



Chhin Saren, 33, is a farmer and a businesswoman in Pit Rang Village in Cambodia. Aside from growing vegetables, she also sells broiler chicken to other farmers. She earns roughly US\$ 2,000 yearly from her poultry business. Savann Oeum/Oxfam

# ASEAN THROUGH A GENDER LENS

## Recommendations for the Full Implementation of the Action Agenda on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment in ASEAN

ASEAN's legal and institutional framework is reviewed through a gender lens to distill recommendations for the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework. The operationalization of the Action Agenda for Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment is offered to contribute in ensuring that all ASEAN policies are gender responsive and inclusive. A call to action is made for ASEAN to adopt concrete and measurable actions and indicative activities that mainstream women's economic empowerment through innovation, trade, and inclusive business.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Action Agenda on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment (Action Agenda) was adopted by ASEAN Leaders on 13 November 2017 to achieve a gender responsive ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and encourage all ASEAN Member States to mainstream women's economic empowerment through innovation, trade, and inclusive business.

While a number of ASEAN Member States have initiated efforts on operationalizing the Action Agenda, ASEAN regional work plans and instruments have yet to include indicative activities or goals that promote fair and inclusive labor and employment policies for women, as well as their equal access to the regional marketplace. The economic constraints faced by women were further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic that exposed vulnerabilities in the social, political, and economic systems, which amplified its impacts, particularly among women and girls. Strategic interventions for women's economic empowerment can be the next driver of the ASEAN's post-pandemic recovery and, in order to translate into resilience, these interventions must be inclusive. Women must not be left behind.

Since its establishment in 1967, the ASEAN has enacted policies and installed mechanisms to promote gender equality. It established the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) as the primary body responsible for crafting gender policies through the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women (AMMW), the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW), and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC). Since 1988, the ASEAN has promulgated various declarations to promote women's rights that were eventually operationalized through the ACW Workplans for 2011–2015 and 2016–2020. ASEAN Member States have also committed as parties to the Convention Against Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals. This progression of affirmative actions has culminated in the adoption of the Action Agenda and the "ASEAN Declaration on Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025" and Sustainable Development Goals".

However, a cursory examination of ASEAN's community blueprints shows that its gender policy framework and regional mechanisms for implementation is concentrated in the ASCC. This resulted into funneled gender policies on women's social and cultural status, which effectively omitted the promotion of women's economic empowerment. While indeed women's issues are discussed in the ASEAN Political-Security (APSC) pillar, gender policies are framed in terms of protection rather than empowerment, as addressing violence against women is affirmed as an immediate concern.

Women's economic rights are not discussed as a matter of agenda in the ASEAN Economic (AEC) pillar, which is partly attributed to the inadequate representation of women in the working committees under the AEC and the absence of sex disaggregated data in ASEAN's official statistical yearbook.

It is therefore recommended that the Action Agenda's six-pronged approach on mainstreaming women's economic empowerment be fully operationalized through the inclusion of the following indicative activities in the ACW Workplan for 2021–2025 and inform the AEC Blueprint and ASEAN's Comprehensive Recovery Framework from COVID-19:

- Gender disaggregation and intersectionality of data in the ASEAN Statistical Yearbook to provide in-depth information on women's economic participation and the challenges that confront certain groups of women.
- Review of ASEAN instruments and policies to ensure a gender normative framework and recognize the differential impact of gender on macroeconomic policies.
- Assess the adequacy of women's representation in ASEAN's policymaking bodies.
- Provide education programs for women, either as apprenticeships or ICT upskilling, to close the gender gap and achieve a stronger, more inclusive, and integrated community.
- Inclusion of gender responsive indicators in the ASEAN scorecard that will include women in leadership positions, parental leave, flexible employment, and support for transition from informal employment to ease the double burden of unpaid labor borne by women, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Creation of an ASEAN Work Plan that provides for an enabling environment for women-led and women-owned MSMEs.
- Escalate programs that will enable smart gender investing on women-led and women-owned enterprises.
- Provision of support to business and industry associations, such as the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network (AWEN), that extend assistance for women to access the marketplace and provide for opportunities in the ASEAN supply chain network.

Finally, it is proposed that a Gender Mainstreaming Committee be established under the ASEAN Coordinating Council to coordinate and implement efforts in mainstreaming gender and women's empowerment across all three pillars of the ASEAN.

In conclusion, mainstreaming women's economic empowerment requires multi-sectoral collaboration and a multi-dimensional approach that cuts across the three ASEAN communities to ensure that no one is left behind, particularly women. The Action Agenda, as a living document, can be used as a tool for gender lens analysis for this purpose and as a means to institutionalize a mechanism for gender equality and women's economic empowerment in the ASEAN.

# 1 WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AS KEY TO INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC RESILIENCE & RECOVERY IN THE ASEAN

As part of the commemoration of the 50th Founding Anniversary of the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN), the Philippines hosted the first ASEAN Women's Business Conference in Manila on 31 August 2017. This was attended by policymakers, women business leaders and entrepreneurs across ASEAN, international organizations, the academia, and youth and private sector representatives who issued the "Manila Statement on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment in ASEAN" (Manila Statement) that urged ASEAN Leaders to recognize the "importance of women's economic empowerment as a major driver of ASEAN's future success and as a key strategy for achieving inclusive economic growth, stability, and prosperity in the region".<sup>1</sup>

The Manila Statement was strengthened in an "Action Agenda on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment in ASEAN" (Action Agenda)<sup>2</sup> that was endorsed to the ASEAN Leaders who, recognizing that gender equality is a cross-cutting concern for achieving a gender responsive ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), adopted the Action Agenda on 13 November 2017 and encouraged all ASEAN Member States to mainstream women's economic empowerment through innovation, trade, and inclusive business.

The Action Agenda was a ground-breaking development for the ASEAN because previously, women and gender concerns were confined in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). The Action Agenda being under the purview of the AEC confirmed that there is a need for a regional cohesive and concerted effort to enable an ecosystem that encourages women to participate and benefit from economic activities.

