures through cultural tourism	Management of security issues to reinforce the reputation of the region as a secure destination
Promotion of green investment, investment in physical infrastructure and digital infrastructure	Widespread and fair distribution of economic and social benefits	Environmental protection, ecosystem preservation, and biodiversity conservation	Safeguard tangible and intangible cultural heritage	Crisis preparedness planning
Sustainability as part of marketing campaign	Address specific vulnerabilities faced by woman	Mitigating the effects of climate change	Promote living culture and the creative industries	Multi-hazard risk management and enhanced communication/ partnership
	Targeted interventions for more sustainable locally driven MSMEs			Harness international initiatives for sharing of information
	Develop public-private-community partnerships/ mechanisms to engage and empower local communities			

CROSS CUTTING FACTORS

GOVERNANCE	PARTNERSHIPS	MONITORING	TECHNOLOGY

Action roadmap for sustainable tourism development in ASEAN

Aimed at providing tourism stakeholders with a deeper understanding of how to effectively apply the principles of sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience of tourism, the ASEAN Tourism Ministers endorsed the Action Roadmap for Sustainable Tourism Development in ASEAN in January 2024.

Building upon the framework, the roadmap serves as a comprehensive and long-term strategic plan for the region. While the framework aimed to establish a long-term vision for sustainable tourism development in ASEAN, and define the overarching operational goal, strategic goals, guiding principles, and key pillars, the roadmap takes it a step further. It provides stakeholders with the necessary strategies, actions, and best practices to achieve the key priorities identified through consultations and surveys with the ASEAN Member States and external partners.

The roadmap is envisioned as a regional guiding framework, enabling the ASEAN Member States to align their sustainable tourism strategies with the overarching goals of ASEAN, thus fostering a cohesive and integrated approach to sustainable tourism development in the region through country-level and region-wide activities. This will be crucial for ASEAN's efforts to promote resilient and sustainable development.

By prioritising sustainable practices, ASEAN promotes resilience and positions itself as a responsible and environmentally conscious tourism destination. Promoting sustainable tourism practices, such as ecotourism, helps protect and conserve natural resources. On this note, the Lao PDR, as the current Chair of ASEAN, has included the development of the ASEAN Ecotourism Standard as one of the Priority Economic Deliverables under its ASEAN Chairmanship in 2024

Photo Credit: ©Thanachet Maviang / Shutterstock

Benefits for Business in ASEAN

Providing common vision and enabling multisectoral collaboration

Tourism businesses are starting to perceive adopting sustainable practices as an opportunity rather than an obstacle, recognising that it makes good business sense. Today, the tourism industry is arguably more mindful that the main priority of sustainability is to ensure long-term economic benefits, equitably distributed across businesses of different sizes, while ensuring the responsible use of finite natural resources. For example, Traveloka, one of the leading online travel platforms in Southeast Asia, has been providing its hotel partners with training programmes on how to be more sustainable in their business operations (Ignatius, 2023). The framework will further encourage and incentivise businesses to participate in the transformation toward sustainable tourism.

As tourism is a cross-cutting sector, cooperation between industry players will be crucial to advancing the progress towards sustainable tourism development in ASEAN. Accordingly, the framework provides

a common vision for business with clear guidelines and principles for businesses to follow in promoting sustainable tourism practices.,

The roadmap identifies the relevant stakeholders, including the private sector, for each strategy and activity. The clarity in the direction helps businesses understand their role and responsibility in contributing to sustainable development. It also enables them to identify potential collaborators on their sustainability activities, which are relevant to the strategies identified in both framework and roadmap. The introduction of the ecotourism standard, once adopted, will also further streamline standards across the region and ensure consistency for businesses operating in multiple ASEAN countries, reducing confusion and facilitating compliance.

