

ASEAN

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community

Plan of Action

1. Embedded in ASEAN Vision 2020, Declaration of ASEAN Concord I (1976), Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (2003) and the Hanoi Plan of Action (HPA) is ASEAN's goal of a community of cohesive, equitable and harmonious societies, bound together in solidarity for deeper understanding and cooperation. Its key features are:

- Equitable access to opportunities will be universal -- rising above the barriers of religion, race, language, gender and social and cultural background;
- Human potentials are nurtured to the fullest, so that all individuals can participate meaningfully in a competitive world in a manner that gives paramount importance to their welfare and dignity;
- Norms of social and distributive justice are upheld by addressing issues of poverty and equity, and special care is given to vulnerable groups -- children, youth, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities -- who could be the subject of abuse, neglect and discrimination;
- The environment and natural resources are protected and managed to sustain development and as a legacy for future generations;
- Civil society is engaged in providing inputs for policy choices;
- People are healthy in mind and body and living in harmony in safe environments; and
- ASEAN citizens interact in a community conscious of its ties of history, aware of its cultural heritage and bound by a common regional identity.

The Imperatives of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community

2. The ASCC reflects ASEAN's social agenda that is focused on poverty eradication and human development. It is linked inextricably with the economic and security pillars of the ASEAN Community. Social inequities can threaten economic development and in turn undermine political regimes. Economic instability can exacerbate poverty, unemployment, hunger, illness and disease. Social instability can emerge from environmental scarcity or the inequitable distribution among stakeholders of the use of environmental assets. Failure to address these critical and persistent social issues can further cause both economic and political dislocations.

3. The ASCC will evolve amidst profound changes that are taking place in ASEAN's social landscape. These include: (i) the rise of consumerism and lifestyle changes resulting from rapid economic growth; (ii) increased personal mobility resulting from advances in infrastructure and more open regimes; (iii) transformation of the family roles and structures, with implications on the care of children and the elderly; (iv) the potential of information technology to enhance the speed and quality of learning and development of human skills, thus narrowing the digital divide; (v) the rapid pace of urbanisation and its impact on employment and the delivery of basic services; (vi) shifts in the labour market resulting from economic integration; and (vii) unsustainable exploitation of natural resources in the process of meeting developmental needs.

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Plan of Action

4. This ASCC Plan of Action (PoA) will have four core elements:

- Building a community of caring societies to address issues of poverty, equity and human development;
- Managing the social impact of economic integration by building a competitive human resource base and adequate systems of social protection;
- Enhancing environmental sustainability and sound environmental governance; and
- Strengthening the foundations of regional social cohesion towards an ASEAN Community in 2020.

Building a Community of Caring Societies

5. Poverty alleviation, equity and human development lie at the very core of a strong and resilient ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. Poverty reduction is fundamental to the development of the human potential, allowing people to participate fully in the mainstream of economic life and contribute to society. A community of caring societies in ASEAN can enhance the potential for production, consumption and wealth creation, thus ensuring the benefits from economic integration. ASEAN Member Countries will therefore strive, individually and collectively, to build caring societies concerned with, committed to, and capable of addressing fundamental issues of poverty, equity and human development. Governments, private sector and civil society will work in partnership to address these concerns.

6. Under the ASCC PoA, the goal of building an ASEAN community of caring societies will address the following concerns:

- Accelerating the goal of poverty reduction within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);

