GALVANIZING A WHOLE-OF-ASEAN EFFORT FOR GENDER EQUALITY

The United States, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) supports the efforts of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states to advance gender equality and the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

Recent decades have shown economic development, government measures, and the efforts of civil society have led to significant improvements in reproductive health, narrowing gender gaps in education and increasing women’s labor force participation and entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia. However, challenges persist, including gender-based violence and discrimination, limited women’s leadership and representation in decision-making, and unequal economic and employment conditions. Moreover, there are well-founded concerns of backsliding due to the unequal burden of the COVID-19 crisis faced by women, particularly those in underserved communities.

In response, ASEAN has committed to advancing gender equality and mainstreaming, including through the Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN and the ASEAN Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and Sustainable Development Goals, both adopted in 2017. Translating these commitments into reality remains an ambition underscored by the recent ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework, which recognizes the pandemic’s profound socio-economic and disproportionate gendered impacts. Leading the charge is the ASEAN Committee for Women (ACW) and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), in coordination with the rest of the ASEAN Community, and supported by ASEAN partners, such as the U.S. government and UN Women.
ASEAN - USAID PARTNERSHIP FOR REGIONAL OPTIMIZATION WITHIN THE POLITICAL - SECURITY AND SOCIO - CULTURAL COMMUNITIES (PROSPECT)

The United States, through the USAID-led PROSPECT project, supports ASEAN to better respond to transnational challenges—including non-traditional security threats—and promotes sustainable, rules-based and inclusive growth by expanding rights and opportunities for women, youth, and other marginalized groups across Southeast Asia. USAID assistance emphasizes cross-sectoral, collaborative approaches across ASEAN institutions, including civil society engagement. For example, USAID collaborates with ASEAN to help institutionalize gender mainstreaming across the three pillars of the ASEAN Community and advance gender equality in all ASEAN sectoral bodies and member states. Additionally, alongside UN Women and other partners, USAID helps take stock of, and make progress toward, regional implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

MAINSTREAMING GENDER ACROSS THE ASEAN COMMUNITY

In 2019, USAID began supporting a joint ACW-ACWC effort to establish a Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework to help ASEAN identify its gender equality goals, necessary resources, and institutional support structures. USAID supported data collection and stakeholder consultations to inform development of the Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework launched in August 2021.

ADVANCING WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY REGIONAL PLAN OF ACTION

Since 2019, USAID and UN Women have been jointly supporting the ASEAN Secretariat, ACW and the ACWC to advance the tenets of the Joint Statement with the development of a comprehensive regional study on the current state of implementation of the WPS agenda in ASEAN. The purpose of the study is to set a baseline for ASEAN to chart its progress on the WPS agenda and serve as baseline evidence to inform next steps toward actively implementing the WPS agenda.

RESULTS TO DATE

- Launched the ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security on International Women’s Day, March 8th, 2021, convening over 150 representatives from ASEAN entities across the Political-Security, Economic, and Socio-Cultural pillars, the U.S. Government, UN Women, and other development partners. ASEAN member state representatives pledged to work toward the formulation of a multisectoral Regional Plan of Action to advance the WPS agenda.
- Supported ASEAN to develop a whole-of-ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework to enhance ASEAN’s commitment, capacity, and culture in relation to gender and inclusion and lay the groundwork for longer-term structural changes that ensure every political, economic, and societal issue of the ASEAN Community is addressed with gender equity in mind.

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