Youth Perspectives brings together a collection of opinion pieces by young people on the issues that matter to them within the scope of ASEAN-Australia relations. The publication samples the diversity of perspectives, ideas and interests of our young leaders, and evidences their engagement with current regional and global challenges affecting our region’s future.

The articles in this volume speak to the diverse experiences and concerns of youth. They share personal experiences of conflict, discrimination, concerns and their hopes for the future. They also shed light onto the many opportunities and challenges that are at the forefront of young people’s minds as they look to the region as a natural neighbourhood for cooperation.

The views expressed in this volume are the authors' own and do not reflect the views of the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth Partnership or our partners including the Australian government.

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With special thanks to Alexandra Smith
Since its founding in 1946, The Australian National University (ANU) has been committed to understanding and engaging with Asia and the Pacific.

As Australia’s national university, ANU maintains world-leading expertise of Australia’s region, and devotes its attention to the complex and evolving challenges confronting Australia, its neighbours, and the world. ANU is home to the largest community of academic specialists on Southeast Asia in the world, outside Southeast Asia itself. It plays a vital role in informing public policy and Australia’s intellectual engagement on the politics, languages, society, economics and cultures of the region.

The Australian National University is proud to be a major partner of the ASEAN-Australia Young Leaders Forum. Initiatives like the Forum play an incredibly important role, not only in engaging young people now, but in fostering a new frontier of leadership. The impressive program, which has been put together by the ASEAN Australia Strategic Youth Partnership will empower delegates to have deep conversations about regional problems, and to design collaborative solutions. We look forward to the lively discussions, and engagement through this Forum.

Youth Perspectives is an exciting and timely new publication that draws on the agenda of the delegates to the inaugural ASEAN-Australia Young Leaders Forum.

The cast list who have shared their perspectives here reflect a range of agile young minds who are determined to take an evidence-based, dialogic approach to the emerging challenges of the region.

There are an eclectic set of concerns in this volume, ranging from social justice and environmental stewardship through to combating mental health, boosting school attainment and re-examining the case for non-alignment in a region where Great Power politics is gaining currency. The combined volume demonstrates unmet demand for the platform that has been created by the AAYLF.

Three themes can be traced running through the spine of this collection. The first is to invite future leaders to think profoundly about the region through an historic prism. Tony Nguyen’s piece on the Vietnamese-Australia diaspora reflects this emphasis, and highlights a set of future opportunities in business and entertainment that were inconceivable forty years ago when conflict dominated between these two countries.

Secondly, the potential of businesses – current and new - in the region is hard to overstate. The region’s economic growth potential is genuinely impressive but, for Australia at least, there is a narrow tightrope to walk in discovering new ASEAN trading partners while remaining heavily embedded in exporting minerals and resources to China. As Maddison O’Grady-Lee notes, there is a strong case for forging closer Australian-ASEAN economic ties as a way of minimising the effects of larger trade war tensions.

Thirdly, many writers here have dwelt on supply side issues that aim to boost the efficiency, productivity, openness and fairness of various countries — including tackling cyber security risks, preparedness ahead of demographic ageing, and, most crucially, unmasking and bearing down of different forms of discrimination. Jemima Kang’s piece for instance points a torch into the dark corner of spoken accents and the need to face up to these problems in Australia as its interconnectedness with the region grows.

This initial set of Perspectives suggests that the second issue will have to cross a high bar, and I look forward to reading those in 2021.
A Fourth Pillar for ASEAN?

Queenie Pearl V. Tomaro
PHILIPPINES

The Indo-Pacific region comprising both Australia and ASEAN is facing an environmental crisis putting at risk more than 620 million human lives and 20% of the world’s species. This protracted ecological calamity is alarming given the emergence of the Philippines and Indonesia as the world’s top two contributors of plastic pollution in our oceans.

The annual devastation caused by forest fires and transboundary haze constitute unresolved environmental challenges for the ASEAN region.1 The impacts of these fires have seen the loss of 2.12 million acres of forest as of September 2019.2 In the Lower Mekong region, fish stocks have recorded significant declines, causing food and economic insecurity for the millions of ASEAN citizens subsisting within the Mekong River ecosystem.3

These same environmental concerns are echoed by Australia as climate change poses a central threat to Australia’s economy and financial stability.4 The region’s shared environmental vulnerability needs a solution.

WHAT ASEAN SHOULD DO

Whilst problems such as potential agricultural crises, the rise of terrorism, human rights, and disasters are answered by existing regional agreements such as the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve Agreement (APTEERR), ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism (ACCT), 2012 ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, and ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, the climate emergency remains without an ASEAN answer.

It is clear therefore that a unified regional action is needed to effectively develop environmental management strategies and address the climate emergency. A coordinated regional plan would facilitate convergence of efforts and changing of mindsets—from economic prosperity to sustainable and environment-friendly development. Hence, I argue for the erection of a fourth pillar in the ASEAN structure, the Environment pillar.

The introduction of a new pillar would bring the climate emergency to the centre of the decision-making table, bringing forward environmental issues that continue to remain unresolved or under-addressed. The pillar fits within the ASEAN way which is about building on complementarities, respect and about co-promoting the interests of every ASEAN member state.

There could be nothing more unifying than the shared impacts of the climate crisis addressed by a shared vision for a healthier ecosystem.

THE ENVIRONMENT PILLAR:
AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ASEAN AND AUSTRALIA

The environment pillar would be a pathway towards the forging of stronger relations between ASEAN and Australia as their close proximity means they face similar environmental concerns. The regional imperative for climate action supports the Sustainable Development Goal 13 on Climate Action, 14 on Life Below Water, and 15 on Life on Land, among others. The environment pillar would also be an opportunity to drive forward SDG 17 on Partnerships for the Goals through creating a region-wide mechanism. Additionally, the ground-breaking adoption of this pillar would localize environment-related SDGs, thus it would institutionalize and guide the initiatives of the ASEAN Working Group on Environmentally Sustainable Cities (AWGESC).

AUSTRALIA’S ROLE

While it is established that the environment is a shared interest of Australia and ASEAN, it is also important to highlight how Australia can partner with ASEAN. Australia can play a vital role in
supporting ASEAN-led climate action initiatives as it is renowned for its global contribution to environmental management through the development of its National Environmental-Economic Accounting Strategy.\(^5\)

This strategy devised by the Australian government ensures that environmental accounts shape economic decision-making, thus underpinning policies that enhance environmental management for a sustainable future.

Thus, the building of the environmental pillar would not only introduce an architecture focused on goals for environmental protection and conservation but it would also increase partnerships, synergize efforts, mobilize knowledge-sharing, stimulate capability-building and technology transfer, and enhance policy coordination and policy coherence between Australia and ASEAN. This will pave the way for environmental partnerships and the convergence of efforts towards the vision of a healthier ASEAN-Australia ecosystem.

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Managing Increasing Waste in Southeast Asia

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is experiencing never-before-seen economic, population and consumption growth. While this may seem like great news, there is a growing problem choking the region. Waste.

In 2016, ASEAN had higher annual average GDP growth (4.6%) than the global average (3.2%) and the region represented 9 percent of global population. Rates of population and economic growth aren’t slowing down. By 2020, ASEAN will have a population of 650 million people and by 2030, it will be the fourth largest economy in the world. Rapid economic growth is increasing the ASEAN middle-class, driving increased demand for goods and a shift to more intensive consumption.

WASTE AND ITS CHALLENGES

Waste generation is increasing, with current municipal solid waste produced at 1.14 kg/per capita/per day, food loss is 120-170 kg/per capita/per year and e-waste has increased by 63 percent. Additional sources of waste include plastic, paper and metals, as well as emerging waste streams from healthcare, industry, construction and demolition.

Waste management systems (WMS) are lagging behind economic growth. Apart from Singapore, which converts waste to energy (WTE) through incineration, open dumping and burning are common in ASEAN [2]. Additionally, China, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam dump more plastic in the oceans than the rest of the world combined.

The ASEAN region supports over half a billion people and is rich in diversity. However, waste has detrimental environmental and human health effects, including on air and water quality. This issue is exacerbated when WMS are not effective.

FOREIGN WASTE IMPORTS

If managing their own waste wasn’t challenge enough, ASEAN countries are straining under other countries’ waste burden. Countries such as Australia export waste as opposed to processing it themselves. Regional waste management issues are therefore not isolated to ASEAN, with other countries contributing to WMS inundation through an inability to process their own waste.

In 2018, China effectively banned waste imports, meaning more than half of the worlds waste required management elsewhere. Countries turned to ASEAN to accept their trash. For example, Australia sends over half of its plastics to be recycled in the ASEAN region.

While waste imports provide a cash injection and support some jobs, weak WMS, limited facilities and low capacity mean that waste often ends up burnt or buried in landfill. Recyclable waste is informally processed in households, causing hazardous emissions and litter. Furthermore, exporter countries send illegal waste, which is contaminated and toxic.

The addition of foreign waste imports into the ASEAN region further overwhelm WMS and I believe they must be ended immediately.

A common sight in Indonesia
A CHANGING STANCE

In August 2019, ASEAN declared they would no longer accept toxic waste stating, ‘we need to send a message to the international community... we don’t want the Southeast Asian region to become a trash can of other countries.’

True to their word, ASEAN countries have already rejected hundreds of containers carrying illegal plastic, including 49 containers from Australia.

SOLUTIONS

The rapid increase of waste and new, emerging waste streams present a challenge. However, by shifting perspective, waste may become a resource. For example, adoption of WTE can reduce waste and provide energy.

To reduce domestic waste, local initiatives should aim to educate communities, promote sustainable development and ensure environmental protection. For example, local community driven education sessions and ‘clean-up events’ raise awareness and encourage change. Other projects could include building local and cost-effective infrastructure, encouraging source recycling and implementing waste disposal incentives.

Will Australia continue to send rubbish to ASEAN? Will they accept it? Can Australia and ASEAN collaborate to find sustainable and profitable solutions for better regional WMS?

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **End waste imports** to reduce stress on current ASEAN WMS, highlighting that ASEAN is not a global ‘dumping ground’ and encouraging other countries to develop better domestic WMS.
2. **Collaborate regionally** to improve domestic WMS by learning from countries with efficient systems.
3. **Reduce domestic waste** through community-driven education and projects.
4. **Explore innovative solutions** for turning waste into profit.

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Combating Modern Slavery in ASEAN and Australia

John Swan

AUSTRALIA

Have you ever thought about who caught the last fish or picked the last fruit you ate? The International Labour Organisation estimated in a 2016 report that there are globally 40 million victims of modern slavery, including 25 million people in forced labour and 15 million people in forced marriage. Modern slavery is a global human rights issue, and is particularly prevalent in the Asia-Pacific region where there are an estimated 24.9 million victims. The ILO’s report also found that women and girls are disproportionately affected, comprising 71 percent of modern slaves. Children make up 25 percent of victims.\(^1\) As modern slavery is often hidden, it can be difficult to measure but must not be ignored.

Modern slavery broadly involves the control of an individual for exploitation. It is an umbrella term that includes slavery; servitude; trafficking in persons; forced labour; debt bondage; forced marriage; and sale or sexual exploitation of children.\(^2\) Industries implicated in modern slavery include construction, mining, hospitality, fishing, and manufacturing. Victims can also be forced into domestic work and prostitution.\(^3\) A country can be a source, transit or destination country of trafficked people or goods produced with exploited labour.

Freedom from slavery is a right under international law. Article 8 of the 'International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights' provides that no one shall be held in slavery; all forms of slavery and the slave-trade are prohibited, and no one shall be held in servitude.\(^4\) Prohibition of slavery is also considered 'jus cogens'.\(^5\) Such a law is a peremptory norm of international law accepted and recognised by the international community from which no derogation is permitted. It is the highest form of international customary law to which all states are bound.

Recent findings of slave practices on Thai fishing vessels are particularly concerning. Men from impoverished families in Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos on these vessels have been tricked into bonded labour. Survivors report routine torture onboard, including sleep deprivation, beatings, and scarce food and water. The killing of those seeking to escape or those unfit to work has been reported. One survivor, Thanawat Wonmoree who was rescued in January 2016 by Thai officials, said that he witnessed ten occasions of a crewmember unable to work being thrown overboard by skipper.\(^6\) Countries that import seafood from ASEAN countries, including Australia, are implicated in this trade.

There are 40 million victims of modern slavery, including 25 million people in forced labour and 15 million people in forced marriage.

—International Labour Organisation (2016)

Modern slavery practices have also been reported in Australia, notably in relation to the horticulture industry. Recent studies have found worker exploitation in the industry, which included debt bondage of migrant workers.\(^7\) These workers may be recruited from their home countries without an adequate work visa, which leads to exploitation and a reluctance to seek help.

ASEAN could have a bigger role in preventing modern slavery in the Asia-Pacific region. The ‘ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons’, Especially Women and Children demonstrates a joint commitment to tackle human
trafficking and worker exploitation. In August, the ASEAN-Australia Counter-Trafficking Initiative was launched. This A$80 million program will assist countries to investigate and prosecute human trafficking, modern slavery and forced labour over 10 years. Further financial and practical collaboration between ASEAN countries and dialogue states to eradicate modern slavery is vital.

Countries must also ensure that domestic legislation and policy adequately criminalise and prevent all forms of modern slavery. Australia recently enacted the Modern Slavery Act 2018 (Cth). The Act recognises the responsibility of firms to eradicate slavery in supply chains and requires that large businesses with a consolidated revenue over A$100 million publish an annual report on their efforts to reduce modern slavery. Whilst the legislation is welcome, it could be improved with penalty provisions for non-compliance and oversight through an appointed independent commissioner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Greater co-operation between ASEAN and dialogue partner countries to enforce domestic modern slavery legislation.
2. Establishment of a multi-national independent oversight body to monitor modern slavery in the Asia-Pacific region.
3. Support for civil society groups assisting victims.

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How inclusive is ‘inclusive’?: An inquiry to ASEAN’s disability-inclusive development

Joshua Arsenio V. Espiritu, III
PHILIPPINES

SCARCITY OF DATA ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITY: A ‘DISABLING’ DEVELOPMENT

Inclusivity, a development principle wherein ASEAN’s policies are anchored, has propelled most of the region’s programs and initiatives in the twenty-first century. As encapsulated in the Bangkok Declaration, future implementations must be grounded by the concepts of equality and inclusivity. Moreover, the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 reflects the aspiration of its member states as well as its people to realise a people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN Community: “where the people enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms, higher quality of life and the benefits of community building”. Specifically, the 2025 Blueprint of ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) stipulates specific strategies and courses of action that are geared towards putting an end to the discrimination experienced by persons with disabilities, thereby, ensuring them with equal opportunities, accessibility, and at the same time upholds the rule of law, promoting their respective rights as humans. With the goals being said, the question now is how do we ensure people of an inclusive development when there are no up-to-date, reliable and opportune statistics on disability across the region since the inception of ASEAN in 1967? Existing data relies on rough estimates and projections (e.g. The World Health Organization/World Bank average prevalence rates; sample surveys on PWDs) and there are no hard data to reflect the state-of-affairs of persons with disability in Southeast Asia. How can we devise informed choices as a regional community if no sufficient information is available?

PWDs’ access to quality of life and education, mobility, participation in the community, social protection, legal support and medical treatments will be dependent on accurate data and statistical analysis. Without these, our attempt to close the gap and our desire to ensure them of their rights and dignity will most likely fail. Reliable data is of paramount significance in achieving inclusive development in the region. In other words, if we cannot have it measured then we cannot have it done.

DATA-DRIVEN AND EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY: ACHIEVING A DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

Driving forward initiatives and programs to support disability inclusion in Southeast Asia means being more erudite about persons with disabilities. This includes acquiring data on the pervasiveness of disability and its diversification across ASEAN countries. As we contextualize this issue, we can better situate the stigma and discrimination they face, their struggles, lack of opportunities for them, and most importantly, their potential for development. Making sure that no persons with disabilities are left behind necessitates the consistent collection and analysis of data on their population across all sectors (e.g. women with disabilities, indigenous people with disability, elderly with special needs, etc.) as a means to ensure that the disability sector are benefiting from development programs and initiatives being introduced at various levels - local, national and regional.