Four years since then, a number of ASEAN Member States have initiated efforts to operationalize the Action Agenda. However, regional work plans and instruments are yet to reflect indicative activities and goals that will enable fair and inclusive labor and employment policies for women, as well as their equal access to the regional market.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic struck, impacting both health and economy of ASEAN Members States. To respond to this extraordinary challenge, ASEAN leaders adopted the Special ASEAN Declaration<sup>3</sup> on 14 April 2020, where they committed to strengthen cooperation in public health measures.<sup>4</sup> Open trade and the

establishment of a COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund<sup>5</sup> were proposed, and further commitments for an ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework were also made.

ASEAN's collective response to the pandemic is welcomed, and it is hoped that it will provide guidance for affirmative action for the most vulnerable sectors in the region because of COVID-19's disproportionate impact. The pandemic has compounded existing inequalities and exposed vulnerabilities in social, political, and economic systems which amplified its impacts,<sup>6</sup> particularly among women and girls:

- Compounded economic impacts are felt, especially by women and girls who are generally earning less, saving less, holding insecure jobs, or living near poverty.<sup>7</sup> By 2030 and without significant intervention, more than 230 million women globally will be living in poverty and a ratio of 121 women living in extreme poverty for every 100 poor men.<sup>8</sup>
- Women are losing their jobs. Of the 72% of domestic workers in the world who lost work, 80% are women.<sup>9</sup> The pandemic and the measures to prevent its spread are driving an increase in women's unemployment, as compared to men, and also decreasing overall working time.
- The pandemic exposed women's precarious economic security. On a worldwide scale, more than 740 million women work in the informal economy and their income fell by 60% during the first month of the pandemic.<sup>10</sup>
- Before COVID-19, women performed nearly three times as much unpaid care and domestic work than men globally. As schools, nurseries, and daycare facilities shut down, women stepped in to fill the gap and render more care and domestic work.<sup>11</sup>

Still, the extent of the pandemic's impact on women in the ASEAN has not yet been fully assessed due to the absence of sex-disaggregated data.

Considering that women constitute more than half of the population of the ASEAN,<sup>12</sup> it is imperative that gender equality and women's economic empowerment should be treated as a cross-cutting concern. A gendered response to the current pandemic is timely and relevant to ensure that women and girls are not left behind.<sup>13</sup>

The full implementation of Action Agenda will certainly be a driver for the ASEAN to steer into this pathway.

# 2 ASEAN'S GENDER LANDSCAPE

The ASEAN's adoption of the Action Agenda in 2017 is significant because it recognizes that if gender equality is the goal, then gender mainstreaming should be reflected in all regional policies and work plans. To enable the full implementation of the Action Agenda, an understanding and analysis of the ASEAN's legal and institutional landscape is imperative.

## ASEAN'S LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON GENDER ECONOMIC EQUALITY

The ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, through the adoption of the ASEAN Declaration<sup>14</sup> to promote regional peace and stability, and maintain close and beneficial cooperation between the Member States.<sup>15</sup>

Over time, ASEAN's aspiration has expanded to include economic growth and social progress with the adoption of the "Cebu Declaration on the Acceleration of the Establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015"<sup>16</sup> at the 12th ASEAN Summit in January 2007, which affirmed the ASEAN Leaders' commitment to accelerate the establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015. The ASEAN Community is comprised of three pillars:

- The ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) that was established to promote a "rules-based Community of shared values and norms; a cohesive, peaceful, stable, and resilient region with shared responsibility for comprehensive security; as well as a dynamic and outward-looking region in an increasingly integrated and interdependent world".<sup>17</sup> The APSC also seeks the promotion and protection of human rights including those of women and children in accordance with the United Nations and ASEAN Charters, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.<sup>18</sup>
- The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) that aims to "create a single market and production base for the free flow of goods, services, investment, capital, and skilled labor within ASEAN".<sup>19</sup>
- The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) that was created to realize "a committed, participative, and socially responsible community through an accountable and inclusive mechanism for the

benefit of all ASEAN peoples”.<sup>20</sup> It also aims to help heighten the region’s commitments to international standards including the “Declaration on Elimination of Violence Against Women”.

In the current ASEAN architecture, gender equality and women-related concerns are under the scope of ASCC.

## **ASEAN institutions on promoting gender equality and women’s economic empowerment**

The ASCC is the primary body responsible for supervising gender policies in ASEAN. Its main responsibilities are to (1) ensure the implementation of the relevant decisions of the ASEAN Summits, (2) coordinate the work of the different sectors under its purview and on issues that cut across the other Community Councils, and (3) submit reports and recommendations to the ASEAN Summit on matters under its purview. There are three main ASCC bodies that focus on women and gender:

- The **ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women (AMMW)** is composed of ministers-in-charge of women and girls in all ASEAN Member States. It sets the strategic policy direction on ASEAN’s regional cooperation on women.
- The **ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW)**, a subsidiary body to the AMMW, coordinates and monitors related ASEAN activities, and facilitates cooperation on women. It is composed of representatives from ASEAN Member States’ agencies on women and supports the AMMW by recommending regional policies, developing and implementing the 5-year regional work plan, and managing partnerships. The ACW also publishes a status report every three years, which analyzes the state of women’s participation in political spheres, as well as the incorporation of women’s concerns in national plans and programs. Furthermore, the ACW facilitates, monitors, and evaluates the implementation of international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (Beijing Platform for Action).
- The **ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC)** was established pursuant to the “Vientiane Action Program 2004–2010” (VAP) to promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and children in ASEAN.<sup>21</sup> The ACWC reports to the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development and engages with UN agencies, particularly UN Women, in promoting the adoption and implementation of international, regional, and other instruments on protecting the rights of women and children. In comparison with the ACW which is comprised of senior government officials, the ACWC is composed of experts and members of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Other regional mechanisms include the **ACW and ACWC Joint-Ad Hoc**

**Working Group on Gender Mainstreaming** that was established to develop a comprehensive strategy to mainstream gender perspectives across all the three ASEAN Community Pillars, and the **ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network (AWEN)**. AWEN is a network of businesswomen in the ASEAN region, which serves as a platform to exchange knowledge and experiences on promoting economic and trade activities in order to enhance gender equality and empower and strengthen entrepreneurship skills of women in the ASEAN Community. AWEN likewise seeks to create a favorable environment for women-led enterprises and provide support for women entrepreneurship in the region.<sup>22</sup>

## **ASEAN instruments and policies on gender**

On 5 July 1988, ASEAN made its first commitment to improve the status of women in the region by enacting the “Declaration of the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region”<sup>23</sup> to promote and implement the equitable and effective participation of women in all fields and at various levels of the political, economic, social, and cultural life of society at national, regional, and international levels.

