



Understanding the ASEAN CHARTER and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint





The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional organization of ten countries in Southeast Asia - Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam. It was established on August 8, 1967 for the purpose of accelerating economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region, as well as promoting regional peace and stability.

Brunei Darussalam	8 January 1984
Cambodia	30 April 1999
Indonesia	8 August 1967
Lao PDR	23 July 1997
Malaysia	8 August 1967
Myanmar	23 July 1997
Philippines	8 August 1967
Singapore	8 August 1967
Thailand	8 August 1967
Vietnam	28 July 1995

Over its 40 years of existence, ASEAN has signed many declarations and statements embodying the Association's ideals and agreements. ASEAN, however, has been strongly criticized for its slow progress and for its failure to tackle controversial issues like human rights. It has come to be known for the so-called "ASEAN Way", or the conduct of diplomacy based on non-interference, consultation and consensus.

However, partly to address such criticism, but more importantly to make ASEAN more dynamic, the Association has embarked on more ambitious projects in the last ten years.

In December 1997, ASEAN Vision 2020 was adopted, defining a strategic goal for the Association and calling for a strong collaboration among members towards the creation of "a community of caring societies." This paved the way for a series of action plans to start working towards the vision outlined in the ASEAN Vision 2020. These action plans identify specific policies and projects that ASEAN members will undertake to realize the goal of cooperation and community. They cover a period of six years and are reviewed every three years. The first of such plans was the Hanoi Plan of Action, implemented from 1998-2004. The current plan is the Vientiane Action Programme (VAP) that takes effect from 2004-2010.

During the 9th Summit in Bali, Indonesia in October 2003, ASEAN Leaders signed the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II). In this agreement, they reaffirmed the commitment to establish an ASEAN Community and identified political and security cooperation, economic cooperation, and socio-cultural cooperation as its three pillars. The agreement established the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), the ASEAN Security Community (ASC), and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

On November 20, 2007 during the 13th Summit in Singapore, ASEAN Leaders signed the ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint. The signing of the two documents signalled more formal arrangements for the Association, and declared it a rules-based ASEAN.

The ASEAN Charter is to the regional organization what a Constitution is to a country. It embodies the basic principles and objectives of the organization, and defines the structure and modes of its membership and governance. The AEC Blueprint, on the other hand, is like a country's long-term or strategic development plan that lays down the policies and projects that will be implemented within a given period. In ASEAN, the AEC Blueprint is one of the three plans that will be used to realize the ASEAN Community. The other two are the Political-Security Community and the Socio-Cultural Community Blueprints, which are still being formulated.

What is the ASEAN Charter?

The ASEAN Charter is an agreement to establish the legal and institutional framework for ASEAN. It has three Chapters, 55 Articles, and four Annexes. The structure and key provisions of the Charter are outlined in Table 2. While it has been signed by ASEAN Leaders, the Charter has to be ratified by each member country, according to each one's ratification and legislative processes.



The Charter gives ASEAN its legal personality. It codifies ASEAN's many previous agreements and declarations, reaffirms long-held principles of community, cooperation, consultation and consensus, and includes the specific goals of the three ASEAN Communities that have earlier been defined. It defines the conduct of its external relations and how it should relate with the United Nations and other international organizations.

The big part of the Charter is devoted to clarifying the conduct of ASEAN's own operations, the identification of its purposes and principles, and the relationship between Members. It clarifies issues of membership, and delineates functions and responsibilities of the different ASEAN organs. It creates a new formal ASEAN bureaucracy, including the following:

- ASEAN Coordinating Council composed of ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting twice a year;
- ASEAN Community Councils: ASEAN Political-Security Council, ASEAN Economic Council, and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Council;
- Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN, composed of appointees by Members with the rank of Ambassador, and based in the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta.; and,
- ASEAN Human Rights Body, the terms of reference of which shall be determined by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting

Table 2
A QUICK GUIDE TO THE ASEAN CHARTER

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Key Provisions</i>
	Preamble	The preamble is an introductory statement that explains the reasons for adopting the Charter and the key objectives it seeks to attain. A milestone in the Charter is the inclusion of "respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms."
I	Purposes and Principles	It outlines 15 purposes of ASEAN including the creation of a single market and production base, and the promotion of an ASEAN identity. The Charter outlines 14 principles, reaffirming those already contained in existing declarations and agreements.
II	Legal Personality	The Charter confers legal personality to ASEAN.
III	Membership	This chapter defines the membership of ASEAN, the rights and obligations of members, and how new members may be admitted.
IV	Organs	Chapter IV identifies the different official bodies of ASEAN and defines their structures and functions. New bodies mandated are the ASEAN Coordinating Council, the ASEAN Community Councils, the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN, and the ASEAN Human Rights Body.
V	Entities Associated with ASEAN	The chapter identifies entities associated with the organization, and gives mandate to the Committee of Permanent Representatives to prescribe rules of procedure and criteria for engagement with them.
VI	Immunities and Privileges	The chapter confers immunities and privileges on ASEAN as are necessary for the exercise of its functions. These immunities and privileges shall be covered in separate ASEAN agreements.
VII	Decision Making	The chapter reaffirms consultation and consensus as the primary mode of decision making.
VIII	Settlement of Disputes	The general principle calls for dialogue consultation and negotiation in the settlement of disputes. Unresolved disputes shall be referred to the ASEAN Summit for its decision.
IX	Budget and Finance	Operational budget of ASEAN shall be met by equal annual contributions of members.
X	Administration and Procedure	Chairmanship of ASEAN rotates annually. English is adopted as the working language of ASEAN.
XI	Identity and Symbols	"One Vision, One Identity, One Community" is the ASEAN motto.
XII	External Relations	Dialogue Coordinators are given mandate to represent ASEAN and co-chair meetings with Dialogue Partners.
XIII	General and Final Provisions	Ratification of the ASEAN Charter shall be in accordance with internal procedures of Members. Review of the Charter may be done five years after it has come into force.
Annex 1	ASEAN Sectoral Ministerial Bodies	The annex gives a list of the sectoral bodies under the three ASEAN Communities (Political-Security, Economic and Socio-Cultural).
Annex 2	Entities Associated with ASEAN	The annex gives the list of entities associated with ASEAN according to categories: Parliamentarians; Business Organizations; Think Tanks and Academic Institutions; Accredited Civil Society Organizations; and Other Stakeholders in ASEAN.
Annex 3	ASEAN Flag	The annex gives the meaning of the ASEAN flag, and specifies its dimensions and design.
Annex 4	ASEAN Emblem	The annex gives the meaning of the ASEAN emblem, and specifies its dimensions and design.



Changes have also been introduced to some existing ASEAN organs, like:

- The holding the ASEAN Summit twice a year, instead of the current practice of holding it just once a year;
- There will be a single Chairpersonship for key high-level ASEAN bodies, meaning that the country who is Chair of ASEAN for the year will hold the Chairmanship of most of the official bodies of the organization; and,
- The redefinition and strengthening of the roles of the Secretary General and the ASEAN Secretariat.

What has been the response to the ASEAN Charter?

The ASEAN Charter has been met with mixed reactions from different sectors. Governments in and outside of ASEAN consider the signing of the Charter as a necessary step towards giving legal force to ASEAN's agreements and declarations. The Charter is also seen as adding formality to ASEAN, establishing rules, and signalling ASEAN's resolve to implement agreements according to these formal rules.

Many civil society organizations, however, are disappointed that the ASEAN Charter lacks important details in many places and fails to create more spaces for peoples' participation. For instance, it does not have clear mechanisms for dispute settlement, accountability and redress. Many of the details for these mechanisms are left to the ministerial bodies to define. While the Charter talks about a people-oriented ASEAN, it does not provide clear mechanisms for transparency and participation. It is silent about how ASEAN's operations can be subject to independent scrutiny, how interested citizens can participate in official ASEAN processes, and how ASEAN will make information available.

The Charter gives provisions for a still government-centric ASEAN, but does not include or mention provisions for the people, particularly farmers, migrant labor and women.

It gives a clear preference for a market-driven economy. The goal of a Single Market and production

base seems to be defined only in terms of liberalized markets, and does not give as much attention to other possible economic interventions. This becomes a concern when taken together with the AEC Blueprint that is discussed at length below.

The most welcome provisions in the ASEAN Charter are the inclusion of human rights in the preamble and statement of principles, and the creation of the human rights body. However, the human rights body, which has been the subject of civil society advocacy for almost one and a half decades, is yet undefined. The terms of reference for the human rights body will still have to be decided by the Foreign Ministers.

