



# CHAPTER 10

## Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship: Network of Innovative Villages for Regional Harmony and Prosperity

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# INTRODUCTION

The economic disparity among ASEAN Member States (AMS) remains a key challenge for the ASEAN Community to achieve its common goals. Some members are less developed while others are more advanced in their economic development. Hence, AMS has been categorised into new (CLMV) and old members (ASEAN-6), making bridging the development gap a core task for the leaders for ASEAN integration to position the region to benefit from global economic growth. Accordingly, various approaches and core activities have been initiated, such as the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI), a strategic framework to narrow the development divide and enhance ASEAN's competitiveness. It was launched in November 2000. The goal is to primarily support CLMV to narrow the development gap. Many goals of poverty alleviation and increasing regional rural development are articulated in the ASEAN economic integration process (ASEAN Secretariat 2012). At the regional level, various innovative village initiatives and programmes have been developed according to local contexts, with the emphasis on digital transformation and innovation on agriculture, climate change, tourism innovation, etc. However, the key concern is how AMS innovate rural approaches to promote the revitalisation of the roles of rural villages in supporting national development and eventually achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs) set out in the ASEAN agenda in November 2015 (ASEAN Secretariat 2015).

This chapter aims at emphasising the importance of rural villages in supporting regional development, highlighting innovative villages of AMS. The focus on innovative villages provides rationales and useful lessons from AMS. The chapter suggests that an innovative approach be established to promote vibrant rural village development across Southeast Asia, contributing to national development and regional integration.

## OVERVIEW OF RURAL VILLAGES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Southeast Asian region, home to approximately 622 million inhabitants, is rich and diverse in cultural, historical, and natural capitals. Most of the population lives in rural areas, relying largely on agricultural and farming activities, including land, inland fisheries, forestry, and marine resources for livelihoods, subsistence, income generation, and local economic development (World Population Report 2020). Villagers rely on agricultural lands for food production while catching aquatic animals from their paddy fields, ponds, rivers, and natural waterways and/or going to the forests to collect plants, herbs, honey, and other types of non-timber forest products to feed their families. In coastal areas, food is even more abundant (Keo 2020).

<sup>1</sup>Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam.

Besides resources supply, to most villagers, social capital in their homelands can be relied upon when shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other extreme events, happen. Amid the pandemic, many migrant workers have returned home after being laid off from their jobs in urban areas. With strong family bonds and community support, villagers can turn to their close relatives or other villagers for support when they need assistance, such as food shortage or a family member falling sick. In many cases, support is granted. In other cases, when support needed goes beyond individual villagers' capacity, village leaders would help mobilise resources from community members at large (Ibid.). This kind of practice is an important social safety net for villagers.

In addition, with necessary skills, resources and social networks in place, returning migrant workers have opportunities to explore potentials for investment in their villages, whether in agriculture, fisheries, and forestry production, and/or relevant fields. Besides, they can stay close to their families. Being able to generate income while staying close to their families is crucial, as it allows them to take care of their old parents and children, who may, otherwise, be left behind. Furthermore, it is very important for the mental health of family members, particularly old parents and young children, who are more vulnerable to shocks. In some cases, young children are forced to drop out of school to reduce family expenses and/or help support family income generation activities, even though they are very young, which eventually lead to inter-generational poverty.

Besides, rural areas offer diverse sources of benefits and services, including land, water, food, raw materials, and other ecosystem services for socio-economic development, urbanisation, fisheries, forestry, animal raising, ecological recreation, tourism and creative industry development, cultural preservation, and biological and environmental protection, among others.

Despite the essential roles of rural areas, there has been a growing trend of migration out of rural areas due to the perception of limited economic viability and the lure of opportunities available in urban areas regarding employment, health services, education for children, and other modern services. Estimated by the United Nations, the trend of population growth in Southeast Asian cities is expected to rise to about 53% in 2030, up from 24% in 2010 (ADB 2014). The decline in rural population has detrimental effects on the rural economy, development activities, social relations and well-being, social viability of the nation, food security, and agricultural productivity, among others.

