



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

ASEAN Must Strengthen Regional Cooperation to close the gap on SDGs

By Mely Caballero-Anthony and Danielle Lynn Goh

2025 is a pivotal year for the global community. This year is mid-point for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. As the world takes stock of the milestones and gaps in meeting the SDGs, challenges like climate change, COVID-19 pandemic, wars in Ukraine and Gaza and heightened US-China rivalry have seriously impacted progress—and even resulted in reversal of gains achieved since the SDGs were adopted in 2015.

According to the [Sustainable Development Report 2024](#), there has been some progress in ASEAN in several areas but challenges remain in eradicating poverty. Broadly, with the region being vulnerable to disasters, ASEAN along with other countries in the Asia Pacific must build their resilience, protecting people's lives and livelihoods and reduce economic losses of those devastated by disasters. As a whole, in the wider [Asia-Pacific](#), only 11 per cent of the measurable targets are on track. On achieving zero hunger, ASEAN countries fared worse, with undernourishment and food security needing to be more urgently addressed. In the area of health security, there have been positive improvements particularly for maternal and child mortality. However, globally, while majority of the health indicators are moving in the right direction, [none](#) of the other health-related indicators have been achieved, and is unlikely to be reached by 2030. Of great concern are the SDGs on climate action, life below water and life on land. The Asia and the Pacific SDG [Progress Report 2024](#) highlighted that there has been a regression in Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific as regards to climate action.

Meeting the SDGs is critical to ASEAN. At the ASEAN Workshop on Sustainable Development 2025, ASEAN Secretary-General Dr Kao Kim Hourn [reaffirmed](#) ASEAN's commitment to sustainable development, and emphasised the importance of sustainable financing. This article will broadly discuss selected SDGs such as food, health and climate security.

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ASEAN 2025 Agenda and SDGs

With geopolitical fault lines and US-China rivalry deepening, the ongoing Myanmar crisis, and disputes in the South China Sea, ASEAN continues to face challenges to its unity and centrality. Plans to develop an ASEAN-wide digital payment system, and a power grid will allow for [regional integration](#), vital to the security of the region. ASEAN has also [urged](#) the Myanmar government to prioritise ending the civil war, and to adhere to the five-point consensus.

Confronted with geopolitical tensions, and bloc politics by major powers, ASEAN's integration is key to regional security and allows for cooperation and sustainable development. ASEAN has put in place regional initiatives to tackle food insecurity, during times of crisis. For example, the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR), which includes cooperation among ASEAN member states, China, Japan and South Korea, has been utilised actively, with countries [contributing](#) rice to countries that require help. However, the region faces multiple challenges, as ASEAN's food production levels are unable to meet increased demand, resulting in a need to import from outside the region. In addition, climate change impacts in Southeast Asia such as changing weather patterns and extreme weather events have further aggravated food insecurity. Regional supply chains can be [strengthened](#), as only 20 – 30 per cent of ASEAN trade in food and agricultural products are from intra-regional trade.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need to develop [regional capacities](#) and collaboration in preparation for future [pandemics](#). ASEAN has taken further steps to build these capacities. In 2022, the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED) was established, and the [One Health Network](#) and Joint Plan of Action was launched in June 2024. However, there remain [disparities](#) as regards to achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC). While most ASEAN member countries have progressed slightly in 2021, as compared to 2015, Myanmar had a decreased score, and Vietnam remained the same.

At a regional level, ASEAN is gradually developing a power grid that can help facilitate a regional market for power trading, distributing renewable energy more efficiently. This cooperation can be effective and instrumental to lessen the region's dependence on fossil fuels and coal. As of 2023, [coal](#)

generated about half of the region's electricity. Within Southeast Asia's energy mix, coal has [risen](#) from 9 percent in 2000 to 28 percent in 2023. It remains to be seen the impact of the ASEAN power grid on the energy transition, and if this would result in a shift away from fossil fuels. Ahead of the 2030 milestone, integrating climate, peace and security in the ASEAN agenda would allow for the region to identify potential at-risk areas, and signal the urgency to prioritise [climate security](#) and action in national and regional policies.

