



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

ASEAN Community 2025 — Towards Truly Inclusive Economic Development

By *Tamara Nair*

ASEAN's aspirations to create a highly cohesive and integrated economic region are outlined in its ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint, which remains the primary multilateral project dealing with economic cooperation in the region. First adopted in 2015, the blueprint has faced significant deterrents and challenges, the most primary one being the COVID-19 pandemic, which has created a need for revisiting and even revising certain policies.

The 2025 Blueprint builds on the achievements of its earlier counterpart, with a stronger emphasis on sustainable development, e-commerce, and digital transformation. The five key pillars of the [ASEAN Economic Community Vision 2025](#) outline a desire for:

A highly integrated and cohesive economy, which incorporates an increase in intra-ASEAN trade; a **competitive, dynamic ASEAN**, focusing on establishing a competitive and resilient economic environment; **enhanced connectivity and sectoral cooperation**, which includes but is not limited to, connectivity across transport networks, E-commerce, and information technology; a **resilient, inclusive, people-centred, and people-oriented ASEAN**, focusing on making businesses more resilient and competitive, and finally, a **global ASEAN**, which outlines the Blueprint's visions to place ASEAN as a prominent global player, integrated into the global economy and actively participating in international economic dialogues.

With a [market size of \\$2.3 trillion and 600 million people](#), AEC aims to achieve a single incorporated market through the process of [regional economic integration](#). Although admirable in its vision and targeted in its approach, there are key areas of

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concern that need to be addressed. At the forefront is the risk of unequal distribution of wealth. With development gaps wide between member states and for states to have a greater propensity to be introverted than to have a regional outlook, integration will require more than bold statements or grand plans.

A large part of realising ASEAN's economic vision will rest on how far member states commit to the shared goals beyond national development. There is also a need for greater investment in human capital. Upskilling labour will require member states to provide training and capacity-building opportunities to lessen the labour development gaps. Included in this is the broadening of digital skills as outlined in the [ASEAN Digital Integration Framework](#). This would be especially potent for digital literacy and the use of Artificial Intelligence or AI in various sectors including in Education and in Manufacturing. Such action will indicate a genuine investment in AEC's vision for the region's economic development.

It is equally important that we bring to the forefront the negligible discussion on human rights within the AEC, including labour rights and women's economic rights. Development gaps and inequalities cannot be brought down when there are varying, uneven, or even non-existent strategies that look at labour rights, women's rights and the rights of certain communities, including rural communities in the region. For example, the aspiration for greater digital access and transformation will have to consider wide connectivity and digital accessibility. Technology and innovation do not necessarily have deep inroads into all member states. While [steps are being taken](#) to increase connectivity, the speed and commitment to this has to match global changes if the region is to 'keep up' and be plugged in to global infrastructure and networks.

With sustainable production and consumption as key objectives, all three of the ASEAN communities [together with the AEC, the ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC) and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC)] need to strongly consider the integration and coordination of activities under their respective aegides. For [example](#), where the environment and disaster management are handled by the ASCC, industries like energy and agriculture, which contribute higher emissions, directly affecting the environment and climate, are managed by the AEC. An important step would be to integrate the frameworks of different sectors/actors of ASEAN as well and remove siloed mentalities. If one sector focuses on humanitarian relief and disaster management in the light of new climate scenarios without considering high emission industries that contribute to climate change in another, how effective would strategies in each respective sector be? Yet another example is about creating a more integrated digital ecosystem. If what is happening in the socio-cultural space is not understood by those creating economic and security networks in digital space to advance economic integration, attempts to reach wider mar-

kets and greater connectivity will be marred by inherent inequalities of access, education, freedom, and security. For any of these strategies to be effective, there needs to be cross-sectoral discussions to ensure that all 'blind spots' are addressed. This is vital for regional economic development and growth.

ASEAN's competitive strength lies in the ['extent of its regional connectivity'](#): physical connectivity, institutional connectivity, and people-to-people connectivity. This is also what provides the region with leverage, especially when faced with regional or global powers. To realise the goals outlined in ASEAN's vision 2025, member states must invest more in it, including a greater internalisation of sustainability and resilience across all of ASEAN's sectors and approaches. At the end of the day, it must not be us who unwittingly obstruct *our* aims in accomplishing what is stated in *our* vision for *our* future.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Seree Nonthasoot. 2017. Humane Aspects of the People-Centred, People-Oriented ASEAN Economic Community. In: Global Megatrends: Implications for the ASEAN Economic Community. The ASEAN Secretariat, pp. 61-97.

Simon S.C. Tay, Chen Chen Lee, and Lau Xin Yi. 2017. ASEAN Approaches to Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development: Cooperating across Borders, Sectors, and Pillars of Regional Community. In: Global Megatrends: Implications for the ASEAN Economic Community. The ASEAN Secretariat, pp. 98-122.