Being data-driven will allow us, our policy-makers and state leaders to rethink and recalibrate the kind of development targets we are setting for everyone, especially for PWDs. The level of efficiency and
effectiveness of supports to inclusion relies on the intrinsically identified needs and perspectives of persons with disabilities and not just being perceived as an ‘add-on’ group. When they themselves are given the voice and are heard, it is a way to recognize their potentials and capabilities and will enable them to define their direction and participate in the process of change through collective action that will ensure their well-being.

With this, persons with disabilities should be given a seat at the table. They should have full access to participation and involvement in the crafting of these policies regardless of their social, economic and political status. But the absence of these principles made the participation of persons with disabilities less and less possible. Most of the time, particularly in policy-making processes, whether national and ASEAN in scope, this sector has not been given a seat at the table. This had resulted in a significant gap and inconsistencies in the policies we have today.

Extra-structural support in the policy-making processes should be provided to PWDs in order for them to have equal access. Thus, the policy makers in local, national and ASEAN level should have an eye for persons with disabilities in policy making processes because this democratizes the process per se and therefore demonstrates an inclusive policy support. No matter what, participation should always be seen as a right and responsibility attributed to both the person and the state.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ASEAN-AUSTRALIA PARTNERSHIP

Australia, being one of ASEAN’s key dialogue partners, has initiated efforts that are geared towards improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in developing countries such as the ASEAN member states. They are committed to working with partner governments and people with disability organisations in achieving such.

Australian Government’s Development for All 2015–2020 Strategy for Strengthening Disability-Inclusive Development in Australia’s Aid Program, frontlines possible opportunities for ASEAN-Australia partnership:

- Supporting governance for equality through the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)
- Enabling infrastructure and accessible water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)
- Ensuring inclusive education and skills
- Building resilience through inclusive humanitarian assistance, disaster risk reduction and social protection.

One of the approaches used by the Australian Government in forwarding a disability-inclusive development is through adopting a twin-track approach. Twin-track approach is the marrying of mainstream approaches with targeted approaches. The former means actively involving people with disabilities as co-actors and recipients of development efforts across all sectors while the latter targets people with disabilities in development initiatives designed specifically to benefit them.

For inclusive development to be true to its nature, it must include and benefit the people in the peripheries, specifically the PWDs. ASEAN member states and the Australian Government can work on knowledge-sharing, continuous diplomatic efforts and aid program investments that will improve the quality of life for people with disabilities in the region.

Only when ASEAN citizens with disability experience the benefits of a better life can we say that the ASEAN’s development is indeed in the upsurge and is genuinely inclusive.
Developing Infrastructure to Develop Cities: A Southeast Asian Will and an Australian Way

Miguel Vera-Cruz
AUSTRALIA

On 22 July 2008, after nearly a decade of delays caused by disputes between the government and international contractors, Terminal 3 of Manila’s Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) opened. The original terminal was well behind its time, reaching capacity in 1991, and consistently rated well into the 2010s as among the worst in the world. Inasmuch as its delays reflected local cynicism and hopelessness up to the mid-2000s about the Philippines, once characterised as the ‘Sick Man of Asia’, its opening became a harbinger of the economic growth to follow.

Yet infrastructure remains a challenge of Manila and other ASEAN megacities. Cities including Jakarta and Bangkok featured among GPS developer TomTom’s list of cities with the world’s worst traffic; traffic app Waze has on various occasions listed Manila and Cebu as the world’s most congested; and the ADB rated Manila as the most congested city in Asia. Much of this can be attributed to a lack of public transport options, which affect not only a city’s economic development, but also economic equality, due to its significance in enabling people to escape poverty. While there is no silver bullet to more inclusive economic growth in ASEAN megacities, infrastructure, especially transportation, is crucial.

The willpower, resources and expertise exists, yet NAIA’s problems reflect the challenges of this mobilisation. While the Philippine public sector has historically underinvested in infrastructure, large conglomerates, which like many ASEAN economies dominate the Philippines, have expressed willingness to address the country’s infrastructure deficit. PPP funding has been steady since the mid-1990s, and conglomerates provide an alternative to foreign financing (which carries political implications). However, a lack of financial products and the opaqueness of regulatory processes, including those that plagued NAIA, remain barriers. Since the 1986 collapse of the Marcos dictatorship, the domestic private sector has somewhat compensated for the shortfall of government investment. Yet, even if the government lacks the capacity, it could still support the private sector by facilitating a smoother PPP tendering and investment process. Enter the potential for Australian expertise and advisory.

Australia is a leader in both asset management and public-private partnerships. Australia’s pension fund industry is among the world’s largest, a particularly remarkable statistic for its small population, and is home to large infrastructure investors including Macquarie Capital, the world’s largest by assets under management. Australia has had its share of hiccups, yet with experience, PPPs have become key to infrastructure development. An ideal solution would combine the best principles of private sector and intergovernmental development finance, and could be done in either or both of two ways.

The first would be for Australian pension funds to co-invest with local conglomerates directly into projects. Australian professionals could assist in drafting contracts, processes, and payments based on tried-and-tested systems; and being of the private sector mitigates political concerns that come with other options including aid. Encouraging openness to riskier emerging market investments among Australian asset managers would be a key challenge, as would the openness among Southeast Asians to foreign ownership of critical public assets.
Additionally, there is more risk of local communities not realising direct benefits via investment returns or project-related employment unless explicitly mandated.

The second would be to establish infrastructure private equity funds, with a minority Australian pension fund stake the remainder owned by ASEAN governments and private investors. This would allow Australian funds to contribute within their area of expertise — asset management — and maintain local control of assets for decision making in local communities’ interest.

With its investment expertise, Australia could assist the public sector in ASEAN countries to make infrastructure investment more effective. With increasing discussion within political and academic circles concerned with Australia’s future place in the region, it could offer a uniquely Australian model for development financing. Most importantly, it would engage Australia with the Asian century via a unique opportunity for partnership in a sector crucial to equitable nation building.

The views and opinions expressed are solely the author’s own and do not reflect those of any group or organisation the author is associated with.

References


11. Image source: Unsplash
Improving Cultural Understanding Through International Teacher Collaboration

Ben Duggan
AUSTRALIA

Teachers around the world seek to answer the same question: “how can I best help students to learn?” From Sydney to Singapore, this common quest to teach effectively creates a bond, a shared understanding of the hope, joy, and wonder of teaching.

Governments are seeking to answer a similar but different question: “how can we improve student learning outcomes?” Multilateral forums and institutions such as ASEAN and the OECD showcase how nations are grappling with this difficult challenge. While various education barriers exist around the world, including funding, infrastructure, materials, and gender, there is one policy challenge that is the most important to address.

It is widely acknowledged that teacher quality is the most important indicator of success in a school system. A high-quality teacher is one who constantly seeks to learn, reflect and improve while supporting colleagues to improve their practice. We also know that a great teacher in Jakarta is also a great teacher in Bangkok.

While we understand the importance of teacher quality, more must be done to support and empower teachers with the resources they need to succeed. Governments should continually invest in evidence-based initiatives that support all teachers to be excellent.

Evidence shows that opportunities where teachers can exchange ideas, learn from each other, and collaboratively solve challenges, teacher quality improves. Teachers are natural collaborators, working together to create and share resources, interpret data, and improve their instructional practice, but they need structure and clear guidance.

Schools are increasingly investing time and resources into establishing and refining more formal professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs are proven to improve the passion, practice, and connection of teachers. The common experience and shared bond of teachers makes PLCs possible on an international level.

I distinctly remember having a cold drink on a hot afternoon in New Delhi with a reflective young educator. I had only spent a few hours with him, observing teachers he was coaching, but already the conversation was flowing. After our discussion ended, I wondered how many other educators would benefit from such a connection, fostered through a more formal international exchange or dialogue.

Teacher quality is the most important indicator of success in a school system.

From ‘tweet chats’ and WhatsApp groups to blogs and Zoom collaborations, teachers are using technologies to connect online and shared ideas. Enhanced communications technology, increased access to the internet, and social media have made it increasingly possible for teachers living in different nations to work together and form strong ties.

While foreign policy efforts focused on improving economic and security ties are essential, it is the connection of people and communities within nations that will improve cultural understanding and promote peace. Investing in international PLCs where teachers from diverse nations come together would support this aim.
Governments of ASEAN states and Australia should support the development of a South-East Asia & Australia Teachers Network. This Network would encourage and support initiatives and opportunities that foster international teacher-to-teacher collaboration through online PLCs. It could also act as a platform to share evidence-based teaching practice, spreading what works throughout the region.

International PLCs would improve the teaching quality of participants while also enhancing their intercultural understanding. It would also create new opportunities for teachers to connect their classrooms and establish new sister school relations.

ASEAN and Australian universities should also develop or expand student-teacher exchange programs. This would enable education students can develop intercultural understanding during their degree and provide advocates for international teacher collaboration.

Teachers are on the front line in the battle for intercultural understanding in our children. We should invest in building the capacity of these teachers as it will be through their efforts to inspire and nurture the next generation that we will see long-term peace and prosperity.

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9. Image source: Unsplash
Addressing Competition Issues in the World’s Fastest Growing Digital Economy

Tilini Rajapaksa

AUSTRALIA

In March 2018, Uber announced it had agreed to sell its Southeast Asian business to Singapore-based regional rival Grab for a stake, merging the two ride-hailing businesses. What followed was Grab’s domination of the ride-sharing market in every single ASEAN nation. While the Competition and Consumer Commission of Singapore (CCCS) ultimately levied a fine of US$9.5 million in total on the companies for anti-competitive conduct and the Philippines Competition Commission (PCC) followed later with a smaller fine, neither chose to unwind the merger - a legal outcome which would have been extremely challenging, if not impossible, to enforce due to how rapidly the companies carried out the merger and the intangible nature of assets transferred.

Southeast Asia is home to the world’s fastest growing population of internet users. ASEAN’s digital economy is predicted to triple its annual size to US $300 billion by 20251. When it comes to mobile internet usage, Southeast Asians are the most prolific in the world, making it one of the world’s fastest-growing regions for e-commerce and ride-hailing2.

Issues to do with the digital economy are no longer peripheral. The digital economy does not refer to a separate economic ecosystem, it refers to a colossal and integral shift in the way the economy operates as a whole. As the OECD noted in 2014 “the digital economy is increasingly becoming the economy itself”3.

The Grab-Uber merger highlights the inadequacies in Southeast Asia’s anti-competitive frameworks in the era of the digital economy, which has transformed business patterns and heightened the complexity of competition issues.4

There is increasing recognition of the tendency for market concentration and monopolistic practices in the digital economy as a result of positive network effects,5 which means the value of a good or service is increased by the number of people using it. For example, as more drivers and customers joined Grab and Uber, the two brands strengthened their footholds in the market as the key platforms for ride-sharing and consequently grew their market value among consumers. These dynamics are increasingly more common as the digital economy allows for businesses to develop a competitive advantage and market power at a very high speed.

Robust competition is at the heart of an effective market, protecting consumer choice and demands and facilitating innovation. Southeast Asia has been one of the last regions in the world to adopt competition regimes and if it fails to protect an even playing field for businesses with the shift towards a digital economy, the region will see its hard-earned regional integration and reputation as an attractive region to do business being undermined by anti-competitive practices.6 Though Southeast Asian nations are adapting, commerce is evolving even faster.

Over in Australia, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) held a landmark inquiry into the impact of digital platforms on competition between 2018 and 2019,7 although limited in scope to studying competition in media and advertising services markets.

Australia and ASEAN have increasingly taken up opportunities to collaborate on competition issues. Through the AANZFTA Competition Law Implementation Program (CLIP), the ACCC and the New Zealand Commerce Commission (NZCC) have provided targeted capacity building and technical assistance to ASEAN states to facilitate the
development of sustainable competition policy and implementation frameworks since 2014.\(^8\)

However, the need prevails for Australia and ASEAN to put greater emphasis on the new nuances the digital economy brings to competition issues. A more multifaceted policy approach is required to address competition issues in the era of the digital economy and may require changes to contract law, consumer protection law and data protection law, as noted by the German Competition authorities in a report submitted to the European Union this year.\(^9\)

While the ASEAN Secretariat’s ASEAN Regional Guidelines on Competition Policy published in 2010 requires renewal to address the immense differences in the commercial landscape today, the ASEAN Competition Enforcers’ Network (ACEN), created in 2018 to further cooperation and handle cross-border cases, is a strong and visible move towards greater regional coordination in the context of rising non-traditional tech companies which operate across borders.

Through CLIP, ASEAN and Australia have a foundation to focus on the sharing of expertise with greater focus on the digital economy. New integrated competition guidelines to address these evolving issues could be developed to facilitate greater consistency in competition regulation and implementation across Southeast Asia. Both Australia and ASEAN, having had varied experiences when it comes to the digital economy, are in a positive place to benefit from greater dialogue to address these evolving challenges.

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2. Ibid.
10. Image source: Unsplash
Mine the gap: Pursuing Growth Through a Transition from Dirty to Clean Data

ASEAN AND AUSTRALIA’S ENERGY RELATIONSHIP
As the digital economy grows, so does the demand for minerals and energy to build technology and power it. Coal is the backbone of the ASEAN region’s energy mix, at 32% in 2013 growing to 50% by 2040. Meeting this energy demand may lead to an increase in price as competition for energy increases with still 120 million people living without electricity across the region.7

Australia has supported Asia and the ASEAN region through this growth period as resource-based economy, contributing to 50% of our national export earnings8 and looks to continue to serve their energy needs through the provision of coal.9

THE COST
However, coal comes at a high price. Southeast Asia is the epicentre for climate impacts and security risks globally.10 The growing frequency and severity of the effects of climate change may affect interstate relations through humanitarian crises, migration, and/or a need for greater imports of vital goods. These forces will destabilise the region unless we act to build resilience in these communities.11 If we are not able to support affected nations suitably, we could see climate security ramifications with large migrations of people.12

The ASEAN region faces a dual challenge, it must adapt to climate change due to existing emissions in the atmosphere, and simultaneously look to transition to cleaner forms of energy. This is the ASEAN-Australian opportunity.

OPPORTUNITY
Australia needs to find new revenue drivers to diversify its economic base13 and the ASEAN region needs more energy to fuel its growing digital economy and accelerate its clean energy transition.

Australia is a global leader in deploying renewable energy, growing at a per capita rate ten times faster than the world average.14 Through initiatives like the Australia-Singapore Power Link,15 we can use this

If I asked you, what is the most valuable resource currently being mined? You may think of resources used in construction, electronics or energy. If you thought of a resource that has come directly from the ground, you’d be wrong. According to the economist, data is now the world’s most valuable ‘mined’ resource.1 They are intrinsically linked with potentially dire environmental consequences if growth is not managed sustainably.2

RISE OF THE ASEAN’S DIGITAL ECONOMY
The fourth industrial revolution is transforming our primary economies into digital economies. ASEAN now has a population of 630 million people, globally the third largest labour force,3 and its digital economy is projected to grow by 500% to be worth over US$200 billion by 2025.4

Digital economies and businesses rely on mining customer data and increasingly cryptocurrencies for e-commerce. With a growing consumer class,5 more people and businesses are online, leading to an explosion of data generation which offers a plethora of opportunities for new personalised services and offerings.

COMING BACK DOWN TO THE GROUND
As data mining and cryptocurrency use is growing, so are the requirements. With every mobile phone, IoT device and cryptocurrency, exponential amount of data is created and requires to be sent through to servers and stored in data centres with ample energy to run. This is where the connection from the data mine to the physical mine comes in.