- Facilitating universal access to education for increased employability, good citizenship, and as a means of empowerment and life-long learning;
- Promoting the welfare of children by safeguarding their rights, ensuring their survival and full development, and protecting them from abuse, neglect and violence;
- Promoting improved standards and access to education through networking and institutional collaboration, using existing regional bodies;
- Enabling youth to have a better future by developing their leadership skills, entrepreneurship, and technical and vocational abilities;
- Promoting equitable participation of women in the development process by eliminating all forms of discrimination against them;
- Ensuring that the elderly are adequately cared for by promoting community-based support systems to supplement the role of the family as primary caregiver;
- Augmenting and supporting the efforts of sectoral bodies to prevent and combat human trafficking, particularly in women and children, through comprehensive policies and measures;
- Strengthening the system of social welfare through the enhancement of national capacities in responding to emerging social issues;
- Promoting health and nutrition, including through advocacy on health-related issues and healthy lifestyles;
- Preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases (including SARS and Avian influenza) through, among others, sharing of experiences and best practices and systems of surveillance;
- Ensuring access to safe, quality and affordable medicines by building ASEAN capacity and competitiveness in pharmaceutical as well as traditional medicines and complementary and alternative medicines;
- Enhancing food security and safety as a fundamental requirement of human security;
- Ensuring a drug-free ASEAN by 2015 through community-based drug prevention, treatment and control of drug abuse in parallel with eliminating drug-trafficking and illicit drug supply through law enforcement and alternative development for the sustainability of drug control; and
- Promoting a culture of science and technology and enhancing cooperation in the utilisation of appropriate applied science and technology in socio-economic activities to improve social well-being;
- Establishing efficient and well-functioning regional mechanisms for disaster prevention and relief that are fully compatible with global disaster management systems.

Managing the Social Impact of Economic Integration

7. ASEAN Member Countries, as a community of caring societies, are committed individually and collectively, to address the impact of economic integration to minimise its social costs and ensure its benefits. Domestic policy adjustments and emerging regional production arrangements from economic integration will have profound social impact that will be felt mostly in the labour market.

8. To manage the social impact, the following key goals will be pursued under the ASCC PoA:

- Promoting human resource development to build a competitive labour force, through, among others, closer cooperation among existing regional centres in the area of education;
- Promoting an efficient labour market through mutual skills recognition arrangements to enhance regional mobility so that ASEAN's workforce are prepared for and benefit from economic integration; such efforts would enable labour markets to operate efficiently with appropriate matching of jobs and skills;
- Strengthening systems of social protection at the national level and working towards adoption of appropriate measures at the regional level to provide a minimum uniform coverage for skilled workers in the region;
- Addressing the impact of liberalisation in the health sector to meet the needs of ASEAN; and
- Promoting joint certification and accreditation of science and technology at the regional level to improve science and technology competence of ASEAN's human resources.

Enhancing Environmental Sustainability

9. A clean and green ASEAN, with fully developed mechanisms for environmental governance, is both a shared goal and responsibility of ASEAN Member Countries. ASEAN commitments to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) have provided the framework for ASEAN cooperation on the environment which currently focuses on ten priority areas: (i) global environmental issues; (ii) land and forest fires and transboundary haze pollution; (iii) coastal and marine environment; (iv) sustainable forest management; (v) sustainable management of natural parks and protected areas; (vi) freshwater resources; (vii) public awareness and environmental education; (viii) promotion of environmentally sound technologies and cleaner production; (ix) urban environmental management and governance; and (x) sustainable monitoring and reporting, and database harmonisation.

10. Under the ASCC PoA, the following goals for promoting environmental sustainability will be pursued:

- Building national capacities to address issues and commitments to multilateral environmental agreements through awareness raising and informed policy choices;
- Effectively managing transboundary haze in accordance with the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution;
- Promoting the sustainable use of ASEAN's coastal and marine environment as a source of food supply and natural heritage;
- Conserving ASEAN's rich biological diversity and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from these biological and genetic resources;
- Promoting the sustainable management of forest resources and conserving critical ecosystems through the eradication of unsustainable practices and related activities, as well as strengthening preservation and management of ASEAN Heritage Parks;
- Promoting the sustainability of water resources to ensure adequate and quality water supply to meet ASEAN health and food needs;
- Promoting environmental education with the view to developing ASEAN citizens who are environmentally conscious;
- Promoting environmentally-sound technologies in partnership with the private sector;
- Ensuring quality living standards in ASEAN cities and urban areas;
- Augmenting and supporting the efforts of the ASEAN Economic Community through the energy sector in developing alternative fuels in order to prevent environmental devastation and resource exhaustion; and
- Promoting environmentally sound and socially responsible mineral development practices in the sustainable management and optimum utilisation of mineral resources.

Strengthening the Foundations of Regional Social Cohesion

11. With globalisation, many of the region's traditional societies, with their cherished cultural norms and practices, are facing new challenges. As ASEAN continues in its community-building efforts, the concern is how to fulfill its aspirations for progress and prosperity while at the same time preserving its rich cultural heritage. Thus, the ASEAN Community envisaged to emerge from regional integration by 2020 is where people, amidst the diversity of their historical and cultural experience, are conscious of a common regional identity. This sense of regional identity and solidarity will have been built on years of cumulative interaction in all facets of social and economic life and at all levels – communities, governments and civil society.

