



MEKONG
INSTITUTE

ASEAN
PRIZE



ASEAN YOUTH CONVERGENCE

2024

May 13 & 19-22, 2024 | Online & Vientiane, Lao PDR

COMPLETION REPORT

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EVENT OVERVIEW

BACKGROUND

The ASEAN youth constitutes a third of the region's population and is projected to peak at over 220 million by 2038. As the region's future leaders, change-makers, innovators, and influencers, they represent the region's asset and hope for the future.

Despite their potential, limited engagement and leadership opportunities hinder their contribution to addressing regional issues. This deficiency stems from several factors, including limited opportunities for youth to showcase their potential and contribute meaningfully to policy discussions and decision-making processes. Additionally, there is a sense of disconnection between youth and leaders, hindering collaboration and consensus-building efforts.

The ASEAN Youth Convergence (AYC) 2024 aimed to address this disconnect by showcasing the achievements of ASEAN Prize Recipients (APRs) to inspire youth delegates. By fostering greater youth participation, AYC aligns with ASEAN's goal of unity and cooperation, contributing to the implementation of the ASEAN Work Plan on Youth 2021 – 2025.

AYC brought together APRs and youth delegates from ASEAN Member States (AMS) to empower and elevate youth capacities in igniting the ASEAN spirit, advancing regional cooperation, and fostering sustainable and inclusive development.



THE ASEAN PRIZE

Established in 2018 during Singapore's ASEAN Chairmanship, the ASEAN Prize is an annual regional premier award to acknowledge the inspiring achievements of ASEAN citizens or ASEAN-based organizations with significant contributions toward advancing ASEAN community-building efforts. The Prize is envisioned to foster the ASEAN identity, promote the ASEAN spirit, and champion the ASEAN way.

To date, ASEC, as the administrator of the ASEAN Prize, has awarded this regional accolade to four (4) individuals and two (2) organizations within the ASEAN.

Read more at www.asean.org/asean-prize

AYC 2024 OBJECTIVES

Inspire Future Leaders: Showcase the exemplary journey, achievements, and advocacies of APRs, fostering inspiration and serving as benchmarks for youth leaders.

Promote Civic Engagement: Encourage youth to take action on issues that matter to their communities, contributing to transformative and meaningful change.

Foster Stakeholder Understanding: Provide participants with hands-on experience in understanding stakeholder dynamics, effective communication, and consensus-building.

THEMATIC AREAS

AYC 2024 put a spotlight on the rich experiences and expertise of the APRs, focusing on the following thematic areas:

Youth Leadership and Volunteerism

Women Empowerment

Regional Cooperation and Integration

THE ORGANIZERS



The Mekong Institute

Mekong Institute (MI), jointly owned and governed by the GMS countries, is an intergovernmental organization that deepens regional cooperation and integration through capacity development, dialogue, and advocacy for sustainable socioeconomic development and poverty alleviation in the GMS. MI is committed to becoming a center of excellence in human resource development, a think tank, and a convener for dialogue and collaboration.

MI strives to bring together stakeholders in pushing for development agendas on agriculture, trade and investment, and sustainable energy and environment. To cement holistic and meaningful impacts, MI covers various cross-cutting themes such as social inclusion and vulnerability, digital economy and innovation, and labor mobility.

MI strengthens synergies across GMS and Mekong-related cooperation frameworks. It serves as a co-creation and multistakeholder platform, fostering complementarity among regional cooperation mechanisms for sustained and more meaningful developmental impacts.

Learn more at www.mekonginstitute.org



The ASEAN Secretariat

The ASEAN Secretariat's (ASEC) basic function is to provide for greater efficiency in the coordination of ASEAN organs and for more effective implementation of ASEAN projects and activities.

The ASEAN Secretariat's vision is to be the nerve centre of a strong and confident ASEAN Community that is globally respected for acting in full compliance with its Charter and in the best interest of its people.

The ASEAN Secretariat's mission is to initiate, facilitate and coordinate ASEAN stakeholder collaboration in realizing the purposes and principles of ASEAN as reflected in the ASEAN Charter.

The ASEAN Secretariat was set up in February 1976 by the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN. It was then housed at the Department of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia in Jakarta. The existing ASEAN Secretariat at 70A Jalan Sisingamangaraja, Jakarta was established and officiated in 1981 by the then President of Indonesia, H.E. Soeharto.

Learn more at bit.ly/ASEANSec



THE ORGANIZING TEAM

MEKONG INSTITUTE



Anusara Tanpitak
Communications and
Knowledge Management
Manager



Natchaya Potiwat
General Service
Supervisor



Anna Leigh Anillo
Communications and
Knowledge Management
Coordinator



Eastword Manlises
Special Projects Support
Coordinator



Narathip Dahan
IT Officer



Thitipohn Rattanatraisri
Communications
Assistant

ASEAN SECRETARIAT



Lee Yoong Yoong
Director, Community
Affairs Directorate



Fitria Ruthi Maharani
Program Officer,
ASEAN Prize

VOLUNTEERS



Alex Wen Jie Lew
Singapore



Nway Aung
Myanmar

THE SPEAKERS



MS. ANNA OPOSA

Executive Director and Chief Mermaid, Save Philippine Seas

Anna has been recognized locally and internationally for her work in environmental conservation and youth development. She leads Save Philippine Seas, a movement to conserve coastal and marine resources by empowering "seaitizens" towards collective action and behavior change.



MR. HAJI MUHAMAD IQBAL FAKHRI BIN HAJI DAMIT

Founder
Hand4Hand Brunei
APR 2022

Iqbal Damit is a youth advocate and community leader from Brunei Darussalam. He has actively promoted inclusive community-based development and intensified regional cooperation towards a resilient ASEAN Community.



MADAM NGUYEN THI TUYET MINH

Founder of WeLead
Founding Member & The First Chairwoman of ASEAN Women Entrepreneur Network (AWEN)
APR 2023

Madam Minh is a distinguished figure from Viet Nam championing women's economic advancement. For decades, Madam Minh has advocated for key regional initiatives and provided policy advisory for the region's business ecosystem, aligning with her aspiration to achieve a sustainable economy and an inclusive community.



APR 2021

MR. SURIYAN VICHITLEKARN

Executive Director
Mekong Institute

Mr. Suriyan, as MI's Executive Director, received the ASEAN Prize in 2021 in behalf of the institute.

As one of the longest running intergovernmental organizations in the GMS, MI is dedicated to building a better subregion focusing on human resource and capacity development to enhance regional cooperation and integration.

The Application Process

The AYC selection process was designed to ensure a diverse and balanced representation of participants in terms of age, gender, and educational and professional background. The selection process adhered to the following mechanics:

- Each of the AMS, including Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam, was allotted a maximum of three (3) representatives.
- Lao PDR, as the host country, was allotted four (4) representatives.
- Brunei Darussalam was allotted two (2) representatives.

Aiming for a balanced participation, the selection process tried to get one representative from each of the following age groups per country:

- 19 to 23 years old – Undergraduate students
- 24 to 29 years old – Professionals under 30
- 30 to 35 years old – Professionals 30 and up; First-time or first-line managers



The call for applications was launched on April 1, 2024, and remained open until April 7, 2024. In addition to nationality and age, the minimum qualifications included the following:

- Either a full-time undergraduate student or a full-time professional
- Demonstrable interest or passion in at least one of the following themes: **regional cooperation, youth leadership and volunteerism, or women empowerment**
- Readiness to travel to Vientiane, Lao PDR from May 19 to 22, 2024
- Commitment to attend a pre-departure online meeting on May 13, 2024
- Commitment to participate in other pre-departure activities, preparations, and post-event activities

The Selection Process

The Organizing Team established a selection committee comprised of five members to undertake the participant selection process for the AYC. Each committee member was assigned a particular set of applicants grouped according to their country of origin. They were responsible for screening the applications based on the approved mechanics and criteria. A screening and scoring tool was developed and employed to record the points assigned to each applicant according to the criteria.

The screening process involved several stages, which included the following:

1. Pre-qualification Round: In this initial stage, participants were screened based on their passport copy submission and Google Form responses to determine their eligibility for the program. The criteria included whether they were AMS citizens, young individuals, and ready to join the program.

2. Objective Screening: Qualified applicants were then graded according to seven criteria related to their international, educational, and professional backgrounds, as well as their aspirations. These criteria included:

- **English Proficiency (2 points):** Applicants needed a certain level of English proficiency to contribute meaningfully to program discussions.
- **International Experience (2 points):** Applicants with the least international experience or exposure were given higher points.
- **Advocacy Work (2 points):** Preference was given to applicants with demonstrable or existing advocacy or community involvement.
- **Self-Introduction (4 points):** This criterion assessed how well applicants could articulate themselves and their potential contributions to the program.
- **Essay 1 (Expectations - 30 points)**
- **Essay 2 (Community Challenge - 30 points)**
- **Essay 3 (Plan of Action - 30 points)**

Due to time constraints, interviews were not conducted. Instead, essay responses were used to gauge the potential usefulness of the conference for each applicant's specific circumstances and needs, as well as their likelihood of applying their learnings upon returning to their home country.

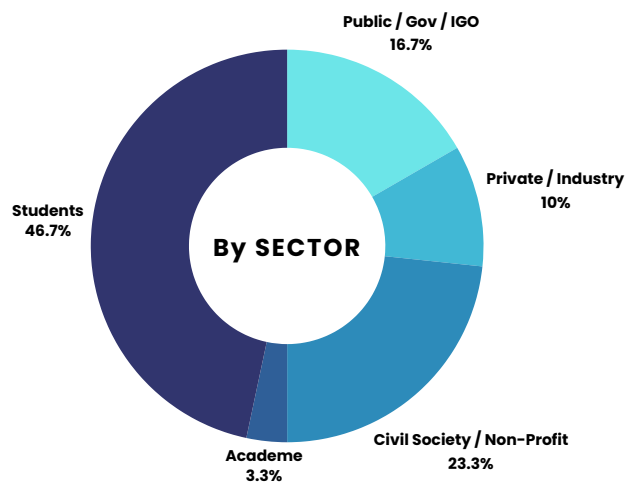
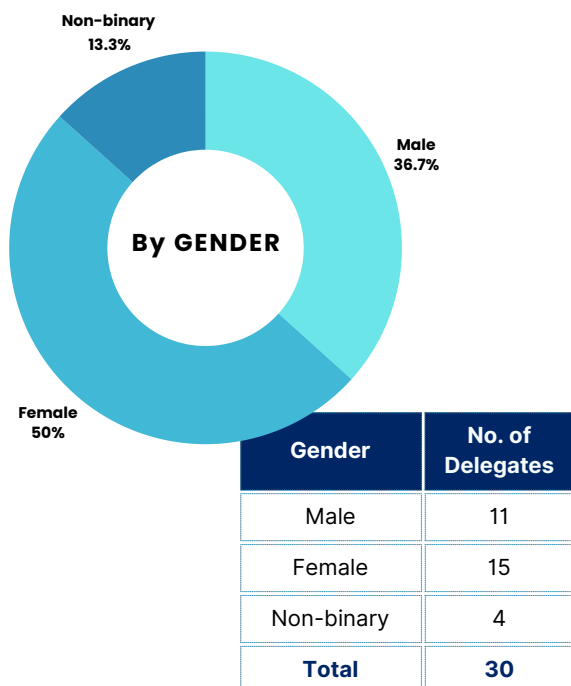
In this round, the aim was to have 2 applicants per age group per theme, if possible, resulting in 18 applicants (3 core themes x 3 age groups per theme x top 2 applicants per age group).

3. Subjective Screening: This stage ensured the selection of a diverse and inclusive set of participants. After identifying the top applicants through the scoring system, the committee considered specific circumstances to create a diverse and inclusive group of up to nine semi-finalists per country. These circumstances included gender, educational/employment background, disability or access requirements, and other special circumstances.

4. Recommendations (Semi-finals and Finals): In these rounds, strong country teams were drafted, ensuring a good mix of members based on gender, educational/employment background, and relevant experiences. The selection committee convened to discuss the finalists per country. This stage involved a mix-and-match approach to consider the composition of other country teams. Consistent with the program design, the goal was to draft a delegation that could be evenly divided into three core themes, was gender-balanced, and included delegates from diverse backgrounds.

Overall, the participant selection process was thorough and aimed at creating a well-rounded and diverse group for the AYC. As a result, the official delegation included representatives from various sectors and backgrounds. Notably, of the **30 delegates** chosen, **there were four who identified as non-binary or members of the LGBTQI+ community** and **at least two are persons with disabilities (PWDs)**—one with visual impairment who required a sighted guide, and another with hearing impairment. The Organizing Team made significant efforts to ensure accessibility for these participants.

Distribution of Delegates



Sector	No. of Delegates
Public / Gov / IGO	11
Private / Industry	15
CSO / Non-Profit	4
Academe	1
Students	14
Total	30

THE AYC 2024 DELEGATES



ABANG

ABANG MD MASRUR ABANG ZAINUDDIN

Government Office Administrator

Abang started his career in the Halal industry as an inspector, eventually advancing to head the government's Halal Enforcement Section. Recently, Abang was appointed as Personal Assistant and Head of Administration in the Minister of Religious Affairs' Office. His core responsibilities include supporting the Minister administratively, with research, communication, and liaison duties. He is a member of Unit Muraqib, a deliverology unit overseeing the efficient and effective implementation of the Ministry's strategic plans. Abang joined Majlis Kesejahteraan Masyarakat (MKM), a local NGO devoted to helping and empowering the less fortunate, where he currently serves as Vice-President III.

Email: abang.zainuddin@gmail.com



IRMA

IRMA SARAH MANSOR

Accounting and Finance Student

Irma is a freshman Accounting and Finance student at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam. She likes to delve into community service and make a difference in the lives of others. She volunteers for Down Syndrome Association (ABLE). As Irma embarks on the AYC journey, she's excited to step out of her comfort zone and expand her horizons. She believes that this experience will not only broaden her understanding of regional issues but also provide her with opportunities to connect with like-minded individuals and make a positive impact big and small alike.

Email: ssarahmansor@gmail.com



DANA

DANA LEE

International Relations and Peace Studies Student

Dana is pursuing a degree in International Relations at a Japanese university. Previously, she studied Politics and Public Administration at the University of Hong Kong as an exchange student. Her research focuses on security in Southeast Asia, women in politics, and state engagement in conflicts. As a research fellow at the Next Generation EU-ASEAN Think Tank, Dana provided policy recommendations to the European Union on Women, Peace, and Security in Southeast Asia. Selected as a youth delegate at the UNGA Science Summit, Dana has earned "Honorable Mention Delegate" awards from international conferences and was honored as a top outstanding student by the Cambodian Ministry of Education.

Email: cam.danalee@gmail.com



SENG

HORSENG SE

English Literature Student

A graduate student in South Korea, Seng possesses excellent skills in public communication and youth engagement. He dedicated three years to communication roles in INGOs focused on education for children in Cambodia. Currently, he serves as a volunteer and Vice President of the Cambodian Student Association in Korea, fostering educational and cultural exchange among Cambodian students. Through social media, he shares insights into education and opportunities to empower Cambodian youth. Seng actively participates in various ASEAN-related platforms, promoting cross-cultural understanding and advocating for youth access to opportunities. His passion lies in utilizing communication for positive change and building stronger ties between Cambodia, ASEAN, and relevant stakeholders.

Email: sehorseng@gmail.com



MAKARA

SOVANNMAKARA NGOUN

International Relations Student

Makara is a junior student at a Cambodian university. His academic journey is marked by a profound interest in research, social change, leadership, and active participation in events that align with his goals and interests, such as international relations. Beyond his studies, Makara finds comfort and joy in creative pursuits. As a struggling artist and an amateur photographer, he channels his creativity through drawing and playing the guitar, enriching his life outside of textbooks and volunteering. Makara's optimistic outlook highlights his belief that positive change starts with individuals, a philosophy that drives him to make a difference in his community and beyond.

Email: sovanmakara112004@gmail.com





RAINNIE

NAMFON SENPATY

International Relations Student



Namfon is a freshman, majoring in international relations with the goal of working in an international organization. She is enthusiastic about volunteering at international events and is always eager to learn new knowledge. In her leisure time, she works as a volunteer for different organizations to gain valuable hands-on experience for her future endeavors. She is currently involved in event planning at the Job Assist Office, where she organizes workshops, showcasing her planning skills. Additionally, she serves as the financial planner for various groups, including the Development of Women and Legal Education Group, The Young SEAKers Lao PDR, and the ASEAN Youth Advocate Network Lao PDR.

Email: namfonsenpaty8804@gmail.com



NING

SANTHANA PHOMPANYA

Politics and Public Administration Student



Ning thrives on exploring new cultures, languages, and cuisines. With a background in politics and public administration, she brings a unique perspective to every conversation and endeavor. Outside of work, you can often find her immersing herself in nature, capturing moments through photography, or delving into a good book. She values connections with others and believes in the power of empathy and understanding. She is always excited about engaging in meaningful conversations and embarking on new adventures, all while embracing the beauty of life's journey.

Email: santhanaphompanya@gmail.com



TOOLY

SENSOUPHANH SOUPHAVANH

Law and Political Science Student



Tooly has a strong passion for volunteering and a steadfast desire to enhance communities through advocacy and practical action. Her primary goal is to raise awareness about social issues among young people, leading her to establish HUBBO, a platform offering capacity-building training to empower and educate young individuals. With a strong belief in the potential of young people, she advocates for their right to voice their aspirations for a better future. She is driven by a vision of creating impactful change and building a network of knowledgeable and capable young leaders.

Email: tsandsuphan@gmail.com



PINGPONG

SOUKTHAVONE DOUANGDALA

English Student



Pingpong constantly seeks opportunities to further his education and improve his knowledge and skills. At the same time, he dedicates himself to helping communities, such as impoverished people and disadvantaged children in rural areas. He uses various skills, such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving, in his volunteering and advocacy activities. He also excels at collaborating with different groups and is able to lead teams towards commendable results.

Email: soukthavonedouangdala@gmail.com



AMRAN

AMRAN WALI

Medical Educator



Amran is a clinician serving a non-governmental organization, the Blood for Life Foundation. He specializes in transfusion medicine and neglected tropical infectious diseases. In 2023, he received an Excellence Award for Community Engagement from the University of Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) - Refugee-led Research Hub (RLRH). The award was in recognition of his contribution to improving public participation in refugee and forced displacement topics, particularly on global health and the rights of undocumented citizens in Aceh province.

Email: amranwali22@gmail.com



HABIBAH HERMANADI

Civil Society Worker and Science Communicator



Beeba is a dedicated professional in science communication and civil society engagement. She has leveraged her expertise to bridge the gap between science and society in Indonesia. With experience in media outlets like The Conversation and The Jakarta Post, she excels in translating complex scientific concepts for diverse audiences. Believing in the importance of science to support the work of civil society, Habibah has led capacity-building and leadership training for scientists and journalists to communicate and engage effectively with broader societal issues. She envisions a world where science is integrated into daily discourse and policymaking, advocating for interdisciplinary collaboration to address global challenges. Aside from her work, Beeba is an avid reader who is also passionate about storytelling.

Email: hhhermanadi@gmail.com



VIVI USMAYANTI

Economics Lecturer and Researcher



Vivi is a young lecturer and researcher specializing in Economics, particularly Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) research. She has dedicated four years to studying MSMEs, starting from the COVID-19 outbreak. She has been an activist since 2011, engaging in various social communities with both local and national impacts. Notably, she participated in Rumah Belajar for two years, teaching orphans in Padang, Indonesia, and led Generasi Cerdas Keuangan (GCK), focusing on financial literacy for housewives and children in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Currently, she serves as a lecturer on Sumatra Island while remaining actively involved in community development efforts.

Email: vivi.usmayanti73@gmail.com



MOHD AZRHUL NIEZAM ABD MUZIDIL

Government Youth and Sports Officer



Azrhul Niezam, a die-hard Arsenal fan, applies his strategic prowess both on and off the pitch. As a Sabahan Member of the Malaysian Youth Parliament, he leads with dedication and flair. Armed with a degree in the University of Malaya's Southeast Asian Studies, he serves as the Assistant Officer of Sabah Youth and Sports Pedalaman Atas area. In the NGO sector, he's been an insightful researcher at Serikat Malaysia since 2021 and was an SMJ Fellow to the Sabah Finance Minister in 2022. His advocacy for the Internship Act showcases his commitment to youth empowerment. A chess lover, he uses strategic thinking in everything that he does.

Email: azrhulniezam.m@gmail.com



MUHAMAD NADHIR ABDUL NASI

Disability Issues Specialist



Nadhir is an independent consultant and researcher specializing in disability issues. Since 2016, he has contributed to various projects by the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM), addressing a range of disability-related issues such as access to banking services, advocacy leadership, political participation, and the local implementation of the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025. As a blind individual trained in anthropology and sociology during his Bachelor's and Master's studies, he possesses a deep interest in disability studies, research, and advocacy. He has authored more than 20 academic papers on disability issues covering various topics and remains eager to expand his knowledge and advocacy into new areas, such as disabled people's inclusion through ASEAN regionalism, the political economy of disability, and climate justice.

Email: anndh91@gmail.com



EE REN NYU

Economics Student



Ee Ren is a sophomore Economics student at the University of Malaya. She is dedicated to advancing Malaysia's anti-discrimination movement. As a long-time volunteer and executive committee member at Architects of Diversity, a non-profit empowering young leaders, she facilitates diversity and inclusion programs for high school students. Ee Ren also serves as Deputy Project Director for the 2024 Malaysian Public Policy Competition, showcasing her passion for positive social change through policymaking. She has excelled in entrepreneurial pursuits, earning recognition in competitions like L'Oréal Brandstorm and TCS Sustainathon, emphasizing inclusive and sustainable solutions. Ee Ren aspires to combine her advocacy and entrepreneurial spirit to create meaningful social impact for women through social entrepreneurship.

Email: eerennyu@gmail.com



SIKE CHAN

International Development Student

SIKE is a postgraduate student at the School of Social Innovation, Mae Fah Luang University, in Chiang Rai, Thailand. He also holds postgraduate diplomas in Political Science from the University of Yangon and Development Studies from Yangon University of Economics, Myanmar. SIKE's research interests include China-Myanmar relations and regional cooperation, sustainable development, climate change and disaster resilience, Myanmar conflict and peace, and international political economy, particularly ethnic federalism. He has previously worked on projects related to microfinance, green city development, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and hybrid governance and public services. His current research projects focus on community disaster resilience, conscription law, and mental vulnerability.

Email: chanrot2013@gmail.com



SUZY PHYO

Software Engineering Student

SUZY has an ardent desire to undertake challenging projects, where she exemplifies flexibility, meticulous attention to detail, and an unwavering determination to overcome obstacles. Never one to surrender in the face of adversity, she consistently seeks opportunities to contribute positively to society through technology. She harbors a profound passion for artificial intelligence. Alongside her academic pursuits, she has actively engaged in numerous volunteer endeavors, demonstrating a commitment to giving back to the community. SUZY eagerly anticipates leveraging her skills and passion for technology to make meaningful contributions to society.

Email: suyiphyo110@gmail.com



ZAW HTUT AUNG

Educational Technologist

MASON is an educational technologist who seamlessly integrates technology into the classroom, enhancing student engagement and optimizing learning outcomes. With a deep interest in AI technology, he advocates for the modernization of student assessment methods in education, while also promoting gender equality in AI fields. MASON believes in the transformative potential of education and continuously hones his technical skills to stay ahead of the curve. Beyond his professional pursuits, he is a devoted cat lover, caring for over 14 feline companions in his home. ZAW's passion for education, coupled with his dedication to technological innovation, gender equality, and love for animals, defines him as a dynamic individual committed to making a positive change in his community.

Email: zawhtutaung@parami.edu.mm



APOLS GARMAY

Social Entrepreneur

APOLS is driven by her passion for social entrepreneurship in the realm of rural agriculture. Throughout her career, she has showcased leadership skills, successfully leading initiatives in the Philippines and Indonesia with the support of fellow social entrepreneurs. Beyond her own endeavors in the agricultural startup sphere, APOLS actively engages in volunteer work with organizations like She Leads Southeast Asia, where she focuses on empowering women economically in rural regions such as Northern Samar. Her diverse interests span social entrepreneurship, the empowerment of women survivors of exploitation and abuse, responsible agricultural practices, and fostering youth involvement. With a sharp focus on innovation and an unwavering commitment to growth, APOLS is dedicated to creating positive change within her field.

Email: hiddenmanna77@gmail.com



JOSHUA COTE

Behavioral Sciences Student

JOSHUA's passion for equality fuels his advocacy for the Sustainable Development Goals. He aspires to bridge the education gap by advocating policy reforms that open doors to scholarships across all disciplines. He is particularly known for creating safe spaces for students both in campus and in far-flung areas in his country. A diplomat in training, JOSHUA keeps on honing his negotiation skills through various international platforms, while tackling global challenges.

Email: joshua_cote@dlsu.edu.ph





MATTHEW DAVID

Industrial Designer

Matt co-founded Format Design Lab, where his creativity empowers communities. Their mission is to champion innovative design solutions that weave Filipino heritage into the fabric of progress. Matt's passion for community bloomed at the Design Center of the Philippines. There, he collaborated with SMEs to create not just globally competitive Filipino products. This experience, along with the skills he honed as a 2023 Community Engagement Exchange Program fellow focusing on Women and Gender issues, solidified his vision: design can be a powerful tool for positive change. Matt's dedication extends beyond his professional work. He actively volunteers with the UNESCO Global Youth Community (GYC) and the Culture and Arts Managers of the Philippines (CAMP).

Email: mattpdavid96@gmail.com



JAMIE YAU

Philanthropic Management Student

Jamie serves as the Acting Chief Operating Officer and Chief Partnerships Officer at Cyber Youth Singapore, where she empowers the youth in tech for societal impact. A Global Impact Scholarship Awardee of Singapore Management University, Jamie combines her academic prowess with hands-on experience in volunteerism and entrepreneurship. Her commitment to youth advocacy is evident through an online safety startup, called, Empathy, which she co-founded. She also participates in panels addressing youth inequality and education. Recognized Holgen Foundation as one of the 30 young leaders of Singapore, she is dedicated to excellence in both academia and community service.

Email: jamie.yau.2023@cis.smu.edu.sg



JODIE NG

Inclusive Workplace Practices Advocate

Dedicated to fostering inclusivity and driving positive change, Jodie has never shied away from challenges. At work, she is a committee member of dbEnable, an employee resource group for people with disabilities. At dbEnable, Jodie managed and expanded their flagship internship programme for students with disabilities, and advocated for inclusive practices in the workplace. Jodie has also represented Singapore at the inaugural ASEAN Volunteer Programme, where she collaborated with other ASEAN delegates on disaster risk reduction and preparedness. This underscores her passion for addressing global challenges and making a meaningful impact on society. Outside of work, Jodie enjoys cycling, diving, and learning new languages. Her seeks to contribute to a more sustainable, equitable and inclusive society.

Email: jodie.ng.ws@gmail.com



QIAO YI LIM

Computer Science Student

Qiao Yi is a tech enthusiast who frequently explores various disciplines of Computer Science, as evidenced by her extensive participation in various tech-related events such as hackathons, game jams, and deepracers. She is actively involved in Women in Tech @ NUS Computing, an interest group at her university that aims to connect, empower, and support women in the faculty, a group often underrepresented in the tech industry. When Qiao Yi is not coding, she can usually be found searching for cats, pursuing adventurous activities to check off her bucket list, or exploring the newest restaurant or bar in town. Qiao Yi is a risk-taker who is as committed to working hard as she is to experiencing new things.

Email: limqiaoyi141@gmail.com



AKKHARAPHAN THAWEEESAK

Environmental Educator

Ice is an active communicator and innovator who demonstrates a strong commitment to community development. Throughout his university journey, he actively contributed as a Green Heart student leader, dedicated to enhancing the nearby community in alignment with the SDGs, with a primary focus on environmental improvement. He engaged in various activities, including participation in the Green School network, aimed at increasing environmental awareness among the younger generation. In his role as a facilitator, he promotes sustainable practices in daily life and encourages actions to contribute to saving the planet from various perspectives.

