

## Article

### **Strengthening ASEAN Capacity and Effectiveness: Growing Together with Collaboration**

ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) is a regional organization consisting of 10 member countries in Southeast Asia. This organization was founded on August 8, 1967, and has the aim of increasing cooperation in various fields between member countries, such as politics, economics, social, and culture. Not only that but to increase the capacity and effectiveness of ASEAN countries, several agendas have also been implemented and developed as part of ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth.

In the framework of economic integration, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint 2025 has been prepared. This document is a long-term strategic plan initiated by ASEAN member countries to create an integrated economic region in Southeast Asia. This document contains several efforts to increase the capacity and effectiveness of ASEAN countries in the economic field, including strengthening trade and investment cooperation, increasing human resource capabilities, and encouraging technological innovation. The AEC Blueprint 2025 was officially adopted in November 2015, replacing the previous plan, namely the AEC Blueprint 2015. The AEC Blueprint 2025 also involves all ASEAN member countries, namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The AEC Blueprint 2025 aims to create an integrated economic region in Southeast Asia that focuses on four main pillars, namely:

- **Single Market and Production Base.** This pillar aims to create a single market in ASEAN, enabling the free and open flow of goods, services, investment, labor, and capital among ASEAN member countries.
- **Competitive Economic Regions.** This pillar aims to strengthen economic competitiveness in ASEAN by increasing productivity, innovation, and production capacity in various economic sectors.
- **Equitable Economic Development.** This pillar aims to strengthen economic equality among ASEAN member countries by strengthening development in lagging and vulnerable regions.
- **Integration into the Global Economy.** This pillar aims to enhance ASEAN's position in the global market by strengthening economic cooperation with ASEAN partner countries outside the region.

It is believed that the impact of implementing the AEC Blueprint 2025 will bring significant economic benefits to ASEAN countries, namely increased competitiveness at the regional level and investment and trade between ASEAN countries. The establishment of the AEC will also help speed up the process of economic integration by removing trade barriers and strengthening relations between ASEAN countries.

However, the implementation of the AEC Blueprint 2025 also faces several challenges, including differences in economic development among ASEAN countries, regulatory issues, underdeveloped infrastructure, and dependence on certain economic sectors. Therefore, a collaborative effort from ASEAN countries is needed to overcome this problem and ensure the smooth and successful implementation of the AEC Blueprint 2025.

The ASEAN program to progress and grow together is the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN). This program aims to develop 26 smart cities across ASEAN. ASCN is an ASEAN initiative to improve the quality of life of city dwellers through digital technology and

innovation. This initiative was launched in April 2018 and was attended by 26 cities from 10 ASEAN member countries. ASCN aims to strengthen cooperation among cities in ASEAN and facilitate the exchange of experience, knowledge, and resources in developing smart cities.

The initiator of ASCN is Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry. This initiative was launched at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Singapore in April 2018. ASCN serves as a forum for cities in ASEAN to collaborate and share experiences in building smart cities, aka Smart Cities. All ASEAN countries are involved in this initiative. In the program, each ASEAN member country can designate up to three cities as ASCN members. Currently, 26 cities within ASEAN are ASCN members, with three major cities in Indonesia: Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung.

The implementation of the ASCN program is expected to have a positive impact on the quality of life of residents in cities in ASEAN. By leveraging digital technology and innovation, ASCN aims to increase city efficiency, resilience, and security and strengthen connections between cities in ASEAN. ASCN is also expected to be able to create smart cities that are environmentally friendly, inclusive, and sustainable.

In its implementation, ASCN adopts four main pillars, namely: (1) Environmental Sustainability, (2) Good Community Life, (3) Effective Governance, and (4) Competitive Economy. Each ASCN member is provided access to a range of resources, including training, technical support, and exchange programs, to assist them in developing smart cities.

Various other programs that have been implemented or are currently in the joint drafting stage include:

- ASEAN Disaster Risk Financing and Insurance Program: This program aims to increase the capacity of ASEAN countries in dealing with natural disasters by building a disaster risk management system, including building infrastructure and training human resources.
- ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center: This was created to assist ASEAN countries in combating the threat of landmines and explosives leftover from the war.
- ASEAN Center for Energy: This was created to increase the capacity of ASEAN countries in the development of clean energy and energy efficiency. The ASEAN Center for Energy provides technical assistance and training to ASEAN countries in developing energy policies, increasing energy efficiency, and promoting clean energy.
- ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy: Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy is a strategic plan that aims to strengthen cooperation among ASEAN member countries in facing cyber security challenges. It is planned that ASEAN will cooperate in various fields, including capacity building, information exchange, and joint policy development. This plan aims to increase the effectiveness of ASEAN countries in dealing with increasingly complex and evolving cybersecurity threats.

Strengthening the capacity and effectiveness of ASEAN countries is a must in facing various complex and dynamic challenges in the global world. In this regard, ASEAN has a crucial role in promoting regional and international cooperation and enhancing security, trade, and investment in the region.

Indonesia's chairmanship at the 2023 ASEAN Summit is an example of joint efforts to strengthen governance, improve the quality of human resources, and develop closer cooperation. The hope is that ASEAN countries can achieve more sustainable and inclusive development for the benefit of all people in the region, in line with this year's theme: "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth."

Reference:

***ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025. ASEAN. (asean.org)***

***ASEAN Smart Cities Network. ASEAN. (asean.org)***

***ASEAN Disaster Risk Financing and Insurance Program. ASEAN. (asean.org)***

***ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center. ASEAN. (asean.org)***

***ASEAN Center for Energy. ASEAN. (asean.org)***

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