Ian Buck
AUSTRALIA
capacity and expertise through linking to an ASEAN-wide power grid to provide access to more reliable energy supplies and establish 'microgrids'. This will in turn provide energy security, reduce emissions and provide significant investment to the region while providing new sources of growth for Australia.16

Through the transition from dirty data to clean data, Australia and the ASEAN region can ensure economic prosperity as we move towards the fourth industrial revolution.

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Digital consumption is set to have a bigger impact than aviation on our planet.
Source: Andrzej Krauze
Catalysts to ASEAN-Australia Sustainable Relations: Trade, Investment and Finance

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Formed in 1967, ASEAN is projected to become the world’s 4th Largest Economy by 2030, trailing behind only the United States, China, and European Union.7 ASEAN’s combined GDP reached US $2.8 trillion in 2017.9 Within ASEAN’s neighborhood, Australia became its first dialogue partner in 1974, and established the Australian Mission to ASEAN in 2013.3 Besides diplomatic relations, the two sides share interests in promoting mutual economic prosperity through trade, investment and finance.

In 2009, the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA) was initiated to strengthen economic cooperation and development, promote business sustainability and opportunities, and to protect the investors.6 Under this agreement, trade volume has increased year on year. In 2017, ASEAN exports to Australia reached US $34,557 million, increasing by almost 19 percent compared to 2009. Similarly, ASEAN imports from Australia rose to US $24,583 million, up by 34% from 2009.1

The variety of two-way investments between Australia and ASEAN, ranging from agriculture to technology, was valued at AU $224.4 billion in 2016.4 Two-way flows of foreign direct investment also reached AU $81.6 billion in 2016.6 Through foreign direct investment, the transfer of soft skills and technologies, important long-term inputs of economic growth and development, have flowed between Australia and ASEAN. Australian firms, have benefited from ASEAN’s labor force, which ranked the world’s third largest labour force in 2017.5

The relationship between ASEAN and Australia’s financial sectors has improved. Under the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership Action Plan 2015-2019, there was a call for action to promote financial development and integration of capital markets.6 Furthermore, Shaping Inclusive Finance Transformations Program (SHIFT) was launched to enable small and medium enterprises, especially those owned by women and low-income individuals, easy access to financial opportunities through the digital financial inclusion, aiding sustainable development of the economy and improvement of living standards.8

Despite the mutual benefits, obstacles to trade and investment persist. First, there is a lack of adequate infrastructure to support supply chains and final goods delivery to both inside and outside the region. Second, Australia’s ignorance about some ASEAN states will leave space for other countries to closely connect with ASEAN, causing Australia, in the long run, to lose political bargaining power in the region. By looking at the investment corner, most of the investments have flowed into only the more developed ASEAN states. Particularly, only Singapore ranks among the top 20 countries Australia invested in in 2018.4 Third, banking differences between ASEAN and Australia are still considerable. Due to the different stages of development among them, it is challenging to promote the concept of banking integration, which is considered as a main obstacle to investment.

In response to the infrastructure problem, ASEAN and Australia, through the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, should join efforts to translate the plans of this project into real actions by exchanging assistance through trainings and sharing information between experts. Additionally, Australia should reconsider its prioritisation of ASEAN states rather than following other countries’ footsteps. Second, Australia should consider diversifying its investment, from where not only enhances state-level relations, but also business to business relations. It should support small and medium enterprises looking for joint-venture and funds as
well as the technical assistance. Third, as Australia is working closely with ASEAN local governments and commercial banks, it is suggested that Australia should take this opportunity to create links between ASEAN local banks and Australian banks to facilitate monetary transactions between countries to become fast, easy, and free. And, this will largely contribute to enhancing investment and remittance outflow of documented workers.

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Power to ASEAN: Energy Security in Southeast Asia

Kate Fletcher

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In August this year, I was in Jakarta, the capital city of ASEAN’s largest member, Indonesia. It was around midday on a Sunday, when suddenly the air-conditioning switched off. Losing power briefly is not unusual, but fast forward to about 9pm that evening, and my accommodation had put candles all throughout the hallways to illuminate the continued pitch-black darkness. I couldn’t charge my phone, so turned it off to save the last 10% of battery for an emergency. Passengers had to be evacuated from Jakarta’s new mass rapid transit (MRT) system, the airport and hospitals were just continuing to function thanks to back-up generators, celluar phone networks were disrupted, and traffic was in disarray as traffic lights went out. The usual hustle and bustle of Greater Jakarta was eerily quiet as up to 10 million people spent over 8 hours without any electricity.11

Energy security is defined as having economical access to fuel and energy resources.2 Southeast Asia’s energy demands have grown 60% over the past 15 years and is forecast to grow by another two-thirds by 2040.3 ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together addresses the issue of energy security in the ‘Economic Community Blueprint’ in Section C,4 outlining energy connectivity and market integration throughout ASEAN as key. Energy security is crucial to ensure ASEAN’s continued economic growth and to ensure living standards continue to improve.

In 1999, the ASEAN Centre for Energy (ACE) was established to represent ASEAN Member States’ (AMS) interests in the energy sector.

An enhancement in 2015 means ACE serves as a think tank to identify innovative solutions, a catalyst to strengthen cooperation and a data centre and knowledge hub.5 However, in March 2019, ‘Renewable Energy Transition’ Report (released by KPMG) found that there are still 70 million ASEAN citizens without access to reliable electricity.6 These energy reliability issues are pressing within themselves. However, as we become increasingly aware of the impact climate change will have on the ASEAN region, it is crucial to look to renewable energy sources. Currently, AMS are heavily reliant on coal and oil as energy sources.7 In 2017, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and ASEAN set a target of securing 23% of its primary energy from renewable sources by 2025.8 In addition to this, AMS are setting their own renewable energy targets9 (see below). ACE has highlighted that cost-reductions on renewable energy would be one of the major benefits of renewable energy cooperation in ASEAN.10

It’s hard to not notice the acute effects of climate change at home in Australia. Simply watching the news highlights that bushfires are more intense,11 and droughts are lasting longer.12 As climate changes in varying ways throughout the world, Australia and ASEAN can work together to increase investment into renewable energy sources to mitigate this. The ‘Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership’ encourages the promotion of energy security “through the development of renewable and alternative energy sources”, indicating a step in the right direction.13 As the leaders of tomorrow, we owe it to future generations to invest in energy security to increase living standards and continued growth, but also to do this sustainably to alleviate the ever-growing threat of climate change. So, what would we, as young people, recommend?

- Investment into research and development into renewable energy technology — furthermore, localised R&D can create more effective solutions for specific climates throughout the region.
• Continue to advance free trade agreements and promote investment in renewable energy, so Australia and AMS can work together to contribute to different stages of construction of mechanisms to harness renewable energy technology. One of the primary causes of delay for renewable energy development is costs,\textsuperscript{14} so lowering these should be a priority.

• Communicate and exchange best practices, successful strategies and technical advice to ensure all Australia and the entirety of ASEAN is fully equipped to transition from non-sustainable energy sources to renewable energy.

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15. Image source: Unsplash
October saw the escape of approximately 800 Islamic State-linked detainees in Syria, with at least 50 of these being radicalized Indonesians. The threat of these ISIS militants and their families returning home looms over the ASEAN region, and poses significant concerns to tourism, with many Australians still remembering the heart-breaking Bali bombings of 2002. With ASEAN being a close neighbour to Australia, we have a vested interest in the security of the region – including the threat of terrorism.

Some voices suggest that repatriating those in Syrian prisons may be the most effective solution. This does not, however, address the influence of foreign events on radicalizing those already within ASEAN, with many becoming increasingly sympathetic and emboldened in the terrorist cause after events such as the Syrian prison outbreak.

So, how should ASEAN address the concern of further radicalization through foreign events? One challenge to this is the ASEAN Way. While terrorism is clearly a regional issue, the ASEAN Way emphasises norms of non-interference and sovereignty. This has resulted in the implementation of ‘soft’ counter-terrorism laws, with these weak legal obligations resulting in varying levels of commitment by ASEAN member states. There is a path to circumventing the issues ASEAN Way presents in addressing a regional problem like counter-terrorism, through a community that extends beyond state borders: religion. Religion in South-East Asia predates the existence of most transnational relations, providing people with an identity beyond national or ethnic ties.

This is not necessarily a call for ASEAN-Australian relations to become more religion-based: religion by itself is not a solution. In fact, many of the issues related to radicalization are driven by religious belief itself. It is, however, a call for increased interfaith dialogue within the region. Interfaith dialogue is an opportunity for representatives of different faiths to interact with each other, with the purpose of fostering respect and achieving peace-building goals.

Interfaith dialogue has played an important part in the de-radicalization process of individuals. One example of this is the use of interfaith dialogue in the Maluku of Eastern Indonesia, as an attempt to combat religious-based violence between Christians and Muslims. During the process of interfaith dialogue, it became apparent that neither group truly understood the belief system of the other, making it difficult to develop the social cohesion necessary for the two communities to coexist. The use of interfaith dialogue provided a forum for those predisposed to political violence to be exposed to opposing perspectives, while maintaining the capacity to voice their own opinions. The opportunity to develop respect for divergent viewpoints in the Malukus has been a key factor in de-escalating violence in the region.

Singapore has made attempts at interfaith dialogue in the past, with the inaugural ‘Faithfully ASEAN’ interfaith program being held in December last year. But the ASEAN-Australia relationship can be more proactive in ensuring that interfaith dialogue is a significant element of counter-terrorism efforts – particularly in prevention through de-radicalization.

Consequently, it is recommended that ASEAN and Australia establish an official annual Interfaith Dialogue Conference, with one of its primary objectives being the issue of counter-terrorism and prevention of ethno-religious conflict in the region. Australia can be an effective strategic partner in this, using our experience with religious pluralism to...
assist in establishing interfaith dialogue in the conference, with the capacity to act as a neutral third party in facilitating discussion. Sustainable political security for ASEAN-Australia is not simply an issue for governments and law enforcement: the issue requires a more holistic approach that encompasses the pluralism of the ASEAN-Australia community.

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9. Image source: Unsplash
ASEAN and Australia’s Ageing Populations

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The issue of ageing society has slowly been looming into many countries – ASEAN and Australia included. With advancement in technology and significant improvement in the realm of medicine, it is only logical that the result is directly translated into an increase in life expectancy and ageing populations as a whole. By 2035, ASEAN is expected to have a total population of 127 million of senior citizens\(^1\) with Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam leading these ranks\(^1\). All the ASEAN member states will be categorized as ageing nation; as all ASEAN countries will by then surpass the 7 percent threshold of what is considered by the UN for a country to be identified as ageing. This presents an immense pressure on government officials to start preparing. While there have been many initiatives implemented, the issue of abandonment and loneliness amongst the elderly is rampantly affecting their emotional wellbeing - subsequently triggering senility and dementia.\(^3\) Traditionally in ASEAN, children provide for their ageing parents, but due to the increasingly individualistic culture, few of the younger generation care for the many old.

Similarly, Australia is also facing a demographic shift - with over 15 percent of its people categorised as ageing at approximately 3.8 million.\(^2\) Overall, Australians now enjoy one of the highest life expectancies in the world. Despite their age and decreasing productivity, the elderly contribute a vital part to the economy through their continuous engagement in the workforce and post-retirement. Volunteerism and community work is common in Australia and this ongoing social and economic engagement has holistically benefited the country. Surprisingly, an Interim Report into aged care services titled Neglect pointed out the inefficient and incoherent service system in the management of these ageing populations, referencing appalling waiting lists, lack of due process, limited and inflexible system design and most importantly - high cost.\(^6\) Nevertheless, the majority of senior citizens in Australia are comparatively more involved and committed to being more engaged in their own community compared to their ASEAN counterparts. However certain population groups still face some degree of social isolation and insecurity, such as those from lower socioeconomic groups and with poorer health.\(^5\)

The demographic landscape of ASEAN countries is changing rapidly and much of the valuable work is being focused on the development of youth, who are undeniably important assets of the region. However, the rise of ageing populations is equally crucial and should not be dismissed. Government agencies around the region alongside with their strategic partners and other multilateral organisations should give maximum efforts to ensure that these issues are addressed through the approach of inclusivity. Encouraging the establishment of older peoples’ networks to strengthen their capacity and promote connectivity with one another could be adopted in ASEAN member states. ASEAN member states could also introduce and further promote age-friendly communities in the region through a sustainable and accessible infrastructure that can benefit and enhance the way of life for these senior citizens.

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Elevating ASEAN Australia Cyber Security Cooperation to the Next Level

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ASEAN-SINGAPORE CYBER SECURITY CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE (ASCCE): AUSTRALIA’S ROLE IN CAPACITY BUILDING

The ASEAN centre for capacity building in cyber security (ASCCE) will be opened in the second quarter of 2020 in Singapore, the region’s most advanced cyber nation according to Global Cyber Security Index by ITU. Australia, as the first dialogue partner of ASEAN along with other countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom have shown their commitments to engage with the centre. Although the list of participating countries seems reassuring, it is not adequate. The private sector should be invited to play a role in the centre.

Australia’s Ambassador for Cyber Affairs, Tobias Feakin has recognized the importance of the private sector in internet governance. Australia in this regard should push the involvement of the private sector in ASEAN settings as well. It is coherent with Australia’s pledge in its International Cyber Engagement Strategy to ensure the stance of private actors is represented in international forums. A platform already exists of global technology companies that are committed to strengthening cyber security, namely The Cyber Security Tech Accord. Cyber behemoths like Facebook, Microsoft and Cisco are signatories of this accord. According to its mission statement, signatories are ready to collaborate with initiatives aiming to enhance security, stability and resilience of cyberspace. This is precisely what ASCCE and Australia wish to accomplish. Therefore, the idea of collaboration between signatories of the Tech Accord with ASCCE should be taken into consideration.

ASCCE’s mission includes CERT-related technical training and exchange of cyber threat information. The signatories will perfectly fit for this role in accordance with their vow to work with like-minded groups to further enhance cyber security best practices.

NON-STATE ACTORS: THE LOOMING CYBER THREAT

The challenge in cyberspace is constantly evolving and constructive engagement between ASEAN and Australia should be maintained. Discussion between cyber authorities since the ASEAN-Australia Cyber Policy Dialogue in 2018 has been promising. The implementation of the Regional Cyber Point of Contact and Cyber Bootcamp projects are some of the onward initiatives between ASEAN and Australia. However, these must be expanded to incorporate other stakeholders as well. The internet is not only a domain for governments to set rules for each other, the potential of non-state actors should also be harnessed.

Despite robust commitment in the implementation of international law and confidence building measures in the cyber realm based on 11 UNGGE voluntary norms, non-state actors will be able to jeopardize mutual trust that has been built in a cordial fashion. Certain groups of people who possess the necessary expertise and tools can easily wreak havoc towards norm-abiding states. These people are commonly known as hacktivist, patriotic hackers or cyber proxies. There was a precedent in 2013 where Indonesian patriotic hackers launched a DDoS attack against an Australian government website. More catastrophic cyber attacks by non-state actors has previously taken place in Estonia in 2007 where the country’s internet was systematically brought down.

Unlike kinetic wars where only armed forces own cruise missiles sufficient to hit adversaries,
non-state cyber actors can simply purchase a zero-day exploit on the dark web and unleash it against digital infrastructure abroad. While there has not been an Estonia-style attack against ASEAN or Australia, the risk has been and always will be. Therefore, extended cyber policy and dialogue upon which multi-stakeholders are included should be contemplated to make cyberspace safer, more secure and more stable.

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ASEAN-Australia Partnership on Sustainable Development

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Born out of immediate necessity, the ASEAN-Australia partnership has long evolved around the political domain, ever since the two became formal dialogue partners in 1974. But as the regional paradigm shifts from war-time political anxiety towards economic-driven development, ASEAN and Australia have begun to recognize the importance of strengthening regional economic and people-to-people collaborations which continue to set the scene for a more deeply integrated partnership of the two parties in an array of dimensions.