On 12 October 2012, ASEAN Member States adopted the “Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region” and committed to “take all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and empower women and strengthen their economic independence and to protect and promote full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in order to allow women and girls to protect themselves against violence.”<sup>24</sup>

These declarations were subsequently operationalized in the ACW Work Plan for 2011–2015 that sought to “influence the various pillars of the ASEAN Community Blueprints particularly the ASCC and the ASEAN Member States so that there will visible, credible, and strong gender mainstreaming inputs to government and inter-government policies, programs, and processes,”<sup>25</sup> and the ACW 2016–2020 Workplan that introduced economic rights of women as a new thematic area.<sup>26</sup>

Another important ASEAN commitment on gender and economic rights is the “Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children” (Ha Noi Declaration)<sup>27</sup> that was adopted on 28 October 2010 which reaffirmed the ASEAN Members States’ commitments under CEDAW, the SDGs, and the Beijing Platform for Action by fostering concerted efforts to strengthen existing institutional mechanisms and technical capacity of ASEAN Member States’ relevant agencies to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment,<sup>28</sup> as well as to undertake concrete measures to promote gender equality and women’s participation in the labor market, address gender-based occupational segregation, and strengthen their economic skill.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, the Vientiane Action Program (VAP)<sup>30</sup> that was adopted on 29 November 2004 sought to increase the participation of women in the productive workforce.<sup>31</sup>

## Regional commitments on gender equality and women's economic empowerment

ASEAN's cooperation on promoting gender equality and empowerment of women and girls is guided by the foundational international commitments on CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals.

CEDAW, which is known as the International Bill of Rights of Women, was adopted by the United Nations in 1979 and took effect on 3 September 1981. As of February 2015, 188 State Parties have agreed to implement the provisions of the treaty by taking appropriate measures against all forms of discrimination and exploitation of women. In particular, CEDAW mandates State Parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate economic discrimination against women.<sup>32</sup>

The Beijing Platform for Action was adopted by world leaders during the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995. It is the most comprehensive commitment on gender equality and empowerment of all women. Particularly, the Beijing Platform for Action urges the review, adoption, and maintenance of macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty.<sup>33</sup> In a Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on June 2000, world leaders adopted additional actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, which became known as Beijing+5.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, in 2015, the United Nations launched the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>35</sup> which is a compendium of 17 interlinked Global Goals that aims to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. SDG 5, in particular, aims to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” and includes targets such as increasing the value of unpaid care and promoting shared domestic responsibilities, and ensuring full participation of women in leadership and decision making.

## THE ACTION AGENDA ON MAINSTREAMING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN ASEAN

On 13 November 2017, the ASEAN Leaders adopted the “Action Agenda on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment in ASEAN” (Action Agenda) as proposed by the delegates of the First ASEAN Women's Business Conference organized by AWEN. The Action Agenda aims to mainstream women's economic empowerment in the ASEAN through innovation, trade, and inclusive business, as well as human capital development<sup>36</sup> through a **six-pronged approach**.

**Table 1. The Action Agenda’s 6-pronged approach to gender mainstreaming in ASEAN**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Gender Mainstreaming Activity</b>
Macroeconomic Policymaking	Adopt concrete and measurable actions to address the barriers that impede maximizing women’s full economic potential in the areas of finance, information access, and markets; human capital development and leadership; and innovation and technology.
Access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)	Promote women’s participation and skills development in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (S.T.E.A.M.), including ICT by providing, for example, incentives for women innovators, allocating more foreign investments in science research institutes and foundations, and by creating an enabling environment for ICT to empower women entrepreneurs and to promote ICT as enabling tools for the advancement of women and their economic empowerment.
Capital Flows and Investments	Invest in programs which provide enabling environments for women-owned micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to prosper through ease of doing business initiatives, incentives, and favorable tax regulations, helping them participate in inclusive and innovative businesses whether as consumer, seller, supplier, distributor, and worker, and by addressing the constraints that limit their integration in the international markets and global value chains (GVCs).
Labor and Work Scorecards	Increase women’s representation and leadership in the workforce at the executive and managerial positions by intensifying human capital development and capacity building programs that empower women to bear equal roles in all sectors as men do, and enhance gender equality policies and strategies to close the gender pay gap.
Adequate Representation	Encourage public and private sector collaboration through the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ABAC) and AWEN for advocacy, networking, and outreach purposes to create more opportunities for women in business; with AWEN representing women entrepreneurs in the ACW under ASCC and in the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small, and Medium Sized Enterprises (ACCMSME) under AEC.
Network and Modelling	Consider organizing an annual ASEAN Women’s Business Conference led by AWEN in coordination with other relevant sectoral bodies under the ASCC and the AEC where ASEAN Member States’ public and private sector representatives, academe, and civil society converge to share good practices, discuss gaps and challenges, and put forward recommendations to achieve women’s economic empowerment and gender equality in the region.