Advancing ASEAN tourism's industry competitiveness

More tourists are seeking sustainable travel options. Data from a study by Expedia in 2022 showed that 90 per cent of travellers globally sought sustainable options when booking a trip and that travellers from the Asia Pacific region were willing to pay 41 per cent more to ensure their travel was sustainable (TTG Asia, 2022). The collaborative moves to sustainable tourism in ASEAN encouraged by the framework and the roadmap will provide the ASEAN Tourism industry with a competitive advantage in the market. The active engagement of ASEAN in sustainable tourism will also enhance the region's reputation among travellers, stakeholders, and the broader community, leading to increased customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and favourable media coverage, which are all beneficial for tourism industry growth.

This article is an edited version of the ASEAN for Business Bulletin, which can be downloaded at the following link: https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ASEAN-for-Business-Bulletin-February-2024.pdf

Strengthening ASEAN-India Ties
A Vision for Future Collaboration

Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, recently delivered a lecture at Nalanda University in India, focusing on "The Future of ASEAN" amidst the evolving strategic landscape. Dr. Kao highlighted ASEAN's enduring relevance and resilience, emphasising ASEAN Centrality and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) as guiding principles for regional engagement.

The Secretary-General of ASEAN interacted with students from ASEAN Member States and India pursuing higher studies at Nalanda University, India (15/2/2024)

The Secretary-General of ASEAN meets with the ASEAN New Delhi Committee, New Delhi, India (13/2/2024)

At the invitation of the Government of the Republic of India, the Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, paid a working visit to India on 12-15 February 2024. In addition to his visit to the Nalanda University, Dr. Kao engaged in various discussions to bolster the ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Noteworthy points included India's commitment to ASEAN's peace and stability and the significant economic ties between the two regions, with trade and investment continuing to flourish.

Discussions also covered the potential for deeper cooperation in tourism, cybersecurity, digital economy, agriculture, and education. Both sides recognised the importance of diversifying supply chains and leveraging digital technology to enhance economic resilience.

Dr. Kao stressed the importance of collaborative initiatives to address common challenges, such as attaining sustainable development goals. He also expressed gratitude for India's support in the education sector, mainly through scholarships at Nalanda University, one of India's oldest learning institutions that was reopened in 2007. Each academic year, 20 scholarships are available for students from ASEAN Member States to pursue Master's programmes at Nalanda University.

Throughout the visit, a shared commitment was to elevate the ASEAN-India partnership further, focusing on meaningful and mutually beneficial collaboration. Dr. Kao expressed appreciation for India's hospitality and the conducive environment for productive discussions, affirming the dedication to strengthening ties between ASEAN and India.

The full highlights of the visit can be downloaded here: https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Highlights-of-the-Working-Visit-of-ASG-to-India-final-1.pdf

The Secretary-General of ASEAN delivered a lecture on "The Future of ASEAN: ASEAN's Relevance and Resilience in the Evolving Strategic Environment" at Nalanda University, India (15/2/2024)

The Secretary-General of ASEAN delivered a lecture titled "The ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in the Evolving Regional Architecture" during the 48th Sapru House Lecture event at the Indian Council of World Affairs headquarters in New Delhi (12/02/2024)

Photo Credit: ©ASEAN Secretariat

ASEAN-ROK YOUTH METAVERSE IDEA CONTEST

REIMAGINING CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Ixora Tri Devi
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ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

In May 2023, the *Business Insider* published an article titled "RIP Metaverse: An Obituary for the Latest Fad to Join the Tech Graveyard," signalling the gloomy future of the industry. The metaverse was on everyone's lips just two years before, bolstered by promising claims. Back in 2021, it was almost a daily feature on various media outlets, showcasing its benefits for medical students, its potential for government and private sector applications, and more. However, the buzz around the metaverse abruptly ceased.

Far from the tech hubs of Palo Alto, California—most likely the exact location of what *Business Insider* refers to as the "Tech Graveyard"—ASEAN and the Republic of Korea (ROK) were undeterred by scepticism and continued to explore the potentials of the metaverse. The "ASEAN-ROK ICT Convergence Village" project in South Korea epitomises this exploration.