Trade is one of, if not the most, impressive partnership dimension. With $42bn worth of trade in goods and services in 2000, ASEAN and Australia have managed to triple that number to $121bn in 2018.1 Additionally, ASEAN-Australia two-way foreign investment in the same period is worth more than $200bn.2 Rapid economic advancement, however, does not directly translate to sustainable economic growth. While their trading partnership and shared prosperity occupy the headlines, ASEAN and Australia are at the same time facing two challenges that share the keys to sustainable solutions.

HUNGER AND POVERTY

While we enjoy our high-class expensive meals, many of our ASEAN fellows go to bed hungry. Although ASEAN has achieved the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in reducing its poverty incidence from 17 percent in 2005 to only 7 percent in 2018, 90 percent of this number is from Indonesia and the Philippines. Apart from the income disparity ASEAN-wise, many of the working poor are still vulnerable to falling back under the poverty line. Australia is no different. According to the Foodbank Hunger Report 2018,3 20 percent of Australians went hungry over the past year. Given its population of 25 million people, that means five million Australians do not live up to the living standard. The rising cost of living, amongst other reasons, is the main cause of this issue for both ASEAN and Australia.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

ASEAN is surprisingly among the world’s worst marine waste producers. Along with China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam are responsible for 60 percent of the world’s 9 million tons of plastic waste in the ocean annually. In ASEAN alone, more than 150 million tons of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) are generated annually. More than 50 percent of these are organic waste or food-related, which could be redistributed more effectively, such as to communities, animals, or upcycling for value addition. On the other hand, Australia generated 67 million tons of waste in 2018, up from 50 million tons in 2011.4 While roughly 50 percent of this amount is recycled domestically, the solution for the other half are still unclear. If left uninterrupted, ASEAN and Australia will soon reach the point of no return: unsustainable management that sacrifices the future of the next generations.

While economic growth is one of the main factors that drive these situations, it should not be the scapegoat. Rather, ASEAN and Australia must seek to enhance their economic partnership in a way that encourages even stronger growth while redistributing and managing resources more sustainably. The two must shift from profit-driven approaches to inclusivity and sustainability-driven development. Along with deepening the ASEAN-Australia economic partnership through the existing regional stages such as AANZFTA, RCEP or TPP etc., we should also enhance competitive-advantage-oriented collaborations. ASEAN leads on the areas of its strengths while
supported and learning from Australia on what the latter does better. These collaborations should be promoted at all levels: youth-to-youth, people-to-people, business-to-business, government-to-government, and Public–Private Partnership (PPP).

To survive and prosper in the 21st century, ASEAN and Australia must together shift from the profit-driven mindset and short-term gains towards the sustainability-driven development strategies with the long-term visions. Tackling the issue of sustainable development is no easy mission: it requires deepened mutual understandings, shared goals, and sometimes one or two step-backs for the much longer and lasting journey. But with the right mindset: exchange and collaborations at all levels, ASEAN and Australia will become the next global economic engines without having to sacrifice the futures of the next generations.

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5. Image source: Unsplash
Gender Inequality is Exacerbated in the Face of Unprecedented Change

Elise Giles

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More than ever, our region is facing unprecedented changes ranging from natural disasters, to the climate crisis and geopolitical instability. Recent predictions indicate that by 2050 much of Ho Chi Minh City in Viet Nam could all but disappear due to rising sea levels. At present, there are grave concerns to the availability of water across the Murray-Darling Basin, the food bowl of Australia. These are just two examples from the ASEAN and Australia region, and sadly there are countless other predictions and events of similar nature that are currently occurring.

Catastrophes such as natural disasters and the impacts associated with the climate crisis have seen a rapid escalation of gendered impacts. Gender inequality will be exacerbated during these times of unparalleled change and I’m not optimistic our region is adequately prepared to develop policies that are gender sensitive.

Following the 2004 Indian Ocean Boxing Day tsunami in Aceh, Indonesia it was determined up to four girls and women died for every male – namely due to the gendered differences in ability to respond during times of a disaster and also of cultural preferences towards men. On the other hand, during the aftermath of supertyphoon Haiyan, which hit the Philippines in 2013, findings revealed disaster recovery efforts relied heavily on the mobilisation of women, particularly through unpaid labour and their role as primary caregivers. Interestingly, the significant role of gendered service, for both women and men, and sacrifice in filling critical recovery gaps were seen to have increasingly diverted post-disaster responsibilities away from the Government.

While both examples are unintentional, this diverted responsibility and economic austerity resulted in the implementation of policies that had disproportionate harms to women and girls, who are often in greater need of these services, particularly during times of crisis.

Following these disaster events, countries such as the Philippines have been increasingly progressive in their approaches to disaster preparations; however not all disaster risk reduction policies and programmes across Australia and the ASEAN region take gender into consideration. While much research has focused on disasters within developing countries, there is a lack of attention to gendered policies in Australia, particularly when further investigating the impacts of climate related events.

During times of extreme Australian drought, significant gendered impacts have been brought to the surface. While both genders are significantly impacted, in rural Australia the changes in gender roles has resulted in women needing to seek alternative employment; increased contributions on the farm; and also impacts on health associated with the emotional burden resulting from the effects of the drought. While an increased generation of income should provide women with improved equality in the relationship, it is argued that in fact their position is compromised by their absence on the farm, because this is seen as merely a temporary “survival strategy”. Gender dimensions should be the forefront for those who are developing and implementing policy, and consideration of these issues are key to ultimately achieving gender responsive policies in ASEAN countries and Australia. Men are still overrepresented in top-level management of policy making and the absence of women’s participation consequently limits the female voice in the development of policies. Additionally, the lack of
gendered data significantly inhibits a country’s ability to be able to develop gender responsive policies and programs.\textsuperscript{11}

We all need to understand the gendered consequences of climate events, and the value of applying a gender lens that takes into consideration both genders when developing and implementing our policies. While the problem is indeed a global issue, the role of young leaders, both in Australia and ASEAN countries, is incredibly important in preparing our region for the unprecedented changes ahead.

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12. Image source: Unsplash
Single-use Plastics in the ASEAN Region: Changing perceptions of ‘normal’ plastic use

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As a region with incredibly rich ecological biodiversity and reliance on marine environments, ASEAN is significantly touched by the issue of plastic pollution. Attitudes towards single-use plastics across the region, however, are far from uniform and range from the innovative and progressive, to those which would raise the eyebrows of even the most apathetic of consumers.

At 7-11 convenience stores in Thailand for example, it is standard practice that a customer purchasing a bottled drink will be provided with both a plastic bag, as well as a plastic straw with its own plastic wrapper. A thirsty customer wanting a six pack of the popular Betagen probiotic drink will end up with six small plastic bottles, the plastic wrapper around those bottles, six small plastic straws in six individual plastic wrappers, and a single-use plastic bag to put it all in. All for 6 x 85ml drinks costing about 40 Baht (2 AUD).

This particular example is a standard practice decision by a private company, yet it is a reflection of cultural norms and the practices that individuals will tolerate as ‘normal’.

Recent examples from Australia show however that such norms are actually more fluid than they may at first appear, and general practices in this area can change rapidly. In June 2018 the dominant supermarket chains in Australia, Coles and Woolworths, stopped offering single-use plastic bags to shoppers. Although such a change was certainly not without controversy, by the end of the year the Australian National Retail Association determined that this one change had led to an 80-per-cent drop in the consumption of plastic bags across the country. More than a year later, the position has been maintained and for the most part accepted as the new norm. Considering that the average Australian is estimated to consume 130 kilograms of plastic each year, such a decrease is not insignificant, and raises the question of what similar decreases in other types of plastic consumption could achieve, both in Australia, as well as across ASEAN.

Recent spotlight on this issue does prove promising. On 22 June 2019, ASEAN adopted the ‘Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in ASEAN Region’ where members reiterated ‘concern on the high and rapidly increasing levels of... marine plastic litter and the expected increase in negative effects on marine biodiversity, ecosystems, animal well-being, fisheries, maritime transport, recreation and tourism, local societies and economies’.

The Declaration emphasises collaboration and cooperation between nations, and the public and private sectors. Attention also is given to ‘increase public awareness and participation, and enhance education, with the aim to change behavior’.

This hits at the heart of what is required in addressing this issue. A changing public perception of ‘normal’ is key to limiting single-use plastics. Uniformity of such attitudes across the region is also of primary importance. The objective environmental benefit of an individual in a café carefully choosing a paper straw over a plastic one is somewhat mitigated if another individual elsewhere is regularly given a six pack of straws they don’t really want.

There is certainly a spectrum of steps to take, with a sliding scale of both difficulty to implement, and impact. Though large scale changes may appear daunting, just because such change is not achievable overnight, this does not mean it is not
achievable at all. Certain steps at a smaller scale can set the ball in motion, and help drive a change in social perceptions of normality regarding plastic use. To return to the example of plastic straws at convenience stores, a simple first step to take could be a company decision that instead of straws being provided by default, customers could be asked if they actually want a straw before being given one in their bag.

Hopefully the Declaration on Marine Pollution will provide a positive push in this direction of unified change in what is considered ‘normal’ consumption of single-use plastics across the region.

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4. Image source: Unsplash
They Left and Returned for a Reason: Thoughts on Vietnamese-Australian Diasporas Reconnecting with their Roots

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“When mentioning the [Vietnam] war, a million people feel happy but another million feel miserable.” This saying of the former Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Võ Văn Kiệt had pounded heavily inside the writer’s head for the last seven days. By the time he submitted this article, investigations into the horrible human trafficking tragedy in Essex, England will not be concluded. The victims have been identified to be thirty-nine Vietnamese people aged between 15 and 44,¹ who had suffocated whilst pursuing “the American dream” in the back of a lorry’s truck. The Fall of Saigon, considered to be one of the most unforgettable days for modern Vietnam, kept flashing back when the writer read about the news of the illegal immigrants. It was the day of happiness and tears. For many Vietnamese living under the former government of the Republic of Vietnam, it was hard to immediately accepted the new regime, to adapt to the new lifestyle and ideologies. And so, they left.

Cultural fault lines, an abstruse concept, one of the many reasons that have caused countless meaningless wars. Until this day, in many countries, humans themselves don’t fully accept diverse cultural perspectives. They bring their traditional cultural values into a new country without knowing how to adapt to the new atmosphere. They face difficulties in getting proper jobs and are discriminated against by local residents. And when cultural fault lines reach their peak, they lose their own national identities.

But during the last almost five decades of establishing diplomatic relations, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. The governments of both Vietnam and Australia have built firm policies and actions to reconnect Vietnamese-Australians to their original roots. More Australia-born Vietnamese are seeking for chances to explore their parents’ homeland and taking adventurous investments in the local markets. Despite the political reasons that brought families new southlands, first and second generation Vietnamese-Australians are tracing back their kin and returning to their parent’s motherland. Many of them can be mentioned such as Luke Nguyen, owner of The Red Lantern in Sydney and the host of his own television series cooking shows, now in the role of Vietnam Airlines’ Food Ambassador creating signature dishes for this 4-star airlines.² Or Tan Le, CEO and Founder of Emotive Inc., who was named Young Australian of the Year in 1998 who had her company expanded and department set in Hanoi, Vietnam. Together with successful first generation Vietnamese-Australians, cultural collaborations have been carried out more and more during the last twenty years. Organizations like the Vietnam Cultural Center or Vietnamese version of The Amazing Race made significant contributions to promote Vietnamese traditional culture to Australia and vice versa.

Although it is hard to fully conclude this topic since there are still way too many issues and sides to be carried out and discussed. With the new decade coming, lawmakers can consider these suggestions to continue resolving cultural fault lines of the next Vietnamese-Australian generations. First things first, both sides of postwar governments should accept and encourage the Vietnamese diaspora to return to their homeland and help develop their country. Secondly, we can encourage future generations to preserve their traditional culture anywhere at any time. Finally, Vietnamese and Australian governments can improve social security policies for settlers. This will not only enhance good cooperation between the two countries but can also
enable the settlers to adapt to the local culture more easily.

With the new decade coming and the bursting development of artificial intelligence, we human-beings need urgent actions to resolve humanity’s crisis for a sustainable development throughout the world.

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7. Image source: Unsplash
Combating Fake News

Vi Hoang

VIETNAM

The World Economic Forum listed viral misinformation as one of the biggest global threats to human society.1 A fictitious report relating to current events which is fabricated, and often titled misleadingly, with the deliberate purpose of deceiving users and motivating them to disseminate the report2 is how fake news is defined academically. Fabricated news, predominantly via social media platforms, now seamlessly shapes news audiences’ thoughts not only about politics but also about economic and social issues.

As a community with fast-growing Internet and social media penetration,3 ASEAN is vulnerable to the widespread use of fake news. Similarly, the news about Labor’s ‘death tax’ during the recent federal election triggered debate about fake news and how to tackle it in Australia.4 Having diverse approaches towards the issue, ASEAN and Australia are encountering challenges to mutually accomplishing this goal. Therefore, my article highlights the challenges facing the region, followed by recommendations to enhance effective cooperation.

DIFFERENT FAKE NEWS LANDSCAPE IN ASEAN

Despite the establishment of the Framework and Joint Declaration to Minimise the Harmful Effect of Fake News in 2018,5 it is challenging for ASEAN to cooperatively put policy into practice since each member state has a different fake news landscape. In different states, disinformation campaigns have been carried out by different entities including individuals, syndicates, or terrorists, etc. As a result, unequal weight is placed on the problem.

For instance, the Thai government established an anti-fake news center on November 1st6 while in Myanmar, where ‘Facebook is Internet’, there has been little effort from the government to address fabricated information against religious minorities on social media.7,8 In other words, these discrepancies have hindered ASEAN member states from dealing with the problem on the same scale.

CONTROVERSIAL AUSTRALIAN CODE OF CONDUCT FOR DIGITAL PLATFORMS

In the early stages of combating fake news, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) recommended a new code of conduct for digital platforms. This would be enforced by an independent regulator, such as the Australian Communications and Media Authority7 to govern the handling of complaints about inaccurate information9 according to the latest report of digital platforms inquiry. However, the Digital Industry Group Inc, a non-profit association representing the social media and digital giants in Australia, contents that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ code imposes an unfair burden on tech giants since the act of removing a fabricated post ‘may be considered as intrusive and inappropriate on a private messaging platforms’.10

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to maintain political, economic and social stability in the region, it is imperative that ASEAN and Australia enhance collaboration to combat fake news. A primary step to crack the barriers is to determine the mutual goals, concerns, and weaknesses, alongside the contrasting approaches amongst countries in the region.11 This would illustrate a clearer direction in areas of cooperation so that discrepancies could be negotiated and adjusted based on the mutual aims.

Besides, universities should initiate news literacy campaigns through workshops, initiative competitions, and youth forums to raise students’ awareness about misinformation and their responsibilities in stopping its spread.

As fake news was originally designed to be shared, social media firms in the region should redesign the
choice architecture of the ‘share’ button, asking users to question themselves more about the credibility and the veracity of the source before sharing a piece of news. On the other hand, other tech giants may collaborate with the Communications Ministry to develop a fact-check software which offers browser extensions as well as a built-in plugin on social media for instant fake news detection and credible news source provision.

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11. Image source: Unsplash
A Renewed Plea for Non-Alignment

Qi Siang Ng

SINGAPORE

The time of “having your cake and eating it too” in the Asia-Pacific is over. For most of the past two decades, ASEAN and Australia have profited from the economic heft of a rising China and the protection of the US security umbrella. With growing US-China great power rivalry and protectionism eroding this order, small states and middle powers fear that they may be forced to take sides, losing a key trade and/or security partner in the process.

A more uncompromising relationship between Washington and Beijing could degrade Southeast Asia’s security architecture. To limit great power influence, ASEAN insists on its centrality in managing regional affairs and institutions. If individual states are made to pick different sides in this conflict, however, ASEAN could lose its cherished autonomy by ceasing to be a collective voice for regional interests, becoming instead yet another battlefield for great power influence.

