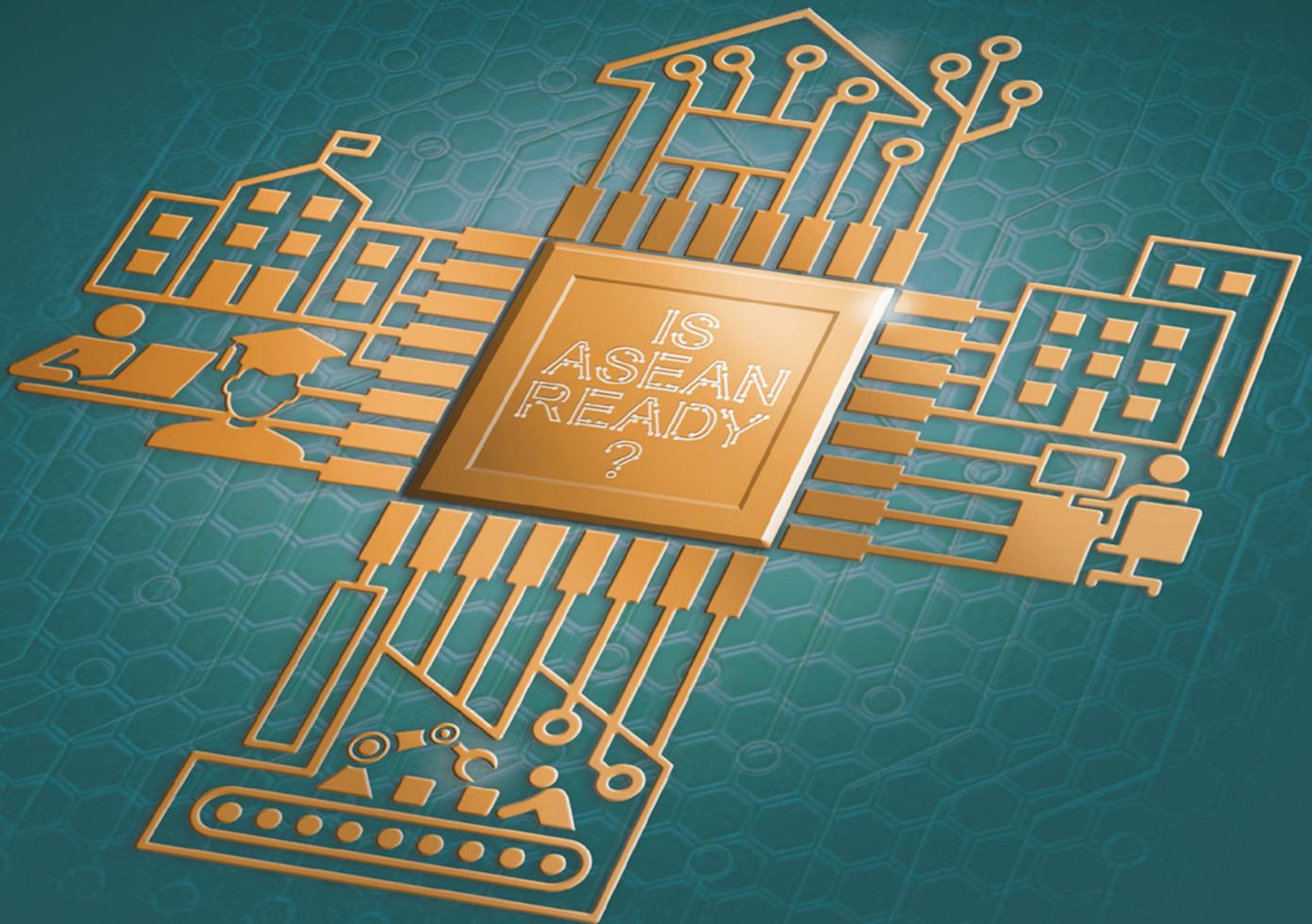


The ASEAN



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ISSUE 02 | JUNE 2020



The Fourth Industrial Revolution, Pandemics, and The Future of Work

ISSN 2721-8058



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IMPACT
ASEAN Builds
a Village

THE INSIDE VIEW
Digital Transformation
and The Civil Service

SHIFTING CURRENTS
COVID-19 Response
Enhanced Cooperation

The ASEAN



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ISSUE 04 | AUGUST 2020

YOUR ARTWORK. OUR COVER.

For The ASEAN's August 2020 issue, it's all about **YOUTH AND SKILLS**. We call on ASEAN's young and talented artists to join the competition and get the chance to have your winning illustration on the cover.

Watch out for more details.

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ASEAN

The ASEAN Magazine

In this issue



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Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC)
Kung Phoaok

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Kiran Sagoo

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

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A Note from the Editorial Team

The magazine's Editorial Board decided early on that The Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Future of Work would be the focus of one of its first editions.

ASEAN Member States had already set in place initiatives to prepare businesses and workers for the changing world of work while ensuring economic sustainability.

Then, the COVID-19 pandemic hit us.

ASEAN now has to navigate through these disruptions while mitigating the negative impact of COVID-19 on economies, livelihoods, and workers' health and well-being.

The 36th ASEAN Summit has just adopted **The ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work**, drafted under Viet Nam's ASEAN Chairmanship this year.

The pandemic has not shifted ASEAN's priorities in the labour sector. It has bolstered new efforts to prepare for the future.

Our contributors write about the importance of investing in education, lifelong learning, building adaptive skills, and flexibility in the region's workforce. The Chair of Senior Officials Meetings for The ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service MATters or SOM-ACCSM stresses the need for agility in government as well. There is consensus that rising up to the challenges caused by the disruptions requires ASEAN to rethink its current strategies and programmes.

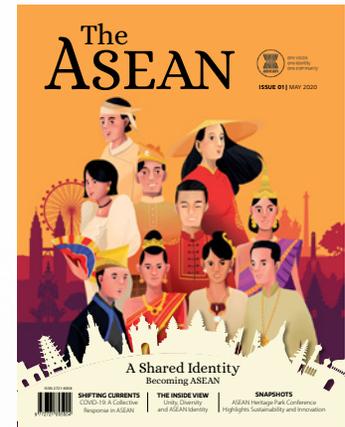
Our discussions on ASEAN's COVID-19 response continue in the Shifting Currents section with updates from ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community's Health Division. The ASEAN Economic Community contributes a piece about measures that will cushion the impact on small, medium, and micro industries.

While different measures of physical distancing were implemented across the world, people came together in music, song, theater, and other forms of art. In Southeast Asia, we found digital artists creating beautiful illustrations that reflected a common desire to reach out and help others live through the lockdown. A few of these artists are featured in this issue.

Inspired by the art we found online, the team decided to launch an illustration contest open to talented artists in ASEAN Member States. The winning illustrations will get a chance to be on the cover and inside pages of our subsequent editions. Each edition focuses on a specific theme. The competition opens for the cover of the August 2020 edition that will feature the theme of "Youth and Skills."

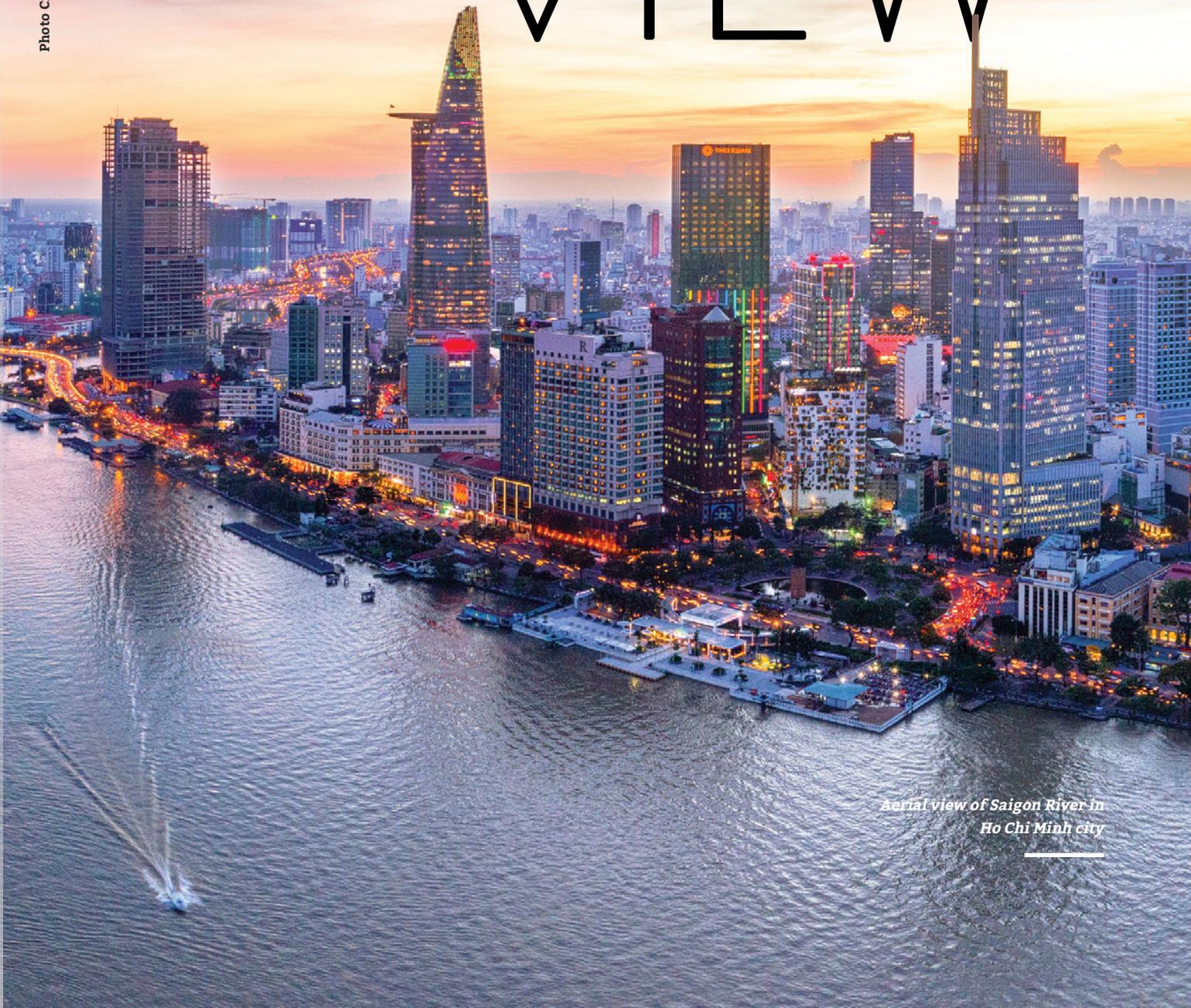
We are encouraged by responses from readers who expressed interest in contributing articles to the magazine. We are pleased to announce that an essay competition will also be launched soon.

Details of these competitions will soon be available on the website and official social media accounts of the ASEAN as well as *The ASEAN* magazine.



If you missed The ASEAN's first issue, you can access it in our archives at https://bit.ly/TheASEAN_V1

INSIDE VIEW



*Aerial view of Saigon River in
Ho Chi Minh city*

PREPARING ASEAN'S WORKFORCE FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK



BY AUBECK KAM

PERMANENT SECRETARY, SINGAPORE MINISTRY OF MANPOWER
AND SENIOR LABOUR OFFICIALS MEETING LEADER OF SINGAPORE

ASEAN, led by Singapore, has an upcoming initiative to support ASEAN Member States to prepare for the future of work in a “new COVID-normal” by leveraging a skilled workforce, embracing technology, and providing safe and decent work for all, supported by harmonious industrial relations.

In recent years, we witnessed a changing world of work. There have been many global disruptions within traditional business models and employment arrangements. Technology has also changed our jobs and how businesses operate—the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and data analytics means that companies and individuals are increasingly turning towards the digital economy to conduct business. Daily online transactions, from banking services to the purchase of essential goods and services, are growing at a phenomenal rate.

These innovations have heightened workers' anxiety levels over the future impact of technology on their jobs. Many workers have come to realise that their skillsets do not match the requirements of future job opportunities, even if these skillsets were recently acquired. A recent Cisco and Oxford Economics study, titled “Technology and the Future of ASEAN Jobs,” estimated that 6.6 million workers in ASEAN would be required to adapt their skills and forge new careers in order to remain

productively employed over the next decade as a result of increased adoption of AI technology and digital technology. Lower skilled workers, particularly in the services and agricultural sectors, are most at risk of being displaced as their skillsets become obsolete over time.

Beyond technological advancements, governments must also contend with their changing population characteristics in reviewing strategies to address future-of-work challenges and create good job opportunities for their citizens. In ASEAN, demographic transition varies across the 10 Member States, reflecting the different levels of development. Countries such as Singapore and Thailand are already facing the challenge of ensuring sustained economic growth with an ageing workforce. While most in the region are still experiencing a rise in the proportion of youth and working-age population, half of the Member States today have total fertility rates below the replacement levels. In years to come, ASEAN's workforce will start to shrink.



We have been fortunate that ASEAN has grown at a faster rate compared to many emerging economies. But we cannot take this for granted. If we fail to adequately prepare our people for these inevitable changes, we run the risk of seeing a widening of inequality within, as well as between societies that have concrete strategies in place to address the challenges of the future of work, and those who do not.

We got off to a good start. ASEAN has taken active steps thus far, to prepare our region for these impacts. We had, in response to



the International Labor Organization's (ILO) call to prepare countries for the future of work, adopted the **ASEAN Labour Ministers' Statement on the Future of Work** at the Singapore Conference on the Future of Work last April. The regional statement, the first of its kind, reaffirmed ASEAN governments' shared commitment to prepare ASEAN workers and businesses for the impact of transformative changes. This commitment is echoed in the landmark ILO declaration—the "Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work"—during the ILO's centennial last year.

Post-COVID-19 Future of Work: Embracing Technology, Upskilling Workers, and Providing Safe and Decent Work for All

There is much more that we must do. In recent months, our world of work has been experiencing a paradigm shift. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted the lives and livelihoods of people all around the world, and ASEAN is no exception. Overnight, the COVID-19 pandemic brought with it a need to urgently review our employment landscape in the region—from a sudden closure of

workplaces, to movement restriction policies, to wage cuts and job losses.

Through this pandemic, we observe, more than ever, the importance of preparing ourselves for the future of work, post-COVID. As the ILO's Director-General Guy Ryder said:

None of the work that the ILO and ASEAN undertook in planning out the future trajectory of the future of work has been made redundant or out of date by the pandemic. I think that the opposite is the case. This

human-centred approach to the future of work that we worked together to construct last year, has to be applied to the circumstances in which we now find ourselves. I think we are well armed with our Centenary Declaration to plot the forward road.

First, we have witnessed first-hand how technology can work for, and not against, us. Technology—digital platforms, adaptive work arrangements—are enabling us to continue with our work, even when our day-to-day lifestyles are disrupted. It is also technology that has facilitated our ASEAN meetings, supporting us in coming together to discuss collective actions to tackle the pandemic, when we are unable to meet physically.

Several ASEAN Member States are in a good position to capitalise on the wave of technological innovation with the abundance of a youthful workforce. But this will require a careful strategy of ensuring adequate job opportunities for their youths amidst the emergence of the “gig economy” in this Fourth Industrial Revolution, particularly given the impact of COVID-19 on labour and employment. In some ASEAN Member States, companies are likely to turn towards freelancers or temporary contract staff for short term assignments, resulting in larger concerns over job security and stability. As a result of the ongoing COVID-19 situation in Singapore, freelancers across different occupations, such as taxi drivers, exercise instructors, and performers in the creative industry, are seeing a reduction in their income. This serves as a timely reminder on the importance of constantly upgrading and diversifying skillsets which freelancers can harness to tide them over difficult periods. ASEAN Member States should therefore strive to regularly review their existing educational curriculums and skills upgrading pathways, to ensure that the youths of the future are adequately prepared and nimble enough to pick up new skillsets quickly to take advantage of new job opportunities.

For ASEAN Member States with ageing workforces, greater emphasis is likely to be placed upon encouraging firms to maximise their human resources by hiring women, older workers, as well as persons with disabilities, while ensuring adequate opportunities for existing workers to upskill



or learn new skillsets for the new employment demands of the digital economy. This strategy requires a significant mindset shift from employers, particularly those who still hold preconceived biases over the employability of such workers. Such employers likewise may not feel the urgency of reviewing existing training programmes or job functions to match the profile of the future workforce. In these cases, government and workers’ organisations will have to exert concerted efforts to convince employers to be more open to hiring a wider range of individuals across society.

Bringing New Meaning to Workplace Safety and Health

Second, even without changes to our nature of work, workplace safety and health remain paramount. This is more so now, when COVID-19 is presenting a public health challenge for every government and has brought new meaning to workplace safety and health. We have to move towards “Safe Working and Safe Living” in the post-COVID world of work, to guarantee all workers a safe and healthy work environment, so that they are able to perform their jobs well and return home to their loved ones safe and sound.

The Importance of Greater Social Dialogue in a Tripartite Setting

The founding principle of ASEAN, that being the promotion of peace and security in the region through collaborative efforts in accelerating economic growth and social process, remains relevant in the Age of Disruption. Similarly, the relationship



between social partners remains important in the post-COVID world of work. The close partnership has helped various ASEAN Member States introduce quick, decisive measures to cope and fight the pandemic. For example, Singapore worked closely with our tripartite partners to issue advisories on appropriate and practical measures to guide businesses and employees, premised largely on sharing of responsibility across government, employers, and workers. Continued social dialogue and developing synergistic partnership amongst the social partners will hold us in good stead as we adjust to the new post-COVID normal and adapt to new ways of working.