Can ASEAN lead the way?

In a fractured world, with the intensification of rival blocs, ASEAN's relevance will continue to be tested. ASEAN member states need to continue to engage and work with all countries, and maintain an inclusive approach to development and peace in spite of worsening geopolitical rivalry between major powers. The clarion call to strengthen its [unity](#) during the recent ASEAN foreign ministers' retreat held on 19 January 2025 in Langkawi, Malaysia, is a welcome one. ASEAN leadership on the global stage, will hinge on its solidarity, and its ability to demonstrate its effectiveness as a regional bloc in addressing the challenges it faces in sustainable development and advancing its values of comprehensive and cooperative security. More can certainly be done to strengthen intra-regional cooperation to better address the gaps in achieving the SDGs in ASEAN.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Jeffrey D. Sachs, Guillaume Lafortune, and Gregor Fuller. 2024. *Sustainable Development Report 2024*. Paris: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. 2024. *Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Goals Progress Report 2024*. Bangkok: United Nations, 2024.

ASEAN Secretariat. 2020. *ASEAN Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Baseline Report 2020*. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat.



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

CLIMATE CHANGE



NEWS & COMMENTARIES

EU warns of 'serious blow' from Trump on climate change

Global efforts to address climate change will be dealt a severe blow if U.S. President-elect Donald Trump again pulls the country out of the Paris Agreement, the EU's head of climate change policy has warned. Trump's transition team has prepared executive orders to withdraw the United States from the main global treaty on climate change, according to sources in the team.

Kate Abnett and Christian Levaux

Reuters | 8 January 2025

The Los Angeles wildfires are climate disasters compounded

An exceptional mix of environmental conditions has created an ongoing firestorm without known historical precedent across southern California. The ingredients for these infernos in the Los Angeles area, near-hurricane strength winds and drought, foretell an emerging era of compound events – simultaneous types of historic weather conditions, happening at unusual times of the year, resulting in situations that overwhelm our ability to respond.

Eric Holthaus

Guardian | 9 January 2025

2024 was the first year above 1.5 deg C of global warming, scientists say

The world just experienced the first full year in which global temperatures exceeded 1.5 deg C above pre-industrial times, confirmed the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S).

The Straits Times

10 January 2025

Climate 'whiplash' linked to raging LA fires

Climate change has made the grasses and shrubs that are fuelling the Los Angeles fires more vulnerable to burning, scientists say. Rapid swings between dry and wet conditions in the region in recent years have created a massive amount of tinder-dry vegetation that is ready to ignite.

Matt McGrath

BBC | 10 January 2025

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Critical geopolitics of global environmental norms: Exploring Indonesia's response to climate mitigation agenda

This article delves into the complex dynamics of global environmental governance, focusing on the role of developing countries in shaping climate mitigation efforts. While the design of global environmental norms often favours the interests of the Global North, the Global South challenges this hegemony through localised adaptation of these norms. By adopting a critical geopolitical perspective on Indonesia as a case study, the article highlights the agency of developing countries in global environmental governance processes.

Margareth Sembiring

Geopolitics, pp. 1–24 | 2025

A conceptual framework for responding to cross-border climate change impacts

The study proposes a conceptual framework that provides typologies of cross-border climate impacts and responses and define different configurations of actors who may respond to impacts. A set of alternative governance approaches are then proposed to address different types of cross-border climate impact, potentially minimising undesirable consequences of adaptation responses.

Sara Talebian, et al.

Environmental Science & Policy, Volume 163, 103949 | 2025

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development 2025

The 2025 APFSD under the theme: "Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no one behind in Asia and the Pacific" will assess progress on the SDGs under review: Goal 3 (good health and well-being); 5 (gender equality); 8 (decent work and economic growth); 14 (life below water) and 17 (partnership for the Goals). The Forum will provide a platform and sessions to support countries presenting their voluntary national reviews at the 2025 High-level Political Forum (HLPF).