A neutral and stable ASEAN is crucial to Australia’s security and trade. Southeast Asia is a strategic junction between Australia and the rest of the Asia-Pacific, insulating it from geopolitical insecurity while controlling access to lucrative shipping lanes. The regional stability of ASEAN centrality and the regional grouping’s commitment to freedom of navigation better enable these interests than the uncertainty of great power conflict.

While ASEAN and Australia have a shared interest in managing regional US-China rivalry, how could they do so while relatively weaker than both powers? The answer perhaps lies in renewing the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) – a group of Third World states that sought to maintain their independence from Cold War rivalries. Rendered obsolete by Pax Americana, non-alignment could be a useful way of constraining US-China competition.

Key principles of non-alignment include respect for national sovereignty, non-intervention in the domestic affairs of foreign nations and independence from great power blocs. In 1961, developing nations formed an influential bloc that introduced a “Third World” perspective into key debates on global issues like the UN Reform. Members states maintained a greater degree of foreign policy independence, though governments usually preferred one superpower over the other in practice.

Certainly, the original NAM was flawed – it advanced an anti-globalisation agenda, never fully overturned international superpower dominance, and was excessively (though understandably) suspicious of the West. Still, non-alignment could serve as a model for managing US-China rivalry. A coalition of non-aligned states could pressure Beijing and Washington to refrain from forcing states to form exclusive alliances and avoiding competition that could lead to negative externalities for the international community (e.g. technological protectionism).

ASEAN and Australia should use their “good offices” to revive or recreate NAM. While the effects of US-China rivalry may be felt more intensely at the regional level, this geopolitical contestation is a global phenomenon, with the resulting fallout requiring global solutions. A global NAM movement would enable states to coordinate cross-regional diplomatic efforts while legitimising the movement through broad international support.

This international movement should therefore be expanded beyond traditional NAM members. States like Australia and South Korea who are not traditionally associated with NAM should also be included due to their similar concerns about US-China rivalry. The inclusion of emerging powers like India and Indonesia will also add significant diplomatic heft to the body.

NAM’s goals and philosophy of the grouping should be modified to present conditions. Where member
states formerly pursued an anti-globalist agenda, for instance, the objectives and philosophy of the organisation should reflect the increasing economic openness that these states have adopted. New topics like sustainability and cybersecurity should also be integrated into the NAM agenda to improve its contemporary relevance.

Growing US-China rivalry is not inevitable cause for pessimism. Small and middle powers should not underestimate the power of collective action in checking Washington and Beijing and asserting their right to foreign policy independence. If Beijing and Washington had to think twice before defying this international assertion of non-alignment, ASEAN and Australia could avoid having to pick sides after all.

Image source: Unsplash
Towards Safe Migration for ASEAN

Kanteena Tipkanjanarat
THAILAND

Overworked and underpaid, this is a typical profile of migrant workers that comes to mind when I reflect on an internship with the Human Rights and Development Foundation in Bangkok. I once read a handwritten letter from a migrant worker. She asked for help to demand compensation from her employer who refused to pay for a work accident that made her unable to work for a few months. As she was the sole family breadwinner, the lack of income during those months greatly affected her family. Unfortunately, this story is not unique. It is only one of the many instances in which I learnt about the grievances suffered by workers who make up 6.8 million intra-regional migrants in Southeast Asia. Hearing these stories, I realized the failure of the current system to provide adequate support and complaint mechanisms for migrant workers who may have irregular status and, as a result, are subject to exploitation and human rights violations. I believe that as strategic partners, ASEAN and Australia have a greater role to play in promoting fair treatment of migrant workers to allow countries to reap the benefits of freely regulated flows of migration. Coordinated and comprehensive migration strategies will boost economic gains, fill labour shortages, and safeguard the rights of migrant workers.

Despite migration and remittances playing an important role in economic growth in both destination and origin countries in Southeast Asia, current migration channels are complex and costly. To address this, increased adoption of digital technology could help lower asymmetric information and transaction costs. Information about the labour market and job opportunities for migrant workers is often limited. They often have to rely on recruitment agencies, friends and family members as a source of information. It is common for migrant workers to incur debt to pay for exorbitant employment fees. Employers similarly pay expensive fees to recruitment agencies to hire a migrant worker and apply for the necessary permits. Regulating information platforms sharing job opportunities and employer reviews would help facilitate greater knowledge for prospective migrant workers and allow them to make informed decisions. Employers could also more quickly find both skilled and unskilled workers to fill labour shortages.

According to the World Bank’s Remittance Prices Worldwide database, the global average remittance cost is as high as seven percent. To work towards three percent by 2030 as outlined as a global target under the Sustainable Development Goals, government and private sector actors will have to collaborate to promote cheaper and more inclusive financial access. According to the World Bank, ASEAN countries received approximately US$62 billion in remittances in 2015. This amount is close to Myanmar’s total gross domestic product (GDP) of US$60 billion in the same year. In top remittance receiving countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam, total remittances could be as high as 10 percent and seven percent of total GDP respectively. FinTech innovations would help lower the transaction cost to provide cheaper and more inclusive finance access. Governments and regulators could accelerate the process through a policy sandbox to remove unnecessary regulatory barriers. This would facilitate economic growth, improve quality of life and narrow the income and development gap between high-income and low-income countries in the region.

It is in ASEAN and Australia’s interest to promote safe migration under both political-security and socio-cultural pillars. Regional and bilateral cooperation are crucial commitments that will greatly reduce complexity and enhance flexibility for migrant workers. There have been encouraging efforts to promote safe migration through...
collaboration and adoption of the Action Plan to implement the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers in 2018. However, there is more to be done. Adoption of digital technology can be one of the key drivers to safe migration. Only through concerted efforts will migrant workers find rewarding working conditions and be fairly paid. They must not be left behind.

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5. Image source: Unsplash
Narrowing the ‘GAP’

Khin Phyu Syn Kyi
MYANMAR

Gap. This is not a clothing brand that we are going to talk about. This is about a large issue that almost every country is facing. Development gap, opportunity gap, economic gap. How many people have been affected by this gap? The rich become richer, the poor remain poor, the educated become more educated, whilst the uneducated remain the same. We have been demanding a better change for the world but what use is it if we cannot reduce the gap between the highest and the lowest?

OPPORTUNITY GAP: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

As a student born in the economic city but studying in a city that is far from urbanization, I myself have experienced the big gap. In the place where I study, there are not many opportunities for youths to improve themselves. However, most students in my university have no idea of what they are losing as a student because they are all used to just going with the flow. When we try to get opportunities on our own, we are not supported by the elders. For example, I have tried to apply to an exchange program and the exchange program requires a transcript as a part of the application. When I ask the administrative teachers to get a transcript, they do not give out the transcript just with a simple reason that the exchange program is not related to the government. This does not happen in the universities in the economic city. Universities there support and prepare what is necessary to apply to exchange programs whether they are related to the government or not. This is only a mere example of true personal experience of how students in the economic city and those outside the economic city get different opportunities even though they are all students studying in the same country.

AUSTRALIA’S “CLOSE THE GAP”

In Australia, there is a social justice campaign called “Close the Gap” that aims to achieve health equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by the year 2030. This ‘Close the Gap’ includes targets to reduce the gap on child mortality, early years education, children’s literacy and numeracy, school attendance and completion, employment and life expectancy.¹ The targets may seem challenging but the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) has determined to put the targets into action. COAG committed $4.6 billion towards Closing the Gap in November 2008, for projects in health, housing, early childhood, economic participation, and remote service delivery.²

NARROWING THE DEVELOPMENT GAP IN ASEAN

Not only in the countries themselves, but also among ASEAN region, there is a development gap between newer and older members. To narrow this, the ASEAN leaders have agreed to launch an ‘Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI)’ since 2000. Widening of the development gap between the older ASEAN-6 members and the CLMV(Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam) countries could undermine regional solidarity.³

YOUTHS TO NARROW THE GAP

As we all know, youths are the ones who are responsible for the future. Therefore, it is in the hands of the youths to narrow the gap in our residing countries as much as we can. So how can youths be of help in narrowing the gap? We should intensify our efforts instead of just staying in our comfort zones; such as helping uneducated children by volunteering to teach them what we know and what we have learnt. The question is, will you become a part of narrowing the gap?

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Collateral Damage in the Trade War

Maddison O’Gradey-Lee

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A current challenge the ASEAN-Australian community faces is the trade war between the United States (US) and China. Economies in ASEAN and Australia are growing, however, many communities do not have the infrastructure or policies to sustain and create resilient and thriving societies. Sustainable and resilient communities are important for regional growth as identified in the ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together declaration.

Sustainable communities promote social development and environmental protection to meet both the current and future needs of people. Resilient communities foster enhanced capacity and capability to adapt and respond to social and economic vulnerabilities.

The trade war between the US and China is a growing threat to Australia and ASEAN retaining economic stability to become both sustainable and resilient communities.

Under world systems theory China sits in the semi-periphery where they are exploited by the core countries (USA) but able to hold their own through strong trade relations and production. Australia also sits in the semi-periphery as do ASEAN member states. Some fall in the periphery where they are faced with lower technology and disadvantageous relations such as Indonesia. The increasing tariffs on China are already impacting the economy however further tariffs could lead to another Global Financial crisis for ASEAN countries.

Australia is in a tricky place being a close partner of ASEAN, having a strong economic connection with China and with the US having large influence on our government decisions.

Historically we have followed the US’s decisions. At this turning point, whoever we side with will create disadvantageous circumstances as we have strong economic and political relationships with both countries. To solve this I believe bringing together an exploratory committee of experts across ASEAN and Australia to prevent the fallback from the tariffs through diplomatic and economic efforts and protection from the reduction of trade.

For Australia, a diplomatic solution must be reached to continue trade and political relationships.

Further, we could look to strengthen Australia and ASEAN economies through trade relations and capacity building such as increasing our digital trade and investment. This could look at creating increased access to education particularly on entrepreneurship and the selling of goods between our two nations digitally.

Image source: Unsplash
Discrimination in ASEAN and Australia: When Actions Don’t Actually Speak Louder Than Words

Jemima Kang

AUSTRALIA

With more than 700,000 Australians able to speak an ASEAN language and nearly one million Australians having ASEAN ancestry, it is clear ASEAN and Australia share a connection. As this connection deepens and the demographics within ASEAN countries and Australia continues to diversify, it is our responsibility to reduce divisions that exist within the region.

As humans, it is widely understood that we have a strong tendency to favour those similar to ourselves, and when we navigate our social world we tend to focus on perceptually salient markers such as race, gender, or age. However, it may be more surprising to know that we also have a great propensity to favour those who sound like us, reflected in a preference for our native accents.

We associate stereotypes to different accents. For example, non-native accents are often perceived as less intelligent, competent, and attractive, and are also associated with being of lower social status compared to native accents. These biases and attitudes are the fuel for accent-based discrimination, and as a result individuals suffer unfair treatment in many aspects of life. Having a foreign accent in the workplace can lead to feelings of exclusion and devaluation. It can increase difficulty finding jobs, and can act as a barrier to progression for some careers. Outside of the workplace, having a foreign accent can lead to discrimination in court cases, or the housing market. People have even been found to feel more confident being treated by a native-accented doctor over foreign-accented doctor, providing clear evidence for associating one’s ability and intelligence to their accent.

Accent discrimination is real and powerful, however it is overlooked partially because there is a weak social norm against it, especially when compared to racial discrimination. Due to this, some individuals think it is acceptable to joke about or discriminate based on the way someone speaks, this ultimately makes this form of social discrimination invisible, more acceptable and less likely to be detected.

As migration between and within the ASEAN nations and Australia increases, and consequently our schools, universities, and workplaces become more diverse, it is important we work towards reducing accent discrimination so we can continue promoting connectivity and inclusivity in the region.

The issue of accent discrimination is complex, though it is an issue relevant to everyone, so here are two broad recommendations on how we can work towards reducing it:

First, in the workplace, legal regulations (similar to those regarding racial discrimination) need to be created and implemented to protect employees from unfair and unjust treatment. Additionally, accent discrimination modules should be recognised and incorporated into cross-cultural training programs. They should aim to teach individuals to acknowledge their biases and increase their linguistic sensitivity skills.

Second, accents are ultimately tied to race or ethnic backgrounds. In order to hope for the elimination of accent discrimination, countries need to be committed to eliminating racial discrimination. For example, Malaysia, Brunei, and Myanmar have not ratified the
United Nations’ International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which is hindering ASEAN’s collective effort towards creating a peaceful and non-discriminatory region⁷.

As ASEAN and Australia continue to become more interconnected, dialogue and cooperation is crucial if we want to deconstruct and solve the complex issue of discrimination. Accent discrimination is powerful and overlooked, but reducing it will drive further social and cultural development in the region. Whether discrimination is based on race, gender, religion, or accent, systematic solutions are required so we can continue working towards the peaceful, prosperous and integrated futures of ASEAN and Australia.

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Image source: Unsplash
Atonement for Environmental Sins: A Market-Based Solution for ASEAN-Australia Carbon Problem

Paul Lim Pau Hua
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In December of 2015, a total of 195 countries converged unanimously to sign the Paris Agreement, ASEAN member states also pledged their commitment to reducing emissions by 2030 under this agreement. It was hailed worldwide as a historic achievement. Nonetheless, the impacts of climate change on our planet are now being felt acutely across the globe. Not forgetting the fires that raged through forests in Indonesia during this past August, shrouding ASEAN cities as far as Kuala Lumpur and Singapore in a cloud of thick smog.

ASEAN REALITY: OPPORTUNITY TO MITIGATE CARBON EMISSIONS

ASEAN is expected to become the world’s fourth-largest economy by 2030. However, ASEAN countries also face the challenge of how to reduce their carbon emissions as per their promises under the Paris Agreement amidst economic expansion. Currently, there is no mechanism to force a country to achieve the emission-reducing goal to a certain level. Meaning that countries are free to choose the stringency of their emission mitigation targets.

Given the rapid development of ASEAN economies, carbon offset is an apt solution permitted by Article 6 of the Paris Agreement to mitigate carbon emissions, while not hampering the economic activities. Carbon offset allows individuals and companies to invest in environmental projects in order to balance out their carbon footprints. The projects include reforestation, investing in renewable energy, reducing emissions through energy efficiency, and more efficient agricultural processes. Offset projects have the potential to deliver a range of positive outcomes in terms of environmental, social and economic benefits such as job creation in addition to emission reductions.

Moreover, carbon credits can be earned by the organization by reducing their emissions below the forecast. It is a certificate that provides the holder of the credit the right to emit one tonne of carbon emission and serves as a tradeable permit in the carbon trading market where carbon is priced. The revenues generated from the carbon trading process can be reinvested and foster sustainable green development projects.

Nonetheless, such mechanisms can pose a risk to the environmental integrity of climate actions, especially if issues surrounding additionality, permanence, leakage, quantification and verification are not adequately addressed. Therefore, well-designed programs may be one way out of the conundrum of needing to achieve steep global emission reductions while at the same time supporting ASEAN development.

ASEAN-AUSTRALIA ACTING ON CARBON

The ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership plan of action has stated a commitment to promote regional cooperation on environmental issues.

In fact, Australia has developed a carbon offset system with a relatively perfect mechanism. So, connecting Australia’s best practices can assist ASEAN to avoid pitfalls. Australia’s National Carbon Offset Standard is a very rigorous and transparent framework that is based on relevant international standards to mitigate emissions. The NCOS was well-drafted with five comprehensive categories to reflect the standard of measurements for different groups. Hence, at a government-to-government level, special policy frameworks designed with...
guidance from Australia’s Department of the Environment and Energy are recommended to assist ASEAN governments on establishing carbon offset standards. Systematic public policy is a cornerstone for ASEAN governments to provide direction and spur societal adaptation to the practice of carbon offset.