Now as ASEAN Member States and other economies reopen, enable businesses to resume and help workers get back to work, tripartism will play a key role in this recovery. Social dialogue will help chart a reasonable path through employers dealing with business losses and workers suffering income losses by setting guidelines and norms for the industry and unions to follow. Tripartite partnerships will support workers to be retrained to work in new areas where demand is stronger. It will facilitate safe

management measures to be implemented at worksites, so that workplaces remain COVID-safe for all workers.

Singapore's Regional Initiative for the Future of Work

During the Conference on the Future of Work in April, ASEAN labour ministers welcomed Singapore's suggestion to create a regional initiative, to sustain continued regional dialogue and capacity building on the topic of the future of work. They recognised that the regional initiative was a tangible and sustained effort to put into action the ASEAN Labour Ministers' Statement on the Future of Work, and heed the call of the ILO and the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 8, to "promote inclusive and sustainable

economic growth, employment and decent work for all."

The Singapore Ministry of Manpower has been working with its tripartite partners (the Singapore National Employers Federation and the National Trades Union Congress) over the past year, in consultation with the ILO and ASEAN Secretariat, to put together our regional initiative. Our intent is to bring together international experts, key ASEAN tripartite stakeholders, and our regional dialogue partners to discuss approaches to preparing workers and employers for the post-COVID new future and new normal world of work. For a start, we will keep this initiative focused on key topics of common interests across ASEAN Member States that are also relevant

towards navigating the new COVID-normal, i.e. technology, workplace safety, and health and social dialogue, while factoring in the development levels across ASEAN.

It is important to stress that ASEAN's governments cannot do it alone. As the ILO centennial report ("Work for a Brighter Future") pointed out, a three-pronged approach of increasing investments in people's capabilities, the institutions of work, and decent and sustainable work will be critical in strengthening the social contract between employers, employees, and the state for long term prosperity. This is particularly critical as we tackle these challenging times, where workplaces and jobs change. Without properly addressing the concerns of both workers and employers, ASEAN governments will find it difficult to implement economic policies aimed at addressing the new post-COVID future-of-work challenges. Employers must also accept the importance of human capital development and invest in skills upgrading for their workers. Progressive workplace practices that will reduce gender inequality in wages and job opportunities are essential in retaining a well-trained, highly motivated, and skilled workforce. Likewise, workers must accept the reality that the best protection for sustained employment would be to adopt a growth mindset and devote time to upgrading their own skillsets.

All these can only be achieved through strong collaborative partnerships across the tripartite entities of state, employers, and employees. As the Oxford/Cisco study pointed out, "the responsibility of mitigating the negative impact of technological change will fall to an ecosystem of government departments, businesses, educational institutions, technology providers and workers' groups... to work collectively to provide workers with the necessary tools and skills for the transition." Singapore's new regional initiative will therefore pay special attention towards forging closer partnerships among ASEAN Member States' tripartite partners, to promote greater social dialogue to help overcome the challenges presented to us by the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the COVID-19 pandemic. ■



For ASEAN Member States with ageing workforces, greater emphasis is likely to be placed upon encouraging firms to maximise their human resources by hiring women, older workers, as well as persons with disabilities, while ensuring adequate opportunities for existing workers to upskill or learn new skillsets for the new employment demands of the digital economy.



Viewpoint: ASEAN HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT FOR THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

H.E. DAO NGOC DUNG

MINISTER OF LABOR, INVALIDS AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, VIET NAM
CHAIR OF ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL 2020

The ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work has been adopted by the 36th ASEAN Summit in June 2020. Minister Dao Ngoc Dung explains why Viet Nam, as ASEAN Chair, believes preparing the region’s workforce is a priority.

The ASEAN Declaration on Human Resource Development can be accessed in full at asean.org.



The ASEAN: Why is human resources development a priority of ASEAN?

Minister Dung: The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), marked by modern scientific and technological advancements, has led to robust development in all areas and the ongoing transformation of the global economy from natural resources-based to knowledge-based. These days,



Photo Credit: ©Viet Nam 2020

underdevelopment can be addressed through human innovation, which, unlike natural resources, is an unlimited resource.

ASEAN, which has a population of 650 million people, is now the 5th largest economy in the world. Yet, its Member States are at varying levels of human development. The *2019 Human Development Report* shows that Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei have very high human development index (HDI) values (above 0.8); Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia have high HDI values (0.7-0.8); while Viet Nam, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar are still in the average HDI group (0.56 – 0.9) despite the considerable progress they have made in recent years.

ASEAN is also emerging as a center of development and innovation of the world. Yet, there is high disparity in terms of the human capital index (HCI), a tool that “measures the contribution of health and education to the productivity of the next generation of workers.” The *Global Human*

Capital Report 2017 shows that Singapore, with HCI of 73.28, is ranked 11th in the world. Viet Nam and Indonesia, with a score of 62.19, are ranked 64th and 65th, respectively. Meanwhile, Lao PDR is in 84th place with HCI of 58.36; Myanmar in 89th with 57.67; and Cambodia in 92nd with 57.28.

ASEAN Member States are seeking to improve the quality of their human resources since they are the drivers of innovation and productivity in a knowledge and digital economy. Viet Nam has made human resources development a priority of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community and the Economic Community for the same reasons. It is also in keeping with the theme of ASEAN Chairmanship 2020—enhancing a responsive ASEAN—and the stated goals of the ASEAN Charter.

The ASEAN: How prepared do you think are Viet Nam’s human resources and those of other ASEAN Member States

The ASEAN Community in general and Viet Nam in particular, recognise that developing human resources through increasing knowledge, capacity and skills, is the foundation for increasing competitiveness of each Member State and industrial sectors in the value chain.

for the future of work, one that is technologically driven and oriented?

Minister Dung: Digital technology and automation are changing ASEAN economies and societies. Many conventional jobs with low productivity are now diminishing, while technology-based jobs are emerging. Workers equipped with technical skills are poised to take advantage of these newly formed jobs.

A recent research reveals that in the next 10 to 15 years, about one-third of current jobs will change due to the impact of information technology, robotics, automation and artificial intelligence. Moreover, about 40 per cent of global workers will not have job-appropriate skills. Currently, the shortage of skilled workers and skills mismatch have resulted in six per cent GDP loss, equivalent to 5 trillion US dollars globally, every year. If countries

concentrate on labour skill development, GDP growth can be boosted by up to two per cent.

Competition will be increasingly intense under a knowledge-based and digital economy. This will require better human resources development to take advantage of regional cooperation on one hand, and withstand or prevail over competition on the other hand.

The ASEAN community, including Viet Nam, recognises that developing human resources through knowledge, capacity and skills building is the foundation for increasing the competitiveness of value chains across different industries of each country. To develop ASEAN human

Aerial view of business district in Ho Chi Minh city

resources successfully, innovation and reforms must be carried out in various areas.

First, vocational education and training must meet the requirements of the labour market, with focus on high-quality skills that match the occupational standards of developed countries. ASEAN Member States must also promote mutual recognition of skills to accelerate intra-regional movement of workers and maximise workers' contribution to development.

Second, lifelong learning must be encouraged to upgrade skills, maintain employment and adapt to new forms of work.

Third, countries must improve labour market governance to balance and regulate the supply-demand relations better.

Fourth, countries must craft policies that encourage decent work to protect employees' rights and dignity in the workplace.

Finally, social protection must be in place to support vulnerable and disadvantaged people in the context of international integration, competition, changing production technology, and climate change.



The ASEAN: What does Viet Nam expect to achieve through the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work and its Roadmap?

Minister Dung: The development of the ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work with a specific roadmap is the result of the consensus of the ASEAN community. It will be the basis of Member States' efforts and cooperation to develop human resources amid the new trends, developments, and challenges in the world of work.

In implementing this Declaration, Viet Nam and the Member States will have opportunities to develop their human resources according to regional and international standards. Participation in the ASEAN Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Council and the sharing of knowledge, experiences and good practices on human resources development among Member States as well as non-ASEAN partners are expected to offer valuable insights for Viet Nam and the rest of ASEAN in developing their human resources development for national development even beyond 2030.

The ASEAN: What role do you think the private sector plays in improving the competitiveness of ASEAN human resources?

Minister Dung: In most Member States, the private sector is the main driver of economic growth and development. The private sector also acts as a lever that can facilitate the upskilling and reskilling of human resources so that companies and workers remain competitive.

For Viet Nam, a transitional economy, the private sector is emerging as the main driving force of economic growth and development, comprising 96.7 per cent of the total number of enterprises nationwide and creating 60.7 per cent of the total jobs in the business sector. Private enterprises in Viet Nam, in particular, and ASEAN, in general, are expanding their participation in production networks, and regional and global value chains.

Member States need to continue improving mechanisms and policies which enhance the leadership of the business sector and industrial sectors in human resources development.

However, like many others around the globe, Viet Nam and Member States are confronted with a number of challenges, such as the educational qualification of workers, skills underutilisation and skills-jobs mismatch. Thus, job recruiters cannot find suitable candidates to fill employment vacancies even though there are many young adults who are out of work and are actively looking for jobs. About four of 10 employers believe that such mismatch is the reason for their inability to recruit from among the new crop of graduates. This situation limits the region's capacity to create economic value from their human resources, according to the *Human Capital Index Report*. Meantime, Mckinsey & Company said that about 40 per cent of young applicants consider themselves unfamiliar with the conditions and requirements of the labour market. Among employed young adults, only 55 per cent can find jobs that are related to their training.

Efforts to develop ASEAN human resources for the changing world of work will not be successful without the participation of the private sector. Member States need to continue improving mechanisms and policies that enhance the leadership of the business sector and industrial sectors in human resources development. They must promote the partnership between the private sector and the government and between the business sector and the vocational education and training system. This cooperation will improve the quality and create a linkage between education and human resources utilisation.

The ASEAN: What are the top three areas of investment on human resources by the government of Viet Nam to prepare its national workforce for the future?

Minister Dung: Viet Nam prioritises human resources development by involving enterprises, developing labour market, and ensuring social protection. In response to the rapid changes in the world of work, the government of Viet Nam has various priorities to prepare its national workforce for the future, focusing on the following top three investment areas:

- (i) Human resources development connected to businesses, 4IR labour markets, and international integration; increasing the number of trained workers, especially highly skilled workers, contributing to the improvement of productivity and national competitiveness.
- (ii) Labour market development, with focus on forecasting and identifying labour demand by sector, occupation and qualification, especially future skills and new occupations; enhancing information technology in demand-supply matching to increase the effectiveness of training and use of the workforce; and promoting decent work.
- (iii) Developing a multi-layer and cohesive social protection system, with focus on social insurance, unemployment insurance, medical insurance, and proactive labour market programs to provide timely and effective support for unemployed, vulnerable and disadvantaged workers in finding employment and raising incomes.

Under the theme of cohesive and responsive ASEAN in 2020, Viet Nam, which holds current chairmanship, wishes to collaborate with other ASEAN Member States in developing dynamic human resources who can respond flexibly to the new requirements of the world of work towards ASEAN Vision 2025. ■

ASEAN HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT FOR THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK



BY MEGA IRENA

HEAD, LABOUR AND CIVIL SERVICE DIVISION
ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT

Human resources development places high on the national priorities of all ASEAN Member States; and it continues to be a vital aspiration of the ASEAN Community. The ASEAN Charter includes in its main purposes: the development of human resources, promotion of sustainable development, and enhancement of regional resilience.

The quality of human resources is a key component of the Charter's objectives. Through knowledge, capacity, and skills development, productivity can be improved; and a country's economic competitiveness can be enhanced. Investing in education and skills development therefore plays a crucial role as ASEAN nations move up the value chains and work towards knowledge-based economies.

But the world of work is swiftly changing due to technological advances, demographic transitions, and greening of economies, and now the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Technology and the Future of Work

Rapid technological advancement has stimulated new business models and influenced labour markets like never before. The disruptive changes brought about by digitalisation and automation are transforming the nature of work and required labour skills. On the one hand, technological transformations can create new jobs, lower production costs, increase efficiency and productivity, and accelerate economic growth. On the other, these disruptions are projected to change value-chain structures, render current occupations obsolete, and relegate certain jobs to automation.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the emerging characteristics of future labour markets are more fluid, unforeseeable, less secure, and technology-driven. The range of tasks that can be handled by technology will expand. There will be greater expectation that human resources have up-to-date skills to work with advanced technologies. Human resources development policies and programmes should therefore respond to these opportunities and challenges.

Investment in human resources development is necessary to make workers more versatile and adaptable and keep economies growing. The projected impact of the fourth industrial revolution or 4IR can be mitigated by preparing ASEAN labour markets. Educational systems that not only promote cognitive and behavioural development, but also nurture creative skills should be supported. Reskilling and upskilling of workers should be pursued as they can boost productivity and competitiveness of firms. With the right skills, individuals have better chances of engaging in meaningful work and earning higher salaries.

Human Resources Development in ASEAN

With the rising demand for workers with future-ready skills and changing employment relations, ASEAN Member States have put in place strategies

to maximise the opportunities presented by this technological transformation as well as cushion its adverse impact. ASEAN Member States vowed to cooperate in the preparation of the region's workforce for the future of work and development of its human resources.

This commitment, embodied in the **ASEAN Labour Ministers' Statement on the Future of Work: Embracing Technology for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth** issued in April 2019, demonstrates the ministers' resolve to embrace technology in preparing the ASEAN work force for the future and promoting decent work.

The ministers agreed to build the capability of government and private sector to produce a future-ready workforce, and work with tripartite partners and other stakeholders in supporting enterprises and workers. They also pledged to encourage businesses to invest in decent work and apply technology that improves the quantity and quality of current and emerging jobs.

The ministers agreed to support fiscally sustainable social protection initiatives for workers, and encourage participation of vulnerable populations in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and related careers. Finally, they pledged to share information on responsive policies, best practices, and experiences of their countries as well as learn from other partners outside ASEAN in preparing workers to adapt to future jobs.

Under the ASEAN Chairmanship of Viet Nam this year, governments, tripartite partners, the academia, and business sector jointly crafted the **ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work**. The declaration was finalised by the ASEAN Education and Labour Ministers, and adopted by the 36th **ASEAN Summit** in June 2020.

The declaration commits ASEAN Member States to cultivate a lifelong learning culture and raise awareness among the youth, workers, and employers on the importance of investing in education, training, and skills development initiatives to adapt to the changing world of work.

Member States agreed to promote demand-driven competencies and qualifications in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education, improve accessibility and quality of labour market information, and promote infrastructure development so that opportunities brought by 4IR could be widely enjoyed.



The declaration also aims to improve the inclusivity of education and employment for all, coherence of human resources development policies, as well as responsiveness and cohesiveness of labour, educational, economic policies and institutional frameworks. Leadership of business, industry, and educational institutions on human resources development is acknowledged and supported by fostering closer partnerships between the government and private sector, and providing incentives.

The establishment of a central pool of funds will be explored, with contributions from governments, private sector, international organisations, and other partners to support priorities and research on future skills needs. A roadmap of strategies and actions to implement commitments in the declaration will be developed in the latter part of this year.

The declaration also formalises the establishment of the ASEAN TVET Council, a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder platform for coordination, research and development on innovations, and monitoring of regional programmes that support the advancement of TVET in the region.

The COVID-19 Disruption

ASEAN has also set initiatives to build the resilience and adaptability of the region's labour force in times of crises. The COVID-19 pandemic's profound impact has gone beyond public health. Its economic impact is significant and broad-based, disrupting supply

Humans and technology working in harmony

chains and financial markets. Restrictions on mobility and demand side-shocks have slowed down the normal course of production, trade, and distribution. Livelihoods of people around the world have been adversely affected.

The ASEAN region has not been spared. Millions of workers are affected by temporary workplace closures that have led to a decline in earnings, furloughs, or outright layoffs. Many of them are low wage workers whose livelihoods are at risk. The *ASEAN Policy Brief*, published in April, states that informal economy workers, gig workers, and daily-wage earners in industries like travel, tourism, and retail are the hardest hit groups in the region. Furloughed and laid off migrant workers also face an uncertain future and may have to be reintegrated into the mainstream economy.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Culture Organization (UNESCO), closures of schools and universities are affecting over 60 per cent of the world's student population. Distance learning has been implemented by educational institutions around the world to ensure learning continuity, but many school systems, teachers, and infrastructure are generally unprepared for online education.

To more thoroughly understand the repercussions of the pandemic on labour, education, and vulnerable groups in ASEAN, the Asia Foundation and the ASEAN Secretariat's ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department have embarked on a study entitled

“Rapid Assessment for ASEAN: Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Livelihoods of ASEAN Populations.”

This evidence-based study is expected to inform the national responses of Member States as well as help relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies and the ASEAN Secretariat identify immediate and longer-term actions needed at the regional level.

ASEAN ministerial sectoral bodies on health, economy, foreign affairs, labour, tourism, agriculture, and defense have convened their special meetings virtually to deliberate on regional cooperation. The 2020 ASEAN Chairmanship's theme of building a cohesive and responsive ASEAN is especially apt given the current circumstances.

The **Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit on COVID-19** held on 14 April 2020 reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to take collective action and coordinate policies in the fight against the pandemic. In the declaration, our leaders agreed to, among others, keep markets open; provide targeted support to assist people and businesses especially the micro, small and medium enterprises; ensure social safety net for our people; and encourage the development of a post-pandemic recovery plan.