12. Under the ASCC PoA, the goal of creating an ASEAN identity involves:

- Mainstreaming the promotion of ASEAN awareness, regional identity and values in national communications plans, educational curricula, people-to-people contact mainly through culture, arts and sports, especially among the youth, and the promotion of ASEAN languages learning through scholarships and exchanges of linguists;
- Preserving and promoting ASEAN cultural heritage and living traditions, as a vehicle to better understand the link between culture and development, and as a source of inspiration for future endeavours;
- Fostering dialogues among civilisations, cultures and religions as a means to foster better understanding, build confidence, and address threats to peace and security; and
- Promoting ASEAN's standing in the international community.

Implementation Modalities

13. Specific measures envisaged under each of the four elements of the ASCC are in Appendix A. These measures will be translated into more concrete projects and activities in the Vientiane Action Programme (VAP) covering the medium-term period 2004-2010. In general, ASCC activities fall into three categories: (i) nationally-driven initiatives; (ii) regional activities that enhance or complement national initiatives through sharing of experiences, information and knowledge; establishment of regional networks; and joint regional approaches (e.g. the development of regional work programmes); and (iii) regional activities that involved setting up of regional mechanisms or standards.

14. For nationally-driven initiatives, ASEAN Member Countries shall prepare individual action plans for the period 2005-2010 consistent with their respective national policies and development priorities, and taking into account implementation capacity, including the availability of budgetary resources. Peer review and monitoring of these individual action plans will be done at the level of the relevant ASEAN body, consolidated by the ASEAN Secretariat, and reflected in the Secretary-General's report card to the ASEAN Summit.

15. The AMM shall take necessary follow-up measures to implement this Plan of Action including consultation and coordination with other relevant ASEAN Ministerial bodies; setting up ad-hoc groups as appropriate; reporting annually the progress of implementation to the ASEAN Summit; as well as introducing new measures and activities to strengthen the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community as appropriate.

16. Self-reliance, shared responsibility and ownership are the principles that will guide the implementation of ASCC projects. The discipline of mainstreaming regional goals and commitments into the national plans and priorities will be of paramount importance in order to secure the resources required for implementation. Regional advocacy can provide the leverage to help drive national level actions and secure the necessary budget resources.

17. For regional level activities, particular attention will be given to activities that are best achieved through regional cooperation because of resulting economies of scale, value-added, or strategic interests. These activities will be implemented primarily through the relevant ASEAN bodies or through the ASEAN Secretariat.

18. Implementing the ASCC PoA will require intensive and sustained capacity building at the national and regional levels in a wide range of areas. Active participation of various stakeholders in ASCC activities will also be encouraged to draw from their wealth of expertise and experience and to promote a strong sense of commitment and ownership of projects and activities. Building region-wide networks of NGOs, training centres, academic institutions and other ASEAN organisations will gradually weave into the fabric of the ASEAN Community and help to strengthen social cohesion.

19. Mobilisation of resources will remain to be a key challenge for implementing various activities under the ASCC PoA. Resource mobilisation, however, should increasingly be viewed as a process of mobilising national, regional and external resources -- intellectual, technical and financial -- in support of ASEAN priorities.

20. Finally, the ASEAN Foundation, with the full support of the Member Countries, should play a more active role in supporting the implementation of the ASCC PoA. Activities where the ASEAN Foundation could play an active role include: promoting access to ICT resources of differently advantaged groups (youth, women, persons with disabilities, and rural communities); promoting ASEAN awareness through language training and mass media; and youth exchange activities (such as through volunteer programmes and youth camps) with the view to facilitating greater awareness among ASEAN youth of the region's vision of a cohesive community of caring societies.

21. To realise the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community by 2020, ASEAN shall endeavour to work towards the implementation of the areas of activities in the following Appendix. It is acknowledged that some of these activities are already ongoing and at various stages of implementation. Additional activities could also be implemented in the future. ASEAN will make every effort to promptly carry out activities, which gain consensus support.