Evgeny A. Kanaev, Sofia M. Akhmanava, and Ekaterina A. Vaseneva. 2020. Achieving the Vision of the ASEAN Economic Community –2025: The Role of ASEAN Business Advisory Council. ЮГО-ВОСТОЧНАЯ АЗИЯ: АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ РАЗВИТИЯ. Vol. 1, No.1 (46), pp. 13-28.

ASEAN. 2020. ASEAN Digital Integration Framework. ASEAN.

CLIMATE CHANGE



NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Trump victory is a major setback for climate action, experts say

The US president-elect is a known climate sceptic who has called efforts to boost green energy a "scam". But with renewable energy gaining a strong foothold in the US and popular support for wind and solar, Trump's efforts to ramp up oil and gas instead may be less effective.

Matt McGrath

BBC | 7 November 2024

Brazil announces new climate change pledge ahead of COP29 summit

Brazil's new target aims to reduce emissions by 59% to 67% by 2035, as compared to 2005, up from the previous target of a 53% reduction by 2030.

Reuters

10 November 2024

Climate change poses multiple risks for banks

Climate change poses risks to banks on several levels: it can directly impact their finances, tarnish their image and land them in the courtroom.

The Business Times

10 November 2024

As Australia puts more focus on climate change, New Zealand is accused of pulling back

The Australian government legislated higher emissions reductions targets, introduced a "safeguard mechanism" that would act as a carbon cap for the country's biggest emitters and negotiated a vehicle efficiency standard aimed at disincentivising the use of high-polluting cars. On the other hand, the New Zealand government aims to reverse a ban on offshore oil and gas exploration, double mineral exports by 2035 and establish a "fast track" for major development projects that bypasses environmental approvals and conservation concerns.

Mahalia Dobson

NBC News | 10 November 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Asia-Pacific climate report 2024: Catalyzing climate finance and policy solutions

Private sector capital is essential to meet vast climate finance needs. Emerging business opportunities boosted by climate policies and financial market development facilitate the scale-up of private climate capital. Greater climate-related risks and the associated shifts in the regulatory landscape are pushing significantly more private capital into climate-aligned investments. However, uncertainty and misaligned climate policies weaken the incentives for private climate investment.

Asian Development Bank

2024

No escape – On the frontlines of climate change, conflict and forced displacement

The risks for displaced people and their hosts will grow significantly given an increase in climate-related hazards in the coming decades. As climate shocks and stresses impact the homelands and destinations of forcibly displaced people, they increasingly find themselves with no escape route.

UNHCR

2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

2024 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 29)

Themed, 'In Solidarity for a Green World,' Azerbaijan identified two mutually reinforcing pillars, namely enhancing ambition and enabling action, as the vision of its COP29 Presidency.

Baku, Azerbaijan

11 - 22 November 2024

ENERGY SECURITY



NEWS & COMMENTARIES

In drive to meet Southeast Asia's growing energy needs, nuclear is not the only option

Even without looking into nuclear energy, countries in Southeast Asia that are deploying less renewable energy due to constraints could potentially tap their more resources-endowed neighbours to decarbonise their power sector, should there be a robust infrastructure supporting it.

Taufiq Zalizan and Nikki Yeo

Channel News Asia | 18 October 2024

US agrees to help Indonesia develop small nuclear reactor

Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto has secured his American counterpart Joe Biden's support to speed up the feasibility study on the development of a small nuclear reactor in Indonesia.

Jayanty Nada Shofa

Jakarta Globe | 13 November 2024

COP29: Energy transition must not trigger a 'stampede of greed' that crushes the poor

Climate talks at COP29 in Baku turned to the pressing issue of how to manage the demand for minerals essential to producing electric vehicles and solar panels without triggering a "stampede of greed" that exploits local communities and crushes the poor.

UN News

13 November 2024

No economic case for LNG in the Philippine energy sector

Aside from the economic costs, fossil gas promises long-lasting harms from worse climate and environmental degradation. Proponents tout LNG as a "cleaner" alternative to coal, yet emissions from gas are estimated to be 33 times more potent than coal over a 20-year period.

Cielo Magno

The Philippine Star | 14 November 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

World energy transitions outlook 2024

The 2024 Outlook provides an overview of progress by tracking implementation and gaps across all energy sectors, and identifies priority areas and actions based on available technologies that must be realised by 2030 to achieve net zero emissions by mid-century.

IRENA

2024

Phasing out coal power in two major Southeast Asian thermal coal economies: Indonesia and Vietnam

This paper finds that prioritising renewable energy growth, as well as halting the construction of new coal plants, would be the most practical and viable way forward for both countries rather than an oversized early focus on coal plant closures.