Meta, the parent company of Facebook, describes the metaverse as "the next evolution in social connection and the successor to the mobile internet". On the other hand, consulting firm McKinsey characterises the metaverse as an evolving digital space, enabled by 3-D technology. This space leverages virtual reality (VR), augmented reality, and cutting-edge internet and semiconductor technologies to facilitate realistic online personal and business interactions.

Since 2020, sponsored by the Ministry of Science and ICT along with Busan Metropolitan City and managed by the National IT Industry Promotion Agency, the initiative has aimed to enhance ASEAN-ROK ICT exchanges and mutual growth in the Extended Reality (XR) industries. It supports collaboration between the two regions' XR industries through infrastructure and production projects based on local ICT convergence technology.

The ASEAN-ROK Youth Metaverse Idea Contest was born as part of this effort. The Busan IT Industry Promotion Agency (BIPA), in collaboration with the Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA), the ASEAN-ROK Working Committee on Cultural Heritage Cooperation, and the ASEAN Secretariat, held the contest from August to November 2023. It aimed to encourage using metaverse technology to preserve and enhance cultural heritage among ASEAN youth.

Out of 183 university students from 10 ASEAN countries that applied, five teams from Viet Nam (Cú Mèo), Thailand (Tom Yum Goong), Malaysia (Creative Potatoes), Myanmar (KYAT), and Singapore (LASALLE College of the Arts Singapore) participated in the final session in Busan, South Korea, on 5-11 November 2023.

The winners had a unique opportunity to virtually present their project at the 3rd Working Committee Meeting for ASEAN-ROK Cultural Heritage Cooperation on 13 December 2023, in Chiang Rai, Thailand.

Views from the Finalists

"Before joining this contest, I thought the metaverse was solely for entertainment and relevant only during the pandemic, but I was wrong," said 20-year-old Warittorn Duangtongpul, a member of the Tom Yum Goong team.

Warritorn explained how the event in Busan, a city where the metaverse is key to cultural and tourism efforts, changed his perspective. "They showed us, rather than telling us, how they use the metaverse to promote their cultural heritage. We visited science and technology museums, among other places, and saw how they made exhibitions far more interactive with VR technology," he continued.

"It was the first time I saw Busan in real life," echoed Teerapat Ramdit, 21, also from team Tom Yum Goon. "When I googled it, I thought Busan was an old city, but once I got there, everything changed my mind. Everything is convenient for tourists, they brought up early innovation, and everything is easy to know, to learn with just our mobile phone," he added.

Carla Castle, 27, majoring in art management at LASALLE College of Arts Singapore, shared a different perspective. Unlike the other teams that are mostly majoring in IT and Computer, she highlighted how their background in art management positions them uniquely for adopting technologies to preserve cultural heritage. "We are going to be the ones who kickstart the projects," she said.

She also reflected on the differences in cultural policy between Korea and Singapore. "It's interesting how South Korea utilises its cultural heritage as a form of grand cultural diplomacy and policy. In contrast, in Singapore, we don't seem as concerned with commercial viability since much of our cultural and arts funding, around 90 per cent—if I recall correctly—comes directly from the government. This contrasts with South Korea, where there's a real concern over commercial viability due to lesser reliance on public funds. This difference has given us a new perspective on what to consider when creating cultural experiences for audiences."

Chin Yee Khor and Sin Yi Tan, both 22, from Creative Potatoes also highlighted the impact of mentorship on reviewing their project's market viability. Chin noted, "The mentors' emphasis on market considerations influenced us to make strategic adjustments to our project, ensuring it was not only innovative but also marketable." Sin added, "The feedback helped us see our limitations in scalability and sustainability. The industrial visits in Busan, especially, broadened my understanding of XR technology's advancement."

