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SUPPORTING BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND RESILIENCY FOR ASEAN SMEs

BACKGROUND

The United States is providing small and medium enterprises in Southeast Asia with the skills and tools needed to adapt and thrive following the COVID-19 pandemic. Small (including micro), and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent more than 97% of firms and between 50-90% of total employment across Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. Equipping SMEs for success is critical to economic stability, paving the way for a more peaceful, secure region.

The United States has long recognized that supporting SMEs, the backbone of ASEAN country economies, can help build economies that are more resilient and prosperous. In 2011, the US-ASEAN Business Council (US-ABC) established a capacity-building program to empower ASEAN SMEs in response to a request by the ASEAN Economic Ministers. In 2014, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the US-ABC launched the US-ASEAN Business Alliance for Competitive Small and Medium Enterprises (Business Alliance).

To reach more SMEs, the Business Alliance launched an online training platform in 2016 called the ASEAN SME Academy that provides free, centralized, online access to global, regional, and country-specific business and digital training resources for ASEAN SMEs. In 2018, the SME Academy was handed over to the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (ACCMSME) with support from the Philippines Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Philippines Trade and Training Centre (PTTC), and the US-ASEAN Business Council. In 2022, USAID through the ASEAN-USAID Inclusive Growth in ASEAN through Innovation, Trade, and E-Commerce (IGNITE) project alongside US-ABC, Philippines and ASEAN partners launched the revamped website called the ASEAN SME Academy 2.0.

GOALS

MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

The ASEAN-USAID IGNITE project provided significant technical support during 2022 to revamp the SME Academy website to enhance online training materials to assist SMEs overcome the post-pandemic economic downturn. ASEAN-USAID IGNITE project created a new set of courses and related learning materials, and these resources are now available online under the Business Continuity and Resilience Tab (“BCR Tab”) of the ASEAN SME Academy website.

A NEW RESOURCE FOR SMEs – THE BCR TAB

Launched by ASEAN on May 23, 2023 in partnership with USAID and US-ABC, the BCR Tab is the result of a systematic effort by the ASEAN-USAID IGNITE project to survey SMEs dealing with the economic challenges to design the most useful resources for economic recovery. The four new courses contained within the BCR Tab target business continuity and resiliency and include: Transforming Mindsets and Teams; Managing Customers Digitally; MSME Growth Engine; and Future-proofing Your Business. Translations of course offerings in Bahasa Indonesia, Thai, and Vietnamese are underway and will be available for public release later in 2023.

As part of the revamped [ASEAN SME Academy](#) online platform, the [BCR Tab](#) is a one-stop webpage containing courses for SMEs that focus on building skills and capacity to learn and adapt digital tools to operate effectively through economic shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic. The courses and learning materials are provided for free to micro and small businesses, thanks to contributions by international organizations, such as the International Labor Organization and US-ABC [member companies](#). BCR Tab users can access e-learning modules, webinars, communities of practice, and curated tools to learn practical techniques that can help businesses expand and are especially relevant for COVID-19 economic recovery and digital transformation.

“The United States is proud to continue our partnership with ASEAN and US-ABC to help small businesses grow, expand and thrive,” said Dr. Steve G. Olive, Mission Director for the USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia. “The USAID-supported Business Continuity and Resiliency Tab webpage offers a fresh suite of online ASEAN SME Academy courses that represents a timely response to the challenges faced by small businesses in a rapidly changing, increasingly digital world.”

KEY RESULTS

The SME Academy exemplifies a successful partnership between the United States, ASEAN, and the U.S. private sector. For over seven years, SMEs across ASEAN benefit from online access to courses and resources on marketing, finance, human resources, management, trade and logistics, operations, and technology from a host of leading U.S. companies. Here are key indicators for the SME Academy 2.0 as of April 2023:¹

- Boasts over 3,452 active users (376% increase from one year ago)
- Attracts more than 13,500 visitors to view the website resources
- Facilitates access to skills and resources for SMEs in all ASEAN member states and across 15 sectors
- Harnesses private sector partnerships with 21 companies to offer 110 courses.

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¹ Figures are quoted by US-ASEAN Business Council for the SME Academy. https://www.usasean.org/sites/default/files/uploads/SME/us-asean_factsheet_-_asean_sme_academy_sme_program_updated_as_of_jan_2023.pdf.