The adoption of the Action Agenda was supported by the “ASEAN Declaration on Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and Sustainable Development Goals (Declaration on A Gender-Responsive ASEAN Community)” that, aside from endorsing the Action Agenda, reaffirmed the ASEAN Member States’ commitment to a gender-responsive implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 that supports gender mainstreaming initiatives across the three ASEAN pillars.<sup>37</sup> This declaration expanded

the 6-pronged approach of the Action Agenda on gender mainstreaming and added the following operational commitments for the ASEAN Community Vision 2025:

**Table 2. Gender mainstreaming activities under the Declaration on a Gender-Responsive ASEAN Community**

Sector	Gender Mainstreaming Activity
Macroeconomic Policymaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancement of the ASEAN Member States' capacity to strengthen national and sub-national sex-aggregated databases and analyses on all SDGs, and consider establishing reliable regional gender statistics, including sex-disaggregated databases for key sectors to support ASEAN policies and programmes in the three ASEAN Blueprints toward the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.</li> <li>• Collect, manage, analyze, disseminate, and ensure access to high quality, reliable, and timely data disaggregated by sex, age, and socio-cultural, and economic characteristics.</li> <li>• Strongly encourage the monitoring and evaluation of existing policies, plans, and programmes on women and girls, including assessing the contribution of women in the economy and the economic costs of gender-based violence.</li> <li>• Support the development and implementation of gender mainstreaming initiatives across all sectoral bodies in the three ASEAN pillars.</li> </ul>
Access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)	No indicative activities provided.
Capital Flows and Investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reaffirm the need to mainstream a gender perspective and analysis, which may include targeted actions and investments, and gender-responsive budgeting.</li> <li>• Encourage more investments to close resource gaps for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.</li> </ul>
Labor and Work Scorecards	No indicative activities provided.
Adequate Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote women's equal access to and full participation in decision-making bodies and mechanisms involved in the implementation of all goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.</li> <li>• Encourage ASEAN Sectoral Bodies to engage and establish mechanisms for engagement with women's groups and organizations.</li> </ul>
Network and Modelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the engagement of men and boys as agents and beneficiaries of change in the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls as strategic partners and allies.</li> </ul>

However, the Action Agenda and the "Declaration on A Gender-Responsive ASEAN Community" are yet to be operationalized in the ASEAN Community Blueprints, Regional Work Plans, or other policy instruments.

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN ASEAN

The mid-term review of the ASEAN Community Blueprints, which provides the guidelines in pursuing the collective vision for ASEAN Vision 2025, has been conducted and concluded in 2020. As part of the review, the ASEAN Secretariat organized focus group discussions with experts, researchers, stakeholders, and private sector participants to generate recommendations for the three ASEAN Community Pillars and address existing constraints to integration, including the impacts of COVID-19.

The ACW is currently crafting its Work Plan for 2021 to 2025. This is an opportunity to introduce recommendations for the full implementation of the Action Agenda in the next five years. Likewise, recommendations can also be offered to the ACW and ACWC Joint-Ad Hoc Working Group on Gender Mainstreaming for the strategic framework in operationalizing the “Declaration on a Gender-Responsive ASEAN Community” whose implementation should also be included in the ACW Work Plan for 2021 to 2025. Likewise, it is imperative that ASEAN’s post-COVID-19 proposed recovery framework include a gender perspective to ensure that women’s concerns are addressed.

The Action Agenda should be one of the cornerstones of the ASEAN Gender Framework, and should inform ASEAN’s work plans and indicative activities. While the importance of women’s economic empowerment has been recognized by the ASEAN, its commitment to being gender-responsive will be measured by addressing the gender gap of its legal and institutional frameworks.

# 3 GENDER GAP ANALYSIS: ASEAN'S LEGAL & INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS THROUGH A GENDER LENS

Gendered policy analysis aims to make women visible in policy, recognize how men and women are treated differently or the same, surface the underlying assumptions and stereotypes embedded in policy, and understand how women's lives and roles are regulated and constrained by policy.<sup>38</sup> A gendered perspective on policymaking is twofold: (1) to provide perspective on how laws and policies disadvantages women and (2) to distill thought and experience from the women themselves on how to eliminate their disadvantage toward a more equitable implementation of a policy.

ASEAN's legal and institutional framework was developed primarily from trade and economic integration, and seems to be gender neutral. This approach has served its purpose in maintaining peaceful and equitable relations between the ASEAN Member States, and ASEAN Leaders have recognized the importance of inclusivity as the means for an equitable and sustainable growth and prosperity.

## MODELS FOR MEASURING EFFECTIVE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Oxfam defines effective women's economic empowerment to have occurred "when women enjoy their rights to control and benefit from resources, assets and income, and their own time, and when they have the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and well-being."<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, the promotion of women's economic empowerment can translate into "meaningful economic empowerment" when "women have the autonomy and self-belief to make changes in their own lives, including having the agency and power to organize and influence decision making, while enjoying equal rights to men and freedom from violence."<sup>40</sup>

In order to assess whether or not ASEAN policies and institutions adequately address the concerns of women, the Action Agenda's six-

pronged approach can be used as a lens to filter the design and implementation of ASEAN’s work plans and programs to indicate if women were considered in the following aspects:

- Macroeconomic policymaking
- Access to ICT
- Capital flows and investments
- Labor and work scorecards
- Adequate representation
- Network and modelling

Another tool that can be used in measuring the gender responsiveness of ASEAN’s frameworks and work programs is the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel Report on Women’s Economic Empowerment (UNHLP WEE Report) on the following seven primary drivers of women’s economic empowerment:

- Tackling diverse norms and promoting positive role models
- Ensuring legal protection and reforming discriminatory laws and regulations
- Recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid work and care
- Building assets (digital, financial, and property)
- Changing business culture and practice
- Improving public sector practices in employment and procurement
- Strengthening visibility, collective voice and representation

**Figure 1. Seven primary drivers of women’s economic empowerment<sup>41</sup>**



The Action Agenda as a gender lens and the UNHLP as an action framework are useful tools in identifying possible gaps in the ASEAN Gender Framework and offering solutions on how these gaps can be addressed.