Email: akarapan.icece@gmail.com





SASIPORN PHUPHAPLOY

Program Management Personnel

Sasi has years of experience in and is adept at providing support to capacity-building programs that contribute to better facilitation of trade and investment opportunities within the Greater Mekong Subregion. Her expertise is in logistics arrangements, demonstrating valuable skills in time management and administration. She excels in project budget management and is good at organizing events locally and abroad. She is a proactive and decisive staff and team member with admirable leadership qualities. Her openness to challenges demonstrate her eagerness to expand her skill set and venture beyond her comfort zone.

Email: sasiporn.p1990@gmail.com



TANADECH SRIWANCHAI

Intergovernmental Office Staff

Gunn is adept at providing comprehensive technical and administrative support to heads of organizations, especially during high-level engagements. He excels at managing document flow, organizing meetings, drafting speeches, and coordinating with stakeholders. He effectively ensures that plans and activities are aligned with organizational objectives and donor requirements. His expertise extends to logistical support, budget monitoring, stakeholder liaison, and data consolidation. As a previous project operations support staff, Gunn significantly contributed to program implementation, workshop facilitation, and administrative coordination within his organization.

Email: tanadech.sr@gmail.com



ANH DANG THI PHUONG

Agricultural Researcher

Anh is busy enriching the field of crop science as a PhD student at the Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences. Her research centers on in vitro propagation of lotus varieties. She has substantial contributions to projects in orchid cultivation and quinoa production, especially under challenging conditions. She is passionate about the advancement of agricultural research, even securing research fundings from donors like the UNDP and Bayer Foundation. Her expertise extends to microscopy techniques and publications in journals. Her work demonstrates dedication to sustainable agriculture and climate change adaptation through innovative crop technology and molecular breeding.

Email: dangphuonganhvandai@gmail.com



HOANG VIET NGUYEN

Medical Student

With nearly four years of experience participating in youth projects and organizations in Vietnam and abroad, Andy is committed to learning and contributing to sustainable and positive impacts for prosperity and equity through multilateral cooperation. He dedicated a year to self-study and obtained over 20 certificates in business development, organizational analysis, data analysis, research design, and clinical medicine, among others. He is also eager to develop a better understanding of multidimensional relationships within social ecosystems. These include organizational management structures and their impact on individuals, the interaction between macroeconomic factors with social sciences and humanities, influencing development trends, conflicting interests, and consequences for the environment, human happiness, and national prosperity.

Email: vn2004851@gmail.com



HONG TRANG VU

Educator and Gender Issues Specialist

Eliza is an advisor on gender issues at Equal Asia Foundation, co-founder of Stepforward Education, a social enterprise focusing on education, and a speaker at various international events, such as the 2020 IOM Dialogue on International Migration and the 2020 UN Youth Forum on Migration. She was one of the 20 ASEAN Storytellers on the topic of Biodiversity in Southeast Asia, where she highlighted the role of folk beliefs in biodiversity. Eliza holds an MA degree in European Studies from a joint Erasmus Mundus program in France, Germany, and Sweden, as well as an MA in Chinese Studies from China. Previously, she worked as a Graduate Teaching Assistant at Peking University and as a Project Assistant at UNICEF.

Email: trang.stepforward@gmail.com



THEMATIC GROUPINGS

Regional Cooperation Group



ABANG

Brunei Darussalam



MAKARA

Cambodia



NING

Lao PDR



BEEBA

Indonesia



NADHIR

Malaysia



SIKE

Myanmar



JOSHUA

Philippines



JAMIE

Singapore



GUNN

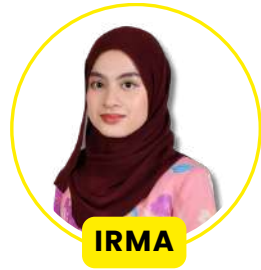
Thailand



ANDY

Viet Nam

Youth Leadership and Volunteerism Group



IRMA

Brunei Darussalam



SENG

Cambodia



PINGPONG

Lao PDR



AMRAN

Indonesia



AZRHUL

Malaysia



SUZY

Myanmar



MATT

Philippines



JODIE

Singapore



ICE

Thailand



ANH

Viet Nam

Women Empowerment Group



DANA

Cambodia



RAINNIE

Lao PDR



TOOLY

Lao PDR



VIVI

Indonesia



EE REN

Malaysia



MASON

Myanmar



APOLS

Philippines



QIAO YI

Singapore



SASI

Thailand



ELIZA

Viet Nam

Schedule Highlights



AYC2024 consisted of three main parts: (i) an online pre-departure delegates meeting, (ii) the ASEAN Prize Symposium 2024, and (iii) a youth conference.

May 2023

MONDAY
13

Online Pre-Departure Meeting

Via Zoom 8:30AM to 4:00PM Bangkok Time

SUNDAY
19



Travel to Vientiane, Lao PDR

MONDAY
20

ASEAN Prize Symposium

8:30AM to 4:00PM

Crowne Plaza Vientiane



TUESDAY
21

ASEAN Youth Convergence Proper

8:30AM to 4:00PM

Crowne Plaza Vientiane



PRE-DEPARTURE DELEGATES' MEETING (ONLINE)

13 May 2024 / Via Zoom

Meet and Greet

Youth delegates were provided with instructions, including their pre-departure assignment, administrative reminders, and logistical notes for their participation in the event. It was also a chance for participants to break the ice, and foster a sense of community or camaraderie.

Letters to Leaders Workshop

The exercise aims to open doors for networking and collaboration between the younger generation and established leaders, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility for regional development.

AGENDA

Time (BKK, +7)	Activity
08:30 - 9:00	Registration
9:00 - 9:10	Welcome Address Lee Yoong Yoong, Director, Community Affairs Directorate, ASEAN Secretariat
9:10 - 9:20	Overview of the AYC 2024 and Introduction to the Day's Agenda
Letters to Leaders Workshop	
9:20 - 10:00	Letters to Leaders Ms. Anna Oposa , Executive Director and Chief Mermaid, Save Philippine Seas
10:00 - 10:30	Letters to Leaders Exercise (Breakout group per country)
10:30 - 11:30	Output presentation and feedback session: Letter Reading and Tips on Writing Effective Letters Ms. Anna Oposa
11:30 - 12:00	Letter Writing Assignment and Letters to Leaders Exhibit
12:00 - 13:30	Lunchbreak
Preparing for Impact: Meet & Greet	
13:30 - 14:30	Ice-breaker
14:30 - 15:15	Pre-departure briefing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities • Admin and logistics • Other requirements
15:15 - 15:30	Closing

ASEAN PRIZE SYMPOSIUM

May 20, 2024 (Monday)

Venue:
Lane Xang 1+2, Level 1
Crowne Plaza Vientiane



AYC coincided with the ASEAN Prize Symposium 2024, allowing youth delegates to participate in a broader discourse.

The ASEAN Prize Symposium is a flagship programme aimed at promoting the ASEAN Prize and its role in fostering ASEAN Community building. The event will highlight and share the respective achievements and advocacies of the APRs, serving as inspirational benchmarks and guiding principles for the targeted audiences, including professionals, academicians, think tanks, organizations and entities, business communities, media as well as aspiring youth leaders.

AGENDA

Time	Activity
08:30 - 09:00	Registration
09:00 - 09:05	Greetings and Opening
09:05 - 09:25	Welcome Remarks a. Mr. Phetthanousone PHOMMALATH, Director of ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community of ASEAN Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR b. Mr. James Chan, Senior Director, Temasek Foundation c. Mr. Lee Yoong Yoong, DIR for Community Affairs Directorate, ASEAN Secretariat
09:25 - 09:40	Introduction to the Symposium and the ASEAN Prize Overview by Mr. Lee Yoong Yoong, DIR for Community Affairs Directorate, ASEAN Secretariat
09:40 - 09:45	Photo Opportunity
09:45 - 10:00	Networking Break
ASEAN Prize Talk by Recipients - Journey of the ASEAN Prize Recipients	
10:00 - 10:20	A Journey of Regional Cooperation and Integration Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn, Executive Director of the Mekong Institute ASEAN Prize Recipient 2021
10:20 - 10:40	Empowering Women in Socio-Economic Development Madam Nguyen Thi Tuyet Minh, Founder of WeLead Founding Member, The First Chairwoman of ASEAN Women Entrepreneur Network (AWEN) ASEAN Prize Recipient 2023
10:40 - 11:00	Youth Leadership and Volunteerism Mr. Haji Muhammad Iqbal Fakhri bin Haji Damit, Co Founder Hand4Hand Brunei ASEAN Prize Recipient 2022

AGENDA

Time	Activity
11:00 - 11:20	Open Forum and Q&A Session
11:30 - 11:45	Overview of the Breakout Session by Ms. Anusara Tanpitak, Communications and Knowledge Management Manager, Mekong Institute
11:45 - 13:00	Lunch (Mosaic Restaurant within the hotel premises)
Breakout Session: Solutions Room Fortifying ASEAN Community Building Through Solutions Development Venue: Lane Xang 1 (Level 1), Lane Xang 2 (Level 1), and Simunag+Horphakao (Level G)	
13:30 - 15:00	Breakout Sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mekong Institute – ASEAN’s Regional Cooperation and Integration • Mr. Iqbal Damit – Youth Volunteerism in ASEAN • Madam Nguyen Thi Tuyet Minh – Women’s Socio Economic Empowerment in ASEAN
15:00 - 15:30	Refreshment and Coffee Break
15:30 - 16:00	Wrap-up and Closing Ceremony
16:00 - 16:45	Free Time
16:45 - 17:00	<i>Gather at the designated area and depart from the hotel for Patuxai</i>
17:00 - 18:30	Group Photo at Patuxai (Youth Delegates Only) Quick Stop at Souvenir Shops
18:30 - 19:30	Dinner (at a restaurant outside the hotel)



The symposium was streamed on MI’s social media platforms.

Help us promote the event by sharing its livestream!

Use the event’s hashtags:

#ASEANPrize #ASEANPrizeSymposium
#ASEANYouthConvergence2024
#ASEANPrizeRecipients



Master of Ceremonies

Mr. Phoudthasaichay Yokkhanphone

an officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR

Open Forum Moderator

LEE YOONG YOONG

Director of Community Affairs Directorate, ASEAN Secretariat

ASEAN YOUTH CONFERENCE

May 21, 2024 (Tuesday)

Venue:
Lane Xang 2, Level 1, Crowne Plaza Vientiane



The conference featured interactive exercises including the following:

1. Lightning Talks

This segment provided a platform for concise, impactful presentations by the APRs on topics related to their expertise/advocacy.



2. ASEAN Café

Following the Lightning Talks, participants moved to the ASEAN Café area for networking and interactive discussions. The ASEAN Café provided an informal space for participants to digest the insights from the Lightning Talks and engage in deeper conversations.



3. Stakeholder Engagement Exercise

The Stakeholder Engagement Exercise aimed to provide participants with a hands-on experience in understanding and navigating the complexities of stakeholder relationships. By immersing themselves in various roles, participants will gain insights into the perspectives of different stakeholders, fostering empathy, effective communication, and collaborative problem-solving.



4. Letters to Leaders Showcase

This was a curated exhibit that provided a tangible and impactful way to bring the voices of the youth to the forefront of the conference. It aimed to foster a deeper understanding of the concerns, aspirations, and perspectives of the youth within the ASEAN community.

Facilitator

ANUSARA TANPITAK

Communications and Knowledge
Management Coordinator, Mekong Institute

INDICATIVE AGENDA

Time	Activity
08:30 - 09:00	Registration
09:00 - 09:05	Greetings and Welcome
09:05 - 09:20	Opening Ceremony <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome Remarks by Mr. Htet Aung, SOMY Chair, Director General, Department of Youth Affairs, Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, Myanmar
09:20 - 09:25	Introduction to the Youth Conference
09:25 - 09:30	Photo Opportunity
09:30 - 09:45	Lightning Talk A The Role of the Youth in Addressing Community Challenges by Mr. Thatsaphone LETTHAVONE, Director of International Relations-Cooperation Division, Lao Youth Union
09:45 - 10:00	Lightning Talk B How consensus-building strengthens regional cooperation by Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn, Mekong Institute
10:00 - 10:15	Lightning Talk C How do we ensure our initiatives are inclusive by Madam Nguyen Thi Tuyet Minh
10:30 - 11:50	ASEAN Café and Refreshments
11:50 - 12:00	Wrap-up of the morning session
12:00 - 13:30	Lunchbreak (Mosaic Restaurant)
13:30 - 15:00	Stakeholder Engagement Exercise
15:00 - 15:15	Refreshments and Networking Break
15:15 - 16:00	Wrap-Up and Closing
16:00 - 18.00	Free Time and Preparation for Cultural Night
18:00 - 20:30	Cultural Night (Venue: Simunag+Horphakao, Level G)



Pre-Departure Delegates Meeting

Monday, 13 May 2024 | Zoom

Designed to foster Southeast Asian youth development and engagement, the first-ever ASEAN Youth Convergence (AYC) organized by Mekong Institute (MI) and the ASEAN Secretariat began with an online meet and greet, pre-travel briefing, and a workshop on writing letters to leaders. With support from the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Youth (SOMY), AYC 2024 sought to inspire the youth to take action on regional community issues and enhance their capacity for stakeholder engagement.



Director Lee Yoong Yoong, from the Community Affairs Directorate at the ASEAN Secretariat, in his opening remarks, emphasised the crucial role of youth in the ASEAN community-building journey. He highlighted that with a third of its population aged 35 years old and below, ASEAN today is a young and energetic region. Director Yoong Yoong also urged all youth participants to have an open mind, inquisitive attitude, and enthusiastic outlook during the workshop in Vientiane next week so that the discussion can be livelier and engaging.



Overview of AYC 2024

The pre-departure meeting was co-facilitated by Ms. Anusara Tanpitak, MI's Communications and Knowledge Management Manager, and Mr. Eastword Manlises, Special Projects Support Coordinator. Ms. Tanpitak shared that over 700 students and young professionals across the ASEAN Member States applied for AYC 2024. "This keen interest highlights the youth's eagerness to participate actively in ASEAN's sustainable development efforts. The 30 selected delegates joining the program will have an opportunity to learn practical skills in advocacy work and civic engagement," she said.

Mr. Manlises gave an overview of AYC 2024 and the pre-departure meeting. The program focuses on regional cooperation, youth leadership & volunteerism, and women empowerment. After recapping the program objectives and setting the expectations for the online meeting, Mr. Manlises proceeded to introduce the resource person, Ms. Anna Oposa.

Letters to Leaders Workshop

Ms. Oposa is the Executive Director of Save Philippine Seas. As part of the pre-departure meeting, she led a letter-writing workshop that sought to equip participants with a simple yet effective tool and approach to engaging ASEAN leaders. She shared inspiring stories of meaningful change sparked by letters sent to government agencies and private entities.

"Leaders may not always be aware of how their decisions affect their constituents. Writing letters to leaders is a concrete way that citizens can take action on an issue they are concerned about. When you write a letter, there is a 50-50 chance of them replying to you. When you don't write a letter, there's a 100% chance that they won't reply to you," Ms. Oposa said during her talk.

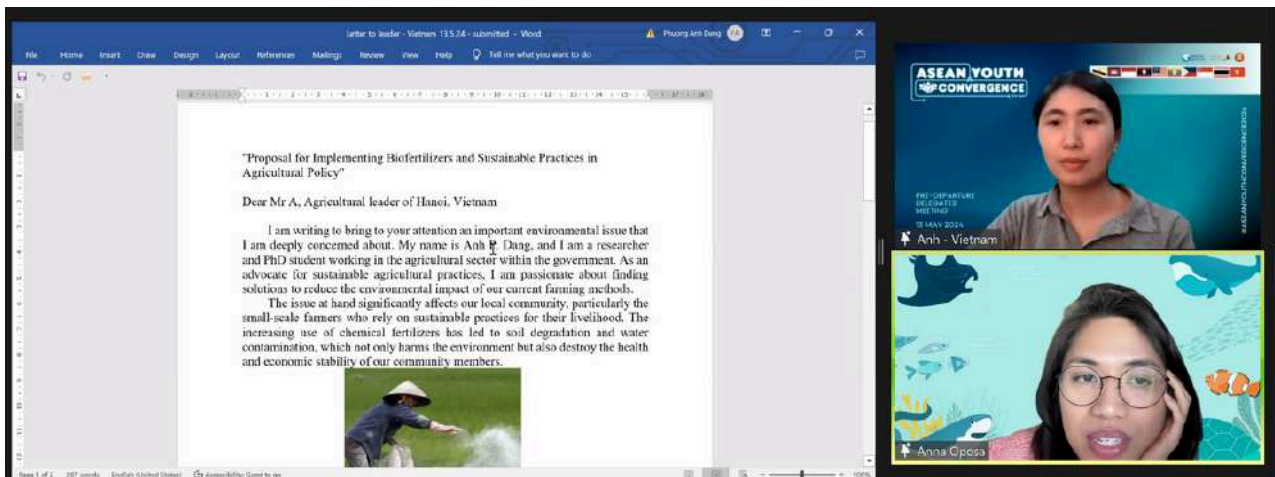


WRITING LETTERS TO LEADERS

Anna R. Oposa
Executive Director and Chief Mermaid
Save Philippine Seas

After her presentation, Ms. Oposa instructed the participants to engage in a small group letter-writing exercise. The delegates were grouped by their respective countries and assigned to separate virtual breakout rooms for discussions. Each group had to agree on a particular issue to address in their letter and decide on the recipient office or organization. They were given 30 minutes to brainstorm and create a draft letter. Following the allotted time, representatives from all ten groups shared their work to the plenary. Ms. Oposa and the Organizing Team members provided feedback on each letter.

Towards the end of the morning session, Mr. Manlises discussed a letter-writing assignment for the participants. They were given two days to prepare and submit a draft letter to a specific leader concerning a topic of their choosing. This assignment aimed to apply the skills acquired from Ms. Oposa's workshop on letter writing to leaders. The letters were later showcased at an exhibition during the youth conference in Vientiane.

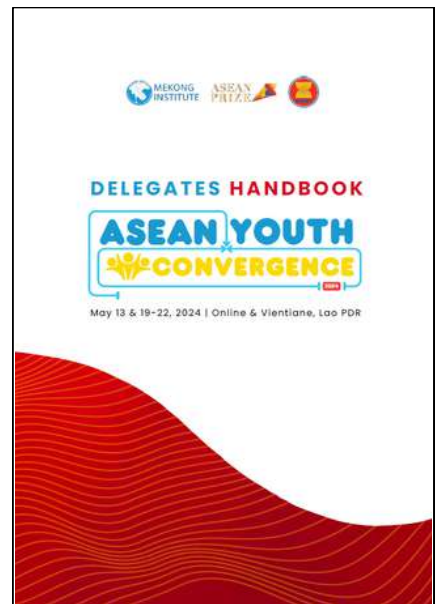


The afternoon session kicked off with an icebreaker hosted by Mr. Manlises, aimed at helping youth delegates get acquainted even before they met in person in Vientiane. He had everyone share two truths about themselves and one false statement. The delegates took turns introducing themselves and selecting a fellow delegate to identify which of their three statements was a lie. The activity sparked interaction and camaraderie among the participants and revealed common interests.

Afterwards, Ms. Tanpitak gave everyone a rundown of what to expect during their time in Vientiane. She introduced a handy handbook with all the details about AYC 2024, including links to event materials. Ms. Tanpitak covered what everyone needed to prepare before heading to Vientiane, like bringing a copy of their confirmation letter. She also stressed the need to bring national attire for the Cultural Dinner on the last night of the program.

Ms. Tanpitak also briefed everyone on logistics for when they arrive at the airport and hotel. She explained that there would be a shuttle service from the airport and a meal allowance waiting at the hotel. She reminded everyone to submit copies of their boarding passes to the Organizing Team for documentation and financial reporting. She also assigned country groups to prepare cultural presentations for the Cultural Dinner.

Before wrapping up, Ms. Tanpitak introduced the members of the Organizing Team and entertained questions from the participants.





ASEAN Prize Symposium

Monday, 20 May 2024, Crowne Plaza Vientiane Hotel, Vientiane, Lao PDR

AYC 2024 youth delegates participated in the ASEAN Prize Symposium 2024, a collaboration by the ASEAN Secretariat, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR, Temasek Foundation, and Mekong Institute. During this event, the young delegates had the valuable opportunity to engage in direct learning and mentoring sessions with the three most recent ASEAN Prize Recipients (APRs): the Mekong Institute (2021) represented by its Executive Director Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn, Muhamad Iqbal Damit (2022), and Madam Nguyen Thi Tuyet Minh (2023). These APRs, recognized as changemakers in the region, were honored with the prestigious ASEAN Prize for their outstanding contributions to building the ASEAN community.

Under the theme "ASEAN Regional Integration – Journey of the ASEAN Prize Recipients," the event served as a call to embrace the ASEAN values of community-building and acknowledge the remarkable efforts that led to the ASEAN Prize awards. It shed light on the accomplishments and advocacies of the APRs, offering inspiration and guidance to a diverse audience including professionals, academics/think tanks, non-profits, businesses, media, and the youth delegates. This platform encouraged learning and reflection, enabling participants to gain valuable insights and appreciate the impactful contributions made by the ASEAN Prize Recipients in their respective fields.

The symposium aimed to raise awareness about the esteemed ASEAN Prize and foster a shared understanding among individuals and entities within the ASEAN community about their potential and crucial roles in shaping a strong regional community. By encouraging active participation and impactful engagement, the forum aimed to promote the ASEAN spirit and drive forward regional cooperation and integration efforts.

Opening Ceremony

The Symposium was attended by over 100 participants coming from public, private, and non-profit organizations in Lao PDR and other parts of Southeast Asia. The morning and afternoon plenary sessions were facilitated by **Mr. Phoudthasaichay Yokkhanphone**, an officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR. After a few introductory remarks, Mr. Yokkhanphone invited the participants to the singing of the ASEAN Anthem.



Welcome Remarks



Representing Lao PDR as ASEAN Chair 2024, the Director of Socio-Cultural for ASEAN Community of MOFA Lao PDR, **Mr. Phetthanousone Phommalath**, mentioned that “The forum is a good opportunity for academics, organizations, youth and student organizations and the private sectors to take part in the discussion of the crucial roles in shaping a robust regional community building across multifaceted thematic landscape.” He encouraged all stakeholders, including his fellow citizens to take on more active and impactful roles in fostering the ASEAN spirit and advancing regional cooperation and integration efforts.



Representing Temasek Foundation, **Mr. James Chan**, Senior Director of Programmes, shared that the Temasek Foundation has been supporting the ASEAN Prize since its inception in 2018. To build a people-centric, inclusive and resilient ASEAN, Temasek remains committed to recognizing and honoring outstanding individuals and organizations for their contributions. “We hope the ASEAN Prize will continue to inspire more individuals and organizations to contribute towards ASEAN community building efforts collectively,” said Mr. Chan.



Mr. Lee Yoong Yoong, Director for Community Affairs Directorate at the ASEAN Secretariat, was also among officials who delivered a welcome remarks. In his speech, he said that the ASEAN Prize Symposium exemplifies the commitment of stakeholders. "It demonstrates an enhanced partnership, promoting a more integrated and vibrant ASEAN Community, and it resonates with the spirit of achieving the shared goal of ASEAN's visions," he added.

ASEAN Prize Overview

Following his opening remarks, Director Lee Yoong Yoong also provided a comprehensive overview of the ASEAN Prize, a prestigious annual award established in 2018 during Singapore's Chairmanship of ASEAN. Administered by the ASEAN Secretariat and supported by the Temasek Foundation, the award aims to recognize and honor significant contributions toward ASEAN community-building efforts by citizens and organizations within ASEAN Member States (AMS). The ASEAN Prize celebrates individuals and institutions that demonstrate exemplary contributions to ASEAN's regional development, reflecting a strong commitment from the ASEAN Secretariat and AMS to promote regional collaboration and development.

The ASEAN Prize Trophy and a cash prize of USD 20,000 are presented by the ASEAN Chair to the selected recipient during a prominent ASEAN event. This ceremony highlights the recipient's achievements and contributions to the ASEAN community.

Nominees for the ASEAN Prize must meet several criteria, including being a citizen of or an organization based in any AMS and demonstrating contributions to a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centered ASEAN Community. This includes outstanding collaboration between AMSs, ASEAN and the world, people-to-people engagement, economic integration, and other significant contributions to ASEAN community building.

Nominees must provide verifiable achievements in promoting intra-ASEAN collaboration, including supporting documentation such as character references, photos, media coverage, and future plans to continue their work after winning the Prize. Self-nominations and posthumous submissions are not considered.

Nominations for the ASEAN Prize are submitted through the National Focal Points in each respective ASEAN Member State, ensuring that each nomination is vetted and endorsed at the national level before being considered for the award. The ASEAN Prize is a testament to the commitment of the ASEAN community to recognize and reward outstanding contributions to regional development. By celebrating these achievements, the Prize aims to inspire further efforts toward building a cohesive, resilient, and integrated ASEAN Community.



ASEAN Prize Talks



ASEAN Prize Recipient 2022

MR. HAJI MUHAMAD IQBAL FAKHRI BIN HAJI DAMIT

Founder, Hand4Hand Brunei

While Mr. Iqbal was unable to attend the Symposium due to an emergency situation, he prepared a presentation that was delivered by a member of the ASEAN Prize Symposium Organizing Team. His presentation focused on his journey on implementing youth-led initiatives that helped him earn the prestigious ASEAN Prize. He stressed the importance of not only empowering the youth but also giving them the opportunity to lead. Not only he believes that the youth are the leaders of the future. "They are the current leaders," he said.

Iqbal shared his extensive experience in humanitarian, charity, and youth work across 11 countries, including Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and others, impacting approximately 220,000 people. His journey began after participating in the Ship for Southeast Asian and Japanese Youth Program (SSEAYP) in 2009, which he described as life-changing.

He outlined six key areas of volunteerism: humanitarian, community, education, environment, animal welfare, and sports. Iqbal emphasized the importance of finding one's passion and collaborating with like-minded individuals to embark on volunteer work, highlighting the significance of enjoying the work to sustain motivation.

He discussed the empowerment of youth through engaging and enjoyable activities, stressing that youth are not just future leaders but current leaders who need opportunities to lead. Effective leadership, according to Iqbal, doesn't require specific skill sets but rather a combination of various useful skills and the ability to adapt to and accept change.

Iqbal shared his belief that self-satisfaction is the greatest reward in volunteering, derived from seeing the positive impact on beneficiaries. Despite facing numerous challenges, particularly from naysayers, he remains steadfast in his mission.

Reflecting on receiving the ASEAN Prize in 2022, he relived the honor of being awarded by Indonesian President Joko Widodo in the presence of ASEAN state leaders. He highlighted the importance of community building and networking within ASEAN, which was bolstered by his award.

Looking ahead, Iqbal aspires to mentor 10 more individuals to continue his work and initiate an ASEAN project involving one million youths. He concluded with a motivational call to action, urging everyone to contribute to making ASEAN a better place.



ASEAN Prize Talks



ASEAN Prize Recipient 2023

MADAM NGUYEN THI TUYET MINH

Founder of WeLead, and Founding Member & The First Chairwoman of the ASEAN Women Entrepreneur Network (AWEN)

During her talk, Madam Minh said that “Receiving the ASEAN Prize is a testament to the power of dedication and perseverance.” Her journey from a small town in Viet Nam to becoming the first Vietnamese recipient of the prestigious award is “a reflection of the incredible potential within each of us”. She hopes that her story would inspire others to pursue their dreams with passion and resilience, believing that no obstacle is too great when driven by a commitment to positive change. She believes that the spirit of the ASEAN Prize should be widely promoted across the ASEAN community to encourage creativity and goodwill, facilitating a sustainable and more people-centered region.

