PARTNERING WITH THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN)

ASEAN is a dynamic region with a population of 650 million, collectively representing the fifth-largest global economy. As one of the fastest growing regional economies in the world, the 10 member states\(^1\) of ASEAN represent an economy of more than $3 trillion and an enormous market for U.S. products. Nearly 42,000 U.S. companies export to Southeast Asia, supporting 600,000 U.S. jobs.

As part of the United States strategic approach to the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) prioritizes its cooperation with ASEAN. Partnering with ASEAN fosters regional economic growth, strengthens public health security, and reduces transboundary threats – such as trafficking in persons, global climate change and illegal wildlife trade. In our partnership with ASEAN, USAID promotes prosperity and security through economic inclusion, women’s empowerment, and good governance.

OUR WORK

USAID partners with ASEAN to promote unity, consensus-building, and solidarity to bolster ASEAN’s credibility, coordination, and institutional capacity to create policies and frameworks to implement endorsed commitments at the national-level across ASEAN member states. This partnership was further cemented in 2020, when USAID and ASEAN signed the first ever, five-year, $50 million Regional Development Cooperation Agreement to support regional challenges, economic integration, and rule of law to shape policies that influence national sectoral approaches.

As an integral element of the United States’ whole-of-government engagement with ASEAN, USAID collaborates closely with the Department of State, U.S. Trade Representative, Department of Commerce, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and the U.S. Department of Labor and their ASEAN counterparts. The U.S. government also partners with the U.S. private sector on key ASEAN initiatives.

USAID - ASEAN JOINT COOPERATION ACTIVITIES

Combating Trafficking in Persons: Traffickers are often linked to international criminal networks that take advantage of weak laws, lack of law enforcement, porous borders, and corrupt officials. USAID works with ASEAN transnational crime and human rights officials to execute regional guidelines tailored for national-level implementation to harmonize

\(^1\) Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.
standards for the treatment of victims of trafficking, in accordance with the 2015 ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

**Advancing Economic Integration:** USAID’s support for the ASEAN Single Window, a flagship trade facilitation initiative, spans over a decade. The electronic data exchange platform streamlines customs clearance procedures and reduces costs for traders. Together with the U.S. Customs Border Protection, USAID is working toward linking the ASW with U.S. customs information systems to facilitate U.S.-ASEAN trade. Electronic exchange of customs information will reduce trans-Pacific costs and expand U.S.-ASEAN trade (over $300 billion in 2020).

**Combating Illegal Fishing:** A USAID-designed electronic catch traceability system tracks illegally traded species and helps ASEAN suppliers meet E.U. and U.S. market traceability requirements. USAID also sponsored a Regional Study on Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labor in the Fishing Industry to inform future ASEAN and partner actions.

**Digital Connectivity:** USAID supports ASEAN’s efforts to enhance regional internet connectivity and accessibility while adopting approaches that strengthen cybersecurity and digital finance and governance. USAID helped ASEAN design its Digital Integration Framework, as well as a tool called the ASEAN Digital Integration Index to measure progress on its implementation.

**Gender Mainstreaming:** Through a coalition of stakeholders to strengthen gender responsive policies within the ASEAN Economic Community, USAID supports the cultivation of a new entrepreneurial ecosystem. USAID sponsored members of the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network to attend an enterprise exposition hosted by Taiwan, supported the organization of the ASEAN Women CEO Summit, and provided a loan guarantee which made it possible for women-owned small and medium green-enterprises to access financing raised through the Women’s Livelihood Bond II. USAID also supported ASEAN’s regional study on Women, Peace and Security, which will inform its next steps in the implementation of ASEAN commitments to promote women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

**Strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction and Management and Health System Coordination:** To build ASEAN’s capacity for coordinated response to natural disasters, USAID partnered with Japan to fund the installation of a disaster monitoring and response system at the ASEAN Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance. The COVID pandemic put a new spotlight on the importance of coordinating response to public health emergencies. Currently, USAID is working with ASEAN to develop a legal framework that will serve as the basis for an ASEAN Public Health Emergency Coordination System (APHECS). Once endorsed, ASEAN member states will establish mechanisms and standard operating procedures for joint action and information-sharing on public health emergencies in the region.

**Combating Trafficking in Wildlife:** Illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products harms local ASEAN communities. USAID partnered with ASEAN to develop the ASEAN Guidelines for Detecting and Preventing Wildlife Trafficking which highlights inter-country data sharing, joint-operation and policy making processes.

**Promoting Science, Technology, and Innovation:** USAID helps ASEAN use science-based, data-driven decision making in policy making. USAID-supported activities such as the Science Prize for Women and the Science and Technology Policy Fellows program advance these efforts.

**Elevating Youth Engagement:** USAID partners with ASEAN to raise youth awareness and strengthen a shared ASEAN identity. The ASEAN Youth Social Journalism contest encourages youth to take action on pressing issues, promote creative solutions, and to champion good governance and economic growth.

**Promoting Renewable Energy:** Together with the ASEAN Centre for Energy and U.S.-ASEAN Business Council, a USAID-funded study on energy digitalization helped mobilize investment for grid-connected renewable energy.

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