Meanwhile, 23-year-old Thwin Htoo Aung from Team KYAT reflected on the entire journey as an unforgettable chapter, opening new worlds of possibilities with metaverse technology. "A visit to Busan became more than a destination; it became a muse for our metaverse journey. We made friends with fellow creators from ASEAN countries. These friendships are for a lifetime. Yeah, this is an experience I will never forget."

Phuc Nguyen Nguyen, 21, the leader of the winning team Cú Mèo, saw the contest as a bridge to understanding how cultural heritage preservation could be seamlessly integrated into everyday life. By blending it with fashion, they aimed to make cultural heritage more relatable and engaging.

"Participating in the competition gave us the chance to learn more about metaverse and XR technology, allowing us to 'level up' our original idea and align cultural heritage with global trends," she shared.

She further elaborated on the challenges and aspirations associated with their project. "The topic of cultural heritage has always been extensively discussed; however, it is a broad field that requires a lot of effort and knowledge. Therefore, we do not think one simple project could adequately capture the beauty and uniqueness of ASEAN countries' cultural heritage. Although we cherish cultural heritage greatly, we do not believe that our initiative could represent the cultural heritage of the ASEAN nations. In our project, we only intended to experiment in our motherland, which we understand the most. Should our project successfully operate, we will develop it widely in the ASEAN region. Hopefully, in the future, the world will witness the splendour of the ASEAN nations' cultural legacies."

THE PROJECTS

Cú Mèo
(First Place Winner)

FPT UNIVERSITY, HO CHI MINH CAMPUS, VIET NAM

Team Members:
Phuc Nguyen Nguyen, Quynh Huong Vu, Thuy Duong Vu, Ngoc Minh Tu Phan

Project Name/Description:
"INXPIRE: The Reborn", a project that combines art, fashion, and the metaverse aiming to bring Viet Nam's cultural heritage closer to the younger generation.

"We are all girls who studied Multimedia Communication. The main reason we participated in this contest is to challenge ourselves and learn more about metaverse, which we think is compelling and full of potential.

"When we decided to take part in this contest, we thought that preserving and developing cultural heritage is a big deal and so unrelated to our daily life, that it is the job of the authorised people, not of ordinary ones like us.

However, the more we worked on the project, the more we wanted to change that notion. We came to the point of realisation that preserving and developing cultural heritage can simply come from being aware of the existence of the heritage and passing it on to current and future generations. That is the reason why we chose to combine cultural heritage and fashion - one of the most essential elements of our daily life. Participating in the competition gave us the chance to learn more about metaverse and XR technology. Therefore, we can 'level up' our original idea, making the concept of cultural heritage more interesting and catching up with world trends." – Phuc Nguyen Nguyen.

Photo Credit: ©Cú Mèo

Tom Yum Goong
(Second Place Winner)

KING MONGKUT'S INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY LADKRABANG, THAILAND

Team Members:
Nonpawit Ekburanawat, Teerapat Ramdit, Potsatorn Choavaratana, Warittorn Duangtongpul

Project Name/Description:
Go Thailand, an all-in-one mobile application for tourism in Thailand.

"Our inspiration came from my trip to Nakhon Si Thammarat, a lesser-known secondary city in Thailand. I arrived with no expectations, only to be pleasantly surprised by its stunning nature, culture, and temples. It left me wondering why I hadn't heard of this place before. The issue, I believe, lies in the inadequate promotion of such secondary cities, preventing people from appreciating their cultural heritage. Additionally, navigation and language barriers pose challenges for tourists. For instance, as a foreign visitor, the difficulty is compounded by the locals' limited English proficiency, making it hard to communicate or seek directions, further obscuring the city's treasures.