Madam Minh also shared her journey to becoming the ASEAN Prize recipient in 2023. Born in a small town in northern Viet Nam, she grew up questioning why many girls were denied educational opportunities. This question fueled her 40-year quest to improve conditions for women.

Her professional journey began with the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), where she worked on projects supporting poor women in starting businesses. One notable project involved creating stable income opportunities for 30 poor women through waste collection and classification, a model that has since been replicated.

Madam Minh's significant achievement was the establishment of the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network (AWEN). Despite initial hesitations and numerous challenges, including lack of precedent, funding, and language barriers, she persevered. Her efforts culminated in the official launch of AWEN on April 22, 2014, where she served as the first chairwoman.

Throughout her tenure, Madam Minh faced many obstacles, such as securing funding and achieving consensus among ASEAN members. She introduced innovative feedback mechanisms to streamline decision-making and mobilized resources through relentless networking at various regional conferences. Her initiatives, like the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Forum and the Award Ceremony to Honor Outstanding ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs, have become annual events.

Her work with AWEN was recognized with the prestigious ASEAN Prize in 2023, awarded by the Chairman of ASEAN at the 43rd ASEAN Summit in Jakarta. Along with the award, she received a USD 20,000 cash prize, which she used for WeLead activities to further support female entrepreneurs.

Madam Minh concluded her speech by encouraging the audience, particularly young people, to pursue their dreams with passion, determination, and hard work. She emphasized that success is achievable for those who strive diligently, regardless of their background.



ASEAN Prize Talks



ASEAN Prize Recipient 2021



MR. SURIYAN VICHITLEKARN

Executive Director

Mekong Institute (MI) Executive Director, Suriyan Vichitlekarn, talked about MI's transformative journey and what it meant for the institute to be awarded with the ASEAN Prize. "Winning the ASEAN Prize in 2021 was a great honour...though MI's real success is seen in the positive impact on the ground, showing that what we do matters to the communities and the people. The work of MI has been a collective effort, and we owe thanks to all who have supported its mission," said Mr. Vichitlekarn.

Sharing MI's journey and achievements as the ASEAN Prize recipient for 2021, Mr. Vichitlekarn emphasized the importance of regional cooperation and community building within ASEAN, stressing that no single country can address challenges alone.

MI was established in 1996, following the Cold War, through a collaboration between the New Zealand Government, the Royal Thai Government, and Khon Kaen University. Initially launched as a development project, MI's first training program aimed to assist Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) countries in transitioning to a market economy. This program brought together participants from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam, fostering skills development and regional cooperation.



He highlighted the unique connections among GMS nations, emphasizing shared histories, cultures, and traditions that go beyond geographical borders. He noted that MI has evolved from a training center into an intergovernmental organization recognized by a royal decree from the King of Thailand in 2009. Over the past 27 years, MI has focused on capacity-building programs, research, and policy advocacy, empowering member nations to tackle common challenges and celebrate successes together.

MI's efforts have created a network of over 10,000 alumni, many of whom hold significant positions in government, business, and civil society across the GMS. The institute's programs have promoted mutual friendship, understanding, and trust among participants, fostering sustainable prosperity in the region.

Mr. Vichitlekarn also shared a personal anecdote about his time at the ASEAN Secretariat, where he witnessed the power of regional cooperation. This experience underscored the importance of institutions like MI in driving regional development and integration.

Mr. Vichitlekarn expressed pride in MI's achievements and reiterated the institute's commitment to serving the people of the GMS and beyond. He said that MI's success lies in its positive impact on the ground and its dedication to regional development and solidarity.



Open Forum

Director Lee Yoong Yoong facilitated the open forum that began with an insightful message about the advantages of technology and connectivity in today's world, and how these improved how young individuals access information and engage with inspiring changemakers. He reminisced about the challenges faced by previous generations before encouraging participants to take advantage of the opportunity to ask questions.

Getting the ball rolling, a participant from **Indonesia** raised a question about sustainability in advocacy, specifically regarding financial sustainability. MI's Mr. Vichitlekarn said that understanding the core reasons behind advocacy and finding like-minded individuals are important components of a sustainable advocacy. He said that resources are just the surface issue and stressed the necessity of creating compelling concepts and collaborating with beneficiaries and stakeholders for continuity. Weighing in on the question, Madam Minh shared her experience as a businesswoman, explaining that she always considers sustainability when setting up projects, often through membership fees or donor support. She underscored the importance of convincing partners about the project's benefits and developing a good reputation to gain trust from donors.

A participant from **Cambodia** inquired about Madam Minh's shift in focus from education to women's socioeconomic empowerment. Madam Minh reiterated the activities of AWEN, mentioning Cambodia's current chairmanship. She outlined various initiatives such as training, workshops, advocacy, and networking to support businesswomen in the region.

A participant from **Singapore** asked about outreach strategies to authentically reach target beneficiaries. Madam Minh explained that they conduct surveys, consultations, and refer to studies to understand stakeholders' needs. Sharing MI's experience, Mr. Vichitlekarn added that they focus on organizing platforms for experts and stakeholders to interact, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and continuous learning.

A civil society representative from **Lao PDR** briefly shared an experience working with women in poor areas and asked about encouraging ethnic minorities to become entrepreneurs. Madam Minh acknowledged the difficulty and shared her approach of working with government agencies and using methodologies that promote inclusion. She emphasized the use of pilot projects to demonstrate success and persuade partners to support.

A representative from the **Philippines** asked about bridging cultural barriers in women's economic projects. Madam Minh discussed the importance of understanding and adapting to different cultures and policy systems, sharing experiences from her AWEN chairmanship and the importance of raising a collective voice in various forums.

Another participant from the **Philippines** asked how to create projects that consider and represent different national policies and beliefs. Mr. Vichitlekarn said that finding common ground and creating spaces for dialogue are important strategies. He also stressed the value of conducting objective studies to inform decisions and reduce conflicts.

A participant from **Myanmar** asked about minimizing confrontation and maximizing cooperation among political players. Mr. Vichitlekarn highlighted the importance of evidence-based activities and setting boundaries to avoid generalized information, which often leads to confrontation. He suggested focusing on common interests and working on agreeable aspects while setting aside irreconcilable differences.

Another representative from **Cambodia** inquired about consensus-building and persuading others about inclusive ideas. Mr. Vichitlekarn shared his experience with ASEAN+3 on emergency rice reserve, emphasizing the need to acknowledge common problems and interests backed by research. He stressed treating colleagues as allies and not adversaries.

Another participant from **Lao PDR** asked about ensuring sustainable border management in the Mekong River Basin while including indigenous peoples and farmers. Mr. Vichitlekarn mentioned collaboration with the Mekong River Commission and the importance of involving industry and beneficiaries. He emphasized the need for connecting networks for discussion. Madam Minh shared her approach to prioritizing and solving challenges step by step, aided by advisory groups and building a strong reputation.

After the last question was answered, Director Yoong Yoong thanked everyone for their active participation and the APRs for their contributions. He invited participants to visit the ASEAN Secretariat to discuss more about consensus-building.

Breakout Session: Solutions Room



The afternoon breakout session, called "Solutions Room," was introduced by **Ms. Anusara Tanpitak**, the Communications and Knowledge Management Manager at Mekong Institute. This interactive session aimed to foster problem-solving through in-depth discussions, practical advice, and actionable steps. The session comprised three breakout rooms, each led by a facilitator, focusing on different themes and each featuring one of the three APRs as resource person.

The breakout rooms were centered around three main themes:

- **Regional Cooperation**, facilitated by Ms. Tanpitak
- **Youth Leadership & Volunteerism**, facilitated by Ms. Anna Leigh Anillo
- **Women Empowerment**, facilitated by Mr. Eastword Manlises

Participants chose their respective breakout rooms and engaged in discussions for one and a half hours. The session aimed to enhance community building and strengthen bonds among participants through collaborative learning and peer interaction, aligning with the symposium's objective of promoting an integrated ASEAN community. It encouraged stakeholders to play more active roles in fostering the ASEAN spirit and advancing regional cooperation.

In each breakout room, participants were divided into smaller groups and presented with case studies related to the core themes. Each group selected a case study and co-created solutions using a "solutions tree" template, focusing on practical and implementable solutions across various sectors. The session allowed participants to contribute to finding solutions for critical issues in Lao PDR that also resonate with other ASEAN nations.

Groups were also requested to identify organizations in Lao PDR that are already working on the identified issues. The APRs provided guidance and answered questions as they moved around the room. Each group designated a representative to present their solutions in a concise 5-minute presentation.



Solutions Room Case Studies

Regional Cooperation and Integration

- **Addressing Carbon Emissions:** Implementing steps to reduce carbon emissions and collaborate with other nations for sustainable goals.
- **Food Security in Times of Crisis:** Enhancing regional collaborations to ensure food security during crises like pandemics.
- **Tourism and the Creative Industry:** Revitalizing tourism and supporting creative businesses post-pandemic.
- **Transnational Crimes:** Strengthening regional cooperation to combat drug trafficking and people smuggling.
- **Cybersecurity:** Improving regional cybersecurity cooperation and developing common response strategies.



Youth Leadership and Volunteerism

- **Insecure Youth Employment:** Creating stable, well-paying jobs for young people in Lao PDR, especially outside agriculture.
- **Opportunities in the Agriculture Sector:** Teaching modern farming techniques and providing market access to attract young people to agriculture.
- **Migration Risks:** Reducing the need for urban migration by creating local job opportunities and educating on safe migration.
- **Mental Health Challenges:** Providing accessible mental health support and addressing root causes of mental health issues among youth.
- **Digital Learning Differences:** Ensuring equitable access to digital learning resources and improving internet infrastructure in remote areas.
- **Climate Action Gap:** Empowering and mobilizing Lao youth to take active roles in climate action initiatives.



Women Empowerment

- **Skills Diversification:** Encouraging women in Lao PDR to pursue technical fields and higher-paying jobs traditionally dominated by men.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Addressing the lack of control women have over finances, land, and business training in key industries.
- **Male Engagement:** Involving men and boys in promoting gender equality to challenge harmful gender norms.
- **Addressing Early Marriage:** Supporting young women in pursuing higher education and delaying marriage.
- **Violence Prevention:** Tackling violence against women and improving access to justice and economic opportunities.

The APR assigned in each Solutions Room provided insights and recommendations based on actual experiences to demonstrate the practicability and effectiveness of the proposed solutions. This interactive format promoted networking, peer-learning, and the development of practical solutions to regional challenges.

The Solutions Room proved to be an engaging component of the ASEAN Prize Symposium. It helped attain the following outcomes:

- **Collaboration and Peer-Learning:** Facilitated cross-country collaboration and shared learning among ASEAN representatives.
- **Actionable Solutions:** Encouraged the development of practical solutions that can be implemented by various sectors.
- **Networking:** Strengthened networks and relationships among participants, fostering a sense of regional solidarity and cooperation.
- **Practical Guidance:** Provided participants with valuable insights and recommendations from the APR, enhancing the effectiveness of the proposed solutions.

Closing Ceremony

After the breakout session, attendees were asked to return to the main hall for the closing ceremony. Director Lee Yoong Yoong invited the APRs to join him on stage and discuss the key highlights from their respective Solutions Room. Mr. Vichitlekarn and Madam Minh were both impressed with how actively the participants engaged in small group discussions. They particularly admired the involvement of young participants from the National University of Laos and other organizations from all across Southeast Asia. They said that they also learned so much from the participants' sharing of experiences. Director Yoong Yoong also allowed the participants to share their key learnings. Before formally concluding the event, he encouraged everyone to review the mechanics of the ASEAN Prize and nominate individuals or organizations they deem worthy to be recognized with the prestigious regional award.

After the event, AYC delegates went to Patuxai for a group photo.





ASEAN Youth Conference

Tuesday, 21 May 2024, Crowne Plaza Vientiane Hotel, Vientiane, Lao PDR

Forging a stronger and more sustainable regional community, ASEAN Secretariat and Mekong Institute (MI) gathered 30 young leaders from across ASEAN Member States for the ASEAN Youth Convergence (AYC) on 20-21 May in Vientiane. Supported by the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Youth (SOMY) and through ASEAN Youth Programme Fund (AYPF), AYC set a remarkable tone for youth leadership and civic engagement with aim to shape the future of the region.

His Excellency Mr. Htet Aung, Chair of the ASEAN SOMY and Director-General of Myanmar’s Department of Youth Affairs, Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, graced the opening program for the youth conference. In his welcome remarks, he emphasised that opportunities like the AYC help young leaders expand their networks and meet like-minded peers. These learning platforms further empower young people as architects of the future of ASEAN community.

“We must keep exploring approaches that enable ASEAN youth to leverage their skills and competencies for our community-building efforts. We also ought to strengthen the institutionalisation of these youth engagement mechanisms, including through regional policy discourse.”



On behalf of the ASEAN Secretariat, **Mr. Lee Yoong Yoong**, also delivered an opening remarks. He highlighted the significant role of youths as active drivers of the region's future. He emphasised that ASEAN is committed to harnessing the extraordinary potential of young people by providing them with the necessary tools, platforms, and opportunities to contribute to the region's development.

"The ASEAN Youth Convergence is organised to enrich the capacities, honing the technical skills, and deepening the understanding of youth participants in forging ASEAN's regional development journey, especially through the areas pertinent to regional cooperation and integration, youth leadership and volunteerism and advancing women socio-economic empowerment," he stated.



Facilitating the youth conference proper, **Ms. Anusara Tanpitak**, Manager of MI's Communications and Knowledge Management Unit and AYC 2024 project leader, explained that the AYC sought to inspire the youth on regional community issues and enhance their capacity for stakeholder engagement.

"We wanted the delegates to develop a sense of aspiration, and we did this by showcasing the extraordinary journeys of our ASEAN Prize Recipients (APRs), providing them with role models. We also worked on deepening their understanding of and sharpening their skills in regional cooperation, youth leadership and volunteerism, and women empowerment, which are this program's core themes," said Ms. Tanpitak.





Lightning Talks

The AYC included a series of talks on topics relevant to civic engagement. **Mr. Thatsaphone Leththavone**, Director of the International Relations-Cooperation Division from Lao Youth Union, discussed the role of youth in addressing community challenges. **Mr. Vichitlekarn** delivered a comprehensive talk about how consensus-building strengthens regional cooperation, while **Madam Minh** spoke about ways to ensure advocacy initiatives are inclusive.

The Role of the Youth in Addressing Community Challenges

In his segment, Mr. Leththavone highlighted the pivotal role of ASEAN youth in addressing community challenges and shaping the region's future. He noted that the youth sector comprises one-third of ASEAN's population and is expected to exceed 220 million by 2038. This demographic is crucial as it represents the future leaders, intellectuals, innovators, change-makers, influencers, community developers, and workforce of ASEAN.

He identified several regional challenges affecting ASEAN youth. In terms of health and well-being, he pointed out the inadequate access to sexual reproductive health information and healthcare services, rising rates of non-communicable diseases, mental health issues, and substance abuse. Education quality and accessibility, including the digital divide, are significant concerns, with disparities in education quality between countries and rural areas, limited access to the internet and digital literacy skills, and issues such as fake news, online social bullying, and cyber-security threats.



Lightning Talk

The Role of the Youth in Addressing Community Challenges

Mr. Leththavone shared that unemployment and underemployment remain problematic, particularly in rural areas, due to limited job opportunities and lack of relevant skills. Political and civic engagement is hindered by limited access to information and inadequate involvement in policy-making processes. Climate change also poses challenges, with natural disasters, air pollution, and water pollution being prominent issues.

ASEAN youth are actively involved in addressing these challenges and shaping the future of the region. They bring innovative ideas and solutions, ensuring that policies and initiatives reflect their long-term interests. Their engagement in addressing these issues ensures that their voices are heard in policy-making processes aimed at achieving sustainable development goals. Empowering youth from diverse and marginalized backgrounds fosters a sense of ownership and belonging, promoting social cohesion and inclusivity within ASEAN.

To support youth development, ASEAN has implemented various programs, including the ASEAN Work Plan on Youth, ASEAN Youth Development Index (YDI), ASEAN Youth Volunteer Programmes, ASEAN Young Leader Programmes, ASEAN Scholarship and Exchange Programmes, and ASEAN Youth Seminars, Forums, and Training Programmes. These initiatives inclusively support and empower ASEAN youth to become active citizens and participants in shaping a prosperous future for the region.

Lightning Talk

How consensus-building strengthens regional cooperation



Mr. Vichitlekarn discussed how consensus-building strengthens regional cooperation by explaining that consensus-building is a process that involves a good-faith effort to meet the interests of all stakeholders and seek a unanimous agreement. For a regional community like ASEAN, consensus-building is crucial as it facilitates cooperation and unity among member states. Unlike simple compromises or meeting in the middle, consensus-building aims to address the core interests of all parties involved, ensuring a holistic and inclusive agreement.

To effectively build consensus, several strategies and tips are essential. These include adopting a collaborative mindset, facilitating discussions on neutral ground, and focusing on common interests and clear objectives rather than rigid positions. The process involves constructive dialogue, active listening, and sorting out misunderstandings. Possible compromises and incremental agreements can also help in reaching consensus, along with a strong commitment and follow-up to ensure the decisions are implemented effectively.

ASEAN has unique characteristics when it comes to consensus-building, as outlined in the ASEAN Charter. Chapter VII, particularly Articles 20 and 21, emphasizes consultation and consensus, as well as the 'ASEAN Minus X' approach, which allows flexible participation in economic commitments. The principles of non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful settlement of disputes, and non-confrontation underpin the consensus-building process within ASEAN. This approach results in various types of consensus, including agreements and principles that guide regional cooperation.

Mr. Vichitlekarn also shared examples of regional consensus that have led to beneficial impacts for ASEAN citizens, illustrating the practical outcomes of successful consensus-building. However, he acknowledged that achieving consensus can sometimes be challenging. When consensus is elusive, the group may have to agree to disagree, returning to the drawing board to find common grounds. In such cases, the process of seeking consensus continues until a mutually acceptable solution is found, reinforcing the commitment to regional cooperation and unity.

Lightning Talk

How do we ensure our initiatives are inclusive

Madam Minh emphasized the importance of ensuring that advocacies and initiatives are both feasible and inclusive by aligning them with ASEAN's goals and directions, addressing existing problems, and attracting stakeholder participation. She stressed the necessity of ensuring sufficient resources for implementation, sustainability of the initiatives, and the evaluation and replication of successful models to enhance social impact.

To attract and engage the correct stakeholders, Madam Minh highlighted the need for diverse representation, equitable opportunities, and partnerships based on respect, equality, and mutual benefit. She also emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity and continuous evaluation and improvement to ensure that initiatives are inclusive and leave no one behind.

Creating a supportive environment for stakeholders involves building trust through transparency, compliance with regulations, and fulfilling commitments. Initiatives should be executed as planned and on schedule, with the primary focus on the program's goals rather than personal gain.

Madam Minh also stressed the importance of giving benefits first to gain support from partners and members later, avoiding discrimination, and actively engaging stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of activities. The closure of programs should include evaluation, lessons learned, and recommendations.

Madam Minh shared her experience with the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network (AWEN), where stakeholders include the ASEAN Secretariat, ACW, MOLISA, MOFA, VCCI, related ministries, women entrepreneur associations, and international organizations like DEPAT, ACTI, WB, and UN WOMEN. AWEN builds trust through transparency and compliance with regulations, consistently keeping commitments, and providing benefits first, such as offering free activities for members and sponsoring delegates. By respecting partners and members and often exceeding commitments, AWEN has enhanced its reputation. The active participation of partners and members has significantly contributed to the development and success of AWEN, demonstrating the effectiveness of these inclusive strategies.



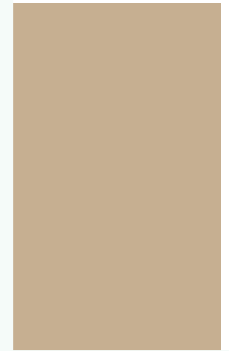
ASEAN Café



The Lightning Talks were followed by small-group conversations, dubbed ASEAN Café, a world café-style activity designed to foster reflection, sharing, and discussion among participants. There were three stations with different facilitators: Station 1 with Mr. Vichitlekarn and Ms. Leigh Anillo, Station 2 with Madam Minh and Mr. East Manlises, and Station 3 with Dir. Yoong Yoong and Ms. Tanpitak.

At each station, participants, divided into three groups, were provided with specific discussion questions. They were encouraged to reflect on these questions, write their thoughts on cards, and take turns sharing their answers within the group, with each participant given two minutes to speak. Facilitators and resource persons at each station encouraged deeper reflection, connection-making, and thinking beyond the initial questions. The delegates were given 20 minutes in each station before moving on to the next. There were three rounds of station rotation in total.

Mr. Vichitlekarn asked the participants about their perceived uniqueness of the AYC and the opportunities it presented. In Madam Minh's station, the youth delegates focused on sharing what they thought was an enabling environment for active youth or citizen engagement, encouraging participants to share their personal stories and journeys. Station 3, facilitated by Dir. Yoong Yoong, prompted participants to reflect on meaningful insights and major learnings from the conference. Throughout the activity, tea, coffee, and refreshments were available, creating a relaxed, café-like, and friendly atmosphere. The facilitators then recapped the key discussions during the plenary session.



Stakeholder Engagement Exercise

At the AYC, one of the main goals was to equip participants with skills and a deeper understanding of stakeholder dynamics and consensus-building. To accomplish this, AYC delegates engaged in a role-playing activity where they led and participated in stakeholder meetings. By embodying various stakeholder perspectives with differing viewpoints, they collaborated to reach mutual agreements. The objective was for participants to enhance their abilities in stakeholder interaction and negotiation, grasp diverse viewpoints, and practice consensus-building strategies.

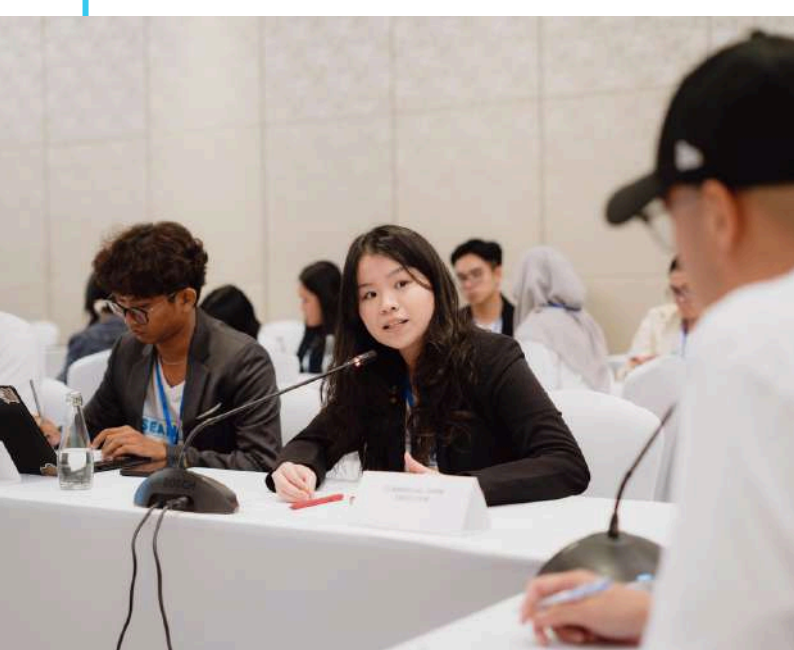
Prior to the group simulations, Ms. Tanpitak talked about stakeholder engagement, defining stakeholders as individuals, groups, or organizations with a vested interest in business, organizational, or project decisions and activities. She stressed the significance of involving stakeholders in any program, project, or advocacy, emphasizing benefits like improved decision-making, better communication and understanding, increased support, and increased project success.

She then introduced the stakeholder engagement exercise, where participants were grouped by thematic areas and provided with scenarios related to these themes to set the stage for their stakeholder meetings. Each group, comprising ten members, assumed specific stakeholder roles with distinct perspectives on the issue.

Stakeholder Engagement Exercise

Participants were instructed to review scenario and stakeholder role background information, understanding their interests, concerns, and objectives. While allowed to conduct additional research, they were not permitted to deliberate their arguments before the simulation. During the simulated stakeholder meeting, some delegates facilitated discussions, ensuring all viewpoints were acknowledged and steering conversations towards productive outcomes.

Active engagement was promoted, urging each member to present their stakeholder's viewpoints, negotiate with others, and strive for common ground. The exercise aimed to address conflicts and reach a consensus or proposed solution that catered to all stakeholders' concerns and requirements. This exercise aimed to offer hands-on experience in managing diverse stakeholder interests and achieving consensus in intricate circumstances.





After every group simulation, Mr. Vichitlekarn and Madam Minh provided their insights by highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. Feedback was also given by members of the organizing team. Towards the end of the session, the delegates were encouraged to share their thoughts on the exercise and express how it feels to step into the shoes of a stakeholder with a perspective different from their own.

The exercise sought to improve the delegates' understanding of stakeholder engagement and practice negotiation skills and consensus-building.

Wrap up

After the exercise, Ms. Tanpitak recapped the activities of AYC 2024, showing all the exercises and workshops that the delegates completed. Participants had ample opportunities for networking, opening doors for dialogue and collaboration with their peers and resource speakers. She congratulated everyone for finishing the program and for helping meet its objectives. The afternoon session concluded with reminders for the Cultural Dinner and some announcements regarding the return trips of all the delegates.

Letters to Leaders Exhibit

Before convening in Vientiane, the delegates participated in an online “letters to leaders” workshop led by Save Philippine Seas Executive Director, Ms. Anna Oposa. This workshop introduced a simple yet powerful tool for engaging their respective stakeholders. After the workshop, the delegates were assigned to compose individual letters, applying their newly-acquired skills. The participants were given two days to submit their drafts.

A total of 30 letters were prepared. The Organizing Team provided feedback on the letters before allowing the delegates the opportunity to refine their drafts based on the comments received. Once the letters were finalized, they were prepared for display at an exhibition during the youth conference on May 21, 2024. The exhibit not only prompted the delegates to put their skills into practice but also highlighted the youth's agenda, encompassing their concerns, aspirations, and viewpoints on the ASEAN community. The letters covered an array of pressing topics, including public transportation, neurological and mental health, women's involvement in the security and defense sector, women in the tech industry, racism and discrimination, digital carbon footprint, environmental issues, rural education and healthcare, and sustainable agriculture, among others. To make the exhibit interactive, sticker emojis were incorporated for observers to “react” or convey their sentiments about the letters.



Cultural Night

The AYC wrapped up with a lively cultural dinner, bringing together delegates from various ASEAN countries for an evening of celebration, camaraderie, and friendship. Dressed in their traditional or national attire, the youth delegates graced the red carpet and delighted each other with cultural performances that highlighted the diversity and creativity of the ASEAN community.

The evening began with welcoming remarks from Dr. Roger Chao Jr., Assistant Director of the Youth, Education, and Sport Division at the ASEAN Secretariat. Dr. Chao stressed the significance of youth involvement and cultural appreciation within ASEAN, setting a motivational tone for the night. He also led the awarding of certificates of participation to each delegate.

Following the certificate ceremony, a buffet dinner was served, leading to country performances. A total of 10 presentations showcased a glimpse of the cultural richness of each ASEAN Member State. Delegates presented songs, dances, skits, slide shows, food and traditional cosmetics demonstrations, and even an interactive quiz. Post presentations, the organizing team members delighted the audience with special impromptu performances, fostering a warm and memorable atmosphere.

The evening concluded with closing remarks from the organizing team representatives, Mr. Vichitlekarn for Mekong Institute and Mr. Lee Yoong Yoong on behalf of the ASEAN Secretariat.