Thang Nam Do and Paul Burke

Energy for Sustainable Development, Vol. 80 | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

International Conference on Stakeholder Engagement for Nuclear Power Programmes

The conference will provide a global platform to exchange good practices, experiences, challenges and lessons learned related to stakeholder engagement for nuclear power programmes.

Vienna, Austria

Deadline for Abstract Submission 2 December 2024

FOOD SECURITY



NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Food security beyond borders: Securing ASEAN's food supply chains

As ASEAN reaches the end point of its 2016-25 blueprint, it is pertinent to ask how regional trade and economic integration can shape ASEAN food security discussions post-2025, and the steps needed to shift the focus from traditional country-level food security to a truly integrated regional approach centred on interlinked food supply chain security.

Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros and Paul Teng

RSIS Commentaries | 5 November 2024

COP29: FAO says agrifood systems transformation holds solutions for the climate crisis

The only way to reduce carbon emissions and restore nature on the path to limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius is to transform our agrifood systems, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), QU Dongyu, today told the UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan.

UN FAO

12 November 2024

Kuwait: Digital stockpile program reinforces food security, ensures sustainability

Kuwait is seeking to establish a digital system which links multiple food cooperatives, thus having a central database on stockpiles or "digital stockpiles." This was seen as a key step towards more transparent and efficient management of strategic food stockpiles.

Omar Al-Loughani

Kuwait News Agency | 13 November 2024

Indonesia, US to partner on ai-driven sustainable agriculture

Indonesia's new President, Prabowo Subianto met with his American counterpart, Joe Biden, to discuss how to increase access to safe and nutritious food at all times, while protecting the environment. They agreed to promote research collaboration at the nexus of artificial intelligence (AI) and sustainable farming practices, including through the 2nd Indonesia-US Digital Technology Dialogue on Agriculture.

Jayanty Nada Shofa

Jakarta Globe | 13 November 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Demystifying food systems transformation: A review of the state of the field

Given the myriad ways of understanding food systems transformation, this article presents an overview and synthesis of the scholarly literature in English and Spanish anchored on food systems change in the past three decades to shed light on how the theory and literature landscape has evolved, and how concepts are understood.

Silvana Juri, Naomi Terry and Laura M. Pereira

Ecology & Society

2024

The economics of food systems transformation

Our food systems — the way we produce, market, and consume food — are part of the political, social, economic, ecological, and cultural fabric of our communities. This report identifies the elements of what a transformation from today's food systems to an inclusive, health-enhancing and environmentally sustainable global food system entails, from biophysical and economic viewpoints.

Ruggeri Laderchi, C., et al., Global Policy Report

Food System Economics Commission (FSEC) | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Decarbonizing food value chains: Transformative financing for rice, dairy, & beef sectors to reduce methane

The event explored transformative strategies in rice, dairy & beef sectors to reduce methane emissions, bringing together methane reduction experts, think tanks & key government personnel to focus on market mechanisms, value chain mitigation, success stories and future collaborative approaches.

Recorded Meeting

13 November 2024



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Singapore launches scheme to rate medical devices based on cyber-security provisions

Singapore launched a new voluntary scheme to rate medical devices' cybersecurity standards, aiming to prevent data breaches. TIIM Healthcare's aiTriage tool was among the first assessed. Applications are now open.

Lee Li Ying

The Straits Times | 16 October 2024

75th session of the Regional Committee: Briefing session on the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body/Pandemic Agreement

WHO's Member States are negotiating a new Pandemic Agreement to enhance global pandemic preparedness and equity in access to healthcare. An update on the progress was presented at a regional meeting by INB Vice-Chair Ms. Fleur Davies.

World Health Organization

24 October 2024

WHO and partners activate Global Health Emergency Corps for the first time in response to the mpox outbreak

In October 2024, WHO activated the Global Health Emergency Corps (GHEC) to combat mpox outbreaks, deploying experts to 18 African countries, focusing on rapid response, coordination, and capacity-building.

World Health Organization

29 October 2024

Ransomware attacks on healthcare sector 'pose a direct and systemic risk to global public health and security', executive tells Security Council

WHO Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus warned that ransomware attacks on healthcare systems pose life-threatening risks, urging international collaboration to bolster cybersecurity, protect digital health infrastructure, and prevent severe disruptions, such as those seen in Ireland and the Czech Republic.

United Nations

8 November 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATION

The EU Artificial Intelligence Act (2024): Implications for healthcare

The EU AI Act, effective August 2024, establishes comprehensive rules for AI systems, significantly impacting healthcare by setting legal obligations for developers, healthcare professionals, and authorities. It emphasises the need for additional guidelines to address healthcare's specific challenges during the implementation phase.