# INNOVATION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN AMS

Defined by the World Bank, rural development is a strategy to improve the social, economic, and well-being of poor people in rural areas, intended to improve productivity and increase employment and income (The World Bank 1975). The state's intervention approach and policy engagement in developing rural areas, in either underdeveloped or developed countries, are applied and adapted depending on local context, as rural areas differ and the criteria defined are different from one country to another. However, the concepts of rural development have gone through changes, as rural areas have transformed. Thus, innovations of sustainable and inclusive rural development have occurred in response to changing local contexts. During the OECD 8th Conference on Rural Development in Russia in 2012, OECD announced their new rural development approach, which was set out in OECD's 2006 publication, to shift from agrarian by increasing multi-sectoral, place-based strategies that identify and better exploit the development potential of rural areas, for examples, rural tourism, manufacturing, and ICT industry (OECD 2012).

Southeast Asian nations have initiated numerous policies and programmes for the revitalisation of rural villages through innovative approaches for inclusive, sustainable, and competitive local economies, including, but not limited to, (1) Brunei's Food Security and Self-Sufficiency in Brunei Darussalam, (2) TECHO 100-Villages in Cambodia, (3) Innovation for Prominent and Sustainable Village in Indonesia, (4) Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) in Lao PDR, (5) The 21st Century Village Program (21CV) in Malaysia, (6) Local Development Funds (LDFs) in Myanmar, (7) Adaptation and Mitigation Initiatives in Agriculture (AMIA) in the Philippines, (8) The Village Broadband Internet (Net Pracharat) project in Thailand, (9) National Target Programs for New Rural Development (NTP-NRD) in Vietnam, among others. Meanwhile, among the ten member states, Singapore and Brunei are rarely seen to have rural development initiatives, as both countries are famous for their industrialisation. Singapore is fully industrialised with zero percent rural population as of today while Brunei remained about 22.4% in 2018, down from 25% in 2010 (The World Bank 2018). Therefore, we exclude Singapore from our presentation below.

# BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

## Brunei's Food Security and Self-Sufficiency

The global food crisis in 2007–2008 hit many countries in the region (Ross Simon 2017). With no exception, Brunei Darussalam, well-known as one of the world's richest countries with oil and gas being the strong economic backbone of the country since 1929 was also affected by the global food crisis at that time (Briegel 2012). Since then, all fields related to food security and increased self-sufficiency have been prioritised as key aims of its economic plans, and this concern is also a key part of the national long-term development plan of Brunei 2035 Vision as well as a pillar of the 10th Brunei National Development Plan (10NDP).

Besides being increasingly agricultural self-sufficient, Brunei Darussalam has also been working hard to make the Brunei Halal Brand become globally recognised by establishing the Halal certificate-programme to standardise its Halal food (Asa 2019). The country has significantly developed its domestic production to meet daily consumption with a strong commitment and well planned. Yet, some beverage products were still imported due to limited agricultural labour force, which was only around 0.6% of the total population, and limited land use (Fina Astriana, Agustha Lumban Tobing, Alexander C. Chandra 2017).

To increase agriculture labour force and agricultural production, the Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources (MIPR), the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food (DAA), has established various strategies such as:

1. Rice Farmer Field School in 2010 to build capacity for farmers.
2. The Agricultural and Agri-food Incentive Scheme (SIPA) provides 50% subsidies on agricultural inputs such as paddy seeds, fertilisers, food packaging material, and chemical insecticides.
3. SIPA's Paddy Guarantee Price Purchasing Scheme to buy rice from local producers at a set price higher than the market price with the condition of planting recommended rice varieties by the DAA (Fuziah Binti Haji Hamdan, Hajah Aidah Binti Haji Mohd Hanifah, H.M. Thippeswamy 2016).