"Our research revealed that tourists' appreciation of culture is often hindered by a lack of understanding of its origins. To tackle this, we're integrating XR technology into a mobile app, making cultural exploration more interactive and accessible via smartphones. This app, aimed at enhancing the tourist experience in lesser-known cities like Nakhon Si Thammarat, offers detailed insights and virtual tours, filling gaps left by platforms like Google Maps. It includes a VR option for an immersive experience, allowing users to explore the city's cultural landmarks, such as temples, from anywhere, even at home, thus bringing the city's heritage to a global audience in a novel and engaging way." – Nonpawit Ekburanawat.

Photo Credit: ©Tom Yum Goong

Photo Credit: ©Creative Potatoes

Creative Potatoes
(Third Place Winner)

ASIA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLGY AND INNOVATION, MALAYSIA

Team Members:
Ivan Yu Ern Liu, Sin Yi Tan, Yi Juan Yeo, Chin Yee Khor

Project Name/Description:
Music Across Malaysia, an immersive digital world where users from around the globe can engage with Malaysia's blend of modern and traditional musical instruments and scenes.

"No one on the team was a musician nor played a traditional musical instrument in their life and no one actually built a metaverse before. So, all of this was very hard for us. We decided to interview experts in traditional music. They provided us with a lot of understanding about the current state of the music scene and advice on what they would like to see in this application. We also interviewed Malaysia's top XR technology company, Virtual Tech Frontier, where they provided us with valuable feedback on our application and the specifics of the amount and time needed to build this metaverse. All of this support was valuable for us and it helped us to understand the problem, how to build the solution and how to further sustain it.

"This application is highly customisable to each country. Not only can each country add their own instrument, but they could also add their own art that represents them to build the world around them. Even though every country in ASEAN may have a different culture and heritage, music is something that we all enjoy and it represents us. No matter if it is modern and traditional, our music should be heard by others and continue to help this industry grow." – Ivan Liu Yu Ern.

Photo Credit: ©LASALLE

LASALLE

LASALLE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS SINGAPORE

Team Members:
Carla Castle, Shi Hui Angelina Ang, Yan Bing Lim, Lionel Yu Suen Fong

Project Name/Description:
Empowering Cultural Preservation; Responsible Tourism

"We've identified a gap in how culture and heritage are currently being digitised. People often assume that simply placing a digitised site into the metaverse is sufficient. However, for us as cultural/art managers, this approach falls short. These sites need to connect with people meaningfully. It only becomes significant if you're familiar with the culture and understand its importance. For those outside the community, we aim to ensure they grasp why these cultural elements are significant. Therefore, technology serves merely as a medium for communication, another way to connect with people. The underlying inspiration comes down to this: as cultural managers, why are we undertaking this? It's to bring people together.

"Our focus is on the intangible aspects of Southeast Asian heritage, moving beyond well-known sites like Angkor Wat or Bali to highlight the unique nuances of each culture. Recognising the challenges of physical presence and the potential harm excessive tourism can cause communities, we strive to represent this culture in a manner that fosters understanding without direct exposure or disruption to the communities' livelihoods." – Carla Castle.

Photo Credit: © KYAT

KYAT

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (YATANARPON CYBER CITY) IN MYANMAR

Team Members:
Thwin Htoo Aung, Ye Win Htet, Aung Phone Pyae, Kaung Thant

Project Name/Description:
Yoke The': Preserving the rich cultural heritage of Myanmar puppetry through metaverse.

"Our primary goal is to fuse Myanmar traditional puppetry with metaverse technology, creating a digital platform to preserve and promote the rich cultural heritage of our traditional puppetry through an interactive and entertaining experience. We've designed it to be accessible to anyone from the ASEAN region, transforming viewers into active participants in this cultural festivity.

"This project is an educational tool for schools and cultural institutions, aiming to expand it with more characters, improved user interface and user experience, and the ability for users to customise puppet designs and backgrounds. This will enable users to share a stage and dance together. Recognising the technological gaps in my country, we are open to and actively seeking technological partnerships within and beyond the ASEAN region." – Thwin Htoo Aung.