Communications

MI and the ASEAN Secretariat collaborated to develop communication materials for the ASEAN Youth Convergence. This involved drafting concept notes, creating event banners, and producing presentations and videos. All pertinent information was shared on a specific webpage: [ASEAN Youth Convergence](#). Subsequently, a press release was issued following each of the three components of the program. Below are the press releases that were published.

- [Inaugural ASEAN Youth Convergence kick-starts with an online delegates' meeting, letters to leaders' workshop](#)
- [ASEAN Prize Symposium 2024 convenes, fostering community building](#)
- [ASEAN, Mekong Institute empower youth in civic engagement for stronger regional community](#)

Event photos are available here: [ASEAN Prize Symposium](#) and [AYC 2024](#).

Meanwhile, the following summarizes the value and reach of published news items and promotional materials about AYC 2024.

MEDIA COVERAGE					
Media	Date	Language	Advertising Value (THB)	PR Value (THB)	Reach
1. Mekong Institute Website	Apr 1, 2024	English	5,000	15,000	n/a
2. Mekong Institute Facebook	Apr 1, 2024	English	10,000	30,000	16,000
3. ASEAN Instagram	Apr 2, 2024	English	60,000	180,000	n/a
4. ASEAN X	Apr 2, 2024	English	50,153	150,459	100,651
5. FYAA Thailand - The Friendship Youth Alumni Association of Thailand Facebook	Apr 3, 2024	English	5,000	15,000	692
6. UTCC Facebook	Apr 4, 2024	English	20,000	60,000	293,829
7. DEKUTCC Instagram	Apr 4, 2024	English	60,000	180,000	n/a
8. Mekong Institute Website	Apr 23, 2024	English	5,000	15,000	n/a

* Click on each item to see the specific published materials.

MEDIA COVERAGE					
Media	Date	Language	Advertising Value (THB)	PR Value (THB)	Reach
8. Mekong Institute Website	Apr 23, 2024	English	5,000	15,000	n/a
9. Mekong Institute Facebook	Apr 29, 2024	English	10,000	30,000	16,000
10. Mekong Institute Facebook	May 3, 2024	English	10,000	30,000	16,000
11. ASEAN Website	May 13, 2024	English	16,905	50,715	9,960
12. Mekong Institute X	May 13, 2024	English	51,894	155,682	109,962
13. Mekong Institute X	May 29, 2024	English	51,894	155,682	109,962
14. ASEAN Website	May 21, 2024	English	19,516	58,548	13,296
TOTAL			247,058	741,174	453,132

* Click on each item to see the specific published materials.

Monitoring and Evaluation

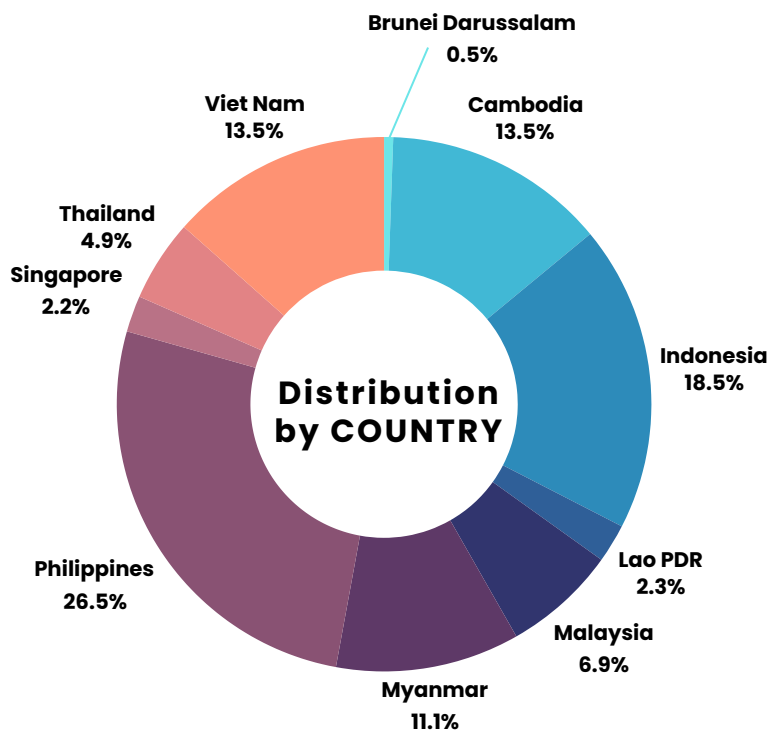
Application Process

The inaugural ASEAN Youth Convergence catered to 30 young leaders from ASEAN Member States. To determine the official delegates, a call for application was launched. In the call for applications, AYC 2024 announced that it will cover all costs related to event participation, including roundtrip flights, accommodation, meals, and event materials. A total of 728 individuals applied for the program. The Organizing Team reviewed the applications based on the set criteria and announced the successful applicants on April 16, 2024.

The following data presents a summary of the applications received by the organizers, demonstrating a strong interest for youth development programs like the AYC 2024 .

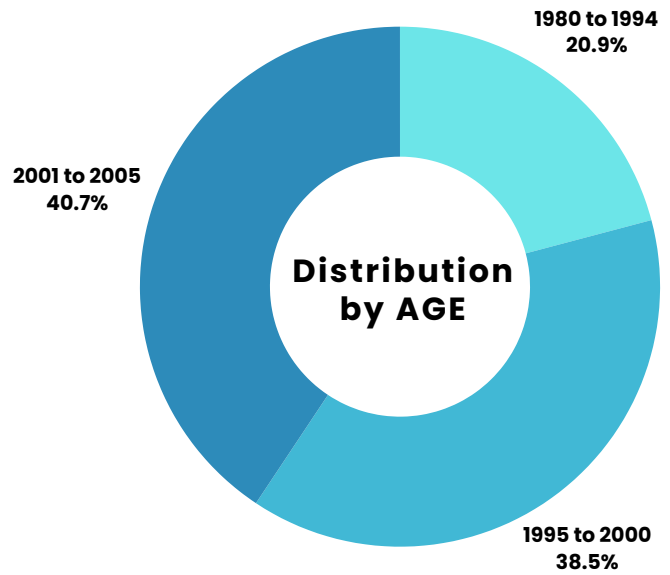
The majority of applicants came from the Philippines and Indonesia. Filipino applicants alone accounted for over one-fourth of the total applications received. Given the short application period, the volume of applications was impressive. However, future efforts should focus on increasing engagement with potential applicants from Brunei Darussalam, Lao PDR, and Singapore, each of which generated fewer than 20 applications.

ASEAN Member State	No. of Applicants
Brunei Darussalam	4
Cambodia	98
Indonesia	135
Lao PDR	17
Malaysia	50
Myanmar	81
Philippines	193
Singapore	16
Thailand	36
Viet Nam	98
Total	728



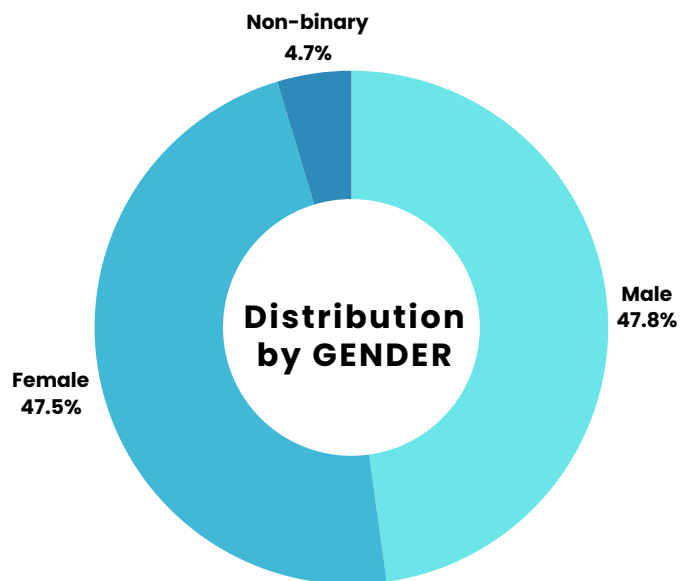
In terms of age distribution, most applicants were either fresh graduates or undergraduate students, showing a high level of interest among this group. The smallest age group comprised professionals over 30, making up only about one-fifth of the total applications received. Notably, six applications were from individuals over the age limit. ASEAN defines youth as those between the ages of 15 to 35, and the application form clearly stated that only those aged 19 to 35 were eligible for the program.

Age Group	Year	No. of Applicants
Professionals above 30 years old / First-time or fist-line managers	1980 - 1994 (30 to 35 yo)	152
Professionals below 30 years old	1995 - 2000 (24 to 29 yo)	280
Fresh graduates / undergraduate students	2001 - 2005 (19 to 23 yo)	296
Total		728



In terms of gender, there was a positive balance between applicants who identified as male (348) and female (346). Committed to promoting gender diversity, the program also welcomed applications from individuals who identified as non-binary, with 34 such applicants.

Gender	No. of Applicants
Male	348
Female	346
Non-binary	34
Total	728

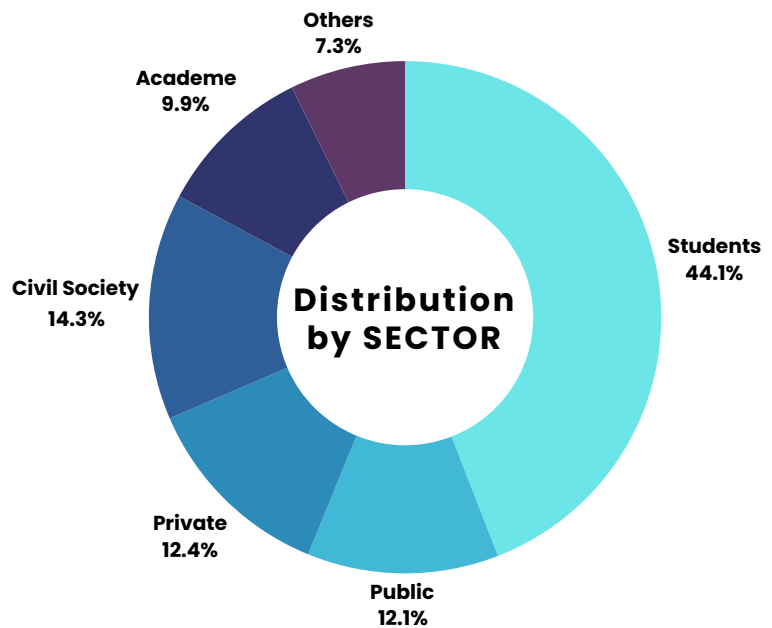


In terms of sector distribution, 44.1% of the applicants were students (321), which aligns with the high percentage of the age group considered fresh graduates or undergraduate students. Following, but somewhat behind, were applicants from civil society organizations, comprising 14.3% (104) of the total.

Applicants from the private sector accounted for 12.3% (90), while those from the public sector made up 12% (88). The academic sector contributed 9.9% (72) of the applications, reflecting a strong representation from educational institutions. The remaining 7.3% (53) fell into the 'Others' category, which included various professions and backgrounds not specifically categorized.

This diverse sector representation highlights the broad appeal of the AYC program across different professional and educational backgrounds. However, there is room for improvement in engaging applicants from underrepresented sectors, such as the public and academic sectors, to ensure a more balanced participation in future iterations of the program. The data suggests a strong interest among younger individuals and students, indicating a potential area of focus for outreach efforts to professionals and individuals in other sectors to achieve a more diverse and inclusive participant pool.

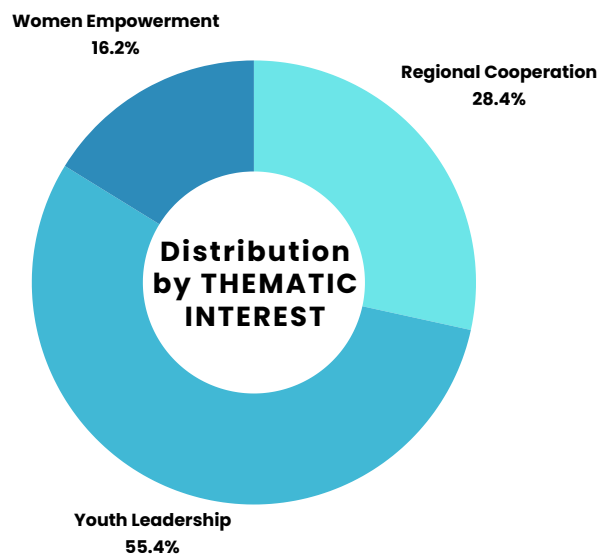
Sector	No. of Applicants
Students	321
Public	88
Private	90
Civil Society	104
Academe	72
Others	53
Total	728



More than half of the applications indicated an interest in the youth leadership and volunteerism thematic area. While not all students or fresh graduates selected this theme, a significant portion did, as evidenced by the screening process conducted by the Organizing Team. It is understandable that students might choose this thematic area, especially if they are not yet certain about which specific issue they wish to advocate for. Notably, the number of applicants who selected youth leadership and volunteerism exceeds the total number of students and fresh graduates, indicating that participants from other age groups also favored this theme. This suggests a strong inclination among applicants, including older age groups, towards youth advocacy and development initiatives over more specific themes like regional cooperation and women empowerment.

In their essay submissions, many applicants specifically noted advocacy interests in areas such as the environment, mental health, digitalization, and gender equality. Some applicants might have chosen an AYC 2024 thematic area that they felt best aligned with their specific advocacies. Future iterations of the program could benefit from being tailored to specific advocacies, sectors, or age groups. This targeted approach would allow for program content and training needs to be more precisely aligned with the interests and requirements of different participant demographics.

Thematic Interest	No. of Applicants
Regional Cooperation	207
Youth Leadership	403
Women Empowerment	118
Total	728



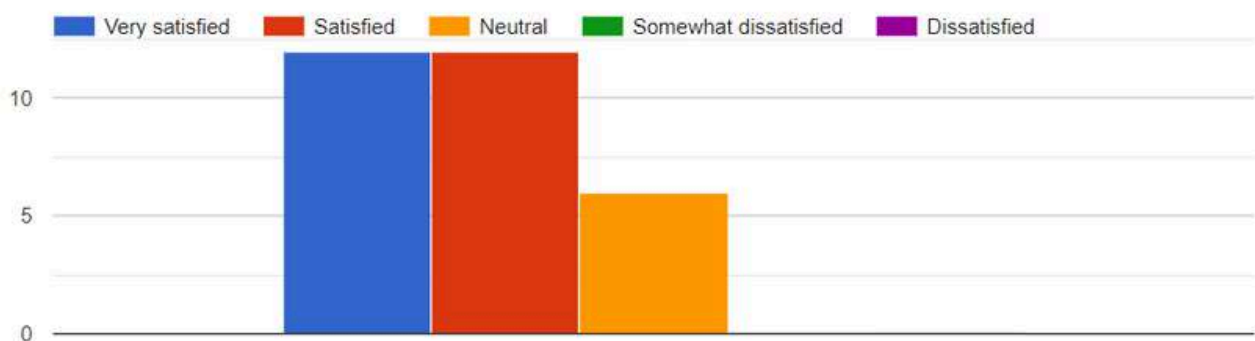
Overall, these application results highlight the need for more nuanced youth development programs. There is also an opportunity to engage this region's youth in championing other causes and issues beyond the broader scope of youth leadership and volunteerism.

To expedite and streamline the selection process, automation could be considered for future implementations, particularly in the pre-qualification stage. This would allow unqualified applicants to be identified and removed early on, making the process more efficient.

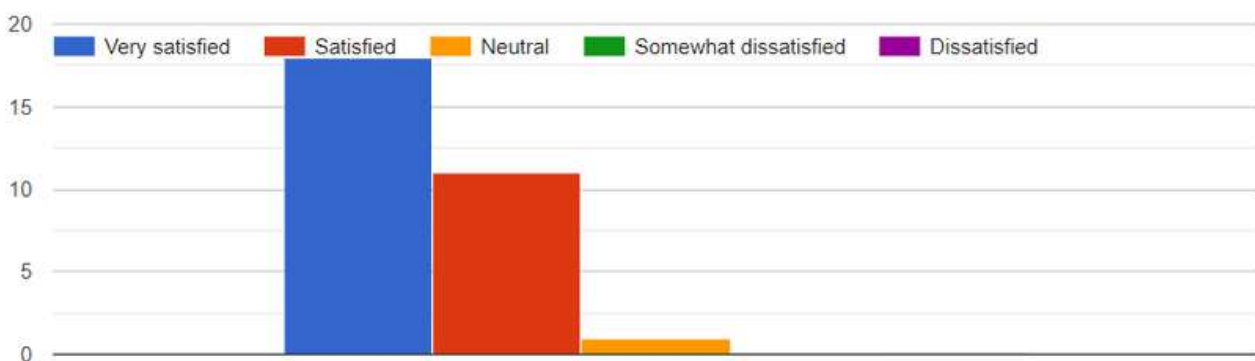
Delegates Feedback

To evaluate the program's success and guide future planning, feedback was gathered from all 30 delegates. The results showed a high satisfaction rate, with most participants reporting they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the handling of the five major activities and events. These included the online pre-departure meeting, the ASEAN Prize Symposium, the symposium's breakout session, the youth conference proper, and the cultural night. Participants particularly appreciated the cultural night, with 80% expressing that they were very satisfied with the event.

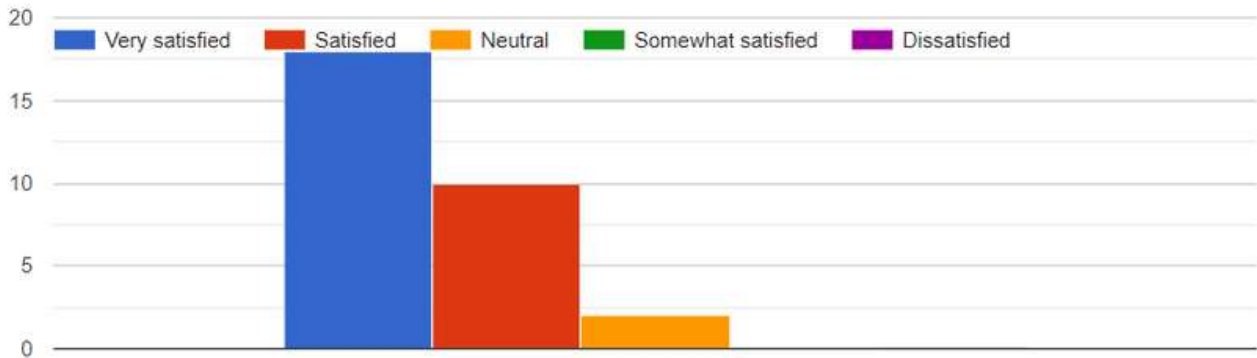
Delegates Pre-Departure Meeting held on May 13th



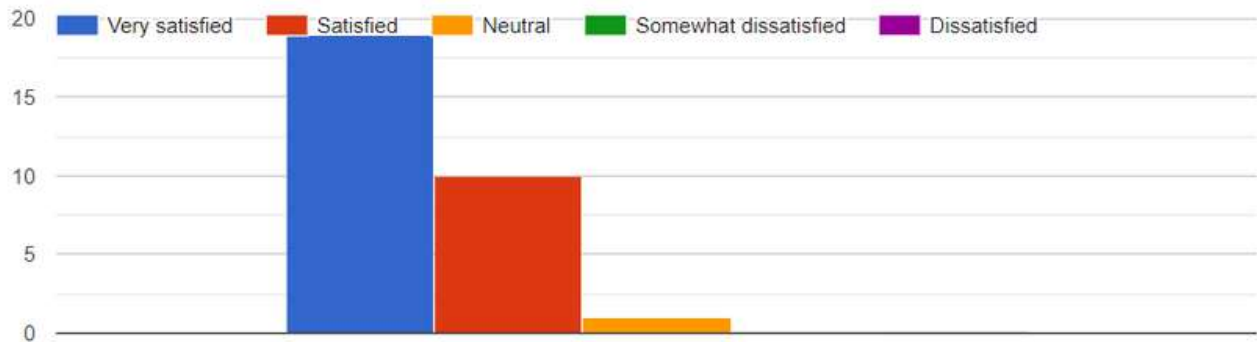
ASEAN Prize Symposium 2024 held on May 20th



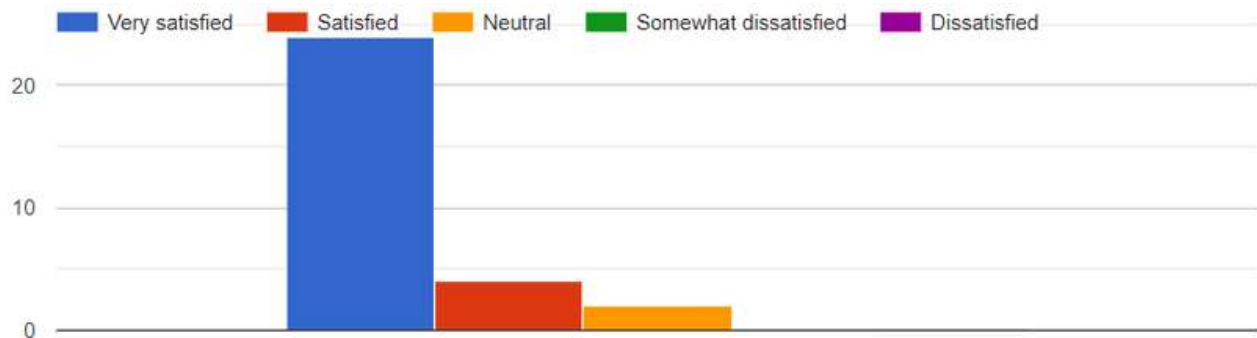
Breakout session of the ASEAN Prize Symposium



AYC Youth Conference held on May 21st



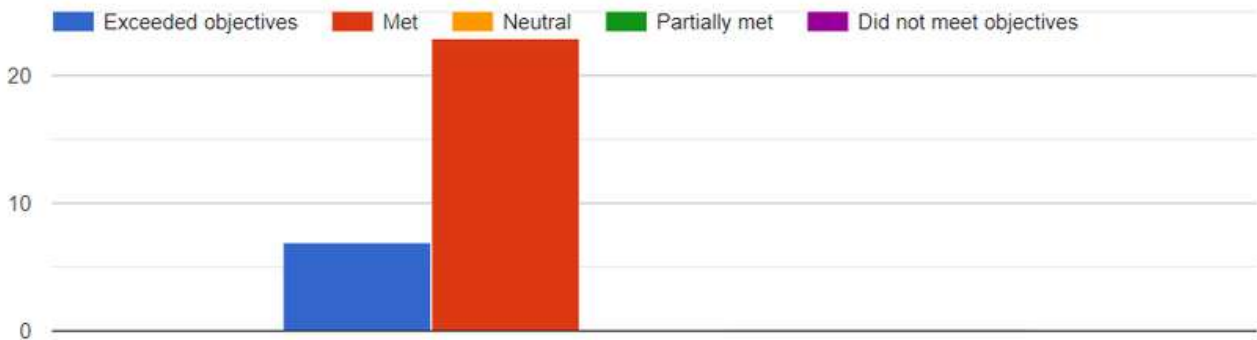
AYC Cultural Night



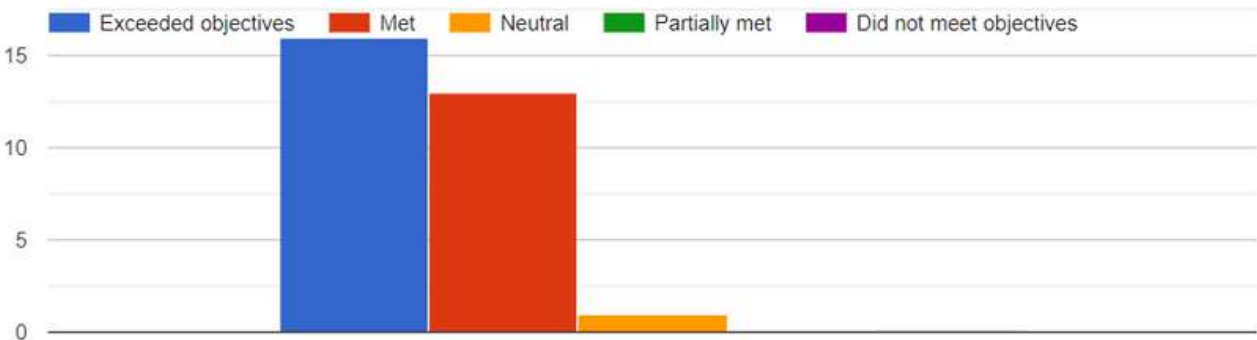
On Event Objectives

The delegates believe that the program either met or exceeded its objectives. Specifically, it successfully promoted civic engagement, inspired youth leaders, fostered stakeholder understanding, and shared practices and tools useful for their advocacy work.

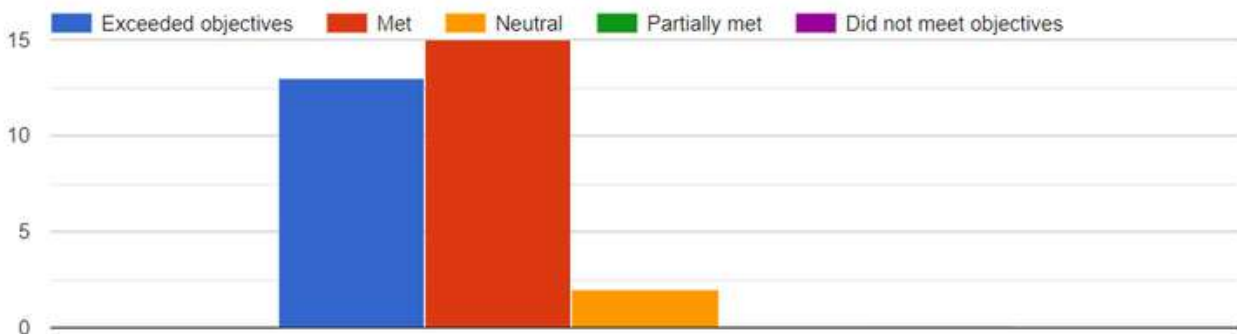
Promoted civic engagement



Inspired the youth leaders and fostered stakeholder understanding



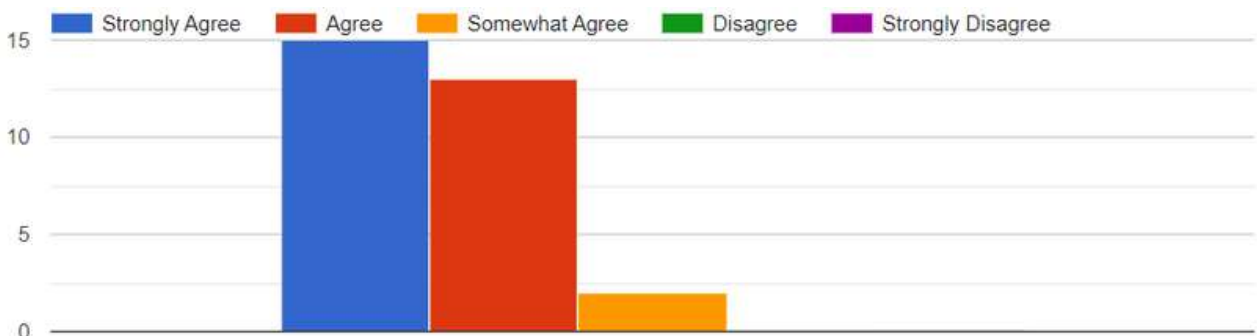
Shared best practices and tools



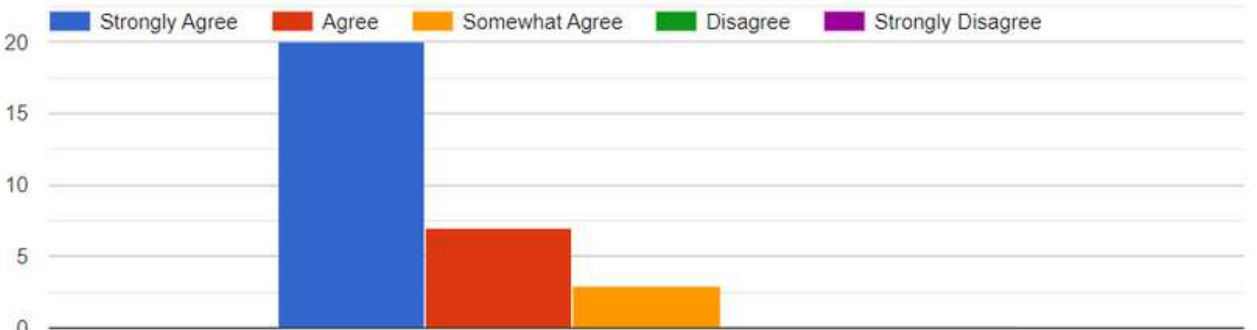
On Event Outcomes

The feedback results indicate encouraging program outcomes. Most delegates agree or strongly agree that they gained meaningful ideas and insights from the discussions, which are useful for their work or studies. Additionally, two-thirds of the delegates reported an improvement in their understanding of stakeholder dynamics, effective communication, and the concept of consensus-building. They also established new knowledge, experience, inspiration, and networks from the event.

