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FOREWORD

2020 was a year like no other. The COVID–19 pandemic disrupted life on a scale beyond imagination, affecting almost every facet of everyday living. While lives and health have been the primary challenges during the pandemic, the parallel economic and social effects have been no less devastating. COVID–19 has hobbled economic growth while starkly revealing inequalities and further entrenching them. It has also accentuated the challenges of addressing existing crises such as climate change and political stability, which remain unsolved and as important as ever. Yet, the pandemic has also been a testament to the spirit of human resilience, with unprecedented levels of global, regional, and national collaboration and cooperation. As with the rest of the world, ASEAN and Australia reckoned with these complexities and will continue to do so for some time.

Against the background of an extraordinary year, the ASEAN-Australia Review 2020 seeks to empower the perspectives of a group whose future is perhaps most at stake: youth. Youth today are facing the most complex confluence of challenges in recent memory. Yet, they also hold incredible potential and the passion to tackle those challenges. The twenty contributors to this year’s review represent eight different countries and bring a diverse range of experience across a spectrum of areas.

The Review is divided into three chapters aligned with ASEAN’s strategic pillars: (1) Political-Security Cooperation, (2) Economic Cooperation, and (3) Socio-Cultural Cooperation. While some authors chose to focus on the Australia-ASEAN relationship at large, others deep-dived into specific case studies on individual countries to draw broader implications for the region. As such, the Review is rich in both the breadth and depth of content, with topics ranging from ASEAN’s landmine legacy and Smart Cities to sports diplomacy and maritime security. We are especially proud of empowering gender perspectives in this year’s Review, both in terms of balanced representation of authors and relevant chapters.

2020 has certainly been a year of much hardship. However, this year’s Review is nevertheless optimistic in its outlook. The problems identified by contributors to the Review are not insurmountable, and in many cases, identifiable solutions and opportunities for greater cooperation are clearly articulated by the authors. We hope you are inspired by the ideas contained within this year’s publication and gain a greater appreciation of the importance of empowering youth perspectives.

Dominic Harvey-Taylor & Ankush Wagle
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CHAPTER 1

POLITICAL-SECURITY COOPERATION
REFLECTING ON THE SYDNEY DECLARATION: MOVING ASEAN–AUSTRALIA RELATIONS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Christopher Khatouki | Australia

Introduction

The establishment of ASEAN in 1967 was a watershed moment for Southeast Asia’s geo-political stability. While there was initial enthusiasm on Australia’s behalf to collaborate with the nascent regional organisation, the country’s unstable economy and cultural affiliation with Europe made it an unwelcome and “awkward partner” for ASEAN in the Asia-Pacific. But that was almost sixty years ago, and few could have imagined the change of dynamic between Australia and ASEAN today. Australia has firmly placed itself as a key economic and strategic asset for ASEAN, taking part in ministerial dialogues every year since 1980 and sharing trade worth A$93 billion dollars, more than Australia’s bilateral trade with Japan, South Korea, or the United States. Australia’s image in the eyes of ASEAN has also drastically improved. In 2018, some ASEAN heads of state, once wary of closer Australian ties, were in mild support, or at least ambivalent, to the idea of Australia’s ASEAN membership. The same year, ASEAN heads of state and business leaders convened in Sydney for a special diplomatic summit, the first of its kind on Australian soil. The 2018 ‘ Australia-ASEAN Special Summit’ was a tremendous testament to the growth in our economic and political ties. More than this, the willingness of all ASEAN heads of state to meet in Sydney proved not only ASEAN’s embrace of Australia, but also Australia’s willingness to step up as a key strategic partner.

Through the summit’s communiqué, The Sydney Declaration, ASEAN and Australia agreed to expand their joint efforts on a wide range of strategic issues. While much could be agreed upon, three central issues dominated the communiqué’s agenda given their geo-strategic significance. The first, a multilateral commitment to counter-terrorism:

“to enhance regional cooperation to counter terrorism, including to prevent and suppress the flow of foreign terrorist fighters in our region”

The second being improved economic engagement:

“to enhance trade and investment as well as resisting all forms of protectionism to improve regional development and prosperity”;

Finally, the third and most sensitive issue was addressing China’s behaviour in the South China Sea:

“to support the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea (DOC)... and an early conclusion of an effective Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC).”

This paper will assess the progress made on these three issues in the two years following the declaration and will identify where there is still need for improvement and readjustment. As these three central issues continue to dominate ASEAN-Australia policy discussions, addressing these points of contention will be crucial in moving relations in the right direction.

**Partnering Up on Counter-terrorism**

It is no question that Australia's own security relies heavily on the stability of its immediate geographic region. In Australia's 2016 Defence White Paper, countering terrorism and violent extremism was placed at the forefront of our national interest, particularly in Southeast Asia. In the past decade, radical Islamic extremism and its propagation has proliferated across social media and propaganda networks in the region at a lightning pace. Wealth disparity, high youth unemployment, and the growth of religious fundamentalism in countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia have broadened the appeal of Islamic extremism and fighting in foreign conflict zones such as Syria. In addition, growing religious intolerance and years of denying the socio-economic participation and autonomy of Islamic minorities in the southern provinces of Thailand and the Philippines has fuelled armed rebellions. All of these coalescing factors have made Southeast Asia a potential hotbed for terrorist activity and recruitment, threatening Australia's fundamental regional security in the process. One only needs to look back upon the 2001 Bali Bombings and the 2004 bombing of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta to understand the immediate knock-on effects of increased radicalisation in the region. But more than the immediate consequences of growing extremism, Australia's growing economic and security ties with the region are also dependent upon the political stability of the government actors which it engages with.

Australia has made significant strides in countering terrorism with its ASEAN partners over the past two decades. It has signed bilateral counter-terrorism agreements with the Philippines and Cambodia and has provided the Indonesian National Police (Polri) resources and specialist training. Australia's engagement with Polri and its counter-terrorism unit 'Detachment 88' has proven particularly effective and has helped to disrupt over 80 terrorist plots since 2010. Australia has also been militarily involved in successfully supressing the ISIL invasion of the Philippine city of Marawi in 2019. However, while security cooperation is at its highest, the growing presence of Islamic extremism is no less visible in parts of Southeast Asia. This was astutely recognised at the Sydney Summit, with then Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, stating that rising extremism in Southeast Asia "persists and the threat is a real and significant challenge for us all". A shared concern for these rising trends at the summit led to the signing of the first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on fighting violent extremism and its financing; a first of its kind which allowed the multilateral exchange of security intelligence. Any short-term success of counter-terrorist security operations from Australia-ASEAN initiatives, however, can lead to an overreliance of securitised counter terrorism strategies rather than structural change. Perhaps the greatest of these structural challenges is combatting the cultural and economic appeal of fundamentalist Islamism itself.

The allure of religious extremism is growing across Southeast Asia. A lack of educational and economic opportunity, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia, has been filled by massive investment in hard-line Islamic educational institutions by Saudi Arabia and likeminded Gulf States. In the past few decades, Saudi Arabia alone has invested at least US$100 billion in building educational institutions in the region, far eclipsing that of Australia or any other Western country. Concurrently, large swaths of money in the informal economy, particularly channelled through difficult to track cryptocurrencies, have also funded aid distribution and

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terrorist recruitment from jihadist networks such as ISIL and Al-Qaeda. As COVID–19 continues to rage local economies, these “extremist charity” networks have shown rapid growth in Indonesia and the Philippines. Fundamentalist organisations are now increasingly providing a means of escape from the economic uncertainty which governments and NGOs are failing to solve. The success of military and police cooperation between Australia and some ASEAN states, has led to a focus of regional counter-terrorism as a security problem. Recent studies, however, have proven that strong securitised responses magnify the social and political consequences of terrorist attacks themselves. Instead of increasing funding towards militarised counter-terrorism operations, ASEAN and Australia must rebalance their counter-terrorism strategy towards aid and poverty reduction. In other words, reducing societal vulnerability to terrorist messaging in the first instance, rather than expanding capability to persecute terrorist networks after the fact.

Increasing Economic Engagement

From a macroeconomic perspective, Australia’s economic engagement with ASEAN has been growing at a rapid pace. Australia’s two-way trade with ASEAN has grown by over A$25 billion in the past ten years to become a top-three trading bilateral trading partner. ASEAN’s fast-growing economy and A$2.89 trillion market has also led to a strong demand for high quality Australian goods and services. This demand has been bolstered by economic agreements such as the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA), the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership (IA-CEPA) and, more recently, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Australia now has, in effect, a free trade agreement (FTA) with every member of ASEAN. One of the main hard economic commitments of the Sydney Declaration, to intensify efforts “towards a swift conclusion of a mutually beneficial Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership” is complete. Soft trade barriers, however, remain a consistent obstacle to true economic partnership. Poor cultural intelligence, a lack of people to people (P2P) links and a general disinterest in doing business in Southeast Asia from Australian businesses have stubbornly kept the ASEAN-Australia economic relationship in an under-developed state. As Malaysia’s former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed has remarked: while its cultural make up has changed, Australian business and society is still yet to truly become “more Asian than European”.

Despite the close proximity of Southeast Asia, Australian business, education and economic ties with ASEAN are weighed down by a lack of cultural and linguistic intelligence. Only half of Australia’s top ten universities offer language courses in an ASEAN language and only one of those universities – Australian National University – offers a language other than Indonesian. Due to the economic impact of COVID–19 and longer-term higher education reforms, even Indonesian language education in Australian universities has been drawn back dramatically, with student numbers half of what they were in 1992. This means Australian students are at a severe cultural and linguistic disadvantage if they choose to go on to do business in Southeast Asia. While the Australian Government has encouraged undergraduate students to study in Asia through the New Colombo Plan Scholarship, less than half of those students are based in any ASEAN States. This has far reaching effects. In an analysis of Australia’s top 200 Australian Stock Exchange (ASX) listed companies, less than 3 per cent of senior executives have a level of Asian language proficiency while only 45 per cent of board members have “little to some knowledge” of ASEAN markets. In another survey taken in 2019 by AusCham ASEAN, more than 35 per cent of its members were

not even aware that an Australia-ASEAN free trade agreement exists. These figures suggest that the problem of advancing economic engagement is now based less on free trade agreements and more on business and cultural literacy.

Another major flaw in Australia’s economic strategy has been a general lack of export diversification in ASEAN markets. Recent shocks in the Australia-China bilateral relationship and unpredictability in American economic policy has brought to light the lack of complexity in Australia's trade strategy. Analysis made by the Perth USAsia Centre has revealed that over half of Australia’s top 30 export sectors – including iron ore, coal and natural gas – is overwhelmingly reliant on one single entity: China. It is then no surprise that it took only a few punitive trade sanctions from China on Australian products in late 2020 to affect over AUD$15 billion in exports. The Australian Government has attempted to develop new trade networks within ASEAN, particularly through the recent signing of FTAs with Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand. Yet despite positive trends, Vietnam and Thailand, two of the largest economies of ASEAN, still account for less than 2 per cent of Australia’s two-way trade. This means there is still a need for a more aggressive push into ASEAN markets. Vietnam, in particular, presents significant opportunities for Australia’s struggling cattle and mining exports. Finally, Australia must make use of the propensity of ASEAN’s growing middle class to save and invest in their children’s education for high class education abroad. Expanding Australia’s educational links in ASEAN will both mitigate an economic reliance on Chinese students worth close to AUD$32 billion and increase P2P links with the region.

Cooperation in the South China Sea

The final issue to consider is prevention of conflict in the South China Sea, an area which has been described as “the geographic heart of Southeast Asia”. The South China Sea is now a well-established flashpoint of various territorial disputes, low-level skirmishes and diplomatic fallout within the Asia-Pacific. Deeply rooted in an unresolved historical past, various ASEAN claimants, particularly Vietnam and the Philippines, have been involved in tense standoffs with China over maritime ownership of the waters. Although Australia holds no territorial claim in the seas, any disruption to the trade flows which run through these waters – worth over A$4.8 trillion – is predicted to have particularly devastating impacts on its economy. As the United States has also taken a more militaristic stance towards China’s behaviour in the region, Australia’s complex security reliance on the U.S. also means it could be dragged into conflict regardless of territorial claim. Building a path for a legally binding Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea was thus high on the agenda for ASEAN and Australian leaders at the Special Summit. It was no accident that all heads of state, in spite of China’s absence, agreed in unison for “commitment to the rules-based order and international law in the region, including the South China Sea” and an expansion on “the scope and sophistication of defence cooperation”. As a non-claimant and non-ASEAN member, Australia had found itself in 2018 as a constructive dialogue partner with the unique advantage of strategic distance. Unfortunately, Australia has failed to capitalise on this position since.

Since 2018 there have been few developments in producing a legally binding playbook for the hotly contested waters. China has continued to deploy its growing naval power and has been involved in minor skirmishes with Filipino and Vietnamese fishing trawlers in the Spratly and Paracel Islands. Concurrently, America’s strategic

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stance on the South China Sea under the previous Trump administration had become increasingly bellicose. Former U.S. Defence Secretary Mark Esper, in the clearest terms to date, stated in July 2020 that the U.S. was “not going to cede this region, an inch of ground...to another country”.29 Meanwhile, ASEAN-led efforts to expedite the CoC process have proceeded at a painfully slow pace. In the past two years, only 20 pages of a draft framework have been written and the crux of the agreement – that of legally binding status – has been rejected by China. Expectations of Vietnam, the most assertive ASEAN claimant, bringing the issue to the forefront as ASEAN 2020 chair have also gone sour. In an ASEAN heads of state summit hosted by Vietnam in July 2020, discussions of a CoC were almost entirely sidelined. With a lack of diplomatic progress and wedged between the U.S. and China’s militarisation of the debate, ASEAN has now found itself losing grip of the forces which will drive its geo-strategic future. It is with this in mind that Singaporean Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, stressed that ASEAN “must avoid being caught in the middle or forced into invidious choices”.30

Australia has long maintained its neutrality with respect to territorial disputes in the South China Sea. As a state party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Australia has shown restrained support of the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal verdict which rejected China’s legal claims of maritime sovereignty in the seas. Yet only a few days after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo began encouraging a coalition against “China’s tyranny” in July 2020, Australia formally rejected China’s legal claims in its strongest terms. In a formal letter send to the United Nations, Australia stated that China’s maritime actions “had no legal basis”.31 At the same time, Australian warships were also reported to have closely encountered Chinese naval vessels during patrols in the contested waters.32 This break from strategic ambiguity has taken part amongst wider anti-China sentiment in Australia. The introduction of harsh foreign interference laws in 2018 and a call for a global investigation into the origins of COVID–19 by Prime Minister Scott Morrison form part of this strategic turn. China’s clear response, a deep freeze on bilateral communication and crushing tariffs implemented upon key Australian exports, has sent shock waves through foreign ministries across the world. As a result, Australia’s strategic distance in ASEAN’s eyes is now falling apart at the seams. This will encourage ASEAN policy makers to look instead to other partners such as South Korea or Japan for support and guidance; in turn, lessening Australia’s strategic influence.

Conclusion

This article has explored Australia’s engagement on three issues of recent ASEAN-Australia relations. Since 2018 there has been considerable growth in joint security cooperation, as shown in Australia’s participation in the Filipino suppression of ISIL in Marawi and its continued investment in Indonesian security forces. Nevertheless, both ASEAN and Australia must work harder on humanising counter-terrorism strategies, blunting the growing allure of Islamic extremism at a local level. Economically, we have never been as interconnected or free to access each other’s once heavily protected markets. Yet, there still remains considerable potential in expanding Australian exports in previously untapped ASEAN economies such as Vietnam. Australia must also aggressively raise its Asia literacy to properly compete in culturally and linguistically diverse ASEAN markets. Finally, Australia’s antagonistic posturing towards China has corroded its appeal to ASEAN as a strategic partner. This will undoubtedly affect any constructive role Australia can play in supporting a legally binding CoC, a role thought entirely possible in 2018. In over fifty years of cooperation, ASEAN-Australian relations have never been as deeply interconnected as they are today. The Sydney Special Summit was a bold reflection of this diplomatic good will. Nevertheless, this must not distract from the work that continues to lie ahead.

References

A FUTURE OF MARITIME SECURITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: A LOOK INTO THE TRILATERAL COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT FROM THE PHILIPPINES’ PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

Internal armed conflicts, terrorism, and transnational crime, predominantly facilitated across the seas, remain a serious problem for three maritime border-sharing countries in Southeast Asia: Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. These countries have been experiencing terrorist attacks for decades, threatening economic development, peace and security, and the overall well-being of their people. What is more alarming is the interconnection of various groups from these countries, enabling financial and logistical support including the transfer of active fighters on the ground. While ISIS is continuously losing its foothold in Arab territories, its ideology is still influential among terrorist groups in Southeast Asia.¹

This article explores the Trilateral Cooperative Agreement (TCA), a minilateral security framework developed by Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines in 2016 to secure the Sulu-Celebes Seas from terrorism activities and transnational crime. How does the TCA contribute to securing the Sulu-Celebes Seas? How does it align with the Philippines’ National Security Agenda in terms of responding to security challenges and strengthening of maritime security to safeguard its socio-economic activities? What are the challenges faced by the Philippines in relation to the effectiveness of the TCA? The Philippines’ experience is used as a case study to analyse the implementation of the TCA.

This article is descriptive research with significant dependence on existing secondary sources such as articles, journal publications, and studies related to the topic. Its contribution to existing literature lies in providing an exploratory study on how transnational crimes and terrorism are enabled by a lack of strengthened cross-border maritime security in the Sulu-Celebes seas; and how the TCA, as a minilateral security effort, is a positive move in forging transnational cooperation to solve transnational threats in Southeast Asia. The author argues that the TCA is a suitable complementary mechanism to strengthen the efforts for overall security in the Sulu-Celebes Seas, in order to achieve peace and economic prosperity for people who have long-suffered from the effects of terrorism and insecurity.

Terrorism and transnational criminal activities in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines

Terrorism is not new in Southeast Asia; in fact the region is considered as a base for terrorist operations.² Since the 1990s, Al Qaeda has established a network in Southeast Asia by setting-up regional offices responsible for holding meetings and planning in support of the group’s global terrorism operations. For example, Al Qaeda’s Manila cell, a regional office established by Osama bin Laden’s brother-in-law Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, was active in the early to mid–1990s. It was responsible for the ‘Bojinka plot’, a plan to assassinate Pope John Paul II during his visit to Manila in 1995. The penetration of global terrorist groups in Southeast Asia was made possible due to loose border and financial controls that enabled the groups to transfer, transmit, and launder money easily in the region.

² Bruece Vaughn, et. al., Terrorism in Southeast Asia (Congressional Research Service) 2, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RL34934.pdf
Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines have suffered from varying degrees of terrorist attacks for decades. In Indonesia, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) carried out the bloody 2002 Bali attacks which killed more than 200 individuals. Although the Indonesian government has enforced numerous counter-terrorism measures since 2002, such as the establishment of Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme (BNPT) – a national agency mainly tasked with curbing terrorism, terrorist activities still persist. Recently on 1 June 2020, a police officer was killed while another was injured when a Daesh group attacked a police station in Kalimantan.

Although Malaysia has recorded no violent attacks so far, the country remains a source, transit point, and destination of terrorists from groups including ISIS, Abu Sayyaf, Al Qaeda, and JI, who are travelling to Indonesia and the southern Philippines. Several kidnap-for-ransom incidents have occurred within Malaysian territory in the past decade. In August 2018, a kidnap-for-ransom attempt was stopped by Malaysian forces while on 2 September 2018, Indonesian fishermen were kidnapped off the coast of Semporna in Sabah.

In the Philippines, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) has carried out numerous attacks and is also involved in kidnapping for ransom, piracy, and smuggling in the Southern Mindanao areas. Included in the United States Terrorist Watchlist since 1997, the ASG has deep connections with JI and Al Qaeda. In 2014, they pledged allegiance to ISIS to establish a Wilayah (capital) in the region. The first attempt to seize and hold an urban territory by ISIS-affiliated extremists in Southeast Asia is the Marawi Siege in 2017 that resulted in the death of 920 militants, 165 soldiers, and 47 civilians; as well as the rescue of 1,780 hostages and displacement of 360,000 people. Although key leaders of the ISIS-linked Maute Group were killed during the siege, the group is still active. In April 2020, Filipino troops had an encounter with Abu Sayyaf fighters in Sulu which resulted in the death of 11 soldiers and 14 others being wounded. During the feast of Eid al-Adha the same year, another military encounter with ASG took place in Patikul, Sulu, killing three soldiers, six members of the ASG, and wounding three other soldiers.

The Sulu-Celebes Seas and transnational crimes

The Sulu-Celebes seas are large bodies of water bordering Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines in the eastern part of Southeast Asia, with a combined approximate size of 900,000 square kilometres. The maritime trade routes through the seas are vital in the region to facilitate cross-border movement for international navigation and are safer routes for big tankers navigating to and from East Asia and the Middle East due to the depth constraints of the Straits of Malacca. The seas are also used for international shipping from Australia to Southeast and Northeast Asia and vice versa. More than 100,000 ships carrying 55 million metric tons and 18 million passengers, worth an estimated US$40 billion worth of trade, pass through the seas yearly. For the Philippines in particular, the East Kalimantan route is vital for its energy security since 70 per cent of its coal imports (amounting to US$800 million) from Indonesia pass through it yearly.

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14 Storey, “Trilateral Security Cooperation”.
On the other hand, the seas are also considered one of the most dangerous maritime areas in the world.16 Key dangers are the organized crime by terrorist groups in the area, in particular by the ISIS-linked ASC.17 According to the ReCAAP (Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against ships in Asia) Half-Yearly Report (2017),18 between 1995 and 2012, 41 per cent of the world’s piracy occurred in Southeast Asia with the Sulu-Celebes Seas as a major hotspot. In most cases, Abu Sayaf claimed responsibility.19 Based on an Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) 2019 Report, ransom money from the kidnapping of both locals and foreigners is a source of funds to purchase weapons, sustenance of ASG members and families, and to buy political protection from local politicians. In a 2019 report by ReCAAP,20 from 2016 to 2019, there have been 29 incidents of abduction of crews in the Sulu-Celebes Seas in total (18 actual and 11 attempted incidents) that were reported by the Philippines Coast Guard.

Aside from piracy activities, these seas have been considered as passageways for terrorists coming into and going beyond Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Members of JI are using the seas to reach training camps in the Philippines and connect with other terrorist groups there, such as the ASC, by traveling from Kalimantan Timur to Sabah and then to the Tawi-Tawi or Sulu areas.21 According to Rommel Banlaoi, a Filipino terrorism expert, several routes are used by terrorists for cross-border operations. Among the routes identified (see Figure 1 below) are the following: Manado to Sanghile islands (Indonesia) and to General Santos City (Philippines) and vice versa; Manado to Talaud Islands and then to Davao; and Sandakan and Mapun (Malaysia) to the Tawi-Tawi Islands, then to the Zamboanga areas (Philippines) and vice versa.22

**Figure 1: Transit routes of foreign fighters heading to the Philippines using Malaysian and Indonesian territories as entry point (The Defense Post)**

These events and developments in terrorism are a serious threat for the Philippines and bordering countries due to the cross-regional network of terrorists. The easy connection of terrorist networks is largely due to poor maritime security in the Sulu-Celebes Seas. While completely eradicating the operation and existence of terrorist groups remains an internal task for the respective governments, combating cross-regional terrorist operations requires transnational cooperation. As a response to these threats, Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia entered a Trilateral Cooperative Agreement in July 2016 aimed at guarding the Sulu-Celebes Seas.

The Trilateral Cooperative Agreement (2016-present)

The TCA was signed to define the cooperative arrangement between the three countries in securing the Sulu-Celebes Seas. Among the activities outlined are: To conduct maritime and air patrols; render immediate assistance; share information and intelligence; and establish a focal point and hotline of communication. The agreement is composed of a naval and air patrol patterned on the Malacca Strait Patrols (MSP) model. In June 2017, the parties launched the Trilateral Maritime Patrol and in October, the Trilateral Air Patrol. Due to existing territorial conflicts, the countries adopted a ‘non-prejudicial clause’ to define a map that would be used for coordinated patrol; the map has no legal hold on claims over boundaries. A ‘sea lane corridor’ has also been established to cater synchronized patrols – each country patrols their own territory but in a coordinated manner. There are also naval arrangements for ‘hot pursuit’ – the right to cross into neighboring waters to chase down maritime criminals or provide immediate assistance to a ship in trouble. Three maritime coordination centers (one in each country) – in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi for the Philippines; Tawau, Sabah for Malaysia; and Tarakan, North Kalimantan for Indonesia – have also been established for information sharing and monitoring purposes.

Since the TCA’s inception, several developments have taken place. Consistent information sharing among countries through the designated coordination hubs has been rolled out. In 2019, the three countries finally entered into a joint land exercise held in Tarakan, North Kalimantan, Indonesia from 29 July to 7 August. The exercise, which included training on shooting and close combat, handling of terrorism threats, and friendship-building among armed forces, aimed to enhance border cooperation and contribute to the general peace, security, and economic progress of the area. With consistent information sharing and patrolling, the TCA appears to have had some immediate results. IPAC reported that there were no abductions at the seas from March 2017 to September 2018; the period where air and naval trilateral patrols started to take place.

Interests of the Philippines

Considering that a country’s entry to this kind of military agreement entails costs and resources needed for its operations, why should the Philippines invest in it? The country’s National Security Agenda 2017–2022 specifies the need to resolve problems on terrorism and transnational crimes to ensure the security of the state, its social institutions, protection of properties, and keeping people safe from all forms of threats, both local and abroad. The Philippines recognizes the need for enhanced cooperative inter-state maritime security and defence arrangements alongside efforts to modernize its internal defence system. The Philippines aligns with this strategy of the government. Securing socio-economic activities in the Sulu-Celebes seas is a top concern for the Philippines. Since ancient times, the people of the southernmost part of the country engaged in barter trade with Sabah in North Borneo to import basic commodities. The isolation of remote island communities that are far from

25 IPAC, “Protecting Sulu-Sulawesi Seas.”
26 Ibid.
29 Ibid 21.
central trading ports in the country, and shared cultural and familial ties, drives them to engage in dangerous and under-regulated cross-border trading nearer Sabah to augment their needs.

A study conducted by the Asia Foundation highlighted that the increased security risks in the last decade had caused disruption on the trading system in the region. Malaysia moved to block barter trade with the Philippines in 2017 in response to a spate of kidnappings of Malaysian nationals. The blockages have resulted in the loss of estimated US$400,000–1 million among Malaysian traders while in the Philippines it resulted in an increase in prices of commodities by 70 per cent, adding to already poor living conditions in the region. This clearly shows that the lack of security in the shared maritime border not only aids terrorism but also hits the local economy which supports the already poor economic conditions of people engaging in the barter trade system.

Challenges in securing the Sulu-Celebes seas in the case of the Philippines

The challenges for the Philippines in securing the Sulu-Celebes Seas from terrorist networks are due to lack of capacity and facilities available, outdated immigration law that would respond on contemporary challenges, and existing territorial claims among TCA-member states. According to Captain Dario Yanto Jr., Chief of Territorial Division of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, securing and controlling borders in the Sulu-Celebes seas is hard due to unstable communications, electronics, and information system networks for immediate reporting of incidents occurring in the coastal areas. The current capacity of sensors such as surface and air radars to monitor the area is very limited. Since terrorists and criminals use small speedboats in their operations, a quick response is necessary or they can escape in spite of coordinating centers having information about such criminal activities. Furthermore, the limited number of naval and coast guard patrol boats affects the efficiency of the patrol schemes. At present, the country’s Marine Domain Awareness Technology does not even cover the waters in the southern Philippines.

The poor implementation of outdated Philippine immigration laws (i.e. the Philippines Immigration Act of 1940) is another challenge. According to Capt. Yanto, based on reports, foreign nationals can enter and depart from various areas in the island municipalities of Tawi-Tawi through the use of small watercraft due to insufficient designated border crossing and immigration offices. Currently, there is one immigration field office located in Bongao and a Border Crossing Station in Taganak, Tawi-Tawi. The problem however, is the entry through islands where immigration control is not present, like in Sibutu Island which is closer to Sabah. In a phone call with the Jolo Immigration Field Office, Chief Officer Abdusalim Salihuddin noted that currently there is no immigration consulate located in Sabah and Indonesia, bordering Tawi-Tawi. The existence of such immigration consulates can be a big help in monitoring people leaving Sabah and Indonesia and going to the Philippines. This problem is also prevalent because laws supporting immigration control are outdated. In a statement, the Immigration Commissioner Jaime Morente pointed out that the Immigration Law of 1940 is no longer responsive to the present needs of the country where terrorism, human trafficking, and borderless economies are taking place, which were not present before.