Bangkok, Thailand

25 - 28 February 2025

ENERGY SECURITY



NEWS & COMMENTARIES

AI bigwigs want to go all-in on nuclear. They also happen to be behind nuclear companies

Tech giants have pointed to the benefit of nuclear energy's reliability versus other renewable energy sources, such as solar or wind. Microsoft in September secured a deal to reopen a reactor on Three Mile Island, aiming to revive a different reactor by 2028 to power its AI ambitions. Amazon and Meta have also begun working to lock in deals to secure future nuclear power for their data centres.

Clare Duffy

CNN | 27 December 2024

Constellation inks \$1 billion deal to supply US government with nuclear power

Constellation, the country's largest operator of nuclear power plants, will deliver electricity to more than 13 federal agencies as part of the agreements with the U.S. General Services Administration.

Laila Kearney and Timothy Gardner

Reuters | 3 January 2025

Philippines eyes a nuclear power revival as energy costs soar

The Philippines is weighing the revival of its controversial Bataan Nuclear Power Plant as officials seek to address soaring electricity costs, despite continued resistance to atomic energy over safety, corruption and environmental concerns.

Sam Beltran

South China Morning Post | 6 January 2025

Electricity trading, renewable energy among new areas of Singapore-Malaysia cooperation

Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said one major project in the works is the import of electricity from Sarawak via undersea cables. This would build on positive momentum from the increase in capacity of the Lao PDR-Thailand-Malaysia-Singapore Power Integration Project.

Chin Soo Fang

The Straits Times | 8 January 2025

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Balancing affordability and sustainability: Evidence on public perceptions of reasonable electricity bills in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

This study highlights the need for tariff reforms that better balance affordability with equity and actual provision costs, advocating for less punitive structures for households with higher energy consumption.

Pham Nhu Man and Truong Dang Thuy

Energy Policy, Vol. 198 | 2025

Coal 2024: Analysis and forecast to 2027

New IEA report finds that strong deployment of renewables is set to curb growth in coal use even as electricity demand surges, with China – the world's biggest coal consumer – remaining pivotal.

International Energy Agency

2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

International Conference on Stakeholder Engagement for Nuclear Power Programmes

The conference will provide a global platform to exchange good practices, experiences, challenges and lessons learned related to stakeholder engagement for nuclear power programmes.

Vienna, Austria

26-30 May 2025

FOOD SECURITY



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

New law to bolster Singapore's food safety, security passed, with powers to increase food stockpiles
Singapore recently passed a new law that aims to safeguard its food security and bolster its food safety regulations. The newly enacted law will allow for the island-state to stockpile more food types amidst climate change and the increasingly complex agri-food supply chain.

Shabana Begum

The Straits Times | 9 January 2025

Food security as supply security: Geopolitical implications for ASEAN

Global food supply chains have been disrupted in recent years by the COVID-19 pandemic; geopolitical threats such as the Russia-Ukraine war and the Hamas-Israel conflict; and the escalating US-China trade war. The ASEAN's ability to collaborate in improving supply chain security, despite differences in leanings within the US-China geopolitical spectrum, presents a best practice for countries and regions to emulate.

Jose Ma. Luis Montecclaros

RSIS Annual Review | 13 January 2025

China is scouring the globe in search of new food suppliers

In the face of the upcoming Trump administration, as well as the looming threat of nascent tariffs and trade restrictions from the US, China is pushing to diversify food sources away from traditional western suppliers. This article explores Beijing's determination in cultivating new trade partners and reducing its dependence on the US and its allies to safeguard its own food security.

The Business Times

15 January 2025

Food Security in the face of Climate Change

The recent flood season in Malaysia in December 2024 has destroyed over 100 farmlands across 5 Malaysian states and resulted in a significant shortage of food supply and the skyrocketing of food prices. In this article, the author discusses the dire urgency to address Malaysia's food security and highlights the importance of building a resilient agri-food system with a multi-pronged strategy that integrates technology, policy, and community engagement.

Salini Devi Rajendran

Malaysia Gazette | 16 January 2025

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

The Russia-Ukraine war reduced food production and exports with a disparate geographical impact worldwide

This article explores the effects of the Russia-Ukraine war on global winter cereal production and trade. It also discusses the disproportionate impacts that the war has on lower and middle-income countries and outlines a framework which provides insights into the cascading effects of conflict on global food systems which offers a predictive tool for policymakers to address food availability challenges during future crises.

Nan Jia et al.

Communications Earth & Environment | 2024

Feeding the gap: Examining the nexus of food insecurity, gender, and poverty in the Philippines

This article evaluates the recent efforts by the Philippine government to address food insecurity in the Philippines. The author argues that some of these efforts overlooks the broader challenge of consistent access to nutritious food and highlights the need for a deeper exploration of socio-cultural factors, family health, and alternative food sources like street food.

Veronica L. Gregorio

ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute Perspective | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Sustainable Foods 2025 International Conference and Exhibition

This conference will convene global policy makers, food and drink multinationals, agribusinesses, technology firms, financiers, and investors to explore initiatives dedicated to accelerating the implementation and adoption of sustainable food systems.

London

28-29 January 2025

HEALTH SECURITY



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

One-Health in Action: What Wildlife Health Surveillance Can Tell Us About Pandemic Prevention

WHO partnered with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in Cambodia and implemented the Wildlife Health Surveillance Network into national policy. A Q&A on the surveillance system with advisor Dr Emily Denstedt and project manager Mr Sokha on shifting from reaction to prevention of outbreaks is published.

World Health Organization
16 December 2024

Co-creating EPW2: A vision for health in Europe kicks off

WHO's second European Programme of Work, 2025-2030 was held on 9 Dec 2024. Five thematic hearings addressed critical issues such as mental health and noncommunicable diseases, ageing, technology and innovation, climate change and environment, and health security and emergency preparedness.

World Health Organization
30 December 2024

'Moral imperative': WHO presses China to share COVID origins data

The World Health Organization (WHO) has continued its request for China to share data and access on the origins of COVID-19, and called it a moral and scientific imperative.

Al Jazeera
31 December 2024

'Hospitals have become battlegrounds': Gaza's health system on brink of collapse

Dr. Rik Peepkorn, WHO representative for West Bank and Gaza and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk called for increased protection of hospitals during warfare by all sides and at all times, at a Security Council meeting on 3 January 2025.

United Nations News
3 January 2025

SELECTED PUBLICATION

A health security-based framework for prioritizing regions for digital learning in complex health emergencies

In response to the expanding digital health and learning research, the paper evaluates the value of virtual communities of practice in health emergency response.

D'Andrea, S. M., Fadul, N., and Struminger, B.
Frontiers in Public Health, Volume 12 | 2024

Strengthening global health security under the Biden-Harris administration

The paper discusses global health security under the Biden-Harris Administration, including the COVID-19 response, regional partnerships and reform of the World Health Organization. It calls for sustained commitment to bilateral, regional, and multilateral cooperation.

Pace, L., and Susan C. Kim
Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics, First View | 2025

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

International Day of Epidemic Preparedness 2024

Countries across the globe observed the International Day of Epidemic Preparedness on 27 December 2024, with calls to promote global awareness and collaboration in preparation for future epidemics.

Global
27 December 2024

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF



Photo Credit: DFID - UK Department for International Development via Flickr.com/Creative Commons

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Emergency preparedness and contingency planning: Lessons from 2024 for ASEAN Disaster Management

In 2024, natural hazards affected 146 million people with key events including Papua New Guinea's landslides, Spain's flooding, the Atlantic hurricane season, and the Pacific typhoon season highlighting critical lessons for emergency preparedness and disaster response.