To broaden the agricultural sector in the longer term, the MIPR has developed irrigation systems, set up cooperation with other countries in agricultural research fields, and planned increasing paddy fields and land for livestock farming. As a result, the gross output value of the agriculture and agri-food sector from 2016 to 2020 increased by 14.1% (B\$412.74 million in 2016 to B\$470.86 million in 2020), which is 57% from the livestock industry, followed by 32% from agri-food industry, and about 11% from crop industry) (MPRT 2021).

# CAMBODIA

## TECHO 100 Villages Project

According to the World Bank, Cambodia sustained its economic growth at an average rate of 7.7% for over two decades, between 1998–2019, through garment exports and tourism (The World Bank 2021). Furthermore, in 20 years of nation-building after regaining peace and political stability, Cambodia has reached the stage of welcoming and supporting all initiatives that promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the region, which are mutually beneficial and complementary (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Cambodia 2021). The country is also ready to implement its new initiative for village development, the so-called “TECHO 100 Village Project”. Lessons learnt from this initiative will be shared with the Asian region.

According to the concept note of the TECHO 100 Village Project, the Project is a new initiative of village development model, initiated by the Royal Government of Cambodia. The model is to stimulate rural development by “cultivating potential wealth found in the abundant land and growing diamonds from cultural assets of the Kingdom”. This project is tailor-made to suit the development potential of individual villages by using the Place-Based People-Centred (PBPC) rural development approach, utilising culture and the TECHO concepts as the guiding principle for the development model.

PBPC rural development approach refers to the development that mobilisation and utilisation of the potential of local resources, including natural and human capitals, are fundamental, emphasising people interest and development of growth centres (Keo 2020).

The concept of TECHO 100 Village Project consists of 5 pillars, namely (1) Technology, (2) Education, (3) Cooperation, (4) Humanity, and (5) Ownership, abbreviated as “TECHO”. It aims at enhancing rural community development through innovative, integrated grassroots leadership across the 25 provinces in Cambodia under a multi-stakeholder engagement framework and public-private-people partnership (4P) programme. Through its unique formulation of combining culture with economic potentials of each village, the project has the ambition to contribute to the realisation of Cambodia long-term macroeconomic targets to become an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050, emphasising socio-economic development, inclusiveness, equity, resilience, and sustainability.

The project is strongly supported by the Asian Cultural Council (ACC) as its core ideology. It was officially inscribed in the Seam Reap Declaration at the launch of the Asian Cultural Council in Siem Reap, Kingdom of Cambodia, on 15 January 2019.

On 23 February 2021, the Royal Government of Cambodia established the “Inter-ministerial Committee for Project Coordination and Implementation of TECHO 100 Village Project”, consisting of 22 members.

In addition, the Civil Society Alliance Forum (CASF) of the Council of Ministers is assigned as project secretariat responsible for stakeholder engagement facilitation and administrative arrangements. In addition, the Asian Vision Institute (AVI) is assigned as a project advisor playing leading roles in data collection and management, project formulation, monitoring and evaluation, and stakeholder engagement (The RGC 2021).

## INDONESIA

### Innovation for Prominent and Sustainable Village (see Pius Sugeng Prasetyo et al. 2017)

For the last few decades, the Indonesian government has implemented several policies and allocated funds for villages in the country to develop and improve the living standard of people in rural areas. All government levels have been working hard on applying the ideas and innovative plans to improve the living condition and welfare of poor villagers. As a result, the government has created innovative governance to establish “Prominent and Sustainable Villages” on a community basis. This innovation has expanded its orientation to wider engagements with actors in the governmental system in providing ideas and initiatives.

This innovation project is based on the development of village communities to produce “Prominent and Sustainable villages” such as sustainable food security, education, health, local businesses, and renewable energy, which have been a huge struggle for people in rural areas. Moreover, it also focuses on technology utilisation to overcome various social problems. The government uses new technology innovations to develop villages with five main orientations: 1). food security and production of food commodities to fulfil people’s needs and provide nutrition adequacy in the village; 2). a democratic engagement which includes the society, needs to ensure the sustainability of development and increase the role of civil society, organisations and others participate; 3). health and welfare to improve people’s health and sanitation and deal with many obstacles in their living, infrastructure, capabilities, and economy for better living standards; 4). the government’s education sector provides free public education with the information and knowledge accessible and digitalisation to all children to improve their skills and ability in the community; and 5). the local business that aims to improve the community’s economic interest and create value-added and competitive goods and services produced by the local community, including the potential of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and family businesses.