Kolfschooten, H. and Oirschot, J.

Health Policy, Volume 149 | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Webinar on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Vaccine Research & Development

The webinar will explore how artificial intelligence is revolutionising vaccine development. It will highlight the role of AI in accelerating mRNA vaccine antigen design and clinical trials, demonstrating how these technologies have enabled rapid development—from viral sequence to approved product in under a year. Additionally, the webinar will examine how generative AI is set to transform vaccine development.

Webinar

21 November 2024

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF



Photo Credit: DFID - UK Department for International Development via Flickr.com/Creative Commons

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Behind the scenes: ‘The new normal’ means the job of getting ready for disaster never ends

As historic floods sweep across Europe and Central Asia, preparing for multiple, overlapping crisis will become more important in the future. There is therefore a need for ‘sustainable preparedness’, to scale up their own institutional arrangements.

International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

16 October 2024

TikTok launches in-app feature to respond disaster in Nepal

Leveraging its broad user base and wide platform, TikTok has launched an in-app feature in response to Nepal’s devastating disasters. In particular, it will help ensure users searching for information on disasters will be led to the official government website for more accurate information.

The Rising Nepal

21 October 2024

What could Trump 2.0 mean for humanitarian response?

Considering the significant role the US plays in humanitarian aid, volatile swings in funding as a result of the Trump presidency is likely to severely affect key UN agencies and international aid groups, possibly further politicising international aid.

Irwin Loy

The New Humanitarian | 7 November 2024

Who holds a hose? Climate change as a national security risk in Australian federalism

With climate change widely accepted as a national security risk in Australia, the question on how the country manages disasters and climate change remains. There needs to be a discussion as to the role the Commonwealth government can play in environment management.

Danielle Ireland-Piper

The Interpreter | 14 November 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Operationalising the Quad: Maritime security and climate change in the Indo-Pacific

The Quad should be working towards enhanced cooperation on maritime security and climate change. This will help streamline Quad programs to focus on achievable and inclusive initiatives that strengthen Indo-Pacific security.

United States Studies Centre

2024

Independent review of national natural disaster governance arrangements

This report examines the national disaster governance arrangements in Australia. It highlights the major changes that need to be done to grapple with the increasing size, intensity, cost and complexity of climate-fuelled natural disasters.

National Emergency Management Agency

2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Doing better before and after climate-related disasters

Although climate disasters are increasing, Australians were less prepared for them than in the previous 12 months and fewer than one in 10 people had a written emergency plan. Meanwhile, research from Melbourne University suggests that climate-related disasters have significant long-term negative impacts, with those in insecure housing facing the greatest hardships of all.

Recorded Audio

2024

MIGRATION



Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Health security of low-wage migrant workers post-COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of addressing the welfare of low-wage migrant workers. This includes improving their working and living conditions, better access to healthcare, and more social interactions with local communities.

Danielle Lynn Goh

RSIS Commentary | 30 October 2024

Voters were fed up over immigration. They voted for Trump.

The surge of migration at the southern border, reached record levels during the Biden administration, and has in turn hardened many Americans' views on immigration. While Republican voters had the biggest shifts, Democrats and independents have moved to the right.

Miriam Jordan

The New York Times | 6 November 2024

COP29: Will India finally address climate migration?

India faces the issue of climate-induced migration on the back of extreme weather events such as sweltering heat, droughts and flooding. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) 2022 report showed that India has the third highest number of internal displacements due to disasters. However, there is a scarcity of concrete policies in place to address the issue.

Midhat Fatimah

DW | 8 November 2024

Migrants risk losing right to work, stay

In Thailand, new registration and work permit renewal requirements have reportedly led to large numbers of migrant workers missing the deadline and losing their legal status. Employers and migrant workers are bemoaning the complicated process, which involves multiple fees.

Chairith Yonpiam

Bangkok Post | 8 November 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

ASEAN migration outlook second edition

This publication unpacks the climate-migration nexus in Southeast Asia, and seeks to identify ways to better integrate migration and labour mobility policies with policies addressing climate in disaster risk reduction, climate change resilience and decarbonisation.

ASEAN

2024

Engaging local communities for more effective climate mobility programming

Climate change does not affect all communities in the same way. Localisation means designing solutions to prevent displacement and support safe migration in ways that accounts for a specific community's ability to recover, rebuild and adapt. This issue explores the importance of localisation in climate migration solutions.

Migration Policy Institute

2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

US Immigration Policy: Separating fact from fiction

This webinar organised by the Governance Studies at Brookings, discusses why southern border immigration in the US has become such a hot button issue, the political campaigns messaging on it, facts on the ground and the possibilities in addressing southern border migration.

Recorded Webinar

2024