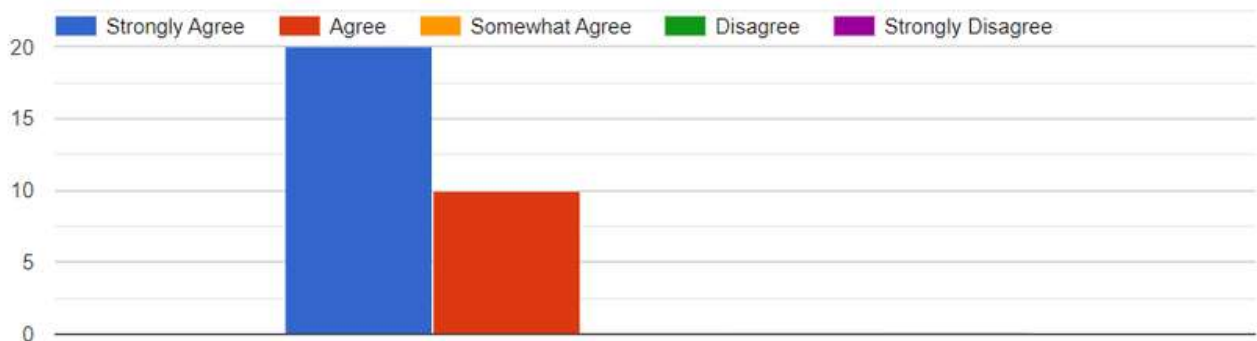
I gained meaningful ideas and insights from the discussions that are beneficial to my work / study.



I have a better understanding now of stakeholder dynamics, effective communication, and consensus-building



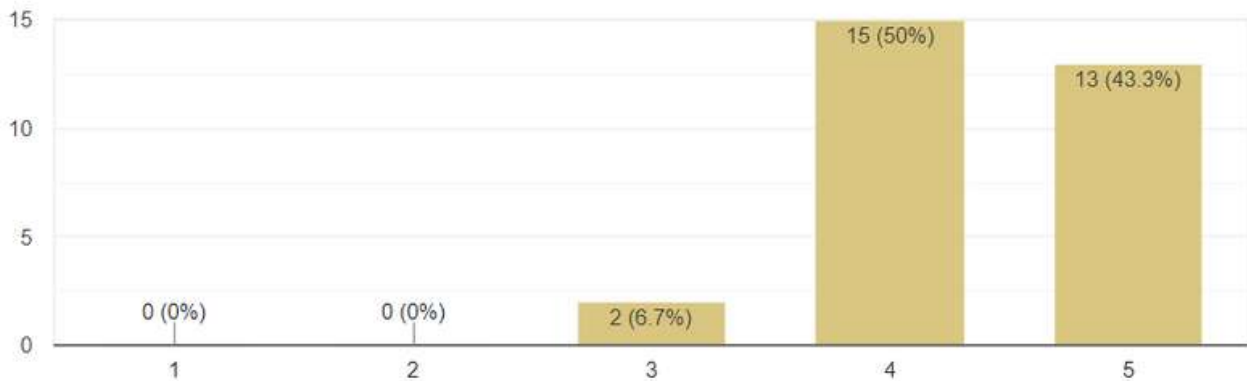
I formed / established new knowledge, experience, inspiration and/or professional networks in this year's event.



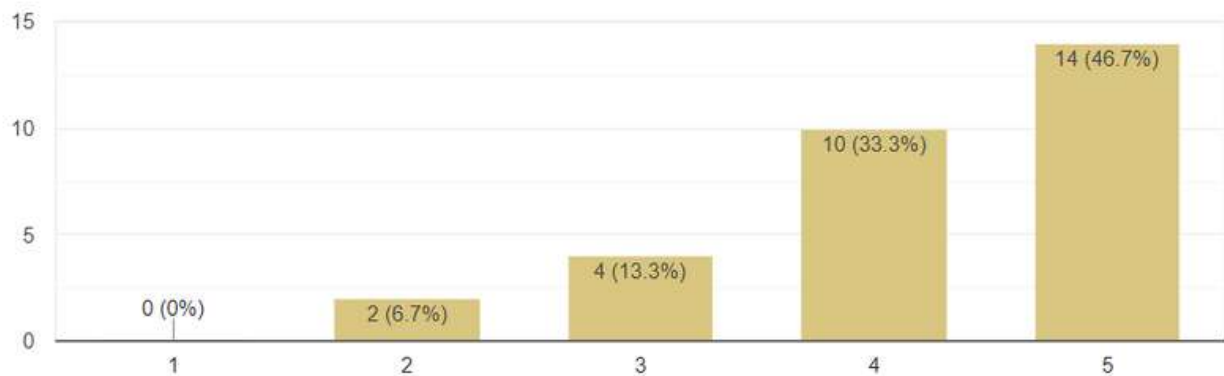
On Event Organization

In terms of event handling and organization, 80 to 90 percent of the delegates consistently gave high ratings on nine out of ten areas. These areas include the relevance and adequacy of information provided, event format, choice of session topics, quality of speaker presentations, opportunity to contribute to discussions, time for networking, the diversity of participants, venue arrangement, and meals and refreshments.

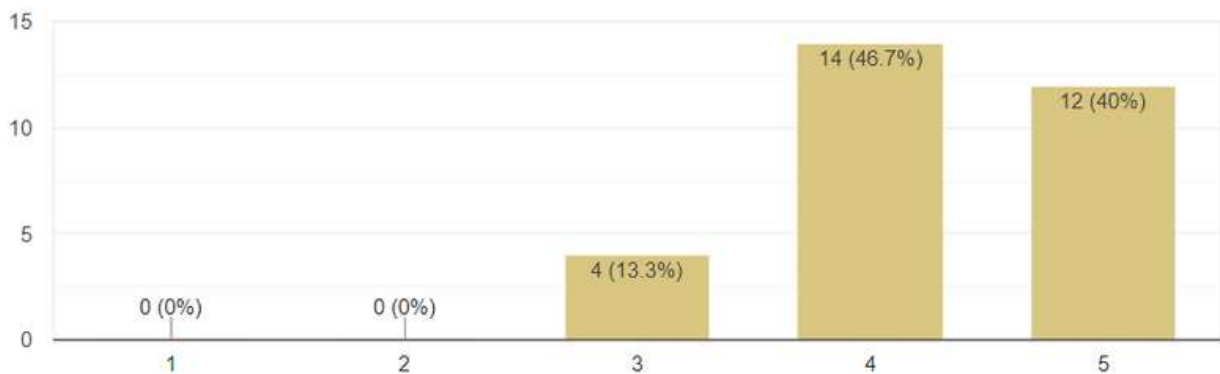
4.1. Relevance and adequacy of information provided



4.2. Event format

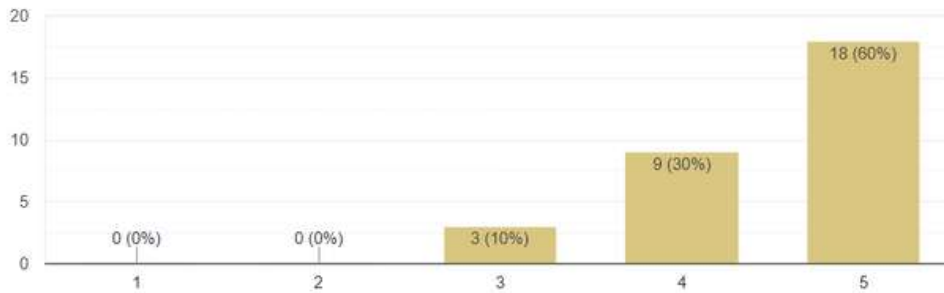


4.3. Choice of session topics

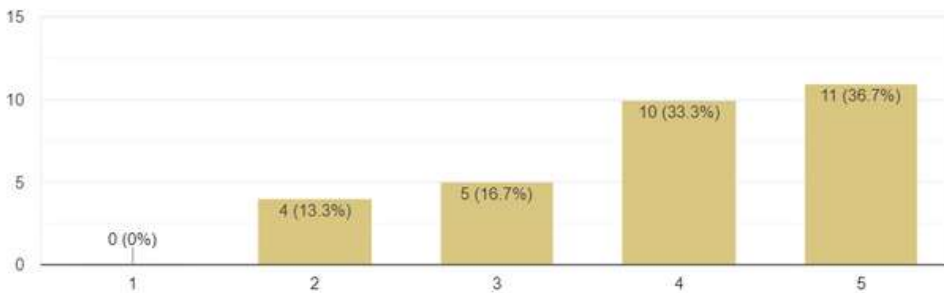


While over two-thirds of the delegates gave high ratings for the program's time allocation for sessions and discussions, nearly one-third provided lower ratings in this area. This feedback suggests that more thought should be given to time allocation, emphasizing that delegates highly value sufficient time for discussions, especially during question and answer sessions.

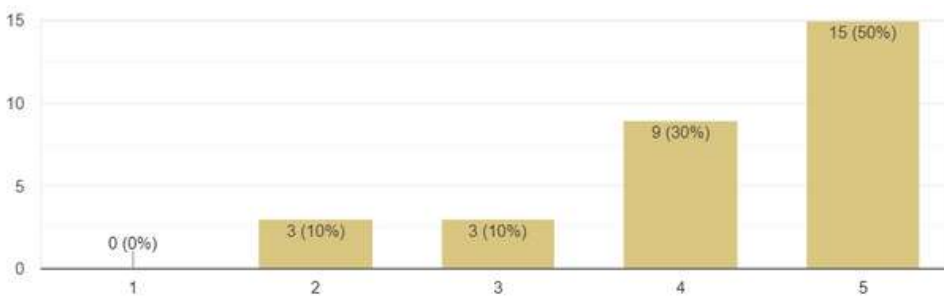
4.4. Quality of speaker presentations



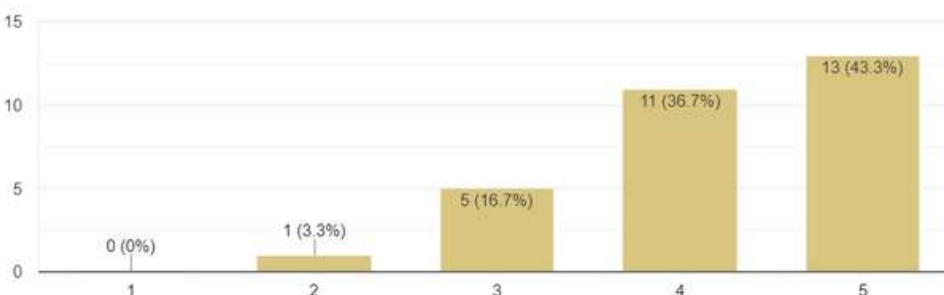
4.5. Time allocated for sessions and discussions



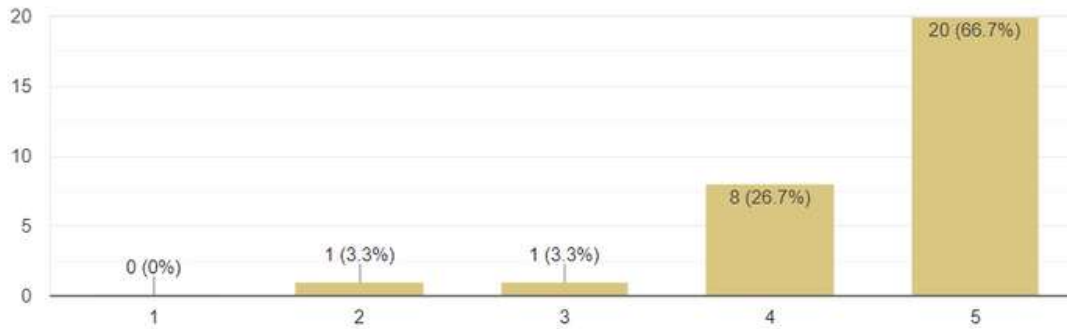
4.6. Opportunity for participants to contribute to discussions



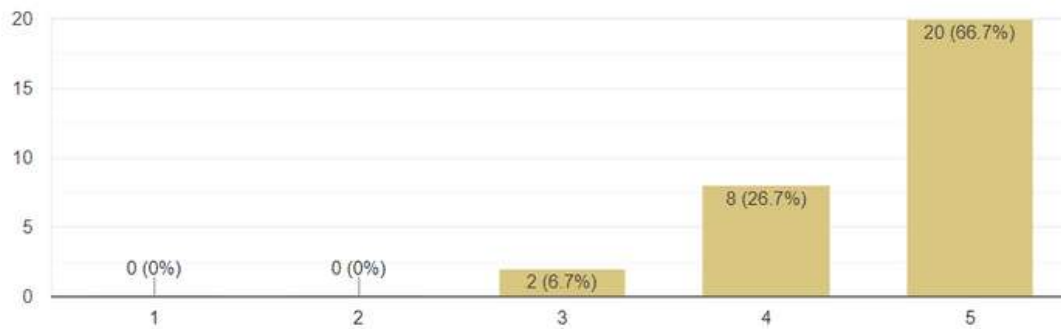
4.7. Time for networking



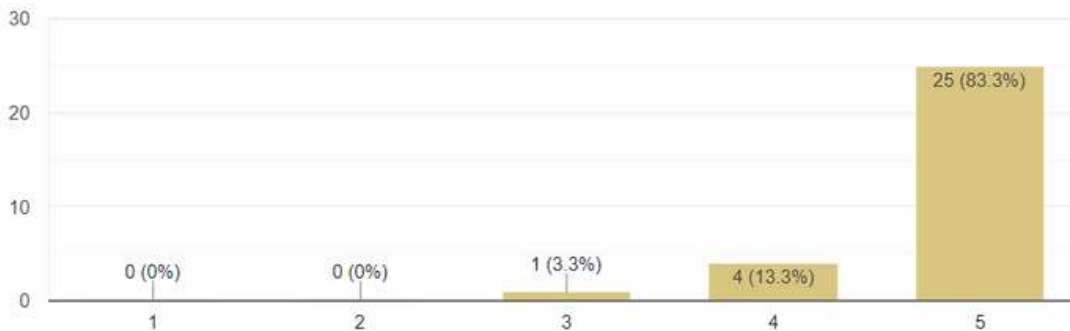
4.8. Mix of participants



4.9. Venue arrangement



4.10. Meal and refreshments



Other comments on event outcomes included gratitude for the opportunity to participate and appreciation for the event team's hard work. Participants felt rejuvenated by the interactions and found the event very inspiring, offering meaningful insights from best practices. One respondent considered it one of the best programs they had attended. It provided a significant learning experience in engaging multiple stakeholders and communicating diplomatically. The event was both beginner-friendly and suitable for experienced participants. There were also suggestions to include hackathons or pitching sessions in future programs.

What aspects of the AYC 2024 did the delegates like the most?

Stakeholders Engagement Meeting Exercise: Many participants appreciated the hands-on experience and interactive nature of this session.

Letter to Leaders Exercise: Participants enjoyed this meaningful platform for direct communication with leaders.

ASEAN Prize Symposium: This was noted for its educational value and the chance to engage with experts and peers.

Breakout Sessions and ASEAN Café: These provided valuable opportunities for delegates to share ideas, learn from each other, and reflect on their experiences.

Cultural Night: This event was frequently mentioned for its fun and engaging way to experience different cultures.

Networking Opportunities: Informal networking sessions and the chance to meet peers from other ASEAN countries were highly valued.

Overall Program Design: The program was praised for its interactivity, diversity, and the coordinators' efforts to create a warm and inclusive environment.

What aspects of the AYC 2024 could be further improved?

Extend Conference Duration: Increase the conference from 2 to 4 days to provide additional opportunities for bonding, interactive sessions, and cultural exploration. The extended timeframe will also allow for more outdoor activities and site visits.

Time Allocation: Allocate more time for the Stakeholder Engagement Exercise to deepen interactions and foster stronger connections between participants and stakeholders.

Activity Diversity: Introduce a variety of activities, including field studies, site visits, and role-playing sessions. Enhance the "Letter to Leaders" exhibit by adding more visual elements and expanding its reach to a broader audience. Incorporate speakers who are direct beneficiaries of programs or projects, such as small farmers and SME owners, to provide diverse perspectives and insights.

Session Structure and Inclusivity: Ensure that all participants have opportunities to ask questions and engage in discussions. Design sessions to accommodate varying levels of career and study experience, making them accessible and beneficial for everyone. Include participants from Timor Leste to diversify perspectives and enrich discussions.

Financial Support: Address additional travel costs and the lack of stipends by providing better financial support. This will help reduce the financial burden on participants and encourage broader participation.

Pre-Departure Briefings and Bonding: Incorporate in-person bonding activities during pre-departure briefings to build relationships and prepare participants for the conference. This will help create a cohesive group dynamic and set the stage for a successful event.

Program Design and Support: Organize workshops designed and led by youths for youths to ensure that the content is relevant and engaging for the target audience. Involve youth organizers in the planning process to capture their perspectives and ideas, ensuring that the program meets their needs and interests.

Logistical Suggestions: Replace online meet-and-greet sessions with in-person gatherings for better interaction and relationship-building. Additionally, incorporate weekly online activities leading up to the in-person event to keep participants engaged and connected.

Post-Event and Networking: Develop post-event activities and create platforms for continued networking to maintain and strengthen connections made during the event. This could include follow-up events, online forums, or regular updates.

Meal Arrangements: Provide meal coupons instead of fixed dinners to offer participants the flexibility to explore and enjoy local cuisine. This approach encourages cultural exploration and supports local businesses.

Overall Event Outcome

The AYC has been a successful inaugural program, setting a benchmark for future youth development initiatives that Mekong Institute, ASEAN Secretariat, and other partners can collaborate on. The program contributed to ASEAN community-building efforts by providing training, engagement, and networking opportunities for young leaders in Southeast Asia.

Key activities included a workshop on writing letters to leaders, a TEDx-style conference, presentations and breakout sessions on civic engagement topics, a training exercise on stakeholder engagement, and multiple networking opportunities. Specific outcomes were heightened interest among young leaders to implement advocacy initiatives and increased capacity to engage leaders and stakeholders in the region.

The AYC not only met but exceeded its objectives, offering a dynamic platform for young leaders to gain valuable insights and skills. The positive feedback and tangible outcomes underscore the program's potential as a model for future initiatives. The collaborative effort of all partners involved has laid a strong foundation for ongoing youth engagement and development in the ASEAN region.

TESTIMONIALS



Qiao Yi Lim • 2nd
NUS Computer Science Undergraduate | Cyber Youth Si...

+ Follow ...

It's been about a week since the conclusion of the ASEAN Youth Convergence 2024 in Vientiane, Laos, and I've since had time to properly reflect on the insights and new perspectives gained from this remarkable experience. As my first international conference, I approached it with an open mind, not knowing what to expect, and came away profoundly inspired by the accomplished individuals I met and their stories, especially the ASEAN Prize Recipients - Mekong Institute (2021), Muhamad Iqbal Damit (2022), and Nguyen Thi Tuyet Minh (2023). My fellow delegates were some of the most capable and passionate individuals I've encountered, with extensive involvement in their advocacy areas and a decisive commitment to action.

The Youth Conference on Day 2 was equally impressive. Witnessing the youth delegates engage in fruitful discussions on regional cooperation, youth volunteerism, and women empowerment was heartwarming and eye-opening. These conversations not only shed light on the various issues and initiatives taking place in our neighbouring countries but also highlighted the power of collective action. I had the privilege of speaking with some of the most influential women in the region, who have made significant strides in empowering women, and their stories of resilience and leadership motivated me to further my own efforts in community engagement.

Overall, AYC 2024 has been nothing short of an unforgettable experience and I am hopeful that we, as youths, will continue to make waves in our advocacy areas!

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to [Mekong Institute](#) and [The ASEAN Secretariat](#) for making this wonderful event possible, and for allowing me to be part of the delegation among 700+ applicants, and last but not least, everyone below who helped shaped this wonderful experience!



Jamie Yau • 1st
COO @ Cyber Youth Singapore | Philanthropic Management Student ...
1mo • Edited •

Spending this week in Vientiane, Laos was unforgettable!

It was my first time flying overseas for a conference, and it set a good bar to say the least:

I met a social entrepreneur focused on providing ethical business services to rural coconut farmers in The Philippines (shoutout to [Hidden Manna Farms](#)), aspiring diplomats and policy makers from Cambodia and Laos, and impressive social advocates from Indonesia! The list only goes on!

I've been inspired by these colourful and passionate delegates from all over ASEAN, and left Vientiane with many learnings. If you'd ask my parents, I could not stop talking about this trip the moment I touched down in Changi HAHAA!

The entire experience was nothing less than awesome! I am most grateful to [Mekong Institute](#) and [The ASEAN Secretariat](#) for the hard work placed into leading this inaugural programme - and thanks to them, I have 29 more friends across ASEAN 😊



Anh P Dang
May 3 •

Proud to be selected as one of the delegates from the 10 ASEAN Member States to participate in the ASEAN Youth Convergence 2024 (AYC) in Vientiane, Laos! Thank you [Mekong Institute](#) so much!

and thank Ms. [Hanh Huynh](#) for sharing useful information!

ai đoàn đừng em đang cầm gì trên tay thì sẽ được discount xx% (x tiền sí) Khi order các mặt hàng tại [Hoa Sen Văn Đài](#) 😊



Makara Sovann is in Vientiane, Laos.

May 26

I found myself standing in the spotlight, humbled and honored to be selected as one of the delegates among 700 applicants to join ASEAN Youth Convergence.

The event featured many interesting and interactive sessions, ranging from the ASEAN Prize Symposium in three different fields—regional cooperation, women empowerment, and youth volunteerism—to the ASEAN Cafe and many more activities.

Additionally, I had the opportunity to visit the beautiful country of Laos PDR and meet with 29 incredibly talented individuals who play a significant role in advocating for their communities across ASEAN.

On this note, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the [Mekong Institute](#) and [ASEAN](#) for creating this platform, allowing us to engage with leaders and APRs and fulfill our curious minds.



Apol's Garmay • 1st

Member of Catalyst 2030 | Social Entrepreneur | Agriculture Advocate...

1mo

My participation in the recently concluded ASEAN Youth Convergence in Lao PDR was an inspiring and transformative experience. Engaging with passionate youth delegates from across the region has renewed my optimism about the future of ASEAN. It is also my utmost privilege to be one of the delegates who represented my country, The Philippines.

A heartfelt thank you to the [Mekong Institute](#) and [The ASEAN Secretariat](#) for organizing this remarkable event, supported by Lao PDR's 2024 ASEAN Chairmanship and the [Temasek Foundation](#). The convergence comprised two key segments: the ASEAN Prize Symposium and the ASEAN Youth Conference, each offering invaluable insights into regional cooperation, youth volunteerism, and women empowerment.

Looking forward to more opportunities to learn, share, and collaborate in shaping a better future for ASEAN.



Matthew David • 1st

OTOP Product Development Consultant, Philippine Delegate to the In...

1mo

It's inspiring to be a young Industrial Designer at the inaugural ASEAN Youth Convergence! Surrounded by such a diverse group of young leaders, I'm hopeful this is a sign that the voices of young creatives are gaining a seat at the table.

My deepest thanks to [The ASEAN Secretariat](#) and [Mekong Institute](#) for recognizing the value and importance of including fresh perspectives like mine in these discussions. Design thinking is so much more than just aesthetics; it's about harnessing creativity to tackle complex issues and craft innovative solutions. This convergence proves design deserves a place in international collaboration, and I'm honored to contribute alongside these inspiring leaders from various backgrounds.

Here's to the power of design! I believe creativity is the most sustainable resource we have. By combining design expertise with the multifaceted perspectives of this incredible delegation, we can design solutions that not only address pressing issues but inspire and empower communities across ASEAN. Let's keep pushing boundaries and using design thinking to build a brighter future, together.



Apol's Garmay

May 27

The entire event was a rich exchange of ideas from different stakeholders and participants, which made the discussion even more valuable. A Laotian student approached me about how she and her team could proceed with their ongoing tech project, so I emphasized the significance of including data in all their decisions. Another university student approached me and asked me on how they could encourage incoming university students to choose other fields, especially those that are considered male-dominated courses. I told her to start an awareness campaign as early as possible and spread the word. I love how each and every one did not just listen to the discussions that were presented, but also took heed the suggestions given by the experienced ones. Thank you so much [Mekong Institute](#) and [ASEAN](#) for initiating this opportunity for us. We didn't only learn but also contributed to the different issues discussed. We look forward to more similar opportunities in the future in which we can share and collaborate more. I'd like to highlight as well my friend Mason from Myanmar who was the only male in the group who believes in male support when it comes to women empowerment.

#ASEANYouthConvergence2024

#ASEANYouth



Jodie Ng • 1st

Strategy | Diversity & Inclusion | Advocacy | ASEAN Community-Build...

1mo • Edited

Attending the ASEAN Youth Convergence in Vientiane, Laos has been an unforgettable experience. Engaging with vibrant and passionate youth delegates has left me inspired and optimistic about ASEAN's future.

I am profoundly grateful to the [Mekong Institute](#) and [The ASEAN Secretariat](#) for organizing this inaugural program, supported by Lao PDR's 2024 ASEAN Chairmanship and the [Temasek Foundation](#).

The ASEAN Youth Convergence comprised two segments: the ASEAN Prize Symposium and the ASEAN Youth Conference. The symposium showcased inspiring stories from past recipients, including Mekong Institute (2021), Muhamad Iqbal Damit (2022), and Nguyen Thi Tuyet Minh (2023). The youth conference then focused on three key themes: regional cooperation, youth volunteerism, and women empowerment.

This experience has reinforced my belief in the power of collaboration and youth engagement in driving regional progress. I look forward to contributing to and witnessing the continued growth and integration of the ASEAN community!



Dana LEE • 1st

Cambodia Youth Delegate to ASEAN Youth Convergence | Youth Dele...

1mo

I feel deeply honored to have been chosen as a Cambodia Youth Delegate to represent my country at the ASEAN Youth Convergence 2024.

My policy recommendations letter advocating for increased women's leadership in the defense sector of ASEAN countries was selected as one of the top two letters. While it began as just a letter, what's truly significant to me is that it had been endorsed and will be included in the meeting agenda within ASEAN Level for further discussion. I'm so grateful to be deserved such an honor, but for my paper to initiate something so huge that could possibly change the fate of women in Southeast Asia in the defense sector, I would call that the "begin of a success."