## FROM INTEGRATION TO INCLUSION

Using the Action Agenda's six-pronged approach as a gender lens, the following were the main outcomes of a gender analysis of ASEAN's legal and institutional framework:

- In terms of **macroeconomic policymaking**, there are no provisions for women's participation in economic activities in the AEC Blueprint. Neither is there a formal recognition that there exists a gender gap in terms of initiatives, incentives, and regulations nor is there language that shows that gender equality is an aspiration for the AEC. Sex-disaggregated data measuring the extent of women's participation in the labor force and marketplace is not indicated in the official statistical yearbook of the ASEAN. Hence, the specific needs of women are not adequately captured in policies.
- **Access to ICT** by women is recognized as a right by the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), which is part of the ASPC. Support to provide for ICT training capacity building for women should therefore be integrated in the work plans and indicative activities of all three community pillars.
- While it is recognized that lack of access to finance is the main constraint for MSMEs, formal recognition that women-owned businesses face more barriers than their male counterparts is still wanting. Provisions for gender-smart financial products that will enable women entrepreneurs to have equal access and uptake to **capital flows and investments** need to be reflected in work plans such as the Strategic Action Plan for ASEAN SME Development (SAPSMED) and in the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on MSMEs (ACCMSME).
- **Labor and work** policies in the AEC Blueprint, while fair to workers in general, needs to consider the specific condition of women workers. The current governance scorecards for ASEAN corporations do not take into consideration the realities of gender-based poverty, which is borne out of implicit preferences for male employees and the double-workload borne by women from their productive and child rearing activities.
- There is a gap on the adequate **representation** of women in economic policymaking. An examination of the three ASEAN community blueprints shows that the region's gender policy framework and regional mechanisms for implementation is concentrated in the ASCC. This approach results into funneled gender policies on women's social and cultural status and not on their participation in economic activities and politics. While women's concerns are indeed

discussed in the APSC, gender policies are framed in terms of protection rather than empowerment as fighting violence against women is affirmed as an immediate concern. Likewise, ASEAN bodies tasked in formulating and implementing gender policies are all under the ASCC (i.e. AMMW, ACW, Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children). Women's concerns are not adequately considered in the AEC agenda due to the limited representation of women (i.e. through the ACW and AMMW) in the working committees under the AEC.

- In terms of **network**, ASEAN Member States have created and provided support to AWEN. The next step would be to elevate AWEN's activities from simply providing contacts to ASEAN women to empowering AWEN to present policy recommendations. This will transform AWEN as a strong interest group or stakeholder for women's concerns.

The gaps presented above can be addressed using the UNHLP's seven drivers of women's economic empowerment:

**1. Tackling adverse norms and promoting positive role models.**

Challenging and transforming the negative harmful norms that limit women's access to work and that often devalue their work are core to achieving women's economic empowerment.<sup>42</sup> Similar to Strategic Objective J.2 of the Beijing Platform for Action, this can be initiated through the promotion of balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media by encouraging the production of materials on women leaders, managers, and entrepreneurs to provide positive role models to young women.<sup>43</sup>

**2. Levelling the playing field for women by ensuring legal protection and reforming discriminatory laws and regulations.**

Laws reflect society's expectations for gender roles, and laws that discriminate against women constrain their opportunities. By removing legal barriers and providing a framework for the awareness and assertion of rights,<sup>44</sup> the importance of gender equality is emphasized. This will require the review, adoption, and/or preservation of macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty,<sup>45</sup> transforming laws and administrative practices to enable women's equal rights and access to economic resources,<sup>46</sup> and providing women with equitable access to savings and credit mechanisms and institutions.<sup>47</sup>

**3. Investing in care by recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid work and care.**

Promoting women's economic empowerment depends, to a large extent, on closing the gender gap in unpaid care work and investing in care. Reducing and redistributing care work require investments from both the public and private sectors. These investments not only have major benefits for the individuals and families but also for economies, businesses, and the society.<sup>48</sup> The AEC Blueprint and its corresponding Work Plans can include gender responsive indicators in the ASEAN scorecard for effective parental leave, flexible employment, and support for transition from informal employment to ease the double responsibility of unpaid labor of women, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The suggested

action is inspired by Strategic Objective F.6 of the Beijing Platform for Action, which promotes harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men.<sup>49</sup>

4. **Ensuring a fair share of digital, financial, and property assets.** Access to financial, digital, and property assets matters in promoting women's economic empowerment. Governments, the private sector, and civil society organizations can accelerate current trends and innovations in digital technology and finance, as well as increase the pace of reforms in land and property law to expand women's economic opportunities.<sup>50</sup>
5. **Creating business opportunities by changing business culture and practice.** Beyond adopting basic protection and standards that are the "right thing to do," companies are realizing the value of women's economic empowerment, as well as supporting and enabling women to reach their full potential at all levels of the value chain—as employees, suppliers, distributors, customers, and community members.<sup>51</sup> The ASEAN can promote this trend and also adopt the strategy of providing non-discriminatory business-related education and training,<sup>52</sup> and addressing the barriers to women's economic empowerment in the value chain.
6. **Creative opportunities for governments by improving public sector practices in employment and procurement.** Beyond determining the legal, institutional and policy environments that affect women's economic opportunities, governments are major employers and procurers of goods and services. Governments can create economic opportunities for women and advance women's economic empowerment through their employment and procurement practices.<sup>53</sup> The ASEAN can incorporate this driver through programs that allow for investing in women-led and women-owned enterprises and procurement services.
7. **Enhancing women's voices by strengthening visibility, collective voice, and representation.** Women's collective and representative organizations, especially those representing women at the base of the pyramid, are important in driving women's economic opportunities. Policymaking and programming for women require women themselves to lead these processes. Worker, employer and business membership organizations should therefore develop mechanisms that allow working women to voice their needs and demands, enhance their bargaining power, advocate for legal and policy reforms, and increase access to markets on fair and efficient terms.<sup>54</sup> ASEAN can integrate this policy by including AWEN and other women's groups or leaders in its policymaking processes to ensure that an adequate gender lens is applied.

To summarize, there is a need to integrate ASEAN's gender policies and inform the work plans of all three pillars in enabling women's economic empowerment. The Action Agenda, more than a groundbreaking statement recognizing the need for women's economic empowerment, is an effective gender lens that can contribute in ensuring the participation and fair share of women in economic activities.