Finally, the Charter building process was characterized by inadequate consultation. No draft was circulated so that it could be discussed by people before it was finalized. As a result, there was limited opportunity for citizens to give inputs to the drafting of the Charter. The concern being raised now is that the Charter will be ratified without the people understanding its full implication. Similarly, many mechanisms mandated by the Charter still need to be defined and supported by separate blueprints or terms of reference. This is similar to crafting enabling legislations for a country's Constitutional provisions, or drawing up implementing rules and regulations for laws that have been enacted. The drawing up of these blueprints and terms of reference – specifically, how democratic and inclusive they would be, and how much consultation and discussion will they be subjected to – is as important as the ideas expressed in the Charter itself.

What is the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)?

The AEC is one of the pillars of the dream ASEAN Community as set out in the Bali Concord II. ASEAN hopes to establish a single market and production base by 2015. This means that by 2015, the movement of goods, services, investment and skilled labor in ASEAN will be completely opened up and liberalized, and capital flows will be less restricted. There will remain to be flexibilities, exceptions and restrictions (especially in the flow of money and capital) to this liberalization, and Members who are not yet ready to liberalize their services sector may



choose to postpone opening up that sector (ASEAN Minus X formula). The strategic goal and commitment, however, is to remove all these restrictions and exceptions, and for all Members to have the same commitments.

A single market and production base basically means that instead of just looking at markets and sources within national boundaries and involving national economic actors, Members will now look at the region as a whole. This means that a Member Country will treat goods and services coming from anywhere in ASEAN the same way as it treats national goods; it will give the same privileges and access to ASEAN investors as it gives to its national investors; and skilled labor and professional will be free to practice their occupation anywhere in ASEAN.

To facilitate faster integration into a single market and production base, the AEC gives focus to two special areas: the priority integration sectors, and food, agriculture and forestry. There are 12 priority integration sectors: agro-based products, automotive, electronics, fisheries, rubber-based products, textiles and apparels, wood-based products, air travel, e-ASEAN, healthcare, tourism, and logistics. These are sectors which most ASEAN Members have common interest in, and where they compete with each other the most. The idea is that if these sectors are fully liberalized, the sectors will be integrated, ASEAN Members will develop regional advantage in these sectors by attracting intra-ASEAN investment and trade (for instance, by outsourcing to each other), and help develop “made in ASEAN” products.

The special focus on food, agriculture and forestry has to do with how to develop a sector that is considered most sensitive by ASEAN Members. For it to be integrated into a single market, the AEC Blueprint looks at how trade liberalization in this area will be implemented, and how common standards will be developed. It is also concerned with cooperation and technology transfer with the help of international/regional organizations (like the Food and Agricultural Organization) and the private sector. It also calls for linking agricultural producers through the promotion and networking of agricultural cooperatives.

Aside from the single market, the AEC also envisions a highly competitive economic

region, equitable economic development and full integration into the global economy. The development of a competitive region will be done by establishing some common policies and building the needed infrastructure. For this, ASEAN will harmonize policies in competition, consumer protection, intellectual property rights, taxation and e-commerce. It will establish an integrated transport network (air, sea and land); develop ICT systems that can be connected and used by all countries in the region; pursue projects to integrate electricity grids and gas pipelines; promote mining as a sector; and, attract the private sector to finance these initiatives. The issue of equity will be addressed mainly through the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs); and the closing of the development gap between richer/bigger and poorer/smaller ASEAN countries, and between ASEAN and other regions, through the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI). The IAI is a project that identifies the technical assistance and capacity building needs of ASEAN countries to be able to participate fully in regional integration. Finally, the AEC seeks to harmonize ASEAN agreements with existing multilateral rules and regulations, and pursue policies that will further integrate the region with the rest of the world.

What does the AEC mean for us?

The ASEAN Economic Community is an ambitious goal which, unfortunately, was developed without meaningful consultations with the different economic sectors in the region. As a result, the blueprint that was drawn up to support it is rather technical and does not allow ordinary economic actors to find significant roles for themselves. Big economic actors and businesses may be in a position to take advantage of the policies and projects enumerated in the blueprint, but it lacks many other policies and projects that could help small producers and businesses to cope with integration.