Meanwhile, the “Prominent and Sustainable Village” also helps to engage with socio-economic aspects and support the village community’s economic sustainability and production activities, especially in the agricultural sector. For example, Sukalaksana village is suitable for vegetable farming for agricultural economic development activities. Due to the practices of new technology innovation, The Prominent and Sustainable village program has shown a growth in production and economic sustainability.

It leads to an increase in the economic aspects of the village community, while strengthening food security, which is the basic pillar of the innovative goal. In addition, the successful application of agriculture in these villages will continue to expand the innovation to other villages, which will also help increase villagers' income and expand the agriculture quality and quantity of production in the market.

## **LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC**

### **Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF)<sup>2</sup>**

Lao is a less developed country, but it has made remarkable progress in poverty reduction. The poverty rate of Lao dropped from 46% in 1992 to 23% in 2015 (UNDP 2018). One of the factors contributing to reducing its poverty rate could be a Community-Driven Development (CDD) approach, the so-called Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF). The model was established in 2002 to align it with the Government of the Lao PDR's decentralisation policy and poverty reduction targets, which aim at supporting and establishing sustainable local capacity, procedures, and systems. The PRF 2008–2015 provided support to sub-projects, such as transport access, community electricity supply, healthcare facilities, domestic water system, education, agricultural infrastructure, and public infrastructure. The project was initiated in 2008–2011. Despite its achievement, the government has taken another step to collaborate with the development partners, for example, the World Bank and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), to expand the second phase (2011–2015). In addition, the PRF has transformed from an approach for poverty alleviation. To receive financial support, the community must assess their own community priority needs and organise the proposal.

To achieve its objectives, the PRF transformed itself to be a government institution in 2012 and was involved by many line ministries, such as ministries of finance, planning, and investing, agriculture and forestry, education and sport, public health, labour and social welfare, industry and commerce, and energy and mining. Together with the Lao Front for National Construction, the Lao Women's Union, Lao Youth Executive Committee and Civil Societies, they manage, lead, and evaluate the project.

## **MALAYSIA**

### **The 21st Century Village Program (21CV) (PEMANDU 2014)**

Since Malaysia became independent in 1957, rural development has been the major concern of the government for economic growth, as the rural economy sector depends largely on agriculture (Fatimah Mohd, Arshad, Mad Nasir Shamsudin, and Alias Ramdam 1997).

<sup>2</sup>See *Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) of Lao 2018*.



However, from 2011 onwards, the country's economy has relied more on industrial and services-oriented sectors than on agriculture, which has caused high rural migration to urban areas. This has caused a decline in the percentage of the agriculture sector's contribution to GDP. To address this rural-urban disparity, the government has taken another step to improve the socio-economic status of the rural community by introducing an initiative of rural development, namely the 21st Century Village (21CV). The 21CV was introduced to the Government Transformation Program (GTP ) 2.0 and launched in 2013.

The 21CV was established to create job opportunities and wealth for rural communities. The initiative itself aims to promote people-private partnership (PPP) in implementing its three core programmes. The programmes have been implemented under the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development. Youth in rural areas is the main target for the programmes to encourage them to work and start businesses in their villages.

The 21CV concept has been conducted through three major programmes, namely 1). Desa Lestari Programme is a community-based participatory approach that empowers village co-operatives as economic development agencies at the grassroots level; 2) The Large-scale Fruit and Vegetable Farming Programme is to promote self-sufficient agri-food by encouraging the production of six high value non-seasonal tropical fruits and three high-value high-land vegetables; 3) Rural Business Challenge (RBC) is to promote youth to participate in the business competition by proposing viable business plans for either new or existing businesses in rural areas.