Unsettled territorial claims among the three countries can also pose a problem in the continuity of the TCA. Border issues limit the hot pursuit operations due to sovereignty issues. The Philippines still has claims over Sabah. Its effect on bilateral ties with Malaysia might not be visible at present but it would affect future ties should the claims over Sabah become more serious. In the Celebes Sea, Indonesia and Malaysia have a standing maritime boundary dispute in the Ambalat area where tensions between both countries’ navies resulted in

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33 Captain Dario Yanto Jr., personal interview by the author, April 17, 2019.
standoffs in 2005 and 2009.⁷⁷ Although there is a map with non-prejudicial character in use, it is delicate to carry out smooth and legal navy and air patrols in areas with serious territorial disputes as infringement of territorial sovereignty is very likely to happen. Until now, no hot pursuit has been conducted largely due to sensitivity of sovereignty issues.

The worsened socio-economic condition in the region is also a factor that contributes to terrorism and transnational crimes. The failure of the government to realize that the issue of security threats are the result of poor socio-economic and political conditions should be recognized. Solving security issues must not be a military effort alone but rather should engage civic and economic policies to improve the well-being of the people. Based on the recent poverty report of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the new Bangsamoro Region recorded the highest poverty incidence in 2015 and 2018. An estimated 2.5 million Filipinos have insufficient income to afford basic food and non-food items. Poverty makes people susceptible to engage in illegal activities and they are subject to the influence of terrorists in exchange for food or money.

Conclusion

For some time, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines have pursued counter-terrorism measures independently, yet terrorism and maritime crimes in the region continue to grow. The cross-border network of terrorist organizations and perpetuation of transnational criminal activities that resulted in decades-long insecurity in the Sulu-Celebes Seas exposed the need for an inter-state maritime security effort. Finally, the signing of the Trilateral Cooperative Agreement served as a testament that these bordering countries need to work hand-in-hand to achieve their common goal. The commencement of TCA is a success in itself to strengthen maritime security in the region. The alternate naval and air patrols, inter-military information sharing, and coordination of military operations are a big help to monitor terrorists’ movement and to stop transnational crimes in the area. However, TCA is not a one-size-fits-all security mechanism. Its success lies on the commitment and capacity of each state to develop modernized internal defence system and strong institutions to put an end to internal and external security threats.

It is undeniable that the Philippines struggles to contain terrorism on its own and its entry to TCA will boost the country’s counter-terrorism efforts. By looking at the country’s case, several challenges in the effectiveness of TCA to secure the Sulu-Celebes Seas were identified. First, the lack of resources and modernized facilities are problems that can undermine the efficiency and the duration of patrols. A quick response is necessary otherwise criminals can escape despite coordinating centers having information about their criminal activities. To prevent the cross-border movements of criminals, more stringent implementation of immigration laws and deployment of border control officers is crucial, as is the establishment of border control facilities up to small islands that are used as transitory points. The existing territorial claims should also be resolved as soon as possible to further widen the scope of TCA as far as hot pursuits and other cross-border operations are concerned. Lastly, there is a need to expand beyond military operations. It is necessary to engage civil society and other government agencies to address the poor socio-economic and political conditions in the region that require multi-sectoral efforts to prevent people from engaging in illegal activities. The key to fully stop atrocities perpetrated by these terrorist groups and other criminal organizations is a combination of transnational effort on common areas of concern and strengthening of national defence and security. The fight to secure the region against terrorism is far from over but certainly, the TCA is a good start in paving the way for maritime security in Southeast Asia.

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⁷⁷ Storey.
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The Current National Security Strategy

The 2020 Defence Strategic Update signalled a shift in the Australian Government’s response to the changing Indo-Pacific security environment. The adjustment seeks to address national security threats through a greater investment in domestic military capability and to facilitate three key strategic pillars; (1) shaping Australia’s strategic environment, (2) deterring actions against Australia’s interest, and (3) responding with credible military force.¹

The enhancement of Australia’s ability to “project military power and deter action against Australia”² will require a financial investment of A$575 billion AUD over the coming decade.³ Specific capability development will focus on long-range sensors and strike weapons, increased munitions stockpiles, satellite systems, upgrades to Australia’s over-the-horizon radar capability, anti-ship and land strike guided weapons, and long-range surface-to-air weapons.⁴

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A key criticism of the policy re-alignment is the decision to invest in specific capabilities to challenge a near-term adversary through conventional military response and kinetic weapons, which only serve to benefit a niche facet of the Australian Government, and arguably do not provide tangible benefit to the Australian taxpayer. It can be argued that much of the capability outcomes highlighted in the update will be obsolete before they come to fruition, and that investment in increasing militarisation within the region is counter to Australia's security aims, serving only to further escalate tensions. Ultimately, the policy can be seen as a $575 billion investment in capability which may not be delivered for a decade or longer, yet is intended to counter a threat in the present day. Additionally, when considering the aims of the investment there is the underlying hope that if strategic deterrence is successful, the multi-million-dollar systems will never need to be used.

In contrast, climate change poses a national security threat which permeates all layers of Australia's regional and domestic security. In a region facing increasing unrest, climate related stressors will exacerbate underlying tensions, further degrading the security environment. And yet, Australia does not have an overarching climate security policy.

In this article, I argue the need to reframe climate change as Australia's greatest national security threat. I will outline the emerging risks of climate change effects and how they relate to national security, I consider the security impacts of climate change effects in both a domestic and regional context, and propose potential mitigation strategies through Australian sovereign investment and multi-national regional co-operation.

Climate Change as a Security Threat

Climate related events are increasing exponentially and occurring simultaneously globally. In the past 10 years Australia has suffered 14 serious natural disaster events with extensive material damage, loss of life and significant associated cost; the economic costs of the 2019–20 fire season alone are estimated to exceed A$100 billion.

More broadly, many of Australia’s neighbours are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate variability. In general, they are geographically isolated, heavily aid-dependent, dislocated from global trade networks and have limited access to freshwater and natural resources.

Generally, discussion around climate change focuses on the broad and overarching impacts – increasing terrestrial and oceanic temperatures, extreme weather events, and rising sea levels. When re-framing climate change as a national security threat, there is a requirement to consider climate effects in their entirety, as a set of changing meteorological variables that trigger other biophysical, ecological and sociological outcomes. In short, climate change effects represent stressors and threat multipliers that occur not in isolation, but in the context of other social, political, ecological, and economic events.
The development of the relationship between climate change and national security occurs across three key impact levels. At the highest impact level there are the overarching effects of climate change: the extreme weather events, and increased temperatures and rising sea levels. These in turn act as a catalyst for second order impacts including an increase in terrestrial and marine heatwaves, increases in drought, greater global mean precipitation, increases in contrast between wet and dry regions, the movement of terrestrial and oceanic flora and fauna species, decrease in oceanic oxygen content.\(^{12}\) This vast array of biophysical stressors then intersects with people and societies at the third impact level through single and compound extreme environmental events. This includes risks to food access and storage, disruption of food networks, risks to global supply chains, access to water, and increased population displacement. The outcomes of this result in risk of injury, loss of life and broader risks to human health, the erosion of economic livelihood, loss of property, and ultimately lead to risk of intensified violence and effects on population movement.

It is at this intersection of environmental hazards and human impacts that climate change becomes a significant security threat. Implications for human security have effects on national security which, in turn, lead to risks for global systems and stability. Erosion of national security may lead to state conflict, political instability and heightened tensions over resources, ultimately threatening regional stability and global supply chains, exacerbating already present stressors and heightening the risk of international conflict.

In order to proactively address the security threat posed by climate change, a widening of the aperture of what constitutes a national security threat is required. Governments will need to consider how a national security enterprise should respond when the threats to citizens and interests domestically and internationally come from a non-military threat.

### Figure 3: Levels of climate related threats and their intersection with national security

Arguably, the COVID–19 pandemic presents an opportunity for a case study of this concept. We are currently living through a global threat which has emerged from the ‘natural’ world. COVID–19 has significantly eroded global economic interests and has to date, claimed the lives of more than 1.5 million people across the globe. In the United States alone, the daily death toll at one point reached the level of the lives lost in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In response to this impact on human lives, post 9/11 there was a significant and rapid re-structuring of the United States Government executive branch to focus on addressing the threat to national security posed by terrorism. In contrast, very few governments have in any way re-structured their national security enterprises to seek to address the emerging threats from climate change, such as potential future global pandemics. This difference in responses to two threat vectors highlights the current mismatch between the potential emerging threats and how most national security enterprises are constructed to address security challenges.

The recognition of the intersection between climate change and the implications for human security requires a re-consideration of what constitutes national security, and more specifically what constitutes a national security

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threat. Rather than the three key strategic pillars outlined in the 2020 Strategic Update (shaping, deterring, and responding), the Australian Government should focus on a proactive climate security plan centred around two core strategic elements; domestic capability adaptation and regional security co-operation.

**Domestic Capability Adaptation**

Ensuring strategic capability stems from investment in the correct resources and competencies. In order to ensure Australia is best placed to address the challenges of climate change effects, the core element of domestic capability adaptation would involve the Australian Government’s decision to re-frame Australia’s greatest security threat, and re-investment of the allocated AUD$575 billion Defence 2020–30 budget into developing sovereign capabilities designed to manage and mitigate climate change effects.

A number of initiatives aimed at capability acquisition, Australian Defence Force (ADF) restructure, and personnel skill development would be a greater investment in Australia’s future national security. These initiatives could consist of, but are not limited to, the following:

- The acquisition of assets for the development of a firefighting fleet, such as: additional specialised firefighting aircraft held at a national level, and investment in modular palletised airborne firefighting systems for use on multi-use aircraft (such as the C–130J, C–17A, C–27J) as required;15
- The recruitment of an additional 5,000 ADF personnel (both permanent and reserve) to form a dedicated climate effects management branch – with a significant investment in a framework outlining their purpose, focus, training and operational outcomes;16
- Additional Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) related assets such as mass water purification systems, a broader range of temporary modular bridges and large scale temporary accommodation assets;
- The development of new exercises and training focusing on disaster relief, management and prevention (to be conducted both in a range of environments both domestically and regionally) with integration between ADF and civilian entities, as well as at-risk regional partner nations.

Additionally, beyond Defence investment the Australian Government should seek to implement broader initiatives to provide security to the Australian population internally. This includes:

- Investment in ‘disaster-proofing’ domestic and regional key infrastructure – including redundancy planning,
- Investment in regional infrastructure to assist with management of climate effects, such as: additional short-notice stand-up airfields, emergency displaced persons shelters and security infrastructure,
- Investment in domestic food and water supply and storage planning, to ensure sufficient agricultural development and to secure Australia’s access to key resources,
- An investigation into the disease vectors most likely to increase in threat to Australia as a result of climate change effect progression – with a reported outcome to facilitate greater investment in domestic medical research and production of medical treatments targeted at countering these threats,
- The replacement of the current Australian Government Climate Risk Group, which has not met since March 2018, with a more active climate change security adaptation planning committee.17 This should comprise representatives from Defence, Cabinet, key non-government organisations, the community, field subject matter experts and key department leads.

Against the backdrop of 2020, implementing these initiatives is likely to present a challenge for the Australian Government. The release of the 2020 Federal Budget demonstrated the economic impact of the COVID-19

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16 Australian Department of the Senate – Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee, Implications of Climate Change for Australia’s National Security (Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia, 2018), 68.

pandemic, and any significant policy changes resulting in re-allocation of billions of dollars will undoubtedly draw criticism from some domestic groups who prioritise short-term domestic economic investment. However, utilising the funding already allocated to Defence and security may serve to minimise this.

It is also likely that the Australian Government would receive international pressure and scrutiny from some nations who may see a significant shift in Australian strategic defence policy, so soon after the release of the 2020 Strategic Update, as an opportunity to undermine Australia’s resilience on the international stage and to bolster their national significance.

Finally, although separate from Australia’s emissions reduction policy, the announcement of a climate change effect adaptation and security policy is likely to once again draw negative attention on the Australian Government for our current stance on emissions reduction targets.

In contrast to this, there are significant domestic and international benefits of the proposed initiatives. The re-framing of Australia’s national security strategy is a highly visible activity which will provide a tangible result delivery, and represents a proactive stance on addressing the human security implications of climate change.

The assets proposed are multi-purpose across the public domain, rather than solely providing a conventional military outcome, and they can be leveraged regionally to provide support and training to partner nations. Additionally, unlike the military modernisation plan outlined in the 2020 Strategic Update, investment in a climate change adaptation policy does not further escalate the increasing militarisation of the Indo-Pacific region – ultimately assisting to de-escalate a conventional military threat to Australia’s national security.

Regional Security Co-Operation

For Pacific nations such as Tuvalu, Kiribati, and Micronesia, climate change is a genuine existential threat, with the capacity to erase their territorial footprints. In conjunction, Southeast Asia is one of the world’s most vulnerable regions to climate change impacts such as droughts, floods, cyclones, sea level rise, and heatwaves. Enhancing future stability and security within our region will require proactive planning to address climate change impacts through international cooperation on the key policy pillars of socio-economic development, infrastructure planning, disaster response training, health and the environment.

Through Australia’s strategic partnership with the ASEAN Member States the first step to addressing the stability and security challenges facing the region would be the establishment of a broader regional climate security action group. Unlike current groups focused on prevention, this group – comprising key government and non-government organisation members – would focus on climate change effect planning and management, laying the foundation for proactive climate change adaptation investment within one of the most climate vulnerable regions in the world.

Working closely as regional partners, the value in this action group would be to develop a common understanding on climate change challenges; elevating individual national concerns to a regional platform, and the promotion of open information sharing on individual national plans, capabilities, and scientific research and development.

Once established, the climate security action group should seek to develop a collaborative regional strategy to address each of the key areas of climate induced security hazards; initial disaster response, population displacement, health management, and food, water and resource security.

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This strategy will require regular review and continuous improvement. As the outcomes of climate change are realised within the Indo-Pacific region of interest, the nature of events and impacts may be different to those anticipated. Therefore, agility within the collaborative regional strategy will be important to facilitate the most effective and efficient management of climate adaptation.

Outcomes of the plan may include: collective investment in a regional climate related disease vector plan, and cross-national medical research collaboration to seek to address future challenges; multi-national defence exercises focused around enhancing disaster relief management and response in various regional environments; and the development of a regional climate refugee management policy.

There is no assumption that the development of an effective regional climate security action group will be an easy initiative to commence or to manage to fruition. Many nations within the Indo-Pacific region are presently inward facing, focused on domestic challenges and development, and are likely to remain so for some time – especially in the wake of the COVID–19 pandemic. Additionally, as the Chinese Communist Party seek to grow their influence within the region through the implementation of policies such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the threat to stability and security posed by the emerging tensions between national powers is likely to be seen as a short-term security priority for many nations within the regional community.22

Yet, when framed within the context of long-term effects, the benefits to the early establishment of a regional action group to mitigate and manage climate change impacts within our region becomes apparent. The formation of the group would allow for targeted planning and regional aid investment to address specific vulnerabilities at a national level, with the perspective of understanding how capability and infrastructure investment enhances security at a regional level; such as domestic investment in assets with dual purpose for enhanced regional disaster response.

Additionally, the collaborative environment would facilitate greater influence at other international forums, such as the United Nations, to seek proactive policy implementation – such as the broadening of international refugee definitions to include those impacted by climate change.23 Within a broader regional security context, collaborative engagement through a regional forum focused on a non-national common enemy (ecological effects) also provides a useful alternative platform for diplomatic engagement, communication and potential de-escalation of tensions in the fluid sphere of emerging regional political challenges.

Conclusion

Traditionally, national security has been thought of in terms of state threats, the risk of military conflicts and terrorism. In the past, threats to Australia’s security interests have been considered through one vector of threat, however, this framework is no longer useful when bringing a phenomenon like climate change into the context of a direct national security threat.

The exponentially increasing effects of climate change will have an impact at the local, regional and global levels of the strategic environment.24 With the increasing severity and frequency of climate change related disasters globally, Australia must re-frame and escalate its consideration of climate change as a threat to Australia’s national security. The issue is wholly novel; there is no historical example for Australia to rely on or to provide insight into the potential outcomes of various approaches and initiatives. This is a rare opportunity for Australia to show leadership through investment in resources and competencies which will not only protect and assist the Australian people, but also provide support to our more vulnerable partner nations and facilitate regional security, thus aiding in ensuring Australia’s own national security.

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Political-Security Cooperation - Chapter 1


DERADICALISATION DURING THE COVID–19 PANDEMIC: A NEED FOR ADAPTATION TO ONLINE-BASED COUNSELLING PROGRAMMES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA?

Unaesah Rahmah & Ahmad Helmi Hasbi | Singapore

Introduction

As countries around the globe prepare for the COVID–19 vaccination rollout, most are still grappling with the pandemic threat. According to Bloomberg's COVID–19 Tracker, it would take years to achieve a considerable degree of global immunity. Significantly, COVID–19 has brought unprecedented change to global communities. Non-essential enterprises remain restricted and physical distancing rules are still implemented globally. As governments worldwide are coping with the daunting economic challenges caused by the pandemic, COVID–19 has also changed general social norms. For instance, the restricted physical interactions and lengthy lockdowns have reportedly led to increasing internet penetration. People around the globe spend more time on the internet to ensure continuity of work and education. Experts suggest that increased online activities could raise the chances of people falling into the trap of radicalism and the risk of violent extremism. Thus, as the world continues to deal with the pandemic, governments must not let their guard down in their counter-terrorism efforts and continue to work on effective strategies.

The discussion on counter-terrorism during COVID–19, particularly deradicalisation and rehabilitation, is still limited. One concern is the assessment that COVID–19 has restructured governments' national priorities, with a possible negative impact on the budget allocation for the security sector. Some analysts, however, suggest that the situation can be advantageous to the counter-terrorism agenda because terrorist activities are themselves decreasing due to physical restrictions, among others. However, there has been a lack of studies on the effect of the pandemic on deradicalisation programmes and alternative programmatic solutions at a time when physical interaction is limited.

This article analyses the impact of the pandemic on traditional face-to-face deradicalisation programmes in three Southeast Asian countries facing different contexts and challenges – Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. To overcome the curbs put in place to deal with the spread of COVID–19 in many countries, the experience in these three countries suggests that technology should be an enabler to ensure the continuation of deradicalisation programmes. In the following sections, we highlight that first and foremost, governments must realise the need to form a robust, strategic counter-terrorism response through deradicalisation and rehabilitation programmes. These programmes require systematic tools and expertise as part of the strategy. Thus, we draw attention to counselling as an integral methodology and explore the feasibility of using technology for it. Thenceforth, we consider challenges and technological readiness of the three selected countries. Lastly, we conclude with recommendations for a sustainable strategic counter-terrorism response.

Deradicalisation Programmes: A Vital Strategic Response to Counter-Terrorism

While most countries take a punitive approach to terrorism by imprisoning terrorist offenders, they also complement this by designing and implementing deradicalisation and rehabilitation programmes in a prison setting. Enforcement of this strategic response, however, varies from one country to another depending on each government’s resources and capabilities. Some countries, like Singapore, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia, adopt structured and holistic programmes with varying degrees of resource allocation. While most governments lead such programmes using a partnership model between relevant ministries and local community organisations, other countries also use their programmes to develop intelligence on the terrorist network, as in the case of Indonesia. Obtaining intelligence enables governments to disrupt further terrorist attacks.6

Deradicalisation and rehabilitation programmes share common objectives: to assist terrorism offenders in achieving optimum independence from extremism; achieve the maximum capacity for a better-quality life, and be able to play a part in a healthy society.7 While deradicalisation involves an individual's cognitive element to instigate change, holistic rehabilitation employs several modes for a successful implementation. Among them are social, psychological, religious, educational, vocational, creative arts therapy and sport and recreational rehabilitation.8 As mentioned above, ultimately deradicalisation and rehabilitation aim to liberate radicalised offenders from demonstrating violent outlooks. It is noteworthy to highlight that there is no guarantee that a person’s mindset can change. Thus, in both approaches, counselling becomes a crucial factor in assessing the improvement of the offenders.

Counselling as Part of a Systematic Deradicalisation Strategy: The case of Southeast Asia

In the Southeast Asian context, the aim of rehabilitation and deradicalisation programmes in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, particularly, is to enable the renunciation of extremist ideology by the terrorist offender. Hence, religious counselling is one of the main features in the deradicalisation programmes run in these countries.9

Counselling is seen to play a vital role in bringing the desired cognitive and behavioural changes in radical inmates.10 Counsellor interventions are varied, ranging from assessing the emotional and mental health conditions of the individual, offering sympathy and emotional support, to having a religious debate and discussion on specific topics with the counselled person.11 Counselling is an integral part of deradicalisation as some research shows that the key to a successful deradicalisation is addressing terrorist inmates’ needs, narratives, and networks.12 Subsequently, the aim is to: (i) reduce inmates’ commitment to their individual goal; (ii) reduce commitment to violent means in achieving the goal; or (iii) restore alternative goals and concerns.13

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6 Angel Rabasa, "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists," [Santa Monica, California, United States: RAND, 2011]
10 The meaning of counselling might vary depending on the context in which the terms are being used and the person who is using the terms. In general, to counsel is to give advice or to provide some information that will assist the person being counselled in making a decision on working out a problem. See Peter C. Kratcoski, "Correctional Counselling and Treatment" (Ohio: Springer, 2019). However, in the context of deradicalisation, counselling is defined as an activity or specific planned intervention techniques that are used to bring about the desired changes of the inmates.

Deradicalisation during the COVID–19 Pandemic
Counselling, on top of education, networking, meaningful jobs, and therapy, can provide targeted individuals activities and opportunities that stimulate feelings of hope and purpose.14

Counselling inside prisons can take place in a one-to-one or group counselling setting. Some counselling sessions are conducted inside the prison during detention and continued upon release outside of prison, as in the Singapore approach. These post-release counselling sessions can be conducted through personal meetings, home visits, phone calls, chat rooms and emails.15 Deradicalisation counselling modes differ from one-to-one counselling to group or even family counselling.

Aside from changing the ideology of the inmates, counselling also aims to lead the offenders to be more productive members of the community and help create a more secure society. This is a preferable option compared to if offenders were harshly punished through long sentences in correctional facilities without undergoing ideological counselling. These approaches in balancing the treatment and punishment given to offenders are grounded in evidence-based programmes.16

The Southeast Asian context has indicated that one of the vital elements to ensuring successful counselling is a credible interlocutor who is able to establish a relationship and be seen as having authority to engage in theological debate with the inmates. Sukabdi underscores four critical stages in counselling, especially for terrorism offenders: (1) building relationship; (2) identification of problems and exploration; (3) problem-solving planning; and (4) applying solutions and closure.17 Angel Rabasa suggests that the success behind the deradicalisation programmes in Singapore and Saudi Arabia has been the utilisation of credible counsellors for both the religious and psychological aspects.18 He also adds that the counselling targets the family in order to create a supportive environment once the inmates return home.19

**Impact of COVID–19 on Counselling**

Physical distancing measures to deal with COVID–19 have impacted the traditional modes of counselling for deradicalisation programmes, viz, conducted on-site and through face-to-face meetings. In such a climate, the ability to continue the programmes through alternative technologically-enabled methods has also depended on the size of the country and the number of terrorist detainees it has to deal with. Countries with a large number of terrorist detainees and less advanced technology may face more difficulties compared to technologically advanced countries with a smaller number of terrorist detainees.

1. Indonesia

In Indonesia, when the government announced a state of emergency due to COVID–19 in March 2021, deradicalisation efforts were pushed into the online space. Spearheaded by the National Counter-Terrorism Agency in Indonesia, BNPT (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme), deradicalisation programmes such as prison counselling were facilitated with the help of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). BNPT also employs rehabilitated ex-terrorist offenders as partners in its deradicalisation programmes. Due to the restriction on prison visits during the pandemic, the prison authorities adopted video conferencing as a medium of communication for counselling between counsellor and inmates.20 Likewise, practitioners handling the mentoring programmes also turned to an online medium to facilitate countering violent extremism (CVE) endeavours with ex-detainees.

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16 Peter C. Kratcoski, “Correctional Counseling and Treatment.”
17 Zora A. Sukabdi, “Psychological Rehabilitation for Ideology-Based Terrorism Offenders”
18 Angel Rabasa, “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists.”
19 Ibid.
2. Malaysia

At the time of writing, Malaysia has recorded 333,040 infections with 1,325 new infections reported on average each day. The COVID–19 situation in Malaysia remains fluid and the country has seen several targeted lockdowns imposed on severely highly affected states on and off. This includes prisons holding Malaysian terrorist offenders such as the Kamunting correctional facility in Perak. With the emergence of thousands of positive COVID–19 cases in prisons across Malaysia, the authorities have enforced strict movement controls around the area heading to the affected prisons. This resulted in deradicalisation initiatives involving external parties and individuals being halted and interrupted. Although the authorities had announced ease of restrictions, it is not clear whether the prison programmes have resumed.

It is unlikely that Malaysia’s deradicalisation programmes which involve counselling, have shifted to online mediums. We assess the reasons for this to be twofold. Firstly, the country’s prisons and detentions centres remain in deplorable conditions. Underfunded by the government, detention centres are outsized in their infrastructure and facilities. Reports even suggest that standard human rights of the inmates are often overlooked and taken care of less. Second, the dearth of sound, verified data about digitalisation ventures in Malaysian prison facilities signals the country's ineptitude in meeting the demand of today's digital age for its strategic counter-terrorism response.

3. Singapore

Similar to its neighbouring countries, Singapore’s rehabilitation programme has also been affected by the pandemic. However, the Singapore Prisons Service (SPS) continues to work with volunteer groups and agencies to ensure that detainees remain engaged in rehabilitation programs. This was made possible by a sophisticated technology system that was already in place prior to the pandemic. Prudent measures have been put in place early to curb the spread of the virus in the community and prisons. As the country have been able to contain the community cases with an average of 13 imported infections a day, some core rehabilitation programmes have resumed their physical settings.

Technology as a Possible Solution for Counselling: Assessing Feasibility

The adoption of video-based counseling is not new. Since 1961, psychologists have adopted video conferencing or interactive videophones in health care and correctional centres. Progressive digitalisation of telecommunication lines, rapid transmission rates, and better image and sound quality has expanded the use of this medium in recent years. For example, Justice Action (JA), an Australian-based non-profit organisation, has proposed computer usage and online counselling for the country’s prison systems. According to JA, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) – treatment widely employed in counselling to facilitate offenders’ rehabilitation processes – is viable through the online medium. Experts suggest that online video communication provides a richer interaction because of the real-time experience.

However, the level of acceptance of video counselling among practitioners remains low. This could be partly attributed to the different levels of digital literacy among practitioners.\(^{30}\) Furthermore, video conferencing alters the kind of communication that can occur in the counselling session, making it challenging for counsellors to capture non-verbal communication and the subtle nuances that occur during the online session.\(^{31}\) It is also an expensive enterprise for which some governments are inadequately resourced, in terms of financial investment and human capacity. Moreover, governments also need to prepare for the security risk posed by the potential misuse of technology inside or outside prisons by the inmates. Taking these challenges into consideration, we assess the readiness and feasibility of online counselling for the aforementioned three countries below.

Singapore, a regional technology powerhouse, has adequate tools in place with regards to online counselling.\(^{32}\) Since 2004, SPS had started to enhance its prisons system and moved towards digitisation. Advanced systems such as the implementation of mobile devices known as PORTS (Prison Operation and Rehabilitation System) and DIRECT (Digitalisation of Inmate Rehabilitation and Corrections Tool) in 2017 proved to be handy during the current COVID–19 situation.\(^{33}\) Though these advancements were initially targeted to prepare for an unprecedented age shift due to the country’s declining birth-rate and shrinking workforce, it has allowed the country’s multi-pronged terrorist rehabilitation strategy to carry on in the virtual world, as pandemic restrictions have necessitated a downsizing of face-to-face interventions. Advanced technology has therefore enabled SPS and community partner agencies to continue more purposeful engagement with inmates and work on their holistic rehabilitative needs.

