

The ASEAN



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DOUBLE ISSUE
DECEMBER 2021-JANUARY 2022

Transforming ASEAN's Rural Landscape

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SHIFTING CURRENTS

Beyond COP26
ASEAN's Climate
Change Agenda

THE INSIDE VIEW

Empowering
Rural Women

CONVERSATIONS

Literacy
and Sustainability
in Rural ASEAN



Ministerial Bodies

*) takes guidance from and reports to both AMCA and AMRI

AMRI-ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information

AMCA-ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts

AMMY-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Youth

ASED-ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting

AMMS-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Sports

AMRDPE-ASEAN Ministers on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

AMMSWD-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development

AMMW-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women

ALMM-ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting

ACCSM-The Heads of Civil Service Meeting for ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters

AHMM-ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting

AMMDM-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management

COP-AADMER-Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response

AMME-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Environment

COP to AATHP-Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution

SOMCA-Senior Officials Meeting on Culture and Arts

COCI-The ASEAN Committee for Culture and Information

SOMRI-Senior Officials Meeting Responsible for Information

SOMY-Senior Officials Meeting on Youth

SOMED-Senior Officials Meeting on Education

SOMS-Senior Officials Meeting on Sports

SOMRDPE-Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

SOMSDW-Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development

ACWC-ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children

ACW-ASEAN Committee on Women

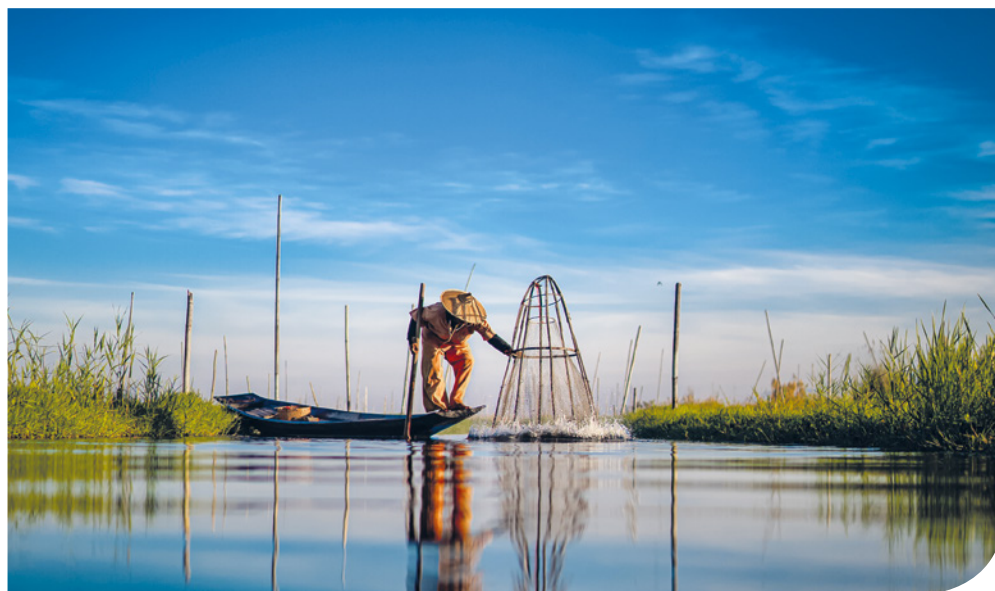
SLOM-Senior Labour Officials Meeting

SOM-ACCSM-Senior Officials Meeting on ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters

SOMHD-Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development

ASOEN-ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment

COM to AATHP-Committee under the Conference of Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution



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Composed by **Kramakata**



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Note from the Editorial Team

More than half of ASEAN's population live in rural areas, and poverty is twice as prevalent in rural towns and villages than in urban centres. As the pandemic continues to wreak havoc on economies and livelihoods, these gaps and inequalities are widening.

Rural development and poverty eradication have always been one of ASEAN's top priorities. However, with the pandemic's impact on the poor, on women and other vulnerable groups, ASEAN addresses these issues with even more urgency.

We delve into ASEAN's multi-sectoral initiatives towards transformative rural development. The ASCC Poverty Eradication and Gender Division gives an overview of ASEAN's action plan and its objectives to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth, eliminate barriers to inequality and alleviate poverty.