Through the initiative programmes, the Delsa Lestari programme has applied various projects such as the production of Madu Kelulut, homestay, and freshwater fish farming in 57 villages. The programme is expected to expand to more villages to implement homestay, mushroom cultivation, and rental farm machinery based on the cooperative model. Regarding the Large-Scale Fruit and Vegetable Farming Programme, three farms were established and operated by the private sector on Papaya and Pineapple by the end of 2014. For the RBC programme, the government has organised the competition, and more than 1,500 participants have participated. Along with that, the government has introduced the competition strategy with a total budget of RM43.3 million to be disbursed to 74 winners so that they could use it to implement their proposals. Besides, to encourage youth to implement their business proposals, Government Linked Companies (GLCs) policy was introduced to provide financial or in-kind assistance to run the RBC programme and guide successful candidates in pursuing their business models.

## **The 21st Century Village Program (21CV) (PEMANDU 2014)**

The New Villages Action Plan was initiated in 2007 under a programme called "Gerakan Daya Wawasan" (Visionary Capability Movement) with a bottom-up approach.

<sup>2</sup>GTP is an effort of the Malaysian government in transforming the country.

The programme was introduced to help villages design their village development plan, emphasising active involvement and participation of village communities in planning and implementing projects to improve their wellbeing. The programme was officially launched as a new phase of rural planning by the Malaysian prime minister in 2009.

The programme's initiatives involved capacity building of rural leadership such as Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK) in planning, implementing, and managing projects by the Federal Government, Institute for Rural Advancement (INFRA). As for the earlier phase of the training programme, which has been conducted at the INFRA campus for several years, was found to be ineffective due to its too much focus on unrealistic theories and low participation from key participants, among other shortcomings. Thus, the training programme was shifted to a new approach of learning by doing, in which the training programme was conducted at each village where various stakeholders such as JKKK, entrepreneurs, farmers, women, youth, NGOs, and teachers were actively involved.

There are three main partners involved in the initial project collaboration:

1. Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), responsible for preparing a module, advice on the procedure for plan-making and facilitating some workshop sessions.
2. Institute for Rural Advancement (INFRA), responsible for organising the meeting, facilitating the workshop sessions, providing logistic support, assisting the workshop process, and preparing the documentation after the workshop.
3. Communities to participate in brainstorming, planning, and implementing the plan. As a result, for the first phase, by the end of 2009, 22 projects arising from the village action plans from 14 villages out of 17 villages had received funding from the federal government with a total amount of US\$746,000 and an averaged amount of US\$3,392 per project.

Experiences from the initial projects for village action plans initiated by the communities themselves have become major milestones toward sustainable development and improvement of the wellbeing of Malaysia's rural communities.

## MYANMAR

### Local Development Funds (LDFs)

As approximately 70% of the total population need agriculture products, the government, through national strategic plans and policy making, have focused on developing agriculture as the country's main economic sector. However, according to the World Bank report, food insecurity in Myanmar is a problem that accounts for about 25% of households living under the line of official poverty (The World Bank 2019).

In 2011, the government established the Local Development Funds (LDFs) as a community-driven project to promote a more people-centred and bottom-up approach by empowering the community to involve in the project development cycle, such as identifying the needs of its community and project design that aligns with their implementing ability. The projects are supported by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank. They are implemented by the communities with the quality controlled by Village Tract Development Support Committee (VTDSC) and monitored by Township Development Support Committee (TDSC) under the Township Development Implementation Committee (TDIC).

The LDFs in Myanmar can serve as a viable funding vehicle for community development projects and open the way for more major types of fiscal decentralisation and broader devolution of powers if planned and managed effectively. The LDFs have shown to be more interconnected between government and communities in terms of using funds. The LDFs, according to all government officials and MPs, can disburse targeted funds at the community level. Both methods and criteria for project selection, tendering, execution, and monitoring should be specified in the documents (Bart Robertson 2015).