It should be noted that there is no mention of small farmers or fishers in the blueprint, and the mention of workers only refers to professionals and highly-skilled workers. The section on the promotion of agricultural cooperatives is concentrated on linking and networking, suggesting the need for them to conglomerate and become big. How these cooperatives can



**Table 3
KEY ELEMENTS OF THE AEC BLUEPRINT**

<i>CHARACTERISTICS</i>	<i>KEY ELEMENTS</i>		
A. Single Market and Production Base			
<i>Free flow of goods</i>	<p>Elimination of Tariffs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by 2010 for ASEAN-6 and by 2015 for CLMV (with flexibilities for some sensitive products by 2018) • Priority Integration Sectors: by 2007 for ASEAN-6 and 2012 for CLMV • Sensitive List (SL) tariffs to 0-5% by 1 January 2010 for ASEAN-6, 1 January 2013 for Viet Nam, 1 January 2015 for Lao PDR and Myanmar and by 1 January 2017 for Cambodia • Phase in products in the General Exceptions List <p>Elimination of Non-Tariff Barriers. By 2010 for ASEAN-5 (ASEAN-6 minus the Philippines), 2012 for the Philippines, and 2015 with flexibilities to 2018 for CLMV</p> <p>Ease of trade transactions thru: Trade facilitation, Customs Integration, ASEAN Single Window.</p>		
<i>Free flow of services</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove all restrictions on trade in services by 2015 • Progressively liberalize financial services by 2020 • Liberalization through the ASEAN Minus X formula. • Mutual recognition arrangements (MRAs) 		
<i>Free flow of investment</i>	<p>ASEAN Investment Area (AIA) realized by 2015 (opening up of all industries and national treatment granted to all investors, with some exceptions)</p> <p>Establishment of the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement (ACIA)</p>		
<i>Freer flow of capital</i>	Strengthening ASEAN Capital Market Development and Integration, and promoting greater capital mobility.		
<i>Free flow of skilled labor</i>	Facilitation of movement and employment of professionals and skilled labor engaged in cross-border trade and investment related activities.		
<i>Priority Integration Sectors</i>	Comprehensive integration of 12 priority sectors to catalyze overall economic integration.		
<i>Food, Agriculture and Forestry</i>	<p>Intra- and extra-ASEAN trade and long-term competitiveness of ASEAN's food, agriculture and forestry products/commodities through liberalized trade in agriculture and forestry; the development and implementation of common management systems and regulation in fisheries, pesticide use, forest certification and bio-security; the application of improved standards for safety and quality.</p> <p>Cooperation with international and regional organisations and private sector.</p> <p>Promotion of ASEAN agricultural cooperatives</p>		
B. Competitive Economic Region			
	<p>Development and implementation of policies on competition, consumer protection and intellectual property rights.</p> <p>Infrastructure Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient, secure and integrated transport network; ASEAN Single Aviation Market; ASEAN Single Shipping Market • Interconnectivity and technical interoperability among ICT systems, trust in e-commerce • Energy cooperation in bio-fuels, and interconnected networks of electricity grids and gas pipelines [Trans-ASEAN Gas Pipeline (TAGP) and the ASEAN Power Grid (APG)] • Trade and investment in geological and mineral sector (mining) • Attraction of greater private sector involvement. <p>Development of policies to eliminate double-taxation, and to enhance e-commerce.</p>		
C. Equitable Economic Development			
	<p>ASEAN Policy Blueprint for SME Development (APBSD) 2004-2014</p> <p>The Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) – vehicle to narrow the development gap within ASEAN and between ASEAN and other parts of the world.</p>		
D. Integration into the Global Economy			
	<p>Coherent Approach towards External Economic Relations (taking into account external rules and regulations in developing AEC policies)</p> <p>Enhanced participation in global supply networks</p>		
IMPLEMENTATION			
<i>Implementation Mechanism</i>	<table border="0"> <tr> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency in notification • Consensus • ASEAN-X formula </td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ratification of legal instruments in 6 months • Enhanced Dispute Settlement Mechanisms • Flexibility </td> </tr> </table>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency in notification • Consensus • ASEAN-X formula 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ratification of legal instruments in 6 months • Enhanced Dispute Settlement Mechanisms • Flexibility
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<i>Resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASEAN Development Fund (ADF) • Technical studies • Translating AEC targets into national targets • Participation of ADB, WB/IFC, dialogue partners, private sector • Strengthen ASEAN Secretariat research and planning capabilities • Strengthen Members' research and planning capabilities • Capacity building for newer members 		
<i>Review</i>	Periodic review of the AEC		

• ASEAN-6 refers to Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
• CLMV refers to Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam



be developed to defend production and increase incomes is not clear.