On the other hand, ASEAN e-commerce is experiencing explosive growth. Nevertheless, packaging waste is fast piling up adjacent to soaring sales, contributing to carbon emissions. Great business leaders have a greater responsibility to act aggressively on tricky problems. Inspiration has been exemplified by the Australian Airline Qantas, who has piloted the emissions offset initiative for their flights. So, it will be exhilarating if e-commerce giants like Tokopedia take the lead in investing in ASEAN’s low-carbon-economy by offsetting its shipping carbon emissions. If this happens, it would signify that every purchase on Tokopedia can make a positive impact for the betterment of ASEAN. It will certainly give the consumers an impression of what responsible e-commerce looks like.

Time is ticking! ASEAN must dramatically transform how it values the climate in the economic system to realise their promises.

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4. Five categories of NCOS: Organisations, Events, Precincts, Buildings, Products Services

Image source: Unsplash
Improving Mental Health

Christian Habla
AUSTRALIA

1.1 billion people experience mental illness globally,1 45% of Australians experience mental illness in their lifetime,2 and 8 million working days are lost in Australia each year due to mental illness.3 The World Economic Forum predicts that the global cost of mental illness by 2030 will be greater than cancer, diabetes and respiratory illness combined.

Globally there is a 20-year life expectancy gap between people with and without mental illness.4 This is a global problem which, like other increasingly complex problems, does not respect borders and cannot be solved by drawing only on the ideas available in any one country.

Australia has intermittently prioritised and ignored mental health. Despite this history, an opportunity for reform exists in Australia. A Prime Ministerial national suicide prevention advisor has been appointed, Australia’s Productivity Commission (a body of inquiry that often indicates government priorities) has been directed to report on mental health reform, and a State Government has commissioned a Royal Commission into mental health.

Seizing this opportunity for change is important in Australia, as across ASEAN nations. The impacts of underinvestment in mental health, demographic changes, funding complexity, increasing inequality and the impacts of loneliness seem only to be increasing.

What may prevent change? Seizing this opportunity for change depends, in large part, on mental health stigma and its impact quashing personal and societal recognition and engagement with mental illness.

Mental health stigma presents through structural stigma, public stigma, self-stigma, and stigma by association. Structural stigma involves private and public institutions intentionally or unintentionally restricting opportunities (e.g. discriminatory laws). Public stigma includes stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination (e.g. misinformed beliefs around criminality of people with mental illness). Self-stigma involves internalising stigma (e.g. not applying for a job or reduced help-seeking). Stigma by association is the stigma experienced by friends, family and carers.

Most broadly, stigma contributes to the systematic lack of resource allocation to mental health - despite its significant impact - particularly when compared to issues of physical health.

Adding complexity, assessing stigma is difficult. One method is measuring desire for social distance - willingness to make friends, become neighbours and marry people living with mental illness. Another is surveying views of mental illness, including views of personal responsibility, unpredictability and dangerousness of living with mental illness.

Practicable interventions that address stigma are not readily identifiable. Whether because of the complexity of stigma or the stigmatisation of the issue itself is unclear. However, promising areas of intervention that that may gain traction are growing. Specifically, educational interventions, knowledge or information campaigns, improved media portrayal of mental illness and better enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation.

Besides reducing stigma, educational interventions may improve mental health literacy, help-seeking and coping. As well as being politically palatable (information campaigns highlight government activity) campaigns may help reduce stigma. Encouraging responsible representation of mental illness in the media reduces misinformation. Better enforcement of often already existing but under-utilised anti-discrimination law - for example in travel insurance - will help change acceptable behaviour toward people living with mental illness.

These examples may form part of any framework of stigma-reduction interventions implemented on community, state or national scales.
Addressing stigma will help change erroneous yet prominent beliefs across ASEAN nations and Australia: uninformed beliefs that people living with mental illness are weak rather than sick, responsible for their illness, or dangerous. Further, it may reduce discrimination in finding a job, a house, and being falsely charged with violent crimes.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Implement practicable interventions to reduce stigma and improve mental health outcomes. These include:

- educational interventions;
- aspects of knowledge or information campaigns;
- improved media portrayal of mental illness; and
- anti-discrimination law and regulation.

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Current Challenges in the ASEAN-Australia Relationship

Chen Heang
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Australia has demonstrated a willingness to accompany ASEAN in tackling risk in the region. The trade war between the United States and China occupies much of the current focus of global economic and political experts. It has significant effects on ASEAN and Australia, facing them both with a choice between the US or China that will also have repercussions for the ASEAN-Australia relationship. Both sides must also acknowledge the challenges facing each member state for relations.

First, ASEAN may prefer to not make a choice due to lessons learned and the current situation in South China Sea which paid ASEAN painful memories. It provides Australia a critical point for reflection before setting foot in the region. Generally, Australia is deep in its relationship with the United States in terms of diplomatic relations and military, and is also strongly economically integrated with China, its largest trading partner. Even now, Australia has not been able to position itself well to explain its actions as an independent actor in the region beside China and the US. Canberra must acknowledge needing to play a sophisticated role to make ASEAN feel that its foreign policy is distinct and not allied to China or the US. Outside tensions allow ASEAN to come closer together at home, however ASEAN also does not want to take a side. So it makes more sense for Australia to focus on other frameworks and areas of cooperation than those dominated by China or the US in the region.

Second, economic sharing proves the tied relations between states and states. Australia and ASEAN’s economic relations has intensified in the last few years, however; it is still small if compared to other trade partners in the region despite Australia being the first dialogue partner of ASEAN since 1974. Technically, approachable relations would be impacted by the consequences of succeeding preferential access to economic interaction, reinforcing Australia’s reputation as a trustworthy partner of ASEAN by sharing prosperity together. Nevertheless, trade and investment in ASEAN might face some issues such as corruption, tech talent, barriers to ownership and investment, unsupportive infrastructure, skilled labor, or technology.

Third, ASEAN people and Australia people seem to have less connectivity to each other than other peoples. We can observe that the activities of ASEAN and Australia at a people to people level haven’t seen much for the past few decades. Equally important, when parts of ASEAN face social problems such as health care, clean water, or lack of school infrastructure, as an example, Japanese often come to visit and help by joining campaigns or activities. So even local people know and love Japanese people. They feel very comfortable with Japanese. Australians should also play a role like the Japanese in this region to build people connectivity. Not only giving aid but also being involved with them to feel as the same neighbourly group.

The hypothesis above proves conclusively that ASEAN and Australia must have more tangible activities in political collaboration, economic integration and social cultural cooperation. ASEAN and Australia should build a Policy or Research Institution as a consultative institution that produces more important frameworks and works to solve regional conflicts. To accelerate economic integration, Australia should be willing to assist ASEAN to enact digital economic policy through Digital trade and E-commerce working group. In addition, Australia should provide more fellowships or internships to ASEAN peoples in order to limit gaps in work experience. Both sides should increase
multilateral or bilateral agreements to improve investment regulation and tax deduction. Increasing social activities of both regions would empower local communities. ASEAN and Australian youth or people must get more involved in development projects and campaigns in the region together. To move borders closer, ASEAN and Australia should grant access to Visa-Free travel. Moreover, some Australia entertainments (Sport or Art) should add in ASEAN Member States, rugby in SEA Game is an example. Low levels of barriers correspond to a perceived higher degree of peace and development as we have an obligation to build a strong independent region for every eventuality.

![Image Source: Unsplash](image-url)
ASEAN and its way to LGBT Rights

The Asia-Pacific can be considered as the world’s most populous regions whilst also being one of the strongest and fastest growing regions economically. But what of the social aspects and human rights that are fundamental to the lives of citizens in the region? Southeast Asian countries have large communities of LGBT+ identifying persons, with the Philippines ranked in the top 10 most LGBT friendly countries globally and Thailand one of the countries where LGBT is considered free and acceptable in many aspects.

LGBT Rights have been considered to be quite a controversial topic over the past decades, especially in ASEAN. To be exact, as of now ASEAN has never reached any specific conventions nor agreements in regards to LGBT rights. But if we consider cases within ASEAN, there are countries trying to support and legalize LGBT rights to certain levels.

Same sex sexual activity is legal in Vietnam and Thailand, and in countries like Philippines, Laos and Cambodia there are no laws against it. As you can clearly see that constitutes 50 percent of ASEAN member states, however what about the other five countries?

In Myanmar there is a law that makes same sex sexual activity punishable by imprisonment. Singapore made it illegal for men to have intercourse with a maximum of two years in prison for “any act of gross indecency with another male person” in “public or private”. in Indonesia it is legal but not in the provinces of Aceh, South Sumatera and Palembang. Malaysia made it punishable up to 20 years in prison. Last but not the least in the case of Brunei Darussalam, same sex activity is punishable up to death under Syariah Penal Code Order or Sharia Code in 2014.

With the example of same sex sexual activity, we can see that the basic rights provided to the LGBT community in ASEAN is already divided. Most of the time the reason behind this the influence of each country’s dominant religion which plays a big part in the lifestyles and beliefs of the people. In some countries, it is claimed that same sex activity is illegal in de jure but not in de facto, meaning the law itself is not practiced or enforced.

Even in countries that allow same sex sexual activity, LGBT rights still lack in many other areas, undermining the goal of an equal society. Other rights infringements are highlighted by few same sex marriages, same sex adoption and laws concerning sexual identity. But still considering all of these we must come back to one of the ASEAN pillars, the socio-cultural community. As we mentioned one of ASEAN’s aims is to promote human rights, equality and inclusiveness among the society. Even if the law is not enforced, is it right to have laws that discriminate or that concern only certain groups of people when we consider ourselves entering the rule of law of a state?

In Australia, it is evident that the LGBT community has begun to be treated equally especially since 1997. Since then Australia has continued to uplift LGBT rights in different sections including same sex marriage in 2017 and same sex adoption in 2018. In this stage, as the relationship between ASEAN and Australia is growing and one of the missions is also an inclusive society and human rights, ASEAN could learn a few lessons from Australia as to rule of law and fully promote peaceful equal society for all.

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Current Education Issues

In Myanmar there are seven states and seven divisions. The seven states are Kachin, Chin, Shan, Mon, Rakhine, Kayin, and Kayan. Burma is the majority group. Myanmar is a diverse country with different cultures, languages, customs and religions. According to the Education system in Myanmar, every state has to use the same curriculum. There are three levels: primary school, middle school (secondary school) and high school. Primary education lasts five years, middle school lasts three years, and high school lasts 2 years. During both middle and primary school, the system is a no-failure education system. But at the end of high school, the students have to take the matriculation exam (University Entrance Examination).

Myanmar’s education system has numerous problems. In 2018, UNICEF for Every Child showed government spent 7.5 percent ($1.32 billion) of the Union’s budget on education. The budget was not enough for education sector. The impacts of this were not enough schools, school facilities or qualified teachers. In addition, the curriculum is only based on the literacy of the majority group (Burma). Ethnic people feel that the curriculum is not fair for them as they do not have the chance to learn their own literacy. Similarly, the system emphasizes students’ memorization and scores, without having lessons in critical thinking and creative thinking skills which they could use in their career and life. If students get a high mark, they will have to choose a university based on their score, not their hobby or willingness. Moreover, they would have more opportunities to get jobs, particularly in the places of government services. On the other hand, the students who live in rural areas which are so far from the cities do not have the chance to continue attending high school because of financial problems and not having enough schools. Mostly in ethnic areas, they often confront conflicts as well.

For instance, on March in 2019, while I was volunteering teaching students who cannot afford to go to school in Minphoo Village, near the border of Bangladesh, unexpectedly the soldiers entered and a few random shots were fired through the village without fighting with the Arakan Army (AA). A girl from the village, Ye Ye Soe, was killed by soldiers. No one dared to go and see her dead except her mother as government soldiers were surrounding the house. Government did not take any responsibility for her. By seeing these conditions, people including me felt that there is no security or law protection. Likewise, government soldiers arrested civilians who they suspected were related to Arakan Army (AA) without getting any evidence. Before that, I had planned to run an educational institute, yet people are not interested in education as they are always worrying about the soldiers that may come to the village. This is one of the biggest issues which students are facing in education.

When students do not gain enough quality education, they become uneducated persons and have less job opportunities. Most people from rural areas go and work in other countries such as Thailand and China.

Nowadays, there are lots of educational opportunities given to Myanmar’s Education System by ASEAN countries such as Thailand and Singapore and others such as China, the United States and Australia. They invite students from ASEAN countries to attend their university by giving scholarships. However, students are not qualified and lack information related to the scholarship opportunities.

Hence, the government should use more budgets for education, reform the education system and consider education among conflicts in ethnic areas.

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Australia-ASEAN Cooperation on Terrorist Repatriation and Rehabilitation – Too Much to Ask For?

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To face the threat of rising extremism and returning foreign fighters in the region, Australia and ASEAN need to cooperate on developing rehabilitation programs for terrorists and at-risk individuals – but is Australia itself willing to embrace this path forward?

Counter-terrorism is hardly an under-discussed threat in the ASEAN region. Discussed at most ASEAN leaders’ meetings, cooperation on counter-terrorism is a ‘safe-bet denominator for security cooperation’ amongst a minefield of other more contentious topics. Terrorism and its precursors radicalism and extremism have spread their roots deep into the ASEAN region. Networks cross borders, jump seas, and span archipelagos, making it an issue no longer able to be tackled alone. Yet, despite terrorism being a regional hot topic, policy makers and analysts have hesitated on the issue of increasing Australian-ASEAN counter-terrorism cooperation.

The main cause for concern is the ongoing struggle to find the balance between national security and individual rights. With heightened terrorist activity occurring on social media platforms, the need for disruption of online propaganda, recruitment, and discussion has increased tenfold. Strengthened online measures, however, would require greater surveillance and censorship – two words not often met with open arms.

These apprehensions are undoubtedly worth significant consideration and discussion. Regardless, there is a different form of counter-terrorism that remains overlooked by ASEAN-Australian cooperation.

The most recent growth in Australian-ASEAN counter-terrorism occurred in 2018, when all 10 parties signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on ‘Cooperation to Counter International Terrorism’, implementing the ‘2016 ASEAN-Australia Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism’. This MoU looks to strengthen ASEAN-Australian cooperation on technical support, legislation-building, and capacity-building initiatives in key counter-terrorism areas such as information sharing, law enforcement, border control, combating terror financing, and crisis response.

These efforts go a long way to secure the region against the diverse threat of violent extremism and terrorism. However, they neglect a major area: rehabilitation.

Despite considerable programs appearing among individual ASEAN nations, there was nothing said in this MoU about recent ASEAN efforts towards rehabilitating at-risk individuals or known-terrorism to prevent further radicalisation, recidivism, and the greater spread of terrorism.

Rehabilitation, disengagement, and deradicalisation are often labelled as a form of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), seen as ‘softer’ forms of counter-terrorism. These programs are primarily aimed at at-risk individuals (those who have shown signs of radicalism or been exposed to radical networks) and people already convicted of terrorist crimes. These programs often go hand-in-hand with repatriation – the process of reintegrating people returning from foreign conflict zones like Syria and Iraq. These programs help them to disengage from violent networks, set up sustainable new lives, and slowly moderate their beliefs.
ASEAN has seen the beginnings of formal rehabilitation cooperation, with a clause added in the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025 to “Strengthen cooperation to enhance moderation agenda and deradicalisation initiatives ... including through exchange of experiences and best practices on deradicalisation, rehabilitation and re-education to prevent and suppress terrorist acts.”

Some individual Southeast Asian nations have proved their individual expertise in these areas:

- Singapore has seen the Singapore Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) which serves to counter radicals’ extremist views of Islam through an integrated approach of counselling, publications, conferences and outreach events.

- Malaysia has a conditional case system in which returnees are repatriated, investigated and prosecuted when necessary, and undergo mandatory deradicalisation programs. These programs then support the ongoing reintegration of these returnees into their communities. According to the Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, the success rate of these programs is between 95 and 97 percent.

- Working alongside civil society organisations, the Indonesian government is beginning to build a comprehensive repatriation, rehabilitation, and disengagement framework that is helping deradicalise exposed or already-radical individuals.