The ASEAN labour ministers also held a special meeting virtually on 14 May 2020 to discuss the regional response to the impact of COVID-19 on workers. One of their commitments is to strengthen the effectiveness of active labour market policies at national and regional levels, occupational safety and health standards, and social protection systems so that workers retain their jobs and are more resilient, and those at-risk are less vulnerable.

The worldwide temporary restrictions of movement and business closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic are unprecedented. The crisis, however, provided an opportunity for governments, employers, workers, educational institutions, teachers, learners, and other stakeholders to draw lessons from the current challenges and be better prepared for the changing world of work. ■

Workers from Myanmar, in a footwear factory on the Thai-Myanmar border

Photo Credit: © catastrophe_OL/Shutterstock



The full joint statement can be accessed at:



LINK 1



LINK 2

<https://asean.org/joint-statement-asean-labour-ministers-response-impact-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-labour-employment/>

<https://asean.org/storage/2020/05/ALMM-Joint-Statement-ADOPTED-14-May-20201.pdf>

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE CIVIL SERVICE: **AGILITY IN ACTION**



BY PIAWAT SIVARAKS, PhD
DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OFFICE
OF THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION THAILAND
AND CHAIR, SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING FOR
THE ASEAN COOPERATION ON CIVIL SERVICE MATTERS

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital transformation. Stringent social distancing measures are changing lifestyles and work arrangements. Businesses and governments have to rely even more on technologies to provide information, goods, and services to meet shifting demands from the public.

In the past few months, how much more often have you ordered groceries and food through a mobile app? Have you shifted to online payments and banking? How many video meetings and messaging apps have you downloaded?

Data indicate we were already in a “disrupted stream,” even before the pandemic. According to a media consumption study by Nielsen, people spent about 90 per cent of their mobile time using apps. This may account for the more than 200 billion apps downloaded in 2019, according to the State of Mobile 2020 report.

In Thailand, motorcyclists in colourful jackets line up in front of restaurants to pick-up and deliver food ordered online. A *Bangkok Post* article reported that there were about 120,000-140,000 deliveries per day in 2018 which could scale up to about 3 million per day in the next five years.

Fintech is also expanding in Thailand and the rest of ASEAN. In the digital banking study conducted by

Mckinsey & Company, use of mobile banking in ASEAN increased significantly over the past years and is now much more widespread than in most developed Asia. The Bank of Thailand reports that the value of mobile banking transaction in Thailand had increased twenty-fold during the past five years. This development may have led to the planned closure of some 200 physical branches of one of Thailand’s major banks as part of its digital transformation strategy, according to news reports.

In recent years, there has already been a significant shift in business practices and services generated by digital technology—the so-called digital disruption. This in turn, changed people’s expectations towards business, society, and government. Whether from the point of view of customer or citizens, demands in the digital age cover the aspects of speed, personalisation, transparency, comparison and clarification, and omni-channels.

COVID-19 has created a “new normal,” with telecommuting, online education and fintech, and other services required to live through the pandemic.

Here comes the importance of “agility.” Digital disruption means significant transformation in the ways we think and operate, not just in businesses, but also in governments. The civil service is no different.

Civil service systems in many countries have been growing through the influence of scientific management approach, with emphasis on hierarchical organisational structure and specialisation-oriented human resource management. However, this rigid management platform cannot survive in a time when digital transformation will be pushed to an extreme.

New demands from citizens require policy outputs that come from the real synchronisation of thoughts, ideas, and implementation that cuts across the boundaries of divisions, departments, and ministries of the civil service.

The ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters (ACCSM) is a key sectoral body of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, in the promotion of effective and efficient civil service. ACCSM realises the rapidly changing digital landscape forces civil service to embrace the agility imperative, in order to cope with the change.

Thailand, as the 20th ACCSM Chair, has come up with the theme “Accelerating Agile ASEAN Civil Service” as the focused agenda of the ACCSM Meeting. Even before the pandemic, we recognised that digital transformation is imperative. In the



ASEAN Statement on Promotion of Good Governance and Acceleration of an Agile Civil Service in a Digital Economy, we affirm commitments to build capacities of the ASEAN civil service sector to respond flexibly, effectively, and promptly to the intense period of digital transformation.

The statement calls for ASEAN Member States to concretise the concept of agility in order to enhance the capacities and capabilities of our civil service by improving our policies, processes, systems, and change-ready mindsets. The statement also emphasises key platforms and channels to implement ACCSM's agility strategic intention. These include collaboration with ASEAN resource centres, the ASEAN Network of Public Service Training Institutes, as well as ASEAN sectoral bodies, ASEAN dialogue partners, and international organisations.

Moving in the same strategic direction of ACCSM, the Office of the Civil Service Commission of Thailand, as the government's central human resources agency, is also driving its policy to support departments and officials in dealing with digital transformation. To effectively ride the wave of digital transformation, we believe the following key drivers are needed:

A – Anticipation and Awareness

It is necessary to understand the dynamics of the digital disruption especially their potential effect on the departments' mission. Any change or transformation will not happen if someone does not

The statement calls for ASEAN member countries to concretise the concept of agility in order to enhance the capacities and capabilities of our civil service by improving our policies, processes, systems, and change-ready mindsets.

foresee coming problems or challenges. Anticipated awareness in the workplace can serve as a starting point of digital transformation and organisation's agility. For such an awareness to occur, several components are needed. They are, and not limited to, ability to observe what is happening in your policy areas or other policy spheres that might affect your mission/strategy; ability to identify irregularity of the policy outputs/outcome; quality relevant data; effective discussion within department and with key stakeholders; and, more importantly, commitment of departments (and their leaders in particular) to deliver quality service to the citizen. Through dialogue with civil service leaders, the Office of the Civil Service Commission has found that executives of leading departments all possess this anticipated awareness characteristic and use it to drive their digital transformation strategy.

G – Growth Mindset

In the midst of uncertainty is the opportunity presented by technology disruption to build a



culture of learning and development. The concept of “fail fast, learn fast” seems to be suitable, but what must be underscored is the “growth mindset.” In the book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Dweck distinguishes mindset into two major types: a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. If you have a fixed mindset, you see that abilities, skills, and potential are unchangeable; and that feedback equates to criticism. On the other hand, in a growth mindset, you are willing to embrace failure and challenges as opportunities to grow. In past decades, failures in policy and implementation were hardly part of the civil service sector’s vocabulary. Through the growth mindset approach, the Office of the Civil Service Commission is now promoting “HR-Lab” as a tool to explore and calibrate suitable civil service HR policy and practice to answer our new landscape.

I – Infinite Perseverance

A growth mindset can be actualised with perseverance. Solutions never come easy. Brainstorming, convincing, getting out of the comfort zone, working with the budget, and drafting new laws and regulations to fit new policies are actions that will make proponents of transformation raise the white flag. Perseverance itself depends on several factors, including the ability to understand that resistance to change is the norm for any transformation; clear but flexible transformation milestones and positive thinking about change (which are small-step improvements worth celebrating); and strong and supportive teamwork.

L – Leverage partnerships

Dealing with disruption is a never-ending story. It requires massive amounts of coordination and collaboration, both within and across boundaries, and linking of efforts at the local, national, regional, and global levels. Leadership at all levels of the organisation is an indispensable factor for civil service digital transformation. Successful departments have top leaders that create

opportunities for change, and putting themselves as one with the team. They facilitate the expansion of strategic networks across different sectors of society. They ease up on their authority. They allow mid-level leaders and team members to work flexibly with the organisation’s partners and stakeholders, and come up with innovations.

E – Employ Tech Wisely

Today, everyone appears to be enthusiastic about incorporating technology into their organisation’s strategy implementation. As transformation challenges vary from organisation to organisation, it is important to understand that certain technological solutions may not be a fit for all. It is therefore easy to fall into technology trap, where the luxury of ready-made software and applications overshadow actual practical usefulness for the organisation. Like the transformation strategy, new technology too needs to be customised to answer specific policy and operational needs. The Office of the Civil Service Commission found that, through clear problem analysis of departments and close collaboration with solution developers in both government and business sectors, it is possible to find technology-based solutions that are effective and economical.

In summary, the ACCSM is well aware of the need for digital transformation and agility in the civil service so that it can improve its responses and services to citizen, while ensuring the sound implementation of good governance principles. Thailand’s Office of Civil Service Commission is working closely with various departments and other civil service commissions to identify key drivers that will promote agility and transformation.

Currently, several civil service human resource systems and components are being analysed and potentially modified to support the transformation. The focused reform areas include: remodeling employment and compensation regimes; performance management; merit promotion; and performance and potential development.

ACCSM embraces the concept of agility through its statement during the 20th ACCSM Meeting, and Thailand is determined to enhance agility of its civil service, as well as to collaborate with all ASEAN Member States to sustainably implement digital transformation.

One of the myths about agility is that it is applied exclusively to the business sector. In fact, the civil service sector too needs to be agile in order to effectively respond to the needs of citizens, as we all learn to live in a world that has markedly changed after COVID-19. ■

LIFELONG LEARNING FOR A FUTURE-READY WORKFORCE



BY JESUS LORENZO R. MATEO

UNDERSECRETARY FOR PLANNING, HUMAN RESOURCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND FIELD OPERATIONS, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, PHILIPPINES
AND CHAIR, SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING ON EDUCATION

As ASEAN transforms itself to rise up to the challenges of continuous digitalisation brought about by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the Philippines' Department of Education ensures that educational mechanisms are in place to sustain lifelong learning opportunities for Filipinos.



Promoting Lifelong Learning in Basic Education

Enshrined in the Philippines' K to 12 basic education curriculum is the promotion of the 21st-century skills that encompass learning and innovation, effective communication, information and technological and life and career skills. Aptitude in these areas empowers Filipino learners for lifelong learning.

The department's current curriculum review, which intends to enhance the K to 12 curriculum standards and in particular, the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) standards and competencies, is expected to address the gaps between the acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities of

graduates and industry and market demands. The results of the review will allow us to elevate the capabilities of K to 12 graduates as they face the impact of the changing world of work.

Lessons from the Philippine Experience

The Philippines' K to 12 curriculum is dynamic and flexible. One of the success stories we can share is our evolving technical-vocational and livelihood (TVL) curricular programs. Our programme offerings, for example, include Maritime Specialization, a unique TVL track where individuals strategically situated near shipping industries and who are interested to become part of the maritime industry are provided various opportunities to learn and acquire a range of relevant skills, from navigational and engine watch, to ship safety, to catering services.

Our curriculum also provides for work immersion of senior high school learners so that they develop the requisite competencies, work ethic, and values

before joining the world of work. Exposing learners to a real work environment has proven to be highly effective in achieving greater congruence between basic education and the nation's development targets. It has allowed learners to appreciate the importance and application of the principles and theories learned in school; enrich students' skills in communication and human relations; and develop good work habits, attitudes, appreciation, and respect for work. Overall, this allows Filipino learners to become ready when they enter the workforce.

Delivering Basic Education Amid a Pandemic

The unprecedented impact of COVID-19 on various sectors of Philippine society pushed the Department of Education to explore creative ways to ensure that learning continues without compromising the safety of our students and teachers. We want our teachers to be able to deliver instruction in a safe work and learning environment. The Basic Education–Learning Continuity Plan guarantees that learning is uninterrupted by carrying out K-12 curriculum adjustments, aligning learning materials, implementing learning delivery modalities, and providing corresponding teacher and parent/guardian training.

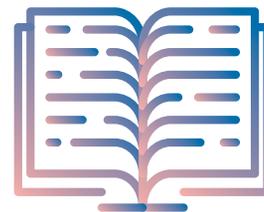
Digital divide challenges due to the school's (as well as students') lack of technological hardware and infrastructure are being addressed through the development and production of Alternative Learning Delivery Modules to be distributed to all learners across the country. The synergy between the department and its stakeholders proved to be a rallying leverage in educating the 28 million Filipino learners.

Meantime, to contribute to the mental/psychological well-being and social development of children and youth while at home, the department has taken steps to ensure that both learners and parents are not overwhelmed with heavy curricular contents during remote or distance learning. These steps include identifying and implementing the most essential learning competencies. ■

EDUCATION

IN THE AGE OF PANDEMIC

PROMOTING, CARING, AND SHARING



BY KUNG PHOAK
DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL OF ASEAN
FOR ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY

In an effort to curb the spread of COVID-19, over 190 countries have ordered school closures. This move impacts 90 per cent of the world's learners, which translates to a staggering 1.6 billion children and young people.

In the ASEAN region, governments were quick to deploy distance learning at scale. A number of online platforms were launched by ministries of education, maximising available e-learning solutions such as virtual classrooms and open educational resources.

While these interventions allow learners to continue their education in the interim, distance learning is often criticised for exacerbating existing educational and social inequalities.

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may fall even further behind due to lack of access to the Internet and technology. For these students, the gains made as a result of widening access to education are at risk of being lost. A grim yet possible scenario is

that these educational gains may even be reversed completely.

The conversation brings to the fore the gender dimensions of the digital divide. Due to cultural norms, girls from underprivileged communities may have less opportunities to access technological devices shared by the family. As girls tend to undertake more responsibilities in the household, less time is also devoted to their learning.

The transformative power of education cannot be disputed. Education leads to better health outcomes, higher social capital, more gender-equal societies, and decent work opportunities. Studies reveal that every additional year of schooling is linked to a 10 percent increase in income.

However, if learning grinds to a halt, the children and young people of today simply cannot enjoy the wider benefits of education.

An inclusive quality education is the right of all children and young people in ASEAN. In the face of a global pandemic, this right has to be protected and fulfilled more than ever.

A look at promising cases across the ASEAN region shows that the inability to access and participate in virtual schooling does not necessarily pose a barrier to learning.

Educational television networks, such as *TV Edukasi* in Indonesia, *TV Okey* in Malaysia, and *Knowledge Channel* in the Philippines, air free educational programmes based on national K-12 curricula.

In Lao PDR, community radio is widely used to broadcast basic education programming in various local languages.

In Cambodia, the *Text to Change* project uses SMS to deliver English instruction as well as lessons in life skills to students in Battambang and Siem Reap.

Remote learning in the midst of COVID-19 must be true to the principles of inclusion and equity in education. These offline approaches demonstrate that education does not have to be limited to better-resourced students in the online classroom.

With the recent school closures, the most crucial concern in educators' minds was to keep disruptions to learning at a minimum. However, we fail to realise that the challenge of education in times of lockdown is not solely confined to learning outcomes.

The mental health and psychosocial consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on learners are equally worth addressing.

Schools hold a central place in promoting social interaction and a sense of belonging.

With schools predicted to remain closed indefinitely, this can create feelings of isolation, loneliness, and uncertainty among students. Prolonged periods of quarantine and social distancing can have far-reaching effects on students' mental health and well-being, including post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

The emotional and psychological effects of the pandemic are profound. Ensuring that learners are provided with adequate psychosocial support in these challenging circumstances should not be considered secondary to delivering quality distance education.

In the ASEAN region, various organisations and universities have stepped up to offer free counselling and other psychological services—via landline, mobile, email, Skype, and Whatsapp. Audioguides, videos, and other self-help resources on stress management, mindfulness, and relaxation are also readily available for download at no cost.

Post-COVID 19, the issue of mental health in education must remain a priority for action by ministries of education, schools, educators, parents, and communities at large. No learner should ever have to feel disconnected, scared, and alone.

School managers, teachers, and parents—our indispensable partners in education—also require support during these trying times. As we navigate the psychosocial challenges of this pandemic, available tools and platforms must be mobilised to facilitate connectedness and the sharing of coping strategies.

At the global and regional levels, a series of virtual meetings and webinars have been organised in recent weeks to exchange experiences and lessons learnt. Discussions were conducted around topics of mutual interest and concern such as distance learning strategies, psychosocial support and socio-emotional learning, innovative teaching practices, equity in remote education, and the gender aspects of school closures.

As we speak, school managers, teachers, and parents are also working together to confront common issues and challenges.



Post-COVID 19, the issue of mental health in education must remain a priority for action by ministries of education, schools, educators, parents, and communities at large. No learner should ever have to feel disconnected, scared, and alone.

These can range from strategies to sustain learner engagement, the sharing of teaching–learning materials, and the technical constraints of video conferencing platforms.

These inspiring displays of solidarity—involving governments, schools, organisations, communities, individuals—reinforce our collective commitment to education, even in the most difficult of conditions.

At the UNESCO Futures of Education panel discussion held in March 2020, Professor Arjun Appadurai commented that “unlike other global crises, the COVID-19 outbreak has also awakened our sense of belonging to the global environment, and all other forms of beings.”

This message resonates strongly with the ASEAN Community. The **ASEAN Socio-Cultural Blueprint 2025** is underpinned by aspirations to build “a caring and sharing society,” where its citizens “face new and emerging challenges together.”

In the service of its Member States and their peoples, the ASEAN Secretariat will play a convening role to facilitate the continued sharing of knowledge, information, ideas, best practices, lessons learnt, and experiences to support the education sector in the midst of the coronavirus outbreak.

As this pandemic unfolds, wherever possible, let us help one another. Our common humanity needs to be at the core of efforts to ensure the continuity of learning for all. ■

GERMANY'S TVET 4.0:

A PARTNERSHIP FOR HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT WITH ASEAN



PETER SCHOOF, PhD
EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY
AMBASSADOR OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF
GERMANY TO INDONESIA, ASEAN AND
TIMOR-LESTE

Human resources development has been on the agenda of ASEAN since its formation in 1967. The 2008 ASEAN Charter reaffirmed the development of “(...) human resources through closer cooperation in education and lifelong learning (...)” as a key purpose of the ASEAN community.



And in 2015 the **ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2025** listed the promotion of lifelong learning, the development of a system of continuous training and retraining, and the establishment of “ASEAN as a centre for human resource development and training” among its strategic measures.

In recent years, just as the ASEAN community began to take shape and increasingly live up to its promise, the world entered a new era of change and disruption. One of the principal drivers of

this change is the parallel advent and commercialisation of groundbreaking technologies, often described as the fourth industrial revolution or industry 4.0.

For ASEAN businesses and industry, advances in the application of digital technology hold great potential. Further progress in automation can boost labour productivity, reduce costs, and vastly improve operational efficiency. Digital technology supports the development of innovative products and services tailored to specific customer demand. For many

ASEAN business leaders, the question is no longer whether they should engage in industry 4.0, but how to secure access to human resources with the right competencies to manage the transition.

For ASEAN governments, a future in which economic success is built on the mastery of advanced technology and less on the abundance of cheap and low-skilled labour poses formidable challenges. Influential studies have raised the prospect of dramatic transformations in the labour markets in the ASEAN region as

routine manual jobs become displaced and a larger share of ASEAN jobs—one study estimated 57 per cent—comes under threat of automation.

More recent analyses provide a more nuanced picture. In the longer term, losses in manual and routine jobs may be more than offset by the emergence of new occupations and a rising demand for non-routine jobs that build on human cognitive strengths.

Even this more balanced outlook, however, leaves little doubt—as technology advances, labour market demand in ASEAN will change. Offering the citizens of ASEAN Member States opportunities for personal development and access to decent work will require dynamic efforts to advance all aspects of lifelong learning. In the era of industry 4.0 the strategic measures of the ASCC Blueprint 2025 are becoming ever more important.

TVET 4.0—Providing ASEAN Competencies for the Future

Industry 4.0 concerns businesses worldwide. In Germany, too, a very practical-oriented technical and vocational education and training (TVET) approach has to be modernised to keep up with the structural changes in industrial production.

In ASEAN Member States, employees must acquire new basic competencies that make them more versatile and adaptive to change, empower them to work with increasingly intelligent machines, or give them a competitive edge over these machines. These competencies include: (i) foundational

As part of lifelong learning, TVET consists of education, training, and skills development on a wide range of occupational fields, production, services, and livelihoods.



Dicoding Indonesia received the ASEAN Business Awards 2019 in Skill Development category.

skills such as sound numeracy, reading comprehension, and the capacity for self-directed learning; (ii) soft skills such as the abilities to communicate, work in teams, and engage in complex problem solving; and (iii) basic digital skills. In addition, employment will continue to depend on competencies related to the specific job and its requirements.

TVET, especially the dual system of schooling and on-the-job training as it is practiced in Germany, is widely credited for providing skilled workers with broad competencies, arming them with the knowledge as well as the practical skills to perform effectively in the workplace.

As part of lifelong learning, TVET consists of education, training, and skills development on a wide range of occupational fields, production, services, and livelihoods. It can take place at secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary levels, and includes work-based learning and continuous training and professional development.

Today, when companies develop new high-tech production facilities in the ASEAN region, TVET is often an integral part of the investment. Innovative service providers cater to human resources development for the IT industry. “Dicoding Indonesia” was founded in 2015 as a platform to enable young people from various backgrounds to learn coding and qualify as professional programmers. Working with TVET schools, Dicoding has since attracted more than 140,000 IT developers from all over Indonesia with its programme. The start-up was awarded the

ASEAN Business Award 2019 in the category of “skills development.”

Public TVET systems can make an important contribution when it comes to providing qualifications in the era of industry 4.0. A comprehensive research project of the German Federal Institute of Technical and Vocational Education and Training recently found that more than 80 per cent of enterprises see an equal or increasing demand for skilled workers due to the impact of digitalisation. However, the qualification and competency requirements and the urgency of adapting these differ widely between occupations. While tasks in many occupations become more complex, they do not necessarily require higher qualifications. Instead, they may require new skills, such as an understanding of integrated production processes and systems, or advanced digital skills—skills that can be attained in technical education and work-based learning.

For the TVET system, the findings imply a need for continuous reform, the speed and depth of which differs by occupation. It concerns the development of modern didactics and the cooperation of different places of learning including schools, companies, and inter-company training centres. Continuous qualification assumes a new relevance.

TVET 4.0—Providing ASEAN Competencies of Today

For TVET practitioners across the ASEAN region today, the reform agenda of industry 4.0 is only beginning to emerge.

Whereas some ASEAN Member States occupy leading places in global comparisons of digitalisation, others remain far less advanced. Compared to other regions of the world, the uptake of technologies related to industry 4.0 has so far been slow. This is particularly true for micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSME), the backbone of ASEAN economies. MSME offer between 50 per cent and 90 per cent of jobs in ASEAN Member States. So far, only a small fraction of MSME (16 per cent) uses digital tools.

While current data on skills needs in ASEAN remain scarce, a look at the global level indicates a strong and even



Workers prepare machinery at an oil and gas platform.

rising demand not only for engineers or IT experts, but also for skilled trades such as welders, mechanics, and electricians. In OECD countries, most of the top ten in-demand occupations today require post-secondary training but not always a full university degree. Mid-skilled roles represent 40 per cent of all jobs, and demand for them is growing.

The importance of TVET as a provider for many of the most highly sought-after occupations is widely accepted in ASEAN Member States. Yet, many of the school-based TVET systems of the region have long fallen short of expectations. In a 2014 employers' survey, only 53 per cent of respondents agreed or agreed strongly that TVET systems match their skills needs—though the rate was 90 per cent in some ASEAN Member States and merely 30 per cent in others.

Among the most pressing challenges of underperforming TVET systems are a shortage of adequately trained TVET personnel (especially those with practical competencies and industry experience), a lack of adequate funding, as well as related deficits in teaching materials and equipment of TVET schools.

The Future ASEAN Agenda for TVET

Modernising ASEAN TVET systems, improving the quality of teaching outcomes, and synchronising the development of TVET with technological progress and changing labour market needs require a determined effort of all stakeholders. As demonstrated by leading TVET systems in ASEAN and beyond, the most important engine for change is the direct involvement of

business and industry in the planning and delivery of TVET—at the national level as much as at the level of individual TVET schools and colleges.

Recognising the need for action, in 2018, the ASEAN Secretariat with support from the German government's **Regional Cooperation Programme for TVET in ASEAN** or **RECOTVET** initiated a regional learning process. The high-level policy dialogue, "Business and Industry Cooperation in TVET—Towards a Better Practice for ASEAN," brought together leading decision-makers from TVET line ministries with representatives of business and industry from all over the ASEAN region. At the meeting, a working group of 20 TVET champions from chambers, business associations, and companies was asked to develop action-oriented policy recommendations to make TVET in ASEAN fit for the future. In March 2019, the group finalised 45 recommendations covering nine thematic areas—from enhancing the quality of TVET regulations and strategies to strengthening the leadership of business membership organisations in TVET and deepening the collaboration of TVET schools with business and industry.

The final document, the "Future ASEAN Agenda for TVET," was mentioned in the Chairman's statement at the 34th ASEAN Summit in June 2019 and has been brought to the attention of ASEAN senior officials for labour and education as well as the ASEAN Business Advisory Council.

To continue its work as a business interest group for the promotion of TVET, the regional working group has since constituted itself as the ASEAN Future Workforce Council.

Examples from all over the ASEAN region are a testament that the promotion of business and industry participation is today a priority of ASEAN governments concerned with TVET.

In 2018, for instance, the government of Malaysia formed the TVET Empowerment Cabinet Committee with the participation of its seven ministers and a technical chairman from the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers. As part of its TVET Empowerment Plan, the Committee

envisages a national TVET coordinating body, a sustainable financing model, as well as a national singular TVET brand that promotes TVET as a mainstream educational choice. The plan envisions the active involvement of the industrial sector in TVET, from student recruitment via curriculum design, to TVET delivery and job placement.

Other examples include Cambodia's new Skills Development Fund which provides co-financing for measures to align TVET outcomes to labour market demand. The revised labour law of Viet Nam provides a legal basis for and encourages companies to engage in cooperative training, thereby strengthening the practical orientation of TVET. Countries like Thailand and, more recently, Indonesia, provide tax incentives for companies that invest in the qualification of in-company trainers or dual or cooperative training measures.

The Road Ahead

As ASEAN Member States tackle the complex task of TVET reform to empower ASEAN human resources for today and tomorrow, TVET cooperation between Germany and ASEAN as well as between the ASEAN Member States can make an increasingly relevant contribution.

Combining resources from ASEAN Member States at different stages of TVET development, as well as the private sector, academia, international organisations, and development partners, ASEAN, with the active participation of its Secretariat, can provide an innovative platform for learning and exchange, agenda setting, as well as cooperation in the interest of the ASEAN Community.

The SEA-TVET regional exchange programme; publications like *Standard for In-Company Trainers in ASEAN Countries* and *SEAMEO Regional TVET Teacher Standard*; and training modules and materials on topics such as Fit for Industry 4.0 indicate that outcomes of regional TVET cooperation can be both tangible and of practical relevance to TVET systems of ASEAN Member States.

With SEA-VET.NET, a platform developed and hosted by SEAMEO VOCTECH, the TVET centre based in Brunei, the ASEAN region

today has access to a unique source of information on TVET systems development.

Building on the initiative of the Philippines to establish an ASEAN TVET Council, ASEAN Member States can take the next important step of overcoming the

institutional fragmentation that has long characterised the regional TVET discourse and establish, at the ASEAN level, a public-private partnership for TVET.

As it complements and supports dynamic TVET reforms in ASEAN Member

States, Germany's cooperation with ASEAN for TVET 4.0 can help unlock the contribution of TVET to lifelong learning. Similarly, it will benefit the development of ASEAN as a centre for human resource development and training, as envisaged by the ASCC Blueprint 2025. ■

ENHANCING HUMAN CAPITAL

THROUGH TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET)

Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 seeks to strengthen TVET in ASEAN as one of its initiatives to improve the way we live, work, and travel

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- Enhance human capital and prepare for future workforce
- Reduce the vocational skill gaps in ASEAN
- Exchange good practices and innovation in TVET across ASEAN

WHO WILL BENEFIT?

- | | |
|--|---|
| 
Students | 
Government |
| 
TVET personnel | 
Policy Makers |
| 
TVET institutions | 
Private Sector |
| | 
Industry |

WHAT WILL WE DO?

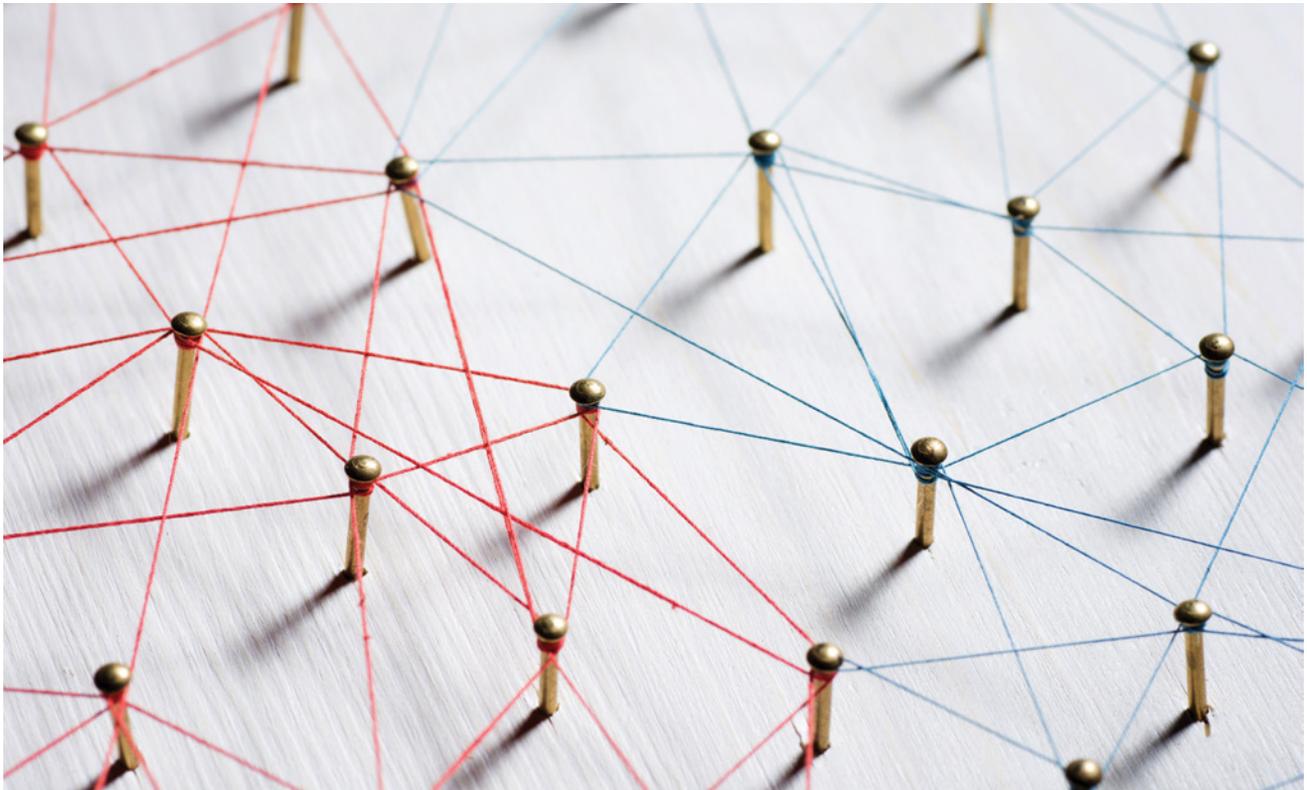
- Identify five TVET priority sectors and up to 10 priority programmes
- Cross-border internship for students and faculty exchange for teachers
- Capacity building for TVET personnel
- Forum and dialogue for policy makers

HOW DO THEY BENEFIT

- TVET personnel will have strengthened capacity for skills development and management
- Students will be able to access quality education and have more opportunities for employability
- Policy makers will have enhanced knowledge on the skills and competencies required of ASEAN's future workforce
- Private sector and industry would be better placed to meet their future workforce needs



Source: <https://connectivity.asean.org/resource/infographic-enhancing-human-capital-through-technical-and-vocational-education-and-training-tvet/>



SHAPING ASEAN'S **HUMAN CAPITAL** DEVELOPMENT WITH **CONNECTIVITY**



BY LIM CHZE CHEEN
DIRECTOR, ASEAN
CONNECTIVITY DIVISION



TENGU IARI VEHULIZA
SENIOR OFFICER, ASEAN
CONNECTIVITY DIVISION

Our region is only as strong as our peoples. ASEAN's economic growth and social development in the past decade have been resilient owing to the contribution of its productive workforce and growing middle class.

More can be done to invest in our peoples and build human capital. The World Bank Human Capital Index in 2018 highlighted that a child born in ASEAN is expected to realise less than 60 per cent of their full productivity potential. The levels of education, literacy, and skills development vary in ASEAN, with seven Member States achieving literacy rates of more than 90 per cent and most Member States having enrolment rates in secondary education—said to lay the foundation for lifelong learning and human development—of less than 80 per cent. There is a higher education growth potential across ASEAN with only two Member States surpassing a 50-per cent tertiary education enrolment ratio.

The future of work, workplace, and workforce will be different from today. The path to this future has changed rapidly due to the advent of digital technologies and the COVID-19 pandemic. Investing in peoples goes beyond providing quality education. It involves enhancing work skills and life skills, taking into account the unique contexts of different countries and different generations, each of which brings its own perspectives to the workplace.

Seizing these opportunities require rigorous prioritisation and coordination so that available resources support policy actions and activities that matter most to the region.

When the concept of ASEAN Connectivity was first mooted in 2009, the main strategy was to promote deeper intra-ASEAN social and cultural interaction and understanding, as well as greater intra-ASEAN people mobility. People-to-people connectivity is the socio-cultural glue that supports and anchors the various initiatives toward greater physical connectivity as well as the regulatory and institutional reforms that are needed to ensure institutional connectivity in the ASEAN region.

The **Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025** adopted in 2016 recognises such linkages and focuses on strengthening people mobility and exchanges to enhance opportunities for reskilling and upskilling the workforce. This is why ASEAN has embarked on the

ASEAN-Korea Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Mobility Programme to develop high quality vocational training programmes and address gaps in vocational demand and supply by 2025. At the same time, the MPAC 2025 focuses on enhancing student mobility across ASEAN Member States by addressing four gaps in higher education: information, awareness, regulatory, and incentives.

We see three opportunities in shaping human capital development with connectivity. First, the initiatives allow us to understand, anticipate, and plan for the future of work and its relevance to the region. These include understanding the vocational skills gap and the training programmes for sector qualifications

conducted across different ASEAN Member States, and then mapping out priority sectors based on private sector interest and long-term need for ASEAN Member States. More robust data and evidence on labour market and skills levels will be important. Comprehending the state of human capital provides an evidence-based approach to develop specific training programmes for priority sectors that will address any skills gap and build a pipeline of skilled workers.

Second, there is a need for partnership between businesses, educational institutions, and government in developing competency-based curriculum and critical skills. Such collaboration will be responsive to the demands of the labour market for workers with specific skills and competencies as well as workplace attributes and behaviours. This will help bring quality into quantity of graduates and improve their readiness for work.

Third, MPAC 2025 connects human capital with other relevant initiatives within and beyond the region. Infrastructure development, digital innovation, and smart city create employment, enhance productivity, and contribute to better welfare. These developments require cognitive, agility, adaptability, and social skills. The goals of ASEAN Connectivity are to help coordinate the strengthening of these linkages and to work with partners, taking into account Member States' priorities, in developing a future workforce that is resilient and responsive to changing industry needs.

Seizing these opportunities require rigorous prioritisation and coordination so that available resources support policy actions and activities that matter most to the region. It is important to develop and leverage data and metrics, including situational and forward-looking analyses, to inform policy options. Rapid digital disruptions and COVID-19 pandemic serve as a wake-up call for all of us to step up our efforts in enhancing human capital development. In the post-pandemic world, our future growth will only be as high as our current efforts to connect our peoples, enhance our human capital, and leave no one behind. ■



ASEAN LABOUR AT A GLANCE



Productive working-age population (those between the ages of 19 and 59):

61.8%
of total population

Source: ASEAN Key Figures 2019, ASEAN Secretariat 2019



An estimated **244 million workers** are in informal employment in the ASEAN region. Informal employment exists in both the formal and informal sectors.

The labour force participation rate (LFPR) measures the proportion of a country's working-age population that engages actively in the labour market, either by working or looking for work. It indicates the size of the supply of labour available to engage in the production of goods and services, relative to the population at working age (ILO 2016).

Labour force participation rate, as of 2018: (in per cent)

Brunei Darussalam	65.4
Cambodia	84.3**
Indonesia	69.2
Lao PDR	68.0*
Malaysia	68.5
Myanmar	62.0
Philippines	60.1
Singapore	67.7
Thailand	68.3
Viet Nam	76.8

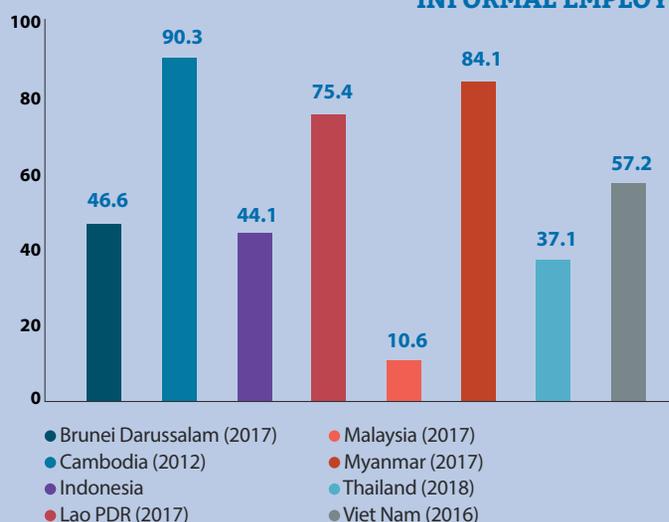
* 2015 figures
** 2017 figures

Source: ASEAN Key Figures 2019, ASEAN Secretariat 2019



LFPRs in Member States are higher among men compared with women.

INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT RATE



Data are derived from the submission of AMS focal points. In the case of Malaysia, only workers in informal employment and up to age 64 are counted.

Source: Regional Study on Informal Employment Statistics to Support Decent Work Promotion in ASEAN, 2019

ASEAN MIGRATION AS OF 2019

Nationals abroad: Intra-regional (in ASEAN)
6,800,000

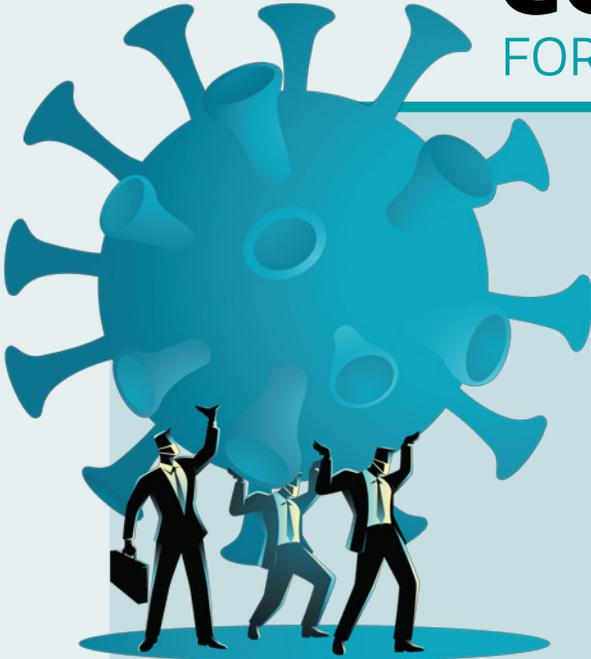
Main countries of destination for intra-ASEAN migration:

Thailand 3.50 million
Malaysia 1.92 million
Singapore 1.12 million

Note: Irregular migration is not fully captured in these statistics

Source: United Nations Departments of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019

ENHANCING ASEAN CONNECTIVITY FOR POST-COVID-19 RECOVERY



WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in March 2020. The crisis has affected economic and social lives of people around the world since. ASEAN took swift actions to strengthen connectivity to mitigate the immediate impact.



Impacts of COVID-19

Movement restrictions led to business closures and job losses.

Decreasing economic and industrial activities interrupted global trade and supply chains.

Mounting pressure on government's capacity to invest in crucial infrastructure



What can ASEAN Connectivity do to help mitigate the impact of COVID-19?

Strengthening regional Connectivity to chart the directions for post COVID-19 recovery in ASEAN.

Greater mobility of labour and resources to respond effectively and efficiently to different needs.



Resilient infrastructure remains key to sustainable socio-economic growth.

Increase investment in critical infrastructure to facilitate movement of goods, services and labour.



Boost industrial capacities to build a competitive regional production network.

Expand market potentials to scale up regional trade routes and supply chain efficiency.



Enhance human capital to improve employability

Develop future-ready skills of the labour force to meet job market demands.



Strengthen the digital economy for collective recovery

Empower micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to adopt digital technologies to maintain growth.



Sustain ASEAN trade and economy to mitigate impact

Maintain ASEAN's open economic and integration policies and ensure continued flow of essential goods.



Illustration: © Jojo S. Limpo

Shifting Currents

COVID-19: A look at how ASEAN is helping save lives and livelihoods in the pandemic. Artists in the region create art to reach out, as people stay apart.

COVID-19 Response: Enhancing Regional Cooperation



BY FERDINAL M. FERNANDO, MD
HEAD, HEALTH DIVISION
ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT

It is clear that the world will need to live with the threat and impact of COVID-19 for the foreseeable future. The dangers and dire consequences from the spread of this disease loom over us, and there is no time for complacency.

Since early January, ASEAN Member States and the ASEAN Health Sector have launched national and regional measures to stop the spread of the disease. These collective actions have not ceased; and there is increased cooperation with health

and non-health partners to mitigate the impact of this pandemic,

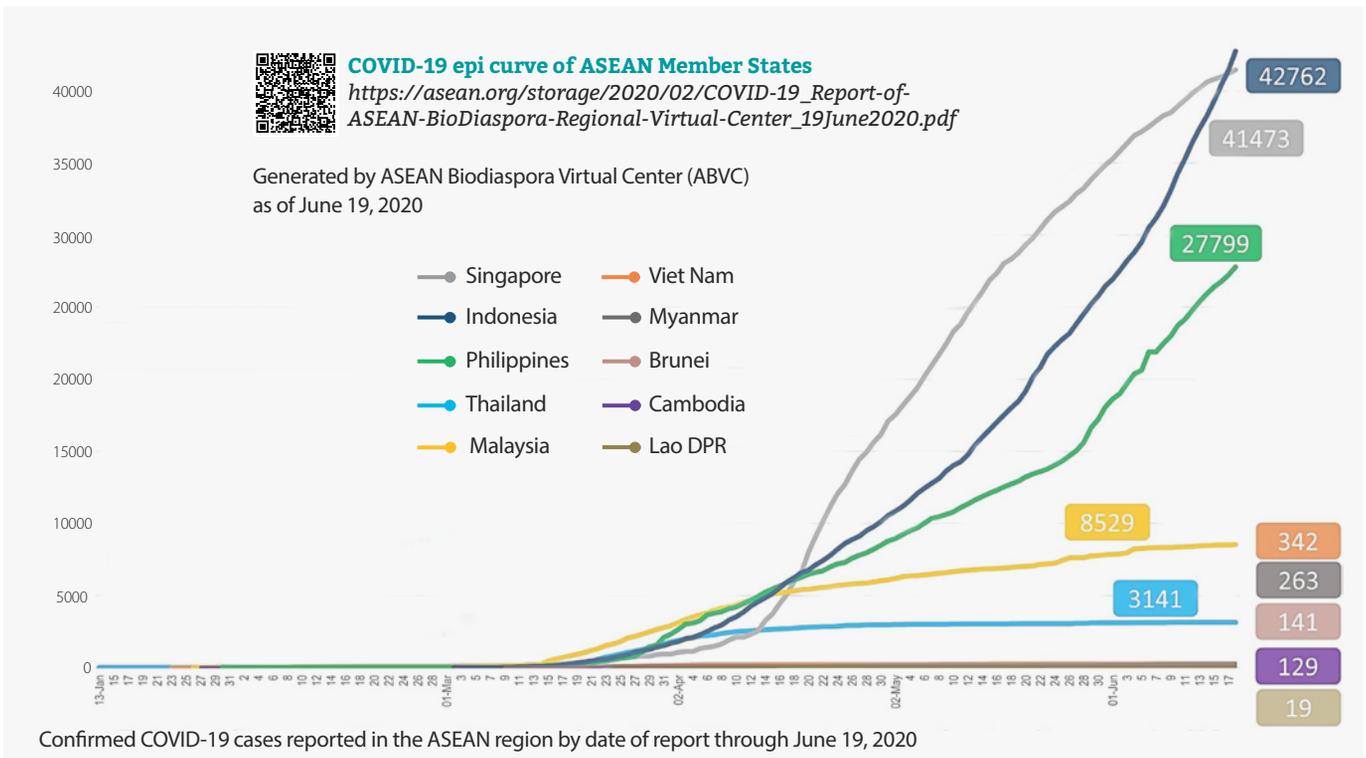
Tracking the Disease in the Region
The numbers of cases of COVID-19 and deaths are still increasing.

As of this writing, there are 8.4 million confirmed cases reported in more than 212 countries/states other than China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau. More than 450,000 deaths have been recorded, with case fatality ratio (CFR) at 5.38 globally.

The ASEAN region—with all its 10 ASEAN Member States having reported outbreaks of COVID-19 since the first confirmed case on 13 January 2020—has more than 124,000 people infected with the virus. About 3,600 people have died in seven ASEAN Member States. Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam are the only countries with no reported fatalities. The CFR in this region ranges from as low as 0.06 to as high as 5.47 among the affected countries.

We can now classify countries based on their rates of transmission, using data culled by Blue Dot Inc., a partner institution of the ASEAN Health Sector, through the ASEAN BioDiaspora Virtual Centre.

The latest epidemiological curve of the ASEAN region indicates that there are countries with a slowing trend of infections, with a few countries with no detected local or imported cases for



ASEAN Member States	First Confirmed Case(s)	Latest Report on Confirmed Case(s)	Confirmed Cases (Deaths)	Case Fatality Ratio *
Brunei Darussalam	10 March 2020	07 May 2020	141 (3)	2.13
Cambodia	27 January 2020	18 June 2020	129	-
Indonesia	02 March 2020	18 June 2020	42,762 (2,339)	5.47
Lao PDR	24 March 2020	13 April 2020	19	-
Malaysia	25 January 2020	18 June 2020	8,529 (121)	1.42
Myanmar	23 March 2020	18 June 2020	263 (6)	2.28
Philippines	30 January 2020	18 June 2020	27,799 (1,116)	4.01
Singapore	23 January 2020	18 June 2020	41,473 (26)	0.06
Thailand	13 January 2020	18 June 2020	3,141 (58)	1.85
Viet Nam	23 January 2020	18 June 2020	342	-

*The calculated CFR is based on reported deaths and reported case counts, and does not account for recovered cases over time or rate of testing in a particular region.

Source: *Risk Assessment for International Dissemination of COVID-19 to the ASEAN Region, ASEAN Biodiaspora Virtual Centre (ABVC) 19 June 2020 (14.00 GMT+8)*



almost six to nine weeks. Although some countries show a slowing rate of transmission, the serious threat of infections and re-infections remains.

Building on the Gains and Moving Forward

Increased cooperation with external partners has built upon existing ASEAN regional mechanisms and platforms.

Concrete initiatives have come out of the commitments made by the Health Ministers of ASEAN with the Plus Three Countries of China, Japan, and Republic of Korea, and with the United States of America through their Joint Statements issued in April. Engagements with other

external partners for enhanced cooperation in COVID-19 response such as Canada, European Union, and World Health Organization have likewise continued.

Our health counterparts from the National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China since the start of the outbreak have been proactively engaged in sharing critical information and updates on a regular basis through video conferences among senior health officials and experts, as well as sharing technical guidelines. Through bilateral cooperation, direct support to ASEAN Members States have been made possible through the provision of technical assistance, personal protective equipment, and laboratory reagents and other medical

supplies and equipment to further build national response capability.

The health focal points from Korea Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and Republic of Korea's Ministry of Health and Welfare have been actively engaged in technical exchanges through a series of **Special Webinars on COVID-19 for Policy and Technology Sharing** with invited health officials and experts from ASEAN, China, and Japan. To date, there have been six webinars organised.

Funds from Republic of Korea have also been mobilised to support the project on **Enhancing the Detection Capacity for COVID-19 in ASEAN Member States (June 2020-January 2021)**. This project will provide diagnostic kits and equipment, with corresponding conduct of in-country trainings for laboratory officers in response to COVID-19.

We have similar engagements with the health focal points of Japan who have been equally supportive in technical exchanges on COVID-19 through the ASEAN Plus Three health platforms. Funds from Japan are currently supporting the conduct of a **"Feasibility Study on the Establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (June-October 2020)"**, a critical mechanism which hopes to bring together relevant initiatives that strengthen public health emergency preparedness and response capacity of the ASEAN region.

Through the **ASEAN-Canada's Global Partnership Programme on the**



These coordination mechanisms also strengthen the capacity of ASEAN Member States to mitigate a wide range of biological threats, including capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to outbreaks, emerging dangerous pathogens, and other hazards that have public health implications.

Mitigation of Biological Threats (2014-2022), Canada has enabled the ASEAN Health Sector to immediately launch a sustained regional response against the outbreak through the *ASEAN EOC Network for public health emergencies*, *ASEAN BioDiaspora Virtual Centre*, *ASEAN Plus Three Field Epidemiology Training Network*, and the *ASEAN Risk Assessment Risk Communication Centre*. These coordination mechanisms and operational platforms also strengthen the capacity of ASEAN Member States to mitigate a wide range of biological threats, including capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to outbreaks, emerging dangerous pathogens, and other hazards that have public health implications. These programmes and other projects on biosafety and biosecurity as well as laboratory and disease-surveillance strengthening began in 2014.

The Global Affairs Canada also engages with ASEAN at the bilateral

level through the provision of personal protective equipment, reagents, and biosafety cabinets for laboratory. Funding support was also allocated for the development of the **ASEAN Portal for Public Health Emergencies (June-July 2020)** which will be used initially as a platform for enhanced real-time information sharing and knowledge exchanges dedicated to COVID-19 response during the pandemic and post-pandemic phases at the regional level. Subsequently, the portal will serve as a value-added platform with various layers or technical sections for public and internal exchanges on public health emergencies and emerging infectious diseases.

The European Commission is currently supporting 18 projects on research and innovation through Horizon 2020, the EU research and innovation

programme. These projects, involving 140 research teams, are rapidly working to understand the behaviour of the epidemic through epidemiology and modelling, developing rapid diagnostics, as well as treatments and vaccines. Research institutions from ASEAN Member States that are interested to cooperate in these projects have already participated in the international matchmaking video conferences.

Our health counterparts from the United States have likewise been very active and supportive in technical exchanges and sharing of relevant information on COVID-19. Humanitarian assistance has been bilaterally provided to ASEAN Member States to scale-up pandemic response. There is commitment to further strengthen regional public health emergency coordination systems as well as enhance cooperation in human resource development; the development and production of vaccines, immunomodulators and antivirals; promoting normal flow of essential medicines and supplies; and strengthening health systems through universal health coverage.

In addition to these enhanced cooperation schemes, there is an essential need to fast-track coordination on research and development of accessible, safe, affordable, and quality drugs and vaccines against COVID-19. Entry points for cooperation on this matter can be aligned and harmonised with the implementation of the adopted **ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on ASEAN Vaccine Security and Self-Reliance**, and the implementation of ASEAN Drug Security and Self-Reliance Framework.

The impact of COVID-19 has gone beyond the health sector. Nations are weighing on difficult decisions to slowly ease physical distancing measures, restart economic activity, while ensuring the safety and health of their communities. Enhanced cooperation among ASEAN Member States and their partners has never been more crucial. ■

Health Division Senior Officer, Jim Catampongan contributed to this article.

Keep the Small Strong:

Measures to ease the pandemic's impact on MSMEs in the region



BY NORA'IN ALI
HEAD, ENTERPRISE
AND STAKEHOLDERS
ENGAGEMENT DIVISION
ASEAN ECONOMIC
COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT



VANIA KARIMAH
OFFICER, ENTERPRISE
AND STAKEHOLDERS
ENGAGEMENT DIVISION
ASEAN ECONOMIC
COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT

The micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprise (MSME) sector is often described as the backbone of the ASEAN economy.



Available estimates indicate that MSMEs constitute a large proportion of the total enterprise population in each country:

**87–99
per cent
of all enterprises**

In seven out of 10 ASEAN countries, the sector's contribution to the economy ranges from:

MSMEs also employ between:

**47 and 97
per cent
of the working
population**

**43–69 per cent
of the gross domestic
product**

In times of crises and economic disruptions, MSMEs tend to be more at risk because of their size and limited access to resources and financing. Key challenges include the lack of operational cash flow, drop in demand for their products and services, reduction of opportunities to meet new clients, ability to change business strategies to offer alternative products and services, and difficulties in obtaining raw materials and supplies. The COVID-19 pandemic has particularly affected vulnerable firms and individual business or micro-enterprise owners, many of whom operate in the informal economy. Since these actors constitute the vast majority of workers and businesses across the region, the challenge to ASEAN is huge.

MSMEs in the ASEAN Economic Integration Agenda

Efforts to develop the MSME sector in ASEAN is guided by the [ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development 2016-2025 \(SAP SMED 2025\)](#). Its mission is to create globally competitive, resilient, and innovative MSMEs that are seamlessly integrated to the ASEAN community to achieve inclusive development in the region. Five strategic goals provide broad directions and these are as follows: (i) promote productivity, technology adoption and innovation; (ii) increase access to finance; (iii) enhance market access and internationalisation; (iv) enhance policy and regulatory framework; and (v) promote entrepreneurship and human capital development.

Implementing the strategic action plan is under the purview and responsibility of the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (ACCMSME), composed of the heads and representatives of SME agencies from all ASEAN Member States and supported by the ASEAN Secretariat. Whilst the work of ACCMSME falls under the ASEAN Economic Community pillar, it cooperates and collaborates with other sectors and pillars in ASEAN as well as with external partners and the private sector on many cross-cutting issues. Examples are in the promotion of innovation and adoption of digital technology, promotion of women entrepreneurs, Green MSMEs, and participation of enterprises in regional and global trade.

The ASEAN economic ministers, in its March 2020 statement on strengthening ASEAN's economic resilience in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, had agreed, among others, to keep the ASEAN market open for trade and investment; strengthen regional information sharing, coordination, and collaboration; and use technology and digital trade to allow businesses, including MSMEs, to continue their operations. In April 2020, the **Special ASEAN Summit on COVID-19** issued a declaration calling for the implementation of appropriate measures to boost confidence and improve regional economic stability, such as policy stimulus to assist individuals and businesses suffering from the impact of COVID-19, especially MSMEs and vulnerable groups.

Support Measures to Counter the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

There is much diversity in ASEAN, which adds to its attractiveness as an economic region and destination for business. Diversity also implies that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work—aside from the varying domestic contexts, the different categories of enterprise size within the MSME sector also demands specific and sometimes separate treatments.

Contrary to the perception that regional integration warrants uniformity and harmonisation, the beauty of ASEAN actually lies in the ability to pool resources and knowledge together, and the ability to quickly coordinate and share information to enable policy makers to learn from one another in developing appropriate measures relevant to the local circumstance, yet benchmarked to global standards.

Regional collaboration helps accelerate the development of a conducive policy and regulatory environment that supports MSME development and growth. In this context, information on pertinent policy measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 was compiled and shared and has been regularly updated. The compilation now contains useful reference on a wide range of measures that have been introduced by ASEAN Member States covering the period from February 2020 to May 2020.

Effort is now underway to provide deeper insights through the collaborative analysis of compiled data and lessons learnt globally. A first edition of a Policy Insight document is being prepared and is expected to be available in June. It will be a “living” document to be routinely updated since the impact of the pandemic is still unfolding and ASEAN Member States will continue to learn from one another and from our external partners to address immediate as well as mid-to-longer term challenges. This effort is part of ACCMSME's collaboration under the Canada-OECD Project for ASEAN SMEs.

In the interim, there are some preliminary insights based on information gathered to-date. At the outset it should be noted that measures to support MSMEs and the self-employed/sole proprietors cannot be considered in isolation from measures to support households and businesses in general.

One example of support measures is collectively called “deferral measures.”

They refer to deferral of tax, pension, social security, and debt payments, with the objective of allowing businesses to free up their cash flow and support them with the working capital requirements.

Another is “direct financial assistance via loans,” which aims to support working capital requirement by allowing the reduction of interest rates for businesses, restructuring loan repayments, and extending payment deadlines. Most countries have created new loan scheme mechanisms and some have developed more sophisticated mechanisms that focus on specific needs of businesses based on their size. A notable common effort observed in most countries is the easing of procedures and conditions for obtaining loans, which is important for MSMEs.

“Direct financial assistance via grants/subsidies” is another useful tool to support businesses, especially the vulnerable sectors or smaller companies, so they can retain or assist their workforce.

Measures to Support Enterprises and the Workforce during the COVID-19 Crisis

All countries in ASEAN have put in place substantial stimulus packages to support enterprises and workforce during the virus outbreak, with specific focus on measures to support MSMEs. The wide range of measures can be broadly described and categorised as follows:

- Socio-economic stimulus packages
- Deferral of fiscal and social obligations
- Direct financial assistance via loans
- Direct financial assistance via grants subsidies
- Non-financial (structural) support
 - Capacity building and business development services
 - Access to market measures
 - Information provision
 - Support with digitalisation
- Social support assistance
 - Temporary redundancies support measures
 - Support to self-employed
 - Support to micro enterprises
- Sectoral focus support measures
 - Tourism and hospitality
 - Agrofood
- Manufacturing and productive
 - Garments/textiles
 - Aviation

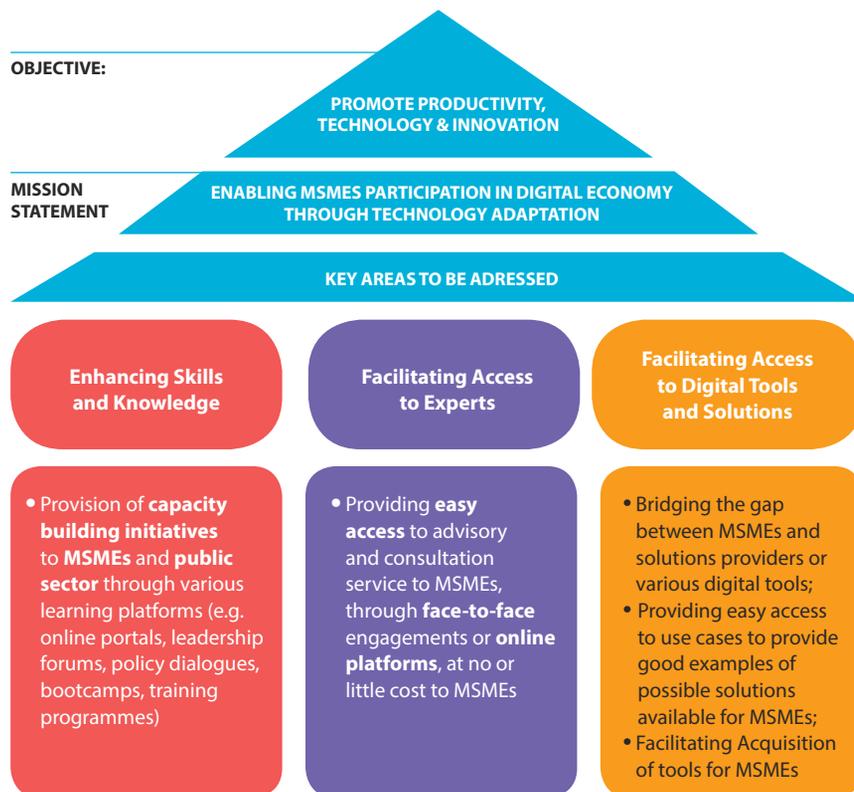


Assistance can be in the form of salary subsidy for MSME employees for a fixed number of months.

Alongside financial relief, most countries also provide support in terms of finding new alternative markets, teleworking and digitalisation, innovation, and (re)training of the workforce. Such policies aim to address urgent short-term challenges while at the same time contribute to strengthening the resilience of MSMEs in a more structural way. They are referred to as “non-financial structural support policies.” These policies are implemented through a range of mechanisms including capacity building activities, provision of information and guidance including on digitalisation support (digital tools/ technology adoption), as well as support for new ways of operations and promotions/ marketing such as migration to online/e-commerce platforms.

It is in such mechanisms that ASEAN has more opportunities for regional cooperation and collaboration. The Member States can take advantage of new and existing MSME development initiatives in ASEAN, such as the **ASEAN SME portal** that promotes access to information (e.g. new supply/demand sources) and **ASEAN SME Academy** that facilitates entrepreneurs’ learning, and accelerate the implementation of the Action Agenda on Digitalisation of ASEAN MSMEs through Capacity Building Initiatives which was adopted by the ACCMSME in 2019. In this connection, the ACCMSME welcomes contribution and collaboration with the private sector and non-governmental organisations to support and advance its objectives in various initiatives.

Framework of the Action Agenda on Digitalisation of ASEAN MSMEs through Capacity Building Initiatives



Moving Forward

It should be noted that many of the support measures address the immediate and urgent needs of MSMEs in facing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These are necessary to prepare the sector for the medium-term consequences of the crisis that will bring additional new challenges under the so-called “new normal” context. The non-financial structural support policies

are thus an area that is very important for ASEAN to collectively examine carefully moving forward. It presents opportunities to jointly come up with new and innovative approaches to prepare the MSME sector for the mid to longer timeframe. In doing so, it is also important for ASEAN to put in place mechanisms that promote linkage and collaboration between the key actors—governments and the business community. Businesses would be in a good position to provide feedback on what measures work better, or that are more efficient and effective. The MSME sector will also need to reach out to supporting sectors such as those providing digitalisation and connectivity infrastructure as anecdotal evidence suggests that more and more MSMEs are turning to online sales and services to survive. Underlying all these efforts is the need to cultivate an innovative and resilient mindset and capabilities among both policy makers and business actors in ASEAN. ■

Course topics available at the ASEAN SME Academy website



Source: www.asean-sme-academy.org

ASEAN Arts and Culture Riding the Digital Waves



BY JONATHAN TAN

HEAD, CULTURE AND INFORMATION DIVISION
ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT

In June 2019, six musicians caught the world's attention as they came online to perform an orchestral piece by Bach from six different cities across the world.

Thanks to the power of 5G network, the musicians played the violin, cello, piano, and timpani drum in perfect harmony with no delays, as if all were together in one stage at a concert hall.

Fast forward to 2020, this set up has become the norm with the onset of COVID-19. Many musicians and performers are coming together online, demonstrating the power of arts and culture to bring people together through the creative use of digital technologies.

Post-COVID-19, as we enter a new normal, we will see more people adopting and embracing digital technologies in multiple facets of our lives. Likewise, the digital revolution will bring profound changes to the arts and culture landscape in our region.

As it is, 55.1 per cent of the global population is now connected to the Internet, while in ASEAN, the rate is higher, with 64 per cent of the population plugged online. Eighty per cent of the internet traffic revolves around video consumption.

Riding the digital waves, ASEAN is working with its partners to promote arts and culture in innovative and creative ways.

ASEAN and the Republic of Korea are working together to showcase the UNESCO cultural heritage sites of all 10 ASEAN countries using virtual reality. The immersive experiences of *Angkor Wat*, *Borobudur Temple* and *Bagan* can now be enjoyed at the ASEAN Culture House in Busan.

Likewise, ASEAN and Japan recently launched an interactive portal to digitally archive cultural artefacts in the region. This initiative is timely following the shutdown of museums and other cultural sites due to the pandemic. The **ASEAN Cultural Heritage Digital Archive** not only promotes greater awareness and appreciation of ASEAN culture, but does so in an equitable and inclusive way, allowing all in the region to access and learn about the rich diversity and vibrancy of the arts and culture of ASEAN.

But reaching out to a larger audience through digital connectivity is not the only reason that we are striving for greater adoption of emerging technologies to promote arts and culture.

As a disaster prone region, we have witnessed our rich cultural heritage and arts being destroyed by natural calamities in the past. Beyond the region, the world stood witness to the devastating cultural loss of the 1,700-year-old *Buddhas of Bamiyan* in Afghanistan due to conflict.

Making use of digital technologies to preserve our cultural artefacts is therefore an important bulwark against potential cultural losses from climate change, conflicts, and other human-made disasters.

More policy conversations among our cultural policymakers and practitioners to make use of digital tools as part of our effective disaster risk management for cultural sites will be pivotal.

Beyond the preservation of tangible cultural heritage, digital technologies can likewise play a critical role in promoting and preserving our intangible heritage and practices. The oral histories, for example, of



Illustration: © Ilyssa Low

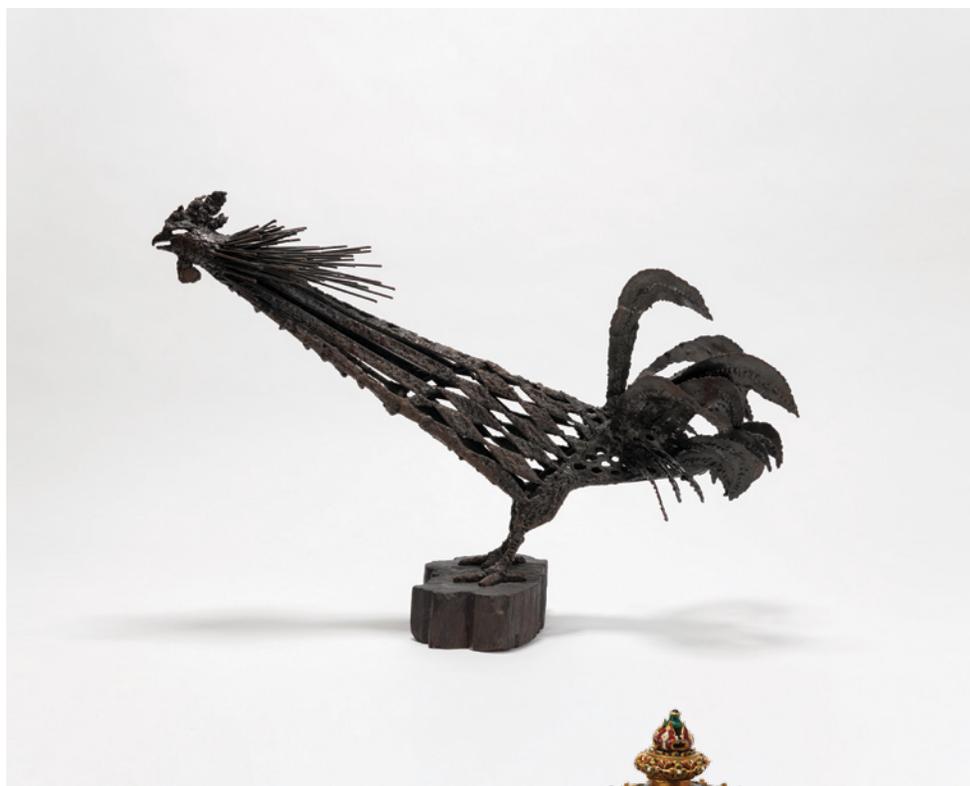
Making use of digital technologies to preserve our cultural artefacts is therefore an important bulwark against potential cultural losses from climate change, conflicts, and other human-made disasters.

our fast disappearing traditions captured on podcasts or e-books will not only enrich mutual understanding, but will also create bonds between past and present as we look into the future.

Digital devices are also powerful storytelling tools that can inform us about the lives of ordinary people which often go unrecorded, yet form a significant and rich tapestry of our shared histories. It is with this aim that the ASEAN Oral History workshop was convened in October 2019 with regional archivists gathering to discuss effective ways to capture the unspoken stories of our people in the region.

The creative economy will also benefit significantly from the adoption of digital technologies to create a vibrant marketplace of innovation. Take for example the small medium cultural enterprises (SMCEs). They can utilise digital platforms to market their artisanal goods and handicrafts to a wider audience, while at the same time generate buzz and exchange ideas with likeminded craftsmen and women. Similar to how disruptive technologies are revolutionising the media industry, SMCEs have to embrace digital convergence to reach out to a wider swathe of ASEAN population composed significantly of digitally savvy youth.

The use of digital technologies for arts and culture is even more relevant today than before. This is especially so in this era of cultural pessimism where intolerance,



extremism, radicalisation, falsehoods are easily peddled online by anyone who has access to the internet.

An effective counter narrative to cultural pessimism is to make use of greater digital connectivity for arts and culture to promote and celebrate our region's shared values of cultural pluralism and diversity, as we foster a common voice in tackling extremism, lack of tolerance and respect for life, as well as social disharmony and distrust through the **ASEAN Culture of Prevention**.

Digital technology is ultimately only a tool. The fundamental questions lie in how we utilise such tools, and how we define our relationship with it. In providing cultural offerings digitally, we must ensure that the eco-system is people-centred. Doing so also dovetails with ASEAN's ethos of promoting a people-centred, people-oriented community. Digital cultural offerings can be made more readily accessible, inclusive and user friendly, to both young and old, able or vulnerable, and rural and urban communities across the region.



Southeast Asia artefacts featured in the ASEAN Cultural Heritage Digital Archive website

Looking ahead, the work is cut out for us to ensure the power of good in arts and culture as an enabler for inclusiveness, intercultural understanding and a culture of peace, amplified by the effective use of digital technologies, will serve as an important and innovative pathfinder that nurtures and celebrates the rich cultural and historical threads that bring ASEAN people together. ■

COVID-19:

How Lockdown Arts Bring us Together



BY NOVIA D. RULISTIA



MARY KATHLEEN QUIANO-CASTRO

People have been forced to stay apart by COVID-19, but the arts are bringing us closer together.

Artists in the region have created various forms of art to reflect on the uncertainty and tragic consequences of the pandemic. In their works, posted online, we also find a collective desire to send out messages of hope and purpose.

Filipino Jojo Limpo is a semi-retired creative director who lives in Manila. In his social media accounts, Limpo created his #lockdown digital art series to contemplate on the value of family and relationships.

"All the works invite us to look at all that we already have or had with fresh, loving, appreciating eyes; to enjoy life's simple joys, those that we often take for granted or overlook because we are so busy making a living", explained Limpo.

"Art gave me a sense of freedom during lockdown. It allowed me to focus on what I could do, rather than all that I couldn't."

Erin Dwi Azmi, a fresh graduate from Yogyakarta's Indonesian Arts Institute (ISI), said that through her work, entitled "#stayhome", she wanted to show support for the government's call to help curb the spread of the virus.

"The illustration is quiet, so I used bold and bright colour palette to cheer up the mood so we can stay energised during this time," Azmi said. So far, she has seven illustrations related to COVID-19.

"I am encouraged to make illustrations on COVID as a campaign on social media to do something positive during this pandemic. This is also a way to stay happy and sane."

"DAY OUT!"

©2020 Jojo S. Limpo

The overwhelming sense of freedom you get from riding a bike, and the joy of feeling the wind and the warm sunlight hitting your face. An idyllic scene most people may have taken for granted a couple of weeks ago, is something we can only dream of doing today. Take advantage of all the time you have to rethink what really makes you happy. #MyArt #idlehands #lockdown





"Art gave me a sense of freedom during lockdown. It allowed me to focus on what I could do, rather than all that I couldn't."

"FLY HIGH!"

©2020 Jojo S. Limpo

Not meaning to escape from challenges, but rather, to soar in spite of them! Let hard times bring out the best in us!

#MyArt #idlehands #lockdown



"STAY AT HOME"

© Erin Dwi Azmi (@erindwia)

Views from the window and balcony.
Bright and bold colours are dominant to
balance out the quiet illustration



“HEALTHY”

© Erin Dwi Azmi (@erindwia)
Healthy eating for a healthy life

Another Indonesian visual artist, Anindya Anugrah, under her Phantasien brand, produced fantasy-like drawings to reflect life during isolation.

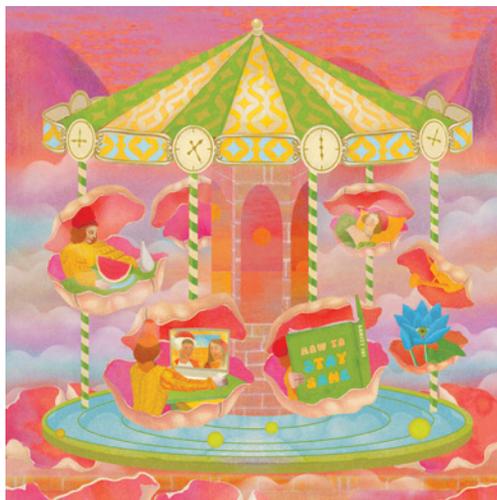
Her pieces showed that staying at home was a blessing, as she could work while lounging at home.

“I am encouraged to make illustrations on COVID as a campaign on social media to do something positive during this pandemic. This is also a way to stay happy and sane.”

“MERRY GO ROUND”

© Anindya Anugrah (@phantasien)

The artwork reflects life during lockdown when days move slow like a merry-go-round and boredom being locked at home starts to creep in.



“I also sell tote bag and cloth masks with my designs on it to earn extra income because this pandemic has affected my financial situation, and many other artists’ too I believe,” she said.

Vietnamese graphic designer Hiep Le Duc created posters to encourage people to be responsible and stay home.

“I made the poster because I was bothered when I saw people did not practice social distancing seriously, so I am sending a message to everyone with the tools I have,” Le Duc said.

The first poster features a health worker standing in solidarity with a citizen, inspired by viral photos of doctor and nurses holding up signs saying, “We go to work for you, you stay at home for us”. He used a style reminiscent of wartime propaganda that is familiar to most Vietnamese. It was an attempt, Le Duc said, to evoke a sense patriotism in the fight against COVID-19.

The second poster, which was released on Viet Nam Reunification Day on 30 April, showcases a more uplifting mood to reflect Le Duc’s hope that one day the pandemic will be over.

“The content was simple: people celebrating together and hailing a doctor by throwing him up in the air against a slogan of ‘Thank you, Viet Nam!’” he said.



“Art has such a great influence on people in Viet Nam, especially now. We use pop songs, dance videos, posters to promote hygiene and social distancing and I think it is effective.”

Le Duc sold the posters and received a huge response from the public. Proceeds from poster sales were used to buy a donation of two tons of rice for people who were out work because of the pandemic.

The Viet Nam Stamps Company also released a new collection of stamps, designed by painter Pham Trung Ha, with the theme of solidarity in the fight against COVID-19.

“Art has such a great influence on people in Viet Nam, especially now. We use pop songs, dance videos, posters to promote hygiene, and social distancing and I think it is effective,” he said.

Thai puppeteer Jae Sirikarn Bunjongtad released a short video on social media that featured a hand puppet washing its hands with soap and water, to coincide with the World Puppetry Day on 21 March 2020. He also made line art for coloring and created a tutorial video on how to make cute masks for children.

A local organisation, Mirror Foundation, saw the video and later asked Bunjongtad to make masks for the children of Hill Tribes in northern Thailand.

“There are a lot of children and I could not make the masks alone. The foundation asked me to share the patterns for their volunteers to help,” he said. “These are my way to communicate with children on how to protect themselves in a fun way.”

During the lockdown, Thai artists, including young children, used online platforms to continue honing their skills and explore new ideas. Bunjongtad also said a number of artists collaborated to raise funds for hospitals. ■

Left

© **Hiep Le Duc**

With the poster, Le Duc sends a message that “Staying at home is loving your country”

Right

© **Jae Sirikarn Bunjongtad**

Bunjongtad releases a 20-second video demonstrating hand-washing to encourage children to protect themselves.



Impact

Five young ASEAN nationals talk about their motivations, experiences, and aspirations as volunteers.

ASEAN helps survivors of the Central Sulawesi disaster rebuild their lives by constructing a new village.

Youth Volunteers Gain Life Skills while Serving Communities



BY JOANNE B. AGBISIT
AND THE ASEAN EDITORIAL TEAM

Nobel Peace Prize Winner Desmond Tutu once said, “Do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”

This ethos is what drives many volunteers around the globe, among them, young Southeast Asians who serve their communities with passion and little monetary expectation.

Nguyen Dang Dao, a Vietnamese graduate student on Erasmus Mundus scholarship, realised his calling in college after observing that vulnerable groups were underrepresented in policymaking. “I want to hear their voices, I want their voices to be heard, and the only way to address that is to volunteer,” he said.

Nguyen went for and secured a spot in the 2018 ASEAN Youth Volunteer Programme which enabled him to participate in community improvement projects in Langkawi, Malaysia. He now serves as director of the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth Partnership, a network that aims to promote stronger ties between Southeast Asian countries and Australia.

Channita Ouk’s journey as a Cambodian volunteer also began in college, initially as participant in charity events to raise funds for students in need, then morphing into a desire to help others in the fields she is most passionate about—culture, heritage, and environment. It is her interest in the latter that led her to apply at the 2018 ASEAN Youth Volunteer Programme and join similar volunteer and leadership missions.

Despite a full time job at the French embassy in Cambodia, Ouk launched



Top

Dao Dang Nguyen and fellow AYVP volunteers conduct a month-long mission in Langkawi Island, Malaysia

Bottom

Channita Ouk joins mission to donate school supplies and library materials to Hun Sen Batheay High School, Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia

early this year a project called *Sebpak Khmer* (Cambodian Crafts) to promote Cambodian handicrafts, improve local artisans’ work conditions, and enable the

transfer of skills to future generations. Ouk said that this project has been her dream for years, one she finally pursued with the help of like-minded volunteers. “We hope that with this project, we could preserve their craft tradition and identity, and support their local products,” she said.

Nguyen and Ouk embody the segment of Southeast Asian youth that is socially active and engaged with their communities. Data from the **2017 ASEAN Youth Development Index** show that this segment is small, with only 31 per cent of the more than 200 million youth population having spent time volunteering in an organisation. Although the ASEAN figure is much higher than the global estimate (21 per cent), it is still less than ideal and leaves much room for improvement.

Avenues for Volunteering

Creating a culture of volunteerism while developing a sense of regional identity among Southeast Asia’s youth, is one of ASEAN’s priorities for the youth sector. This is articulated in the **ASEAN Work Plan on Youth 2016–2020** crafted by the Senior Officials Meeting on the Youth.



IN A NUTSHELL

The ASEAN Youth Development Index (YDI) is the composite of various indicators in the areas of education; health and well-being; participation and engagement; employment and opportunity; and ASEAN awareness, values and identity. The index is meant to gauge the overall wellbeing and quality of life of ASEAN youth. Volunteerism is one of the two proxy indicators (the other one being “helping a stranger”) for participation and engagement. The volunteerism data were derived from the Gallup World Poll. A detailed discussion of the YDI is available at https://asean.org/storage/2017/10/ASEAN-UNFPA_report_web-final-05sep.pdf.

“The interviewer told me that he saw my potential through my volunteering experiences even if I didn’t have any professional experiences. I think volunteerism gave me a great opportunity to be in a career that is competitive.”

ASEAN works with volunteer programmes in the region to achieve its goals. One of these is the **ASEAN Youth Volunteer Programme (AYVP)**, run by the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia with guidance from Malaysia’s Ministry of Youth and Sports and support from the US Agency for International Development. Now on its eighth year, the AYVP has mentored 394 young people from all 10 Member States, including Nguyen and Ouk.

Another ASEAN partner is the Student Volunteers Foundation, locally known as **Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa (YSS)**, under the supervision of Malaysia’s Ministry of Education. YSS was established in 2012 and began collaborating with ASEAN in 2018. Since 2012, YSS has mentored a total of 1,481 college students including 389 students under its cooperation project with ASEAN.

Both programmes are open to ASEAN nationals and entail the immersion of youth volunteers in a select community for several weeks to complete various projects. Eco-tourism, sustainable farming, infrastructure improvement, social entrepreneurship, health campaigns, and disaster relief are some of the projects tackled by the volunteers.

Acquiring Life and Work Skills for the 21st-Century

While altruism may be the initial motivation of many youth volunteers, they end up gaining so much more—valuable skills needed to handle 21st-century life.

Alina Chin, an accounting student at the University of Brunei Darussalam and a YSS alumna, said that the experience taught her to become a better communicator and team player. As a team leader, she had to divide the tasks among the team members and manage the time for each activity,

a role she found challenging because of the different opinions and personalities of members. “The mission sharpened my communication skills because communicating (with members) leads to better teamwork,” Chin said.

This was echoed by Sunderesan Krishnan, an education graduate from the Sultan Idris Education University in Malaysia and a YSS alumnus. “My public relations tremendously improved. I learned how to talk to people, to authorities,” he said. In addition, Krishnan said that the missions he joined taught him time management. “When we were sent to Indonesia and Viet Nam, we had a strict schedule (because) we had a time limit,” he said. Now, Krishnan is confident about his ability to work under pressure and meet any deadline.

Laotian student Deuanphachanh Sisongkhame said she developed self-confidence from her volunteering activities. “I used to be a very private person, not confident at all, and afraid to get out of my comfort zone, (but) after I volunteered, I changed a lot,” she said.

Volunteers also gain real-world experience which gives them an edge when applying for work, further training, or even scholarships. Studies show that employers tend to favour applicants with volunteer experience because it speaks to their leadership potential, social responsibility, and strength of character.

Ouk relayed that when she interviewed for her first job after her graduation, it was her immersion as a volunteer that clinched her the job. “The interviewer told me that he saw my potential through my volunteering experiences even if I didn’t have any professional experiences,” she said. “I think volunteerism gave me a great opportunity to be in a career that is competitive.”



Top

Alina Chin helps repaint an herb garden as part of her YSS community project in Mukah, Sarawak, Malaysia

Bottom

Deuanphachanh Sisongkhame and her campaign partner hold a clean-up drive at the Boat Racing Festival in Vientiane, Laos

Sisongkhame similarly attributes the major breaks she has had, such as her selection as an ASEAN training participant, to her involvement in volunteer programmes in school and her community.

Building Cultural Understanding and a Sense of Regional Identity

Region-wide volunteer missions are occasions for the youth to meet, interact, and work with peers from other ASEAN Member States.

For many youth volunteers, the mission gave them their first taste of intercultural encounter, and the exposure increased their appreciation for neighbouring countries.

“Before I joined the volunteer programmes, I had a vague idea about other religions, other cultures,” Nguyen



said. "Only after we (volunteers) were forced to interact with one another, live with each other 24/7, that I started to develop a multicultural mindset."

Chin was thrilled to discover that countries have commonalities in their customs and traditions and some even speak the same language. "We had heart-to-heart talks sometimes and we talked about each other's culture and our own families," she said.

Ouk talked about gaining a better understanding of the culture of her host community and country after living with a local family for several weeks. "We cooked, ate, shared stories, and laughed together at dinner time," she said. "We learned from each other about our culture, tradition, and lifestyle."

These encounters have led not only to strong networks and abiding friendships, but also stirred the volunteers' consciousness of a regional identity and citizenship.

"I used to think that ASEAN is just the name of the region," Sisonkhame said. After her participation in ASEAN activities, she began to understand the importance of Southeast Asian countries relying on each other and working together. She said that the youth has a huge role to play "because they are future leaders who will shape ASEAN."

Nguyen said that he began to see himself as an ASEAN citizen after participating in volunteer missions and ASEAN-led initiatives. "Whenever I participate in any programme and dialogue outside ASEAN, people do expect me to represent not only my country, Viet Nam, but also the whole ASEAN," he said. "Volunteering or people-to-people exchange is the most effective way to create a sense of belonging within our community."



Sunderesan Krishnan and other volunteers interact with Vietnamese students at the 2018 YSS-ASEAN Green Summer Volunteer Campaign in Viet Nam

Current Challenges

Ouk and Nguyen lament the limited funding that flows into volunteer programmes and projects. While it is true that volunteers expect no more than psychic income from their service, programmes and projects require funds to operate.

"Right now, I run my (Sebpak Khmer) project without any budget and it is hard for us to do things," she said. She expressed hope that her fellow volunteers remain committed to their vision despite this drawback.

Nguyen noted that volunteer programmes are often competitive and offer limited slots annually compared to the huge volume of applicants. This can discourage students from participating.

Technology is also shaping volunteer organisations and programmes around the globe, according to recent reports from the UN Volunteers and The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. An assessment may be necessary

to determine how technology is expanding or dampening interest in as well as access to volunteering opportunities across Southeast Asia.

Strategies for the Future

Alumni youth volunteers have become the staunchest drumbeaters of volunteerism in the region.

Krishnan said that when he finished his project in Viet Nam and went back to Malaysia, he made it his mission to share his positive experiences and encourage other students to volunteer. He related, "Actually two of them approached me and said they got into YSS volunteer mission because of me, because of the sharing session that we did. Now they are already alumni since they have completed the mission." Krishnan is also serving as country coordinator of Malaysia for the ASEAN University Student Council Union, a network of young leaders across the region engaged in conversations on issues affecting the youth in ASEAN.

Nguyen, meanwhile, said that he advocates the participation of youth even in nonformal settings. "It is not necessary to participate in fully-funded programmes of ASEAN right at the beginning," he said. "You can start with your community. It does not matter how many people you can help, it is the goodwill behind your actions that counts."

At the regional level, ASEAN plans to continue its partnership with volunteer programmes and organisations beyond its 2016-2020 work plan. Under the guidance of ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Youth and support from partner organisations, the ASEAN Secretariat is currently working on a regional volunteering platform for the youth. This initiative is in line with the post-2020 strategic direction of youth development in ASEAN, which aims to develop future-ready ASEAN youth who are equipped not only with technical intelligence, but also with 21st-century skills, such as empathy, integrity, adaptability, and respect for one another. ■

Mary Anne Therese Manuson, Larasati Indrawagita, and Shinta Permata Sari of ASCCD's Education, Youth, and Sports Division contributed to this article.



ASEAN Builds a Village



BY NOVIA D. RULISTIA
AND THE ASEAN EDITORIAL TEAM

Photo Credit: © AHA Centre

Soil liquefaction swept their homes and loved ones away. Now, survivors of the Central Sulawesi quake get new homes on sturdier ground.

On 28 September 2018, a 7.4 magnitude earthquake hit the Donggala regency in Central Sulawesi province, Indonesia. The quake, which also affected the province's capital city of Palu, triggered a tsunami, landslides, and liquefaction—a series of events so devastating and unexpected.

By the end of October 2018, the death toll from the disaster reached over 2,000 people, with over 1,300 people still missing and over 200,000 residents displaced.

Many residents in the neighborhoods of Balaroa and Petobo in Palu had no time to escape the swirling soil and silt that came crashing on their houses. Survivors climbed to their rooftops and watched in terror as the ground swelled and moved like waves.

Twenty-four-year-old Mentari Pratiwi lost both her parents when mudflow surged through their neighborhood. Since then, she has been living with one of her siblings. Soon, Pratiwi will be moving to a



permanent home in the new ASEAN Village, along with many others whose homes were destroyed by the calamity.

The first ASEAN Village is being constructed on a 22,600 square-meter highland in the Tondo neighborhood of Palu. Once completed, it will have 100 permanent houses, community roads, public facilities, drainage, and access to water and electricity. So far, 75 permanent houses have been built, each one with two bedrooms and a latrine.

The project, which costs 723,647 US dollars, is being facilitated by the Jakarta-based ASEAN Coordinating Centre for



The ASEAN Village in Palu was built with aid from Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines and Australia

“I’m so happy because I don’t need to be worried anymore about where to live. I’m ready to move to ASEAN Village”



Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre). The project’s mission is to provide effective support to the priorities identified by the local government in the disaster recovery phase.

In the early recovery phase, some ASEAN Member States requested the AHA Centre to coordinate the provision of their assistance as mandated by the **ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN One Response**. The AHA Centre initially proposed to build temporary housing for those affected.

Speaking during the virtual handover on 16 April 2020, the AHA Centre Executive Director Adelina Kamal explained that the AHA Centre, upon the request of the Indonesian government, had provided a range of support not only at the ongoing recovery stage, but also during disaster relief efforts in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

“We coordinated with the Palu local government and understood that what they needed were no longer temporary houses, but permanent ones,” she said.

Responding to this need, the people of Brunei Darussalam through crowdsourcing and the Philippines government funded the construction of the permanent houses. The AHA Centre also received funding from the Australian government to support the operational costs.

ASEAN Village virtual handover ceremony at the Palu City Hall on 16 April 2020

The first phase, involving the construction of 75 houses, began on 6 August 2019 and was completed in March 2020. Once work on the access to clean water is completed, the housing units can be handed over to the recipients immediately.

The second phase is underway and will continue until the end of 2020. This involves the completion of the remaining 25 houses; one mushola, a small place of worship for Muslims; and one auxiliary health centre. The additional 25 houses and the mushola are being built with additional funding from Brunei Darussalam, while the health centre is supported by the nonprofit organisation, Direct Relief.

Palu Mayor Hidayat said that the ASEAN Village was part of the government’s efforts to provide permanent settlement for around 7,000 affected families.

“We wish to convey our gratitude to the AHA Centre for facilitating assistance from ASEAN Member States. We hope this will bring happiness for those affected by the liquefaction,” Hidayat said during the handover.

As one of the beneficiaries, Pratiwi is overjoyed.



IN A NUTSHELL

ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN One Response

The ASEAN Leaders signed the ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN One Response: ASEAN Responding to Disasters as One in the Region and Outside the Region at the 28th ASEAN Summit in Vientiane, Lao PDR, on 6 September 2016.

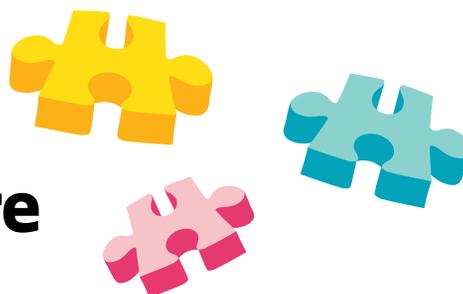
One ASEAN One Response is about ASEAN responding to disasters within and outside the region in a holistic and synchronized manner; that is, having as many relevant stakeholders involved to achieve the envisioned speed, scale, and solidarity.

One ASEAN One Response helps increase the effectiveness of humanitarian response, reduce the burden of the affected country, and alleviate suffering of the affected population. It also allows ASEAN’s solidarity to be felt and seen by the ASEAN Community in times of disasters. One ASEAN One Response also aims to achieve a faster response, mobilise greater resources, and establish a strong, coordinated ASEAN collective response to disasters. **Source:** *Operationalising One ASEAN One Response - AHA Centre*

“I’m so happy because I don’t need to be worried anymore about where to live. I’m ready to move to ASEAN Village,” she told *The ASEAN*.

Pratiwi just graduated from a pharmacy college in Palu and is looking for a job. Knowing that there will be a health centre in the ASEAN Village, she hopes to eventually work there and be able to help her community. ■

ASEAN CHILDREN: Developing Potential and Building our Future



BY KIRAN SAGOO, PhD
AND THE ASEAN EDITORIAL TEAM

Children in ASEAN are living in a rapidly changing world brought about by technological advances and demographic shifts. It is crucial that children have their basics needs fulfilled to enable them reach their potential, and also be equipped with 21st century skills to manage anticipated long-term challenges.

ASEAN's commitment towards improving and ensuring the well-being its children is clearly demonstrated through the various ASEAN initiatives.

Towards Improved Health and Education

ASEAN's success in reducing poverty over the past decades has resulted in improved child mortality and morbidity rates. The majority of ASEAN's population, which includes children, have access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation. Immunisation rates for children under one have also increased. Nevertheless, sizable pockets of poverty continue to exist, resulting in malnutrition among children under five in the region. The **2016 Regional Report on Nutrition Security in ASEAN, Volume 1** notes that 17.7 million children are affected by stunting, 5.4 million children are wasted, while 4.5 million children are overweight. Also of concern are the 21.4 million children under five who suffer from anemia. To address this problem, ASEAN adopted the **ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Ending All Forms of Malnutrition**. The declaration encourages a multi-sectoral approach in scaling up interventions to end all forms of malnutrition.

Children in ASEAN have benefitted from improved access to education, with over 90 per cent of children enrolled in basic

education. Emphasis is also given to increasing access to early childhood education. The **Bangkok Declaration on Advancing Partnership in Education for 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in ASEAN** reaffirms ASEAN's

commitment to ensure that children in the region are provided with quality education and lifelong learning. The declaration also promotes inclusive education to address the needs of vulnerable groups such as out-of-school children and children with special needs.

A major challenge ASEAN faces is increasing enrolment rates at the secondary education level, which is currently at 70 per cent. The **Children in ASEAN: 30 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child** publication notes gender disparities which prevent boys and girls from completing their schooling. Boys tend to leave school



UNDER FIVE MORTALITY RATES:

39.3 per 1000 live births (2005)
25.6 per 1000 live births (2017)

Population with access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation is above **90%** and **80%**, respectively in six Member States.

Immunization rates for DPT range between **80%-100%** in Member States.

Source: ASEAN Key Figures 2019

ASEAN MEMBER STATES PROVIDE FREE BASIC EDUCATION.

In 2017, enrolment rates in all Member States were over 90%

Source: ASEAN Key Figures 2019

All ASEAN Member States have one or more reporting and complaint mechanisms for children or their representatives to file their complaints about violence.

Source: Ending violence against children in ASEAN Member States: Mid-term Review of Priority Areas under the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children 2016-2025, 2019



All countries in the region have introduced legal reforms to improve the protection of children, and continue to develop legislative and policy frameworks.

to enter the labour market, while girls are taken out of school to attend to household chores and child-rearing. These gender disparities are being addressed through various ASEAN initiatives.

Strengthening Children's Rights

Last year marked the 30th anniversary on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. ASEAN joined the international community in celebrating children's rights in the region, noting that by 1995, all countries in the region had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and taken steps towards its implementation. Nevertheless, disparities continue to exist among different sections of society, such as children with disabilities and migrant children.

The adoption of the **ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** addresses the needs of children with disabilities. Among others, it encourages for full and effective participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities, including children. Countries in the region have undertaken various initiatives to create a more disabled friendly environment.

High migration rates in the region have resulted in various challenges. UNICEF estimates that as of 2017, there are 1.2 million international child migrants in ASEAN. Migrant children face discrimination, violence and exploitation. Recognising these vulnerabilities, ASEAN adopted the **ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration**. The declaration resolves to provide basic services, such as health and psychosocial support to children in the context of migration. It also encourages for coordination with respective consular officers or legal authorities to facilitate birth certificates. The rights of migrant children are further supported through the **ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out-Of-School Children and Youth**, which recognises that the right to education is a basic right, and promotes accessibility of education regardless of nationality.

ASEAN has also made commitments and taken action to address the problem of violence against children. ASEAN adopted the **Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Children** in 2013, which was followed by a **Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against**

Children in 2016. The report on **Ending Violence against Children in ASEAN Member States: Mid-term Review of Priority Areas under the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children 2016-2025** notes progress on the implementation of this action plan.

All countries in the region have introduced legal reforms to improve the protection of children, and continue to develop legislative and policy frameworks. Six countries have implemented programmes to address violence against children at schools, while seven countries have mechanisms to respond to violence against children in emergency situations. In addressing the root causes of violence against children, there is a need to shift from a reactive and responsive system to a more proactive prevention approach.

Childhood is characterised by better access to the internet and social media, which means more opportunities to communicate and interact. Growth of the digital world however, has brought new vulnerabilities of being exploited and abused. Recognising that the continuous development of digital technology has brought about unforeseen consequences that harm children, ASEAN adopted the **Declaration on the Protection of Children from all Form of Online Exploitation and Abuse in ASEAN**. Among others, the declaration calls for an improvement of child protection standards and policies for online exploitation and abuse. It also encourages awareness raising through national education programmes.

Many initiatives have been implemented to improve the health and social well-being of children in the region. Measures have been undertaken to improve nutrition standards, increase access to education and also address the needs of vulnerable children. While poverty has decreased, it remains a factor in some of the challenges faced by children. With poverty expected to grow due to the social and economic consequences brought about by the coronavirus, ASEAN continues to address the needs of all children in the region, as it works towards building an inclusive society. ■

Southeast Asians find alternative ways to mark their Religious Festivals



BY JOANNE B. AGBISIT
AND THE ASEAN EDITORIAL TEAM



Southeast Asians celebrated their religious festivals a little differently this year—in the privacy of their homes.

In an effort to staunch the spread of COVID-19, the governments of Cambodia, Thailand, Lao PDR, and Myanmar banned cultural events and mass gatherings to mark the Buddhist New Year which this year fell on 13 April. Buddhists typically celebrate the event by

washing Buddha statues, and performing cleansing and renewal rituals.

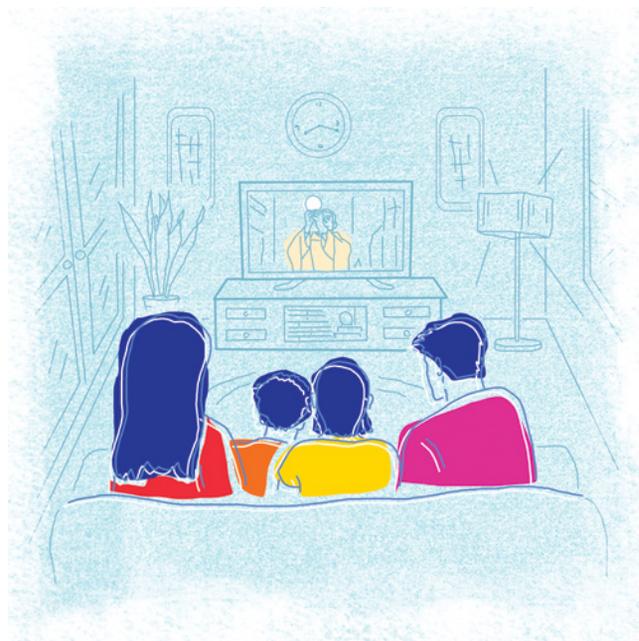
Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen suspended the celebration of *Choul Chnam Thmey*, which usually involves visits to pagodas, food and cash offerings, and traditional games. Instead of visiting pagodas, Buddhist leaders called on Cambodians to observe the event in their own homes, by offering candles, incense sticks and flowers to Buddha, and partaking food with their family members.

Visits to Thai *wats*, water pouring, and other street revelry associated with the

Songkran were also put on hold by Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha. Additionally, the government launched the “Save Parents” campaign, which encouraged citizens to show their respect to their elders not by pouring scented water on their hands as traditionally practiced, but by keeping their physical distance to insulate their elders from the disease.

Lao PDR Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith issued an order advising citizens to steer clear of large gatherings during the celebration of *Pi Mai* which, in addition to temple visits, normally includes parades, dancing, and other

The celebration of these religious events may have moved from the public to the private sphere, but for the millions of Buddhists and Christians across Southeast Asia, they are no less meaningful and significant this 2020.



festivities. The Buddhist order supported the move by canceling religious events and closing the temples to the public. Laotians expressed their support by using the *PiMaiAtHome* hashtag and picture frame in social media.

Public celebration of the *Thingyan*, characterised by water throwing from *pandals*, temple offerings, and musical performances, was likewise restricted by the Myanmar government until the end of April. The government instead distributed food to underprivileged families during the Thingyan holiday.

Catholics and other Christian groups in the Philippines also observed the *Semana Santa*, which began on 5 April, in the confines of their home after the government issued community-wide quarantine. The usual *visita iglesia*, re-enactment of the way of the cross, and Easter procession were prohibited. Instead, Christians were urged to

participate in masses, stations-of-the-cross prayers, and other rituals that were streamed online by various churches, including the Vatican.

The Indonesian government discouraged its citizens from traveling to their hometowns this May for *Eid al-Fitr* or *Lebaran* festivities, which normally include mass prayers, family feasts, parades, and visits to the graves of loved ones. Islamic leaders, instead, appealed to Indonesian Muslims not to congregate at the mosques and to celebrate the end of Ramadan by reciting Eid prayers at home.

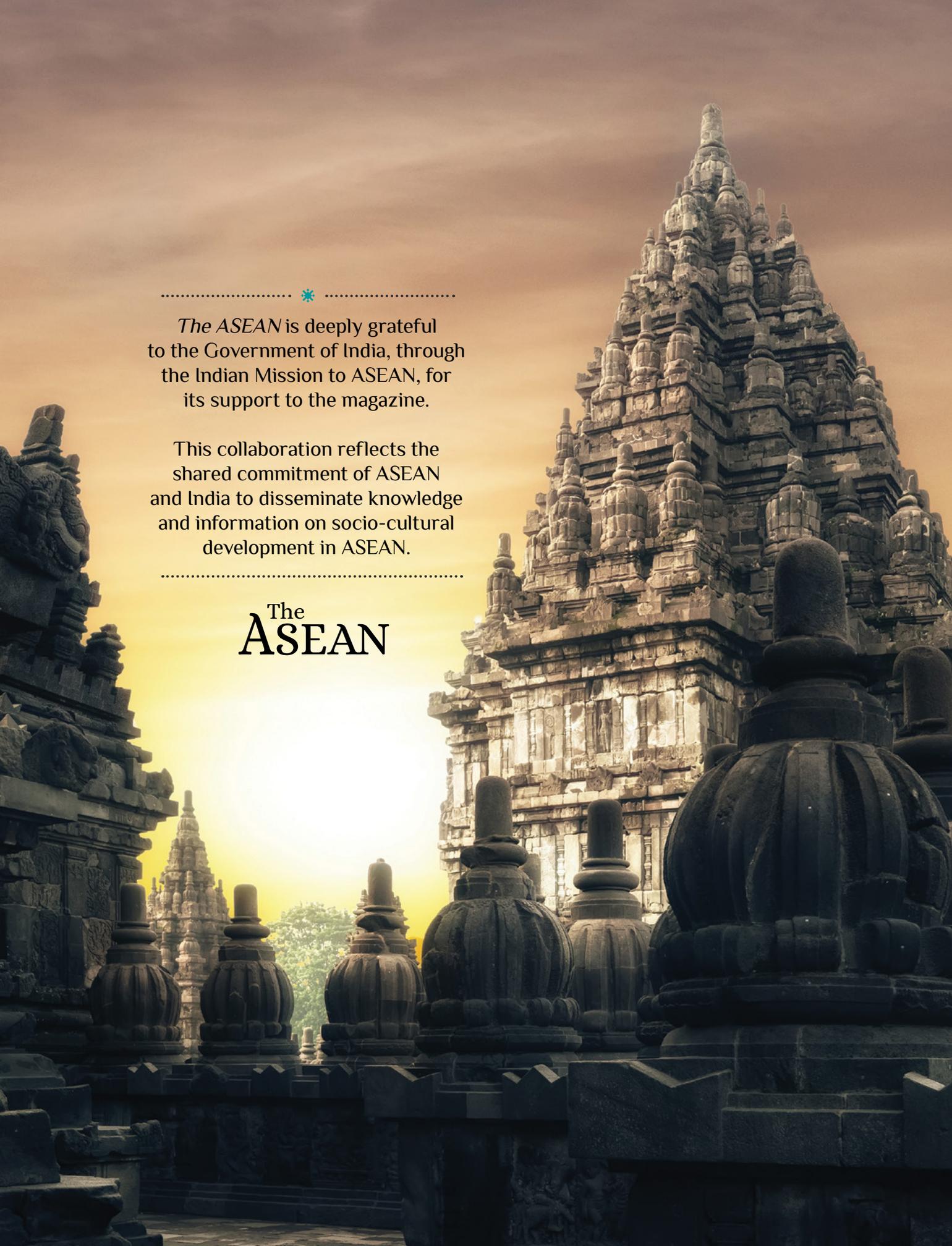
In Brunei Darussalam, His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah prohibited the practice of "open houses" and limited family gatherings to no more than 30 people during the Eid festivities.

The Malaysian government, meanwhile, lifted its ban on mass prayers in mosques, but continued to restrict interstate travel. It also urged its citizens to refrain from



visiting non-family members and holding social gatherings with more than 20 people. Other communities such as the Sikhs celebrated *Vaisakhi* which fell on April 13 and the Tamilian community celebrated the Tamil New Year which fell on April 14 in their homes as well, due to temples being closed.

The celebration of these religious events may have moved from the public to the private sphere, but for the millions of Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims across Southeast Asia, they are no less meaningful and significant this 2020. ■



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The ASEAN Secretariat
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Department
Jalan Sisingamangaraja 70A,
Jakarta 12110, Indonesia