What's in a Name?
Unraveling Naming Conventions in Southeast Asia

Joanne B. Agbisit
Associate Editor, The ASEAN
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

First-time visitors to Southeast Asia often find themselves mystified by local names. They ask: Are one-word names considered given names or surnames? Which part denotes the surname in multi-word names (the current record is 12 words)? Why do spouses, and even parents and children, have different names? This article explores some of the common naming conventions in Southeast Asia shaped by a blend of history, culture, and external influences. The list is by no means exhaustive since ethnolinguistic groups within countries often have their unique practices.

Brunei Darussalam

Structure: Given Name + Patronymic Term + Father's Given Name

Examples: Fatimah binti Haji Ahmad, Yusof bin Haji Ahmad

Influences: Islamic, Arabic, Malay

Quick Facts:

- Brunei uses a patronymic naming system, where the terms "bin" [son of] or "binti/binte" [daughter of] are added before the father's given name.

- Children's given names are often chosen from the Qur'an or after prominent figures in Islamic history, such as Ahmad and Sarah.

- Individuals commonly add titles to their names. For example, those who have completed their pilgrimage to Mecca carry the honorific titles "Haji" for males and "Hajah" for females. Members of the hereditary nobility use "Pengiran" as a prefix before their name. Others use titles bestowed by the Sultan, such as "Dato" and "Pehin" for males and "Datin" for females.

- Bruneian women retain their names upon marriage.

Cambodia

Structure: Surname + Given Name

Examples: Chea Sopheap, Kim Chanthavy

Influences: Khmer, Chinese, French, Sanskrit, Pali (the ancient language used in some Buddhist texts)

Quick Facts:

- The use of surnames became mandatory under a 1910 French decree. Children usually take their father's surname. However, some parents still follow the traditional practice of using the father's (or even grandfather's or great-grandfather's) given name as the surname. For example, if a child's name is Chea Sopheap, "Chea" might be the father's given name, resulting in children having a different surname than their parents.

- Many Cambodian surnames are derived from Chinese words, such as Chin and Lim, while some have French origins, such as Pich and Duch.

- Given names in Cambodia often have poetic meanings or symbolise positive traits, like Chanthavy [beautiful moon girl] and Sopheap [gentle or proper]. Some names, like Socheata [well-born] and Vanna [golden], are gender-neutral.

- Cambodian women typically do not change their names upon marriage, although some have adopted the Western practice of using their husband's family name.

Indonesia

Structure: All components of one's name are considered a unified personal name, unlike the Western norm of using a first name, middle name, and family name

Examples: Ixora Tri Devi, Pricilia Putri Nirmalasari, Budianto, Dyatmiyati

Influences: Sanskrit, Javanese, Arabic, Chinese, Dutch

Quick Facts:

- Indonesia has no national custom of passing down surnames. Different groups have their own traditions. Among the Javanese, one-word names are typical and represent their full name. Some groups, like the Batak, use the clan's name as the individual member's surname (e.g. Putra Harahap). Indonesian Muslims also use the patronymic terms "bin" and "binti" and the father's first name, but only during official ceremonies, like weddings.

- Recent guidelines, like Permendagri no. 73/2022, regulate citizens' names on official documents. For example, individuals must register at least two names consisting of no more than 60 characters.

- Many Indonesians have names derived from Sanskrit, like Dewi, Shinta, and Rama. Those with strong Islamic influence use Arabic names, such as Iskandar and Farah. Indigenous groups like the Acehnese incorporate noble titles such as "Teuku" or "Cut" as the first word in a person's name (e.g. Teuku Wisnu).

- Women typically retain birth names after marriage, though some may informally use their husband's names in social settings.