Malaysia’s current deradicalisation programme also involves online engagement as part of the country’s Integrated Deradicalisation Module for Detainees (Pemulihan). The module, administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs and conducted by the Prisons Department and Royal Malaysia Police, aims to sensitise detainees through the involvement of other modes of rehabilitation, including online platforms. Furthermore, the Malaysian government has also created a voluntary programme where detainees are able to interact with qualified scholars who are hired to hold discussions and dialogues in chat rooms pertaining to Islamic theological matters.\(^{34}\) In 2019, Malaysia claimed to head towards a smart prison system by adopting artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance its facilities.\(^{35}\) However, there is some doubt as to whether it is feasible for the country to run its smart-prison deradicalisation programme extensively. This is due to factors such as first, the unstable internet connection especially in rural areas;\(^{36}\) and second, the on-going political in-fighting between political parties in the country which may disrupt the government’s political will to push through deradicalisation efforts. The political crisis has seen three different governments administering the country within three years. Third, as the country continues to struggle during the pandemic, the national economic recovery and the healthcare sector may be prioritised above deradicalisation programmes.\(^{37}\)

As for Indonesia, its online deradicalisation programme has not been able to run smoothly. The agencies concerned are unable to conduct online counselling for all targeted inmates. With 117 prison inmates expected to go through the deradicalisation programme,\(^{38}\) during the pandemic, BNPT could only reach 30 deradicalisation partners, including ex-terrorist offenders, for the programme.\(^{39}\) Inadequate prison technological infrastructure

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34 Mizan Aslam, "Deradicalization Programs for SOSMA, POTA, and POCA Detainees in Malaysia," Middle East Institute, June 23, 2020.
Looking Ahead

With most countries’ national attention being focused on managing the widespread impact of the pandemic, prison deradicalisation programmes will likely remain affected in the near-term. Therefore, the reliance on the online space to run deradicalisation efforts, in conjunction with permitted offline initiatives, should continue to ensure uninterrupted and fruitful counselling programmes for each country’s terrorist offenders. Therefore, we propose the following recommendations:

Firstly, the authorities must seriously consider further enhancing their prison technological infrastructure. Although it is an expensive investment, its use in prison settings is crucial, especially with the on-going evolution of terrorism. For instance, prisons in Indonesia are under-resourced, understaffed and over-populated; they risk leaving inmates being further radicalised by hardened group members who are placed in the same correctional centre. Currently in this pandemic, the prison deradicalisation programme has mainly returned to the offline mode, however, post-release monitoring of inmates has not been adequately addressed. In 2020, the government released 127 terrorist inmates; however, in the same year, the country has also witnessed two attacks perpetrated by recidivists (a radicalised offender who continue, or return to, a previous radical behaviour) who were released before the pandemic. Amidst the current pandemic, the government now faces a more significant challenge with limited resources, including feeble internet access, which is critical infrastructure for online deradicalisation programmes. This has compounded the perennial problem of post-release deradicalisation efforts during COVID–19.

Secondly, though many countries have built up competencies in general counter-measures against online extremism, governments must also consider setting up digital expertise in rehabilitation and deradicalisation, particularly in prison settings. Digital literacy among practitioners should be an area that authorities must strengthen and build proficiency in. This could be done through bilateral/multilateral cooperation with internal/external partners. For example, in 2019, the Malaysian Home Ministry invited experts from developed countries such as China, Japan, and Singapore to review its prisons management and operations. It aimed to develop Malaysian Prison towards smart system by utilising AI within its facilities.

Lastly, governments should continue to share their intelligence, experiences, and challenges in improving deradicalisation and rehabilitation practices, as well as to ensure security in the region. Well-resourced and highly-plugged in countries like Singapore could extend technical assistance to the developing world to facilitate the successful integration of offenders to the community via innovative online ways. For example, Singapore has plugged in countries like Singapore could extend technical assistance to the developing world to facilitate the successful integration of offenders to the community via innovative online ways.

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GRAPPLING WITH ASEAN’S LANDMINE LEGACY: NEW APPROACHES TO EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE RISK EDUCATION

Heath Sloane | Australia

Introduction

Landmines and other explosive ordnance continue to exact a devastating toll on human life in ASEAN. In addition to inflicting civilian casualties, the dispersal of landmines and other explosive ordnance has rendered extensive tracts of land inaccessible for human use, impeding economic development in contaminated areas. Tasked with addressing landmine contamination in the bloc, the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center (ARMAC) has urged member states to improve explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) in order to reduce casualties. In its May 2020 report, ARMAC advocated for the implementation of what it terms as ‘Integrated Approaches’ to explosive ordnance risk education. ‘Integrated Approaches’ are designed to leverage complementarities across diverse sectors, stakeholders and technologies, ‘integrated approaches’ aim to achieve a greater overall improvement in the level of EORE and to minimise the risk posed by explosive ordnance. While ‘integrated approaches’ promise to augment EORE in countries suffering from landmine contamination, the novelty of these solutions risks failing to address the chronic weaknesses plaguing regional demining efforts – most notably reporting and victim surveillance. This paper will evaluate the implementation of ‘integrated approaches’ to EORE in ASEAN through close examination of select case studies of recent initiatives in Thailand and Myanmar.

Explosive Ordnance in ASEAN

Notwithstanding impressive demining efforts in recent decades, explosive ordnance continues to present a significant public health risk in six of the ten ASEAN member states. While the precise scale of the problem is unknown, six ASEAN member states have reported landmine contamination to varying degrees in recent years: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. To date, explosive ordnance left in the ground have reportedly claimed 100,000 casualties in Vietnam, over 50,000 casualties in Lao PDR, and approximately 3,500 casualties in Thailand. Between 1979 and 2019, landmines accounted for almost 65,000 casualties in Cambodia. Statistics on casualties in Myanmar are unclear, however some estimates suggest that there have been close to 5,000 casualties since 1999 – 1,044 of which occurred between 2015 and 2020. However, incomplete or inaccurate reporting may conceal the real magnitude of the problem.

The latter half of the 20th century saw the widespread use of landmines in the region, including during the Vietnam War (1963–1975), the Cambodian-Vietnamese War (1975–1978), the Sino-Vietnamese border conflicts (1979–1990) and the Cambodian Civil War (1978–1991). Recent territorial disputes between ASEAN member states – for example that between Thailand and Cambodia (2008–2013) – have also seen the use of landmines as a tool for hardening borders. Ongoing sectarian conflicts have seen a resurgence in the popularity of anti-personnel landmines, including in Myanmar’s 72-year-long civil war and in a protracted Communist insurgency in the Philippines. The extensive use of landmines in past and present conflicts ensures that explosive ordnance will continue to pose a public health risk into the future, creating an urgent need for effective ‘integrated approaches’ to EORE among affected ASEAN states.

Mechanisms for Explosive Ordnance Risk Education in ASEAN

A New Solution: Integrated Approaches to Explosive Ordnance Risk Education

While in its May 2020 report, ARMAC advocated for all ASEAN member states to adopt ‘integrated approaches’ to EORE, it stopped short of prescribing specific solutions to this end and opted instead to highlight four features of the ‘Integrated EORE’ framework that could be emulated.15

Firstly, ARMAC emphasised that ‘integrated solutions’ should be designed by default to be sensitive to the contextual complexities of each community such as governance and institutional barriers, the distribution and extent of contamination, cultural nuances, and the availability of resources. ARMAC was careful to underscore that there is no single universal model for EORE in ASEAN, and that it is incumbent on member states to design and implement localized solutions. Secondly, ‘Integrated Approaches’ to EORE should aim to amplify their reach through close coordination and collaboration with diverse sectors, institutions and stakeholders. By utilizing pre-existing infrastructure, networks and institutional arrangements, EORE can be delivered to more communities in a more cost-effective manner. For example, one case study discussed below examines how EORE has been integrated into the curriculum of at-risk schools in Thailand. Thirdly, the ARMAC framework aims to capitalise on new technologies and digital linkages to improve communication, facilitate information sharing, and streamline reporting. The application of digital solutions is also intended to support data collection and victim surveillance in contaminated areas. Lastly, the ‘integrated approaches’ framework emphasises the importance of community engagement in designing and implementing effective solutions. Communication with community stakeholders will likely assist in more accurately capturing community priorities, identify at-risk groups and demographics, and ensure that EORE is provided in areas where it has the greatest potential to minimise risk. ‘Integrated approaches’ should therefore not be conceived as a prescription for a specific solution but rather as a framework to deliver cost-effective EORE by leveraging complementarities with associated activities, technologies, and community stakeholders.

Case Studies

Contemporary EORE initiatives in Thailand and Myanmar illustrate the application of the ‘integrated approaches’ framework. Despite differences in their respective national contexts, both states have endeavoured to design and implement innovative solutions to improve EORE. Select case studies drawn from both of these ASEAN member states will be examined in detail below in order to identify the ‘integrated’ elements of each initiative and evaluate the implementation of ‘integrated approaches’ to EORE in ASEAN.

Case Study: Thailand

Thailand’s use of digital linkages through social media and concurrent school-level collaboration with the education sector offer valuable insights into the implementation of innovative ‘integrated approaches’ to EORE in ASEAN. Anti-personnel mines in Thailand are mainly concentrated along its land borders, notably those with Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia. It is estimated that Thailand has 360 square kilometres of contaminated land spanning 10 provinces.16 In recognition of this threat to public health, Thailand’s National Committee for Humanitarian Mine Action and the Thailand Mine Action Centre formulated the Mine Action Plan for 2017–2023.17 This national plan prioritises EORE in conjunction with associated activities including mine clearance and advocacy for the discontinuation of anti-personnel mines use by the Thai government and has a particular focus on rural populations living near or within the contaminated areas.

‘Integrated approaches’ to EORE in Thailand are designed to overcome geographical barriers and resource constrains in order to improve direct communication with rural border communities. The Thai Mine Action Centre

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sought to create direct communication channels with rural communities by encouraging village leaders to create or join local groups using the LINE Chat smartphone app. LINE is a free online instant messaging service for smartphones and desktop computers used by at least 84% of Thai internet users. This initiative involves Thailand Mine Action Centre mobile teams deployed to rural villages to provide training to community leaders and volunteers to set up local instant message LINE chat app groups. Within the LINE chat groups, community members in at-risk areas share information regarding explosive ordnance and EORE resources, streamline reporting of incidents, and issue warnings to the local community. These groups also serve as a bridge for the Thai Mine Action Centre to communicate with rural communities in order to further support EORE from afar. This innovative solution utilizes the ‘integrated approaches’ framework by leveraging free digital communication technologies and engaging with local communal stakeholders to deliver targeted EORE.

**Figure 2: Screenshot of Local Group Chat on LINE for Mine Awareness**

(Thailand Mine Action Centre via ARMAC)

EORE has also been integrated into the curriculum of Thai schools in at-risk areas to educate large numbers of school-age children in explosive ordnance training. Through this collaboration and by using the school’s infrastructure and resources, educators are now able to reach approximately 30,000 students in at-risk rural communities per year.

These two examples of ‘integrated approaches’ to EORE in Thailand reflect just some of the innovative and novel ways in which EORE may be tailored to local contexts and leverage complementarities from associated activities.

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Case Study: Myanmar

Myanmar’s efforts to overcome its unique contextual challenges through smartphone-based EORE coursework and training for government employees and humanitarian workers represent timely ‘integrated approaches’ to EORE. Explosive ordnance continues to be deployed today in Myanmar, the third most landmine-contaminated country in the world after Afghanistan and Colombia. The country continues to suffer from landmine contamination as a result of longstanding conflicts between government forces and numerous non-state armed groups affiliated with ethnic minorities and separatist movements. Contaminated areas are mainly located in areas of Myanmar adjacent to its land borders with Bangladesh, China, and Thailand, posing a particular threat to civilians in the northern and eastern parts of the country. At ARMAC’s Regional Workshop in Siem Reap in November 2018, the representative from Myanmar reported that 9 of the country’s 14 States and regions contained landmine contamination, although the level of contamination in each was not clear. EORE and victim assistance programs are coordinated by a Mine Risks Working Group comprised of various ministries, international and national organisations, and four state-level coordination agencies. Unlike in other ASEAN member states where EORE focuses on mitigating risks from historical remnants of war, ‘integrated approaches’ to EORE in Myanmar must be responsive to the evolving circumstances of landmine deployment by government forces and non-state armed groups alike.

Figure 3: Screenshot of Coursework Module from MRE Myanmar Smartphone Application (APKPure)

In recognition of the urgent need for EORE, government actors and international NGOs in Myanmar have implemented several innovative ‘integrated approaches’ to minimise casualties from explosive ordnance and improve EORE nationwide. For example, the ‘MRE (Mine Risk Education) Myanmar’ smartphone application leverages digital linkages to overcome geographical barriers and remove the need for an EORE instructor by enabling users to receive EORE training through coursework built into the application. The MRE Myanmar smartphone application is free, functions on most smartphone devices or computers, and can be shared.

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without Wi-Fi or mobile data – allowing it to be used by smartphone users who lack reliable internet coverage. The application aims to capitalize on the country’s high degree of smartphone penetration to deliver EORE directly to smartphone users without the need for bricks-and-mortar infrastructure, personnel, or additional resources. With a market that exceeded 68 million users in 2020, MRE Myanmar has the potential to reach a large proportion of the population and significantly improve explosive ordnance risk education and minimise casualties in at-risk areas.

Explosive ordnance risk education has also been integrated into training for humanitarian workers and government staff in Myanmar. A significant portion of this education is provided by DanChurchAid, a Danish humanitarian non-governmental organisation. This approach aims to ensure that staff with direct contact to the communities, or who may enter contaminated areas in the course of their employment, are trained in EORE. While serving to better protect employees at risk of encountering explosive ordnance, this solution also serves to equip government and humanitarian workers to become advocates and instructors in EORE. This aims to make better use of existing human resource in order to improve public awareness, empower advocates, and disseminate EORE across the broader segment of the population.

**Successes in Minimising Explosive Ordnance Casualties**

Notwithstanding the lack of in accurate and complete reporting, the management of explosive ordnance initiatives in Thailand and Myanmar appears to be achieving impressive results. The overall number of casualties in Thailand attributed to explosive landmines and remnants of war has also reduced sharply, from 115 in 2000 to only 10 in 2019. According to the Thailand Mine Action Centre, Thailand has reduced the size of landmine-contaminated areas from 2,557 square kilometres across 27 Provinces in 2000 down to 245 square kilometres across 10 provinces by August 2019. In Myanmar, UNICEF reported a reduction in the number of reported incidents and victims countrywide from 205 casualties in 2018 to 161 in 2019 and 40 in 2020. Concurrently, over 1 million people received EORE in Myanmar from 2016–2020.

**Challenges in Evaluating ‘Integrated Approaches’ to EORE**

While it is likely that EORE is at least in part responsible for the reduction in the number of casualties noted above, in the absence of additional corroborative evidence, it is difficult to definitively attribute these successes to the ‘integrated solutions’. Inconsistent and inaccurate reporting may belie the actual extent of contamination and the real number of casualties caused by explosive ordnance. Moreover, the lack of data creates difficulties for EORE initiatives to establish benchmarks for evaluating their impact, to deliver continuous improvements, or to ensure accountability. For example, it is unclear how many smartphone users in Myanmar have downloaded and used the MRE Myanmar application, as only the software developer is privy to this information. Further, there is currently no mechanism for assessing how completing EORE training through the MRE Myanmar application has affected EORE standards in Myanmar, or whether this training has had any impact on the total number of casualties from explosive ordnance in the country. The situation in Thailand is not dissimilar. While the Thailand Mine Action Centre makes concerted efforts to train village leaders to establish community chat groups on LINE, it remains unknown how many community members participate in these groups, their level of engagement, and whether the smartphone application has had a direct influence on EORE attainment.

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28 Ibid.
31 "Mine Action in Myanmar Fact Sheet.” UNICEF, last modified 2020. Note: this statistic only includes the first quarter of 2020 (i.e. January-March) as subsequent data was unavailable.
32 Ibid.
Limited Attempts to Improve Reporting and Data Collection Mechanisms

Thailand has made some inroads in addressing this concern by conducting non-technical surveys at the community level with stakeholders in villages. Surveyors trained by the Thailand Mine Action Center travelled to villages to conduct interviews and obtain information on landmine contamination and levels of EORE.33 The Thai Civilian Deminer Association also conducts missions to villages in contaminated areas to gather information and support EORE activities.34 While both initiatives provide valuable insights to support EORE initiatives, ‘integrated solutions’ should also include reporting and data collection functions. Conversely, Myanmar lacks an official data collection mechanism to substantiate the efficacy of its ‘integrated solutions’. Despite recent attempts to gather data such as a United Nations Fact Finding Mission in 201935 and ongoing reporting by NGOs including the Landmine and Cluster Munitions Monitor and the HALO Trust, their findings are quickly rendered obsolete as new landmines continue to be laid in the ongoing conflicts between the government and non-state armed forces. ‘Integrated approaches’ must therefore not solely rely on the novelty of an idea, but also incorporate mechanisms for continuous and accurate reporting, data collection, and/or victim surveillance.

Conclusion

The ‘Integrated approach’ framework has the potential to significantly improve EORE across ASEAN by strategically leverage complementarities with other sectors, stakeholders and technologies. The implementation of innovative ‘integrated solutions’ in Thailand and Myanmar demonstrates how new initiatives can utilise existing infrastructure, institutional arrangements and digital solutions to conduct training, streamline reporting and equip advocates. However, in the absence of robust reporting, data collection and/or victim surveillance mechanisms, it will be challenging to evaluate the efficacy of ‘integrated approaches’ to EORE. ‘Integrated approaches’ to EORE tend to focus on the delivery of initiatives, with less oversight on evaluating their outcomes. Perhaps ‘Integrated and Accountable Approaches to EORE’ may therefore represent a more constructive framework for demining in ASEAN. The additional commitment to developing and integrating accountability mechanisms would underscore the necessity of data gathering and reporting systems. This fundamental component is essential for the successful implementation of explosive ordnance risk education in ASEAN, as it provides a benchmark for accurately evaluating the implementation of EORE initiatives, assessing their outcomes, and delivering improvements where necessitated. The design and implementation of ‘integrated approaches’ should therefore leverage complementarities with associated activities to not only deliver novel programs, but also to glean valuable data to augment EORE levels across ASEAN.

References


The growth of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Southeast Asia has increased rapidly over recent decades. In 2019, Southeast Asia was noted as the region with the most engaged mobile internet users in the world.1 Given the high number of internet users, ASEAN countries are also increasingly facing cybercrime and attacks impacting ICT. As a consequence, cyberspace is now treated as more than just an interconnected virtual landscape, it is now just as crucial as state territorial space. Despite this, the majority of ASEAN countries seem to show little awareness of the need to improve public sector cybersecurity.2 As ASEAN’s first dialogue partner, Australia in recent years has been working within the ASEAN framework to improve regional cybersecurity. In this article, we ask to what extent does Australia’s role contribute to the cybersecurity cooperation framework? We argue that Australia has an emerging capability in cybersecurity which positions it as a beneficial supporting actor in handling contemporary cyberspace challenges. Supported by Australia’s rising capabilities and continual significant attention on cybersecurity, ASEAN has the potential to fully commit to strengthening and maintaining regional stability in cyberspace through cooperative capacity building and joint engagement.

Internet Connectivity in Southeast Asia

With a total population of 662 million people, Southeast Asia had 400 million internet users in 2020,3 70 per cent of the region’s population is now online.4 In addition to being the region with the second largest number of internet users,5 after East Asia, Southeast Asia is home to the most frequent internet users in world, with users spending considerably more time on the mobile internet than their global peers. Internet use has accelerated in 2020 due to the global pandemic with digital services reaching 94 per cent in Southeast Asia.6 The number of hours spent online has nearly doubled due to COVID–19.7 The new digital acceleration is predicted to continue in the post-pandemic era.

The Internet economy has reached US$100 billion for the first time in 2019,8 tripling over the past four years. Other research has found that the internet economy will be worth USD$300 billion by 2025.9 Education, groceries, and lending are the top three digital services which have set an unprecedented pace for internet usage to the benefit of the economy.10 E-commerce is the biggest and fastest sector to reach this point. Currently worth USD$38 billion, it has increased by sevenfold in the last five years.11 In Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines the Internet economy is growing around 20 to 30 per cent annually. Meanwhile, Vietnam and Indonesia are even stronger, reaching 40 per cent growth rates annually.12

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2 The public sector can include many different areas of service — healthcare, education, parks, libraries and more. Phishing, ransomware and malware are common threats faced by public sector organizations. Stolen personal data is often used to commit online frauds and identity thefts.
4 Ibid, 12.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid, 13.
7 Ibid, 15.
8 Ibid, 15.
10 Ibid, 4.
11 Ibid, 5.
12 Ibid.
A Fragility in the Region

Even with the palpable growth of ICT and e-commerce, most ASEAN Member States have not shown enough awareness in improving their cybersecurity infrastructure. Belonging to one of the fastest-growing digital economies in the world, ASEAN countries have experienced a significant amount of cybercrime, from massive data breaches and crippling ransomware attacks to cryptojacking.13 According to INTERPOL, cyber-attacks and data theft have been ranked fourth and fifth in the recently released 2020 global risk report.14

Over the last three years, many ASEAN states have encountered several serious incidents related to cybercrime. In July 2018, for example, the communications conglomerate True Corp.15 suffered a data breach and 45,000 customers were exposed in Thailand.16 Later the same year, SingHealth, Singapore’s largest group of healthcare institutions, experienced data theft of 1.5 million patient records.17 The following year, Cebuana Pawnshop,18 a Filipino financial services provider, was breached and 900,000 clients were harmed.19 In 2019 as well, unauthorized access was detected on the servers of Toyota Motor Corporation in Vietnam.20 In Malaysia it was discovered that the personal information of around 46 million mobile subscribers were compromised.21 Across the region 14 million accounts were phished in the first half 2019.22

These incidents show how far ASEAN countries are left behind in terms of cybersecurity. However, despite the high number and seriousness of these cyber-attacks, states are still not spending enough to protect their citizens from attacks. The lack of investment in cybersecurity in ASEAN can be seen in the regional spending which reached A$2.54 billion in 2018, representing 0.06 per cent of regional gross domestic product (GDP). In contrast, Australia alone spent an estimated A$3.8 billion in 2018 or representing 0.26 per cent of GDP.23

Deeper Engagement, Greater Contribution

Australia’s active engagements towards this agenda are part of its global strategy to lessen cybercrime perils. Its openness and willingness to cooperate with ASEAN can be seen specifically since it declared its desire to be ASEAN’s trustworthy partner across the economic, political, and security sectors at the 40th anniversary of ASEAN-Australia Dialogue Relations in Myanmar in 2014.24 The fact that Australia was a founding member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) only adds to the reasons it has been thoroughly involved in a considerable amount of activities and discussions with Southeast Asian countries. In 2012, the Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department (AGD) proposed a cybersecurity incident workshop to promote capacity building and regional cooperation. As a result, the ARF Statement on Cooperation in Ensuring Cybersecurity was adopted at the 19th ARF later that year25 and a workshop on Cybersecurity Incident Response was held in Singapore.26 Later in 2017, Australia took part in another ARF discussion, co-sponsoring a proposal of a cyber Point-of-Contact database establishment with Malaysia.27

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13 Cryptojacking is a type of cybercrime where a criminal secretly uses a victim’s computing power to generate cryptocurrency.
15 True Corporation Public Company Limited (TRUE) is a communications conglomerate in Thailand. TRUE controls Thailand’s largest cable TV provider, TrueVisions, and True Internet which is Thailand’s largest internet service provider.
16 Ibid, 12.
17 Ibid.
18 Cebuana Lhuillier is a non-banking financial institution offering services such as pawn-broking, money remittance, insurance, bills payment, remit-to-account, corporate payout, collections, and e-loading.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
24 Indonesia Foreign Ministry, “Kerjasama ASEAN-Australia Sembakin Meningkat,” in Masyarakat ASEAN, 11.
26 ASEAN, “ASEAN Regional Forum Work Plan on Security of and in the Use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs),” 1.
Australia's further commitment to having a serious, stronger partnership on cyber issues is manifested through the ASEAN-Australia Cyber Policy Dialogue launched in 2018 and derived from the Sydney Declaration, which was introduced at the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in the same year. The Sydney Declaration itself emphasised the shared commitment in promoting an open, secure, and accessible cyber environment and strengthening digital trade cooperation. Hence, it is expected that both parties are able to address and manage cyber incidents. The Dialogue is also highly beneficial for uplifting cybersecurity resilience and stability in such an interconnected region due to territorial proximity and growing threats in cyberspace.\textsuperscript{28}

Australia's unending support and contribution in many cybersecurity agendas has been welcomed by ASEAN countries.\textsuperscript{29} These contributions mark an expanding range of ASEAN-Australia cooperation mechanisms through the years. This growing interaction potentially develops familiarity, understanding, and trust between each other which are beneficial for the partnership and viability in the future, such as building on relatively weak ties between Australia and ASEAN countries like Cambodia and Lao PDR.\textsuperscript{30} In spite of the COVID–19 pandemic, ASEAN and Australia held a biennial summit in November 2020 via video conference and released a joint statement, stating that their commitment is still going strong. Again, regional capacity in addressing cybersecurity is highlighted as one of the key dialogue points.\textsuperscript{31} In this case, they do not identify the capacity gap between each country as a misfortune, but rather as a basis to push forward and work collectively.

**Why Australia?**

Responding to the growth of ICT offers new opportunities for economic sectors and allows Australia to benefit in the surge of demand for cybersecurity products and services globally. Therefore, Australia offers an ideal growth environment for cyber businesses to respond to the fast-growing Internet economy in Southeast Asia. This momentum puts Australia in a profitable position to develop their cybersecurity sector competitively. Economic analysis notes that the cybersecurity sector has the potential to almost triple in a few years, with the revenues ranging from A$2 billion in 2016 to A$6 billion by 2026.\textsuperscript{32} Australia itself has confidence in its cybersecurity sector due to a good track record and a strong reputation over the years. According to the International Telecommunication Union’s 2017 Global Cybersecurity Index, Australia ranked as the world’s seventh most committed cybersecurity country.\textsuperscript{33} In 2017, Australia’s ‘cyber maturity’ was the second highest in the Indo-Pacific by looking at assessment indicators such as how well the government invested in cybersecurity policies and legislative structures, responses to financial cybercrime, business and digital economic, military cybersecurity strength, and social awareness.\textsuperscript{34}

In practice, cybersecurity in Australia is centred on three main sectors: government, private sector, and the community. Australia believes that to establish secure cyberspace, they need a multi-sector cooperation. The government has launched Australia’s Cyber Security Strategy 2020 as a plan to invest A$1.67 billion over the next decade to establish new cyber security which can assist industries and communities in the future.\textsuperscript{35} This investment also includes A$1.35 billion in Cyber Enhanced Situational Awareness and Response (CESAR) to strengthen the nation’s capabilities in identifying more cyber intrusions and generating faster responses for protection.\textsuperscript{36} Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, has stated that this step is needed after cyber-attacks on businesses and households respectively caused losses of around A$29 billion or 1.5 per cent of Australia’s GDP in 2019.\textsuperscript{37} Taking the total expenditure into account, Australia has consistently shown its seriousness in dealing

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{28} ACSC, 2019.
\bibitem{29} Malcolm Cook, ASEAN-Australia relations: the suitable status quo, Lowy Institute 2018, 10.
\bibitem{30} Ibid, B-11.
\bibitem{31} ASEAN, Joint Statement of the Second ASEAN-Australia Biennial Summit, 14 November, 3-4.
\bibitem{32} Austcyber, “Australia’s Cybersecurity Competitiveness Plan”, 10.
\bibitem{33} Ibid, 11.
\bibitem{34} Tobias Feakin, Liam Nevill and Zoe Hawkins, The Australia-US Cybersecurity Dialogue, 24.
\bibitem{35} ACSC, Australia’s Cyber Security Strategy 2020
\bibitem{36} Prime Minister of Australia, Media Release, June 30 2020.
with cybercrime and attacks. On the other hand, by reading Australia Cybersecurity Strategy, we see that the success of this cyber defence strategy requires an active community involvement to protect their own online network. This is proven by a survey based on Australian cybersecurity awareness and preparedness by Enjoy Safer Technology that 85 per cent of 2000 respondents expressed that internet security instalment on both personal and home devices are important.

**From Concern to Action**

The one thing more fundamental than government commitment is government enforcement. As Australia’s dependence on the information economy and cyberspace for national well-being and security keeps on increasing, so does its fragility to cybercrime and a variety of e-security threats. Australia’s concern and awareness of cybersecurity urgency can be seen as early as 1993 from the establishment of Australia Computer Emergency Response Teams (AusCERT), to the Cybercrime Act in 2001.

In 2005, Air Commodore (Ret’d) Gary Waters and Desmond Ball, Professor in the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at The Australian National University, began looking into the possibility of the Australian Defence Force’s (ADF) information superiority through Network Centric Warfare (NCW). Reliance on the network requires capability in maintaining information sustainability and protection. The rapid changes that came as a package deal in the Information Age includes possible attacks on information systems and the fragility of information superiority. Therefore, Australia has put greater emphasis on potential challenges of NCW and attention to the human (people’s ability) and organisational (technical means) dimensions since then.

Australia’s approach on integrating multi-agency response is manifested in the ADF and the Department of Defence’s commitment to collaborate with government or non-government agencies. Outside of this military sphere, Australia is just as determined in developing its cyber-defence in the public sphere as explained above. In 2006, the government formulated a balanced e-security policy framework for home users, as well as the private sector. It includes improving e-security awareness and practices, ensuring the Government’s electronic systems security, promoting national information infrastructure, cooperating with private sectors, and promoting global information economy security with international actors. Australia stated that part of its global strategy is international engagement. This outward-looking strategy is highly beneficial for enhancing technological and governance systems, whilst putting up a high wall to counter apparent risks and threats that could endanger the country.