# 4 ENGENDERING THE ASEAN: PROPOSALS FOR MAINSTREAMING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Women's ability to contribute to and benefit from market institutions has been and continues to be of great economic importance. John Stuart Mill was among the earliest scholars to argue that society, as a whole, loses when women are not granted access to economic rights.<sup>55</sup> When entire groups of people like women are restricted from owning property, starting a business, or working in a particular occupation, everyone is robbed of the value that would have been created if these have been allowed to share their talents and ideas with the world.<sup>56</sup>

Today, market studies from a gendered perspective highlight the reasons why the market benefits are not equally shared by women. This raises an important question: how can women equally get a share of market benefits if they are not able to equally participate in the market process? Understanding the relationship between markets and women's wellbeing requires a better understanding of the degree of access women have to market institutions.<sup>57</sup>

The analysis of ASEAN's legal and institutional framework using the Action Agenda as a gender lens indicates a disparity of policies on gender and women's economic empowerment between the three community pillars. While seemingly equitable, guidelines and frameworks from the ASCC are not adequately reflected in the work plans of the AEC and APSC. This can be due to the limited representation of women's concerns in the economic sphere. It is also noted that the gendered responses in the AEC and APSC are mainly in terms of protection and not empowerment.

The Action Agenda provides recommendations that can cut across the three community pillars, particularly for the AEC, and can substantially facilitate a gender-responsive and inclusive ASEAN as indicated below:

**Table 3. Indicative activities for operationalizing the Action Agenda**

Aspect	Action Agenda	Indicative Activity for Operationalization	ASEAN Body or Stakeholder
Macro-economic Policymaking	Adopt concrete and measurable actions to address the barriers that impede maximizing women's full economic	Review of ASEAN instruments and polices to ensure a gender normative framework and recognize the differential	ASEAN Economic Ministers, ACCMSME, ASEAN

Aspect	Action Agenda	Indicative Activity for Operationalization	ASEAN Body or Stakeholder
	potential in the areas of finance, information access, and markets; human capital development and leadership; and innovation and technology.	<p>impact of gender on macroeconomic policies.</p> <p>Disaggregation of data on gender in the ASEAN Statistical Yearbook to provide in-depth information on women participating in the marketplace, either as a worker or entrepreneur, to differentiate between women in urban, rural, or indigenous populations or women minorities who are even more at a disadvantage.</p>	Business Advisory Council (ABAC)
Access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)	Promote women's participation and skills development in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (S.T.E.A.M.), including ICT by providing, for example, incentives for women innovators, allocating more foreign investments in science research institutes and foundations, and by creating an enabling environment for ICT-empowerment of women entrepreneurs and to promote ICT as enabling tools for the advancement of women and their economic empowerment.	Creation of education programs for women, either as apprenticeships or ICT upskilling.	ASEAN Digital Ministers, ACCMSME, ABAC
Capital Flows and Investments	Invest in programs that provide enabling environments for women-owned MSMEs to prosper through ease of doing business initiatives, incentives, and favorable tax regulations, helping them participate in inclusive and innovative businesses whether as consumer, seller, supplier, distributor, and worker, and by addressing the constraints that limit their integration in the international markets and global value chains (GVCs).	<p>Crafting of a work plan that will create an enabling environment for women led and owned MSMEs.</p> <p>Increase programs that allow for smart gender investing in women-led and women-owned enterprises.</p> <p>Create programs which values and promotes gender responsive procurement or the selection of services, goods, and civil works</p>	ASEAN Economic Ministers, ACCMSME, ABAC

Aspect	Action Agenda	Indicative Activity for Operationalization	ASEAN Body or Stakeholder
		that considers their impact on gender equality and women's empowerment.	
Labor and Work Scorecards	Increase women's representation and leadership in the workforce at the executive and managerial positions by intensifying human capital development and capacity building programs that empower women to bear equal roles in all sectors as men do and, enhance gender equality policies and strategies to close the gender pay gap.	Inclusion of gender responsive indicators in the ASEAN scorecard for effective parental leave, flexible employment, and support for transition from informal employment to ease the double burden of unpaid labor of women, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.	ASEAN Labor Ministers, ACCMSME, ACW, and ACWC
Adequate Representation	Encourage public and private sector collaboration through the ABAC and AWEN for advocacy, networking, and outreach purposes to create more opportunities for women in business; AWEN to represent women owned MSMEs in the ACW under ASCC and in the ACCSME under AEC.	Assess if women have adequate representation in the ASEAN, ABAC, ACCMSME, and other relevant sectors.	ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women, ACW, ABAC, ACCMSME
Network and Modelling	Consider organizing an annual ASEAN Women's Business Conference led by AWEN in coordination with other relevant sectoral bodies under the ASCC and the AEC where ASEAN Member States' public and private sector representatives, academe, and civil society converge to share good practices, discuss gaps and challenges, and put forward recommendations to achieve women's economic empowerment and gender equality in the region.	Support business and industry associations such as AWEN, in extending assistance for women to access markets and provide for opportunities in the ASEAN supply chain network.	ASEAN Economic Ministers, ACW ACCMSME, ABAC

It is proposed that these recommendations be included in a "Statement on Sustaining and Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic" and translated into a "Workplan on

the Action Agenda on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment in ASEAN During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic" for the consideration of ASEAN Leaders in the 38th and 39th ASEAN Summits in Brunei.<sup>58</sup> Activities leading to such is proposed to be included in the ACW Work Plan for 2021 to 2025, and referred to in the proposed strategic framework to operationalize the Declaration on a Gender-Responsive ASEAN Community.

It is also proposed to establish a Gender Mainstreaming Committee under the guidance and supervision of the ASEAN Coordinating Council to coordinate the mainstreaming of gender and women's empowerment across all three community pillars and not just the Socio-Economic pillar.

It is further proposed that women representatives from private sector be accorded the same status as ABAC as a women interest group (i.e. ASEAN Women's Business Advisory Council) or through an assured representation in the ABAC to ensure diversity and inclusivity.

Mainstreaming women's economic empowerment requires multi-sectoral collaboration and a multi-dimensional approach that cuts across the three ASEAN community pillars to ensure that policies are fair, equitable, and responds to the needs of women. Transformative change goes beyond recognizing the benefit of empowering women and requires a continued analysis of the structures and policies that shape the ASEAN. Ensuring that no one is left behind means that those who lack power like women are given the tools, means and resources to be empowered. The Action Agenda, as a living document, can be used as a tool for gender lens analysis and as a means to institutionalize a mechanism for ensuring gender equality.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: MANILA STATEMENT ON MAINSTREAMING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

We, the government and private sector delegates led by the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs' Network (AWEN) represented by the ten (10) ASEAN Member States: Brunei Darussalam, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Republic of Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Union of Myanmar, the Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of Singapore, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, together with Australia, the United States of America, and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP);

HAVING gathered in Manila, the Philippines on 28 to 31 August 2017 for the first ASEAN Women's Business Conference with the theme: "ASEAN Women: Leading Change" through the support of the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW), the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (ACCMSME), the ASEAN Senior Economic Officials (SEOM), the ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM), and the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC).