For the past three years, being involved in peace and security policy and research, this achievement means a great deal to me. I'd like to share this achievement with my former colleague, [Muizzah Harun](#), for her inspiration, and with [The EANGAGE Project](#) for providing me with the opportunity to engage in security-related fields despite my young age and limited experience. Thank you for giving me the chance. I first learned about this issue over two years ago from Muizzah during one of EANGAGE's trainings, and now I'm grateful to be able to contribute something meaningful to it. I plan to continue advocating by sending this letter to the Minister of Defence of Laos PDR and by personally delivering a handwritten letter to the government of Malaysia (ASEAN Chairman 2025) during my next conference in Kuala Lumpur next month.

A heartfelt thank you to all my colleagues for your unwavering support and belief in me. A special thanks to the [Mekong Institute](#), [The ASEAN Secretariat](#), for your dedication and efforts in organizing such a fruitful event. I truly felt the spirit of convergence, emanating from both the organizers and the participants. To the ASEAN Prize Recipients and ASEAN Youth Delegates, your stories serve as immense inspiration for me to continue my advocacy. I'm honored to have met individuals from the fields of security and politics, as well as the strong, independent women and the three men who support women's empowerment, along with Mr. [Suriyan Vichitlekam](#) and Madam Nguyen Thi Tuyet Minh, who are passionately dedicated to helping the younger generations.

To my fellow ASEAN Youth Delegates,

We are the future of ASEAN. I wish you all the best in your advocacy journeys. Remember, you have a strong support system and a network of 29 potential young leaders across ASEAN. You are not alone!

My experience as an AYC volunteer was both enriching and transformative. Being part of the organizing team offered me invaluable insights into the complexities and logistics of large-scale events. I learned a great deal about project management, coordination, and the importance of clear communication within a diverse team. One specific takeaway was the significance of adaptability and problem-solving in real-time scenarios, as unexpected challenges often arose.

The ASEAN Youth Convergence was a worthwhile program that successfully engaged youth from across the region in meaningful dialogue and collaboration. The program's emphasis on intercultural exchange and youth empowerment was commendable. Given its positive impact, I believe AYC should indeed be replicated and scaled. Expanding its reach could further enhance regional cooperation and offer more young people the chance to participate in such a transformative experience.

- Alex Lew (Singapore), AYC Volunteer

Regarding my volunteer experience in Laos, it was my first time participating in an international volunteering program, and I found it to be a positive and enriching experience.

- Nway Aung (Myanmar), AYC Volunteer

Annexes

E-Learning

All event materials including presentations and photos will be available at the event's e-learning site.



QR Code

URL
bit.ly/AYC2024Elearning
Password
AYC2024

Stakeholder Engagement Exercise

Case Scenarios

1. REGIONAL COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION

With rising global temperatures affecting rice production in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN Sectoral Working Group on Crops is developing guidelines to promote the use of paraquat, a herbicide, to control weeds that thrive in the heat. This move is seen as a potential solution to food insecurity in the region, as it aims to protect rice yields from the increasing threat of weed interference. However, paraquat is already banned in several Southeast Asian countries, including Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, due to its dangers and links to Parkinson's disease in farmworkers.

The new guidelines propose paraquat as a "restricted-use" herbicide, meaning it would be used under strict regulations to ensure safety. Once the guidelines are approved, countries that have banned paraquat will be encouraged to lift the ban to help address food insecurity. To develop these guidelines, the working group has organized a regional consultation in Vientiane to gather input from representatives of ASEAN governments, businesses, small farmers, and civil society groups. Small farmers generally support the guidelines, viewing them as essential for maintaining food security and increasing income, but civil society groups are against them due to concerns about health and environmental risks.

Stakeholder	Position	Description
Lead Convener (Sectoral Working Group)	Neutral	Facilitates the discussion, ensuring all viewpoints are heard (all stakeholders/delegates must be able to speak) and guiding the process toward a consensus; Identifies one additional role/stakeholder that will be part of the consultation meeting.
Sectoral Working Group Consultant	Pro-guidelines	Serves as an expert advisor to the ASEAN Sectoral Working Group on Crops. They advocate for the adoption of paraquat guidelines as a pragmatic solution to address weed interference and enhance agricultural productivity while ensuring safety and compliance with regulations.
Agricultural Expert	Neutral	Provides balanced insights into the agricultural benefits and risks of using paraquat.
Smallholder Farmer	Pro-guidelines	Advocates for the use of paraquat to protect their crops and ensure food security and income.
Commercial Farm Executive	Pro-guidelines	Supports the guidelines to enhance large-scale agricultural efficiency and productivity.
Pesticide Company Representative	Pro-guidelines	Promotes the benefits of paraquat under restricted-use regulations.
Stakeholder	Position	Description
Government Representative from the Philippines	Pro-guidelines	Backs the guidelines to support national food security and agricultural productivity.
Health Expert	Against guidelines	Highlights the health risks associated with paraquat, especially its links to Parkinson's disease.
Consumer Advocacy Representative	Against guidelines	Raises concerns about consumer safety and the potential residues in food. This stakeholder will not be included in the roles that will be given to the delegates.
Environmental Scientist	Against guidelines	Discusses the environmental impacts, including soil and water contamination.
Government Representative from Vietnam	Against guidelines	Opposes lifting the ban due to health and environmental risks.
Government Representative from the Philippines	Pro-guidelines	Backs the guidelines to support national food security and agricultural productivity.

2. YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND VOLUNTEERISM

MyGeneration, a youth-led, youth-oriented non-profit organization dedicated to supporting youth development, is collaborating with the Ministry of Education to bolster educational facilities and opportunities at universities. For 2024, their primary beneficiary is the University of Southeast Asia, a public university recognized for its commitment to academic excellence and student welfare.

The university has submitted two competing proposals from faculties needing facility upgrades. These proposals are from the Faculty of Human Kinetics and the Faculty of Science.

Faculty of Human Kinetics:

- Recently upgraded its football team's practice field.
- Proposes an additional revamp of the athletes' locker room to enhance the overall experience and safety for student-athletes.

Faculty of Science:

- Needs new autoclaves and other materials for its laboratories.
- Has internal funds allocated for these upgrades but prefers to realign those funds for other purposes, opting to utilize the available grant from MyGeneration instead.

The two faculties have been in negotiations for about a month and have consulted the student body regarding school priorities. Despite these efforts, they have not reached a consensus. As a final attempt to determine which project should be prioritized, MyGeneration's Executive Director, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, suggested organizing a meeting with all involved parties to hear their proposals and facilitate a decision.

These stakeholders will need to collaborate to evaluate the merits of each proposal, considering the immediate and long-term benefits for the students and the university. Their goal is to reach a consensus on which project should be prioritized for the funding grant from MyGeneration and the Ministry of Education, ensuring that the chosen project aligns with both the funders' and the university's strategic goals.

Stakeholder	Position	Description
Executive Director (ED) of MyGeneration	Neutral	Leads the organization and facilitates the meeting, ensuring all voices are heard and guiding the decision-making process.
Director of Higher Education Funding and Development, Ministry of Education	Pro-Human Kinetics	As a partner in the project, the Director oversees fund allocation and strategic development for universities, providing insight into national educational priorities, funding opportunities, and alignment with broader initiatives. They aim to enhance the nation's performance in the Southeast Asian Games through initiatives that support athletic excellence and participation.

Stakeholder	Position	Description
University Financial Officer	Neutral	Provides a comprehensive overview of the university's budget and the implications of reallocating internal funds.
Program Manager of MyGeneration	Pro-Human Kinetics	A former athlete, the Program Manager advocates for the locker room revamp, emphasizing how it supports the holistic development of student-athletes and aligns with MyGeneration's focus on youth development.
Dean of the Faculty of Human Kinetics	Pro-Human Kinetics	Advocates passionately for the locker room revamp, emphasizing the benefits for student-athletes, including improved safety, morale, and performance. They highlight recent upgrades and argue for continued investment to maintain momentum and enhance the athletic program.
Student / Football Player	Pro-Human Kinetics	Provides firsthand insights into the student-athletes' needs and strongly supports the locker room upgrade.
VP for Student Affairs	Pro-Human Kinetics	Supports the locker room upgrade by highlighting its importance for overall student welfare and extracurricular engagement.
Dean of the Faculty of Science	Pro-Science	Pushes for the laboratory upgrades, underscoring their critical importance for scientific research and education. They argue that updated facilities will enhance learning outcomes, research capabilities, and the university's reputation in the scientific community.
Student Representative from the Faculty of Science	Pro-Science	Voices the concerns and priorities of science students, advocating strongly for laboratory improvements. They emphasize how modern equipment and resources are essential for their academic and professional development.
University Facilities Manager	Pro-Science	Offers detailed technical insights into the feasibility and costs of the proposed upgrades for both faculties. They provide a practical perspective on implementation challenges and long-term maintenance considerations, supporting the science lab upgrades for their broader impact.
VP for Academic Affairs	Pro-Science	Ensures the proposals align with the university's strategic goals and overall mission. They advocate for the laboratory upgrades, emphasizing the role of cutting-edge facilities in attracting top students and faculty, enhancing research output, and maintaining academic excellence.

3. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

SeaTech is a multinational Southeast Asian software engineering company that exclusively recruits top graduates from leading computing schools in Singapore, Bangkok, and Kuala Lumpur. This strategic hiring approach has propelled SeaTech's expansion, securing its position among the top 20 software development companies in Asia. Now aiming to break into the top 10, the company's Corporate Strategy Team, based in Singapore, conducted a study on the region's top 5 companies. Their findings revealed a commonality among these top performers—they all boast a gender-diverse composition in their senior management teams, executives, and across all levels of developers.

Despite SeaTech's success, the workforce across its three country offices has predominantly consisted of men, with only one woman holding a senior management position over the past seven years. In response to these findings, the Corporate Strategy Team plans to propose the development of an equal opportunity policy and a scholarship program at the upcoming strategic planning meeting in Vientiane. The scholarship program aims to provide opportunities for female students in Bangkok, Singapore, and Kuala Lumpur, with additional scholarships allocated for female students in Vientiane, coinciding with the company's plans for its fourth country office. These initiatives align with SeaTech's regional corporate social responsibility efforts. However, the COO and CFO of the company remain unconvinced about these proposals and are eager to dismiss them.

Stakeholder	Position	Description
CEO	Neutral	Presides over the meeting, ultimately deciding to delay the implementation of the proposals and send them back for further review. Requests the CFO and Corporate Strategy Team to conduct a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis, incorporating key discussion points to ensure a well-informed decision.
Vice President for Communications	Neutral	Concerned about turning the company's potential decision into a positive publicity opportunity to strengthen its reputation.
Corporate Strategy Team Representative	Pro-policy	Strongly supports the development of an equal opportunity policy and the scholarship program, emphasizing the benefits of diversity observed in top-performing competitors.
Human Resource Executive	Pro-policy	Advocates for the proposals, highlighting the positive impact of a diverse workforce on company culture and employee satisfaction.
SeaTech Bangkok Representative	Pro-policy	Supports the proposals, viewing them as aligned with the Thai government's pursuit of workplace inclusion.

Stakeholder	Position	Description
SeaTech Malaysia Representative	Pro-policy	Strongly supports the proposals, citing an increase in female applicants and believing that the new policies will enable the office to attract and retain more talented female candidates.
COO	Against policy	Opposes the proposals, expressing concerns about potential disruptions to operational efficiency and project timelines if hiring practices are altered.
CFO	Against policy	Opposes the proposals due to concerns about their financial impact, stressing the need for a thorough cost-benefit analysis before proceeding.
SeaTech Singapore Representative	Against policy	Opposes the proposals, citing potential disruptions to established relationships with specific universities and concerns about the quality of recruits and partnerships with top computing schools.
Legal Affairs Officer	Against policy	Raises legal implications and potential liabilities associated with the proposed policies, advocating for a cautious approach and thorough legal review.

Samples of Screening and Scoring Sheets for Applicant Selection

MALAYSIA -- AYC 2024 Applicants Screening and Scoring Sheet

PREQUALIFICATION		OBJECTIVE SCREENING																	
Age Group	App. No.	Within age range	AAS citizen	Ready to travel	Student / Professional	Committed to complete all activities	English Proficiency (2 pts)	Int'l Experience (2 pts)	Affiliations / advocacy or volunteer work (2 pts)	Self Intro (4 pts)	Essay 1 Challenge (30 pts)	Essay 2 Challenge (30 pts)							
1988-1994	MY 0001	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	2.0	4.0	4.0	8.5	9.5	5.0	5.0	8.0	7.0	4.0	5.0	8.0
1988-1994	MY 0002	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	7.0	7.0	3.0	4.0	7.0	6.0	3.0	3.0	7.0
1988-1994	MY 0012	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	6.0	7.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	2.0	3.0	8.0
1988-1994	MY 0030	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	1.0	2.0	3.0	6.0	6.0	2.0	3.0	8.0	8.0	5.0	4.0	8.0
1988-1994	MY 0031	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	1.0	2.0	3.5	9.0	9.0	4.5	5.0	8.0	7.0	4.0	4.0	7.0
1988-1994	MY 0032	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	2.0	2.0	4.0	8.0	8.0	4.5	4.0	6.0	6.0	3.0	3.0	7.0
1988-1994	MY 0033	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	1.0	2.0	3.5	8.0	8.0	4.0	4.0	8.0	8.0	4.0	4.0	8.0
1995-2000	MY 0004	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	1.0	2.0	4.0	9.0	9.0	5.0	5.0	8.0	8.0	4.0	4.0	8.0
1995-2000	MY 0011	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	1.0	2.0	3.0	7.0	7.0	3.0	3.0	8.0	7.0	4.0	3.0	7.0
1995-2000	MY 0013	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	1.0	2.0	3.5	7.0	7.0	3.0	3.0	8.0	7.5	4.0	4.0	8.0
1995-2000	MY 0015	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.5	8.0	8.0	3.0	4.0	8.0	7.0	3.0	4.0	8.0
1995-2000	MY 0019	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	6.0	6.0	3.0	3.0	5.0	5.0	2.0	2.0	5.0
1995-2000	MY 0035	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	1.0	2.0	3.0	6.0	6.0	3.0	3.0	7.0	6.0	3.0	3.0	7.0
1995-2000	MY 0044	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	1.0	2.0	3.5	7.0	6.0	2.0	3.0	6.0	6.0	2.0	2.0	6.0
1995-2000	MY 0045	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.5	7.0	7.0	4.0	3.0	8.0	8.0	4.0	4.0	7.0

SINGAPORE -- AYC 2024 Applicants Screening and Scoring Sheet

OBJECTIVE SCREENING										SUBJECTIVE SCREENING											
Age Group	App. No.	English Proficiency (2 pts)	Int'l Experience (2 pts)	Affiliations / advocacy or volunteer work (2 pts)	Self Intro (4 pts)	Essay 1 Challenge (30 pts)	Essay 2 Challenge (30 pts)	Essay 3 Piece (30 pts)	TOTAL (100 pts)	Gender	Education / Employment / Other										
1988-1994	SG 0004	2.0	1.0	2.0	4.0	8.0	8.0	4.5	4.0	8.0	7.0	4.0	4.0	6.0	8.0	4.0	3.5	78.0	Female	Write info summary	
1988-1994	SG	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	-	
1988-1994	SG	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	-	
1988-1994	SG	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	-	
1988-1994	SG	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	-	
1988-1994	SG	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	-	
1995-2000	SG 0010	2.0	1.0	2.0	7.0	6.0	6.0	8.0	3.0	3.5	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	8.0	6.0	3.0	2.0	62.5	Male	ASEAN
1995-2000	SG 0012	2.0	1.0	2.0	6.0	7.0	7.0	3.0	4.0	7.5	7.0	3.0	3.0	6.0	6.0	4.0	3.0	64.5	Female	ASEAN	
1995-2000	SG 0013	2.0	1.0	2.0	3.5	5.0	7.0	2.0	3.0	6.0	6.0	2.0	3.0	6.0	8.0	4.0	4.0	70.5	Male	ASEAN	
1995-2000	SG 0014	2.0	1.0	2.0	3.5	6.0	4.0	2.0	2.0	4.0	6.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	6.0	4.0	3.0	65.5	Female	ASEAN	
1995-2000	SG	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	-	
2001-2005	SG 0001	2.0	1.0	2.0	3.0	7.0	6.0	3.0	3.5	9.0	8.0	5.0	4.0	4.0	6.0	5.0	3.5	76.0	Male	ASEAN	
2001-2005	SG 0009	2.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	6.0	6.0	2.0	3.0	8.0	8.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	6.0	6.0	2.0	3.0	65.0	Male	ASEAN
2001-2005	SG 0011	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	8.5	8.5	4.5	4.0	8.0	7.0	3.5	3.5	8.0	5.0	4.0	3.5	77.0	Female	social worker	

INDONESIA -- AYC 2024 Applicants Screening and Scoring Sheet

OBJECTIVE SCREENING										SUBJECTIVE SCREENING		RECOMMENDATIONS				
Age Group	App. No.	Essay 1 Challenge (30 pts)	Essay 2 Challenge (30 pts)	Essay 3 Piece (30 pts)	TOTAL (100 pts)	Gender	Education / Employment / Other Special Circumstances	Semi-Finalists (up to 9)	Finalists (3 only)							
1988-1994	ID 0018	4.5	4.0	8.0	8.5	4.5	4.0	8.0	7.0	5.0	4.5	81.5	Female	concerned about online gender-based violence		
1988-1994	ID 0019	4.0	3.5	7.0	7.0	4.0	3.0	7.0	6.0	4.0	3.5	70.0	Female			
1988-1994	ID 0049	4.0	3.0	8.0	8.0	4.5	4.0	8.0	7.0	4.5	4.0	75.5	Female	concerned about early marriage		
1988-1994	ID 0053	3.0	4.0	8.0	7.0	4.0	4.0	7.0	7.0	4.0	4.0	76.5	Female	gender inequality among pwds		
1988-1994	ID 0080	4.0	3.5	7.5	7.8	4.0	4.0	7.0	8.0	4.8	4.0	78.5	Female			
1988-1994	ID 0094	3.0	3.0	8.0	7.0	4.0	3.5	8.0	6.0	4.0	4.0	73.0	Female			
1988-1994	ID 0102	4.0	3.0	8.0	7.0	4.0	3.0	7.0	7.0	4.0	4.0	71.0	Female			
1995-2000	ID 0014	5.0	4.0	7.0	7.0	4.0	4.0	9.0	6.0	4.0	2.0	73.5	Male	local women involvement in conservation		
1995-2000	ID 0015	3.0	3.0	6.0	6.0	3.0	3.0	6.0	6.0	4.0	3.0	65.5	Female			
1995-2000	ID 0038	3.0	4.0	6.0	6.0	3.0	3.0	6.0	6.0	4.0	3.0	67.5	Female			
1995-2000	ID 0040	2.0	2.0	8.0	8.5	5.0	4.0	8.0	6.0	5.0	4.0	72.0	Female	works with HIV + individuals		
1995-2000	ID 0079	3.0	3.0	7.0	8.8	3.0	3.0	6.0	7.0	4.0	3.0	68.0	Female	promotion of women in tech		
1995-2000	ID 0083	2.0	4.0	7.0	6.0	1.0	3.0	6.0	5.0	4.0	4.0	62.5	Female	into product development		
1995-2000	ID 0108	3.0	3.0	6.0	6.0	3.0	3.0	6.0	6.0	3.0	3.0	77.5	Female	for gender equality and women empowerment		

Letters to Leaders

MR. AWANG RIDZUAN BIN HAJI AHMAD
DIRECTOR OF LAND TRANSPORT
 MINISTRY OF TECHNOLOGY AND INFO-COMMUNICATION
 Brunei Darussalam

Subject: Renewal and Revival of Public Buses

Dear Mr. Awang Ridzuan,

As a Bruneian citizen who commutes daily using my own vehicle, I have encountered persistent traffic jams throughout the day, especially during peak hours. I strongly believe that this also affects other vehicle users' daily schedule and also raises significant concerns regarding road safety and environmental sustainability.

According to the 'Brunei Darussalam Key Indicators 2023' issued by the Department of Economic Planning and Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Economy, there has been an average growth of over 9% in newly registered vehicles in Brunei Darussalam over the past three years, compared to an average population growth of around 1% in the same period. At this alarming rate, the number of registered private vehicles could soon outnumber the total population.

The environmental impact of our current transportation habits also cannot be overstated. The continuous use of private vehicles contributes significantly to CO2 emissions, exacerbating air pollution and contributing to climate change. As a nation committed to sustainable development, as stated in Brunei Darussalam's commitment in COP28 to achieve 20% reduction of emissions by 2030, it is imperative that we explore and implement measures to reduce our carbon footprint.

In light of these concerns, I would like to recommend the revival and renewal of our current public bus system especially to attract locals to use them. To achieve this, I propose the following measures:

Modernization of Bus Fleets: Introduce new, comfortable, environmentally-friendly buses equipped with modern amenities to attract more users. This may include using advanced technologies such as real-time tracking and mobile ticketing to enhance the user experience and make public transportation more appealing.

Enhanced Bus Routes and Frequencies: Develop a precise network of bus routes with increased frequencies, ensuring that buses are accessible and convenient for all citizens. Prominent bus stops and bus lanes should also be adequate to provide a reliable service to boost public confidence.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Launch campaigns to educate and gain confidence of the locals on the benefits of using public transportation and to encourage them to opt for buses instead of private vehicles, especially during peak hours. The campaigns should also include safety awareness regarding sharing the roads with buses.

Attractive Fares: Introduce good marketing techniques, including promotions and packages, to attract locals to use buses more frequently.

A LETTER FROM
ABANG MD MASRUR ABANG ZAINUDDIN

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 to see the full
 copy of the letter**



AWANG HAJI TUMING BIN HAJI JAIS
PRESIDENT
DOWN SYNDROME ASSOCIATION BRUNEI (ABLE)

Subject: **Enhancing Youth Engagement and Addressing Understaffing at Down Syndrome Association (ABLE)**

Dear Mr. Haji Tumung bin Haji Jais,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to bring to your attention a pressing issue concerning the lack of youth engagement and leadership, as well as the understaffing challenges faced by our organisation, the Down Syndrome Association (ABLE).

It is clear that young people are a crucial resource for our society because they have the energy, creativity, and passion that can benefit non-profit and non-government organisations. However, there appears to be a gap in engaging this demographic in meaningful leadership and volunteer roles within our association, ABLE. This underutilisation of youth not only hinders their personal development but also limits the potential growth and outreach of ABLE.

Besides that, the issue of understaffing is a persistent challenge that affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the association in fulfilling its mission. To address this issue, ABLE can tap into the diverse skill sets and innovative ideas that young people bring by encouraging a culture of youth volunteerism and leadership.

To bridge this gap, I propose the following initiatives:

Volunteer Recruitment Campaigns - This is where ABLE can launch targeted campaigns to attract volunteers, highlighting the personal and professional benefits of volunteering with ABLE.

Youth-led Projects - ABLE can encourage youth to propose and lead their own projects within ABLE. This will provide youth with autonomy over their initiatives. For example, organising fundraising events, sports tournaments, or art exhibitions.

Flexible Volunteer Opportunities - ABLE can offer flexible volunteer opportunities that accommodate the busy schedules of young people, such as weekend events, or short-term projects. This can potentially attract a wider range of youth volunteers who may not have the time for long-term commitments.

Recognition and Rewards - ABLE can implement a system where the contributions of youth volunteers are recognised and rewarded. Examples include through certificates, awards, or public acknowledgement. This can motivate young people to continue their involvement with ABLE and inspire others to join in.

By putting these initiatives into practice, ABLE can not only alleviate the staffing challenges but also cultivate a new generation of leaders who are passionate about advocating for individuals with special needs such as Down syndrome. I look forward to discussing these ideas further and exploring how we can work together to enhance youth engagement within ABLE.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours truly,
IRMA MANSOR

GENERAL CHANSAMONE CHANYALATH
MINISTER OF DEFENCE OF LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
 And the Chairman of ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting 2024

Subject: **Promoting Gender Inclusivity in the Defense Sector for Enhanced Peace and Security in ASEAN**

Dear Honourable General Chansamone Chanyalath,

As a Southeast Asian woman, I would like to extend my gratitude to you as the chairman of the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting 2024 for giving the "Joint Statement by the ASEAN Defense Ministers on the ADMM's Accomplishments in the Implementation of the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025." For that, I would like to applaud the decision to commend ASEAN's assertive efforts in Women, Peace, and Security to ensure responsiveness in changing the security architecture in the ASEAN Political Security Community. To support that, I would also like to highlight the pressing need to increase the representation of women in executive positions within the defence sector. Acknowledging the pivotal role of gender inclusivity in fostering peace and security, it is crucial to prioritise the promotion of women's participation in decision-making processes related to defence and security matters.

Women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership roles within the defence sector across ASEAN member states, while the highest number of women represented in the ADMM and ADMM Plus is one person. In addition, women in the military in ASEAN countries accounted for only less than 20%. Despite women constituting almost 50% of the population and demonstrating competence and capability in various fields, our representation at the executive level in defence institutions remains disproportionately low.

Here, I would like to restate why it is necessary to include women in the defence sector. The aims of ADMM are also to promote mutual trust and confidence in regional security. Given the charismatic nature of women, increasing the number of women in leadership roles in the defence sector would promote trust and cooperation. For that, the theory of feminine peace would support my argument, and we need increased women's participation in the peace process, peace negotiation, and in the peace and security sectors as well as the defence sector. More women in leadership positions in the defence sector can help facilitate the achievement of inclusive peace.

The underrepresentation of women in executive positions within the defence sector not only perpetuates gender inequality but also deprives us of diverse perspectives and innovative solutions to contemporary security challenges. Studies have consistently demonstrated that gender-diverse teams are more effective in decision-making, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. By harnessing the talents and perspectives of women, we can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency in the defence sector.

As an expert in Women, Peace and Security field, I would like to propose an increase in the number of women in positions higher than head of department in the Ministry of Defense to at least 40% by 2035 in order to build a more peaceful regional security cooperation. To achieve this, we need a concrete 10-year (2025-2035) action plan to promote women's leadership in the military and defence.

Yours sincerely,
DANA LEE

**Scan the QR code
 to see the full
 copy of the letter**



HIS EXCELLENCY HUN MANY

DEPUTY MINISTER, MINISTER OF CIVIL SERVICE AND
PRESIDENT OF THE UNION OF YOUTH FEDERATIONS OF CAMBODIA (UYFC)

Respected H.E. President of the UYFC,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Se Horseng. I am writing to express my gratitude for the support provided by UYFC before my arrival in South Korea and request your consideration in establishing a Cambodian Academic Repository for storing research database contributed by our Cambodian students, alumni and scholars.

First of all, as a student about to graduate from a South Korean university, I am deeply thankful for UYFC's assistance that has enabled me to pursue my studies. Currently, I am in the final stages of completing my master's thesis, which focuses on English and Khmer Translation. Throughout my research journey, I encountered significant challenges in accessing relevant documents concerning our country. Despite the growing number of Cambodian students studying abroad, including approximately 500 individuals annually in South Korea based on recent surveys, many of us face difficulties in finding credible sources for our research endeavors.

In my capacity as the Vice President of the Cambodian Student Association in Korea, I have become acutely aware of the shared struggle among my peers. We are enthusiastic about contributing to the body of knowledge that can address various gaps within our country. However, the scarcity of strong sources related to Cambodia often leads to research topics that may not directly benefit our nation.

Therefore, I respectfully request your consideration in establishing a comprehensive database platform where Cambodian students can submit their research theses, dissertations, or relevant papers. This platform should not only encompass studies conducted in South Korea but also include those from other countries. By collaborating with existing student and alumni associations, UYFC can initiate efforts to collect data from students and alumni within their networks.

Such a platform would serve as a valuable resource, facilitating access to previous studies and fostering the exchange of research knowledge. Furthermore, it has the potential to support advancements not only within Cambodia but also across larger regions such as ASEAN and beyond.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to H.E. and UYFC for your unwavering support of Cambodian students embarking on educational journeys abroad. Your dedication to empowering youth in our country is truly inspiring, and I am confident that this request aligns with UYFC's mission. Thank you for considering my proposal. I eagerly anticipate your response and the possibility of seeing this initiative come to fruition.