Lao PDR

Structure: Given Name + Surname

Examples: Khamphanh Sayavong, Chanthalat Chanpheth

Influences: Pali, Sanskrit, Lao

Quick Facts:

- Surnames only became mandatory in the 1940s. Children usually inherit their father's family name at birth, though exceptions exist, especially among indigenous or remote communities. For instance, among the Hmong, the clan name comes before the given name.

- Naming children is often done by older relatives, like grandparents, and sometimes guided by local astrologers or doctors. Newborns might go without an official name for up to a year, during which they receive nicknames based on their appearance or behaviour.

- Most Lao names combine two or three Pali or Sanskrit words with Lao words, often starting with common prefixes like Buon- [happiness], Chan- [moon], Kham- [golden], Seng- [light]. Many Laotian-given names are gender-neutral, such as Bounchanh and Sengdeuane.

- While many women take their husband's surname, some keep their own, especially if they come from a respected family.

Myanmar

Structure: All components of one's name are considered a unified personal name, defying the Western norm of a first name, middle name, and family name

Examples: Zaw Min Htet, Ma Aye Thida

Influences: Pali, Chinese, Indian

Quick Facts:

- While some indigenous groups maintain family names, they are not officially recognised in Myanmar's documentation, with only the given personal name appearing.

- Many names are non-gender specific. Names are carefully chosen to ensure each component complements the others in meaning and sound, creating harmonious identities.

- The selection of Myanmar names is guided by astrology, aligning names with the time and date of birth, believing that a fortunate name brings good luck.

- Myanmar embraces the practice of name changes, often as a means to cast off misfortune, embrace new beginnings, or mark significant life events. These changes might occur through simple public announcements, such as newspaper notices.
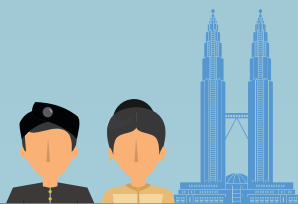
Malaysia

Structure: Given Name + Patronymic Term + Father's Given Name

Examples: Mohammed Igbal a/l Hamid, Siti Nur Amira a/p Hamid, Sangeeta d/o Kumar, Rajesh s/o Kumar, Sanjay Kumar

Influences: Malay, Arabic, Indian

Quick Facts:

- Malaysian parents often choose first names with personal, historical, or religious meaning. Many Malay male names start with "Muhammad" or its variations like "Mohammad," "Mohammed," and abbreviated forms: Muhd., Mohd., Md., or M. Second names are common if the first name is popular.

- Most Malaysians do not use family names. Instead, they use a patronymic system, using terms like "bin" [son of] and "binti" [daughter of], or their Malay equivalent, "anak lelaki or a/l" and "anak perempuan or a/p."

- Malaysian Indians also use the patronymic terms like "son of" or s/o and "daughter of" (d/o). At times, they drop the patronymic phrase altogether (e.g. Sanjay s/o Kumar becomes Sanjay Kumar).

- Titles play a significant role in Malaysian names, appearing before the person's name, such as Haji, Hajjah, Tung, Tan Sri, Datuk, and Datin.

Structure: Surname + Given Name

Examples: Lim Goh Tong, Alice Tan

Influence: Chinese

Quick Facts:

- Malaysians of Chinese descent "romanise" their names, but follow the Chinese structure of surnames preceding given names.

- Some adopt Western first names and follow the Western naming order.

Philippines

Structure: Given Name + Middle Name + Surname

Examples: Maria Isabel R. Perez, Tala L. Panganiban, Mariam Fatima Ibrahim

Influences: Spanish, American, Chinese, Arabic, Malay

Quick Facts:

- Children carry their father's surname. Surnames became compulsory in the mid-19th century, with many adopting Hispanic names. Indigenous surnames, derived from Tagalog, Visayan, and other local languages, are also common. Filipinos of Chinese descent use Chinese surnames like Tan or Lim, or "Filipinized" versions like Tanjuatco or Quizon.