Utilising the region’s burgeoning interest in deradicalisation and rehabilitation, it is the perfect time for Australia and ASEAN to cooperate on these initiatives. Literature and policy surrounding these areas are still emerging, making it an ideal time to create an Australia-ASEAN-wide approach and see these programs improved and replicated across the region. More importantly, rehabilitation and disengagement programs also work to directly counter the threat posed by the large influx of returning foreign fighters and general rise in extremism seen across the region.

But there is a major question remaining regarding the potential for heightened deradicalisation cooperation: if ASEAN seeks replication of these programs across the region, would Australia join in?

Regardless of enthusiastic regional cooperation on other more material forms of counter-terrorism, the Morrison government has taken a particularly defensive stance on ex-terrorists and the return of foreign fighters.

New laws have seen Australians with suspected links to terrorist networks being barred from Australia for up to 2 years. Peter Dutton has called for DNA tests on returning Australians to ‘prove their citizenship’ and denied national responsibility over these individuals, regardless of their willingness to participate in those conflicts. The current government seems content on shutting the borders to any and all former-Australians returning from Iraq and Syria.

Australia’s national approach to the deradicalisation of domestic terrorists is far from coherent, occurring mainly at the discretion of state governments. New South Wales has some state-run deradicalisation programs for convicted terrorists, but there remains a huge disparity between funding for ‘harder’ counter-terrorism efforts and those ‘softer’ CVE efforts. The Victorian government has a similar prison-based deradicalisation program, but this too has faced serious concerns regarding its effectiveness. Overall, Australia is lacking in targeted programs that intervene for those already radical or at-risk.

The Australian government’s position on this issue is that it is “too risky.” It is too risky to work with at-risk youths or communities to deradicalise them and it is too risky to allow the return of Australians from Middle Eastern conflict zones.

The Australian government needs to take a leaf out of ASEAN nations’ book and recognise that it is too dangerous to not rehabilitate and disengage these individuals already in Australia, lest they recidivate, radicalise others, and attack again.

Further, this approach of refusing the return of these foreign fighters and related individuals from overseas dodges responsibility and leaves other governments
to deal with the burden. The implemented laws would likely bar women and children from returning home, failing to consider broader questions of agency and participation. Furthermore, this rejection of former-Australian nationals presents the risk of these members remaining radical and traveling to nearby ASEAN nations, where more porous borders allow easier immigration.

There is a long way to go to ensure the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs, but there should be no doubt that these programs are key in the future of regional countering violent extremism.

The already-paved counter-terrorism mechanisms of ASEAN-Australia is an ideal way to strengthen and spread these repatriation, rehabilitation, and deradicalisation programs — but if we do see this occur, would Australia be willing to replicate these measures itself?

We need Australian-ASEAN cooperation that deals with these emerging regional problems head on and works together to embrace both the opportunities and responsibilities of rehabilitation and deradicalisation.

Image source: Unsplash
Using the Triple Bottom Line to Tackle Development and Environmental Challenges

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It is no surprise that countries included in the ASEAN-Australian partnership are extremely vulnerable to natural hazards. What makes these hazards a disaster is how much they impact vulnerable populations. Climate change is not only increasing the intensity of natural disasters but also the frequency. Mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions is the ideal solution and approach to minimising environmental impacts. However, with regards to mitigation, Australia and ASEAN countries are in a bit of a paradox. Economically, it is seen as difficult for Australia to divest from the mining of natural resources. It is also difficult for developing countries in the ASEAN region to develop without consuming mined natural resources. Expecting these countries to find alternative methods of development is somewhat unjust, as mass consumption is how Australia developed.

This intersection between fossil fuel consumption and development is certainly an opportunity for ASEAN countries and Australia to work together on and a paradigm that needs to be shifted. However, in the interim there is a need to adapt to the already known impacts of natural disasters and this is also a great opportunity for collaboration.

Australia and many ASEAN countries have vast coastlines. The combination of warmer waters, changing microclimates, sea level rise, polluting of waterways and large populations living on coastlines create the perfect storm for natural disasters. A shift needs to be made to make coastline communities more resilient to inevitable disasters.

As these are shared issues, the way forward is the sharing knowledge and research to achieve the common goal of resilience. To be successful, climate change adaptation solutions need to consider the economy, environment and social sustainability (triple bottom line). Recent research and trial implementation in low-lying communities has shown that wetland ecosystems have the potential to straddle this triple bottom line. The benefits of wetland ecosystems include carbon sequestration, water and air pollutant filtration, reducing coastal erosion by dampening wave power and also providing habitat for fish and prawn nurseries. While they provide a lot of opportunity to lessen physical vulnerabilities, they also provide opportunity to lessen the social vulnerabilities of communities. Providing jobs in fisheries, research and education are just some of the opportunities.

Another to strengthen community resilience to disasters is in ASEAN and Australia’s relationship with waste management. Australia only recycles about 12% of our recyclable waste and some of the remainder that isn’t stored in landfill is sent to ASEAN countries, such as the Philippines. Waste sorting in ASEAN countries provides some lower socio-economic communities with income, a way of life and becomes a centre of the community. Australia is beginning to look at alternatives to shipping waste overseas, which would negatively impact the income stream to these communities. If this is going to be the most environmentally sustainable way forward for Australia, the ASEAN-Australia partnership needs to work together to ensure that it is the most economically and socially sustainable way forward for these communities too. Opportunities for reskilling workers could be established and developing cooperative initiatives that are people-centred and recognise local power dynamics. These initiatives could include teaching trade skills in schools and
educating women in WASH initiatives to disseminate information on the need for sanitation, because in many countries women are seen as the educators. Particularly it is important to focus on reskilling to rebuilding more resilient infrastructure during post-natural disaster phases, which is a job often completed by aid agencies.

Often environmental issues are framed as an isolated problem, which can often result in a lack of momentum and a problem that only “greenies” care about. However, framing environmental problems as intersecting with economic, social and development problems could present them as more of a priority. By understanding the impact of ecosystem health on local economic productivity and community resilience, decision-makers will be forced to consider infrastructure design and management strategies that preserve the environment for future generations.
Tobacco No More: Leveraging ASEAN-Australian Cooperation to Curb Smoking

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One in five adults in ASEAN nations smoke, and many of them begin smoking before the age of 20. Although smoking prevalence is generally declining in industrialised countries such as Australia (13.8% of adults in 2018), smoking prevalence continues to increase in ASEAN (26.6% of adults in 2013). The introduction of strong tobacco control policies is required to curb this epidemic.

THE BURDEN OF THE TOBACCO EPIDEMIC

Aside from the known health effects, tobacco use is strongly linked to increased poverty and lower levels of educational attainment. Tobacco perpetuates vicious cycles of poverty, as smoking addicts are driven to spend a large proportion of their income on cigarettes, which deprives them of household income and decreases their spending on basic necessities. Tobacco users are also highly likely to fall seriously ill from tobacco-related diseases, with tobacco causing more than half a million deaths in ASEAN each year. Most ASEAN governments spend significantly more in tobacco-related healthcare costs than they gain from tobacco revenue. Hence, greater funding, awareness and governmental support for tobacco control will be essential in the fight against poverty in ASEAN.

TOBACCO INDUSTRY INTERFERENCE

The ASEAN tobacco epidemic is marked by strong interference from local and multinational tobacco industries. These industries have effectively lobbied and dissuaded governments from developing and implementing effective tobacco control policies. The World Health Organisation (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) provides a set of recommendations to support governments in shielding their policies from industry influence.

All countries in ASEAN have ratified the FCTC except Indonesia; this lack of progress in Indonesia is attributed to strong industry interference. Despite having a number of government objectives in place to warn the public about the health dangers of tobacco, Indonesia places no restrictions on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship and there has been no change in the affordability of cigarettes since 2008. Given that Indonesia has the highest smoking prevalence in ASEAN (36.1% among adults) and accounts for over 50% of the smoking population in ASEAN (50.6%), urgent action is needed to garner political support and commitment from Indonesia’s government and stakeholders.

An ironic example of the unscrupulous tactics employed by tobacco companies was highlighted in 2017. Philip Morris International, a multinational tobacco company, announced that they would be funding a new non-profit organisation, ‘Foundation For A Smoke-Free World’. This obvious conflict of interest has provoked unanimous opposition to the initiative from the WHO, academics and tobacco control advocates.

ASEAN-AUSTRALIA COOPERATION TO IMPROVE TOBACCO CONTROL

Smoking was ubiquitous in Australia in the mid 20th century, however, Australia’s smoking prevalence is now among the world’s lowest. Australia’s plain packaging laws, for example, were a world first when introduced in 2012, and set a precedent which has encouraged other countries to adopt similar laws. Thailand, an ASEAN leader in tobacco control, introduced plain packaging in September this year. Singapore will implement plain cigarette packaging in July 2020.

With the economic and social burden of tobacco smoking expected to significantly increase in
ASEAN over the next decade, strategic ASEAN–Australia collaboration may help prevent and treat the tobacco epidemic. Practical ways in which ASEAN–Australia collaboration may support improved tobacco control include:

- Partnerships between tobacco control leaders (such as Australia, Thailand and Singapore) and other ASEAN nations to lend pro bono expertise for the development of tobacco control policies.
- Research collaboration to investigate effective means of tobacco control in developing nations, as previous findings from developed nations may not always be relevant. E.g. The efficacy of subsidising nicotine replacement therapy in developing nations.
- Generalised capacity building of health infrastructure to prevent and treat tobacco-related illnesses.

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Beyond Participation: Substantive Economic Opportunities for Women in ASEAN is Good for Growth, Innovation and Climate

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In 2017, Australia’s female labour force participation rate overtook that of Asia for the first time since 1990. Asia’s female labour force participation rate had decreased steadily for almost two decades, from 66% to 59%, while Australia’s had an almost identical inverse trajectory. However, in ASEAN nations the trend is very different. A series of flat lines from 40% in Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines to 80% in the socialist states of Laos PDR, Vietnam and Cambodia: flat lines because they have remained largely unchanged in two decades.

In the same year, Australia supported ASEAN’s release of the Manila Statement on Mainstreaming Women’s Economic Empowerment. This statement outlined a view to adopt concrete actions to increase women’s economic participation. The statement is clear in intent but lacking in imperative: it is no longer about fixing the flat lines of participation, but ensuring that participation is substantive and impactful. At the close of the decade in an increasingly turbulent region, substantive action on gender equality supports economic growth, innovation and climate action in ASEAN, and is an area of strength for ASEAN-Australia relations.

GENDER EQUALITY FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

ASEAN is a region of strong economic growth, posting just above 5% in 2018. However, this figure belies the diversity of economies within ASEAN, and the diversity of women’s participation in these economies – in quantity and quality.

Women’s economic inclusion globally brings high rewards. The ADB estimates that “Asia would see a 30% growth in income per capita in one generation if female participation in the workforce rose to 66.2%.” However, participation rates tell only a partial story.

In the Philippines and Indonesia, a low participation rate hides some of the highest rates in ASEAN of women in senior management (32.8% in the Philippines) and on boards (14% in Indonesia). In Vietnam, conversely, women occupy only 13% of senior management and 15% of board positions, despite a high participation rate. Leadership diversity is good for profits and innovation, and this is a dividend even economies with many women in the workforce can miss out on.

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITY

In ASEAN, improving the quality of women’s economic activity would naturally differ country to country. In highly agricultural nations like Cambodia, Laos PDR, and Myanmar, ensuring women have access to the same productive assets as men could help to increase yields by 20-30%, and help reduce climate-destructive practices such as deforestation.

In Singapore and Thailand, women are less represented in high-growth and high-skilled sectors such as value-added manufacturing and industries central to digital transformation. This means that women are less likely to benefit from major ASEAN policies investing in such high value sectors, and that such sectors will risk slower growth and innovation.

In Vietnam, only 31% of women are employed in the formal sector, creating vulnerabilities which preclude women from benefiting from ASEAN trade agreements. In Laos, a lack of female ownership over agricultural work leads women to work across the border, exposing them to exploitation. As
ASEAN works to improve economic integration and increase trade, it is important to remember that it’s not about who has a job currently; perception of opportunity can mean the difference between protection and risk for many women in ASEAN.

AUSTRALIA’S ROLE IN DRIVING CHANGE

The discussions of 2017 set a path for Australia-ASEAN relations that is secondary in many conversations, but crucial to the future of the region. Women’s economic empowerment in ASEAN must be about much more than participation, and Australia has been and continues to be a strong voice for profound change in this area.10 If the ASEAN-Australia grouping is to become an economic power able to balance tensions in the region for stability and prosperity, women are key to this success.

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11. Image source: Unsplash
Opportunities for Australian and ASEAN Businesses to Collaborate

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There is tremendous potential for Australian businesses to capitalise on the significant opportunities in the Southeast Asian region. The region is set to have one of the largest young, educated and digitised consumer base with rising incomes, but it currently lacks many key skills and industry expertise. As a regional economic bloc, ASEAN’s combined GDP of US$2.5 trillion already makes it the world’s seventh-largest economy, and the region is set to become the world’s fourth-largest economy by 2030, with growth rates significantly higher than the global average. Being logistically close, culturally familiar and a joint history of maintaining stability in the region, there are a lot of opportunities for Australian and ASEAN businesses to collaborate to develop in the future. Some factors are particular promising:

1. Shifting rural-urban immigration with expanding cities accelerating economic growth;
2. Rising consumer income and the growing middle class with greater purchasing power;
3. A steady stream of innovation and digital technology disruptions, fostering high growth in e-commerce and digital services; and
4. Deepening regional integration and a stronger sense of united identity, including the influence of Australia’s FTAs and the growth-driven by expansion in China’s outward investments and trade.

CURRENT LEVEL OF INTEGRATION

Long-term economic growth is highly dependent on innovation, and currently, Australia is doing well in establishing strong scientific partnerships with all ASEAN members, especially in areas of health, medicine and earth sciences. Significant breakthroughs include a promising new leukaemia treatment, better ways to manage chronic hepatitis B, a new understanding of quantum phenomena, and a better understanding of factors that contributed to previous Antarctic ice melting.

CSIRO has also been on the forefront in driving collaboration in research and innovation in the region. CSIRO’s new ASEAN hub in Singapore will help continue the development of research partnerships with Singapore in areas like precision health and high-performance computing, and a role in the DFAT-led Aus4Innovation initiative to strengthen Vietnam innovation system. CSIRO research has also had successes in being commercialised, such as Novaco®, a prawn feed product that enables prawn farmers to grow prawns in a faster, cheaper, healthier and more sustainable way. The Melbourne company Ridley now sells in Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, as well as China and some smaller South Pacific markets. These are good examples of how innovation and collaboration have helped develop both the sustainability and development of the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order for the future business and research leaders to take advantage of the opportunity for mutual growth, a few things should be necessary.

1. Expansion of cultural and political understanding between Australia and ASEAN, especially between young people. This could involve more cultural exchanges and activities, stronger support for students to travel to study in across the region and more investment into language training in schools from the primary level.
2. Facilitating the development of relationships and collaboration between businesses and researchers across the region. This could include developing industry and in-country visit of business leaders, creating networks between entrepreneurs and improve research collaboration between universities.

3. Stronger political alignment and mutual respect between Australia and ASEAN countries. This could involve developing a comprehensive strategy in the engagement of the ASEAN region, facilitating high-level exchanges between political leaders and senior officials and more directed aid and investment programs into the region.

Image source: Unsplash
ASEAN, Australia and the Rohingya Crisis Two Years On

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Earlier this month, in an address to the leaders of ASEAN, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres spoke to the continued plight of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar’s Rakhine state. The deadly ethnic cleansing campaign of August 2017 effected the largest and fastest Rohingya refugee influx into Bangladesh. Over two years on, Guterres has urged Myanmar to tackle the ‘root causes’ of the conflict and to build a ‘conducive environment for the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable repatriation of refugees’. The persecution of the Rohingya represents a significant diplomatic challenge for ASEAN and Australia, and demands serious engagement in order to end the ongoing crisis.

