GALVANIZING A WHOLE-OF-ASEAN EFFORT FOR GENDER EQUALITY

The United States government and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) work together toward shared gender equality goals.

Recent decades have shown economic development, government measures, and the efforts of civil society lead to significant gains in reproductive health, women’s labor force participation and entrepreneurship, and a narrowing gender gap in education in Southeast Asia. However, challenges remain. Gender-based violence and discrimination, limited women’s leadership and representation in decision-making, and unequal economic opportunities persist. Moreover, there are widespread concerns of backsliding due to the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

Women’s full and equitable participation in all aspects of public life is an essential characteristic of secure, peaceful and thriving societies. Recognizing this fact, the ASEAN Committee for Women (ACW) and ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) are leading ASEAN’s progress toward gender equality commitments with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

ASEAN-USAID PARTNERSHIP FOR REGIONAL OPTIMIZATION WITHIN THE POLITICAL-SECURITY AND SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITIES (PROSPECT)

The United States, through PROSPECT, partners with ASEAN to enhance collective capacity to address transnational challenges to human security and expanding rights and opportunities for women and youth for a more connected, prosperous, secure and resilient region. Since 2019, PROSPECT has worked with ASEAN, UN Women and others to advance gender equality across Southeast Asia through initiatives focused on gender mainstreaming and regional implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

MAINSTREAMING GENDER ACROSS THE ASEAN COMMUNITY

In line with the ASEAN Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and Sustainable Development Goals (2017), USAID supports a joint ACW-ACWC initiative to establish and implement a Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework (GMSF) to help ASEAN move forward its gender equality goals, necessary resources, and institutional support structures.
ADVANCING WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY REGIONAL PLAN OF ACTION

USAID and UN Women work with the ASEAN Secretariat, ACW, and the ACWC to advance the vision of the Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN (2017) and reinforce women’s meaningful participation and leadership in dialogue, deliberation and decision-making related to security challenges, conflict resolution, and sustainable peacebuilding.

“The Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework marks the culmination of years of effort on the part of ASEAN and the United States to move from gender policy commitments to implementation and the meaningful integration of gender equality across the ASEAN Community… it could not have come at a more critical time.” – Jennifer Klein, Executive Director & Co-chair of the White House Gender Policy Council, delivering opening remarks at the launch of the GMSF in January 2022.

RESULTS TO DATE

- With USAID assistance, the ACW and ACWC convened key stakeholders from across the ASEAN Community at the first ASEAN Regional Symposium on Women, Peace and Security and launch of the ASEAN Women’s Peace Registry in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- PROSPECT-supported research and regional exchange led to the ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security in 2021, which set a baseline on the current state of implementation of the WPS agenda regionally and provided recommendations for next steps, including the development of a multisectoral Regional Plan of Action on WPS, which the U.S. is supporting in 2022.
- USAID technical assistance resulted in a whole-of-ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework to enhance ASEAN’s commitment, capacity and culture in relation to gender and inclusion. Follow-on support from PROSPECT in 2022 will help lay the groundwork for longer-term structural changes to enhance women’s participation and leadership, entrepreneurship and economic security, and counter systemic bias that limits rights and opportunities on the basis of gender.
- Over 100 women received USAID-supported training to strengthen their skillset, leadership, and professional advancement across a range of regional development challenges including protection and assistance for victim-survivors of human trafficking, countering violent extremism and promoting tolerance, and strategic communications and social awareness campaigns.

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