Aside from practices, the country is also making efforts in disciplinary fields. Its long-term strategic investments in research and development contribute to national competitive advantage and places Australia in the frontline of global cybersecurity landscape. Considering its emerging capability and prominence in this realm, Australia’s leadership in the international cybersecurity agenda is undoubtedly something to be proud of. In 2018, the Australian Cybersecurity Centre was re-elected as Chair of the Asia-Pacific Computer Emergency Response Team (APCERT) Steering Committee in Shanghai. Additionally, the country has also led an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) initiative in building CERT capabilities in developing economies.

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41 Waters, “Protecting Information Infrastructures,” 103.
42 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Protecting Australia Against Terrorism 2006, 61
43 NCW can be understood as the current and future military operations logic which utilises networked systems.
46 Waters, “Protecting Information Infrastructures,” 103.
47 Spry, “Promoting Prosperity and Providing Protection,” 60.
50 Waters, “Protecting Information Infrastructures,” 103.
Chapter 1 - Political-Security Cooperation

Recommendations

ASEAN has the potential to fully commit to strengthening and maintaining regional stability in cyberspace through cooperative capacity building and joint engagement. In this case, Australia has risen as a prominent actor with emerging cybersecurity capabilities. The crucial thing to underline in these capabilities is not the country’s global reputation, but rather the government and public awareness of cybersecurity threats which is not seen in ASEAN countries yet. We realise that this awareness is the critical point in taking this matter into action. Regarding this issue, our recommendations will focus on a number of things that require improvement. First, governments need to enhance public awareness through socialization and, more importantly, provide necessary assistance. As most of the ASEAN members are developing countries, public awareness of the importance of cybersecurity is relatively low. This is caused by the low rate of literacy and culture of information security threat that has not been part of the public mindset yet.

The ASEAN Vision 2025 of the ASEAN Political-Security Community (ASPSC) focuses on traditional threats such as territorial disputes, nuclear proliferation, and great power rivalry in the region. Alongside traditional threats, ASEAN must also commit to protect their region from non-traditional security (NTS) threats such as climate change, migration, the pandemic etc. However, national security is now not only limited to physical threats but has expanded into cyberspace. The current blueprint underlines how ASEAN countries have yet to recognise cyberattacks as high-level threats despite the serious consequences which may result from them. In line with this, the governments need to re-prioritise their national agendas to pay more attention to cybercrime.

The Southeast Asian region is known to be vulnerable to cyber-terrorism threats coming from the non-state actors, such as terrorist networks, cyber-criminal organisations, etc. These attacks are conducted through information technology usage or communication networks exploitation in order to execute attacks or disruption which benefits the aggressor’s ideological goal or serves as a platform for committing their act. This issue is much too difficult and complex to be managed at the individual state level. Since cybersecurity is also considered part of regional security, this matter cannot be underestimated. A regional strategy has become a crucial need. However, several observers have noted that ASEAN has been too slow in further adopting in-depth cybersecurity strategies. For this reason, ASEAN ought to increase its responsiveness and preparedness as it is likely to have cross border impacts. Each country is greatly encouraged to work collectively in improving their response to cyber-terrorism. The experiences as a result of regional cooperation, via workshops or training for expertise and specialists, will create a sense of familiarity with the problem—what happened and how to handle it—and develop the sense of alertness and preparedness which contributes to quick and effective problem-solving.

ASEAN’s rapid economic growth, developing online presence, and digitisation of numerous crucial systems contributed to the possibility of being targeted by cyber-attacks. In line with this, since ASEAN and Australia developed the Digital Trade Standards Cooperation Initiative in 2018, both parties should enhance their collaborative efforts to improve capacity building, for example through technology and knowledge transfer. Since digital trade and economy are relatively new concepts, countries are more likely encounter significant challenges. Through these efforts, limited understanding and capability due to differing development stages can be bridged towards addressing these challenges. Collaborative cooperation with Australia, which has actively taken supportive actions to help developing digital economies, is beneficial to lessening the region’s digital economy cybersecurity weaknesses. Therefore, Australia’s emerging capabilities in cybersecurity should takes a significant role as ASEAN’s supporting partner in handling cyberspace challenges to national and regional security.

52 ASEAN, ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together.
53 Borelli, “ASEAN Counter-terrorism Weaknesses,” 19.
56 Borelli, “ASEAN Counter-terrorism Weaknesses,” 19.
57 Ibid.
59 Ibid, 10.
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CHAPTER 2

ECONOMIC COOPERATION
WHAT DOES THE ASEAN-AUSTRALIA GRID CONNECTION MEAN FOR MANAGING THE ENERGY TRILEMMA? THE CASE OF INDONESIA

Muhammad Ichsan & Ilyas Taufiqurrohman | Indonesia

Introduction

Current plans for an ASEAN-Australia energy grid connection will make Australia a renewable energy exporting superpower. It presents an opportunity to reduce Australia's economic dependence on the export of dirty coal which is becoming less and less popular today in the country. Australia's Federal Minister for Industry, Science and Technology, Karen Andrews, said that the renewable energy trade will generate approximately AUD$2 billion worth of exports for Australia annually. At a glance, it seems that Australia has a dominant interest in realizing this grid connection.

In addition to Australia's national interest there are growing narratives which suggest that the export of clean power from Australia can help regional neighbours to use more renewable energy in their energy mix with lower investment cost. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) agrees that global energy interconnection is essential to having a robust power system and to realize Paris Agreement goals in emission reductions. Analysis on grid connections in the European Union (EU) shows that more connected power systems can accelerate the expansion of renewable energy deployment by solving the intermittency issue of renewable energy and promoting cost efficiency. However, an important question emerges: Can we directly contextualize the mutually benefited outcomes of power grid development in the EU into the ASEAN-Australia case?

Although some cross-border grid connections in the EU region provide evidence of success, we cannot generalize the outcomes of the application of the same technology in different contexts. While countries in the EU are among the most developed states on earth, ASEAN predominantly comprises of developing nations. Therefore, we need a different policy analysis to understand how developing countries can mutually benefit from grid connection development. In particular, the 'energy trilemma' presents a distinct challenge in terms of managing energy governance in developing countries.

'Energy trilemma' epitomizes a typical challenge for effective energy governance in developing countries, where tensions to simultaneously reach the goals of energy security, energy poverty and climate change mitigation often arise. The first tenet of energy trilemma is energy security which is defined as having a reliable and sufficient flow of energy supply. Accessibility to energy resource and geopolitical factors are important...
Economic Cooperation - Chapter 2

considerations for energy security.\textsuperscript{10} The second tenet of the energy trilemma is energy poverty which simply refers overcoming the issue of limited access to modern energy services at affordable prices. Distinguishing it from first tenet of energy security, energy poverty affordability focuses on meeting the lowest consumers’ willingness to pay based on their economic categories. The third and final tenet of energy trilemma is climate change mitigation, which refers to actions to transition from the use of fossil fuels to clean energy.

This article highlights a case study on Indonesia’s benefit potential from the proposed ASEAN-Australia grid connection and explains how the connection will affect the energy trilemma outcomes. The discussion of the energy trilemma here focuses on the electricity sector, not energy in a broader sense. Indonesia is an important country in the grid connection development agenda, as it will be the first country to be connected into the energy grid and become Australia’s main bridge to mainland Asia. We argue that to realize a sustainable cooperation in electricity trading between Australia and ASEAN, the grid development should pursue mutually beneficial objectives.

The ASEAN-Australia Grid Connection

The ASEAN-Australia grid connection initiative emerged in the early 2010s with most activities funded by successive Australian governments and investors. The proposed grid development aims to utilise the untapped and enormous renewable energy resources in Western and Northern Australia by exporting the produced electricity to the ASEAN region.\textsuperscript{11} This initiative assumes that ASEAN States are pursuing renewable energy mix targets and are prepared to act as buyers of renewable electricity from Australia. There is no indication that ASEAN States can simultaneously sell their own renewable electricity production through the same grid connection.

Currently, there are various development plans for the ASEAN-Australia grid connection, which differentiate in terms of grid connection routes and the investors.\textsuperscript{12} In general, however, most of the development plans propose to pass the connection through Western Indonesia before heading north to mainland Asia.

From all the development plans, Sun Cable and the Asian Renewable Energy Hub have the most developed plan towards realizing the grid connection. Sun Cable is an energy company who has been granted ‘Major Project Status’ by the Australian Government since 2019. It proposes to build 3,711 km of a submarine High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) connection starting from the Northern Territory of Australia to Western Indonesia by crossing the Java Sea, and directly connecting to Singapore.\textsuperscript{13} This project seems to plan to sell electricity directly to Singapore, but not to Indonesia. Through this grid connection, Australia’s renewable energy is projected to meet 20 per cent of Singapore’s electricity demand.\textsuperscript{14}

The Asian Renewable Energy Hub, on the other hand, is a project consortium of three energy companies (Intercontinental Energy, CWP Energy Asia, and Vestas) and will commence its construction in 2026.\textsuperscript{15} This project will include the development of 26 gigawatts (GW) of wind and solar power plants in the East Pilbara region in Western Australia and 3,500 km of a HVDC connection from Australia to Western Indonesia, particularly to Java and Bali Islands, before continuing on to Singapore and eventually expanding to mainland Asia in the future.\textsuperscript{16} The HVDC will be connected to Java-Bali’s power transmission system so that these regions in Indonesia can buy the electricity.

\textsuperscript{11} Crichton-Standish.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
Indonesia’s Energy Trilemma

Since the 1990s, power generation in Indonesia has begun to shift from diesel to coal power plants. Growing dependence on diesel imports was considered counterproductive to national energy security. As the owner of the fifth largest coal reserve, and one of the major coal exporters in the world, Indonesia’s decision to make use of its abundant domestic energy resources seemed a logical strategy.

To further address energy poverty as well as energy security, the government launched several policies to increase domestic power capacity. In 2015, the last policy in relation to this commanded an additional power capacity by 35 GW. Of the total additional capacity, approximately 57 per cent was designated for coal power plants. In August 2019, the Government claimed that Indonesia’s electrification ratio had reached 98.86 per cent,

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growing at 3 per cent annually in the last four years. However, the state electricity company, Perusahaan Listrik Negara (PLN), argued that the data did not reflect the actual electrical condition in rural regions, particularly in Eastern Indonesia.

In line with the energy poverty objective, Indonesia’s electricity prices are highly regulated and subsidized. The government allocates a huge amount of electricity subsidies in the State’s annual budget so that everyone can afford the electricity. To maintain the fiscal burden from electricity subsidies, the cheapest electricity production is prioritized. This in part explains why coal power plants are still the most popular mode of electricity generation in the country. Until 2019 coal power plants still dominate the total number of power plants installed in the country, accounting for 49.85 per cent; meanwhile, renewable energy sources account for approximately 14.78 per cent, while the rest comes from natural gas and diesel.

![Figure 2. Power Plant Capacity Installed by Sources in Indonesia](Data: Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources)

We can easily observe the tensions of the energy trilemma across government policy in Indonesia’s electricity sector which arises largely from the country preference of coal generated power. Indonesia has more than enough coal supply and coal power plants to generate the cheapest electricity. These two considerations support the objectives of energy security and energy poverty. However, increasing the use of coal and slow progress on renewable energy deployment undermines the objective of climate change mitigation.

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The Grid Connection and Energy Trilemma

Energy Security

In terms of energy security, maintaining a reliable and adequate energy supply for electricity across Indonesia is still a challenging task. The World Economic Forum reports that the reliability of electricity supply in Indonesia scored 94.7 per cent and its rank is 54 out of 141 countries. Most notably, power blackouts mostly occur outside of Java Island.

The ASEAN-Australia grid connection can improve the reliability of power supply in Indonesia by supplying renewable electricity from Australia. However, the planned grid connection currently will only pass-through Java Island, bypassing other parts of the country where energy supply is less stable. This means that the benefits of the grid connection towards energy security will be fairly limited.

Moreover, dependency on Australia as the external electricity supplier is risky from a geopolitical perspective. Indonesia will not have control over the resources it consumes. It might be a different case if Indonesia could also act as a seller for its domestically produced electricity through the grid connection. This two-sided trading arrangement could balance individual countries’ authority over the grid connection’s operationalization and thus reduce geopolitical risk. In addition, the both-sided trading arrangement can avoid a perverse incentive for consumer countries such as Indonesia to not develop its own renewable energy potential.

Energy Poverty

In terms of energy poverty, discussions are divided into spatial and pricing considerations. Firstly, in regard to spatial consideration, Indonesia still needs to expand its electricity access to some rural regions, particularly in eastern Indonesia, to achieve a 100 per cent electrification ratio. However, again, in contrast to the situation of low electricity access in rural and small islands in eastern Indonesia, the ASEAN-Australia grid connection is planned to only pass-through Western Indonesia. The grid is expected to support projected high energy demand in Java and Bali Islands. However, with the country’s economic activity centralized in Java, we can predict that Java and Bali Islands will have little opportunity to suffer from energy poverty. In addition, an off-grid electricity system provides more rationales for archipelagic geographies such as Indonesia to improve their electricity access. This demonstrates that the grid connection will have little impact on improving energy poverty outcomes in Indonesia.

Secondly, regarding pricing considerations, the grid connection will not be able to influence Indonesia’s retail electricity prices. This is because retail prices are not based on the market but are instead regulated and subsidized by the government. However, if the prices of renewable electricity supplied from Australia are lower than Indonesia’s electricity generation costs, we may expect the grid connection will cut government subsidies. Presently, Indonesia’s retail electricity prices for household consumers are 10.30¢ US/kWh. Meanwhile, Australia’s Levelized Costs of Electricity (LCOE) for solar PV project can go as low as 2.7–3.6¢US/kWh, with additional costs for pumped hydro storage that currently are estimated to be as low as 2.6¢US/kWh. This presents an opportunity for Indonesia to maintain affordable retail electricity prices, and at the same time reduce the country’s fiscal burden on energy subsidies. However, Indonesia’s electricity generation costs are varied across provinces.

24 Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, Republic of Indonesia, "Tumbuh 3 Persen per Tahun".
Figure 3 shows that most of the provinces that have electricity generation costs higher than Indonesia’s household retail electricity prices are predominantly located in eastern Indonesia. As the grid connection will only pass-through Western Indonesia, this again shows us that the cheaper renewable energy supply from Australia will not have an impact on Indonesia’s energy poverty outcomes.

**Figure 3: Average Electricity Generation Costs per Province**
(Data: Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, 2019b)

In terms of climate change mitigation, Indonesia still needs to increase its share of renewable energy sources in its electricity mix. Based on the National Energy General Plan or *Rencana Umum Energi Nasional* (RUEN), Indonesia’s renewable electricity mix target is set at 33.33 per cent by 2025 to fulfil the emissions reduction target in the Nationally Determined Contributions. Apart from the domestic political economy that tends to support the further use of fossil fuel for electricity generation, high renewable energy’s LCOE often becomes a barrier for domestic renewable energy project proposals. Therefore, when Australia can offer cheaper renewable energy through the connection grid, this will bring an opportunity for Indonesia to increase its renewable electricity mix. The grid connection will help ASEAN States to transition from fossil fuels.

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This discussion shows that even with the development of grid connection, the energy trilemma is still challenging to manage. If we consider this grid connection a response to international forces to mitigate climate change, we can still expect that the realization of the initiative may be difficult for developing countries to accept. This is because energy security and energy poverty are deeply embedded in domestic political economies. This makes them more important priorities for local politicians in comparison to climate change mitigation. This finding is in line with Gunningham’s argument that energy security and energy poverty are predominantly driven by internal forces, while the climate change mitigation objective is largely pushed by external forces. This brings us to the important implication that managing the energy trilemma should focus on harmonizing both the internal and external forces. The harmonization of these forces is not impossible, but certainly needs a strategic approach.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the ASEAN-Australia grid connection is advantageous for Indonesia and other developing countries in the ASEAN region if they want to accelerate their efforts in realizing climate change mitigation objectives. However, relying on renewable electricity imports to meet national energy demands is risky in term of energy security. Moreover, the one sided trading arrangements of the grid connection may undermine domestic renewable energy development and exacerbate the challenge to attain energy security. In addition, the problem of energy poverty, which is most acutely felt by Indonesia as a developing and archipelago country does not seem to be directly solved by the grid connection development. We argue that to realize a sustainable cooperation in electricity trading between Australia and the ASEAN countries, the grid connection proposal should have been developed to accommodate a wider range of interests.

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CATALYST FOR RECOVERY? AUSTRALIAN OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE IN VIETNAM IN RESPONSE TO COVID–19

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“COVID–19 is a shared crisis – a reminder that many problems are best solved or, indeed, can only be solved through cooperation. At the heart of successful international cooperation is the concept that each country shares, rather than yields, a portion of its sovereign decision-making. And in return, each gets something from it that is greater than their contribution”.

“COVID–19 is our common enemy. We must declare war on this virus. That means countries have a responsibility to gear up, step up and scale up.”

With strikingly similar messages, one might have thought the two quotes come from the same speech, or the same speaker. But in fact, the first one was delivered by Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne in June 2020 to an Australian audience while the second came from UN Secretary General António Guterres in March 2020 speech given to a global audience. In November 2020, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison again emphasized the importance of international institutions and alliances of "like-minded nation-states" to “maintain the peace and security, to keep our economies, to tackle common challenges... whether that be COVID–19 or climate change.”

Australia has remained committed to multilateralism and international cooperation, most notably through its overseas development portfolio, at a time when many other powers are withdrawing from international development efforts due to economic recessions and financial pressures during the COVID–19 pandemic. It comes as a paradox that international cooperation to contain COVID–19 is a global public good that serves everyone's interest, yet it also causes disintegration as states refuse to contribute their share of responsibility or look for a free ride.

Australia’s policy stance is not without strategic intentions. The country's development efforts in response to COVID–19 are coherent with its objectives in trade, regional security, and stability. As an example, Vietnam has drawn more attention for increased overseas development assistance (ODA) for the 2020–21 period from Australia due to its strategic position as an economic and security partner in Southeast Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific. By looking at Australia’s development efforts in Vietnam, this paper argues that Australia’s aid policies serve its national interest in expanding trade opportunities and maintaining regional stability. Nevertheless, Australia’s promotion of development cooperation and multilateralism helps to maintain aid flows for economic recovery in developing countries at a time when the international community seems to have lost appetite for collective action amidst the global economic recession.

The paper will illustrate the above argument in three parts. The first part will demonstrate how Australia’s aid program has evolved since 2013 particularly through the promulgation of the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper. The second part will delve into the case of Australia’s ODA to Vietnam during the same period, reflecting on the general foreign policy frameworks and the changing relationship between Australia and Vietnam particularly since the

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Australia’s Development Policy: From the Foreign Policy White Paper to the Partnerships for Recovery

Figure 1: Australian Aid over Time (Development Policy Centre)

The figure above tracks how Australian aid has changed over time between 1961 and the present day. Australia’s ODA increased at the fastest rate from 2001–02 to 2013–14, doubling from A$2.5 billion to A$5 billion. This period was the so-called “golden consensus” of Australian foreign aid spending as both major political parties supported raising the aid target to be 0.5 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI). According to Wells, the “golden consensus” emerged at a time when the Australian economy was booming and other OECD countries were also increasing their contributions. After the Liberal-National Coalition came into power in 2013, Australia’s aid budget was cut significantly. AusAid – an executive agency responsible for managing the aid portfolio – was integrated into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). As then-Foreign Minister Julie Bishop stated in 2013, the Coalition’s foreign policy aimed to enhance “Australia trade and economic interests in the Indo-Pacific region”; to align with this objective, the foreign aid program previously managed by AusAid must also “transform our overseas development assistance program from aid-donor-recipient relationships to sustainable economic partnerships.”

The Coalition’s stance on aid and international affairs is consolidated in the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper. The document lays out a framework for Australia’s international engagement to ensure its national interest in safeguarding Australia’s prosperity, Indo-Pacific regional security, as well as the rules-based international order. The White Paper reiterates throughout that cooperation and partnerships are key to achieving the national interests while also bringing mutual benefits for other stakeholders in the region. Despite this, Australia’s ODA

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7 Wells, “Influencing Australian Aid.”
dropped from a peak of 0.32 per cent of GNI in 2014–15 to only 0.21 per cent of GNI in 2019–20. After adjusting for inflation, the program has shrunk by 27 per cent from 2013 to 2019. Aid allocation to the Pacific has increased but has been at the expense of other regions, including Southeast Asia (4.2 per cent drop in real change from 2018–19). This is despite the White Paper's acknowledgment of ASEAN's important role as Australia's biggest trading partner and as a strategic security partner in the Indo-Pacific. As DFAT Secretary Frances Adamson explained, Australia has shifted towards “economic governance and policy reform to develop the skills and human capital that Southeast Asian countries want”, considering their high economic growth in the past decade. This rationale aligned with Minister Bishop's statement on transforming aid relationships into economic partnerships in 2013.

While the 2017 White Paper still guides Australia’s international engagement today, COVID–19 has prompted the government to reorient its development program. In Foreign Minister Marise Payne’s speech on 16 June 2020, she highlighted the need for Australia to actively create new rules vital to its security, interests, and values, and that Australia must better target its role to create positive outcomes for Australia and its partners. Reflecting the new policy shift, since May 2020, the Partnerships for Recovery (PFR) has become the temporary new doctrine of Australian foreign affairs and aid policy in a vision of preserving a “stable, prosperous, resilient Indo-Pacific in the wake of COVID–19.” The new PFR framework makes changes to development priorities and approaches across countries and regions, with an amplified emphasis on cooperation and partnerships. While the Indo-Pacific remains a priority, the aid program has changed its area of focus to health security, social stability and economic recovery – three pillars that apply across every country-specific plan, including for Vietnam.

**Australia’s Development Policy in Vietnam: Strategic Partners in COVID–19**

**Evolution of aid and the bilateral partnership**

Australia’s development program in Vietnam exemplifies Australia’s changing foreign affairs and aid policies in Vietnam as the Australia-Vietnam bilateral partnership has improved over time. Australia established diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1973, but the bilateral relationship has only grown in earnest with the signing of the Comprehensive Partnership in 2009 and was elevated with the Strategic Partnership in 2018. During the past decade, both countries have increased engagement through high-level visits, multilateral trade agreements, security cooperation, and knowledge-innovation exchanges. By 2019, Vietnam has become Australia’s fastest growing trade partner, with bilateral trade reaching A$15.5 billion.

Australia’s ODA to Vietnam has also evolved alongside the development of the bilateral partnership. After the Comprehensive Partnership was signed in 2009, a new aid investment plan was implemented with a focus on economic growth, poverty reduction, value for money, and gender equality, accompanied by a specific performance benchmark. These reforms aligned with Australia’s global aid program after AusAid was integrated into DFAT in 2013.

As Vietnam’s economy grew substantially in the 2010s, Australia again refocused its Aid Investment Plan (AIP) for 2015–16 to 2019–20 to working with the Vietnamese government and other multilateral partners, such as UN Agencies and the World Bank, to carry out top-down development projects targeting governance, leadership, and economic cooperation, and knowledge-innovation exchanges. By 2019, Vietnam has become Australia’s fastest growing trade partner, with bilateral trade reaching A$15.5 billion.

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12 Clare, “Official Development Assistance (ODA).”


capacity-building. The AIP also stops investment in health, energy, human rights, climate change, and disaster risk reduction, instead claiming to integrate these issues across other activities. There are three objectives that the AIP identifies specifically for Vietnam: (1) enabling private sector development, (2) assisting the development and employment of a highly-skilled workforce, and (3) promoting women's economic empowerment. These objectives are in turn carried out through the Aus4Vietnam portfolio – Aus4Reform, Aus4Skills, Aus4Transport, Aus4Innovation, Aus4Equality and Aus4Water. As Australia’s global aid budget reduced significantly during this period, Australia’s ODA in Vietnam was also cut by half from A$160.5 million in 2014–2015 to only A$86 million in 2015–2016, further dropping to a mere A$78 million in 2018–2019. However, these trends slightly changed course in 2020 with the introduction of the Partnerships for Recovery (PFR) in 2020.

**Vietnam’s COVID–19 Development Response Plan (DRP)**

The PFR has reoriented most of Australia’s development priorities through country-specific COVID–19 Development Response Plans (DRP). In contrast to the previous trend, the ODA budget for Vietnam in 2020–21 has actually increased slightly from A$78.2 million in 2018–19 to A$78.9 million. The DRP has also adopted the three pillars of actions of the PFR – health security, stability, and economic recovery – in place of the three Vietnam-specific objectives (see above).

Under the three new pillars, existing development activities have been pivoted or rebranded. Health security focuses on innovation and assistance for the health system to maintain service delivery and access to medical products under pressure of the pandemic. Activities under this pillar also include new dialogues among law-enforcement agencies, defence forces, and border agencies to exchange information on cross-border health security. The Stability and Economic Recovery pillars consolidate existing development activities with slight adaptation to COVID–19. The Enhanced Economic Engagement Strategy laid out in the Joint Statement of 2019, for example, will likely adapt to changing economic situations in the region and focus on assisting businesses post-COVID. Many other programs under Aus4Skills, Aus4Reform and Aus4Transport are kept the same, such as human resources and skills development programs for government officials, vocational education and industry skills boards, and knowledge exchange in transport systems. Gender equality and women’s economic empowerment ceases to be a standalone objective and is instead integrated across all categories.

The DRP has also resumed activities in ensuring food, energy and water security, which the AIP 2015–16 put a stop to earlier. As central Vietnam got hit by a series of continuous superstorms during October and early November 2020, Australia has also provided A$2.1 million in emergency relief towards urgent needs such as ensuring access to clean water and sanitation or access to education for children.

Both the DRP and the PFR stay close to Australia’s foreign policy objectives. Health security cooperation activities help to contain the spread of virus across borders, thus allowing the movements of people, goods and services to continue. Under the Economic Recovery pillar, the DRP supports Vietnam to “reopening supply chains disrupted by the pandemic and implement trade commitments” as well as improving “the biological security of trade in plant and animal products with Vietnam.” These types of assistance directly serves Australia’s trade and business interests in diversifying its supply chain and markets particularly for agricultural products as Australia’s economic relationship with China (its largest export destination) deteriorates. The program also emphasizes aid-for-trade activities could both support Vietnam’s economic recovery and create new economic opportunities for Australia. It must be noted that Australia has also committed A$80 million to the Covi COVAX initiative and a further A$23.2 million to ensure access to COVID–19 vaccines in the Pacific and Southeast Asia on top of the A$4 billion ODA budget. This will be a significant contribution to pandemic relief efforts and further facilitates

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21 Ibid.
22 Ibid, 3.
economic recovery for the whole region. Through the DRP, Australia continues to highlight the Australia-Vietnam relationship, Vietnam’s strategic importance as a middle power in the region, and relationships with multilateral partners like the World Bank and the Asia Development Bank. This narrative reflects Vietnam’s position as an important regional partner especially in trade, as Australia and Vietnam also engage in multilateral trade agreements such as CP-TPP, AANZFTA, RCEP, and ASEAN forums.

**National Interests and Collective Action**

Global cooperation, particularly during global crises, is a type of global public good that will serve every country’s interest, as one country’s collapse will lead to others in the current interconnected world. Development assistance can uphold recovery and global cooperation as it is determined by political commitments and not external economic shocks; but it is also under severe threats of decline. Even before COVID–19, the majority of Development Assistance Committee countries were already failing to achieve the 0.7 per cent target of ODA as a share of GNI. According to preliminary data, bilateral aid commitments in 2020 have fallen substantially from US$76 billion to about US$45.8 billion in comparison to 2019.

In this global context, Australia’s decision not to make further cuts to its development program and incrementally increase its ODA-to-GNI level is a positive call for collective action. Of course, Australia’s policy stance is purely based on its national interests. Whether before or after COVID–19, Australia’s development program has been consistent with Australia’s foreign policy and trade objectives. Australia has increased its development efforts in Vietnam, for example, as the country is an important economic and security partner. As a nation benefiting from economic globalisation, it is important for Australia to advocate for international development and cooperation to foster global economic recovery. As the OECD notes, “the status-seeking efforts of governments are intertwined with peoples’ spirit of mutual solidarity when facing a common challenge.”

Australia is an example of an emerging power taking a more active role on the international stage to pursue its national interests; yet its efforts also uphold international cooperation in this difficult time and contribute to global economic recovery.

There are widespread calls for Australia still to further increase its aid budget and make reforms to better serve its foreign policy goals and foster sustainable recovery for its development partners. According to the Lowy Institute, DFAT needs a budget and priority boost from the government to achieve Australia’s goals in the international arena to carry out an increasingly heavy development and diplomacy portfolio. The government also needs to change Australian public perspectives to garner more domestic support for foreign aid. In 2018, a Lowy Institute poll surprisingly found that the majority of Australians actually favour the foreign aid budget to increase by more than 12 times (it was only about 0.8 per cent in 2019 and will likely drop to 0.63 per cent in 2020–21). Enhanced aid advocacy at home and abroad will be instrumental to changing political leadership mindsets and bring more much-needed support to the aid and foreign policy programs, which in turn contribute to global recovery efforts.