ACKNOWLEDGING with appreciation the activities organized in collaboration with our Partners in support of the ASEAN Women's Business Conference:

- WE ENDORSE the Co-Chair's Statement from the ASEAN forum on Women's Economic Empowerment: The Next Driver of ASEAN's Success co-hosted by the Governments of the Philippines and Australia which outlined the importance of women's economic empowerment as a major driver of ASEAN's future success and as a key strategy for achieving inclusive economic growth, stability, and prosperity in the region;
- WE REAFFIRM our commitment to eradicate widespread and entrenched disparities in women's access to economic opportunities and resources to ensure the inclusive development for all as discussed during the United States-ASEAN Connectivity through Trade and Investment (US-ACTI) Forum on Mainstreaming ASEAN Women in Trade of Goods and Services toward the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) 2025;
- WE RECOMMEND the proactive engagement of ASEAN Women (AWEN) in providing inputs to the design, development and implementation of regional strategies and policies in progressively

fostering gender mainstreaming and women business empowerment across the ASEAN Community as well as creating connectivity among women associations in ASEAN to enhance communication and cooperation that would strengthen the women's economic empowerment especially in rural areas; and

- WE WELCOME the Women ICT Frontier Initiative (WIFI), a capacity building programme on information and communication technology (ICT)- enabled women entrepreneurship of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for ICT for Development (APCICT) of the UNESCAP and call upon all relevant stakeholders to support its implementation in the ASEAN Member States.

DESIRING to be leaders of change for ASEAN Women through its full support to the implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 through the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment as stated in the Joint Statement of the Second ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women (AMMW) issued in October 2015 in Manila, the Philippines and the ACW Work Plan 2016-2020, and the implementation of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2025 to achieve a stronger, more inclusive, and integrated Community;

RECOGNIZING that gender equality and women's economic empowerment are cross-cutting concerns and that advancing women's economic empowerment supports a gender responsive AEC;

NOTING that women constitute more than half of the population of the ASEAN region and majority of whom are active participants in the region's economic activities, thereby boosting trade and economic growth;

CONSIDERING that the ACCMSME serves as the platform to advance women's economic empowerment in trade, leadership, and entrepreneurship, among others in the AEC pillar, as aligned with the Strategic Action Plan for SME Development (SAPSMED) 2016- 2025 particularly under E-2 (Human capital development for MSMEs will be enhanced especially for women and youth) of the Strategic Goal E: Promote Entrepreneurship and Human Capital Development; and

WELCOMING the resolution of ASEAN-BAC to designate AWEN as the Co-Chair for the ASEAN-BAC Businesswomen Working Group (ABBWG) to ensure effective collaboration and complement initiatives in providing voice to women in corporates and business under the AEC, and as an Associate Member of the Joint Business Councils;

DO HEREBY recommend the endorsement of the attached Action Agenda on Mainstreaming WEE in ASEAN (enclosed in Annex A) which was presented at the ASEAN Women's Business Conference and submitted to the ASEAN Senior Economic Officials and Economic Ministers for adoption by the ASEAN Leaders and endorsement for implementation by the relevant sectoral bodies in ASEAN.

DONE in Manila, Philippines, this 31st day of August 2017, in one single copy in the English language.

## **Annex A to Appendix A. Action Agenda on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment in the ASEAN**

The Action Agenda aims to mainstream Women's Economic Empowerment through innovation, trade and inclusive business, and human capital development by encouraging each ASEAN Member State to support the following actions:

- **ADOPT CONCRETE AND MEASURABLE ACTIONS** to address the barriers that impede maximizing women's full economic potential in the areas of: finance, information access, and markets; human capital development and leadership; and innovation and technology;
- **PROMOTE** women's participation and skills development in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (S.T.E.A.M.), including information and communication technologies (ICT) by providing, for example, incentives for women innovators, allocating more foreign investments in science research institutes and foundations, and by creating an enabling environment for ICT- empowerment of women entrepreneurs and to promote ICT as enabling tools for the advancement of women and their economic empowerment;
- **INVEST** in programs which provide enabling environments for women micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to prosper through ease of doing business initiatives, incentives and favourable tax regulations, helping them participate in inclusive and innovative businesses whether as consumer, seller, supplier, distributor, and worker, and by addressing the constraints that limit their integration in the international markets and global value chains (GVCs);
- **INCREASE** women's representation and leadership in the workforce at the executive and managerial positions by intensifying human capital development and capacity building programs that empower women to bear equal roles in all sectors as men do and, enhance gender equality policies and strategies to close the gender pay gap;
- **ENCOURAGE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR COLLABORATION** through the ASEAN BAC and AWEN for advocacy, networking, and outreach purposes to create more opportunities for women in business; AWEN shall echo the voices of women MSMEs as its representative in the ACW under ASCC and in the ACCMSME under AEC; and
- **CONSIDER** organizing an annual ASEAN Women's Business Conference led by AWEN in coordination with other relevant sectoral bodies under the ASCC and the AEC where ASEAN Member States' public and private sector representatives, academe, and civil society converge to share good practices, discuss gaps and challenges, and put forward recommendations to achieve women's economic empowerment and gender equality in the region.

# APPENDIX B: PROPOSED STATEMENT ON SUSTAINING AND PROMOTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT DURING AND AFTER THE COVID- 19 PANDEMIC

We, the leaders in and across the Member States of ASEAN together with women business associations and women CEOs, led and inspired by the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network (AWEN) reiterate the call for an inclusive and cohesive ASEAN by ensuring a gendered response to COVID-19 where women's economic needs and priorities are sustained and supported.

We laud and support communities that undertake an early diagnosis of the health and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, provide for strategies that promptly adapt and respond to changes, and foster innovation in the traditional ways of doing business to allow women's increased participation in the marketplace.