In an interview with Indonesia's Minister for National Development and Chairman of the National Development Agency (BAPPENAS) Suharso Monoarfa, we learn about Indonesia's push to promote strategic rural areas

and implement an integrated rural development plan. Dr. Wasana Techavijitsarn, ASEAN Unit Director at the Thailand Ministry of Interior, writes about the significant impact of the country's new agriculture approach that helps mitigate disaster risks and the creation of special economic zones that spur growth.

We also get the view from China's Director-General of International Poverty Reduction Center Liu Junwen, on the country's long-running rural development initiatives that have helped alleviate poverty. Asia DHRRA (Asia Partnership for the Development of Human Resource in Asia) points to increased urban to rural migration during the pandemic, with job losses forcing workers back to their rural hometowns. According to Assistant Secretary-General Mags Catindig-Reyes, the current crisis provides opportunities to implement more holistic and multi-sectoral approaches to rural development.

Former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also shares his valuable insights on the importance of multilateral cooperation in addressing global challenges.

In our Conversations section, we highlight the work of individuals who empower rural communities. These champions bring books and libraries to small villages, discover and promote lost local cuisines, and preserve coastal mangroves for sustainable fishing. We also feature the Mekong Institute, ASEAN Prize Winner for 2021.

It is a fact that poorer communities in our region bear the brunt of the climate crisis. In this issue's Shifting Currents section, we give a particular focus on ASEAN's Climate Change Agenda post-COP-26, the roles of peatland and biodiversity conservation in the battle against global warming.

We round up this issue with a look at how the youth identify with ASEAN from a study launched by the ASEAN Youth Ministers in August 2021. Results show that young people who identify strongly with ASEAN appreciate the common values of community-building and cultural diversity.

This kinship and diversity are celebrated at the ASEAN Pavilion in World Expo 2020, which runs in Dubai from October 2021 to March 2022. We should all take pride in what ASEAN brings to the world. ■

Related Issues:

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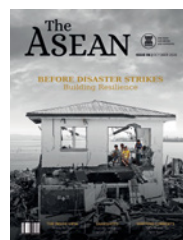
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Bringing Literacy to Rural Areas



PRISCILIA PUTRI NIRMALA SARI
OFFICER, ANALYSIS DIVISION, ASEAN
SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT

As technology advances, the library is no longer only a place where people can read and borrow books. It also serves as a community hub, providing people with the space to develop themselves and come together as a community. But access to books and libraries is still limited for many who live in rural areas.

The ASEAN talks to two literacy champions who use creative ways to bring books and libraries to rural areas and help transform lives and entire communities.

Peter Sy, eLibraries in a Box

Peter Sy is a professor at the University of the Philippines who, on the side, created the Tambayayong eLibrary project. With this project, he provides eLibrary boxes to schools across the Philippines, especially to those in the farthest corners of the country with limited access to infrastructure development.

“I come from a rural area myself, and education has always been at the heart of my personal journey. So, when I graduated and became a professor, I always had the passion to pay back and help the people back in my hometown.”

The first eLibrary prototype was rather bulky and difficult to carry around. After exchanging ideas with another similar project in Sarawak, Malaysia, he decided to use the Raspberry Pi technology to make the device more portable and self-sufficient.

Peter wants others to reproduce his eLibrary boxes. He has recommended content for those who need it but encourages teachers to create their own. “The technology is open source. Everyone can build their eLibrary box with the framework and tailor the content for their teaching use.”

The project implementation at the grass-root level is supported mainly by various donors, from governments to religious groups and NGOs. Currently, the project has been implemented in seven areas across the Philippines, with 31 communities or schools as the project beneficiaries,

including the floating classroom of Claret Samal-Bajau School (which caters to indigenous children). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, it has been difficult for Peter to visit the sites personally. Nevertheless, he is glad to know that some teachers are using the eLibrary to implement long-distance learning and social distancing in their classrooms.



As an educator, Peter Sy hopes that his eLibrary project can help improve digital literacy and digital skills in remote areas of the Philippines, such as the Claret Samal-Bajau School (photo below)



The eLibrary is a platform of engagement, for getting together to help improve K-12 instruction, share educational resources, and enhance the overall experience of teaching and learning. The eLibrary box is a stand-alone, browser-accessible repository of digital resources.