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26 The OECD Development Assistance Committee is international forum of 30 country members (including Australia) that provide international aid.


References


LABOUR OF LOVE: BOOSTING THE INDONESIA-AUSTRALIA PARTNERSHIP IN EDUCATION AND LABOUR SKILLS TRAINING THROUGH THE IA-CEPA

Hilda Yanuar Jong | Indonesia

Introduction

Indonesia is in a critical period of action on whether it can become a high-income country and the fourth biggest global economy by 2045. It is experiencing a demographic dividend starting from 2020, where the working age group is expected to reach up to 70 per cent of the total population by 2030. This potential, however, is at risk partly due to Indonesia’s inadequate labour performance as shown by its poor ranking in the United Nation’s Human Development Index: 111th out of 189 countries, one of the lowest among the world’s major economies. Moreover, by 2030, 23 million currently available jobs could be displaced by automation amidst the Industry 4.0 trend, making the need for higher qualifications in the form of college or other advanced degrees inevitable.

This article will identify Indonesia’s pain points in upgrading labour skills and propose recommendations to boost the cooperation between Indonesia and Australia. Australia is a natural partner for Indonesia in addressing the need of labour upgrading and reskilling because of the geographical proximity and the commendable Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector. Two policies by the Government of Indonesia (GoI) that could potentially help boost the cooperation are the ratification of the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IA-CEPA) and the passing of a jobs creation bill called the ‘Omnibus Law’. Despite the positive developments, it is important to reflect on and analyse the problems that have occurred in the past for thorough planning moving forward.

Indonesian labour market at a glance

As of August 2020, the Indonesian workforce consists of around 138 million people, nearly 40 per cent of which are under the age of 35. With an unemployment rate of 4.94 per cent, a third of the workforce is employed in the agriculture sector.

1. Labour supply: low educational attainment

While it is apparent that higher education degrees will become more essential to compete in the labour market, Figure 1 shows that the Indonesian labour force is still dominated by the lower educated. Around 40 per cent of the total labour force in Indonesia have completed only primary school education. This population group is at the most risk in the face of rising automation, potentially exposing the country to a ‘middle-income trap’ (stagnancy of national income within the middle-income range). Moreover, Indonesia still ranks relatively poor in the English Proficiency Index at 74th out of 100 countries.
Higher education (HE) attainment is still very low due to structural problems within the Indonesian education sector. Data from 2019 shows that less than 9 per cent of the population holds a bachelor’s degree and less than 0.5 per cent holds a master’s degree. These low percentages occur despite nearly half of the population being under the age of 25. The numbers are critically low and have been relatively stagnant in the past decade.

2. Predominantly informal labour demand and skills gap

On the macro level, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) comprise around 60 per cent of the Indonesian GDP and employ most of the workforce. Unfortunately, SMEs in Indonesia commonly operate informally. As of 2019, the total workforce in Indonesia is 133.56 million people, yet only 38.7 million (around 29 per cent) hold taxpayer status.

Furthermore, in the formal sector that typically requires high school education as minimum qualification, there is a significant skills mismatch. Figure 2 shows that at least 50 per cent of formal employers think high school education does not meet the enterprises’ needs. While the figures are better for HE, the proportion of enterprises that are satisfied with college education is still less than half. The best performing type of education is vocational training, which indicates that Indonesia could prioritize this for practical solutions of skills mismatch.

The current labour demand landscape is expected to change soon due to digitization and industrialization. With the Indonesian economy is transforming to be more service-based, the demand for higher skilled workers is inevitable. For instance, the COVID–19 pandemic exposed Indonesia’s lack of healthcare workers, bringing attention and urgency to quickly increase the number and quality of labour in the sector. Furthermore, with the digitization trend prevalent in almost all industries from healthcare to lifestyle, the demand for tech-savvy labour will increase significantly.

Regulatory issues in labour skill improvement

Indonesia ranks 88th in the world in education, indicating that Indonesian labour has limited resources to improve its quality. While GoI has launched several policies over the years to improve education and labour quality, the following regulatory and political issues cause poor outcomes.

1. Rigid Indonesian education laws

The prevailing regulation on education in Indonesia is relatively rigid, which hinders both the private and public sector in developing domestic education services. Laws stipulate that education services at all levels should be carried out by non-profit foundations, naturally limiting private sector participation in developing the industry. Furthermore, public education institutions are also limited by additional sets of regulation due to state funding.

The rigidity remains despite the persistent backlog in domestic higher education demand. Indonesia’s public universities can only accept about 97,000 students, merely 20 per cent of total high school graduates, and the percentage is relatively stable since 2010. Furthermore, public universities have very little financial autonomy which constrains their capability to expand capacity and arrest declining quality. Public universities have mainly two sources of funding, namely government funding from the state budget and revenues from students. While revenues generated by public universities are also considered as state income, both sources of funding are subject to strict audit and control by the central government, hindering innovation and investment on long-term programs.

Combined with the limited participation from the local private sector, more Indonesian middle-income families decide to send their children to foreign universities. The domestic backlog is positively correlated with the growing number of Indonesians seeking degrees abroad, which indicates growing purchasing power for education. Indonesia is the third-largest sender of international students among ASEAN countries; the figure has grown by nearly 62 per cent since 1998, reaching a high of 47,317 in 2016. The growth of Indonesian students abroad is still lower than expected mainly due to low English language proficiency.

13 OECD and Asian Development Bank, Education in Indonesia – Rising to the Challenge.
2. Restrictions for foreign investment in higher education

With limited local capacity to improve education, the sector is also relatively closed for foreign investment. Education is included in the Negative Investment List (Daftar Negatif Investasi / DNI) which strictly regulates foreign education institutions entering Indonesia. While the demand of foreign education by the middle-class population is growing, the restriction not only causes losses for the local education capacity, but also a growing deficit in the education trade balance.

HE is subject to stricter regulation compared to compulsory education from operational perspective. For HE, the law requires any institutions to prioritize Indonesian citizens to be lecturers. As there is only a fraction of the population that holds doctorate degrees, the requirement makes it difficult for foreign universities to maintain quality as well as discourages knowledge transfer to Indonesia.

3. Limited capacity from GoI to tackle life cycle effects of education inequality

Despite popular perception, financial factors may not be the primary reason for the low educational attainment of people from lower socioeconomic groups. The government has launched a program called School Operational Aid (Bantuan Operasional Sekolah / BOS) Program in 2005. BOS has practically eliminated school fees starting from primary to senior secondary school. However, even 15 years after the launch of the program, the effect on school participation rates among the lower socioeconomic groups is relatively low.15

The data indicates that there are life cycle effects where disadvantaged children experience a snowballing discrepancy in education from an early age. According to a national survey between 2015 and 2019, the data on average school duration for citizens aged above 15 shows an enormous gap between expenditure groups. Only people from the top socioeconomic group have an average duration close to twelve years, which indicates completion of education up to secondary level, the minimum requirement for HE. The second top quintile has an average of only nine years, and the figure decreases further down to 6 years for lower expenditure level as shown in Figure 3. Children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less motivated to engage in starting learning at an early age, causing low attainment that further demotivates them to continue to the following education level.

Figure 3: Indonesia’s Average School Duration based on Expenditure Group 2015–2019
(Bandan Pusat Statistik)

Indonesia-Australia dynamics in Education

Australia is the most popular destination for rapidly expanding Indonesian middle-income families seeking HE abroad, attracting around 40 per cent share and growing steadily over the years.16 With education as the largest services export, in 2019 Australia booked record-high education exports at A$37.6 billion.17 As of 2017, there are 20,000 Indonesian students in Australia, the figure is however significantly lower compared to other populous countries like China and India.18

The following are two important policies that can potentially help boost the relationship between Indonesia and Australia in education.

a. IA-CEPA

Following the ratification of the IA-CEPA on 5th July 2020, both countries are expected to begin the implementation of the agreement in the next few years. From a trade aspect, the agreement eliminates tariffs for 100 per cent of Indonesian exports to Australia and 99 per cent of Australian exports to Indonesia, practically allowing for the free flow of goods and services between the two countries.19 Moreover, ‘enhanced skills’ is one out of three main outcome areas covered in the agreement. The signature activity in this scope is co-investing in Skills and Training.

Several initiatives have been outlined under the scope of ‘enhanced skills.’ Australia is allowed 67 per cent ownership for supplying certain training services.20 There will be industry committees to identify major skills gaps in various priority industries and a TVET clearing house to cater the needs identified by the committees.21 Furthermore, both countries will also develop an exchange program for working professionals. Australia has also committed to expanding the working holiday visa program to provide learning experience for Indonesian youths.22 These measures will not only tackle the skills mismatch, but also provide greater access for the younger Indonesian generation to get better education and training from Australia.

IA-CEPA’s considerable scope demonstrates mutual needs between governments of two countries, yet awareness amongst Australians in this regard is relatively low. Indonesia has been a top destination for students studying abroad on the Australian Government’s New Colombo Plan scholarship launched in 2014.23 However, Australian interest in Indonesia is declining significantly as indicated by only nine out of thirty-nine Australian universities offering Indonesian-language programmes at the end of 2020.24

b. Omnibus Law.

The Indonesian parliamentary passed a jobs creation bill called the ‘Omnibus Law’ on 5 October 2020 amending as many as 79 existing laws.25 The Omnibus Law was controversial during its legislation process, as there was relatively minimum public involvement in such a sweeping bill. There has also been a public circulation of at least five different draft versions even after the parliament passed the law. Nevertheless, the Omnibus Law signifies Indonesia’s ambition in attracting investment to create job opportunities in the country. There are several articles in the Omnibus Law that are in favour of the implementation of IA-CEPA and partnership between both countries in education:

16 “Indonesian Outbound Continues to Grow with Emphasis on Regional Destinations.”
17 “Australia’s $37.6b International Student Export Con - MacroBusiness.”
18 Poole, “Australian Universities to Benefit in Australia-Indonesia Free Trade Deal.”
19 DFAT, “Indonesia - Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IA-CEPA): Economic Cooperation Program (ECP)”
20 Poole, “Australian Universities to Benefit in Australia-Indonesia Free Trade Deal.”
21 DFAT, “Indonesia - Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IA-CEPA): Economic Cooperation Program (ECP)”
22 “Kemitraan Baru RI-Australia, Dari Strategic Deficit Ke Strategic Trust | Ekonomi”
23 Australian Embassy in Indonesia, “New Colombo Plan”
24 “Unis Give up Teaching Indonesian Just When We Need Our Close Neighbour”
25 BBC, “Indonesia”
1. Chapter 12 Article 65: Licenses in the education sector can be registered through a business license. This may alleviate the non-profit restrictions for education institutions.

2. Chapter 9 Article 150: It may be easier for foreign educational institutions to enter Indonesia through Special Economic Zones (Kawasan Ekonomi Khusus / KEK).
   a. Types of KEK: Education is added to the list of industries open for foreign investment in KEKs.
   b. Location criteria of KEK: KEK’s criteria is significantly simplified and made more generic than previously, allowing flexibility for stakeholders to establish and capitalize the benefits from KEKs.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the current Omnibus Law is yet to be enacted into government regulations, making the law act as a guiding principle, rather than a binding law. Stakeholders need to wait for the corresponding government regulation to be issued to appreciate the real implications of the law.

**Recommendations**

The latest developments may not be sufficient to address the latent education inequality. Hence, it should be solved internally by GoI. As for Indonesia-Australia cooperation, a quick win would be to target current working professionals through vocational training and address the HE backlogs to cater to the growing middle-income families. The recommendation here is a three-pronged approach to cultivate a more conducive environment for the implementation of planned programs of the IA-CEPA:

1. **Shape public opinion on importance of opening the education sector**

   Indonesia is still relatively protectionist, as reflected in the restrictions in education. Given the demographic bonus window of opportunity combined with automation trends, Indonesia needs swifter solutions, one of which is to allow foreigners to teach in HE in Indonesia. Changes along this direction would not be possible without a proper public understanding that opening the education sector is both beneficial and urgent. One possible alternative is for governments to lobby key public organizations that hold essential roles in Indonesian education such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and associations of education institutions and teachers. The campaign should include how opening the education sector would be favourable for current stakeholders and would not compromise national values of identities.

2. **Expand English and Indonesian proficiency**

   Language literacy is an important factor in boosting the bilateral relationship. While the majority of the population still has limited English proficiency, to maximize the outreach of Australian TVET in Indonesia, Indonesia should invest more in expanding the English language training to the general population and improve its EPI ranking to be comparable to other major economies. On the other hand, Australia should also put efforts into training Indonesia-literate citizens to ensure adequate human resources in developing a mutually benefitting and respecting diplomacy with Indonesia during implementation of IA-CEPA.

3. **Build synergy between Australian and Indonesian TVET providers**

   While the Omnibus Law is moving towards liberalization of education, the real impact depends on the derived law. Considering the long-standing protectionism, there may still be political pressure to put regulatory constraints in the derived law that can hinder the implementation IA-CEPA programs. Hence, Australian TVET providers may need to work with their Indonesian counterparts to ensure that the programs can still be carried out through strategic partnerships and structuring.
References


Why Public Sector Innovation Matters

In recent years, the macro-societal transformations underpinning the ‘Fourth Industrial Revolution’ have recalibrated the salience of growth enablers, particularly those centred on harnessing innovation from all sectors of society for positive transformations. This has compelled many governments in developing countries to explore various means to maximise this force for meaningful economic progress. A case in point is public sector innovation – the ‘institutionalisation of new approaches to provide quality public services and better respond to society’s needs.’¹ As the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI) articulates,² public sector innovation has recently been accruing prominence in many emerging economies, especially those focusing on rendering their governments more ‘seamless and agile’ in guiding development pathways.³ COVID–19 furthermore heightened its urgency, as governments are required to craft and enact comprehensive policy measures to cushion the repercussions on public health and social systems,⁴ while strengthening resilience against the foreseeable economic fallout.⁵

Policymakers in Southeast Asia are also rushing to embrace this priority. The recent ‘ASEAN Public Service Delivery Guidelines’,⁶ for example, recognises that the demand for high-quality public services in the region is rapidly growing, due in part to improved citizens’ livelihoods which are fuelling higher expectations for more responsive and accountable governments.⁷ The ‘ASEAN Vision 2025’ also denotes sound public service as integral for regional architecture building, particularly the formation of a ‘politically cohesive, economically integrated, socially responsible and truly rules-based, and people-centred community’.⁸

In Cambodia – a nation once destabilised by the notorious Khmer Rouge regime – the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has been instrumental in bolstering public sector innovation to hasten its post-COVID socio-economic recovery on many fronts. Recognising the ample benefits of capable governments in overcoming state fragilities, policymakers have been working consistently to implement ambitious public administration reforms (PAR) via the ‘National Plan for Public Administration Reform 2019 – 2030’ to enhance institutional capacities in adapting to the post-COVID context. This also forms part of a nationwide endeavour to eliminate convoluted bureaucratic processes and performance inertias, such as endemic corruption and long-standing

⁶ This the first-ever regional handbook which outlines extensive recommendations for gauging the performance of Southeast Asian governments.
patronage systems, all of which are undesirable symptoms of weak governance. Furthermore, the government has also been collaborating with multiple international development partners to realise these aspirations, one being Australia.

A History of Australia’s Role in Cambodia: Enhancing Post-Conflict Recovery

Historically, Australia has been an active agent in facilitating Cambodia’s post-conflict reconstruction processes. Leng Thearith, a renowned Cambodian foreign policy scholar, characterises Australia as an ‘architect of Cambodian peace’ given her wide-ranging contributions to the former project.10

Canberra began to demonstrate notable interests in Cambodia’s post-conflict transition following the Khmer Rouge’s demise in 1979. Here, it generously offered substantial relief aid in 1981 to help restore Cambodia’s economic prosperity and also demonstrated strong political goodwill by revoking diplomatic recognition of the Khmer Rouge Party to downplay its international political legitimacy, given the regime’s unlawful orchestration of atrocities and war crimes affecting almost 2 million Cambodians from 1975 until 1979.11 In November 1989, a series of diplomatic dialogues led by Australia were convened with the relevant conflicting parties to broker a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Further assistances were also channelled towards the curation of a comprehensive 155-page plan entitled the ‘Red Book’, which called for an enhanced transitional role for the United Nations in overseeing the peacebuilding process,12 particularly the functioning and administration of the temporary government, the Supreme National Council (SNC), combined with an enhanced electoral role in arranging and overseeing a national election.13

Backed by persistent diplomatic efforts from (then) Foreign Minister Gareth Evans and the (then) Australian Special Envoy, Michael Costello, these undertakings culminated into the adoption of the landmark ‘Paris Peace Accords’ in 1991,14 which authorised the deployment of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).15 This was a large-scale peacekeeping operation that Australia supported by appointing Australian Force Commander Lieutenant General John Sanderson as Head of Mission.16 Under his command, 495 Australian Defence Force personnel were deployed as a signals contingent, along with 6 headquarters staff, 10 Australian Federal Police officers, 9 Australian Electoral Commission Officers, and 69 election observers. Australia also made other substantial logistical contributions.17

Today, Australian aid assistance to Cambodia, totalling A$66 million from 2019 – 2020, has expanded to include more diverse areas of development cooperation, ranging from fostering stronger people-to-people links via flagship educational initiatives to promoting better trade and investment relationships. Currently, it is also supporting the Cambodian government in effectively responding to the detrimental healthcare and economic ramifications of COVID-1918 via its ‘COVID-19 Development Response Plan (CDRP).’19 Strategically, Canberra also views Cambodia as a crucial partner in its broader engagement strategy with Southeast Asia, as articulated in the ‘2017 Foreign Policy White Paper’.20

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11 Ibid.
13 Thearith Leng, “Australia’s Role in Cambodia: More than a Peacemaking Architect,”
14 Frank Frost, “Cambodia’s Troubled Path to Recovery;”
16 Ibid.
17 Thearith Leng, “Australia’s Role in Cambodia: More than a Peacemaking Architect,”
Despite these efforts, there are still multiple spaces within the current aid agenda for Australia to further assist Cambodia in achieving its central priorities for post-COVID socio-economic recovery, one being public sector innovation. In fact, Australia’s public sector is one of the most innovative and progressive in the Asia-Pacific region. Therefore, Cambodia’s public institutions can benefit enormously from Australian expertise. Two sectors in Cambodia in which Australia has relative strength in the region are: (1) promoting public policy research and (2) developing GovTech (government technologies).

Promoting Policy Research

Australia's continued support for promoting high-quality and evidence-based policy research in Cambodia can be beneficial for its current development trajectory and recovery process in many ways. Fundamentally, a vibrant research environment is central to the incremental evolution of a ‘sound and enabling national knowledge regime’ for underpinning economic rebound and long-term sustainable development. In Cambodia, research is also essential for what Carol Weiss calls, ‘broadening the intellectual horizons of government thinking’, fundamental for increasing the quality of existing policy debates and dialogues. A rigid research-policy linkage can also better enable policymakers to explore, experiment, and engage with a constellation of unique solutions and leverage points for championing ambitious institutional reforms and creating better policy measures. This is pertinent during post-COVID transitions, as research can help engender novel insights for reorienting development trajectories, timely and targeted policy interventions, and also the early identification of the perceived shortcomings of the current national recovery approaches.

In Cambodia’s current knowledge sector – defined broadly as the ‘set of knowledge institutions and actors which delineate the interconnections among them’ – the national research environment is nascently improving. This is primarily driven by the growing recognition of the imperatives of evidence-based policies and their vital contributions to informing the design and execution of contemporary reforms and policy undertakings on transitioning Cambodia into a middle-income and high-income nation by 2030 and 2050, respectively. Ambassador Pou Sothirak, Executive Director of the Cambodia Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP), further underscored its potency in stabilising Cambodia’s growth patterns and national resilience against the magnitude of emerging macro-scale shocks, such as globalisation and great power competition. Around 30 research institutes and think tanks are presently operating in Cambodia, engaging actively with several focal policymakers within government circles to influence the relevant policy agendas and programs. In essence, Australia has also been actively supporting their expansion while recognising its enabling potentials in fostering higher levels of participatory and improved policymaking plus governance. In August 2019, Australia instituted ‘Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development’ – a three-year, A$2.9 million (2019 – 2022) initiative centred on ‘strengthening the capacity of Cambodian think tanks and other institutions to undertake quality research’ and to ‘encourage the active use of research to inform public policy analysis and dialogue in Cambodia.’

Through this initiative, there are ample opportunities for Australia to further diversify its programmatic activities in Cambodia’s research environment, particularly by ensuring that their development-related outcomes effectively correspond to the prevailing priorities on enhancing public service delivery for post-COVID recovery. Many policy options are worth exploring. First, Australia could further support the capacity development of Cambodia’s researchers, targeting those with capability to produce high-quality, evidence-based research on successful approaches to public sector reforms for accelerating post-COVID recovery. This is achievable through directing more financial assistance to prominent researchers within key think tanks, for training or professional development in Australia or elsewhere, to learn about comparative experiences and best practices in policy research and innovation associated with designing and astutely implementing COVID recovery strategies. For example, the Australian National University (ANU) annually convenes the ‘ASEAN-Australia Health Security Fellowship’ – a program for candidates from specific ASEAN countries to undertake a Master of Philosophy in Applied Epidemiology in Australia to hone their skills in detecting and responding to disease outbreaks within the region.32 Such an approach can also be tailored into an initiative akin to a ‘COVID Policy Research and Innovation Fellowship’ for Cambodian policy researchers. Students may undertake short-term study visits to prominent Australian think tanks and research institutes to learn viable strategies in formulating targeted research and communicating tangible policy recommendations on innovating and augmenting government responses to the cascading effects of COVID–19, particularly in Cambodia’s presently changing socio-economic context.

Concurrently, Canberra can also consider establishing more multi-directional ‘institutional linkages’ between Cambodian and Australian policy research institutes like the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) or the Australian Institute. This would engender viable collaborative platforms for knowledge and expertise sharing, through possible initiatives like short-term training courses on policy-relevant topics, collaborative conferences and research projects, digital leadership mentoring series, or even joint policy hackathons. In the short-run, this can potentially normalise the use of ‘collective intelligence’ to spearhead public service innovation for COVID recovery in Cambodia, particularly via international exchanges with Australian experts. Such cross-institutional partnerships can also gradually solidify local policy researchers’ capabilities in tailoring ‘home-grown solutions’ to public issues – a crucial starting point in localising service innovation for ongoing institutional capacity development.33 In the long-run, these measures can also help position Cambodia’s development trajectory on a more ‘self-sustaining pathway’, thereby creating better prospects for durable economic growth and also resilience in the post-COVID era.34

A final avenue for amplifying research-related support is via working more closely with the existing think tanks and epistemic communities to co-develop ‘attractive incentive mechanisms’ to increase public participation in research projects and initiatives designed to address the lingering impediments to responsive, inclusive, and innovative public services in Cambodia. In previous years, for instance, student research competitions, ranging from the national ‘Cambodian Student Research Competition’35 to the policy-focused ‘Student Essay Contest’36 by the Cambodia Development Centre (CDC), were organised annually to crowdsource ideas from talented university students on innovative policy solutions. Limited attention, however, is still given to encouraging public involvement in dialogue about strengthening existing civil service reforms. In light of this debacle, Australia could, through the Ponlok Chomnes initiative, work collaboratively with local research entities to convene a ‘National Public Policy Competition’ to harness research-driven public inputs for implementing civil service reforms in a more open and participatory manner. In addition to prizes, therefore, the competition could feature a ‘springboard incubation program’ for the winners to work with focal policymakers in government to enact their proposed policy initiatives with ongoing supervision from them. In Malaysia, for example, the flagship ‘Malaysian Public Policy Competition’ is organised annually, where undergraduate students propose fresh and forward-thinking ideas and solutions to incumbent policymakers on several policy issues confronting Malaysia at both the national and local levels.37

and state level. Winners then work in coherence with the ‘International Council for Malaysian Scholars (ICMS)’ to partake in consultations with a plethora of public and private stakeholders to officially implement their ideas on national policy agendas.\(^\text{37}\) With support from Australia, a similar competition can also be commissioned in Cambodia. Fundamentally, its emphasis on reinforcing the value of policy research will surely elevate the ‘symbolic importance’ of the former, thereby promoting greater national momentum in this emerging domain alongside existing schemes like the Ponlok Chomnes’ Emerging Research Fund\(^\text{38}\) and the government’s Innovation Fund.\(^\text{39}\) In the long-run, it will also empower more young people to participate in research and dialogue to engage with government counterparts on inclusive and forward-looking policy configuration and implementation – a cardinal endeavour to strengthen public trust in government and influence positive perceptions among young Cambodians in the post-COVID period.

### Incentivising Investments in Gov-Tech Start-ups

Aside from modernising the research sector, Australia could also further assist Cambodia in attracting more ‘GovTech Start-ups’ in its domestic entrepreneurial landscape. According to the World Bank, GovTech broadly refers to ‘whole-of-government approaches that promote simple, accessible, and efficient government’, through the use of ‘technology to transform the public sector, improve service delivery to citizens and businesses, and increase efficiency, transparency, and accountability’.\(^\text{40}\) At present, many tech-savvy entrepreneurs in the global start-up community are continuously leveraging these emerging technologies to modernise core government operations\(^\text{41}\) and to also nourish more agile, innovative, and transformational governance mechanisms and organisational practices within public institutions.\(^\text{42}\)

In Cambodia, even in the capital city of Phnom Penh, GovTech developments are still relatively insubstantial. Impact Hub’s report on ‘Cambodia’s Social Innovation Ecosystem’ articulates that the majority of tech-based social enterprises are concentrated in sectors like EdTech and women empowerment.\(^\text{43}\) Unfortunately, there is still a dearth of start-ups introducing modern policy trends that map onto government agendas, like tech-based healthcare innovation or digital citizen engagement.

In the ‘Global Innovation Index 2020’, Australia’s innovation ecosystem ranks 23rd in the world in terms of competitiveness and vibrancy. Furthermore, its government effectiveness – evaluated in terms of public service responsiveness and efficiency – ranks 14th in the world.\(^\text{44}\) Ultimately, these indicators suggest that that Australia, as an Asia-Pacific power, is well-placed to assist Cambodia in the fields that contribute to these indices. To date, Canberra has been a long-standing supporter of Cambodia’s Public Financial Management (PFM) reform project, now progressing to Stage Three (2019 – 2022).\(^\text{45}\) This illustrates that it has established a fairly reputable and creditable position in the public sector reform space that would enable it to act on similar initiatives in the future.

Going forward, Australia can explore these policy alternatives. In the GovTech space, Canberra can consider channelling more financial and technical assistances towards the Cambodian government in implementing its recently enacted ‘E-Commerce Strategy’, particularly the cardinal policy priorities aimed at diversifying the structural bases of the e-commerce ecosystem. To enhance the ‘digital readiness’ of aspiring tech entrepreneurs,

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for example, one strategic objective is to ‘strengthen the national digital skills infrastructure’ through, *inter alia*, improving digital entrepreneurship support for tech start-ups. As a practical matter, this is achievable through establishing more incubation facilities within second-tier cities and rural areas to provide a space for passionate entrepreneurial agents to test and trial their ideas on addressing urban and rural issues via tech-based solutions.\(^{46}\) Here, Australia could consider contributing technical assistance to help set up a ‘City Lab’, starting off in Phnom Penh, which will serve as a dynamic and vibrant ‘GovTech co-working space’ for tech-savvy individuals to congregate and experiment their ground-breaking technological solutions enhancing the quality of urban public services before rolling them out as full-fledged installations. In fact, the city of Melbourne has such a unique space, hosting regular ‘hackathons’ (i.e. GovHack) to crowdsourcing local solutions to urban challenges from civic-minded residents.\(^{47}\) Given its distinctiveness and scalability, this model could also be replicated and adapted to Cambodia’s context with sufficient technical and administrative support from both Australian and Cambodian counterparts. In essence, the lab can function as a central community-oriented public space for local residents to collectively generate policy ideas geared towards not only promoting COVID–19 urban socio-economic recovery in the short-run but also developing smart urban solutions in the long-run in Phnom Penh and other emerging metropolitans like Siem Reap or Battambang, both of which are also designated as pilot smart cities in the ‘ASEAN Smart City Network’.\(^{48}\)

In addition, Australia could also support Cambodia by helping domestic entrepreneurs, GovTech start-up founders, and incubators expand their current connections with overseas networks and markets. This is imperative if they are to acquire greater knowledge about successful examples abroad and adapt those for incubating breakthrough GovTech mechanisms to facilitate government delivery of public services in Cambodia. For Australia, it also creates a crucial avenue for Australian entrepreneurs to share their expertise with key counterparts within the region. In the longer term, this benefits Australia by facilitating priority access to Cambodia and potentially other Southeast Asian emerging markets, capital sources, and the education sector.\(^{49}\)

**Conclusion**

This essay argues that enhancing assistance for public sector innovation through improved policy research and investments into the GovTech landscape to accelerate Cambodia’s post-COVID recovery is essential for both Cambodia and Australia on many fronts. Aside from bolstering Cambodia-Australia relations, bigger investments into enhancing governance and service delivery effectiveness will ultimately enable Cambodia to significantly improve its economic prosperity for the livelihoods of its citizens, who are also future consumers of Australian products, business counterparts for Australian professionals, key focal points in maintaining stable government-to-government relations, and also responsible citizens with shared ideals for better and more resilient communities. Reputation-wise, these efforts can also cement Australia’s image in Cambodia and within Southeast Asia as an Asia-Pacific power committed to taking a more innovative and strategic approach as part of its foreign policy through supporting sectors that are gradually becoming the next critical growth engines in Cambodia.