The AEC seems to equate regional economic integration with merely simple and fast liberalization. It is not clear whether the benefits of regional integration are reserved for the region. With the goal of coherence with international rules, it appears that the AEC is just a platform so that ASEAN Members can liberalize faster. The blueprint is stronger in its pursuit of accessing external markets (making ASEAN a competitive region, liberalizing all economic areas) than it is in developing an internal regional market. Only the priority integration sectors specifically target the regional complementation and the development of an internal market ("made in ASEAN"), but it remains to be seen how successful this initiative is. The priority integration sectors were introduced as early as 2004 in the VAP, but until now no substantial progress has been reported.

It has been shown that liberalization in trade and investment can have negative impacts on the economy and local employment. Many studies also cast doubt on the claim that liberalization results in increased trade which in turn results in higher economic welfare. These studies say that growth does not automatically follow liberalization. The experience of East Asia in the financial crisis also should serve as a caution to the region. Wide-ranging liberalization measures, especially in capital, can result to volatility in capital flows and affect the real economy. The same is true for the opening up of the goods and services sector to competition from other countries. Similarly, big projects like an interconnected power grid, the promotion of bio-fuels, or the entry of mining concessions have the potential of (a) displacing communities visited by these projects; (b) endangering food security by encouraging the clearing or conversion of agricultural lands for industrial uses or for purposes of cultivating bio-fuels; and (c) contaminating water resources and damaging the environment. The AEC blueprint does not fully recognize this danger and hence does not provide clear plans to address the negative impacts of liberalization and big integration projects.

The AEC blueprint does not contain any discussion on how to learn from the economic growth and development experiences of the more

advanced ASEAN countries. For instance, it does not discuss how protective support given by Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia helped develop their industries; or how Singapore's huge investments in public services and infrastructure were crucial in developing its internal market. Instead, the blueprint talks about completely eliminating these protective mechanisms (e.g. performance requirement and national regulation are non-tariff barriers) and attracting the private sector. While there is mention of consumer protection and competition policy, these have yet to be elaborated. Transparency and access to information, and citizen's participation are also not discussed as part of these safeguards.

There are specific action points and timelines on when certain liberalization policies should be in place, but the AEC blueprint lacks discussion on the requirements so Members can integrate properly. Financing is crucial in getting the many projects listed in the AEC blueprint off the ground, but there is not enough discussion on how the CLMV, for instance, can access resources so they can participate in these projects. The blueprint only talks about the IAI and the ASEAN Development Fund, which are both limited mechanisms for financing, covering mostly capacity building and technical assistance projects. It does not talk about how the richer Members should assist or co-fund projects for the poorer Members. It is widely known that non-ASEAN Members (e.g. regional banks, international institutions and bilateral donors) contribute bigger amounts in ASEAN regional funds than do the ASEAN Members themselves. While extra help is needed, the disproportionately large external contributions to regional funds may unduly influence the development priorities of ASEAN and its needy members. That is, it is possible that the projects that get implemented are those that follow the donors' priorities.

Beyond the issue of financing are other broader issues that put into question how regional solidarity will be achieved in the AEC. The blueprint is specific about harmonizing AEC rules with international rules and regulations, but there is no discussion on how different country interests will be managed and protected in the context of international rules.

The ASEAN Economic Community idea provides some exciting possibilities for the



peoples of the region. The word community after all is associated with cooperation and people coming together, working together and helping each other. The idea of a Single Market and production base can also mean that ASEAN producers increase interaction and exchanges among each other, and temper the urge to compete against each other. It can also mean that truly regional products – ones which producers from different Member countries contribute in the making of – can be promoted.

However, the AEC blueprint is not a blueprint for community in this sense. For the AEC to be really relevant, it should be reoriented and involve the people more in planning and implementation. The compulsion for growth would be desirable if the underlying motivation is to improve the lives of ordinary peoples and communities. A real community is one which ordinary peoples embrace, and embodies their aspiration of solidarity and cooperation.

What are the free trade agreements that ASEAN is entering into and how will it affect farmers?

The ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) is the main economic scheme in ASEAN. It is implemented through the Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT) Scheme, which provides that all tariffs will be eliminated by 2010 for ASEAN-6 and by 2015 for CLMV. All sensitive products will be included in the scheme by 2018.