Desiring to promote a deeper integration of the ASEAN economy, we promote the sharing of best practices in digitizing or digitally transforming women-owned enterprises to further enhance access to cross border e-commerce.

We likewise encourage gender smart investing by ASEAN governments and private financial institutions to fill the lack of access of women to financial products to start or expand their businesses. Continued financial education for women should also be made a priority.

We shall develop through the leadership and reach of AWEN, a more integrated and effective network of micro, small, and medium-sized women-led and owned enterprises that create opportunities in the marketplace or in the supply chain network across ASEAN.

The current health and economic crisis have also allowed us to examine the progress of and improve on the "Action Agenda on Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in ASEAN" adopted on 31 August 2017 in Manila, Philippines considering the challenges faced by women during the pandemic. With this, we do hereby recommend the endorsement of the attached "Workplan on the Action Agenda on Mainstreaming WEE in ASEAN during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic" for adoption by the ASEAN Leaders and endorsement for implementation by the relevant sectoral bodies in ASEAN.

**DONE** in \_\_\_\_\_, in one single copy in the English Language.

## **Annex A to Appendix B: Proposed Workplan on the Action Agenda on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment in the ASEAN during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic**

On 31 August 2017, the Action Agenda on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment (AAWEE) in Manila, Philippines. It aims to mainstream WEE through innovation, trade and inclusive business, and human capital development by encouraging each ASEAN Member State to support the following actions:

- ADOPT concrete and measurable actions to address the barriers that impede maximizing women's full economic potential in the areas of finance, information access, and markets; human capital development and leadership; and innovation and technology.
- PROMOTE women's participation and skills development in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (S.T.E.A.M), including information and communication technologies.
- INVEST in program which provide enabling environments for women micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to prosper and make them part of the international market and global value chains (GVCs);
- INCREASE women's representation and leadership in the workforce at the executive and managerial position.
- ENCOURAGE public and private sector collaboration through the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (BAC) and AWEN to create more opportunities for women in businesses; and
- for AWEN to echo the voices of women MSMEs as its representative in the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) under the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) pillar and in the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on SMEs (ACCSME) under the AEC.

To operationalize the action agenda during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the following must be undertaken in order that a gendered response to the health and economic crisis in ASEAN is achieved. ASEAN instruments need targeted policies to close the gender gap in education and labour and create an enabling environment for women-owned and led businesses to thrive. To operationalize AAWEE in the AEC, regional policy makers are encouraged to take into consideration the following recommendations:

- DISAGGREGATION of data on gender in the ASEAN Statistical Yearbook to provide in-depth information on women participating in the marketplace, either as a worker or entrepreneur, to differentiate between women in urban, rural, or indigenous populations or women minorities who are even more at a disadvantage.
- REVIEW of ASEAN instruments and policies to ensure a gender normative framework and recognize the differential impact of gender on macroeconomic policies.
- ASSESSMENT of whether adequate representation is given to

women during ASEAN, ASEAN BAC, ACCMSME, and other relevant sectors during policy making in the ASCC.

- CREATION of education programs for women, either as apprenticeships or ICT upskilling, to close the gender gap in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 to achieve a stronger, more inclusive, and integrated community.
- INCLUSION of gender responsive indicators in the ASEAN scorecard for effective parental leave, flexible employment, and support for transition from informal employment to ease the double burden of unpaid labor of women, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- CREATION of an ASEAN Women's Work plan that provides for enabling environment for women led and owned MSMEs.
- INCREASE programs that allow for smart gender investing on women-led and women-owned enterprises.
- SUPPORT to business and industry associations, such as AWEN, that extend assistance for women to access the marketplace and provide for opportunities in the ASEAN supply chain network.

For ASEAN to create inclusive, cohesive, and resilient communities, women's economic empowerment during and after the COVID-19 pandemic must be treated as an urgent and cross-cutting concern. Not only will increased female participation in the workforce lift families out of poverty, but it can also boost countries' economies and maintain their stability. For ASEAN, women's economic empowerment can be the next driver of the region's success.

# NOTES

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- <sup>40</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>41</sup> UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment, Leave No One Behind: A Call to Action for Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment, 2016. Retrieved from <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/hlp%20wee/attachments/reports-toolkits/hlp-wee-report-2016-09-call-to-action-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1028>.
- <sup>42</sup> Page 94, UNHLP WEE Report.
- <sup>43</sup> Strategic Objective J.2, BDPA.
- <sup>44</sup> Page 95, UNHLP WEE Report.
- <sup>45</sup> Strategic Objective A.1, BDPA.
- <sup>46</sup> Strategic Objective A.2, BDPA.
- <sup>47</sup> Strategic Objective A.3, BDPA.
- <sup>48</sup> Page 96, UNHLP WEE Report. See also SDG 5.4 which recognizes and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure, and social protection and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.
- <sup>49</sup> Strategic Objective F.6, BDPA.
- <sup>50</sup> Page 97, UNHLP WEE Report.
- <sup>51</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>52</sup> Strategic Objective B.4, BDPA.
- <sup>53</sup> Page 98, UNHLP WEE Report.
- <sup>54</sup> Page 99, UNHLP WEE Report.
- <sup>55</sup> See Mill, J.S. (1869), *The Subjection of Women*. London: Longman, Green, Reader and Dyer.
- <sup>56</sup> Fike, Rosemarie. (2020), *Women’s Economic Rights – What’s Changed and Why Does it Matter?* Women and Progress 2020, Fraser Institute, 1. Retrieved from <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/women-progress-updated.pdf>
- <sup>57</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>58</sup> See Appendix B.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email [asia@oxfam.org](mailto:asia@oxfam.org).

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## AWEN

The ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network (AWEN) is a network of businesswomen in the region, operating to exchange knowledge and experience; develop and propose initiatives to promote economic and trade activities to enhance gender equality, empower and strengthen entrepreneurship skills for women; and create favorable environment for female-led enterprises and support for women entrepreneurship in the region.

## PHILWEN

The Philippine Women's Economic Network (PhilWEN) is a consortium of six business groups advocating the economic empowerment of women. It also acts as the focal point of AWEN in the Philippines.

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