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2020 has been a year of turbulence on a global scale. Uncertainty ensued following the declaration of COVID–19 as a pandemic in early March. In an attempt to curb the spread of the virus, travel restrictions have prohibited human mobility both internationally and domestically while businesses and institutions entered into a period of extended hibernation. As a result, economies have suffered due to the lockdown and social issues such as unemployment and poverty have been exacerbated. Even after a year under crisis, the onslaught of the novel coronavirus continues to be a major inflection point in global socio-economic and political development. Simply put, because of how the pandemic brought the world to a sudden and drastic halt, COVID–19 is unveiling global incompetencies in real time as existing political and socio-economic systems fracture under pressure.

Post-COVID recovery will require a collaborative effort across governments, civil society, non-governmental institutions and the private sector to re-imagine what a post-pandemic world would look like, in particular, with continued rethinking on how to approach global grand challenges. While the pandemic is catastrophic, the global standstill is an opportunity for societies to rebuild better and in a way that empowers citizens through technology to co-create sustainable urban futures. For instance, even though green transitions were on the policy agenda pre-COVID, the recovery phase could be a distinct timeframe for policy makers to engage citizens in the ‘Green New Deal’. In the months, years and even decades to come, human society will recover from COVID–19 with a new-found purpose — one that centres around technology-enablement in urban spaces and human-environment interactions.

In this context, this paper aims to outline how Smart Cities across the Asia-Pacific are embodiments of smarter, more inclusive and greener urban models. By framing Smart Cities as a developmental goal of Industry 4.0, examples of Smart Cities in Singapore, Thailand and Australia are examined to underline how the Smart City concept can contribute to post-COVID recovery. Respectively, the case studies expound on smart health, economic empowerment, and climate action through the use of technology in urban development. This paper also argues for the importance of nurturing ‘Smart Citizens’ who can participate as non-traditional policy makers in the co-creation of Smart Cities, along with the challenges and opportunities for the future of Australian-ASEAN development.

Industry 4.0 and the Smart City: Empowering Citizen-Government Interaction

At the core of this technology-enabled growth, and interwoven with post-COVID recovery, lies the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Consisting of four components — cloud computing, the Internet of Things (IoT), cognitive computing and cyber-physical systems (CPS) — Industry 4.0 places emphasis on the digital transformation of the entire value chain of the manufacturing industry through automation.1 Countries are transitioning from a production-based economy to a value-based economy that relies on home-grown innovation for continued growth. Across ASEAN and Australia, governments are jumping onto the Industry 4.0 trend to co-create digital solutions. This would allow citizens to live technologically empowered lives and lead to more opportunities for citizen-government interaction. Such initiatives include the ASEAN Smart Cities Network, Thailand 4.0 national development plan, and Australia’s “Prime Minister’s Industry 4.0 Taskforce”.

Merging Industry 4.0 and innovative technologies with urban development, Smart Cities have become a cornerstone of modern city planning. As cities transform, they adopt smart technology accompanied by plural innovation systems that improve people’s standard of living and quality of life. From public health, resource allocation, political participation to transportation and E-governance, technological advancement has become the key to solving most of the 21st-century’s most pressing urban challenges.

Smart Cities and COVID–19 Recovery

Urban regeneration under COVID–19 recovery concentrates on constructing a ‘new normal’ that rearranges how people and institutions interact. In particular, because of the severe economic consequences of the pandemic, the recovery phase can expect to focus on how issues like urban socio-economic inequalities and environmental consciousness are addressed. Equally, guided by the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the post-COVID world is key to “advance[ing] a new sustainable development paradigm” leading up to 2030.

By positioning the pandemic as a critical juncture, COVID–19 offers the opportunity to reflect on and transform existing systems that underlie social interactions. This includes building back using greener, more resilient and more inclusive urban models that will better empower cities and their residents to cushion the shocks of future crises. Considering the long timeline of the pandemic, it is evident that cities need to take on a more proactive role in dealing with crises. Instead of only responding to them, cities need to be better equipped to hedge against risks from natural and man-made disasters.

To achieve this, policy-makers in the region will have to better leverage new technologies that not only enhance the efficiency of the public sector, but also enable more channels of communication between citizens and the government to highlight emerging civil concerns. Therefore, Smart Cities, being at the forefront of the integration between urban planning and Industry 4.0, are experimental sandboxes that allow decision-makers to test policies for post-COVID recovery. In particular, the following sections look at three examples of Smart Cities in the Asia-Pacific region that portray how smart, inclusive, and green recovery policies play a part in strategic long-term urban planning.

Singapore: Smart Recovery for Healthier Smart Cities

Singapore exemplifies the merge between technology and the public health sector to combat COVID–19. With its high population density, Singapore began to incorporate technological innovation in urban development since the 1980s as a powerful catalyst to build a ‘Smart Nation’. Singapore’s E-governance strategy covers several domains including health, education, and urban solutions such as inter-linked public transportation systems.

Expanding on the public health sector, Singapore’s Smart Nation initiative aims to better equip Singaporeans to take care of their own health using Smart devices. This has led to the creation of HealthHub, a one-stop portal and mobile application for Singaporeans to access e-services such as booking appointments and checking their medical records. As a result of HealthHub’s digitalized healthcare services and citizens’ familiarity with health technologies such as Healthy 365 mobile applications and wearable devices, Singapore successfully rolled out TraceTogether, a form of wearable contact-tracing technology during the pandemic.

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The development of responses to COVID–19 were reliant on Smart City tools to reorganize the way cities operate. The expanding virtual space is becoming integral to successful urban planning where residents are consumers of smart technology-infused lifestyles. Apart from a 500–600 per cent boom in Telehealth usage, smart technology was readily employed in strengthening social distancing and contract tracing efforts given their wearability and real-time monitoring capacities. Thus, in the health sector, digitalization trends will continue to develop and should be a priority for Smart Cities in the post-pandemic era as cities progress into the recovery phase.

**Thailand: Inclusive Recovery for Smart Cities**

With loosening domestic restrictions, the Thai government instigated a series of digital campaigns to reinvigorate local tourism. In other words, tourism-dependent Thailand relied on smart technology to overcome its COVID-linked economic stall. In July 2020, the ‘Tao Tiew Day Gun’ (We Travel Together) campaign subsidized travellers to Phuket, and in October, the “Khon La Khrueng” (Let’s Go Halves) campaign distributed a 3000 Baht cash stimulus to stimulate consumption. Both campaigns were expedited by mobile applications that provided seamless consumer and merchant registrations. Moreover, given Thailand’s widespread Internet coverage, technological means effectively reached marginalized communities to support livelihoods disrupted by COVID–19.

In the economic aftermath of COVID–19, both the developed and developing world face worrying GDP contractions up to 5.2 per cent. The pandemic indisputably revealed unjust social systems that marginalize vulnerable groups. These challenges however can be reframed as an opportunity for governments across ASEAN and Australia to seek smart solutions to rebuild urban spaces and bridge structural inequalities using inclusiveness as a guiding principle. For Smart Cities, there is need for governments to strengthen entrepreneurial systems as well as provide infrastructural support for small-and-medium enterprises to transition to the digital economy, especially in the post-COVID era with a projected e-commerce boom.

**Australia: Green Recovery for Sustainable Smart Cities**

Despite countries’ commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and years of climate change advocacy, there is still an existing gap in policy measures for green growth. Considering how citizen health is interlinked with environmental wellbeing and that lockdown restrictions may have contributed to improved air quality, there is a possibility for cities to emerge from the pandemic with a greening mission.

With a basket of policies including Brisbane 2022 New World City Action Plan and Brisbane. Clean, Green, Sustainable 2017–2031, the Brisbane City Council is pioneering green development. The Smart, Connected Brisbane Framework further integrates these strategies using smart technologies, data and innovation to augment Brisbane’s sustainability efforts. Focusing on efficiency, Smart Brisbane prioritizes infrastructures such as Wi-Fi, waste management and green spaces to experiment on green solutions that can be scaled across Australia.

As one of Australia’s fastest urbanizing cities, achieving carbon neutrality through switching to renewable energies, creating green spaces in the city and providing low-emission transportation form the core of Brisbane’s green future. Additionally, Brisbane’s Smart City development actively involves its citizens as Smart Citizens

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10 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
participating in the city’s green efforts. From household waste management to water conservation and neighbourhood plans, Brisbane residents participate in a green ecosystem under the “I Green Heart BNE” umbrella that fosters a communal understanding of individual responsibility for sustainability.\(^{19}\)

Figure 1: I Green Heart BNE (UniLink)

Hence, as cities gradually ease lockdown measures, more public support for the environment-health nexus can be expected as people realise the importance of environmental health for their own wellbeing.\(^{20}\) COVID recovery therefore advances opportunities for governments to switch to sustainable development models, such as ones that reduce cities’ dependency on non-renewable energy. This also includes policies that boost adoption of innovation, climate-smart technologies, and green infrastructure.

Moreover, learning from the success of Brisbane city, sustainable green measures in the post-COVID recovery phase has to be built upon the accumulative efforts of a pool of diverse stakeholders. This includes opening up the policy decision-making space to citizens, but also highlights the importance of active and sustained engagement with both the civil and private sector in order to co-design user-centric green transition policies for sustainable Smart Cities.

Nurturing the ‘Smart Citizen’

To successfully implement Smart Cities across the ASEAN-Australian region as part of COVID–19 recovery, it is essential to diversify the stakeholders involved in Smart City development. This includes citizens, non-government organizations, civil society organizations and the private sector.\(^{21}\) Combined, these actors possess strong leverage in co-creating the foundations and purpose of Smart Cities, such as through providing different perspectives and areas of concern that smart technologies should address as part of urban planning. In the post-pandemic era, scalable and sustainable solutions to urban waste management, mobility as well as access to open spaces remain top concerns.\(^{22}\)

As urbanization continues, the residential population becomes the primary stakeholders who will determine the success of Smart Cities. For Smart Cities to operate, people residing in these spaces have to willingly adapt

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19 Fiscal Affairs Department, Greening the Recovery International Monetary Fund, 2020.
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This places a stronger emphasis on the digital literacy of citizens in addition to Internet infrastructure in the region. However, given the unequal rate of Internet penetration and digital skills across ASEAN, regional implementation of Smart Cities is a challenge. Nevertheless, by recognizing the importance of citizen contributions in the process of creating and sustaining Smart Cities, it becomes easier to align people’s interests to the collective project of co-creating Smart Cities.

To achieve this, it is crucial that leaders of Smart Cities development open up the decision-making process to citizen participation. As non-traditional actors, civil society increasingly takes up space in policy-making, leading to a more participatory approach to decision-making. Moreover, the proliferation of technology has galvanized various E-governance schemes in the region, notably Singapore’s E-government (e-Gov) strategy that enhances transparency, engagement, and consultation with citizens when developing new policies. In the case of Singapore, social media is a key platform that allows citizen-government interactions to happen. For instance, Facebook is a recurring medium that the Singapore government uses to gather public opinion through polls and to consult citizens regarding policy amendments.

Hence, media technology, particularly new media, is a pivotal aspect of civic participation. In addition, based on the case studies for smart and inclusive recovery, mobile applications are effective tools for communication to gather citizen feedback, monitor real-time developments, and roll out new campaigns. Through these means, people are empowered by innovative technologies to become ‘Smart Citizens’ who contribute to successful implementation as well as sustainability of Smart Cities across ASEAN and Australia.

However, the increasing use of smart technologies to transform urban spaces can also present challenges for both policymakers and citizen-users. Notably, cybersecurity risks and citizens’ trust in data protection as well as the reliability of data sources are major concerns surrounding the implementation of Smart Cities. And while media technology acts as an enabling tool for wider participation, they can also be distorted as “instruments of control.” Apart from fluctuating digital literacy rates across the region, national policies on media freedom and freedom of speech also influence how informed citizens are about political developments. This could limit the role of citizen participation in the co-creation of Smart Cities, shifting the focus of such urban development models from being driven by civil society needs to top-down policy implementation.

In the context of post-COVID recovery, failure to meet emerging demands from non-traditional policy actors may lead to policy blind spots or loopholes. As a result, even with wide-spread Smart City technologies to address man-made and environmental disasters, cities can still under-perform in mitigating the consequences of such crises due to a mismatch of policy priorities. Moreover, this concern is further amplified considering the existing coordination gap between civil, private and public sector agencies to implement comprehensive Smart City policies.

Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the Smart City development model is capable of repurposing urban space to contribute to public value. By adopting technologies that leapfrog progress for people’s quality of life and standard of living, Smart Cities add value to urban planning. On top of that, from the perspective of mission-driven recovery, Smart Cities are incubators for transformative innovations. Fitting into the context of post-COVID

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24 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), First ASEAN Youth Development Index. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat Public Outreach and Civil Society Division, 2017.
25 Vanolo, "The Smart City as Disciplinary Strategy,"
26 Lange, "The playful city,"
28 Lange.
30 Lange.
recovery, digitally-empowered 'Smart Citizens' will act as a complementary arm to policy-makers whom together co-design Smart Cities that are greener, more inclusive, and more resilient against future crises.

**Smart Cities and the Future of ASEAN-Australian Development**

With a common goal of sustainable, smart and inclusive post-COVID recovery, Smart Cities offer new opportunities for ASEAN-Australian partnership by facilitating knowledge and technology transfer. Concerning security, cohesiveness between ASEAN and Australia has positive influence on citizen engagement in Smart Cities development and implementation. Lack of coordination across agencies and data insecurity are among the top barriers to regional Smart Cities initiatives. With closer cooperation, such as high-level summits between ASEAN-Australian actors, security concerns over Smart Cities and data governance can be mitigated using shared solutions. Moreover, being ASEAN's dialogue partner, Australia benefits from ASEAN's successful conflict resolution by virtue of the ASEAN Way. As ASEAN continues to develop bilateral relations with ascending powers like China and India, Australia also enjoys greater regional stability. This feeds into the dynamics of public trust in governments to digitally transform urban spaces, aligning values to the co-creation of Smart Cities.

As for economics, ASEAN and Australia engage in lucrative bilateral trade facilitated by the ASEAN–Australia–New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA) agreement. The newly-signed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) also bolsters multilateral trade relations that will enhance the transfer of goods, services and resources between ASEAN and Australia. Similarly, with the ASEAN Economic Community's pursuit of an inclusive and open market-driven economy, Smart Cities will play a significant role in reorganizing economic relations in the region. Notably, Smart technologies are effective tools that governments can employ for inclusive recovery strategies post-pandemic. Increased mobility will also allow Australian businesses to better allocate resources when operating in various ASEAN member states, in addition to accessing standards-based operating systems.

Finally, as Industry 4.0 matures, labour markets need a high-quality workforce that can operate across technologies and cultures. Specifically, interpersonal communication and cultural competency are essential skills for the workplace of tomorrow. These skills can be developed through greater people-to-people interactions, especially using digital platforms that transcend time and location. As digital natives, the region's youth population holds great potential in contributing to ASEAN-Australian development due to their familiarity with connective technologies. In other words, youths are inherent to sustaining Smart City developments due to their propensity for creative innovation and experimentation in the post-COVID future.

**Conclusion**

Smart urban planning policies will continue to gain centrality as nations recovery from COVID–19. Smart Cities play a critical role in how people interact with their natural and built environment. In a post-pandemic world, there will be growing emphasis on inclusiveness, climate action and sustainability as megacities emerge with rapid urbanization. As a result, cities need to proactively prepare and prevent future crises to minimize disruption. Amalgamating cutting-edge technology with innovation, Smart Cities provide solutions to pressing challenges that spill over to regional socio-economic development. Therefore, Smart Cities development across ASEAN-Australia is a lever for systems change that increases the liveability of cities in the 21st-century, and beyond.

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33 Ibid.
35 Australian Mission to ASEAN, “Australia Today”.
36 Ibid.
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- Association of Southeast Asian Nations. *First ASEAN Youth Development Index*. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat Public Outreach and Civil Society Division, 2017.
Technology Innovation: Opportunities for ASEAN-Australia Collaboration

Nitika Midha | Australia

Today, the world is experiencing digital innovations that are disrupting entire systems of production, governance, and management. Innovation, which the Asian Development Bank defines as ‘new, significantly different products and processes that improve productivity and benefits users,’ has led to technology being adopted at a faster pace and providing more impact than ever before. For countries late to economic development, innovation provides an opportunity to enhance digital connectivity and leapfrog traditional levels of development. This is particularly true for Southeast Asian countries, where innovation is underpinning the transition from economic reliance on manufacturing, trading, and resources to service-based economies. Although ASEAN member states have different innovative capabilities, they share a commitment to innovation through active digital development, investment, and infrastructure. The rising number of digital networks, mobile phones, and Internet users is improving the efficiency of small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) and supporting a start-up boom backed by local entrepreneurship. In this essay, I will argue that the technological revolution experienced by Southeast Asian countries is expanding regional opportunities and that Australia should look to develop stronger research, innovation, and entrepreneurial connections with ASEAN nations.

Current Innovation Capabilities

The level of innovation achieved by countries is dependent on their innate potential, which is referred to as innovation capabilities. Research and development (R&D), human capital, and infrastructure all have an important role in contributing to innovation. Assessing these drivers across Southeast Asia; however, highlights the discrepancy amongst the innovative capabilities of individual ASEAN member states. This variation is also reflected by the Global Innovation Index, with Singapore ranking 8th in the world in terms of innovation while Myanmar is ranked 195th.

R&D expenditure is an important indicator of innovative progress in a country. Except for Singapore which invested 1.84 per cent of its GDP on R&D in 2019, most Southeast Asian countries invest well below the 1.9 per cent of GDP that is typically invested by developed countries including Japan, Korea and Australia. Malaysia’s R&D expenditure has slowly risen since 2000 to reach 1.26 per cent in 2014. However, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam have made minimal R&D investments.

A similar trend exists for the number of patent applications within Southeast Asia, which are associated with innovative activities including inventions. Singapore’s population produces the highest number of patent applications, with 600 patent applications per million people. Globally, this situates Singapore’s patent applications per million people near China, but behind Japan’s 2,700 and South Korea’s 4,150. But, other comparable Southeast Asian states produced under 100 per million, with 4 states having less than 10 patent applications per million.

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3 Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), Innovation Policy in ASEAN (Jakarta: ERIA, 2018), 4.
6 ERIA, Innovation Policy in ASEAN, 5.
7 ERIA, Innovation Policy in ASEAN, 6.
Furthermore, a highly skilled and educated workforce contributes to an innovative economy. An analysis of companies across Asia shows a positive association between the quality of human capital and innovation. Education stressing Science Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM) and skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and grit are important to this process. The number of researchers is also indicative of the R&D capabilities of a country, which is fundamental for innovation. Except for Singapore which had 11.6 researchers per 1,000 employed in 2016, Malaysia had the highest number (5.1) across Southeast Asia in the same year, but that number is small relative to Japan’s 10.2 and South Korea’s 13.6.

The varying innovation levels of Southeast Asia can be divided into the following five groups, according to a report by the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia.

- Singapore is the only ASEAN country considered in the frontier phase of innovation, with its advanced IT infrastructure, well-enforced IP protection and extensive R&D investment.
- Malaysia is within the catch-up phase, as technology-based exports are emerging and there is increasing innovation policy coordination from government organisations.
- Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines are situated within the learning phase because they are strengthening their basic infrastructure and are beginning to gain access to foreign capital goods, direct investment and knowledge.
- Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar exist within the initial condition phase, where there is an emergence of demand for technology and a transition from a manufacturing-dependent economy to one that relies on services.
- Brunei, with its economic dependence on natural resources, is difficult to situate in a category. Although government effectiveness and local infrastructure exist internally, Brunei has weak knowledge creation and diffusion processes.

Innovation Collaboration amongst ASEAN States

As the digital revolution progresses, the disparities within the digital infrastructure, access, and skills between countries may increase. However, Southeast Asia is predicted to follow a convergence trend given the leapfrogging capabilities of digital technologies and the learning efforts fostered by the benchmarking exercises of most ASEAN countries. To achieve their vision of becoming a technologically competitive region, ASEAN emphasises strengthening regulatory frameworks, competition policy, and the protection of knowledge across Southeast Asia through their Economic Community Blueprint. By recognising the significance of ICT in economic growth, they are supporting the growth of ICT-based infrastructure, innovation and professional development. A comprehensive action plan promoting a “science, technology and innovation enabled ASEAN that is sustainable, vibrant, competitive and economically integrated” has also been articulated. Here, detailed actions denote how to encourage active collaboration between the private and public sectors, build R&D collaboration, technology commercialisation capabilities, and entrepreneurship along with mobilising talents effectively.

Although the innovation systems and capabilities differ across Southeast Asian countries, investment, infrastructure, and government reforms are increasing productivity and empowering SME’s. Currently, between

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10 Asian Development Outlook 2020: What drives innovation in Asia?
12 Ibid.
13 ERIA, Innovation Policy in ASEAN, 12.
14 Cornell University, INSEAD, and WIPO, Brunei Darussalam, (Geneva: WIPO, 2020).
17 ASEAN, ASEAN Economic Blueprint, (Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 2008)
18 Ibid.
89 per cent and 99 per cent of businesses within Southeast Asia are small-to-medium-sized, but many cannot radically expand due to lack of access to finance, information, and limited market accessibility. Through the rise of digital solutions and e-commerce, SMEs are being connected to larger regional markets and empowered to operate beyond their immediate environments.

**ASEAN Entrepreneurship**

Currently, American and Chinese businesses, including Facebook, Alibaba and Tencent, dominate the top 30 digital scale-ups present within Southeast Asia.\(^{20}\) However, rapid technological shifts and improving institutional conditions have increased the size and number of local digital start-ups across ASEAN. As of 2018, more than 13,500 tech start-ups exist across ASEAN, and the 50 largest start-ups have attracted US$13.8 billion worth of capital which is substantially higher than the $1 billion in 2015.\(^{21}\) Local start-ups are also scaling beyond their home countries and supporting regional connectivity, as 64 per cent of the top 50 start-ups has established presence in at least one other ASEAN country.\(^{22}\)

Entrepreneurs, who find business opportunities from scientific advancements and internal information including demographic changes, regulations or exogenous shocks, are integral to the growth of start-ups in Southeast Asia. They have taken advantage of the rise of e-commerce and are finding methods to deliver products and services. This has disrupted traditional distribution and retailing, payment processes, and delivery methods and is allowing for small-to-medium enterprises to expand their reach.\(^{23}\)

The rise of online retailers including Lazada (Singapore) and Tokopedia (Indonesia) has disrupted retailing across Southeast Asia. To catch up, physical retailers are responding by selling products through existing online retail platforms to leverage their online presence and market reach. Ride-sharing platforms, which make use of mobile phones and digital apps, are challenging mainstream taxi and transportation services. Start-ups including Go-Jek (Indonesia) and Grab (Singapore), have capitalised on their local understanding of the Southeast Asian transportation systems and operate through digital platforms in which vehicle owners provide transportation services to customers. Digital payment systems are also expanding and encouraging a transition from cash-on-delivery to mobile money. Although trust in online payment systems and banking services is low, platforms including Grab and GoJek are developing digital payment systems dependent on fintech technology. These mechanisms promote financial inclusion as it allows existing customers and unbanked individuals to access financial services.

The dynamic economies, cultures and commercial practices of ASEAN states pose a challenge for international companies seeking to expand into and navigate within the Southeast Asian market. Regional start-ups, however, have been more successful because of their ability to maintain a regional lens and incorporate hyperlocal services. Grab, for example, successfully expanded rapidly across Southeast Asia because of its personalised service accounting for distinct regional customer behaviours.\(^{24}\) Local variants of Grab, such as GrabTukTuk and GrabRemorque in Cambodia, GrabTrike in the Philippines and GrabBaray in Indonesia reflect popular modes of transport in the countries they operate in.

The rise of digital technology is also improving the business processes of traditional companies, who are responding by innovating and investing in digital businesses themselves.\(^{25}\) Some companies are improving efficiency by implementing digital systems internally, while others are using e-commerce platforms and apps to support market expansion (Ayala Corp through Zalora) or as marketing tools (Salim). In some cases they are establishing digital start-ups (Charoen Pokphand) and/or investing in external start-ups directly or

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
\(^{23}\) Ibid.
through investment funds (Axiata through Axiata Digital Innovation Fund). For Southeast Asian multinational corporations, digital technology is helping their efficiency, productivity and market reach.

Although the coronavirus pandemic has negatively affected the economic performance of ASEAN states, investment in Southeast Asian digital start-ups has nearly doubled. Foreign direct investment will remain promising, given the rapid growing Internet economy, high mobile phones penetration and continued ASEAN efforts to foster a competitive digital hub.

With ASEAN working towards becoming an integrated market, infrastructure development and STEM-focused education and training, the quality of entrepreneurship and innovation will also improve.

**Collaboration with Australia**

Australia, with its National Innovation and Science Agenda, is focusing on science, research and innovation as long-term drivers of increased productivity and economic growth. The *Australia 2030: Prosperity through Innovation* plan published in 2017 outlines how Australia can prepare to thrive in the global innovation race by enhancing the national culture of innovation, improving R&D effectiveness, and stimulating high-growth firms. However, an important aspect of innovation in today’s globalised world is international collaboration, as it supports the exchange of knowledge and diversifies how innovators and researchers solve global problems. Given the evolving digital landscape in Southeast Asia, there is scope for stronger public and private Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) collaboration between Australia and ASEAN. Indeed, both China and India have developed their own regional and bilateral collaboration with ASEAN states. For example, India’s Ministry of External Affairs funds the ASEAN-India Science and Technology Development Fund, which dedicates US$1 million to support collaborative R&D projects. China is supporting technological transfer into Malaysia by allowing Malaysians to upskill in technological fields where China has an advantage via their Education Association for International Exchange, while also deepening financial services and innovation collaboration with Singapore.

Australia’s strongest innovation collaboration within Southeast Asia exists bilaterally with Singapore, as they are collectively enhancing research science and research cooperation, STEM engagement and cooperating on smart cities. The National University of Singapore is working on projects with Australian institutions including the data science arm of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) to effectively coordinate data responses, the University of Queensland to predict tropical coastal ecosystem changes, and the Sydney Institute of Marine Science to improve city marine environment sustainability. A Landing Pad has also been established in Singapore to enhance the ability of Australian start-ups to build and commercialise business ideas across the Southeast Asian region. Here, Australian market-ready start-ups gain access to a network of investors, mentors, and strategic partners to help them expand into new markets. So far there are 45 alumni start-ups which have managed to launch their businesses within the ASEAN region through this program.

Innovation and entrepreneurial collaboration with other Southeast Asian states does exist. For example, the CSIRO-funded Aus4Innovation program is helping Australia and Vietnam explore emerging technological areas.

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28 Ibid.
trial new models for partnerships between public and private sector institutions, and strengthen Vietnamese capability in digital foresight, commercial and innovation policy.\textsuperscript{35} Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) also funds the ASEAN-Australia Smart Cities Accelerator, which supports and scales high-growth potential start-ups developing smart urbanisation solutions. Furthermore, interregional competitions and programs exist such as Austrade's ASEAN Tech Challenge which allows Australian business to pitch solutions to ASEAN investors, and DFAT's Australia-ASEAN Emerging Leaders Program which brings together social entrepreneurs across the region.