Warm regards,
SE HORSENG

MR. SURIYAN VITCHITLEKARN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MEKONG INSTITUTE

123 Mittraphap Rd., Muang District, Khon Kaen 40002, THAILAND

Subject: **A Heartfelt Letter to Leaders - Expressing Gratitude and Advocating for Youth Engagement in ASEAN**

Dear Mr. Suriyan,

I trust this letter finds you in good health and high spirits. My name is Ngoun Sovannmakara, a passionate youth coming from Cambodia. I am writing to you today, not just as a concerned citizen, but as someone who embodies the vibrant and untapped potential of our nation's youth and the ASEAN community. While I stand as one, I believe my experiences and perspectives can shed light on the aspirations and challenges of many. In ASEAN, we have over 213 million young souls, each brimming with ideas, energy, and the desire to make a difference. Yet, it deeply concerns me that their voices often go unheard, their ideas unexplored, and their potential untapped due to limited opportunities for meaningful engagement and leadership roles.

I recall an incident from a national conference I attended last year, where leaders and international organizations from various sectors were present. Driven by curiosity and the desire to learn, I asked a question to a government official during one of the panel discussions and got the response. However, I was later approached by two individuals who suggested that my question was sensitive and should not have been asked. This encounter was a moment of revelation for me. It made me realize the gap that exists between youth and our leaders, and the need for a platform where we can voice our opinions without fear. This incident, rather than discouraging me, has only strengthened my resolve to bridge the gap between the youth and our leaders.

On this note, I express my heartfelt gratitude to you and the entire team at Mekong Institute and ASEAN Secretariat for creating the ASEAN Youth Convergence that allows us to engage with leaders and ASEAN Prize Recipients and fulfill our curious minds. Among 700 applicants, I found myself standing in the spotlight, humbled and honored to be selected as one of the chosen delegates. There was a moment of self-doubt, moments when I questioned my own abilities. Was I competent enough? Did I have enough knowledge to stand shoulder to shoulder with such esteemed individuals? Despite the uncertainty, there was my passion for change that guided me here - a change to see more youth like myself stepping up, taking charge, and making a difference.

As I look forward to the sessions, I am filled with anticipation for the opportunity to learn from my fellow delegates and our ASEAN Prize Recipients. I want to pass the knowledge I learn from this to those who couldn't make it here. In the future, I hope to see more initiatives within ASEAN, like those led by Mekong Institute that encourage youth-leader interaction and contribute to more involvement of youth in policy decision making. I urge you to consider creating more platforms for youth to voice their opinions and contribute to policy discussions.

Youth of today are the architects of tomorrow. I am deeply grateful for this opportunity, which not only fosters personal growth in me but also empowers me to make a positive change.

Thank you for your contribution to the ASEAN region and for investing in the potential of the youth. Your belief in our ability to shape the future is truly inspiring.

Yours sincerely,

SOVANNMAKARA NGOUN

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN)

Dear The Secretary-General of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

The regional body of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) through ASEAN Health Ministers' Meeting (AHMM) and ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting on Health Development (SOMHD) bring hope by tying multinational cooperation towards cross-border health issues. The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, and the spike of, but not limited to Dengue, Tuberculosis, Anthrax, Malaria, Influenza A virus subtype H5N1, and Polio are true cross-border health issues, spread across the region, and in need of immediate calls for ASEAN cooperation.

Respected Leaders of ASEAN, everyone may be at the highest risk of transmitting and/or attracting the diseases, be it the host communities or refugees, be it young age or elderly, be it the writer of this letter or the reader. Thus, if there is a solution that we can take to prevent the growth of the diseases, to create bidirectional securities, and ultimately to protect everyone, it would be the **establishment of cooperation for cross-border health issues and vaccine equity**.

It is not the responsibility of Indonesia only for the on-going Polio cases, nor is the responsibility of Lao PDR only for the anthrax. It needs our collective actions to make us, as humans, not as certain citizens, feel safe and secure.

I am calling your initiative, voice, and actions to take this matter for a serious level, to establish a **cooperation for cross-border health issues**, especially on neglected tropical infectious diseases and **vaccine equity**, especially for refugees, people in refugee-like situations, stateless persons, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), returnees (both refugees and IDPs) and others of concern especially in the region of Southeast Asia.

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition. The health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent on the fullest cooperation of individuals and States. (World Health Organization, WHO)

Health will never meet its definition when social well-being still be questioned, and the attainment of peace and security will never be met when prejudice and judgment is being made to those who are at higher risk of transmitting the disease, especially refugees and other forcibly displaced groups.

I would like to close this letter by stating that these statements are also relevant to the political position of ASEAN for the people of Palestine. They also, at the time, experience what is called humanitarian crisis, genocide, and unprecedented health crisis that risks an outbreak of deadly infectious diseases. The establishment of cooperation for emerging infectious disease control and vaccine equity for the people of Palestine is highly urged to be taken for consideration by the ASEAN.

Sincerely,
AMRAN WALI
 MD

DR. HUL SEINGHENG
CHAIRMAN OF ASEAN COSTI 2024-2025
 SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY DIVISION
 The ASEAN Secretariat
 70A Jalan Sisingamangaraja Jakarta 12110

Dear Dr. Hul Seingheng,

It is a great honor to witness the flourishing cooperation among ASEAN nations through science and technology, innovation-driven policies, and a shared vision. My name is Habibah, a science communicator working on a global media platform that aims to bridge science and society. As someone who dreams of a growing scientific landscape where science and technology are inclusive, I believe there is a pressing issue I would like to address in this letter.

The annual priority for COSTI clearly reflects the region's desire for a more collaborative space with ample room for innovation. However, esteemed Chairman, collaboration extends beyond the mere establishment of infrastructures. At the heart of research, science, and technology are the scientists and researchers. We must recalibrate the environment and landscape for conducting research among member states. In addition to creating the ASEAN Technology Management Hub, it is crucial to address the specific needs of scientists.

Through this chart that compares GDP growth and spending on research and development (GERD) the investment in R&D remains disproportionately low in many ASEAN nations. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the average expenditure on R&D in several ASEAN member states is below the global average, with some countries spending less than 0.5% of their GDP. This is in stark contrast to countries like South Korea and Japan, which invest over 4% of their GDP in R&D. This disparity significantly limits the potential for groundbreaking research and technological advancements within the region.

Furthermore, we must be able to understand that despite the initiative, the persisting institutional structural barriers play a crucial role in hindering research productivity. Bureaucratic red tape, insufficient autonomy for research institutions, and lack of incentives for researchers are some of the issues that need urgent addressing. Many researchers from the ASEAN member states report spending an inordinate amount of time navigating administrative processes to secure funding and ethical clearances, which detracts from their primary focus on scientific inquiry.

With this, I wish that COSTI can also include a more multidimensional approach in fulfilling its vision for ASEAN. Primarily by engaging deeper than the biannual meetings and high level discussions, COSTI can take a more active role through connecting in research centers and universities. Meaningful collaboration, in this context a collaboration based on each other's needs and resources, requires a deeper interaction. By being more aware of the presence of COSTI, ASEAN member states researchers and scientists are capable of finding a common place for each other.

Esteemed chairman, the establishment of the ASEAN Technology Management Hub is a step in the right direction. However, as a person who works closely with scientists and researchers to popularize science, I believe that we must also focus on creating an environment that supports and values its scientists and researchers. By addressing the multidimensional challenges at hand, we can create a more vibrant and productive scientific community in ASEAN. This will not only foster innovation but also ensure that the benefits of scientific advancements are widely shared across all member states.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. In your tenure, I look forward to the continued growth and success of scientific endeavors within the ASEAN region.

Yours sincerely,
HABIBAH HASNAH HERMANADI

MR. BUDI KARYA SUMADI
AN INDOONESIAN MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION

Dear Sumadi,

We appreciate all the policies that you have applied in Indonesia in your period of term. Especially the policy after COVID-19 when you made a decision either to open or close the international border in Indonesia to prevent the outbreak spread. However, we have our concern regarding your current decision regarding changing the status of international to domestic airports in several cities in Indonesia.

Several cities with several countries surrounding Indonesia have the advantage of visiting other countries rather than the capital city of Indonesia. The distance and the international flights that are cheaper compared to the domestic flights are the main reasons why people in several cities such as Aceh, Pekanbaru, Medan, and Padang in Sumatera Island and Pontianak in Kalimantan prefer to go to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur rather than visit Jakarta for tourism purposes. Even the international cost from Perth, Australia is much cheaper rather than going to Papua, in East Indonesia. The current policy to boost domestic tourists to visit Indonesian tourist places is not on point with the degradation of the status of international to national airports.

Other than that, it is worsened by the additional tourism fee for domestic flights that have purposes to support domestic tourists, as we know that the center of government, and business, are in Jakarta and everyone is visiting Jakarta or Java island for vacation purposes. Best medical access, scientific conferences, training, or even the best higher education are Java-centric. This phenomenon has created huge disadvantages for people living outside Java Island.

This issue indeed requires the government, especially the Ministry of Transportation to be more open with the perspective of Indonesia as an archipelago, not only focusing on one central island. Therefore, I, as an Indonesian citizen living outside the capital Jakarta, am hoping that there is a revised policy regarding the equality between national and international airports and flight prices.

Warm Regards,
VIVI USMAYANTI

**LAO WOMEN'S UNION
BUENGHAYONG VILLAGE, SISATTANAK DISTRICT,
VIENTIANE CAPITAL, LAOS**

Subject: **Call to action for advancing adolescent girls and women's empowerment**

Dear Mrs. Aly Vongnorbountham, President of Lao Women's Union,

I hope this letter finds you well and in good spirits. My name is Namfon, an International Relations student who has strong passion and advocacy for women's empowerment in my community. I am writing to you today with a pressing concern that I believe requires immediate attention and concerted action from your leader.

Firstly, I do believe that the young teenage girls are powerful and brimming with potential and inspiration to contribute to a better future for our community. There are 700,230 adolescent girls aged 10–19 in Lao PDR. Many are progressing. However, there are still a few people in rural areas who are left behind and face numerous challenges that can hinder their development and limit their opportunities: more than 42,000 adolescent girls who never attended school, lack of education and job opportunities, poor health and nutrition, and face-based gender violence and discrimination.

In rural communities, 60% of girls are facing mental health issues caused by violence and discrimination, wellbeing concerns; 1 in 4 girls aged 15–19 is currently married, and 1 in 10 girls marry before the age of 15. Nearly 1 in 5 girls aged 15–19 has begun childbearing. Nearly 3 in 7 pregnant adolescents, girls aged 15–19, are anemic. Anemic can harm the health of a girl and her baby under certain circumstances.

Empowering women and adolescent girls is not only a matter of compassion. It is a societal and strategic necessity. Several research projects have shown that societies that invest in adolescent girls experience higher levels of greater society and help them to be able to stay in school and be educated and empowered, to be able to access sexual and reproductive health information and services so they can protect themselves from unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections and plan their lives the way they want, to access economic opportunities and allow them to fulfill their dreams calls for action towards, so that they can be employed and contribute to the development of society.

Therefore, I kindly urge you, as a leader with influence and authority, to prioritize initiatives and investments which support adolescents girls and women's empowerment in rural areas by focusing on the following:

Ensuring they have access to quality education, including secondary and higher education. This involves not only providing scholarships and financial aid but also creating safe and supportive school environments that encourage girls to pursue their studies without fear of harassment or discrimination and training opportunities for girls and women, particularly in fields traditionally dominated by men.

Implementing measures to access comprehensive health services, including sexual and reproductive health education and information, so they can protect and care for themselves. This will help girls make informed decisions about their bodies and their futures.

Encouraging and supporting to create opportunities for girls to take on leadership roles in their schools, engagement in communities, and beyond.

Best regards,
NAMFON SENPATY

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**DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL
MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS**

Nahaidiao Quarter, P.O Box 6376 Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR

Dear Deputy Director General,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the lack of community involvement in various developmental initiatives in Laos. While the government has made significant strides in various sectors, the full potential of these efforts is often hampered by insufficient community engagement.

Community involvement is a cornerstone for sustainable development. When local communities are actively engaged, they can contribute valuable insights, resources, and support that enhance the effectiveness of programs and policies. However, in many areas of Laos, there is a noticeable gap in this crucial aspect. One major issue is the limited participation of local communities in the planning and implementation of development projects. Often, decisions are made at higher administrative levels without sufficient input from those directly affected by these initiatives. This top-down approach can lead to a disconnect between the intended outcomes of projects and the actual needs and priorities of the community.

Additionally, there is a lack of awareness and understanding among community members about the importance of their involvement. Many people do not feel empowered or knowledgeable enough to participate in discussions and decision-making processes. This can be attributed to inadequate outreach and education efforts that fail to effectively communicate the benefits of community participation.

Moreover, there are cultural and socio-economic barriers that hinder community involvement. Traditional norms and economic pressures can limit the ability of certain groups, such as women and marginalized communities, to engage in public affairs. Addressing these barriers through inclusive policies and targeted support can help foster a more participatory environment.

To address these challenges, I propose the following measures:

Enhance Communication and Outreach: Implement comprehensive awareness campaigns to educate communities about the importance of their involvement in development projects. Utilize various platforms, including local media, community meetings, and social networks, to disseminate information.

Facilitate Inclusive Participation: Ensure that development programs include mechanisms for meaningful community input at every stage. This could involve regular consultations, participatory planning workshops, and feedback mechanisms.

Empower Local Leaders: Provide training and resources to local leaders and community representatives to help them effectively advocate for their communities' needs and facilitate local engagement.

Address Cultural and Socio-Economic Barriers: Develop policies and initiatives that promote inclusivity, such as supporting women's groups, providing childcare during community meetings, and offering financial incentives for participation.

Monitor and Evaluate Community Involvement: Establish metrics to assess the level of community participation in development projects and use this data to improve strategies for engagement.

Sincerely,
SANTHANA

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**HIS EXCELLENCY KAO KIM HOURN
SECRETARY-GENERAL, ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS**

70A JALAN SISINGAMANGARAJA
JAKARTA 12110

Dear Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn:

I am writing to raise my concern to the Distinguished Members of the ASEAN Secretariat, Governments, and Intergovernmental Organizations about climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, and resource management which are among the pressing global challenges of our time with far-reaching negative impacts on the environment, society, and economy, particularly affecting vulnerable communities worldwide. The peoples and biodiversity of the ASEAN-Mekong region face significant vulnerability and adverse effects from climate change (floods, droughts, extreme heat, glacier melting, landslides, crop and forest losses, and health impacts).

Particularly in the Mekong and ASEAN regions. The climate crisis is arguably the existential challenge of our times. It is graphically described as "global boiling" by António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General. ASEAN countries are vulnerable since Southeast Asia is one of the most at-risk regions in the world to the effects of climate change, resulting in ASEAN countries being particularly weak. Numerous natural disasters, which have increased significantly in frequency and severity, provide unequivocal evidence of its effects. 1,380 disasters were recorded in the region between July 2012 and June 2018, according to data from the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Center). At 808 occurrences, flood was the most frequently occurring hazard, followed by wind (230), storms (124), landslides (123), earthquakes (42), volcanoes (32), and drought.

As a Laotian girl who feels deeply connected with the Mekong River, I feel heavily concerned about the climate risk impact on the nation since more than 70 percent of the Laos population gains their main income from the agriculture industry with cultivated floodplains found along some reaches of the Mekong River and the natural resources. Across the lower Mekong River climate change's consequences are clearly visible, increasing temperatures and alterations in rainfall patterns, river flows, floods, and droughts are causing significant damage to homes, infrastructure, crops, and fisheries. Consequently, vulnerable communities are experiencing food shortages and a decline in their livelihoods. When the climate has changed including the weather patterns, it has increased high risk of natural hazards, people losing income in households, and losses in agriculture production which affects the economy directly and can lead to gender inequality in society, especially in rural areas regarding traditional norms that will create more percentage of food security and poverty. At the community level, A few years ago, villages enjoyed two farming seasons annually (December and July). However, the situation has changed, and now they rely solely on the rainy season for cultivation. This reduction in farming opportunities has led to decreased income levels, intensifying food insecurity and prompting a surge in migration to urban areas or abroad. This condition has also heightened the risk of financial instability within these rural communities.

I urge the ASEAN and all relevant stakeholders to collaborate in collective collaboration by developing and implementing comprehensive regional policies and initiatives. These efforts should focus on promoting sustainable resource management, enhancing climate resilience, and protecting biodiversity. It is crucial to strengthen transboundary communication, coordination, and solidarity to address our shared environmental challenges arising from climate crises through development projects (e.g., land, forest, dams, irrigation canals, tourism), and other causes that encroachment by large corporations/businesses, and take action in collaboration with grassroots communities, civil society organizations, NGOs, donors, media, academia, decision-makers, and other stakeholders at all levels - local, national, regional, transnational, and international. I demand the inclusion of all voices and concerns through a well-established mechanism of youth participation at local, national, regional, and international forums and mechanisms such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to address the current climate challenges experienced in the region and beyond, providing mechanisms and support, such as capacity-building activities and youth platforms, to realize our agency. It is crucial to include everyone in the policy-making process to ensure a sustainable future for all. By working together, we can create meaningful solutions that benefit both people and the planet in ASEAN.

SOUPHAVANH SENSOUPHANH

HIS EXCELLENCY KAO KIM HOURN
SECRETARY-GENERAL, ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
70A JALAN SISINGAMANGARAJA
JAKARTA 12110

DEAR SECRETARY-GENERAL KAO KIM HOURN:

I hope this letter finds you in good health and high spirits. I am writing to propose the creation of an ASEAN Communication Center, which I believe could serve as a pivotal step in mastering public diplomacy within our region.

I am just a Southeast Asian Studies graduate. It has been three years since my graduation, and throughout these years, I have been constantly troubled and heartbroken by the problematic practice of quiet diplomacy in ASEAN.

ASEAN's commitment to non-interference and mutual respect, as outlined in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) of 1976, has fostered stability and cooperation among member states. Yet, reliance on quiet diplomacy, while discreet, has sometimes led to perceptions of opacity and ineffectiveness, potentially undermining ASEAN's credibility. Addressing these challenges is crucial to maintaining public trust and engagement within the region.

The ongoing conflicts within our region highlight the urgent need for improved communication and diplomacy. The crisis in Myanmar and the unresolved territorial disputes in the South China Sea serve as poignant reminders of the challenges we face, causing immense hardship and deepening divisions. This troubling reality demands that we do better, that we strive with renewed vigor to build a future where such adversities are not allowed to persist.

To address these challenges, I propose the establishment of an ASEAN Communication Center. This center would serve as a hub for coordinating public diplomacy efforts, ensuring a coherent and planned communication strategy across the region. By fostering transparency, inclusivity, and active public engagement, the center could significantly enhance the visibility and impact of ASEAN's initiatives.

The ASEAN Communication Center could serve as a catalyst for diplomatic dialogue and negotiation, creating informal avenues for trust-building and cooperation among diplomats. By promoting transparency and accountability, it would help rebuild trust and confidence among member states, paving the way for diplomatic reconciliation and cooperation on contentious issues.

I urge the ASEAN leadership to consider this proposal as a strategic step towards a more integrated and proactive regional diplomacy. In line with the ASEAN Communication Master Plan, I call upon each of you to prioritize the establishment of the ASEAN Communication Center. Let us take concrete actions to allocate resources, set up a task force to develop a detailed implementation strategy, and actively engage with stakeholders across all member states. Together, let us harness the power of communication and dialogue to build a brighter future for ASEAN and its people.

Thank you for considering this proposal. I look forward to any positive response and am available for any further engagement.

Yours sincerely,
AZRHUL NIEZAM

DATO' SERI UTAMA HAJI MOHAMAD BIN HAJI HASAN
MINISTER, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Wisma Putra No 1, Jalan Wisma Putra
 Presint 2 62602 Putrajaya Malaysia

Subject: **PROPOSAL FOR A SERIES OF EVENTS CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AS PART OF MALAYSIA'S CHAIRMANSHIP OF ASEAN 2025**

Honourable Dato' Seri,

Referring to the above matter, I, Muhamad Nadhir Abdul Nasir, a Malaysian delegate to ASEAN Youth Convergence humbly call the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia to lead in conducting a series of events relevant to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in ASEAN Community Vision 2045 as part of Malaysia's chairmanship of ASEAN in 2025.

As a blind person engaging in the works relating to the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities since 2019, I believe Malaysia is capable of facilitating the advancement of the empowerment and inclusion of persons with disabilities in this region. With this in mind, the MADANI Government, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, should organise the following series of events:

Coordination Meeting for Preparatory Work of the End-Term Review of the Enabling Masterplan 2025. This 1-day event is proposed to be organised in February 2025. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs can collaborate and coordinate with important stakeholders such as SOMSWD, AICHR, and regional and national consultants. Organisations representing persons with disabilities and NHRIs from ASEAN Member States must also be invited. This event has three specific objectives: (1) to reflect on the gaps and challenges encountered during the Mid-Term Review of the Enabling Masterplan 2025; (2) to brief on the preparatory work for the End-Term Review of the Enabling Masterplan 2025; and, (3) to ensure full and active participation of persons with disabilities in the End-Term Review process in all ASEAN Member States.

High-Level Engagement for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in ASEAN Community Vision 2045. This 3-day event is proposed to be organised between May 2025 to August 2025. The proposed theme is "Towards Inclusive Development in ASEAN Facing a Multipolarity World". The Ministry of Foreign Affairs can collaborate with the High-level Task Force for the ASEAN Community's Post 2025 Vision (HLTF-ACV) and other relevant stakeholders in organising the event. Each day of the event shall focus on each ASEAN Community pillar. Presenters and discussants amongst persons with disabilities, public officials and scholars will be the main component of this event. This event aims to ensure the interests, voices and aspirations of persons with disabilities are integrated into the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and its accompanying operating instruments, either blueprint or strategic plan. If there is a call for a specific blueprint for persons with disabilities, a committee must be established and its membership must include persons with disabilities besides other important stakeholders.

Launching of ASEAN Post-2025 Agenda on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. This event is proposed to be organised in December as part of the celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3rd and the Human Rights Day on December 10th. This event has two specific goals: (1) to launch the End-Term Review Report of the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and, (2) to launch an ASEAN Post-2025 Agenda for persons with disabilities as part of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045. There can also be several pre- and post-event activities. ASEAN sectoral bodies and member states may make use of this event to announce initiatives for persons with disabilities in their respective countries or the region as a whole.

Sincerely,
MUHAMAD NADHIR ABDUL NASIR

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 copy of the letter**



YB Aaron Ago Dagang

Pejabat Menteri, Kementerian Perpaduan Negara
 Aras 5 - 10, Blok F9, Parcel F
 Lebuhraya Perdana Timur, Presint 1
 62000 Putrajaya
 Malaysia.

Proposed Anti-Discrimination Act in Malaysia

Dear YB Aaron Ago Dagang,

I am writing to bring your attention to a solution that addresses the growing polarisation within Malaysia. It is time for the government to enact an anti-discrimination law that consolidates protection in free speech, labour, employment, housing and education under a single agency mandated to address discrimination.

According to the State of Discrimination Survey by Architects of Diversity in 2023, majority of Malaysians (64%) reported having experienced some form of discrimination, including workplace and housing, in the past 12 months. For instance, job advertisements seeking potential employees of a certain race are usually deceitfully framed in the form of a specific language ability, such as "Mandarin speakers only. Many persons with disabilities are rejected at the job application phase or during the job interview, once the prospective employer discovers they are disabled. Malaysian landlords are quite overt with rental advertisements explicitly stating racial preference for potential tenants, such as 'no Indians wanted'.

In Malaysia, the laws on discrimination in the workplace are in their infancy. Although amendments to the Employment Act 1955 encompass some anti-discrimination provisions, it is vague as it does not define discrimination. It is problematic when discrimination is not defined as an offence on the basis of refusal for employment and unemployment. Malaysia has a long way to go before reaching a mature stage like the United Kingdom where the Equality Act 2010 can be enacted to combat workplace discrimination.

Any Malaysians can attest that the nation is plagued with polarisation. Politically, our leaders of different parties have a hard time seeing eye to eye with each other due to identity-based ideological divides, especially during election season, political parties tend to resort to racial rhetorics to rally ethnic support. Deepening polarisation over race and religion has intensified the divide in the nation, where 3R (Race, Religion, Royalty) hate speech has recorded major increases, according to the election monitoring conducted by the Center of Independent Journalism. However, the current laws governing the 3R hate speech such as the Sedition Act and Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA) are archaic and repressive.

Discrimination needs to be addressed through comprehensive and effective laws, and none of the existing law is sufficient to tackle these issues, as each of these laws have it's limitations. Malaysia urgently needs an Anti-Discrimination Act that would not only protect the rights of all Malaysians but also send a powerful message about our nation's commitment to equality and justice, aligning with the Madani government values. I believe the introduction of an Anti-Discrimination Act would reinforce our standing as a progressive, inclusive society and serve as a model for other ASEAN countries facing similar challenges.

Yours sincerely,
EE REN NYU

U KHIN MAUNG YI
UNION MINISTER
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY
Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar

Dear Minister U Khin Maung Yi,

I respectfully express my concern regarding the increasing deforestation in Myanmar, particularly in the Chauk and Magway regions, and its alarming impact on local temperatures. As a resident of Magway, I have witnessed firsthand the rapid rise in temperatures, which have now exceeded 40°C this year. This unprecedented heat not only affects the comfort and health of residents but also has severe implications for our local environment and agriculture.

Deforestation is a significant factor contributing to this rise in temperature. The loss of forest cover reduces the region's ability to regulate its climate, exacerbates the heat, and leads to a cascade of environmental problems, including soil erosion and reduced rainfall. These issues directly impact the livelihoods of our community, which relies heavily on agriculture and natural resources.

I understand that there are multiple perspectives on land use and development, and the economic benefits that sometimes drive deforestation. However, it is crucial to balance these needs with the long-term environmental sustainability and well-being of our population. Research has shown that reforestation and sustainable forest management can mitigate temperature increases and provide numerous ecological benefits.

I respectfully request the Ministry to consider actions to address deforestation in our region. Specifically, I propose the following measures:

- Implementation of stricter regulations on logging and land clearance: to preserve existing forests and prevent illegal deforestation.
- Promotion of reforestation programs: involving local communities to restore lost forest cover and enhance biodiversity.
- Introduction of sustainable agricultural practices: that reduce the need for land clearance and improve soil health.

These steps would not only help in controlling the rising temperatures but also promote a healthier and more sustainable environment for future generations. I am confident that with the Ministry's support and leadership, we can develop effective strategies to combat deforestation and its adverse effects.

Thank you for considering my concerns and proposals. I look forward to your kind response and to seeing positive changes in our environmental policies.

Sincerely,
SU YI PHYO

**HIS EXCELLENCY MR. SONEXAY SIPHANDONE
ASEAN CHAIRMAN FOR 2024**

PRIME MINISTER OF THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC (LAO PDR)

CC: His Excellency Mr. Alounkeo Kittikhoun, Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar, His Excellency Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN, The ASEAN Secretariat

Subject: ASEAN Youth-led Cross-border Humanitarian Plus Corridor to Myanmar

Your Excellency,

As a concerned citizen and emerging leader within the ASEAN community, I am writing to bring to your attention the critical humanitarian situation in Myanmar. My name is Sike Chan, a Master's student from Mae Fah Luang University in Chiang Rai, Thailand, and a Myanmar Delegate of the ASEAN Youth Convergence 2024. The situation in my home country of Myanmar is alarming: 2.8 million people are displaced and 18.6 million are in need of humanitarian assistance, a 19-fold increase since February 2021 (UN OCHA, 2023). Despite the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs appealing for \$994 million in 2024 to address these needs, the humanitarian response plan is only 4 percent funded.