## THE PHILIPPINES

### Adaptation and Mitigation Initiatives in Agriculture (AMIA)

Climate change remains the key issue for the agricultural sector worldwide, also affecting the fishing nation. Likewise, geographically, the Philippines is known as one of the most vulnerable countries in the world with adverse effects of climate change, making it the 5th ranked in the long-term global Climate Risks Index (CRI) among the ten most-affected countries from 1998 to 2017 (David Eckstein, Marie-Lena Hutfils and Maik Wings 2018).

The Philippines mainly depends on agriculture as a core contribution to its national economy. Aquaculture industry has covered the employment rate of 14% of the country's total population, with the fisheries sector alone employing over 1.6 million people across the country and contributing approximately 1.5% to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the Philippines in 2015 (Napoleon Salvador, J. Lamarca 2017).

In response to climate-related risks that have affected the country's economy and threatened the lives of people, the government has mainstreamed Climate Change into policy formulations mandated in the memorandum of the Department of Agriculture (DA)'s programmes, plans, and budgets, in which the Adaptation and Mitigation Innovative in Agriculture (AMIA) was designed as the flagship programme of Climate Change (GOVPH n.d.).

The AMIA programme has four main strategic objectives intended to develop the AMIA village model across the country where all communities are resilient and prosperous in agriculture and fisheries livelihoods. The programme was designed and categorised into 3 phases of implementation frameworks, defined as AMIA Phase 1, AMIA Phase 2 and AMIA Phase 3.

AMIA Phase 1, started in 2014–2015, aimed at capacity building of the DA’s key officials in enabling an environment to mainstream climate change. AMIA Phase 2 is divided into AMIA 2, AMIA 2+ and AMIA 2++. It started in 2016–2018 and focused on building climate-resilient agri-fisheries livelihoods and communities by initiating the Climate Risk Vulnerability Assessment (CRVA) and identifying the CRVA areas. AMIA Phase 3 has started since 2018, and it aims at “Out-Scaling and Sustaining Climate Resilient Agriculture and Fisheries communities across the country”.

According to the Department of Agriculture-System Wide Climate Change Office, as of December 2017, 10 AMIA village sites covering 26 barangays out of 10 provinces had been established.

## THAILAND

### The village broadband internet (Net Pracharat) project (ITU 2019)

The village broadband internet or Net Pracharat Project is the Thai flagship digital infrastructure development project developed by the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (MDES) in collaborations with several agencies: Telephone of Thailand Public Company Limited (TOT), Office of The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commissions (NBTC), Metropolitan Electricity Agency (MEA), Provincial Electricity Agency (PEA), Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education (NFE), Ministry of Interior (MOI), and National Statistical Office (NSO). The project was established to expand the high-speed internet network to reach all villages in Thailand at an affordable price, bridge the digital divide, and build an inclusive and sustainable connected society. The project target area focuses on rural areas, where access to high-speed internet services is not yet available. There are about 24,700 villages in total.

In 2017, MDES and TOT completed the installation of the fiber cable network to 24,700 target villages. In addition, the government has provided free access to public wi-fi hotspots at the speed of 30/10 Mbps. As a result, in 2019, there were 5.4 million users registered to access the Net Pracharat Wi-Fi, and newly registered users have increased around 20,000–30,000 every month.

To promote the awareness of this new technology, MDES has created a leading group of Net Pracharat trainers to provide training on internet fundamentals (Basic Use of Internet) to officers from the non-formal and informal education sectors, as the leading group will allocate this knowledge to the community leaders. In line with that, the MDES has also generated internet applications for career building and income supplements.

Meanwhile, the project has also organised Net Pracharat Volunteer Network and implemented its application to create a channel for communication between the government and people. The volunteer villagers were recruited from the 24,700 target villages and received training from November 2018 to February 2019.