But, STI collaboration need to be more sustained across the region, especially considering it is an important aspect of the ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Partnership\textsuperscript{36} and a priority for the Australia-ASEAN Council.\textsuperscript{37} Australia's strong research base combined with Southeast Asian entrepreneurship can be extremely beneficial for developing effective solutions in the fields of finance, medicine, agriculture and smart cities.\textsuperscript{38} The STI collaboration between Australia and Japan is an example of what can be fostered between Australia and Southeast Asian countries. Since 1980, Australia and Japan have worked together to address shared challenges with science and technology. Their partnership ensures collaboration within mutually beneficial projects, including the creation of new energy and manufacturing technologies, improving agricultural productivity and creating a sustainable energy supply chain with hydrogen.\textsuperscript{39} Australia's STI relationship with Singapore is strong, but there is an opportunity to build stronger ties with Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, especially considering their burgeoning innovative capabilities. A bilateral approach to innovation, similar to what Australia has implemented with Singapore and Japan, is plausible given the varying innovative capabilities across Southeast Asia. If Australia wants to become an innovation leader, instead of a follower, taking initiative to build stronger relations will be paramount. The disparate resources, capabilities and interests of ASEAN member states could make effective engagement difficult. But, if India and China can establish strong bilateral and regional cooperation mechanisms with ASEAN states\textsuperscript{40}, Australia can surely work towards enhancing bilateral engagement with individual Southeast Asian countries while improving regional STI engagement. Regional ASEAN-Australia collaboration across innovation and entrepreneurship will foster prosperity and sustainable economic growth across the Indo-Pacific.


\textsuperscript{38} Department of Industry, ASEAN Strategy: NSW strategy for growing trade & investment with ASEAN, (Canberra: NSW Government, 2019).


References


CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL CULTURAL COOPERATION
CHANGING PERCEPTIONS: ANALYSING THE FORMS AND POTENTIAL OF YOUTH STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Min Punia | Myanmar

“I remember my older siblings letting me and other younger kids join their game as (so-called) sating pusa. This means that we were allowed to play with them, but we could not be the ‘it’ because we were too young…. Being a sating pusa is like being a player and yet not really being part of the game.”¹

The ASEAN way of consensus has achieved considerable progress for youth. This can be seen through the creation of a youth development index, the reinforcement and re-emphasis on member states’ youth policies, and the formation of more youth-oriented activities.² However, following the global pandemic in 2020, emerging progress towards youth involvement in development has stagnated. There has been no definite or directed policy response for youth throughout the pandemic at the national level amongst ASEAN states. Similarly, at the regional level, there has not been any intensive or specific response for youth, especially with regards to the effects of COVID–19.³ This passivity demonstrates that despite some advancement, youth are still regarded as a mascot for development rather than as vital players in their own right.

In 2017, almost one-third of the ASEAN region’s populace was youth.⁴ In respective member states, young people constitute a considerable proportion of national populations. When using the United Nations definition of youth – individuals between the ages of 15–24, youth made up an average of 17 per cent of respective member states’ populations in 2020.⁵ When adopting ASEAN’s definition of youth, which encompasses those aged 15–34, the number only increases. On this basis it is not only their future potential, but also the size of their population that makes it appropriate for youth to be considered firm constituents of ASEAN.

Kurth-Schai has stated that it is mainly the existing views of adults towards youth that prevents further youth contribution to society’s advancement.⁶ At one end of the spectrum of existing perceptions, youth are viewed as ‘trivial’ and their capability is greatly doubted. Dolan and Brennan found that, “Adults tend to have low and often negative expectations of young people, focusing on their risky behaviour, destructive peer influences and resistance to adult authority; few see youth as individuals with the positive motivation and skills to contribute to their communities.”⁷ Similarly, Velasco voiced that “Young people are, at best dismissed as being too inexperienced to make meaningful contributions...at worst, senior officials brand them as naive.”⁸

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⁴ “First ASEAN Youth Development Index.”
Following this is the concept of potential: still considering youth incapable at present but recognizing their importance in future. This approach sees youth as ‘adults in-waiting’ and as Kurth-Schai put, “not needed until it’s time for them to take control”.9

At the other end of the spectrum of perceptions is the view that youth can be relevant in the process of social cohesion and peace which demands certain attributes and levels of participation from young people.10 This elevates youth from ‘the waiting list’ to the status of a minor contributor in the present. As accepted perceptions can define the limits and degree of community support for youth participation in their communities, it is inevitable for policymakers to reconsider and relocate their understanding of ‘the social potential of youth’.

This article aims to assert that amidst the constraints stemming from existing adult perceptions, youth nevertheless actively engage in both regional and national progress towards social development in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, this article also seeks to persuade the reader to see the potential of youth as ‘stakeholders’, using Freeman’s definition of ‘stakeholders’ – “any group or individual who can affect … the achievement of an organization’s objectives” through an analysis of the forms of their “stakeholder engagement.”11 This analysis will focus on examples from Myanmar which scored the highest in the ASEAN Youth Development Index in the domain of youth civic participation amongst ASEAN Members.12

Youth as Stakeholders

Youth, regardless of location, are never a collective, uniform body.13 They therefore can engage differently in a wide variety of behaviour. Nevertheless, these engagements can broadly be classified into two types – “passive” and “active” stakeholder engagement. These types are determined by how the results of engagement contribute to existing government processes, rather than how they engage or the relations between youth and the adult stakeholders. However, according to interviews with youth, the existing relationship between youth and adult stakeholders can condition the type of engagement. It is observed that having close and good relationships with authorities tends to create and encourage favourable conditions for passive stakeholder engagement and having relationships that are distant or bad at times can condition the youth to choose active stakeholderhip.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is observed to be a vital factor in both types of engagements, especially in the time of the COVID–19 pandemic.

Passive Stakeholder Engagement

In "passive" youth stakeholder engagement, young people participate in the community’s progress by assisting through volunteerism in crises that demand manpower or public participation. Youth stakeholders contribute with their expertise in better execution of services, and by supporting policy implementation. This form of participation, mainly based upon young people’s moral obligation to help their community, requires certain enablement from authorities. However, the activities in this form of engagement do not necessarily need to have a direct relationship with authorities.

13 McEvoy-Levy, “Youth as Social and Political Agents,” B.
The assistance of Myanmar youth to the government during the pandemic can be observed as a significant example of passive stakeholder engagement. Myanmar, a developing country in ASEAN, struggles to meet growing demands during the pandemic due to its limited and less-equipped health workforce and facilities. When the government facilitates volunteerism and provides constant official operation and logistics support, youth are encouraged to give their full assistance.

“Frontline medical workers are struggling in this time and as you know they really need human resources. If people like us don’t get involved, who will get involved?” said Htet Myat Noe Oo, a 20 year old medical student who volunteered in the quarantine centres, when asked about her motivation to join. Over 1000 youth between the ages of 15 – 35, enlisted to volunteer and are working in Myanmar’s COVID–19 treatment and quarantine centres, performing tasks ranging from logistics and office work to auxiliary tasks in the centres such as cleaning, chores, and assistance (except treating patients).

In October 2020, the government created another opportunity for youth from medical universities to volunteer in the contact tracing process. There have been two batches of youth, 1000 per batch, that have volunteered for one month assignments. Necessary training, questions, and report formats are provided and the process is supervised by government officers. Volunteers are divided into small groups and are expected to make calls to all individuals who have tested positive in one day, approximately thousands of people, inform and counsel them and report back to superiors with the obtained information of primary and secondary contacts. When asked if the government enablement and support was crucial to volunteer participants, Htet Myat Noe Oo answered, “It is crucial. If the authorities didn’t allow us, we might not be able to be involved and assist to this extent.”

Another remarkable example is the Red Rose campaign organized by students at the University of Medicine 1 Yangon which provides easy and safe blood donations during the pandemic. Although their intention was to educate and empower people about regular voluntary blood donation, the unforeseen impact of assisting the better delivery of the government’s services can be observed. Firstly, the students present information in an unorthodox, but more relatable way to the public. Shwe Yee Win Moht Moht, the founder of the campaign, describes this phenomenon, “We know the trends of youth and we can breakdown and paraphrase the existing facts into the way that the public can relate.” Secondly, she explained that the campaign also acted as a responsive medium between the government as it introduced participants to the online registration system and served as technical assistants to participants through their responsive social media. An existing connection between them and the Nation Blood Centre through annual university blood donations can be observed and the Ministry of Health and Sports as well as the centre’s cooperation was found essential in their success. Currently, there have been around 600 participants since the launch in July with a monthly average of 100 participants.

Active Stakeholder Engagement

In contrast to “passive” stake holder engagement, youth addressing their community’s needs and unsolved challenges through activism and self-developed solutions and spaces are considered “active” youth stakeholder engagement. This participation is the most common form of youth engagement and is based on a range of motivations from the desire to create conditions for self-development and improving personal welfare, to the desire for a better community.

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Self-created spaces of youth come into existence as the result of existing conditions or the lack of certain facilities. Care Teen, the country’s only registered youth philanthropic organization, is one of them. Ye Ye Oo, the founder, reminisces about the motivation for the organization and his struggle in the early years, “I started this because I wanted to do philanthropy but not of any aspirations as in my time there was few philanthropic organizations locally and none of youth.” He also mentioned many structural approaches that he found irrelevant to youth like him such as full-time membership and activities which are solely focusing on fundraising. Thus, he worked on a group that directs toward casual yet effective, systematic, wide-ranged, and accessible volunteering. He also aimed to create an environment where youth can develop themselves through these activities independently which was not in existence previously.

Established in 2014, the organization now has around 400 members and is running several projects such as the change project in which members exchange spare change for passengers using public transport, and the teaching project where volunteers tutor the underprivileged children. Currently, Care Teen is working on a donation project in which the organization provides groceries to people from Yangon district who are in need. The project has helped 930 households with the total assistance worth approximately USD$10 000.22

The focus of the organization is to create opportunities for youth to do philanthropic activities in the most relevant and accessible way. This is observed in the form, scope and conduct of their projects. Care Teen serves a great example as it promotes social cohesion and social connectivity although it focuses only to create a safe and casual space for youth philanthropy and youth development through self-actualization.

Y – Digital Hub, a social enterprise of four undergraduate students from the University of Economics Yangon, is another example of active engagement which aims to improve the youth community through digital storytelling. Delivering knowledge in the subjects of digital literacy, interpersonal skills, and career readiness, this space fills the education gap during the pandemic, as Myanmar’s education has been on pause since April 2020. The organisation gives youth opportunities to adapt and improve their odds in changing situations through the pandemic. “One of the main values that we offer is the youth digital literacy which the government still can’t deliver,” said Min Myat Swan, the 18 year old project director of the enterprise. “We also work to build a platform to organize and connect youth during the pandemic as a step for us, youth and the country.” Through their development, around 50,000 youth have participated and partnered with individual domestic companies as well as INGOs and Samsung.23 Although it was founded during the pandemic and with no prior support, they progressed with the use of ICT and social media and an urge of self-actualization is observed among the protagonists.

Unlocking the Potential of Youth

The observation of Southeast Asian youth engagements in two forms, ‘passive’ and ‘active’ stakeholder engagements, reveals the tendency and potential of youth participation for the advancement in the endeavour of achieving community’s developmental goals. As the article tends to present the reader with a concise concept of social potential of Southeast Asian youth engagement, it simply recommends viewing Southeast Asian youth as ‘stakeholders’ in development and to incorporate their views in youth-related policies, approaches and programs. To promote adult-youth partnership is the main recommendation of this piece. For existing youth entities and organizations in the region, it is recommended to promote programs that aims for youth enablement and better participation rather than programs of mere awareness-raising and knowledge-sharing. Young people have a propensity to engage more with issues which they can relate through their lived experience.24 Thus, these programs should also include the goals of inspiring and developing a level of awareness of issues.

22 Ye Ye Oo and Khin Chan Myae Nyein, CareTeen, Interview, December 7, 2020.
23 Min Myat Swan Pyae and Thet Phone Shein Toe, YDH, December 8, 2020.
Spaces and avenues that channel the opinions and feedback of youth and that serve to connect governments and youth, especially in youth-related matters, physical or digital, formal or informal, should exist for better youth contribution, coordination and engagement. Most importantly, these facilities should not be tokenistic but rather perceive and incorporate youth as ‘potential stakeholders.’ During implementation, these facilities should tend to expand and reach as many young people as possible and to get to youth of all backgrounds to avoid nepotism and elitism.

Governments and international entities should not be tokenistic with youth involvement and should consistently work on including every youth engaging and not engaging as there is no youth or youth group which solely represents their fellows. Furthermore, the approaches and models of conducting should be youth-driven or youth-led but this doesn’t mean less adults involved since “adults often play a key role as mentors and motivators”. Needless to say, governments and international entities plays an important part in the formation, success, and sustainability of these activities.

**Conclusion**

In the discourse of finding the right view of youth engagement in society, discussions have been based on moral viewpoints which places the relevance of youth either in the future, seeing them as successors, or in change as revolutionists. Regarding youth as advantageous stakeholders in contemporary society, as this article asserts, may give rise to a more relevant, beneficial and new demographic for policymakers in creating youth-related policies, facilities and programs. Simply viewing youth as ‘stakeholders’ and redirecting existing policies and approaches to the goal of ‘stakeholder enablement and engagement’ covers the idea of the recommendations above and will unlock the full potential of youth contribution to the society.

The moral influence on adults that diminishes the potential of youth should be rejected as the analysis clearly depicts that youth stakeholder engagement is beneficial and necessary for both sides. For young people, engaging through volunteerism increases their experience, essential skills and therefore chances for employment. Activism enables them to shape their desired environment and improve their welfare and in turn improves their social bonds and quality of life. For adults, as discussed in the analysis, these engagements help their policies to be more relevant, their implementation and delivery more effective. The World Youth Report in 2016 stated, “young people who are more involved in and connected to society are less likely to engage in risky behaviour and violence—and are likely to stay engaged as they grow older.” Therefore, the fear of uprising should not constrain adults in responding to the recommendations above. Finally, it is important to accept and empower youth ‘stakeholder’ engagement because it exists not only because of the work of morality or of political inspiration but because of the demands of the development process.

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26 Dolan and Brennan, 24.
References

» An officer from the Yangon Region Youth Affairs Committee, December 4, 2020.


» Min Myat Swan Pyae and Thet Phone Shein Toe. YDH, December 8, 2020.


DE-COUPLING SOUTHEAST ASIAN WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT FROM WESTERN SCALES

Queenie Pearl Tomaro | Philippines

From the widely dominant western perspective, gender equality is perceived to be determined by labour participation, educational outcomes, financial independence, and in general is a product of economic development. In a separate camp, however, there is a growing recognition of the strong influence on gender equality by ‘long-lasting institutions’ such as religion, traditions and practices within the family, and the legal system. This recognition supports the need for a deep dive into the multiplicity and intersectionality of women’s experiences in varying rigidity of gender norms in different context-specificities mediated by race, class, ethnicity, culture, and religion. Furthermore women’s lived experiences cannot be seen as if their concerns and challenges are uniform and universalised. To acknowledge these multiple voices rather than one is to adopt a critical feminist lens which moves beyond the focus of a single narrative but emphasises ‘multiplicity, intersectionality, and fluidity of voices.’

In this article, I problematise the existing western-framing of gender equality measures of Southeast Asian countries which presently do not consider the influence of lasting social institutions such as culture and religion, state power, and family relations on women’s empowerment movements. Existing measures such as the Gender Development Index (GDI), and the Gender Inequality Index (GII) by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) mainly highlight gender inequality ‘in a broad set of domains but do not measure empowerment directly.’ These indicators do not depict the lived experiences of women in local communities in Southeast Asia.

By drawing upon western and Asian camps of feminist discourse, I ask: how do we frame the Southeast Asian understanding of gender equality from the lens of culture and religion, involvement in women’s groups, and family relations? What is not taken into account by the predominantly used gender equality scales? With the aim of communicating Southeast Asian women’s lived experiences I seek to contribute to locally informed inputs into existing Gender Equality Measures by exploring the importance of family, of women’s groups, and of culture and religion in shaping the contours of women’s agencies, opportunities, and outcomes.

Differentiated universalism: Context matters

Context is important when considering why global feminist discourse fails to capture an exact depiction of women’s movements in Southeast Asia. It all lies in understanding the differentiated universalism of gender equality vis-à-vis women’s empowerment.

While gender equality and women’s empowerment are both universally recognised goals that countries have worked to attain, more attention must be given to how these goals are framed. Whose vision do these goals convey and whose narratives are amplified? Western feminism defines the feminist agenda based on ‘women’s equal participation in work and education, reproductive rights and sexual freedom.’ Although these are important values of gender justice, universalising values in the discourse of gender equality requires us to

4 Shih, Chang, and Chen, “Impacts of the Model Minority Myth on Asian American Individuals and Families”
6 Chilla Bulbeck, Re-Orienting Western Feminisms, Re-Orienting Western Feminisms, 1997.
navigate 'ethical regimes' in localized contexts, more than just imposing transnational norms and values of gender justice vis-a-vis gender equality. The danger of framing feminism in conformity to the western lens is the possibility of obscuring deeper problems embedded within issues arising from race, class, sexuality, and other differences recognising multiplicity of voices and narratives and intersectionality of structures and experiences.

Emerging from the recognition of multiplicity and intersectionality is the understanding that there are differentiated realities of gender (in)equality in countries, especially post-colonial countries that exist in Southeast Asia. Concepts of gender equality must be translated into situated knowledge and ethics to rethink feminist universalism. Integrating a cultural nuancing of feminism is vital because it does not onlyouch feminism in the understanding of the effects of race, religion, state, and family but also allows the recognition of the differentiated progress of women's empowerment.

Scholars may have entered the conversation on Southeast Asian feminism but some have focused mainly on Islamic revivalism, on the regions comparable to Middle Eastern and South Asian societies, in areas such as the agricultural aspect of women's empowerment, on rights-based strategies for empowerment and on country-specific case studies. What remains to be captured is an exploration of how cultures, religion, women's groups, and family relations shape Southeast Asian women's agencies, opportunities, and outcomes and how inputs can be developed to inform the crafting of context-specific indicators for gender equality.

A Woman is the Centre of Asian Families

One of the key points that really sets Asian views of feminism apart is their belief that women are the 'lynchpin' of every Asian family. In Filipino culture for example, women are considered to be the light of the home. But what do women's roles within their homes and family mean for Southeast Asian women's empowerment? To answer this question a closer look into women's agency based on decisions made by women within their households should be a measure of gender equality. While empowerment is experienced at an individual level, existing indices of empowerment and gender equality are typically measured at the aggregate country level and mainly focus on sharing of assets and unpaid care.

A more specific case in how relations within the household or family-level are not accounted for in gender equality measures, is the United Nations Development Programme’s gender measure which only records women's share of earned income based on male/female difference in urban wages. This does not account for intra-household income distribution, rural wages, income from subsistence activities, and income from working in the informal sector. Gender measures, for example, do not capture women's contributions to the household economy such as the forest work of women in Laos which fosters influence for Lao women within their village and household, but are not accounted as it falls under household economy. These indicators also do not capture how Southeast Asian women can frame empowerment not only fiscally, but also relationally. In Cambodia, for example, women's empowerment is defined to be ‘contributing to and gaining respect from partners and family

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8 Chanda and Owen, "Tainted Goods?: Western Feminism and the Asian Experience."
13 Alkire et al., "The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index."
14 Ong, "Translating Gender Justice in Southeast Asia."
16 Chanda and Owen, "Tainted Goods?: Western Feminism and the Asian Experience."
18 Alkire et al., "The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index."
20 Ibid.
members’, a definition derived from interviews with 120 Cambodian women. This means women refer to their empowerment not solely from an individual standpoint but from a relational and associative aspect in the form of support from partners and respect and recognition from family and community members.23

While we focus on women’s central role in the Asian family structure, some caution in valorising women’s roles at home must be taken. In Southeast Asian countries, feminisation of care work perpetuates in such a way that it remains to be seen by many women as an obligation due to necessity, demographic legacy, and marital insecurity.24 In Vietnam, women in the household are still taking up majority of the household chores, despite decades of socialist policies on gender equality.25 Furthermore, gender relations within Asian families are among the factors constraining education’s role in promoting women’s empowerment, alongside educational structures and content and social and economic structures.26 This is seen from how control of men in Asian families over educated and working women increases through their control over women’s income. Feminist discourse must delve deeper into family relations and how it shapes women’s empowerment movement within the home.

Arguments above brings to fore the vitality of translating gender equality ideas into situated ethics of culture and family life in Southeast Asian countries. Understanding the shifting dynamics of family relationships in consonance with the changing dynamics of communities and cultural structures will be invaluable inputs to inform feminist discourse and gender-related interventions.27 Echoing the argument of Phan28, measuring individual women’s empowerment by bringing focus to the household relations is crucial. This calls for investment in local-level research which goes beyond our over-reliance on aggregate data that fails to capture realities of women in Southeast Asian communities.

Women in Cultural and Religious Structures

Cultural beliefs and norms reinforce the second-class rank that is usually prescribed to women.29 Religious institutions have also historically perpetuated patriarchal norms which in turn normalise gender stereotypes and discrimination.30 In this part of the paper, I ask, how does culture and religion across Southeast Asian countries affect conditions, status, and freedom of women? Answering this question requires an understanding of the strength of religious authorities in Southeast Asia and how their power permeates into communities, families, and gender relations.

Southeast Asia is described to be the region of strong religious identities where people do not only see themselves as citizens of their nations but as people of faith.31 The Malay world professes Islam, while the rest are mainly followers of Christianity and Buddhism.32 Gender-related issues in Southeast Asia are under the jurisdiction of traditional religious authority.33 For millions of Muslims in Southeast Asia, Islamic judges and ulamas decide on cases involving divorce, gender oppression, rape, polygamy, inheritance and sexuality.34 Women in the Southern Philippines are not given spaces in decision making because of interpretations of religion and

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22 Doneys, Doane, and Norm, “Seeing Empowerment as Relational: Lessons from Women Participating in Development Projects in Cambodia.”
23 Ibid.
31 Joseph Chinnyong Liow, Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia, 2016.
33 Ong, “Translating Gender Justice in Southeast Asia: Situated Ethics, NGOs, and Bio-Welfare.”
34 Ibid.
patriarchal cultures. Culture contributes in ossifying the persistence of gender biases and discrimination within the religious institutions, including sexual and gender-based violence. Despite global condemnations, cultures and the silence of religious institutions has allowed the continuance of Female Genital Mutilation (FCM) in Indonesia, the Philippines, Southern Thailand, Brunei, and Malaysia. The lack of action from religious groups to delegitimise FGM and the role of culture in perpetuating the practice prove that the influence of religion and culture on gender related issues should not be underestimated.

A deeper understanding of the vast power of culture and religion on gender discourse expands our scholarly casts. In this expanded view, one must also acknowledge that to regard religion as simply a form of barrier in empowering women negates how religion can be used to promote critical discourses on gender and how piety and feminism can intersect and overlap. Women's interpretations of the impact of religion to their agency has been underscored by the emerging critical accounts where women can become more than just mere blind believers of religious practices, but they have now been taking critical stances that facilitate promotion of gender equality and rights within the contours of religion. This is especially reflected on how religious groups like the Fatayat Nadhatul Ulama used gender-just Islamic interpretations to contribute to the discourse of gender equality in Indonesian society and to serve as ideological basis for women's empowerment programmes. National religious groups like Fatayat NU in Indonesia help empower Indonesian women by providing them spaces to participate in national debates of moral and religious groundings. In the Philippines, cultural positions like the Bae-a-Labi in Maranao Culture, one of the dominant Muslim groups in the country, is held by women and is an equal counterpart of the Sultan providing spaces for women to act as mediators of conflict and to provide a gender perspective in community affairs. Another case in point is the Buddhist women's Sakyadhita movement, a religious movement working to challenge gender disparities in Buddhist societies like Thailand. The Sakyadhita movement is centred on reflexivity and equal rights for women; these are principles argued to be at the heart of Buddhism.

The number of women in parliament is frequently used as an indicator for women's political empowerment, however the number of women in cultural and religious leadership positions and religious organisations should also be accounted. Women in cultural and religious positions often forward a feminist framing of religious interpretations and cultural practices and traditions. I echo the point of Santiago that it is vital to popularise positive cultural concepts that support women and religious interpretations. This serves to strengthen the call for gender equality, but more importantly one must look beyond putting women in political positions but in putting women in influential positions within cultural and religious structures.

36 Bronca, “A Feminist Analysis of Women’s Role & Status and Gender Relations Among Church Workers in the United Methodist Church in the Philippines.”
40 Chaudhuri, “Women’s Empowerment in South Asia and Southeast Asia: A Comparative Analysis.”
41 Rinaldo, “Pious and Critical: Muslim Women Activists and the Question of Agency.”
42 Rinaldo, “Pious and Critical: Muslim Women Activists and the Question of Agency.”
43 Arnez, “Empowering Women through Islam: Fatayat NU between Tradition and Change.”
45 Ibid.
Women’s organisations as drivers of women’s empowerment

In Southeast Asia where state control is strong, women’s movements must negotiate their space in the contours set by state policy and patriarchal political structures. This is perfectly captured in the statement of Lyons that ‘one cannot simply be a feminist as it is an identity built on contingency and compromise’. Compromise here entails negotiating spaces alongside state forces. This may involve disassociating one’s self from feminism due to the negative connotation that the term carries, as seen in the case of the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), the first ‘feminist’ organisation in Singapore. AWARE, in navigating the authoritarian political climate in Singapore, has had to maintain a non-political identity and must adopt a framework of ambivalence in advocating for women’s rights while being mindful of public antagonism and threats of de-registration/ organisational close down.

In the Philippines, a more politically involved feminist organisation is Gabriela which emerged to be the first and only women’s group in the competitive party list system of the Philippine’s lower legislative chamber. Gabriela also has to face varying intimidation from state forces including being recently tagged to be a front for the communist revolutionary movement, alongside seventeen other organisations. In Indonesia, women’s involvement in national organisations such as the Fatayat NU, have shaped Indonesian women’s political views, have structured their engagement with global discourses of feminism, and the advancement of women’s empowerment.

While women’s organisations have been instrumental in advancing women’s movement in Southeast Asia, it must be noted that mere representation does not guarantee women’s empowerment. A case in point is the Vietnamese Women’s Union which is the largest state institution tasked to represent Vietnamese women. The Women’s Union has primarily become a vehicle for state propaganda rather than a platform for women to transform patriarchal structures and to advocate for women’s rights. It has essentialised female domesticity and endorsed female subordination and the undermining of women in the labour force by serving as the arm of the Communist Party in homogenising women’s experiences and ideals to fit the Communist Party’s political and ideological purposes.

Evidence above shows that national organisations have been identified to play influential roles in shaping women’s involvement in politics and in advancing the women’s empowerment movement. Existing and emerging women’s rights organisations however are not among the indicators across mainstream gender equality measures. The considerable influence and potential of women’s organisations, when not used as machinery for propaganda, must be recognised as an indicator symptomatic of existing social movements for gender equality.

49 Ibid.
53 Arnez, “Empowering Women through Islam: Fatayat NU between Tradition and Change,” the young women’s branch of the Indonesian Muslim mass organization Nahdatul Ulama (NU)
Conclusion

In this article, family has been identified to be the central most powerful institution shaping who a woman is and what she can become. Gender Equality measures must go beyond aggregate measures but must capture women's voices in the household. This is echoed by Völker and Doneys,\textsuperscript{56} emphasising the importance of incorporating women's concerns in the communities in designing empowerment projects.

Secondly, culture and religion are pinned to not only be seen as barriers of women's empowerment but to some extent as the enabler. This brings to focus the importance of cultural structures and religious institutions in pushing for feminist values. It is also surmised that women in cultural and religious institutions must also be among the indicators for women's role in decision-making processes more than just the number of women parliamentarians.

Lastly, the vital role played by women's organisations as channels for the women's empowerment movement has been emphasised. Their roles are often understated in feminist discourse. Women's organisations carve out negotiated spaces for women's voices and interpretations. Strengthening support to women's groups is crucial and can be institutionalised by recognising women's groups to be among the indicators of gender equality measures standing against numerous patriarchal structures and organisations in Southeast Asian society.

Southeast Asia is a not a monolithic and homogenous entity, to assume so, would be remiss. To frame feminism and women's empowerment in Southeast Asia from a western lens, measured from a western yardstick is even more problematic. Situated knowledge on family relations, role of women's organisations, and the influence of culture and religion must be given value in framing women's empowerment and in developing gender equality measures that capture local realities and definitions of empowerment. After all, discourses on women's empowerment must not be about fitting women within a certain frame, it must be about the continuing construction and deconstruction of what constitutes women's empowerment.

\textsuperscript{56} Marc Völker and Philippe Doneys, "Empowerment as One Sees It: Assessment of Empowerment by Women Participants of Development Projects," 
References


The gender and climate change nexus represent the confluence of two of the most serious issues facing Southeast Asia and Australia today. Southeast Asia’s acute vulnerability to the impacts of climate change is experienced against a background of gender and social inequality that no country is immune to, but which is particularly marked in a majority of ASEAN states. These are both fronts on which Australia is also battling. In order to address the diverse causes and effects of the issue, action must adopt gender frameworks in community and national policies and projects which aim to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Action which mitigates and adapts to climate change is taking place on all levels in ASEAN and Australia, though not all measures reflect the varying needs of people of all genders. After outlining the first principles of gender and climate action and the methods by which Australia and ASEAN are currently tackling these concerns, this article recommends an intersectional approach to climate justice which amplifies the voices of marginalised peoples. Highlighting examples, we argue that gendered climate action must be taken on all levels throughout society. Women (defined here as people who identify as female) are active agents of change who must participate in discussions and responses to ensure effective mitigation and adaptation strategies. Though some ASEAN states are addressing the gender and climate nexus, others, such as Australia, fail to tailor climate policy to diverse demographic needs. This article highlights the need for gender-focused regional cooperation across sectors to ensure a just and meaningful response to the global climate crisis.