Users can use a wifi access point (“Tambayayong eLibrary”), open the browser, and point it to an offline address to access the repository (“library.ph” or 172.24.1.1). No internet connection is needed. Learn more about the eLibrary Box and Tambayayong eLibrary project here: <https://library.ph>

Ridwan Sururi, A Horse-powered library

In Mount Slamet, Central Java, Indonesia, horse caretaker Ridwan Sururi started Kuda Pustaka, a horse library project. With his horse “Luna,” Ridwan has been visiting schools and Quran reading classes to bring books closer to the children since 2014.

“I started with 136 books donated by the owner of the horse that I took care of. I took them with my horse to schools and asked the principals’ permission to set up my horse library during recess.”

Ridwan’s strategy to bring the books directly to children has been so successful, the horse library quickly gained popularity and started to run out of books to lend. He then went to social media to ask for book donations and his project garnered interest from book-lover communities. Ridwan’s collection has grown to more than 5,000 books. A donor also gave him another horse, Jermanis, adding some horsepower to his library.

Ridwan’s horse library model is also being replicated in other remote areas like Papua and East Nusa Tenggara in eastern Indonesia. Now, Ridwan travels between 10 schools and two Islamic Education Centers (TPI)—where the children learn to read the Quran—every weekday while running a horse-riding stall on the weekend.

Challenges like bad weather and the COVID-19 pandemic halted Ridwan’s horse library activities. Since schools have switched to distance learning methods, the horse library only commutes to TPI for now. He cannot wait for the situation to get better so he can travel to schools and greet the children with his horse library again.

Despite his socio-economic condition, Ridwan is passionate about his horse library project as a way to contribute to society and educate the children in his area. The children’s smiles,

and enthusiasm when they see his horse library encourages him. He hopes that he can have his library building one day too. “The most important thing is to be sincere and to have a strong intention to help others in doing this. Otherwise, this kind of project won’t be sustainable.”

Project's Ripple Effects

For Peter and Ridwan, the impact of their rural library projects extends way beyond sparking the joy of reading in children.

When eLibrary is introduced in schools, teachers who are the main facilitator of their students’ learning process eventually become students themselves. To incorporate the digital materials and new technology, the teachers need to update their skills and knowledge before they can teach their students.

“I hope that we can develop pedagogy around tech. Technology can become obsolete but the idea of advancing technology can enhance education. There’s so much to be done. My vision is ultimately to see the necessary connection in terms of learning outcomes to truly transform the learners,” Peter says.

Since the eLibrary can also store multimedia content, Peter hopes that it can equip students in rural areas with digital skills and increase their competitiveness to enter the job market. In addition, with the shift to digital media, he sees that students’ interest is also shifting to more visually interactive content and hopes that his eLibrary can help to facilitate this.

The same can be said for Ridwan, whose horse library has evolved from just a moving library to a learning space for his community. Due to the support from various donors, his living room has transformed into a small library, complete with several computers, from where he runs free courses on computer literacy for local youth.

Youth from rural areas are often disadvantaged due to inadequate access to digital skills essential for the current job market. Libraries can play an important role to fill this gap, providing a platform for youth in rural areas to develop their skills.

The impact of rural libraries reaches far beyond just increasing the digital literacy rate among youth. It also contributes to improving the community’s welfare and empowering its members. As his collection grows, Ridwan’s horse library patrons also include mothers who are accompanying their children in Quran classes. “Since we live in a tourist area, the women here often make little handicrafts to sell and gain some additional income. Arts and crafts, as well as DIY-creation books that use everyday material, are very popular,” Ridwan says.

These rural library advocates hope that libraries can be embraced as drivers for advancing education in rural areas. People-to-people connections can also become valuable assets for developing rural libraries in the region. “The seeds of ASEAN cooperation are already there. We have friends in Southeast Asia who can learn and support each other,” says Peter. “We should at the very least understand the rural areas better.” ■



Top to bottom:
Kuda Pustaka travels to schools during recess, allowing students to borrow books for free; Ridwan and his horse, Luna.



You can learn more and donate books to Kuda Pustaka horse library through their social media: Facebook: Ridwan Sururi (Kuda Pustaka); Instagram: kuda.pustaka