With the Net Pracharat Project, the citizens can equally access useful information and services such as education, public health, and government services, which could improve quality of life. Besides, it helps increase business opportunities for people through E-Commerce, which will generate employment, provide skills, increase income in local communities, and improve their living standards. As a result, the Net Pracharat Project of Thailand has been presented as a successful showcase at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

## VIETNAM

### National Target Programs for New Rural Development (NTP-NRD) (The World Bank 2017)

New Rural development implemented under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Vietnam plays a crucial role as the primary mechanism for the Vietnamese Government to address development challenges and narrow the disparities between rural and urban areas, focusing on disadvantaged areas with high proportions of ethnic minorities.

Vietnam's government initiated the National Target Programs on New Rural Development (NTP-NRD) in 2010. The programme aims to be implemented across the 63 provinces of Vietnam. The NTP-NRD established 19 development indicators—identified across various sectors and social, economic, cultural, and environmental aspects. It aims to improve the well-being across various sectors that each targeted commune should achieve the criteria and not leave even a single indicator. This bottom-up community approach requires each commune to prepare the community needs assessment to reflect 19 development indicators and conduct prior needs development plans for their community to receive financial support.

The NTP-NRD has general objectives to acquire relevant social and economic infrastructure; to achieve agro-industry and services sector which link rural-urban; and to achieve inclusive growth. To achieve its objectives, the NTP-NRD has implemented 11 components in the 63 provinces, including 1) new rural development master plan; 2) social-economic infrastructure development; 3) production development and rural economic structural transformation; 4) social security; 5) development of education in rural areas; 6) development of grass-roots health facilities; 7) improving cultural life; 8) improving rural hygiene and environment; 9) improving quality and roles of political organisations; 10) robust national defence and security, social order and safety in rural areas; and 11) enhancing capacity for NRD implementation and M&E.

During the implementation period of 2011–2015, the programme achieved remarkable progress of upgrading services and infrastructure of rural communities, but not much on the rural income, productivity, and value-added dimensions (The World Bank 2017).

Therefore, with the opportunity to further implement the programme, Vietnam's government collaborated with development partners, IFAD, the World Bank, UNIDO, and other development agencies to expand its second phase (2016–2020). This has made the programme become a rural development rolling plan. As of this second phase, a success of phase I, the NTP-NRD focused on four objectives: 1). 50% of communes to meet NRD standards; 2). communes, on average, to meet 15 out of 19 NRD criteria, and no commune to achieve less than five criteria; 3). basic production and quality of life requirements to be achieved for rural citizens in areas such as transportation, power supply and domestic water, schools, and health stations; and (4) income levels to increase by at least 1.8 times compared with 2015.

## ASEAN'S NETWORK OF INNOVATIVE VILLAGES INITIATIVE

For the last few decades, the ASEAN Community has been doing well toward the common interest of the regional bloc. When it comes to rural innovative development initiatives, we found that AMS are working hard to develop their individual countries. Mostly, those initiatives are well established and adopted. Yet, they are generally limited to the national boundary and have not been widely shared at the regional level. Consequently, many opportunities are missed. First, there is limited learning and sharing of experiences from one country to another, in which good lessons can be learnt, while pitfalls can be avoided. Second, there is still a limited opportunity for transferring technology, knowledge, and know-how, which may help address the problems or develop the local economy and local livelihoods in certain villages. Third, meaningful village cultural exchanges and people-to-people connectivity, one of the key missions of ASEAN Community building, are missed. Finally, collaborations between ASEAN national and sub-national government agencies, villagers, the private sector, academic institutions, donors, and Non-Government Organisations for village development are not maximised.

In response to the concerns, innovative rural development approaches that can be learned from all the AMS should be widely shared. Hence, a platform of ASEAN's Network of Innovative Villages shall be established with clear objectives as the following:

- Create a digital platform for coordinating members and stakeholders of ASEAN's network of innovative villages. This platform will serve as a central point for communication between ASEAN Village Network members, national and sub-national government officers, and stakeholders for exchanging ideas and sharing lessons learnt on innovative village development. This central platform should be supported by national focal points, which can make two-way communications from villagers in native languages to ASEAN members and send messages from ASEAN members to the villagers.