**Framing climate change vulnerability: An intersectional approach**

The effects of climate change are not experienced evenly across the global community. Communities from lower socio-economic backgrounds are substantially more vulnerable to climate change shocks than those from higher socio-economic classes. As such, it is imperative that we adopt an intersectional framework within this article and highlight the overlapping pressures many women in these communities face. Intersectionality highlights the multiple layers and interconnectedness of disadvantage and oppression, such as classism, racism, and patriarchy. For the purpose of this analysis, the article adopts a binary gendered lens. Gender, here, refers to the socially constructed characteristics and divisions of female and male identifying people, and the unequal power relations that underpin these concepts. The authors recognise the limitations of adopting a binary lens. However, as we show, women (and those that align with being feminine) exponentially experience impacts of climate change compared to cis men.

Within the climate debate, intersectional understandings highlight the numerous structural systems of oppression simultaneously operating, leading to climate impacts being felt unevenly across communities and...
identities, exacerbating current disadvantages. Intersectional framing of climate change across ASEAN and Australia is of utmost importance, as it provides an analytical tool which allows for a deeper understanding of how institutional systems and structures exclude certain identities or voices, thereby limiting diversity in the response. Yet, climate change and the intersection of vulnerabilities across gender, class, ability, etc. will continue to disproportionately affect those communities by intensifying climate-events and disasters, such as floods, cyclones, and droughts.

Figure 1: Communities are planting trees in Veal Veaeng, Pursat Province, Cambodia. (UNDP Cambodia 2020)

Climate change is not gender blind

For climate action to create meaningful change on all levels, responses must be tailored to the relevant demographic and environment they apply to. It is now widely recognised that the impacts of climate change are ‘not gender neutral’. This fact has implications for policymakers and grassroots actors. In ASEAN and Australian contexts, a person’s gender greatly influences their access to services and resources. For instance, women are well below 50 per cent of all landholders in ASEAN countries, falling as low as 24 per cent in Indonesia. This structural violence against women becomes particularly visible during extreme weather events as it undermines the wellbeing of women and the ability to respond to crises.

6 Gay-Antaki.
7 Ibid.
Caballero-Anthony describes climate change as a ‘threat multiplier’ as it embeds and exacerbates existing socioeconomic pressures. In ASEAN states in particular, the effects of climate change are and will continue to be, particularly acute. Not only does Asia already experience approximately 40.3 per cent of global natural disasters, but high poverty rates and a reliance on sectors sensitive to climate change make the impacts of disasters more severe. Nor is Australia immune to the destructive effects of climate change. As of 2015, Australia had already experienced a 0.9 degree rise in average temperatures. Indeed, Australia’s recent trail of devastating droughts and bushfires indicates that disasters are growing both more severe and frequent, significantly impacting gendered experiences across communities. Increased environmental risks of this nature serve to multiply the effects of discrimination or inequality experienced on the basis of characteristics such as gender.

Although Australia and Southeast Asia have made strides towards gender equality in recent decades, the remnants of deeply ingrained patriarchal structures remain. Gendered social norms affect women and girls’ ability to ‘make decisions, to propose solutions, and to lead, constraining women’s lives and choices.’ When considering the current and rising climate insecurity in Australia and ASEAN in parallel with inequality experienced in the region, it becomes clear that planning at all levels must address the diversity of human experience.

Though climate change can exacerbate gender inequality and vulnerability, it is incorrect to characterise women simply as victims. By incorporating all genders as agents of change, adaptation and mitigation strategies are considered to be more effective and sustainable, as well as promoting equality. As explained by Nunan, activities can be an ‘opportunity for social reform, for the questioning of values that drive inequalities in development and our sustainable relationship with the environment’, thus promoting sustainable economic and gender development. It is essential that all action directed at addressing climate change from the highest level to grassroots projects not only address the varying needs of people of all genders but take this opportunity to advance the status of women, and those aligning.

Gender mainstreaming across ASEAN and Australia: local and national collaboration

For action to be truly effective in responding to the diverse ramifications of climate change, local, national and regional sectors must work together. Discourse surrounding climate change and gender inequalities is commonly framed in a global sense, that is, analysing and positioning these challenges through uniform macro-responses and phenomena. Although these vulnerabilities are global challenges, the impacts are significantly more nuanced across regions, nations and communities (see Figure 2).

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12 Caballero-Anthony.
13 Ibid.
19 Caballero-Anthony, ‘ASEAN and Climate Change: Building Resilience Through Regional Initiatives’.
As Figure 2 shows, even across ASEAN states, the vulnerability to climate change is highly diverse.\(^{22}\) ASEAN states are four of the world’s top ten countries impacted by climate change: Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.\(^{23}\) These states experience climate change vastly differently on account of geography as extreme weather events lash certain areas and not others.\(^{24}\) Communities, states, and regions are intrinsically interconnected in their responses to climate action and gender equality, and for meaningful mitigation responses to occur, sectors across local and national levels must work together.\(^{25}\)

### Gender and climate change at a local level

Contrary to the dominant discourse, local communities are taking charge of their futures by adapting to climate uncertainty across ASEAN and Australia.\(^{26}\) Within this space, due to the division of labour, women and girls often undertake much of the subsistence livelihood activities. This leads to a greater understanding of land systems and thus, early warning indicators of disasters as well as intricate knowledge of ways to adapt to these changing systems.\(^{27}\) Yet, women’s capacities can be limited due to a lack of financial independence, resources, and recognition.\(^{28}\) By addressing these unequal power dynamics across communities and encouraging women to lead and participate at all levels, effective climate adaptation and mitigation can come to fruition.\(^ {29}\)

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\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) Ibid.


\(^{27}\) Tanyag and True.


\(^{29}\) Tanyag and True.
One example of this is the grass-roots organisation *Serikat Perempuan Indonesia* (Indonesian Women's Organization) in Indonesia. This organisation advocates for women's rights and equality across Indonesia in the environmental and labour spaces. In Indonesia, women and girls are significantly more impacted by natural disasters than men. Disasters such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami on Aceh, the Java earthquake in 2010, and the 2010 Merapi volcano eruption saw a disproportionate number of women fatally and directly impacted. Organisations like *Serikat Perempuan Indonesia* are essential for advocating, researching and leading programmes to demand equal rights and climate action across the archipelago.

Similarly, Vietnam faces extreme climate-related challenges. 50 million Vietnamese people living predominantly in coastal communities are at high risk of rising sea levels, landslides, floods and droughts which significantly impact women's livelihood activities and vulnerabilities. Vietnamese women across these local communities face challenges in the agricultural and household sectors as women are rarely legally registered to their leased land, with the male representative controlling contracts, resources, and land rights. Yet, their roles in agrarian and domestic settings contribute significantly to adaptation and mitigation measures. Working predominantly within the agricultural sector, the Vietnamese Women's Union (VWU) offers support for over 10,500 local union groups with more than 13 million members. The VWU's goals are to strengthen women's knowledge and capacity across environmental and social sectors, allowing for greater participation across all aspects of society.

Likewise, Australian rural and regional communities also face increasing risk of climate-induced disasters. Communities in rural Australia are significantly more disadvantaged than those residing in metropolitan areas. Gender inequality intersects with and increases this vulnerability. The gender pay gap in Australia of $460 per week (favouring men) epitomises the formal inequality Australian women experience. Additionally, rural indigenous Australian women face the intersecting challenge of systemic racism which amplifies their disadvantages of rurality and patriarchy. On the current trajectory, climate change will impact and alter indigenous sacred sites, connection to land and livelihood activities. Yet, as the above examples demonstrate, communities are not passive victims. Indigenous communities are working together to mitigate and adapt to the rapidly changing environment. For example, in Cardwell, Queensland, a group of Aboriginal women have come together through Giringun Aboriginal Corporation rangers (Figure 3) to conduct cool burns (cultural burning) across their country which mitigate fire hazards, heal country and strengthen their connection with traditional livelihoods. Elevating and centring indigenous women's knowledge and experiences within the climate crisis and beyond is key to effective and meaningful action.

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37 Nursery-Bay, M. ‘Not passive victims’.
38 Ibid.
Mainstreaming gender equality through climate action must be locally-led and community-centred. As Dankelman\(^40\) reflects, paternalistic, colonial and neo-colonial forces and values have very often marginalised women’s knowledge.\(^41\) It is often through the Global North’s ‘development’ agendas that socially constructed gender roles are embedded and strengthened, resulting in continued neo-colonialism.\(^41\) In saying this, however, national policy and ‘development’ projects can have a critical, positive role to support community-led initiatives, especially surrounding gender equality in climate action.\(^42\)

**Gender and climate change at a national level**

The examples provided above display what Lee and Zusman describe as pilot initiatives that ‘offer clear evidence of how women can mitigate climate change.’\(^43\) However, national policy and representation are also critical in paving the way for gender-responsive climate action. With effective action and gendered climate responses being taken on a national level, gender mainstreaming can begin to be normalised on a local level, as demonstrated by the following examples.

A top-down approach to integrating gender considerations into climate change policy has been witnessed in Cambodia. Over 68 per cent of Cambodian women attend farms as unpaid family workers and rely on stable weather for household and communal food security and familial income.\(^44\) In the face of climate change, the Cambodian government has emphasized the importance of women’s meaningful involvement in climate action. Oum Sophy, Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Environment, has stated that ‘women are the backbone and breadwinners of Cambodia. We need to engage them, encourage them and provide more information

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42 Tanyag, Maria, and Jacqui True, ‘Gender Responsive Alternatives to Climate Change’.
so they can build awareness and deal with climate change better.\textsuperscript{45} As one of the world’s poorest nations, Cambodia is surpassing the world, especially Australia, in taking concrete steps. As part of the Cambodian government’s continued efforts to address gender and climate change, the Gender and Climate Change Committee in 2013 reviewed the Cambodian Climate Change Strategic Plan and made recommendations for gender mainstreaming. As a result, gender is a notable feature of the Strategic Plan, including in the objective to ‘reduce sectoral, regional, gender vulnerability and health risks to climate change impacts’ and the guiding principle of ‘ensure[ing] that a climate change response is equitable, gender sensitive, transparent, accountable and culturally appropriate’.\textsuperscript{46}

Another example of national-level policy is the Philippines, which is facing catastrophic consequences in the face of natural disasters and rising sea levels.\textsuperscript{47} In the face of climate change and increasing disasters, the 13.6 million Filipinos who live in coastal communities are experiencing rising challenges, resulting in widening inequalities.\textsuperscript{48} On a national scale, the Philippines have brought in numerous policies and laws to engage women’s voices in climate responses.\textsuperscript{49} In fact, the Philippines Commission of Women monitors and evaluates national and regional standards and responses to climate change and environmental impacts. Furthermore, The Philippine Climate Change Act of 2009 provides that the state is obliged ‘to incorporate a gender-sensitive, pro-children, and pro-poor perspective in all climate change and renewable energy efforts, plans, and programs’.\textsuperscript{50}

In contrast to efforts in ASEAN countries, the Australian Government is yet to meaningfully address gender diversity in climate policy. The government’s National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy is the central policy for outlining a climate-resilient future. However, it is almost entirely gender-blind, mentioning gender considerations only in the context of Australia’s foreign policy efforts.\textsuperscript{51} This fails to recognise that the diverse needs of specific groups in Australian communities should be central to climate policy. The strategy does acknowledge that people in certain demographics will face disproportionate effects of climate change (‘those in poverty, migrants, refugees, children, older people, people with disabilities, people who are homeless or transient, and people living in poor quality housing’).\textsuperscript{52} However, women are absent from this list, notwithstanding that gender influences Australians’ experiences of climate change.\textsuperscript{53}

Gaps in gender and climate change policy

As outlined above, approaches across many levels are taking place in ASEAN and Australia to incorporate women’s unique experiences into projects and policy whilst taking advantage of the gender equality gains this can generate. However, in some contexts, local action is not supported by national policy, thus limiting its efficacy. Accepting that ‘truly transformative change requires engagement at different levels of decision making’,\textsuperscript{53} an absence of policy-level measures prevents the language shift from influencing action on other levels. Women across the region are using their voices and energy to undo and prevent climate injustice. Where this does not occur within a national framework which recognises and addresses the way power structures affect climate change vulnerability\textsuperscript{55} it is difficult to see how widespread change can occur. As conceptualised by Crease, Parson and Fisher,\textsuperscript{56} power is a ‘social relationship rather than an external force, with power relations dictating access


\textsuperscript{46} Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Cambodia.


\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{51} Commonwealth of Australia, ‘National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy’.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{54} Lee and Zusman, ‘Participatory Climate Governance in Southeast Asia: Lessons Learned from Gender-Responsive Climate Mitigation’.

\textsuperscript{55} Crease, Parsons, and Fisher, “No Climate Justice Without Gender Justice”: Explorations of the Intersections between Gender and Climate Injustices in Climate Adaptation Actions in the Philippines’.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
and entitlement to resources, including those to adapt to climate change,’ and such deeply ingrained concepts improve with concerted long-term planning.

Alongside this lack of robust climate change policy, low numbers of female parliamentarians in ASEAN countries and Australia further reduce the likelihood that policies will be gender sensitive. Representation of women in Australia’s Federal Parliament currently stands at 33 percent,57 and across the entire Asian region, female parliamentarians represent a very low 19.8 percent.58 A notable exception is the Philippines, which Setianto59 observes has one of the highest rates of females in high-ranking political positions across the world, with women holding 46.6 per cent of senior positions, almost double the world average.

Many ASEAN states as well as Australia must do more to adopt gender and climate change principles into national policy. Australia, in particular, can be guided by states such as Cambodia and the Philippines in recognising that vulnerability to climate-related effects differentiates according to intersecting individual and community characteristics, and tailor policy accordingly. Without recognition and action at this highest level, community efforts on the ground can only be so effective. A multi-level, intersectional approach is crucial in ASEAN and Australia so that truly transformative change in the gender and climate change space can be achieved.

Conclusion

Mainstreaming gender across climate responses is critical for effective mitigation and adaptation across local and nation spaces. Climate change disproportionately affects women, yet the impacts are diverse in nature. As such, responses need to be tailored to include those most impacted. By adopting a gendered climate response, communities and policies are recognising the value of women’s perspectives and knowledge. We argue that women’s intersectional and meaningful representation is critical across local, national and regional initiatives, projects and policy to effectively adapt to and mitigate climate change. Across ASEAN states, there is a diverse range of effective grass-roots and national initiatives that are creating meaningful change in mainstreaming gender across the climate space, yet there is still much to be done. As a ‘developed’ country, Australia is behind many ASEAN states in its efforts to embed gender across its climate action laws and policies. As the region will continue to face increasing climate-induced natural disasters, sea level risings and food insecurities, we must work together across community and national bodies to ensure a meaningful gendered response.

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GAME, SET, AND MATCH: A CASE FOR SPORTS DIPLOMACY TO STRENGTHEN ASEAN-AUSTRALIA RELATIONS

Shantanu Paul | Australia

Introduction

2021 is the 50th anniversary of ‘Ping-Pong Diplomacy’, a politically salient event in the early 1970s. In 1971, an unlikely friendship between two rival American and Chinese players at the World Table Tennis Championships sparked a significant shift in United States (US)-China relations, culminating with the sitting US president Richard Nixon making the first ever presidential state visit to China. The events of 1971 highlighted the ‘butterfly effect’ that the sporting sector and its stakeholders can have in achieving diplomatic goals.1

The blueprint set by Ping-Pong Diplomacy has paved the way for other forms of sports diplomacy in the 21st Century, including ‘Cricket Diplomacy’ to advance peace talks between India and Pakistan. ‘Football Diplomacy’, has also been used widely for image and nation building, soft power and advancing relations between nations. The historic match between Turkey and Armenia in 2008 is an example of this, as the political leadership from Ankara and Yerevan put aside years of hostile relations by using the event as an anchor for dialogue. Sports does not need language for participation, making it universal and giving it a distinct advantage over other cultural mediums such as literature and cinema. For ASEAN and Australia, there is a natural opportunity to continue the work already being done and accelerate the impact that sport can play in achieving mutual benefits, such as people to people connections and socio-economic development.

Leveraging Global Sporting Excellence to Promote National Interests and Strengthening Regional Relationships: An Australian Perspective

In Australia, there is a widely accepted perception that the nation’s second most important job is the captain of the men’s national test cricket team.2 Such is the reverence of sports in Australia’s identity and culture. Today the sporting sector in Australia is underpinned by an industry which is contributed to through multi-stakeholder roles and engagements, branching not just into competitive sports but also health and wellness, social change initiatives, and also promoting regional cooperation and development. The systematised and structured manner in which the sector has developed is clear with the level of public involvement, with 14 million Australians participating in sports every year, 1.8 million volunteering, and 220,000 being employed in sports.3

Beyond just a shared national identity, the sporting sector is buoyed by economic value, equivalent to 3 per cent of the national GDP of the country and providing a combined A$83 billion of economic, educational, and health benefits, as reported by the Australian Sports Commission in 2017.4 The return on investment for the sports industry in Australia today is around A$7 for every dollar spent.5 The sector also contributes up to 55 per cent of all tourism income on a year-to-year basis.6

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While the national sporting pedigree has developed, historically diplomacy has leveraged it only in an ad hoc manner. This changed in 2015, when the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) released the world’s first comprehensive ‘Sports Diplomacy’ strategy, aimed at being ‘a whole-of-government approach to maximise people to people links, development, cultural, trade, investment, education and tourism opportunities’. The strategy focuses on the ‘goals of connecting, developing, showcasing and sustaining new and existing channels of sports support, sports industry partnerships, and international sports networks.’ The success of the first rollout saw the Pacific Partnerships Program engage over 1.5 million participants in sporting activities and helped address inequalities experienced by demographic groups such as women, girls, and people living with disabilities. Furthermore, stronger sporting linkages were made with several countries within ASEAN, such as the sports cooperation agreement between Australia and Singapore which furthers bilateral cooperation through athlete training exchanges, sharing of best practices to tackle doping and illegal betting, and capacity development of administrators.

This was succeeded by the Australian government’s rollout in 2018 of the new Sports Diplomacy 2030 strategy based on four key pillars: (1) to empower Australian sport to represent the country globally; (2) build linkages among neighbours (especially in Asia and the Pacific); (3) maximise trade, tourism and investment opportunities; and finally, (4) to strengthen communities in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. The growing focus of sports and its intersection with diplomacy in the country is a recognition of Australia’s potential to be a global pioneer in innovation in sporting diplomacy.

An ASEAN Perspective: A Vision to Become a Global Sports Hub

In Asia, ASEAN is a linchpin of regional cooperation, given the shared Southeast Asian identity and trust developed between heterogeneous member nations, especially when compared to nations in East and South Asia. The growing regional identity evidently extends to sport, as seen in the joint bid of all 10 ASEAN member nations to host arguably the most anticipated sporting event in the world, the FIFA World Cup, in 2034. The bid, if successful, would be the first time that a regional intergovernmental bloc would be jointly hosting a sporting event of such magnitude. The very process of jointly bidding for the event is equal in value as winning itself, with ASEAN regionalism being nurtured through the shared journey.

Most ASEAN member states have national strategies to develop domestic sporting sectors while also recognising the value of sports in promoting shared interests with neighbours. Singapore’s Vision 2030 strategy makes an explicit case for this by stating, ‘Sport can help to maintain Singapore’s social integrity and economic strength. It help us overcome the challenges being presented by an ageing population, rising regional and international economic competition and the increased diversity within our multicultural, multiracial society.’

At a bloc level, sports is governed by the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Sports (AMMS) and the Senior Officials Meeting on Sports (SOMS), which is a regional body that brings together national agencies responsible for sports. SOMS, which develops and implements the ASEAN Work Plan on Sports has set four key objectives between 2021–2025: (1) Promoting awareness of ASEAN through sports (and thereby bringing benefits to citizens of member nations); (2) fostering a sense of community among ASEAN nations; (3) strengthening ASEAN people’s sense of resilience through healthier lifestyles; and finally, (4) to activate the competitiveness and capacities of sports in the region.

The blue ribbon for ASEAN is not to win big ticket events such as the Olympic Games or FIFA World Cup but to create sporting ecosystems that open up participation at all levels of society.
Bolstering ASEAN’s vision of becoming a global sports hub are the changing demographics of the region’s population. As the region’s middle class grows and the population continues to bulge, the demand for sports and leisure activities increases. This opens up potential new markets and foreign investment opportunities through services, infrastructure, television, tourism, equipment and events. For ASEAN members, this is not just the case of a still sleeping giant but one that has woken, is active, and is making strong progress. The region already plays a big role in hosting and participating in events such as the Asian Games and the biennial South East Asian Games, while innovating with new multi-national competitions, such as the ASEAN Basketball League. Meanwhile, the sheer potential of ASEAN’s sporting future is recognised by some of the largest global sporting associations and clubs. Some of these have set up academies to nurture talents from Asia into their competitions, such as Paris-Saint Germain in Thailand, while also innovating business models to monetise the growing public interest in sports.

The Impetus and Value of Sports for ASEAN-Australia Relations

The case which sports presents for both partners in promoting shared interests is difficult to ignore. For Australia, the strategic mandate for the region is clearly set out in the Foreign Policy White Paper of 2017, with one of the highest priorities being, ‘to increase efforts to ensure that we are a leading security, economic and development partner for Southeast Asia’. Notwithstanding political-security cooperation, sport can become an important innovation mechanism of socio-economic partnership. This is especially true given Australia’s comparatively lower significance as a trade partner for ASEAN; and as Australia’s position continues to shrink regionally, in terms of being an export partner, and contributor to foreign aid. Sport presents an opportunity to move up the field in the right direction for Australia, avoiding the risk of becoming a ‘lonely country’ in the region.

The most obvious win for Australia is the soft power that comes with people to people exchange in the region. A study conducted by Austrade with citizens from five of the top partner nations within ASEAN showed that one of the top markers for Australia’s appeal as a country is because it offers a ‘wide array of exciting experiences such as sport and entertainment’. Given there are over 1 million Australian citizens who identify with ASEAN ancestry, over 100,000 students studying in the country, and over 1.4 million visits being made in 2017 from the region, there is an impetus for Canberra to innovate approaches to market its supply of sporting opportunities and as a result continue to build positive perceptions of the country.

There also exists an undeniable economic incentive for both partners. As mentioned previously, Australia and the ASEAN region are lucrative sports markets, especially from a tourism perspective. Collectively, there are over 3 million visits made by Australians to ASEAN member nations annually, many to destinations which centre their identity around sporting and/or leisure activities. This includes Thailand as a global hub for martial arts such as Muay Thai, which saw approximately 6800 Australian citizens visiting for long-term training camps and events in 2016. Vietnam is also actively portraying its national identity as a destination for outdoor leisure activities and drawing in tourists in big numbers. Furthermore, the opportunity for Australia does not solely rely on Canberra opening up diplomatic and trade networks for Australian businesses to enter the sports sector in ASEAN, but in the reverse
flow of investment as well. Asian interest through ownership and sponsorship of sports franchises is on the rise, and there exists an opportunity for Australia to dip into this growing pool by increasing engagement with the region, particularly with strategic sports that have existing audiences such as football and basketball.

Australia has a long history of ticking all the boxes that the ASEAN Work Plan on Sports wants to achieve itself, such as hosting major sporting events like the Olympic Games, democratising access to participation and viewership of sports, establishing effective grassroots ownership and governance of the sector, marketing the nation as a tourist destination because of the appeal of sports, implementing and measuring the impact of sports on development both domestically and through aid programs and last, regularly filling the national trophy cabinet with the accolades of athletes. ASEAN thus doesn’t need to look far to leverage the teachings and frameworks of an established partner to advance its own ecosystem.

Kicking Goals: Doing More to Accelerate the ASEAN-Australia Relationship through Sports

An analysis of the progress report of sports in the ASEAN-Australia relationship cannot discount the strides made so far. It is important to remember that significant bilateral relationships already exist among Australia and member nations of ASEAN, with countries such as Laos, Indonesia and the Philippines benefitting from Australia’s ‘Sport for Development’ programmes. Through public-private partnerships, this program has delivered high impact sports programs contributing to socio-economic development in Asia-Pacific. This is an important point because the heterogeneity of ASEAN member nations means that each partner has different ambitions and needs, hence there cannot be a ‘plug and play’ model that will work for all. Australia’s approach to sports diplomacy needs to continue to recognise where individual ASEAN members could benefit and continue to innovate policies and interventions around it. However, there are also shared ambitions that the region has, mostly around people to people connections and the creation of a shared identity, which can be looked at and supported through a collective approach. There are several other actions that can be taken to further the impact of sports diplomacy.

First, both partners should build on the decision to shift the biennial ASEAN-Australia Summit to an annual meeting by introducing a working group for sports. Modelling the success of the ASEAN + Japan cooperation strategy that now includes the ASEAN + Japan Ministerial Meeting in Sports and the ASEAN + Japan Senior Officials Meeting on Sports, there is a replicable framework that can translate intention into action from both partners. The working groups on sports between ASEAN and Japan recognise the sovereign goals of both partners and take on the role of overseeing the implementation of shared commitments towards these. A similar setup for both ASEAN and Australia would only speed up the impact created through sport.

Second, there is an opportunity for Australia to deepen the impact it can create through sports for development initiatives by focusing on shifting from service delivery approaches to systemic changes. Since 2009, Australia has implemented many programs across ASEAN countries with the support of the sports industry and grassroots organisations. Programs such as Australian Rugby Union and ChildFund Australia’s rugby for social development have created significant impact, equipping youth from disadvantaged backgrounds with the life skills and confidence to overcome challenges. Skilled volunteering programs which have seen Australian athletes and coaches spending time overseas have spurred this impact. However, as noted by partner organisation viaSport, who has worked with Australian Football to implement programs across schools in Denpasar, Indonesia and Mumbai, India, structural challenges such as a lack of localised infrastructure and a dearth of local coordination bodies, prohibits effective sports programs from continuing. There is an opportunity here to create in/outbound programs that connect local sports bodies and administrators to skilled experts from Australia, whom can help co-create and implement long term strategies that help establish in-country ecosystems for sports to thrive. The silver bullet shouldn’t be to impact a specific number of people through a limited pool of resources but to

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utilise the funding and human resource capabilities of Australia to enable ASEAN nations to create this impact themselves. This kind of systems change approach helps take initiatives that create evident impact, such as Baseball Australia’s prevention of gender violence program in Indonesia, and then ask what structures and dynamics locally need to change or be established to allow this to reach every women and girl at risk in the country.23 Another potential anchor here would be to build on the strong educational exchanges already in place by marketing and facilitating opportunities for students from ASEAN to take on sports administration, coaching, nutrition and other related courses in Australia. This can create long-term human capital through exposure and learning with Australia’s world class institutions.

Lastly, individual countries within ASEAN and Australia should develop strategies that enable both diaspora and overseas athletes to grow and feature in domestic competitions at the highest level. When diaspora and global athletes become successful overseas, there is diplomatic and reputational capital that is generated for both home and migrated countries.24 A clear example of this is the impact that South Korean footballer Son Hueng-Min has had while working in the UK. His performances on the field have not only brought tourism gains for the UK but also had “a major influence on many British people attempting to sample and understand Korean culture.”.25 In line with this, Australia in particular can take more initiative in establishing systems overseas which can nurture and scout emerging talent in sports of mutual interest. This has the twin impacts of both heightening Australia’s broader diplomacy goals through people to people exchange while also bringing talent into domestic competitions. Further, Australia currently isn’t seeing its vast multicultural identity being translated into representation at a national level in sports. A major factor is the taboo that exists among migrant parents towards the risks of pursuing elite sports, with a belief that education needs to be foregone.26 A concerted effort to engage migrant communities into sports systems at a grassroots level while also debunking these myths has the potential to see a reversal. The Australian Institute of Sports is one of many organisations that offers elite athletes educational pathways while they represent the country at the highest level. Integrating this knowledge into school career counselling and initiating other outreach activities should help.

Conclusion

In the rapidly changing world today, very seldom can a nation achieve its sovereign goals in isolation from the pull and push of globalization. This is no different for any of the members that form the ASEAN-Australia partnership. While the road to achieving these goals often leads to a zero-sum game, there are also some universal opportunities to collectively bring the very best outcomes for everyone. Sports is one such opportunity and the world is catching on. For the ASEAN-Australia relationship, sports diplomacy is going to continue to be an important pillar that holds the bridge of social, cultural and political understanding between the two partners together. In order for this to happen, structures need to be put in place so that innovation and cohesion can continue to be seen through sports.

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