Human displacement, asylum seeker movements, refugee and stateless populations, and irregular labour migration flows have long posed challenges for Southeast Asia as a region. The region is both a source of refugees and a region of transit. To the extent that there is a ‘shared regional experience of forced migration’, the region is one of ‘large mixed migration flows but limited formal legal protection’. ASEAN is the most significant regional initiative with implications for forced migration policy. In relation to the Rohingya crisis, ASEAN bears a responsibility to help facilitate a repatriation process that guarantees the long-term safety and security of the Rohingya. At present, there is little prospect of any sustainable repatriation process, and certainly none can progress until the Myanmar military’s crimes are condemned, abuses investigated, and justice sought for the victims of the atrocities.

Australia’s response to the situation thus far has primarily focused on improving the conditions for women and girls in Bangladesh refugee camps. Canberra must work with ASEAN and others to lead a wider regional diplomatic and humanitarian effort and assist ASEAN to overcome a ‘lack of resolve to act quickly’. In the first instance and in taking steps towards obtaining justice for victims, the Myanmar authorities must be pressed to cooperate with international institutions and to allow humanitarian agencies and independent monitors into Rakhine state. The Australian government must continue to call out the crisis, engage in international discussion around allegations of genocide, and highlight the need for accountability amid the ongoing violence.

Further, ASEAN is well placed to play a mediation role in a dialogue process between the Myanmar government and Rohingya refugee representatives. The situation poses a difficult question of balance for ASEAN: ‘how can state sovereignty be reconciled with humanitarian responsibility and human rights?’ Recent years have seen an evolution within ASEAN, with an ‘increasing reference to human rights and fundamental freedoms, constructive engagement, and to being “action-oriented” and responsive’. ASEAN could facilitate meaningful consultation between Rohingya communities in Bangladesh and Myanmar in designing a repatriation process. ASEAN must work towards ensuring that Rohingya refugees can make informed decisions about repatriation and, ultimately, can consent to return. Australia should bolster these efforts via measures such as providing mediation and coordination expertise.

Building on Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne’s visit to Bangladesh in September, Australia must also ‘enhance its bilateral and multilateral strategies to address the persecution of the Rohingyas’. Australia should be a leader in supporting the Bangladeshi authorities in responding to the needs within Bangladesh, including through the ongoing provision of humanitarian aid and disaster relief.

The humanitarian crisis in neighboring Bangladesh is dire. Prior to August 2017, approximately 307,000 Rohingya refugees lived in camps, makeshift
settlements and with host communities in parts of Bangladesh. Today, the estimated number seeking refuge in overburdened camps in Bangladesh is over one million. Recently, Bangladesh authorities imposed restrictions on refugee online communications and freedom of movement. Only several hundred Rohingya have returned to Myanmar since August 2017, as the threat of further violence and persecution persists. The Myanmar government has failed to guarantee basic rights to the Rohingya, including full citizenship, restitution of lost land and property, access to public services and formal recognition as ‘Rohingya’. The circumstances call for serious and swift action on the part of ASEAN and Australia to begin the process of peace-building, though any solution appears unlikely to come about soon.

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Uncertainty and the Future in Disaster Resilience

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The Asia-Pacific region is the most disaster-prone region in the world. In 2018, almost half of 281 global natural disaster events occurred in this region, with 8 out of the 10 deadliest events occurring in the Asia-Pacific (Guha-Sapir 2019). Moreover, climate change has added an extra element of uncertainty to the weather patterns, as can be seen by out-of-season extreme disaster events such as the intensifying bushfires affecting Australia and the myriad of typhoons, earthquakes and cyclones affecting the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries (ESCAP 2019).

Although technology and increased data availability have increased the predictability of and preparation period for some natural disasters, natural disasters ‘triggered’ by climate change tend to deviate from the ‘norm’, thus reducing the usefulness of the historical record (ESCAP 2019). A key example is Cyclone Nargis, which made landfall in 2008. One of the most deadliest cyclones to ever make landfall, its impact was likely worsened due its location in the Irrawaddy Delta, where there had been no historical record of cyclones and little preparation for such an event (Horton, De Mel et. al 2017). This uncertainty caused by climate change has led to a growing awareness that the usual disaster risk management context may not be as useful as it has been previously, and as such may need to be viewed at from a different angle.

RESILIENCE IN DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

Resilience is a cornerstone of the current disaster risk management context. According to the Hyogo Framework of Action (UNISDR 2005), resilience in a disaster management context refers to the “capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure.” In other words, resilience refers to the preparedness of a system, community or society to ‘bounce back’ from a disaster event.

Resilience is usually viewed through a forward-planning linear lens- when a disaster occurs, it impacts a community and then, lessons are learnt which are later used to strengthen the resilience of a community. Most frameworks such as the Sendai Framework and the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) would have resilience as a core theme underlying national disaster risk management policy. However, beyond acknowledging the impact caused by climate change on the intensity and frequency of natural disasters, most of these frameworks do not pay enough attention to its effect on the frameworks themselves.

IMPACT OF UNCERTAINTY ON RESILIENCE-BASED FRAMEWORKS

The uncertainty caused by climate change has meant that the importance of historical records has somewhat diminished (ESCAP 2019). It is no longer enough to simply plan based on previous and/or ‘normal’ natural disasters, as the context in which they occurred has shifted causing deviations in the ‘norm’. As natural disasters have become less predictable and more likely to deviate from the ‘norm’, simply ‘forward-planning’ is not enough, authorities have to ‘plan backwards’. In other words, they have to shift their perspective. Rather than plan for the future based on information gathered from past events, they should instead plan from the future and work backwards to identify the actions that need to be taken to achieve a particular future scenario.

With the effects of climate change growing ever more apparent in the natural disasters unfolding in the Asia-Pacific region, to which both Australia and the ASEAN belong, disaster management continues to be a key area of interest for both- as seen in the
recently finalised 2020-2024 Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership. As such, both parties should collaborate in the reframing of current regional disaster management policies, such as the 2016-2020 AADMER Work Programme, to include an element of planning from the future when creating policies. It is vital that the frameworks through which disaster risk management is viewed be able to compensate for increasing uncertainty.

References


5. Image source: Unsplash
The Silence of Domestic Violence: ASEAN-Australia Combating Violence Against Women and Girls

Khetsavanh, a 26-year-old coffee farmer from Sekong Province, southern Laos, came from a poor family, went to lower secondary school and soon after she got married to her husband. She experienced domestic violence for a while, and due to little knowledge she thought it was normal for a husband to mistreat and disrespect his wife. She did not report it because she did not believe it would help her and she felt it was a taboo topic to talk about.

WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS?

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most prevalent and devastating human rights violations. World Health Organisation (WHO) acknowledged that VAWG can cause major physical and mental health issues for victims. Globally, 1 in 3 women (35%) experienced either physical and/or sexual violence in their life time (WHO, 2017). Forms of violence against women can start from psychological and verbal abuse from intimate partners and non-partners, making sexist jokes to a female colleague, making sexual harassment in public and/or online-stalking to acts of physical harm. UN Women (2018) suggests women in ASEAN Member States experiences of intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime ranged from 6% in Singapore to 34% in Vietnam and 44% in Thailand. Acts of violence against partners, especially women and girls, are unacceptable and has long-term negative impacts towards their children, families and society.

WOMEN AND GIRLS: THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUP

It is unarguable that education is the key to unleash knowledge and prevent Violence-Against Women and Girls. Well-educated men tend to treat their partners with respect and well-educated women know how to respond and cope with such an issue. Although many more girls are enrolling primary and secondary school, girls tend to drop out more than boys during upper secondary school (Cerdan-Infantes, et al., 2016). Women and girls are usually trapped in domestic work, family responsibilities and poverty which potentially leads to early marriage and child labour, causing women and girls to be more vulnerable to school dropout and violence. Moreover, women with disabilities, indigenous and ethnic women, refugees, elderly women, sex workers and women living with HIV/AIDS are more easily exposed to violence.

WHY SURVIVORS ARE SILENT?

A Study on Violence Against Women and girls in Laos (2014) found that almost half of women who experienced VAWG did not report or tell anyone. The majority of women who were interviewed said it would be embarrassing to let neighbours or other people know because it is a family issue and it should be kept within the family. Some women said it was acceptable because it is in the nature of men, they tend to have more anger sometimes and women should obey them and listen to them as that is how it has been done in the past generations. Furthermore, many countries still lack effective laws and policies. Existing laws can be flouted with impunity so victims tend to remain silent because of social stigma and shame surrounding the issue.

ASEAN-AUSTRALIAN’S INITIATIVES TO COMBAT VAWG

In the light of increasing interest on VAWG issue, reliable and accessible data sources are extremely
crucial for policy makers, programme managers and community workers. In order to design interventions to tackle the issue of VAWG, they need accurate technical inputs and evidence in their papers. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), together with ASEAN and UN Women, published ASEAN Regional Guidelines on VAWG Data Collection and Use, which aims to strengthen the quality of national data, methods and systems of ASEAN Member States. Moreover, kNOwVAWdata, a regional initiative by DFAT and UNFPA, continues to give useful studies, capacity building and policy recommendations, encouraging various stakeholders in national and global level to combat with Violence Against Women and Girls.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2019, A Care International in Laos and its partners implement a project to raise awareness on Gender-Based Violence and VAWG at the community level. It has surprisingly good results on the behaviour changes of the participants in a more positive way. Khetsavanh also joined the activities and she went back to explain to her husband about what she learned, later he also joined. Now Khetsavanh is living happily with her family and her husband treats her with more respectful manners. If we want to see changes in individuals and in communities like Khetsavanh’s and many more, the voices of community need to be reflected in programmes and interventions, ensuring that policies and government regulations are addressing the right issues and the right groups of people. This lets the community and the people become changemakers.

References

2. UN women. (2018). Asean regional guidelines on vawg data collection and use
Countering Terrorism through Women's Rights

Monika Istanto

INDONESIA

Back in 2018, a series of terrorist attack killed 28 people and left dozens more injured in Surabaya. The bombings were carried out by three separate families who seemed to lead a healthy life. The events left a worrying observation that violent extremism groups have modified both their strategies and patterns of attack into smaller units involving women and children. Exposure to radicalizers within their households poses a significant risk for the young and the clueless.

Terrorism and violent violent extremist narratives are experienced differently by women and men. While it can be noted that men play a bigger role in terrorist acts, this fails to understand the extent of women’s roles in violent groups and the impact of gender dynamics represents a current gap in addressing this issue. Violent extremism is a complex phenomenon that the stakeholders need a thorough understanding to combat comprehensively.

Recognizing the role of family in combating terrorism, mainstreaming gender perspective across efforts to prevent terrorism has become an urgent matter. The Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) found that women are well-positioned to detect impending violence as their rights are typically the first to be attacked by violent, extremist ideologies. Furthermore, women’s central role in caregiving, places them in an excellent position to recognize unusual patterns of behavior in the community.

Combating terrorism and violent extremist narratives could be leveraged through capitalizing on women’s roles in the community. Equipping women with the skills to recognize signs of use of violent extremist narratives in their households would be a good start to curb the risks to children and youth in the early stages. Involving them with fellow women to create a community-driven effort to counter terrorism will create a trickle-down effect because they are able to share their experiences and learn from one another. Other than that, women-focused organizations are not only well placed to monitor shifts towards extremism in local communities, but supporting them promotes gender equality and women’s roles in society.

Movements at a grassroots level are not enough to support women in the fight against violent extremist narratives. There is an urgent need to involve women and take into account their experience to get the whole picture of extremism narrative in the community. The common failure of stereotyping gender roles in terrorist acts could cause inefficient policy making and lead the efforts down the wrong path. Involving more women in policy making and leadership position could create respectful partnership between women’s groups and policymakers. Furthermore, women in leadership may attest to the role that religious counter-discourses play, that are not otherwise identified or accessible to governments.

Based on ASEAN statistics, more than 4 million people from Australia travelled to ASEAN countries each year from 2012-2017, whereas around 1.5 million people from ASEAN made trips to Australia. Globalization of travel and information transfer, which increases the salience of economic disparities and ideological competition, facilitates the ability of far-flung but like-minded collaborators to undertake harmful activities. Recognizing the evolving risks of violent extremism, the urgency to have multinational cooperation on countering terrorism has never been higher. Terrorism is a transnational challenge which is not restricted to any nationality, ethnicity, religion, ideology, or gender. As the barrier that separates each country is blurring, it should be in everyone’s interest to create a safe and peaceful community for Australia and ASEAN through above measures.
Nudging the ASEAN Way: Time for a New Behavioural Economics Unit in Southeast Asia

Clancy O’Donnell
AUSTRALIA

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a globally successful multilateral institution, capable of fostering consensus between member states to tackle wicked problems across the Indo-Pacific region. But with ongoing fiscal pressure and a range of strategic issues vying for attention, the Secretariat risks losing relevance in the fight against poverty, climate change and other regional collective action problems.

If ASEAN member states are going to meet and exceed their commitments made under the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, they must work together, including with partners like Australia, to promote leading policy solutions. Behavioural and experimental economics uses evidence-based, low-cost interventions to address a range of complex and consequential policy challenges. 2020 presents a window of opportunity to make a modest investment in a centralised, behavioural economics unit within the Secretariat to deliver measurable benefits for people across ASEAN.

DOING MORE WITH LESS

The ASEAN Secretariat and working groups have a near full dance card, with hundreds of projects and meetings delivered each year with a range of partners from across the world. Coordinating these initiatives between 10 member states takes significant resources. And with a limited annual budget of only around US$20 million and few signs that its mandate or resources will increase, the Secretariat should consider new cost effective ways to achieve its goals.

One approach is through behavioural and experimental economics – 2019 marks the mainstreaming of this field after this years’ Nobel Prize went to Abhijit Banerjee, Esther Duflo, and Michael Kremer “for their experimental approach to alleviating global poverty.” Their research showed that the ideas of behavioural economics - present bias, impatience, salience, framing effects, for example, can make significant inroads in addressing a range of policy areas. This team used randomised control trials, or RCTs, to boost fertilizer use by Kenyan farmers, improve access to drinking water, drastically improve immunization of children against life-threatening diseases in India and halt the rapid spread of HIV in Nigeria.

Over the last 10 years, Governments around the world have seen the value in adopting these approaches to improve outcomes for citizens in a range of policy domains. Its time we think seriously about deploying a behavioural economics model that suits the ASEAN way. From boosting tax revenue, increasing retirement savings, fighting anti-microbial resistance or countering cyber security threats – there are few areas within ASEAN’s charter that would not benefit from applying behavioural economics.

THE RIGHT MODEL FOR ASEAN

One successful model, is to establish a centralised behavioural economics team or a ‘nudge unit’. This would rely on building partnerships and establishing best practice across ASEAN member states. Australia has some lessons it could share, and use its experience to open up a new field of collaboration with ASEAN. Next year, the successor to the ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication for 2021-2025, could provide a mechanism to establish a new nudge unit to drive reform across ASEAN in a range of strategic priorities.
Ultimately, a behavioural economics team should be centrally located, with clear accountability to Secretariat. The unit should have a mandated return on investment of at-least ten to one. This ambitious rate of return is entirely achievable based on the experiences of other behavioural economics units including Behavioural Insights Team in the United Kingdom. To achieve this, interventions must be scalable, capable of being rolled out in any ASEAN country and where possible, leverage partnerships including through digital platforms. A small nudge could lead to long-term rewards for all ASEAN member states.

Fintech: Transforming ASEAN into a Digital Economy

Cameron Hee

AUSTRALIA

As a son of immigrants who themselves were immigrants born into poverty, moving countries and sending money back home became our form of economic empowerment. Today, my family is just one of the growing millions looking abroad for employment, education or a better standard of living only to remit excess savings back home to help their loved ones. However, remittance across borders are often plagued by high fees which has created a significant economic barrier for many in ASEAN. So, the question then becomes how could we lower the cost of international remittance in order to economically empower people and my answer is simple, through Fintech.

Read more at: