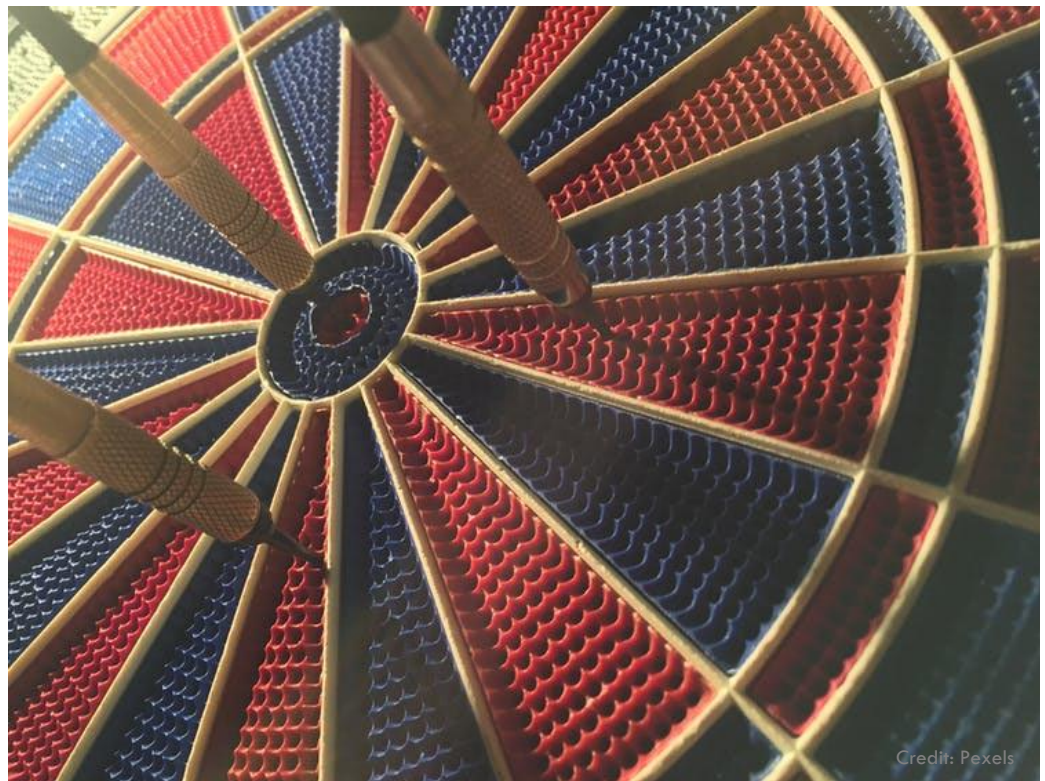


ASEAN-ISIS MID-TERM REVIEW



June 2020

Mid-Term Assessment and Priority Setting for
ASEAN

A project by the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) Network in support of ASEAN's Mid-Term Review of its ASEAN Vision 2025.

ASEAN-ISIS MID-TERM REVIEW

MID-TERM ASSESSMENT AND PRIORITY SETTING FOR ASEAN

ABOUT THE ASEAN-ISIS MID-TERM REVIEW REPORT 2020

This report¹ by ASEAN-ISIS provides a mid-term assessment of ASEAN's progress in achieving its 2025 Community Vision and presents key priorities and cross-cutting issues for ASEAN in the next five years. The report was directed by the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA) as chair of the ASEAN-ISIS network for the year 2020. The main writers and coordinators of the report are represented by the Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation Inc. (APPF) Philippines, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Indonesia, the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DAV) and the SIIA. This report was made possible from the contributions from members of the ASEAN-ISIS network based on their research and observations in and beyond the think tank community. The ASEAN-ISIS Mid-Term Review Report 2020 is supported by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Foundation.

About the ASEAN-ISIS Network

The ASEAN-ISIS (ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies) network is the only association of think tanks within Southeast Asia that is affiliated with ASEAN, enabling it to engage with ASEAN at official meetings. Since its establishment in 1988 the Network has been actively promoting dialogue and cooperation among ASEAN governments and their stakeholders, through “Track 1.5 or 2” diplomacy, on issues affecting Southeast Asia’s peace and security, as well as economic and sustainable development.

¹ To be submitted to the ASEAN Secretariat and relevant ASEAN stakeholders in June/July 2020.

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an independent evaluation of the progress made towards ASEAN Vision 2025 by the ASEAN-ISIS Network of regional think tanks. It is written in conjunction with the ASEAN Secretariat's Mid-Term Review of the ASEAN Community Blueprints launched in 2015. The report identifies cross-cutting issues that ASEAN will face in the next five years. These are: (1) developing resilience in preparation for crises and climate change; (2) the disintegration of the Rules-Based International Order amid great power rivalry and; (3) rising protectionism and populism. This report also provides a broad assessment of the achievements, challenges and priorities across the ASEAN Political-Security, Economic, and Socio-Cultural community pillars.

In writing this report, we note that 2020 marks the year of the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to hurt lives and livelihoods. The “new normal” emerging from the pandemic needs to be considered as ASEAN reviews its goals. This factor also plays a part in identifying priority issues for ASEAN in the next five years to realise its 2025 Vision and in moving towards collective leadership and a global voice.

II. BACKGROUND

At the 27th ASEAN Summit in 2015, ASEAN Leaders endorsed the “ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together”, which charted the path for ASEAN Community building over the next ten years. The ASEAN Community Vision 2025 is a forward-looking roadmap which articulates goals and aspirations to realise further consolidation, integration and stronger cohesiveness as an ASEAN Community. ASEAN is working towards a Community that is “politically cohesive, economically integrated, and socially responsible”. Through this process, it is envisaged that ASEAN will be able to respond proactively and effectively to the emerging threats and challenges presented by the rapidly changing regional and global landscape as a coherent whole.

III. CROSS-CUTTING PRIORITY ISSUES FOR ASEAN VISION 2025

3.1 COVID-19, Climate Change and Preparing for the Next Crisis

The COVID-19 virus has not only hurt lives and livelihoods but has also starkly exposed systemic problems that need to be addressed. Responses to the outbreak across Southeast Asia have been varied. A few ASEAN governments were proactive from the outset, quickly implementing robust testing regimens, contact tracing, and strict quarantines at the short-term expense of their economies. Others were slower to respond and have yet to develop sufficient capacity to address the situation. By May 2020, all ASEAN member states had put into place restrictions on economic activity and the movement of people. By mid-June, almost all ASEAN member states have begun to ease their respective measures. Concerns continue however about possible next waves.

The scale of the COVID-19 crisis has put to test Vietnam's theme for its current chairmanship, "Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN". While efforts to control the spread of the pandemic were largely centred at the national level, ASEAN leaders managed to convene a virtual Special Summit on COVID-19 on 14 April, a month after the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared a global pandemic. During the Summit, ASEAN endorsed several collective steps to fight the pandemic, including the establishment of a COVID-19 ASEAN response fund and the sharing of information, strategies and ways to ease the impact of the global health crisis on people and the economy.

Vietnam also hosted the Special ASEAN and ASEAN Plus Three (with China, Japan and the Republic of Korea) Summit on COVID-19 where leaders discussed actions and initiatives to further enhance cooperation in winning the war against the pandemic, and ensuring the region's dynamic and sustainable development in the long run. In addition, ASEAN has convened several important Ministerial-level meetings on healthcare, the economy and defence to ensure coordinated actions in combating the pandemic. ASEAN also hosted meetings with its dialogue partners, including China, the European Union (EU), the United States (US) and international organisations, such as the WHO, to exchange experience, provide mutual assistance and seek effective responses.

Several lessons have emerged so far from ASEAN's response to COVID-19:

- Recognising the region's interconnectedness and vulnerabilities in the face of COVID-19, **the need for a coherent, multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder and whole-of-ASEAN Community approach** has never been greater.
- Raise the effectiveness of coordinating policies and actions based on a common framework, focusing on building an ASEAN approach in pandemic-related situations, and in the immediate future, **organise tabletop exercises on pandemic responses between countries.**
- Utilise existing platforms or institutions such as the ASEAN Emergency Operations Centre Network, the ASEAN BioDiaspora Virtual Centre (ABVC) and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) for responding to health crises and natural disasters.
- Understand that battling the pandemic must go hand in hand with battling economic recession and social instabilities, with people at the heart of the matter. The pandemic has exposed the **weak social protection systems and infrastructure** in many ASEAN Member States (AMS). There is a need to **invest in strengthening them** as part of an overall strategy as each country recovers from the crisis. More information can be found in the ASCC section of this report.
- Uphold and adhere to the common values on free trade, investment facilitation, avoiding the disruption of supply chains; quickly **normalise trade activities and cross-border transport once the pandemic is under control**, so that all engines are utilised for inclusive and sustainable socio-economic recovery and development in the region. More information can be found in the AEC section of this report.
- **Recognise and encourage bilateral and multilateral initiatives such as travel bubbles/green lanes.** This will also bring in the "Plus Three" countries as well as Australia and New Zealand to kick-start the resumption of business activity among like-minded countries.

Crisis Preparation and Climate Change

The COVID-19 outbreak has emphasised the importance of building up ASEAN resilience to deal with other crises. Climate change and COVID-19 are similar threats on different time scales. Climate change requires immediate coordinated action to avert a future global catastrophe.

ASEAN is vulnerable to climate change in many ways. ASEAN economies depend on sectors such as agriculture (11%) and tourism (12%), which are particularly vulnerable to climate change. Climate risk and pandemic risk are also closely intertwined. Environmental degradation, habitat and forest loss and rising temperatures all increase the risk of transmission of zoonotic diseases (such as COVID-19) among humans. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, climate events continued to happen, threatening to complicate crisis response efforts.

Existing assessments have not painted a good picture of ASEAN's ability to mitigate the effects of climate change. From 2004-2014, half of the global disaster fatalities were ASEAN citizens. This dire situation was compounded by the US\$91 billion worth of economic damage from floods, tsunamis, earthquakes, and other natural disasters. This has a direct impact on people's livelihoods and communities and especially on vulnerable sectors such as women, children, indigenous peoples, and people living in poverty. Dependency of AMS on coal and other fossil fuels to drive economic growth and dynamism must be balanced with the interests of its natural environment and societies.

Globally, the projected emissions reductions for 2020, even with the impact of COVID-19, are still shy of the reduction needed to keep global warming under the targeted 1.5 degrees Celsius per the Paris Agreement. Moreover, these emissions reductions were achieved by bringing entire economies to a complete standstill, which is simply not a long-term solution.

With attention shifted to pressing health and economic needs, ASEAN's nascent trajectory towards a low carbon economy runs the risk of being derailed. But sustainability should not be perceived as a "luxury good"—it is necessary for survival. Instead of addressing economic growth and sustainability in silos, ASEAN should formulate COVID-19 stimulus and recovery plans that address sustainability, economy and long-term resilience as a concerted whole, recognising the interlinkages.

The region's ability to remain resilient to future crises depends on its success in alleviating immediate economic concerns, while staying focused on important long-term sustainability threats like climate change. Resilience may mean a paradigm shift—moving away from a focus on economic efficiency at all costs and building in redundancies into the economy.

The following are recommendations to build ASEAN resilience to future diseases and climate change:

- *Sustainable infrastructure.* As part of rebuilding the economy post-COVID-19, ASEAN countries should plan and **build infrastructure that is climate resilient, such as by utilising renewable energy and green transportation.** A cleaner environment also reduces disease risk. In addition,

COVID-19 has shown the need to strengthen infrastructure for public health, water and sanitation, supply chain logistics, and telecommunications. Sustainable infrastructure will create jobs, lay the foundation for future growth and competitiveness, and help ASEAN countries attract private investment from global investors. It should fit into the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 (MPAC 2025).

- *Agriculture and the resource sector.* Agriculture is a significant contributor to ASEAN's economy but also a major source of carbon emissions. It is estimated that ASEAN peatlands emit two billion tons of carbon per year from deforestation, slash and burn, drainage for agriculture and consequent wildfires, equivalent to 4% of global fossil fuel emissions. Transboundary air pollution caused by forest and peat fires also poses severe health hazards and is a source of geopolitical tension within ASEAN. ASEAN should facilitate dialogue among member countries to coordinate efforts to mitigate fires and haze. It can also provide a platform for member countries to harmonise sustainability standards and relevant certification criteria for companies in the resource sector.
- *Regional cooperation.* Although the COVID-19 crisis has inspired nationalism in some cases, climate change and diseases do not respect borders, and both are subject to collective action problems. ASEAN should promote and **reinforce national and international alignment on issues such as sustainability standards and crisis response**. In addition, while the disruption to the UN Climate Change Conference process and activism due to COVID-19 may set global climate action back a year, ASEAN should continue to work together. Focus should be on issues where there is shared interest (e.g. transboundary haze) or where there are knowledge sharing opportunities (e.g. Infrastructure Asia and Asian Development Bank sustainable infrastructure agreement).

3.2 The Rules-Based International Order Under Stress

The rise of an assertive China and a decline in American global leadership has challenged the rules-based international order in the Asia Pacific that ASEAN has grown accustomed to and prospered under. The global and regional norms and institutions in the security and economic realms have been under stress, as illustrated by ongoing territorial disputes in the South China Sea and the protracted trade war between the US and China. In the security realm, established principles and norms such as withholding the use of force have been challenged by unilateralism. On the other hand, World Trade Organisation (WTO) principles, which has been the basis for ASEAN's open regionalism and economic integration, are also

contested. Experts have posited that the Sino-US trade war is not just about trade, tech, or a clash of civilisations, but is ultimately about a lack of strategic trust. The consequences of this great power competition are playing out in supply chain disruptions, protectionism, and uncertainty which pose great challenges to ASEAN.

The US and China have differing views as to what the new order should look like. In general, the US prefers to keep the status quo, even as President Donald Trump undermines the WTO, WHO and other key multilateral institutions. China, on the other hand, seeks a selectively revisionist order. It wants to reform the political and security norms of the current order, but keep the economic order intact. It is clear that China is challenging a western-dominated definition of the world order (including the alliance system and norms), and is attempting to influence the global order via the creation of parallel institutions (i.e. the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) and the influencing of existing institutions (i.e. the WHO).

ASEAN's Centrality within the regional architecture has been undermined with the revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and promotion of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Strategy. This was sometimes framed as a response to potential influence from China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The launch of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo Pacific (AOIP) at the 34th ASEAN Summit in 2019 aimed to underscore inclusiveness and ASEAN Centrality. The intention of the AOIP was to establish ASEAN as the agenda-setter in the Asia Pacific rather than a follower to the likes of China and the US. Yet, ASEAN is still perceived as a rule taker rather than a rule maker.

It is in ASEAN's interests to ensure that stability persists in the region. The weakening of multilateralism globally presents an opportunity for regional organisations such as ASEAN to step up in the following ways:

- Enhance strategic engagement with international partners to create an environment conducive for multilateral cooperation without the dominance of a single great power. ASEAN should **seek to build an inclusive alternative to both Sino-centric and US-led versions of regional order. This would entail collective leadership in the region through closer cooperation with middle powers** such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand. The coronavirus crisis has shown that while major powers such as the US, China, and Europe have floundered to varying degrees in their efforts to contain the pandemic, the aforementioned middle economies have responded swiftly and effectively to curb the spread and fatality rates within their countries. Not only do these countries have deep, long lasting, and shared interests in the strategic, economic and socio-cultural spheres with ASEAN, they are also seeking to balance their relationship with both the US and China.

- ASEAN should **collaborate with countries who share similar strategic interests** in calling for higher standards. As an example, ASEAN has made it a priority to improve digital connectivity within Southeast Asia, and China, the US and Australia are all participating in ASEAN's Smart Cities partnerships. As countries continue to debate international norms and standards in the cyber and digital domains, ASEAN and like-minded countries might consider launching mini-lateral dialogues on digital governance.
- Currently, only four ASEAN countries are signatories to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). All member states should **consider signing up for the CPTPP** to enhance trade ties outside the region.
- **Promote a multilateral approach to infrastructure development in the region by involving third parties** such as International Finance Corporation/ World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and Infrastructure Asia. This ensures high governance and quality standards in the projects and processes, including addressing environmental, social and governance (ESG) risks. These efforts should also fit under the MPAC 2025. ASEAN should proactively work with key partners such as the US, China, Australia and Japan in infrastructure investment and development, while ensuring that the projects are aligned with the host country's interests.
- **Promote greater respect for international law and strengthen the compliance culture in the region** by speeding up implementation of legal tools provided in the ASEAN Charter such as the 2009 ASEAN Agreement on the Privileges and Immunities and the 2010 Protocol to the ASEAN Charter on Dispute Settlement Mechanisms; enhancing dialogues with partners, including the UN Secretariat, to promote the adherence to the UN Charter.

3.3 Rising Global Protectionism and Populism

Recent years have seen a rise in protectionism and populism affecting multilateral and regional cooperation. While globalisation has helped lift millions of people out of poverty around the world, for many in the West, the benefits were not evident. Wage stagnation, insecure jobs and widening income inequality have left many disgruntled and restless. At the same time, people were uneasy with societies that became more ethnically, religiously and racially diverse. The huge influx of immigrants and asylum seekers in Europe sparked a backlash against open borders. The appeal of nativism and xenophobia was

exemplified by US President Donald Trump's "America First" policy, Brexit and the rise in popularity of far-right politicians in Europe.

Populism taking place outside of ASEAN and within the AMS themselves poses significant challenges in maintaining solidarity and promoting ASEAN Centrality in the global economy. Unlike Europe and the US, populism in Southeast Asia is less about immigration, economic decline, and trade, and more on religious and ethnic divides, and countering drug trafficking. However, populism worldwide appeals to the working and lower-middle classes. In ASEAN, the lower-middle classes have become frustrated with democracy because they believe democratic politicians have not tackled inequality, addressed crime, or delivered effective state services. The rise of identity politics in the region is synonymous with the election of President Joko Widodo in Indonesia and President Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines.

The globalisation backlash has already had profound impacts on Southeast Asia and threatens to reverse some of the economic accomplishments in the region. A decline in world trade, cross border lending and foreign direct investment (FDI) will impede ASEAN's progress towards further economic integration. The withdrawal of the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was a blow to multilateral trading systems that had thus far worked in ASEAN's favour. Economies that had successfully industrialised and moved up the value chain may have some safeguards against a downturn in markets. However, developing economies reliant on the old growth model of labour-intensive manufacturing-for-export may find themselves in a difficult spot, especially with the rise of the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR).

The following are recommendations on how ASEAN can approach the issues of protectionism and populism:

- COVID-19 has illustrated the interconnectedness of economies. Supply chains need to remain open for the survival of countries and its people, especially for smaller and import-dependent countries. As an open region highly dependent on trade and investments, **ASEAN leaders need to reiterate the importance of interdependence, looking outward and keeping economies and borders open.** The benefits derived from deeper economic integration will then need to be clearly messaged to the public.
- **Ensure that people remain at the centre of ASEAN's policymaking and initiatives and that the benefits of an ASEAN community is well communicated,** especially among ASEAN youths, through various channels. (refer to ASCC for more recommendations)
- Recognise the importance of dialogue in addressing the root causes of protectionism and populism. This will require enabling lesser voices to be heard by **promoting open, honest debate about issues of populism and nativism through the ASEAN Foundation and entities associated with**

ASEAN e.g. the ASEAN-ISIS Network, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA), the ASEAN Media Forum, etc.

IV. THE THREE PILLARS OF THE ASEAN COMMUNITY

4.1 ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC)

Overall, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint has laid out a comprehensive, impactful, and sustainable set of overarching goals and detailed action lines towards a rule-based, people oriented, people-centred, resilient and outward-looking community with a strengthened institutional capacity.

ASEAN has made great strides in achieving its stated APSC objectives², with significant success in the goals of “building a peaceful, secure and stable region” and “maintaining ASEAN Centrality in a dynamic and outward-looking region”. All action lines (approximately 96%) have been addressed by either individual AMS, the ASEAN Secretariat, or jointly among these actors within the last five years, demonstrating the consensus and support for this roadmap.

However, to achieve its APSC visions, ASEAN should pay more attention to the following issues:

- *Shortcomings in design:* The four main objectives of the APSC 2025 Blueprint are general in nature, reflecting that ASEAN’s aspirations and targets are formed by the lowest common denominator. Some action-lines lack specificity. The APSC Blueprint also focuses mainly on intra-state issues rather than interstate issues with measures meant to be implemented domestically.
- *Difficulties in monitoring and reviewing:* The APSC Blueprint does not have clear indicators for monitoring and evaluation. Many action lines are mere formalities and of little practical value. There are two main issues that need to be considered: *First*, while the ASEAN Secretary-General (ASG) is assigned to perform the tasks, **many of the action lines in the Blueprint require domestic implementation, which impedes effective evaluation.** AMS may end up muddling through without a rational strategy to pursue activities laid out in the Blueprint, while relying only on existing mechanisms. *Second*, it is foreseen that AMS will become increasingly cautious when the implementation of the Blueprint approaches the more substantive phase – when fundamental values and interests will be significantly affected. **Modalities will need to be discussed between the**

² A survey was conducted within the ASEAN-ISIS Network in preparation for this report.

Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) and the ASG or Deputy ASG, to enhance the monitoring unit in support of the APSC.

- *Possible discrepancy between completion and impact:* While the completion of the APSC Blueprint action lines is important, it is more crucial that this translates into concrete results and substantially contributes to increasing ASEAN's capacity. The ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint of 2025 aspires towards: (a) a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centred community, (b) a peaceful, secure and stable region, (c) ASEAN Centrality in a dynamic and outward-looking region, (d) Strengthened ASEAN Institutional Capacity and Presence. A survey among the ASEAN-ISIS network revealed that out of the four APSC objectives³, **ASEAN has made least progress in the objective of enhancing its institutional capacity.** Likewise, while ASEAN has exerted great efforts and made significant achievements in the goal of maintaining its Centrality, this is still considered the most difficult goal for ASEAN.

Key areas and priority issues for APSC

a) Regional Peace and Security

While ASEAN has made meaningful efforts towards the creation of a culture of peace and dialogue in the region, successfully addressing security challenges and resolving differences and disputes by peaceful means remains an unfinished task. ASEAN ensures that the use of force among member states is kept at bay, respecting one and another's sovereignty and keeping the principle of non-interference intact. However, complex developments and many regional security challenges increasingly expose ASEAN's weakness in developing realistic and measurable mission goals in the Political-Security pillar.

ASEAN has been relatively successful at projecting its fundamental norms and receiving the rudimentary endorsement of external partners in the wider Asia-Pacific security theatre. This has been demonstrated in the expansion of the TAC signatories and in the establishment of rules regarding interactions among AMS and external players e.g. the Declaration of Conduct (DOC) and the Code of Conduct (COC) process. However, *non-compliance and the non-binding nature of these rules and norms* means

³ The ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint of 2025 aspires towards: (a) a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centered community, (b) a peaceful, secure and stable region, (c) ASEAN Centrality in a dynamic and outward-looking region, (d) Strengthened ASEAN Institutional Capacity and Presence.

that ASEAN is poorly equipped to deal with new challenges, including maritime security concerns, particularly in the South China Sea. Despite the progress in managing South China Sea disputes, the situation remains unstable and vulnerable to a number of disruptive factors. Tensions have increased given the mix of proactive protection of exclusive economic zone (EEZ) resources, higher volumes of shipping traffic, piracy, terrorist activities, the modernisation of regional naval and coast guard forces, maritime pollution, and environmental degradation. Besides the challenges to regional stability, assertive behaviour by outside powers threatens the current rules-based order built on international law and ASEAN's fundamental principles and norms.

In the area of non-traditional security, ASEAN has embarked on several important initiatives. Significantly, ASEAN has agreed to enact the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP) (signed on 21 November 2015 in Kuala Lumpur), following the Convention on Counter Terrorism entering into force since 2012. Both conventions will likely lead to more robust cooperation in combatting such issues. Indeed, elaborate work plans have been developed.⁴

Non-traditional security issues are now posing greater threats towards human security and survival, as seen in the current pandemic. In the past, ASEAN countries coordinated efforts to deal with the SARS outbreak and is similarly doing so with COVID-19. However, the institutionalisation of regional efforts of ASEAN remains a hard task. COVID-19 has exposed another shortcoming in the current APSC Blueprint—the *narrow understanding of security*. APSC Blueprint action line B2 commands for a timely response to “urgent issues or crisis situations”, however, this has thus far been applied to conflict situations rather than non-traditional security threats.

Currently, water security, environmental challenges, and diseases are still considered social problems and have yet to be included in the APSC Blueprint. Yet a pandemic like COVID-19 has shown its ability to inflict more casualties than wars and conflicts. On top of this, **the Mekong river sub region is also facing intertwined security threats including climate change, water security, ecological disaster, food security, and human security**. Water security management in the Mekong River is not only crucial for the riparian states and wider regional stability, but has great implications for the promotion of a rules-based order. It is also notable that the risk of dual crises will loom larger as the *interconnectedness of security threats* increases e.g. pandemic-hunger, pandemic-natural disasters, pandemic-humanitarian crises,

⁴ The Bohol Work Plan signed in 2017 for countering trafficking in persons and the Bali Work Plan signed in 2019 for countering radicalization and violent extremism.

etc. It is imperative to pay due attention to these issues as this conforms with ASEAN's "comprehensive security" approach and its "people-oriented" vision.

Some recommendations for ASEAN are:

- **Seek to reactivate the mechanism of the ASEAN Troika, as reflected in the Blueprints, to address pressing issues in a timely and focused manner**, such as humanitarian crisis, pandemic, and even challenges posed by extra-regional forces. The ASEAN Troika, when constituted, shall work and conduct itself in accordance with established modes of ASEAN diplomacy, for example: 1) A "Troika" on a specific issue can be convened below the Ministerial level and be represented by Deputies, Ambassadors or Special Envoys; (2) an initiative to convene a "Troika" requires the support of the majority of AMS/ 3 AMS and will report to ASEAN as a whole; (3) the work of the Troika is to be supported by the ASEAN Secretariat.
- **Promote high-level policy consultation and substantive sharing of positions and policies among AMS** to allow ASEAN to raise common voices in defence of one another when the interests of some AMS are threatened by major countries, instead of solely relying on the Chair.
- Prioritise cooperation among AMS and with external partners to ensure **maritime freedom of navigation, compliance with the 1982 United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the full and effective implementation of the Declaration of the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) and the eventual conclusion of a substantial and legally binding China-ASEAN South China Sea Code of Conduct (COC)**— a critical component of a regime to manage disputes.
- Institutionalise regional cooperation on public health security and disaster management by working through **cross-pillar coordination as well as increased, harmonised engagement with ASEAN Dialogue Partners**.
- Continue efforts to promote **greater regional dialogue and cooperation on areas of non-traditional security, including cybersecurity**.
- **Promote border management cooperation to enable more efficient and resilient movement of goods and people** among AMS while addressing security and other key concerns like public health.

b) ASEAN Centrality

On one hand, ASEAN has been able to strengthen its Centrality by engaging relevant actors in the institutionalised ASEAN-centred regionalism.⁵ On the other hand, the increased number of meetings has not always resulted in higher quality outcomes. Furthermore, ASEAN Centrality has been challenged by rapid and significant structural changes in the external and internal context. This is one of the biggest challenges that ASEAN will face in the next five years and beyond.

The challenges to ASEAN Centrality have manifested in three ways.

First, there has been reduced engagement with great powers, notably with the US. This was evident when the US President skipped the East Asia Summit (EAS), sent a downgraded delegation to the 2019 Bangkok Summit, and cancelled the US-ASEAN Summit planned in 2020. While the US Secretary of State and ASEAN foreign ministers have met, US ambassadorships to ASEAN, the Philippines, and Brunei, remain without nominees, while nominees for Indonesia, Myanmar, and Singapore are pending confirmation or renomination by the US Senate. It also comes at a time where China is significantly ramping up its engagement, and by extension, influence, in ASEAN and its member states.

Second, there are challenges to ASEAN-led mechanisms. While ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM Plus have done well to promote joint activities to ensure mutual understanding and cooperation at a regional level, there is a risk of ASEAN losing its Centrality if cooperation in the ADMM is lagging behind the rapid development of the ADMM-Plus, such that the Dialogue Partners drive the regional agenda. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) has become an inflexible forum to discuss preventive diplomacy as the Forum is stuck in conservatism rooted in the principle of voluntary measures and still lacks both intellectual and institutional breakthroughs. More importantly, there is also a risk that progress at the ADMM Plus comes at the expense of the ARF when countries invest more in ADMM Plus.

Third, besides external recognition, Centrality requires a certain degree of internal unity and cohesion, which is another challenge that ASEAN must overcome. Divisions still linger on important issues

⁵ There are currently 38 TAC signatories, 10 ASEAN dialog partners, and other sectoral dialog partners.

such as maritime security and how to cope with the increased great power rivalry without having to pick a side.

Recommendations for ASEAN:

- It is imperative that ASEAN presses for a more substantive central role in ASEAN-led regional architectures, instead of its current formal role. ASEAN should not be content with just the role of a summoner or convener, rather it should strive to become a transformative agenda-setter. This will be particularly essential in upholding established norms, principles and the rules-based order. ASEAN can also take the lead in non-traditional security cooperation such as climate change, health issues/pandemics, water resources management, etc.
- Improve, and if possible, standardise, dialogue mechanisms involving ASEAN Sectoral Bodies and Dialogue Partners. At the micro level, it cannot be denied that various ASEAN initiatives are supported by Dialogue Partners' resources. Currently, there are two ways ASEAN works to conduct projects and activities with Dialogue Partners: a fund-based formula such as the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund, or a project-based model such as USAID projects dedicated for ASEAN missions. ASEAN rotates the position of country coordinator to manage relations and cooperation with each Dialogue Partner. However, there is currently no standardized framework to ensure concerted and coordinated efforts between AMS and its Dialogue Partners.

c) ASEAN institutional capacity and presence

The ASEAN apparatus still needs to be improved by clarifying the functions and tasks of the existing bodies and institutions as well as the working and coordinating relations among them. As mentioned above, many areas of cooperation such as cybercrime, environmental issues, and disaster relief require various ASEAN bodies to work together. Currently, there is no structured mode of operation.

The function of the ASEAN Secretariat has changed significantly since the ASEAN Charter was enacted. There are gaps in the expected function of the Secretariat and the way the Secretariat has been institutionalised since the Charter, causing limitations on the effectiveness of the Secretariat in promoting cooperation. Therefore, there is a need to upgrade the ASEAN Secretariat with a greater budget and resources to take on its functions and tasks. This will also help to monitor the support units for ASEAN.

Recommendations:

- Enhance transparency and accountability of ASEAN by promoting the capacity of self-review and developing channels to receive feedback from the academia, civil society and the private sector.
- Further enhance the role of the ASEAN Secretary-General within ASEAN i.e. mediation and reconciliation on interstate differences; and in external relations, particularly at multilateral forums.
- Build mechanisms or measures to monitor the implementation of joint decisions or agreements, and where there is non-compliance, to initiate processes to promote compliance by the AMS concerned.
- Develop multi-sectoral and multidimensional mechanism on issues such as irregular migration, radicalism and counterterrorism, and cybersecurity. This can also bring new energies to the ARF.
- Secure necessary financial and human resources for the successful implementation of ASEAN Community goals amidst emerging challenges, by mobilising contributions from different stakeholders.

4.2 ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint 2025 aspires to have the following five main characteristics: (1) a highly integrated and cohesive economy; (2) a competitive, innovative and dynamic ASEAN; (3) enhanced connectivity and sector cooperation; (4) a resilient, inclusive, people-oriented and people-centred ASEAN and; (5) a global ASEAN.

There has been progress made in achieving the five characteristics. In 2018, ASEAN's combined GDP reach US\$3 trillion, making it the fifth largest economy in the world. Over the past five years, the total trade in goods and services of ASEAN countries with the world has increased rapidly. The AEC has successfully increased its institutional connectivity during the past five years by undertaking a number of agreements to facilitate trade across the region, namely, the ASEAN Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Goods in Transit (AFAFGIT) and ASEAN Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Inter-State Transport (AFAFIST).

ASEAN has also become an attractive destination for foreign investment with net FDI inflows. Regional integration has been enhanced in the liberalization of trade and in promoting ASEAN as an integrated supply base. A statistics portal by the ASEAN Secretariat now provides easy access to data on trade and investment through a centralised online portal and the ASEAN Integration Monitoring Office is working on a more detailed quantitative review of ASEAN's economic progress.

Yet some pressing issues remain, and the following are recommended to be at the forefront of the AEC's priorities:

- **Push the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) forward.** ASEAN is a nucleus to help member countries promote economic, trade and investment cooperation with other important partners. In the original RCEP trade deal, ASEAN aimed to link up its free trade agreement (FTA) partners of Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea. This would have been the world's largest free trade partnership that would cover one-third of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The deal would have helped ASEAN's dialogue partners forge trade agreements that did not exist merely on bilateral terms.

While 2019 produced significant progress in RCEP negotiations, India was not convinced to join the deal. This was mainly due to domestic opposition that is unlikely to evaporate soon. Although

India remains on the side-lines for RCEP, the other fifteen countries need to finalise and sign the agreement with a view towards India coming on-board in the future. ASEAN and its current RCEP partners can provide a mechanism for Indian engagement that would provide a staging platform for entry.

The WTO predicts world trade will plummet by between 13% and 32% in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. There will be even more urgency this year to improve trade flows in the post-pandemic recovery process. ASEAN already has a head start after seven years of negotiations on RCEP. Inking the agreement, even without India, will be a necessary first step. Strong and clear signals of commitment to multilateral trade will be needed in the context of increasing anti-globalisation sentiments.

- **Strengthen ASEAN's Position and Integration in Key Value Chains and cross-border interdependencies.** ASEAN's goals for a highly integrated economy faces old challenges and new. More needs to be done to facilitate the movement of goods, services, people, and capital.

Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) and Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) have greatly increased in number and complexity and largely negate the benefits of tariff reduction. ASEAN Centrality depends critically on what benefits it can confer to its citizens through trade liberalization and facilitation as well as how well it can attract investment into a unified production and consumption area. NTMs and NTBs however, prevent the realization of these goals. Reduction and elimination of these should be seriously addressed for the AEC to be achieved. The ASEAN Single Window needs to be fully utilised as this will unlock ASEAN's vast investment potential and benefit non-member countries interested in trading with ASEAN.

Supply chain disruptions have come to the fore due to COVID-19, especially in the area of essential medical equipment such as face masks and ventilators. Export bans need to be avoided; instead, there should be a pooling of essential resources. ASEAN will need to continue its work on supporting an efficient, integrated logistics industry, but some redundancy will be needed to brace for crises. Efforts should continue to promote cooperation between ASEAN and partner countries, especially with the EU in supply chains.

The movement of skilled workers among ASEAN countries still needs to be supported and encouraged. Tapping into Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) for different professions is still minimal. The movement of unskilled workers remains high compared to the movement of skilled workers. Considering COVID-19, governments also need to define a path for the deployment of manpower. For example, Burmese workers in Thailand or Malaysian workers in Singapore will need

a viable long-term solution to be able to continue work and visit their families. This is an area where political will is needed.

- **Keep abreast with technological advances.** ASEAN can enhance and leverage on technology and e-commerce. The growing need for remote interactions to overcome movement restrictions amid the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the benefits of leveraging technologies and digital trade. The ASEAN Digital Integration Framework Action Plan (DIFAP) 2019-2025 was adopted by the 51st AEM in September 2019 and endorsed by the AEC Council on 31 October 2019. This aims to advance the process of digital transformation and innovation in ASEAN.

Moreover, social networks could be a major beneficiary, and e-commerce is likely to grow as consumers avoid physical stores and crowded gathering places, further bolstering use of Omni-channel commerce. There will also likely be an accelerated shift towards digital payments, away from cash payments that involve physical contact and may pose a hygienic and health risk. With all the benefits presented by digital platforms, its detriments are apparent as well—there is a need to address digital divide across AMS and develop cybersecurity capabilities and combat cybercrime.

- **Narrow the development gap in the era of 4IR.** The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) poses both opportunities and potential pitfalls for the ASEAN region. While ASEAN celebrates its diversity, the reality is that each country is at a different stage of economic development. Achieving the goals of the Economic Blueprint, especially integration, may be thwarted if the development gap enlarges. Ambitions for “a competitive, innovative and dynamic ASEAN” will require the whole group, not just some member states, to possess strong infrastructure and connectivity as well as the space and ability to innovate.

In 2019, fixed broadband speeds in Singapore were 15 times faster than those in Myanmar, the slowest among ASEAN countries. In the mobile internet space, there was a narrower gap with Singapore’s speed at around five times faster than the slowest mobile speeds in ASEAN: Cambodia and Indonesia. A minimum threshold should be set in areas such as digital connectivity, followed by collective efforts from ASEAN to ensure member states achieve the desired status. This will include policies that capture the opportunities for leapfrogging in less developed AMS. Not only will this improve integration efforts, but ASEAN’s growth potential as seen by external partners will be further amplified.

- **Consider an ASEAN initiative on Education and Training.** This would examine regional needs and consider how to educate and train workers in different AMS, and in doing so equip them with the skills and knowledge to support cross-border supply and manufacturing chains, and try to help AMS move up the value chain in the medium to long term. The education and training efforts could leverage on e-learning as well as practical in person training involving investors.

- **Re-examine and re-align ASEAN's economic pillar portfolio.** An integrated, competitive and innovative ASEAN will need to involve other pillars/departments of the ASEAN Community and Secretariat. This is particularly salient in connectivity, sustainability, and labour standards.
 - Infrastructure development is an important driver of growth for less mature economies and helps to facilitate ASEAN integration. Currently, there is a lean team under the ASEAN Connectivity Division at the Secretariat that oversees ASEAN's initiatives related to connectivity, including the MPAC 2025. Yet, it is unclear how the economic and connectivity departments work together and more will need to be done to ensure infrastructure/connectivity is meaningfully incorporated in economic goals.
 - Similarly, the issue of environmental sustainability will become more salient for businesses and must be embedded in economic plans. Currently, the sustainable development directorate sits under the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Department at the Secretariat. ASEAN has indeed made great efforts to promote sustainable development in 2019. Last year, ASEAN members agreed to establish the ASEAN Sustainable Development Research and Dialogue Centre (ACSDSD), to facilitate cooperation in sustainable development between ASEAN and development partners. Yet, there is less clarity in how these play into economic initiatives that will ultimately be at the centre of upholding sustainability. For example, the transboundary haze issue has been present for over 20 years and is still a recurring problem. The economic incentives intertwined with the transboundary haze issue need to be worth considering and may have been neglected in part due to the delineated pillars. Furthermore, the future presents a growing generation of environmentally conscious citizens who will not only be seeking economic efficiency, but also sustainability in commercial practices. The concept of a low-carbon/green economy ought to be integrated in any economic planning and implementation.
 - In examining ASEAN's workforce, social sustainability, labour movement and labour-intensive industrialisation continue to be pertinent issues for ASEAN's economic development.

This is especially true for ASEAN's new members that have different economic priorities such as a focus on the low-tech agriculture. The Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) to narrow the development gap in ASEAN needs an expanded program to be relevant to the needs of newer members.

4.3 ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC)

Considered to be the “People’s Pillar”, the ASCC aims to enhance human development, resiliency, and sustainable development in the ASEAN region. The main implementing mechanisms are the 15 sectoral bodies within ASCC. Apart from this, the ASCC also undertakes extensive consultation initiatives from a wide array of stakeholders in government, civil society, international organisations, think-tanks, and the private sector.

ASEAN Vision 2025 committed ASEAN to the creation of a “community” that, among others, ensured food, water, and energy security, provided social services like quality education and healthcare, addressed social and economic inequality, and adhered to environmentally sustainable development.

The ASCC Blueprint 2015-2025 has six characteristics: (1) human development; (2) social welfare and protection; (3) social justice and rights; (4) ensuring environmental sustainability; (5) building the ASEAN identity; and (6) narrowing the development gap. The 2015 ASCC Blueprint also laid down the mechanisms for the implementation, resource mobilisation, and monitoring of efforts towards the realisation of an inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and dynamic ASEAN community.

In 2016, the ASEAN Secretariat published the 2015 ASCC Scorecard, which assessed the implementation of the 2015 ASCC Blueprint’s characteristics except for Narrowing the Development Gap. The 2015 ASCC Scorecard made use of 208 quantitative and qualitative indicators in total across the five assessed characteristics. As with the first MTR, problems with data sets hampered proper assessment, such as missing data sets for indicators in certain years for several AMS. The report noted the lack of updated data sets, with most recent data sets being up to 2012. Inconsistencies in data formatting also hampered comparisons between member states. Another problem was that sectoral bodies were not able to agree on indicators for the assessment of some elements, making the assessment incomplete.

ASCC Characteristic	Quantitative	Qualitative	Total
Human Development	34	5	39
Social Welfare and Protection	68	16	84
Social Justice and Rights	8	3	11
Ensuring Environmental Sustainability	16	12	28
Building ASEAN Identity	10	0	10
Total	136	72	208

Currently in effect, the ASCC Blueprint 2025 retains most of the structure of the 2015 ASCC Blueprint but relabels certain parts— elements are now called key result areas while action points are now called strategic measures. There are now five characteristics: (1) engages and benefits the people; (2) inclusive; (3) sustainable; (4) resilient; and (5) dynamic, with a total of 18 key result areas and 104 strategic measures.

ASCC Characteristic	Key Result Areas
Engages and Benefits People	Engaged Stakeholders in ASEAN processes
	Empowered People and Strengthened Institutions
Inclusive	Reducing Barriers
	Equitable Access for All
	Promotion and Protection of Human Rights
Sustainable	Conservation and Sustainable Management of Biodiversity and Natural Resources
	Environmentally Sustainable Cities
	Sustainable Climate
	Sustainable Consumption and Production
Resilient	A Disaster Resilient ASEAN that can Anticipate, Respond, Cope, Adapt, and Build Back Better, Smarter, and Faster
	A Safer ASEAN that can Respond to all Health-related Hazards including Biological, Chemical, and Radiological-nuclear, and Emerging Threats
	A Climate Adaptive ASEAN with Enhanced Institutional and Human Capacities to Adapt to the Impact of Climate Change
	Strengthened Social Protection for Women, Children, Youths, the Elderly/Older Persons, Persons with Disabilities, Ethnic Minority Groups, Migrant Workers, Vulnerable and Marginalised Groups, and People Living in At-risk Areas, including People Living in Remote and Border Areas and Climate Sensitive Areas, to Reduce Vulnerabilities in Times of Climate Change-related Crises, Disasters and other Environmental Changes
	Enhanced and Optimised Financing Systems, Food, Water, Energy Availability, and other Social Safety Nets in Times of Crises by making Resources more Available, Accessible, Affordable and Sustainable
	Endeavour towards a “Drug-Free” ASEAN
Dynamic	Towards an Open and Adaptive ASEAN
	Towards a Creative, Innovative and Responsive ASEAN
	Engender a Culture of Entrepreneurship in ASEAN

Another observation of the 2025 Blueprint is the large number of strategic measures that can be classified under three general categories: (1) institutionalisation of ASEAN policies and mechanisms (including the establishing of regional platforms and strengthening of regional cooperation); (2) promotion of frameworks and guidelines to coordinate and engage relevant stakeholders; and (3) increasing relevant competencies and enhancing relevant institutional capacities. It is possible that they attempt to address the recommendations given during the first MTR.

Additionally, there has been more thematic organisation of Roadmap items. Instead of individual (often myopic indicators in the cell above), there was a more defined “narrative” or coherence: engagement, inclusivity, sustainability, resilience, and dynamism. These higher-level principles are understood to be promoted across the topical items in the Roadmap, e.g. resilience principles are to be embedded in human development, social protection, environmental sustainability, etc.

One key observation that can be made is how much more general the 2025 Blueprint’s strategic measures are compared to the 2015 Blueprint’s action points. This could lead to difficulties in implementation and evaluation— without specific details and concrete indicators provided by the ASEAN Secretariat or the relevant sectoral bodies, progress will be harder to determine and compare across ASEAN member states, similar to the problems faced by the first MTR and the 2015 ASCC Scorecard. While greater thematic coherence is desirable, this should not come at the expense of specificity in goals and effective evaluation.

Key areas and priority issues for ASCC

a) Sustainable Development and Future Crises

Despite strides in implementing the ASCC Blueprint 2025, this progress seems disjointed to member-states’ implementation of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to the United Nations, ASEAN is poised to reach only two SDGs by 2030. More specifically, the UN analysis of SDG compliance in Southeast Asia shows that the region:

- is *regressing* in improvements pertaining to decent work, economic growth, climate action, peace, justice, and strong institutions.

- urgently needs action on climate and disaster adaptation, water scarcity, and sustainable food production. It will not meet these targets in 2030 based on UN projections.
- has commendable improvement in quality of education, affordable and clean energy, and industry, innovation, and infrastructure, particularly when compared to other Asia-Pacific sub-regions.
- must reverse an increasing trend in rates of illegal drug abuse (itself a Key Result Area in the ASCC Scorecard) and harmful use of alcohol.

Moreover, the ability to respond to human security issues needs to be prioritized. The key priority presently is addressing COVID-19.

According to several studies, ASEAN is increasingly vulnerable to climate-related disasters. Taken together with infectious diseases such as SARS-COV and COVID-19, there is an urgent need for more crisis-management capability from ASEAN organs and an ability to reallocate regional assets where there is a greater need. As seen below, ASEAN's existing capability resides more with information-sharing rather than actual service-delivery on the ground, which needs to be rectified in future institutional capacity-building efforts.

There has been good progress in the last two decades with respect to ASEAN organs and mechanisms related to disaster response and mitigation, climate adaptation, sustainable and green technologies, and food security. Some of these include:

- ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, which is the *first legally binding regional instrument on the matter* in the whole world
- ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance
- ASEAN Emergency Response and Assessment Teams
- ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management
- ASEAN Joint Disaster Response Plan (2017)
- ASEAN Plus Three Emerging Infectious Diseases Programme

With respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, **ASEAN has an existing array of mechanisms mainly over technical exchange and information sharing**. The ASEAN Secretariat has come up with measures which are **mainly advisory in nature** and reflects its existing capability for crisis management:

- A Risk Assessment Report for COVID-19
- Video conferences of Health Ministers

- ASEAN Emergency Operations Centre Network for public health emergencies (led by Malaysia) released daily situational updates to health ministries. The network also has real-time communication between disease prevention and control officials of ASEAN member states to keep them abreast of response measures.
- ASEAN BioDiaspora Virtual Centre (ABVC) led by the Philippines, is undertaking big data analytics and visualization to assess the extent of COVID-19 infections.

With these issues, the following recommendations are made:

- **Greater coherence between SDGs and ASEAN's goals.** The myriad issues addressed by the SDGs do not fit completely under a pillar. Hence, there is a need for a whole-of-ASEAN approach in addressing these issues. By interweaving the SDGs and ASEAN's action plans, the SDGs would provide an external reference point for achieving sustainable development throughout the three pillars and help countries fulfil their commitment to our shared future.
- **Crisis management institutions and resources.** ASEAN's response so far has been strictly related to facilitation of information management. The Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 said that it will promote "public health cooperation measures... through timely and transparent *exchange of information* on real time situation and pandemic response measures..., *sharing of experience and best practices* in epidemiological research and development, clinical treatment, joint research and development of vaccines and anti-viral medicine". However, crisis response through groundwork operations is another matter. ASEAN's capability for service-delivery independent of its member states is still questionable and this must be addressed, perhaps through a dedicated regional crisis team.
- **Existing institutions should also be utilised and beefed up.** The dedicated ASEAN food security reserve has not been sufficiently increased from its 1979-levels to guard against food supply chain vulnerability. During the 2008 food stocks crisis in ASEAN, the mechanisms has been rarely used due to a combination of insignificant volumes of rice reserve and the difficulty of request procedures.

As for the COVID-19 response, the ASEAN Economic Ministers called to utilise the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR) and had a vague reference to strengthen regional food, medicines, and essential supplies supply chain connectivity— where a working arrangement is to

be “explored”. ASEAN should work towards greater specificity in this working arrangement, streamlining of request procedures and ensuring adequate stock in ASEAN food security reserves.

b) Social Protection

Social protection in ASEAN is improving, but still insufficient. Protecting people from forced migration and human trafficking becomes more urgent in times of a pandemic. In 2018, ASEAN came forth with the Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection. The dominant form of social protection in ASEAN is social insurance benefits such as pension, health insurance, and unemployment benefits. This form of social protection protects mainly salaried employees, to the detriment of informal workers and small enterprises. Southeast Asia spends only 2.4% of aggregate GDP on social protection measures, which is below the regional average for the Asia-Pacific. The region has relatively low spending on childcare, assistance to elderly, and social assistance spending.

Therefore, we propose the following recommendations:

- **Planning for a greying economy.** Looking forward, ASEAN will have to contend with a projection that its rapidly ageing population will balloon whilst still at relatively low-income economic levels. Transition planning for a “greying economy” (such as in Europe) does not have special attention in the current ASCC vision 2025. AMS’ future plans should include pension funding, regulation of migration levels, and more care programs for the elderly.
- **Increased protection for migrant workers.** Migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to the lack of social protection. As migration within and outside the ASEAN region has steadily increased over the years, there is a need for attention to protecting their rights, livelihoods, and communities. The COVID-19 pandemic might have put a lid on the mobility of people, but it will also expose vulnerable people to other forms of labour exploitation and human trafficking. For example, the lack of income might push women and children to higher levels of family violence, child begging, child labour, forced marriage, and online sexual abuse.

Safety nets for returning migrant workers to their homeland should be a priority for ASEAN. As people lose their jobs with the closing of borders and the economic downturn, ASEAN must come up with a plan to given them alternative sources of livelihood and upgrading their skills to meet the new demands of a post-pandemic economy.

c) ASEAN Identity

Finding and promoting ASEAN Identity should not just be about common history, culture, and institutions. It should also be about common values, aspirations, and visions as found in the ASEAN Charter and other documents.

A survey conducted by Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) for the 50th anniversary of ASEAN found the following:

- The top concerns of ASEAN citizens are (a) corruption, (b) climate change, (c) natural disasters, (d) income and social inequality, (e) food security, and (d) trade. **All these are socio-cultural concerns**, save for trade, and will thus figure prominently in the medium term leading to 2025.
- Respondents are **least aware of the ASCC** and most familiar with the ASEAN Economic Community pillar. *72% of respondents thought that the media did not sufficiently cover ASEAN* and focused too much on its history rather than present initiatives.
- **Feelings of being ASEAN citizens increased between 2007 and 2016** (from 77% to 82%). The substantial change is the intensification of “strongly agree” responses (32% in 2007 to 50% in 2016).
- Overwhelmingly positive opinion of ASEAN membership.

The content of the ASCC “lacks a clear underpinning principle... the blueprint itself has not set out in holistic term what kind of community ASEAN wants to be. In short, it has not spelled out what the ASEAN identity is or should be”. This is understandable because ASEAN itself is a model of open regionalism, where members are free to negotiate FTAs and bilateral deals unlike the European Union which implements, for example, a common agricultural policy.

With regard to cultural exchanges and regional identity building, in its 50th year, ASEAN cited activities such as the ASEAN Youth Camp, increase in intra-ASEAN tourism, sports competitions, and art exhibitions (along with usual trade activities) as indicative of its efforts. On educational support, a positive development is the proliferation of ASEAN-branded scholarships, e.g. Canada-ASEAN scholarship, EU-ASEAN scholarships, China-ASEAN scholarships.

Hence, the following recommendations are made:

- **Formulating a coherent, underpinning concept of the ASEAN identity.** ASEAN would remain a political-economic functional arrangement, neglecting the socio-cultural arrangement, if it does not resolve the question of common values.
- **Increased people-centric exchanges and regional initiatives.** Support for more well-funded and high-impact regional identity-building and people-to-people exchange leaves much to be desired. A welcoming trend is that younger ASEAN demographic groups are more likely to travel within Southeast Asia. The provision for special ASEAN lanes and abolition of visa requirements is one good step.
- **Intra-region educational support.** However, more intra-region educational support is needed, particularly those relating to ASEAN Studies, or key areas of common interest based on market-demand.
- **Spirit of Solidarity.** ASEAN Member States can enhance unity and goodwill by helping each other in times of need. This will also require the ASEAN country that needs help to be open to receiving aid. Crises are instances where solidarity can be amplified.

V. CONCLUSION

In the overall assessment of ASEAN's progress towards its 2025 vision, this report was intended to analyse some of ASEAN's achievements and shortcomings. At the same time, it has laid out immediate priorities in the areas of crisis resilience (including climate change), a fraying 'rules based international order', and a rising sense of protectionism and populism. This will affect important strategic and economic relations as ASEAN shapes its role and relevance in global governance.

The report also assessed ASEAN's three community blueprints and provided recommended areas of focus for the next five years.

First, under the Political-Security pillar, certain flashpoints remain in issues such as the South China Sea and concerns around the Mekong River. Yet, non-traditional security threats in the areas of cyber and human security warrant ASEAN's attention. In addition, more efforts will be required to boost ASEAN Centrality and to improve ASEAN's institutional capacity.

Second, under the Economic pillar, a major milestone for integration in the works is the finalisation of RCEP. This includes providing a mechanism for India's possible future entry. New priorities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic are the cross-border issues of keeping supply chains open and resuming travel in a safe manner. Furthermore, technology, connectivity and sustainability will likely be necessary considerations embedded in future economic plans.

Third, under the Socio-Cultural pillar, ASEAN will need to continue to push for substantial indicators on what a 'community' means. It will also have to re-evaluate its alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This will be pertinent in migration as well as health and food security.

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