- Parents traditionally name their children after religious figures, such as Maria, Jose, Mohamed, and Fatima. They also use Hispanic names like Linda or Antonio, or local names reflecting desired qualities, like Marikit [beauty] or Dakila [greatness]. In recent decades, more parents are opting for English names, such as Denise or Brian.

- A middle name is a legal requirement, with a few exceptions. The mother's maiden name becomes the child's middle name, with only the initial letter being used on official documents.

- Upon marriage, women often change their names, either adopting their husband's surname or hyphenating it with their maiden name for professional reasons.

Singapore

Structure: Given Name + Patronymic Term + Father's Given Name

Examples: Arif bin Mohammad Agus, Deepa d/o Mehta

Influences: Malay, Arabic, Indian

Quick Facts:
- Singaporean Malays use the patronymic terms "bin/binti/binte" or "anak lelaki (a/l)/anak perempuan (a/p)."
- Singapore Indians use terms like "son of" (s/o) and "daughter of" (d/o), but sometimes drop them entirely (e.g. Deepa Mehta), or use the initial of the father's given name before their own (e.g. M. Deepa).
- Women typically do not change their names when they get married.

Structure: Surname + Given Name

Examples: Tee Yi Xin, Ng Chin Huan

Influence: Chinese

Quick Facts:
- The father passes down the family name to his children.
- Singaporean Chinese names are "romanised" on passports and birth certificates. Some use an official English name in addition to their given name, placed either before the surname (e.g. Lily Tee Yi Xin) or after the given name (e.g. Tee Yi Xin Lily).
- Parents choose names that reflect positive qualities, like Li Qiang [strength] and Hui [kindness]. They may also consult geomancers or fortune tellers for guidance.
- It is uncommon for women to take their husband's names. Many prefer to keep their birth names as a tradition or a sign of respect for their parents.

Thailand

Structure: Given Name + Surname

Examples: Somchai Chaithiang, Kanchana Saengngam

Influences: Thai, Chinese, Malay, Sanskrit, Pali, English, Japanese

Quick Facts:
- Children inherit their father's surname. Surnames were officially introduced in Thailand only in the early 20th century, resulting in many newly created family names. Thai law mandates unique surnames, making it rare for unrelated individuals to share the same family name.
- In the past, names showed birth order, like Ai [first] and Yee [second]; described attributes, like Ram [beautiful]; or expressed aspirations, like Thong [gold]. Gender-specific affixes also became a trend, like -porn or -sri were used for female names, and -chai, -sak, and -yot for male names.
- Thais often use nicknames instead of the lengthy given names for convenience and to ward off evil spirits. These nicknames are often unrelated to their given names, like names of flowers, gems, or parts of nature. Examples are Boa [lotus], Mook [pearl], and Fon [rain].
- A woman can choose to use her maiden name or assume the surname of her spouse when their marriage is registered.

Viet Nam

Structure: Surname + Middle Name + Given Name

Examples: Nguyen Tuan Anh, Hoang Thi Mai

Influence: Chinese

Quick Facts:
- Children inherit the father's surname. The most common surname is Nguyen, representing about 40 per cent of the population. Other common surnames are Le, Tran, Pham, Phan, and Hoang. Sometimes, the mother's surname is added to the child's name, often positioned between the surname and middle name of the child.
- The given name can be a single word or two, often with poetic or symbolic meanings reflecting positive attributes or nature's beauty, such as Binh [peaceful], Lan [orchid], and Tuyet [snow]. Many Vietnamese names can be used for both genders.
- Each generation in a family might have a different middle name, i.e. siblings share the same middle name, but their children would have a different one. Some middle names are gender-specific, such as Thi for females and Duc for males.
- Women usually keep their surnames once they marry, although some women use their husband's first name to introduce themselves.

References may be accessed through the following link: https://bit.ly/Issue36_Ref

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

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ASEAN

Traditional Indian dancers performing at the ASEAN-India Bazaar in Jakarta on February 18, 2024