- Conduct annual events for ASEAN village study visits. The purpose of the visit is to provide direct exposure and hands-on practical experiences of good model villages to all the network members. The members can then transfer knowledge and experiences gained for the improvement of their respective village development. In addition, physical interactions during the study visit provide a good opportunity for meaningful village cultural exchanges, building friendship and networking among ASEAN members' villages. The study visits can be rotated among ASEAN countries. The delegates may comprise village leaders, national and sub-national government officers, the private sector, research institutions, and other stakeholders.
- Provide capacity building programmes. This training should be interactive and closely relevant to local development to provide opportunities for villagers to interact and share their experiences and expertise. Youth and women should be encouraged to attend the training. In addition, specific technical skills, including inclusive leadership, investment planning, project formulation and implementation, digital application, drone use, and technological application for village development and handicraft making, among others, should be provided.
- Establish a mechanism for promoting public-private-people and multi-stakeholder partnership. Since state resources are generally inadequate, it is important to promote private investment in village development. The investment may be in, but not limited to, local human resource development, research and development, increased agricultural productivity, smart farming and water conservation technologies, and others. In addition, other stakeholders, namely university and research institutions, donor agencies, and Non-Government Organisations, can work closely with villagers in areas of their interests for added value to the villages.
- Establish a mechanism for research and publication. A mechanism for recording and documenting village profiles, best practices, and pitfalls of the innovative village development should be established. These documents are useful for sharing among ASEAN members and development partners.

As the Chair of ASEAN in 2022, Cambodia is mandated to take an active role in promoting the interest and well-being of people in ASEAN countries. Cambodia needs to maintain peace and stability to sustain regional prosperity and continue to promote global governance to strengthen the multilateral system, combat climate change, and support post-pandemic economic recovery. Meanwhile, promoting the ASEAN's Network of Innovative Villages Initiative should be one of the priorities mentioned above.

# CONCLUSION

Rural areas in Southeast Asia are important, as they provide rich and diverse natural resource supplies sustaining livelihoods and creating opportunities for rural social progress. Therefore, mobilising resources and identifying the potentials of rural areas by revitalising the diverse opportunities and potentials are key to reducing rural-urban or transnational migrations, while increasing rural social networks and opportunities for local livelihood and economic development.

Each member of the AMS has made great efforts in initiating innovative development models to revitalise villages for inclusive, sustainable, and competitive local economies. Yet, all those innovative approaches have not been widely shared at the regional level. Consequently, numerous opportunities are missed. First, there is limited learning and sharing of experiences from one country to another, in which good lessons can be learnt, while pitfalls can be avoided. Secondly, there is limited opportunity for transferring technology, knowledge, and know-how, which may help address the problems or develop the local economy and local livelihoods in certain villages. Third, meaningful village cultural exchanges and people-to-people connectivity, one of the key missions of ASEAN Community building, are missed. Finally, the collaborations between ASEAN national and sub-national government agencies, villagers, private sectors, academic institutions, donors, and Non-Government Organisations for village development are not maximised.

To promote the revitalisation of the roles of rural villages in supporting national development, urban growth, poverty alleviation, employment, food security, cultural conservation and development, tourism development, and social and climate resilience, and to respond to the concept of the ASEAN Connectivity, the establishment of the “ASEAN’s Network of Innovative Villages” should be taken into serious consideration.

The “ASEAN’s Network of Innovative Villages” will serve as various useful platforms. First, it creates a digital platform for learning and sharing of both best practices and pitfalls in rural development. Second, it showcases good models of innovative village development through study visits. Third, it promotes the roles of local people, particularly youth and women, in innovative village development through capacity building. Fourth, it promotes public-private-people partnership and multi-stakeholder engagements for innovative village development. Finally, it provides opportunities for village cultural exchanges and people-to-people connectivity through physical interactions. The AMS, including Cambodia as the Chair of ASEAN in 2022, should jointly promote the implementation of the above platforms of the ASEAN’s Network of Innovative Villages to achieve more inclusive development and prosperity for people in ASEAN.



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