Keith Paolo Catibog Landicho

RSIS Commentaries | 23 December 2024

Trends that will spur humanitarian needs in 2025

The list draws on an extensive in-dept reporting, which features interviews with researchers, aid workers, and policymakers, as well as with people and communities working to rebuild their lives in the midst of conflicts and disasters.

The New Humanitarian

7 January 2025

Biden administration announces its final military aid package for Ukraine before leaving office

The Biden administration has announced the final tranche of military aid it will send to Ukraine, amounting to about \$500 million. The last package comes as the White House prepares to announce another round of sanctions on Russia.

Alex Marquardt

CNN | 9 January 2025

Floods remain biggest threat in 2025, Indonesian disaster agency says

With La Niña triggering a wetter rainy season in the country, higher intensity rainfall is expected to occur until at least April. This increases the risk of hydrometeorological disasters across Indonesia.

Dio Suhenda

The Jakarta Post | 13 January 2025

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Targeting transformative disaster risk resilience in South and South-West Asia: Asia Pacific disaster report 2024 for ESCAP subregions

The report highlights the growing severity of climate-related disaster in South and South-West Asia, driven by climate change and impacting millions of lives, economies, and ecosystems.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific 2024

Global humanitarian overview 2025

This report is an annual assessment of global humanitarian needs and how to respond to them. The document provides an analysis of the drivers of needs and an overview of the resources required to support people targeted for assistance. It also provides an account of the humanitarian system's collective achievements.

Humanitarian Action

2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Possibility Lab Community of Practice

The webinar brings together experts to discuss the importance of collaboration across the emergency management sector, including building mutual trust with a range of sectors, organisations and people to achieve collective outcomes that better support communities before, during and after disasters.

Recorded Webinar

2025

MIGRATION



Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Poland's changing population mix turns political
Some 2.5 million immigrants live in Poland. A seismic shift compared to post-World War II, where ethnic Poles made up 98 percent of the population. The influx is causing tension among Poles, with 42 percent saying their country should shut the door on arrivals.

Wojciech Kość

Politico | 6 January 2025

Ceasefire offers little respite for Lebanon's displaced migrant workers as shelters close
In Lebanon, thousands of migrant workers are left homeless, with no government support in sight. NGO-run shelters took those who were laid off and forced to the street in large numbers. But majority of the shelters shut when following the ceasefire, leaving migrants stranded.

Anjana Sankar

The National | 10 January 2025

The road to safety and security for migrant workers

During the COVID-19 lockdown, nearly 2.6 million migrant workers were stranded across India. Internal migrants in India are often informally employed in unorganised sectors and vulnerable to exploitation, harassment and discrimination.

Johnson Topno

India Development Review | 10 January 2025

US, Colombia clash over deportations and raise tariffs in show of Trump's pledge to limit migration

Colombia rejected two US military aircraft carrying migrants, accusing the Trump administration of ill treatment of migrants. In response, the US has ordered visa restrictions, and 25% tariffs on Colombian incoming goods which could be raised to 50%.

Regina Garcia Cano and Astrid Suarez

AP News | 27 January 2025

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Towards the more effective use of irregular migration data in policymaking

This policy brief explores obstacles that hinder the collection and use of irregular migration data, how this affects policymakers and other actors, and potential avenues for strengthening the evidence base.

Migration Policy Institute

2024

International migration and sustainable development

This report examines the linkages between international migration and the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. It also discusses how international migration is defined and measured and examines trends in international migration at the global and regional level.

UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs

2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

The Politics and Poetics of Immobility: Asian Migrants (not) on the Move in (Post-)Pandemic Times

The workshop calls for a comprehensive investigation into the experiences and practices of Asian migrants pertaining to (post-)pandemic immobilities. With the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting established (im)mobility regimes and introducing immobility to broader migrant populations, it becomes imperative to examine immobility as a distinct phenomenon.

Online

2024