This crisis affects me deeply, as it impacts my community and my homeland. The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) currently coordinates primarily with state actors and ceasefire ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2023). However, this approach excludes non-ceasefire ethnic resistant organizations (EROs), emerging People Defense Forces (PDFs), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), which are essential to effectively delivering aid to those impacted by political unrest and armed conflicts.

To contribute to the realization of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the implementation of the ASEAN Work Plan on Youth 2021–2025 (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2022), I propose that ASEAN Member States, under the current chairmanship of Lao PDR, establish a standalone 'ASEAN Youth Peace Corps' and authorize it to lead humanitarian aid delivery to Myanmar. Empowering ASEAN youth as a non-state agency can minimize the risk of politicizing humanitarian aid plans, as concerned by Thailand's Vice Foreign Minister (Robinson, 2024). This initiative would promote shared ownership and collective leadership among regional youth, enhancing ASEAN's Centrality in addressing not only the Myanmar crisis but also other regional challenges such as transnational haze and climate change. With the support of the UN Security Council, ASEAN leaders will be well-positioned to mediate humanitarian ceasefires, negotiate transitions, and help establish an inclusive federal democracy in Myanmar.

I respectfully urge you to consider this proposal and authorize ASEAN youth to take a leading role in this humanitarian effort. Thank you for your time and dedication to addressing this critical issue.

Sincerely Yours,
SIKE CHAN (MR.)

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to see the full
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HIS EXCELLENCY KAO KIM HOURN

Secretary-General, Association of Southeast Asian Nations
70A Jalan Sisingamangaraja
Jakarta 12110

Subject: A Call for Regional Action: Establishing a Focused Unit for Digital Carbon Footprint in ASEAN

Dear Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn:

My name is Mason and I am from Myanmar. As I am a passionate tech enthusiast and web developer, I'm witnessing firsthand the incredible growth of Southeast Asia's digital landscape. But with this exciting progress comes a hidden cost: our burgeoning digital carbon footprint.

The concept of a digital carbon footprint might be new to our region. It refers to the greenhouse gases emitted due to the creation, use, and storage of digital data. As ASEAN becomes more digitally connected, the energy consumption required for data centers, networks, and devices significantly increases, contributing to our overall carbon emissions. Addressing this issue is crucial: digital infrastructure often relies on fossil fuels, accelerating climate change and causing severe environmental disruptions. By tackling this now, we can ensure sustainable growth for our rapidly developing digital economy and avoid future costs from environmental damage. As global citizens, we have a responsibility to reduce our environmental impact. Therefore, we propose establishing a Focused Unit for Digital Carbon Footprint to lead efforts in education, innovation, and implementing green technologies across member states. This unit could be a game-changer, focusing on:

- **Standardized Metrics:** Let's develop a consistent way to measure our digital footprint across all member states. This will allow us to compare progress and track our collective impact.
- **Tech Industry Collaboration:** Imagine teaming up with tech giants and data centers! The unit could promote energy efficiency, encourage a shift to renewable energy for data centers, and advocate for groundbreaking green cloud technologies.
- **Knowledge Power:** By creating a knowledge-sharing platform, the unit can empower member states with best practices for sustainable digital infrastructure. Think showcasing successful regional initiatives and fostering expert exchange to accelerate knowledge transfer.
- **Greener Tech R&D:** Let's invest in research and development for a sustainable digital future. The unit could support research on optimizing data center cooling, extending the lifespan of electronic devices, and exploring eco-friendly alternatives for data storage.

By establishing this dedicated unit, ASEAN can lead the way in crafting a roadmap to a greener digital future. We, the tech-savvy generation, are eager to contribute.

Thank you for your leadership and for considering this crucial initiative.

Sincerely,
Mason

HON. SEC. FRANCISCO P. TIU LAUREL, JR.
DEPARTMENT SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Republic of The Philippines

CC: Sec. Renato U. Solidum, Jr., *Philippine Coconut Authority*
OIC Atty. Khay Ann C. Magundayao-Borlado, *Philippine Commission on Women*

Dear Sec. Francisco,

I am Apols, a social entrepreneur dedicated to supporting rural women farmers. I am writing to draw your urgent attention to the plight of women farmers in some rural areas of the Philippines, particularly in Barangay Nagooan, Northern Samar. This community is identified as geographically isolated and disadvantaged, with limited access to vital infrastructure such as national roads and highways.

The primary source of income in Barangay Nagooan is agriculture, with families, particularly women farmers, relying predominantly on coconut production. However, due to severely limited resources, these women earn only between 2,000-5,000 pesos (\$35-\$87) monthly, an income insufficient to sustain their families and uplift their standard of living.

As cities grow, they offer individuals the opportunity to find stable jobs that often provide higher wages compared to rural areas. In the Philippines, the wages of non-agricultural workers are generally higher than those of farm workers (Department of Labor and Employment, 2020). With farming perceived to be a lesser profession by many people in rural areas, young workers are leaving the countryside to try their luck in the cities (Williams & Farrington, 2006; Morales et al., 2022; Mialhe et al., 2014). The migration data reveals that approximately 56.5% of rural women (38.2% of which are men), driven by economic reasons and the pursuit of better opportunities (Quisumbing & McNiven, 2006). This migration trend highlights the urgent need to improve the conditions and prospects for those who remain in rural areas, particularly our women farmers.

These women farmers are the backbone of their communities. They work hard to ensure food security and sustain local economies, yet they remain marginalized and overlooked in agricultural programs. This situation is not only unjust but also hampers the potential for economic growth and social development in these rural areas. I urge you to take decisive action to support these women farmers by including them in more agricultural programs and providing them with the necessary resources. Access to better seeds, modern farming equipment, training, and financial support are essential to improving their productivity and income. Furthermore, infrastructure such as roads and transport services should be developed to enhance their ability to market their products more efficiently.

My organization, Hidden Manna Farms is ready and willing to collaborate on these projects. Together, we can leverage our resources and expertise to create sustainable solutions that empower these women farmers and elevate their communities.

Empowering women farmers is not just a matter of fairness; it is a crucial step toward sustainable development. When women thrive, their entire community benefits. I implore you to champion their cause, ensuring that they receive the support and recognition they deserve.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of these women and pave the way for a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

Sincerely,
APOLS E. GARMAY
Social Entrepreneur and Founder
Hidden Manna Farms Philippines

**HIS EXCELLENCY KAO KIM HOURN
SECRETARY-GENERAL, ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS**

70A Jalan Sisingamangaraja
Jakarta 12110

CC: ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Youth (SOMY)

Honorable ASEAN Secretary-General,

Building on the legacy of Dr. Jose Rizal's inspiring quote, "Ang Kabataan ang Pag-Asa ng Bayan" (The Youth is the Hope of Our Future), I write to you today to highlight the importance of fostering youth leadership across Southeast Asia.

Social media exposes the silencing of young leaders across borders, highlighting the need for inclusivity regardless of where you are, who you are, and what you are. Despite this harsh reality, my trust and belief in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) remains strong. International cooperation and discourse are critical to shaping a better future, and ASEAN provides a platform for young voices to be heard.

Your Excellency, the right to represent the Philippines isn't just an honor and a responsibility. A responsibility to amplify the call of the millions of young voices across the Philippines and Southeast Asia, demanding a better world. We long for a world that is safe, inclusive, and sustainable. A world where we and the coming generations can flourish without living in fear due to a constant threat to our well-being, health, and fundamental rights.

Age is and will never be a barrier to making impactful initiatives to change the world. Growing up, I was privileged enough to be allowed to take up space and make an impact in the communities I have worked with. These changes ignite young minds into changemakers, sending ripples of progress that can reshape our world, one action at a time. The world needs these changemakers to shatter stereotypes and redefine the social norms holding young and old from achieving equality and progress. Look around our region – countless youth-led organizations are already leaving their mark on their respective communities. These young leaders are living proof that age doesn't define potential; it fuels it.

The urgent need for genuine youth representation in crucial international and national discussions is undeniable. Including young voices strengthens our efforts to build a better future and the effectiveness of these discussions. Frameworks and policies crafted with the needs of young people in mind are essential for actual progress. We seek a seat at the table, a platform to share our vision and be heard. There is a lot of potential in integrating youth representatives in the ASEAN Senior Meeting on Youth. This allows us not just to represent ourselves but also to be able to collaborate with different national leaders in the region. This opportunity would benefit not just myself but the millions of young voices across the globe.

While the leadership and platforms provided by ASEAN are invaluable, the true strength of our region lies in the collective voice of its people, including its young generation. I urge your respectable office and governments that are affiliated with it to increase opportunities and representation to reflect our diverse perspectives and backgrounds better. We believe our voices deserve to be heard, not just as the "hope of the future" but as active agents in shaping the present. We seek collaboration with policymakers to create youth-affirming and supportive policies that empower us to contribute to nation-building, policies that safeguard us and our future. Let us work together to ensure the bright future we all envision becomes a reality we all enjoy.

**United By Diplomacy, Powered by Service
JOSHUA COTE**

HON. MARIA LAARNI "LANI" CAYETANO
MAYOR
CITY OF TAGUIG

Dear Mayor Lani,

I am writing to you today as a concerned citizen and an Industrial Designer with a keen interest in utilizing design to address environmental and social challenges. As a resident of Taguig City, I frequently jog along the C-6 Road and have noticed the abundance of water hyacinth accumulating on the shorelines of Laguna de Bay.

While water hyacinth presents an ecological concern, I believe it also holds immense potential as a sustainable material for creating beautiful and functional handicraft products. As the founder of Format Design Lab, a design studio focused on bridging cutting-edge technologies with the communities they are intended to benefit, I am eager to explore the possibility of collaborating with Taguig City in developing handicraft products like fashion accessories and homeware from this invasive plant.

This initiative aligns perfectly with your strong advocacy for women's empowerment. By empowering women through the creation of new livelihood opportunities, we can not only tackle the environmental issue of water hyacinth but also contribute to a more vibrant and equitable society for all.

This initiative aligns perfectly with Taguig City's upcoming partnership with the Philippine Textile Research Institute (PTRI). By combining PTRI's expertise in textile technology with Format Design Lab's design capabilities, we can develop a product line that tackles the environmental issue of water hyacinth and empowers the women of Taguig.

Furthermore, these handcrafted products made from water hyacinth can be promoted for the city's One Town, One Product (OTOP) program. This program provides significant support for local entrepreneurs and artisans, giving these beautiful and sustainable products a platform to reach a wider market. The success of these water hyacinth crafts can not only create new livelihood opportunities but also establish Taguig City as a leader in sustainable design and social innovation.

I am confident that through innovative design and collaboration, we can transform water hyacinth from a pest into a source of environmental sustainability and economic empowerment for the women of Taguig City. I would be honored to discuss this proposal further and explore how Format Design Lab can contribute to this initiative.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
MATT DAVID
Founder, Format Design Lab

HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. KAO KIM HOURN
SECRETARY GENERAL OF ASEAN
ASEAN SECRETARIAT
70A Jl. Sisingamangaraja
Jakarta 12110, Indonesia

Your Excellency, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn,

Encouragement for Greater Focus on Regional Cooperation to Address International Cyber Conflicts

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to urge the ASEAN Secretariat to prioritise regional cooperation in addressing international cyber conflicts. The advent of the Internet in 1983 introduced numerous technological innovations, including the vast and complex realm of cyberspace. Along with its benefits, cyberspace has brought about significant threats that transcend traditional warfare, occurring in both peacetime and wartime, and impacting individuals globally.

Cyberspace has become one of the most critical arenas in the modern world, necessitating robust protection and regulation. Despite this urgency, cyberspace remains poorly defined, with significant discrepancies regarding the definitions of cyberattacks and their parameters. Therefore, we advocate for greater clarity and comprehensive international guidelines, rules, and frameworks.

I am one of the many regional youth who has a vested interest in the cyberspace. My team and I at Cyber Youth Singapore, a youth-in-tech charity in Singapore, has observed that youths are increasingly affected by cyber conflicts. A notable example is "cyber interference," where critical events such as elections are targeted to manipulate or disrupt digital platforms, swaying public opinion and influencing decision-making processes. These concerns have prompted us to convene a special research committee to address these emerging issues.

We are publishing a paper soon that summarizes the current situation in cyberspace, examining existing international laws, guidelines, and frameworks alongside emerging technologies. We have 4 areas of recommendation that we believe should be taken to consideration even at a regional level:

- Elevate cyber capabilities among less developed nations to achieve a minimal level of cybersecurity worldwide.
- Encourage the establishment of guidelines to determine infringements on sovereignty, with criteria based on the extent and type of harm caused by cyberattacks.
- Advocate for corporations with significant influence in cyberspace to mitigate the effects of cyberattacks on civilians, youths, and critical infrastructure, particularly regarding online disinformation and misinformation.
- Establish an international youth platform to leverage youth talents, promote capability development, and encourage communication.

We urge the ASEAN Secretariat to consider these proposals seriously and to take a leading role in fostering regional cooperation to address the growing threat of international cyber conflicts. Together, we can create a safer and more secure cyberspace for all, particularly for the younger generation that will inherit this digital world.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,
JAMIE YAU
Chief Operating Officer and Chief Partnerships Officer
Cyber Youth Singapore

MS. SUN XUELING
MINISTER OF STATE FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT
MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

512 Thomson Road, #10-00
 Singapore 298136

Subject: **Request for Enhanced Funding and Support for Adult Disability Sector Service Providers**

Dear Ms. Sun,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Jodie, and I am a resident of Singapore with a disability. As an advocate for diversity and inclusion, I deeply appreciate the Ministry of Social and Family Development's (MSF) continuous efforts to improve the lives of persons with disabilities in our country. In particular, the development of the Enabling Masterplan 2030 is commendable in providing a concrete roadmap for the vision for Singapore as an inclusive society in 2030.

While there are concrete efforts in this space, I would like to bring to your attention some pressing issues that persist in the adult disability sector, which require urgent and enhanced support. Service providers are struggling with limited funding and high staff turnover, which significantly affect the quality of care and support for persons with disabilities.

Adult disability service providers face several critical challenges:

Limited Funding: Many service providers, including Mr Bernard Chew, CEO of St. Andrew's Autism Centre, said that funding constraints also make it difficult to hire and retain trained professionals. This limitation affects the quality of programs and support services available to clients with higher support needs.

High Staff Turnover: The sector also experiences high staff turnover rates, which disrupts the continuity of care and negatively impacts clients. One parent shared that his 37-year-old son, who has autism and obsessive-compulsive disorder, has been in a day activity centre (DAC) for the last eight years. After familiar staff members left and the new coach got frustrated with him, his son refused to go to the DAC for five months.

Inadequate Physical Space: Many centres also need more space constraints, which limit their capacity to accommodate more clients and provide diverse activities. This issue is particularly pressing given the long waitlists for DACs and sheltered workshops, with wait times ranging from several weeks to up to five years.

Costly for Middle-Income Households: Fee caps were introduced two years ago to keep fees affordable for DAC clients with per capita household incomes of \$2,800 per month or less. For middle-income families, attending a DAC can cost more than \$1,900 a month which can be prohibitive for many, considering the Median Gross Monthly Income of \$5,197.

Yours sincerely,
JODIE NG

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Kimberly Desker

Communications & Engagement Department
Singapore Council of Women's Organisations

Advancing Women's Empowerment in the Tech Industry

Dear Ms Desker,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Qiao Yi, a committed member of NUS Women in Tech and a passionate advocate for women's empowerment. As a female student aspiring to pursue a career in this field, I am writing to share my concerns and propose actionable steps to address the challenges faced by women like me.

The tech industry, while dynamic and innovative, remains predominantly male-dominated. As I prepare to enter the workforce, the prevalent issue of the gender wage gap and subtle discrimination undermines my efforts. Here are some observations I have picked up over my journey:

Unequal Support: My male counterparts seem to receive more assistance and encouragement. Whether it's seeking advice or collaborating on projects, there is an evident disparity in the level of support.

Patience Gap and Heightened Scrutiny: Teaching assistants and mentors sometimes exhibit less patience when addressing my questions or concerns and display stricter grading on presentations and assignments. This can be discouraging and affects my confidence.

I believe that Singapore can do much more in promoting gender equality within the tech sector. Some actionable steps that could make a significant impact include:

Scholarships and Grants: Establish targeted scholarships and grants specifically for women pursuing tech-related degrees. These financial aids can empower promising female students and encourage them to excel.

Education and Mentorship Programs: Expand educational opportunities for women in tech. Workshops, seminars, and mentorship programs can equip us with the skills needed to thrive in this competitive field.

Promote Inclusive Workplaces: Encourage companies to adopt policies that promote gender wage equality. Transparent salary structures and equal opportunities for career advancement are essential.

Supportive Communities: While existing efforts by SG Women in Tech are commendable, there is room for improvement. Let's foster a stronger sense of community, where women can network, collaborate, and uplift one another.

As we strive for progress, efforts to recognize women as equal contenders in the tech industry, or any other industry really, are paramount. By investing in our education, providing mentorship, and promoting fair workplaces, we can create an environment where every woman's potential can flourish.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. Together, we can build a more inclusive and thriving tech ecosystem.

Sincerely,
Lim Qiao Yi

ASEAN TRANSIT TRANSPORT COORDINATING BOARD (ITCB) PRESIDENT

Dear ASEAN Transit Transport Coordinating Board (ITCB) president,

I am Akkharaphan Thaweesak, an SDGs youth ambassador from Thailand. In 2022, I attend the Thailand Clean Mobility Program which was organized by Chulalongkorn University Transportation Institute, in collaboration with GIZ and Office of Transport and Traffic Policy and Planning, Thailand (OTP). Through the visioning workshop, I have presented the idea for clean transportation through effective communication methods that will help gain public acceptance for the transport policies.

Regarding Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one essential pillar directly related to human life is environmental conservation, especially climate action. According to the International Energy Agency, the transportation sector accounts for about a quarter of total global carbon emissions and has become the second-largest carbon-emitting sector in the world (Jianqiang et al., 2023).

This cause intensifies the effects of climate change both in the short term and long term, as transportation is essential to human living. As a result, carbon emissions from this sector should be considered alongside investigating possible solutions. Based on my experience and understanding of the issue, I would like to propose three solutions to mitigate carbon emissions from transportation systems as follows:

Providing Cheaper Public Transport Costs: Convince people to use public transport instead of private cars, which have high carbon emissions per passenger unit. Additionally, this will help reduce traffic congestion during peak hours in the morning and evening.

Promoting Campaigns for Clean Transportation: Encourage people to use carbon-free transportation such as cycling, walking, and electric vehicles. Provide incentives such as point redemption for using green transportation that can be applied for discounts at cafes and restaurants and free entry into a lucky draw for eco-friendly products.

Raising Awareness Among Young Generations: Cultivate awareness among youths about the effects of climate change from daily routines, especially transportation. Support the development of an eco-friendly mindset to promote sustainable development goals through effective practices.

I have a strong intention to solve environmental issues through ideas and cooperation from both people and governmental sectors, as I would like to restore the planet we live on to become clean and sustainably available for everyone in the future. Beginning with the ASEAN region presents a great opportunity to harness the potential of member countries and turn it into powerful action within our association.

I am looking forward to hearing from you regarding the proposed solutions. It would be great to receive your recommendations and further assistance in this regard. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Yours faithfully,
AKKHARAPHAN THAWEESEK

DR. ROGER YAP CHAO, JR
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR AND HEAD
EDUCATION, YOUTH, AND SPORTS DIVISION
ASEAN SECRETARIAT
 Jakarta, Indonesia

Subject: **Proposal for Educational Advocacy and Youth Empowerment in ASEAN Border Areas**

Dear Dr. Roger Yap Chao, Jr,

As a youth residing near the border area of Thailand and Cambodia, I am writing to express my heartfelt concern regarding the disparity in access to quality education among the youth in ASEAN countries, particularly those living in border regions.

Having experienced firsthand the challenges and inequalities within the education system, I am deeply motivated to advocate for change and work towards ensuring that every child in the ASEAN region has equal opportunities to receive a quality education.

My own educational journey, which involved transitioning from rural elementary schools to a prestigious university, has allowed me to witness the stark differences in resources, opportunities, and outcomes across various educational institutions. Unfortunately, many of my peers from rural areas were unable to continue their education due to financial constraints and lack of support systems, leading to early dropout rates and limited prospects for their future.

According to the ASEAN Youth Development Index 2022, published by the ASEAN Secretariat, access to education for youth in ASEAN Member States (AMS) is significantly reduced for those who reside in rural or remote locations, live in extreme poverty, and other marginalized groups. This alarming reality underscores the urgent need for concerted efforts to address educational disparities and create inclusive learning environments for all.

To address this pressing issue, I propose the establishment of an ASEAN Youth Network for Rural Education Development dedicated to promoting educational equity and empowerment in rural, remote and border communities. This network would mobilize young leaders who share a common vision and commitment to drive positive change through various initiatives and activities.

One such initiative involves organizing inspirational talks and mentorship programs featuring successful youth from similar backgrounds, serving as role models and motivators for children in border areas. Additionally, forging partnerships between local schools and institutions of excellence can facilitate knowledge-sharing and capacity-building, bridging the gap between urban and rural education systems. We could also engage the private sector to convince them to participate in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives by providing scholarships, funding support for activities, or offering training for youth who could potentially become their future employees.

Furthermore, by cultivating a network of Border Youth Champions, we can empower young advocates to spearhead grassroots initiatives and amplify our impact within their communities. This grassroots approach is essential for fostering sustainable change and fostering a culture of lifelong learning and empowerment.

Yours sincerely,
TANADECH SRIWANCHAI

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MR. JATUPORN BURUSPAT
PERMANENT SECRETARY
MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT
Bangkok, Thailand

Subject: **Request for cooperation and support to address wildfires in Thailand**

I am Sasiporn, working at Mekong Institute. Our institute specializes in capacity development across the region, focusing on human resource and educational initiatives designed to promote regional development, cooperation, and integration. I am writing to express my concern regarding the persistent wildfires in Thailand, which have been ongoing since 1992. Data from the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation indicates that approximately 49.97 million rai have been burned during these 10 years, with 185,979.47 rai affected in 2023 and more than 50 percent of these fires have occurred in the northern of Thailand.

Wildfires in Thailand can result from natural causes, such as lightning and friction between tree branches, as well as human activities, including arson, discarded cigarette butts, burning garbage, and clearing forests for agriculture. These fires can easily spread to other areas exacerbating the problem.

Given the urgency of this matter, I am reaching out to request your cooperation and support in securing funding or resourcing for my organization to organize the following activities within my province:

Exploration Teams: Implementing teams tasked with surveying and identifying dry forests susceptible to fires, while also promoting the planting of replacement trees in proximity.

Community Incentives: Allocating funds to communities that effectively reduce instances of forest or sugar cane burning.

Plastic Reduction Campaigns: Launching campaigns aimed at reducing plastic usage in markets, alongside offering incentives such as prizes or gifts to participating establishments.

School Role-Play Contests: Encouraging schools to host role-play competitions aimed at raising awareness about the consequences of forest fires, with prizes awarded to the winners.

Your collaboration would enhance our capacity to address these challenges and promote positive change within the region. Should these activities receive positive feedback, our province or organization could serve as a model for other regions, facilitating broader collaboration in the future. For any inquiries or suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 093-7785666 or via email at sasiporn.p1990@gmail.com.

Thank you for your consideration and support in addressing this critical issue.

Yours faithfully,
MS. SASIPORN PHUPHAPLOY

MR. LE MINH HOAN,
MINISTRY OF RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT
HA NOI, VIETNAM

Subject: **Promoting Sustainable Agriculture through Eco-Friendly Practices and the Integration of Lotus Plants**

Dear Mr. Le Minh Hoan, Ministry of Rural and Agricultural Development

I am writing to bring to your attention an important environmental issue that I am deeply concerned about. My name is Anh P. Dang, and I am a researcher and PhD student working in the agricultural sector within the government. As an advocate for sustainable agricultural practices, I am passionate about finding solutions to reduce the environmental impact of our current farming methods. Over the past few years, I have traveled to over ten countries to observe and study various agricultural practices. Most recently, I am doing an internship in Germany, where I am gaining valuable insights into advanced sustainable farming techniques.

The issue at hand significantly affects our local community, particularly the small-scale farmers who rely on sustainable practices for their livelihood. The increasing use of chemical fertilizers has led to soil degradation and water contamination, which not only harms the environment but also destroys the health and economic stability of our community members.

While some may argue that chemical fertilizers are necessary for higher crop yields, research has shown that sustainable alternatives can achieve similar results without the harmful side effects (Nosheen et al., 2021). For instance, studies have demonstrated that organic fertilizers and integrated pest management systems can enhance soil health and reduce environmental pollution. These findings underscore the feasibility and benefits of adopting more eco-friendly agricultural practices.

Furthermore, I would like to draw your attention to the lotus plant, which holds great potential for sustainable agriculture. Lotus plants can improve soil quality and water retention, making them ideal for crop rotation and soil rehabilitation. Their deep root systems help prevent soil erosion, while their natural resistance to pests reduces the need for chemical pesticides. Incorporating lotus plants into our farming systems can provide both environmental and economic benefits, enhancing the sustainability of our agricultural practices.

I kindly request your response to this matter and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss potential solutions with you, such as the use of biofertilizers, organic amendments, integrated pest management systems, and the integration of lotus plants into our agricultural practices. Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,
ANH P. DANG

MS. DAO HONG LAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH VIETNAM
 HA NOI, VIETNAM

Dear the Minister of Health, Ms Dao Hong Lan,

I am Nguyen Hoang Viet, a Can Tho University of Medicine and Pharmacy medical student. It is truly an honour to be the only medical student among friends and colleagues who are experts in economics, finance, and social policy from Southeast Asia at the ASEAN Youth Convergence 2024 (AYC 2024). This achievement results from four years of hard work under the maximum support from the training program and the benefits of the Ministry of Health. Through this opportunity, I wish to contribute my voice to the future achievements of Vietnam's medical education system by advocating for changes to outdated structures and greater attention to students' lives.

"49.2% of medical students are at risk of depression" is the outcome highlighted in the study "Depression among medical students: A medical student's perspective through a qualitative study" conducted on medical students at Pham Ngoc Thach University of Medicine. Some prominent issues mentioned include:

- Rising depression rates: Medical students face increasing depression rates, a concerning trend.
- Factors contributing to depression: Academic pressure, social relationships, and living/working conditions influence depression.
- Academic pressure: Intense study hours and workload contribute to depression risk.
- Social relationships: Loss of relationships and social pressure impact depression.
- Living/working conditions: Financial pressure and living away from family affect students' mental health.

I hope medical students' social life and study process will receive better attention and protection by increasing funding for policies supporting living conditions, simplifying outdated procedures in reviewing complaints and addressing needs for changes, postponements, or academic leaves tailored to individual hardships. Reducing the compulsory nature of union activities aimed at earning training points and replacing them with workshops and talk shows on emerging topics and authorising the free development of networks and collaborations between students and research institutes, organisations, universities, and international collaborations in the region will provide opportunities for unexpected changes.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution was a period of technical reforms, automation, efficiency improvement, and enhanced human-technology connectivity. Concurrently, the Fifth Industrial Revolution is envisioned as an era focused on human values based on the foundations established by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. I believe that with the proposed solutions, Vietnam's healthcare context can address existing crises and achieve accomplishments similar to those of countries in the Middle East, Australia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, ensuring that healthcare not only treats illnesses but also protects and cares for health in an equitable and timely manner.

AYC 2024 reflects the deep and timely commitment of the Mekong Institute and the ASEAN Secretariat to promote a comprehensive, collaborative ecosystem for the future. Additionally, the ASEAN Prize, awarded to Mrs Nguyen Thi Tuyet Minh, Mr Suriyan Vichitlekarn, and Mr Muhammad Iqbal Damit for their outstanding contributions, serves as a strong motivation for changes in Vietnam's medical education policies to achieve structural stability and extensive, robust collaboration.

Yours sincerely,
NGUYEN HOANG VIET



www.mekonginstitute.org