Aside from AFTA, ASEAN is involved in seven other FTAs as a region. These are:

- ASEAN-China FTA (ACFTA) - an Early Harvest Program, involving fruits and vegetables, is already being implemented with the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand; negotiations in the other areas are being completed;
- ASEAN-Korea FTA (AKFTA) - the agreement has been signed, except by Thailand;
- ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership (AJCEP) – negotiations have been completed and the agreement is expected to be signed in early 2008;

- ASEAN-India Regional Trade and Investment Area – negotiations in goods are expected to be completed by May of 2008;
- ASEAN- Australia and New Zealand FTA – negotiations ongoing
- ASEAN – European Union FTA – a joint declaration was signed in November 2007 but negotiations have yet to start;
- East Asia Free Trade Area (EAFTA) – still under consultation and study.

AFTA itself accounts for a rather small proportion of intra-ASEAN and total ASEAN trade, and it remains to be seen whether the free trade area by 2015 will improve it. Agreements with other countries may initially cover fewer products and have longer implementation periods. Still, the general direction is to progressively open up trade with these countries. The main issue for farmers is how these FTAs will affect local agriculture. Initial studies of the early harvest program of the ACFTA, for instance, have shown adverse impacts on Thai and Indonesian farmers.

What are our main concerns regarding agriculture in ASEAN countries?

Agriculture continues to be a significant and sensitive sector in the economy of most ASEAN countries. Excluding Singapore and Brunei, the contribution of the sector to total domestic output ranged from 7.9%, in the case of Malaysia; to as much as 50%, in the case of Lao PDR.

Agriculture's contribution to total employment ranged from 16% to 78%. Agriculture is still a vital source of livelihood and income for the population, especially in the rural areas.

Even if agriculture remains to be a vital sector in most ASEAN economies, we, small men and women farmers and producers, who form the majority of the people dependent on agriculture, are still poor. In ASEAN, poverty is highest and most widespread in the rural areas, where agriculture is the main source of livelihood.

Our poverty is mainly caused by unequal distribution of resources, lack of access



to economic opportunities and our poor participation in decision-making processes.

The current integration of agriculture in ASEAN countries has not benefitted small men and women farmers. Rather, big agri business and transnational companies are reaping the benefits. Unabated and unchecked, the integration will further displace us, lose our livelihoods, and lose the rural heritage and the culture of agriculture communities in Southeast Asia. Women farmers bear the brunt, as they do 50% or more of agricultural work in almost all crops. With less income in their pockets, there is less money for food, health, and education of the whole family.

What are our main calls and proposals for ASEAN?

Principles. Our needs as small scale men and women farmers and producers are simple: we want secured livelihoods, more decent and therefore, happier and more satisfying lives.

ASEAN's agriculture policies should contribute to poverty alleviation efforts, considering that agriculture is the main employer of most of its poor people. They should not lead to displacement and should not heighten existing vulnerability within the sector. Also, the policies should consider that agriculture plays a crucial role in meeting the food security and basic staple food sufficiency needs of a country.

Thus, agriculture integration shall be pursued in a manner that promotes the well-being of all, with preferential option for the poor and marginalized. It should be equitable, inclusive, sustainable, rights-based, and gender-sensitive and eventually leads to empowerment of the poor.

Policies. We ask ASEAN to develop a strategic policy for agriculture that integrates trade and development and that promotes the principles we have just mentioned. This strategic policy can first be done at the national level, then levelled off and harmonized at the regional level. This policy should have the following principles and features:

1. Small men and women farmers need – first things first: land to till. In Indonesia,

much of the agricultural lands are in the hands of the state or big plantation owners. In the Philippines, much of the prime agricultural lands are still in the hands of landowners who wield influence in executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. This agriculture policy will make access and control of land resources a pre-requisite to trade and development.

2. Provide adequate support services to small farmers like access to credit/ capital, technology, crop insurance, as well as price support, targeting women farmers.
3. Pour massive infrastructure investments in support for smallholder agriculture.
4. Direct research and development efforts to raise the quality of local commodities.
5. Ensure self sufficiency in basic or staple crops of the country; where producers are assisted to produce enough food that comply with safety and environmental standards, and where governments try to balance production and demand, meeting domestic needs for staple crops first rather than international needs for cash crops.
6. Provide calibrated liberalization and calibrated protection to protect the jobs and livelihoods of the small producers, attuned to the specific conditions and needs of each member country.
7. Develop tighter domestic forward and backward linkages as well as focusing on the linkages between the agricultural and food processing industries. The interests of producers and end users can converge through the use of trade and price management that ensures that the price spread between imports and local commodities is not too big.
8. Mainstream sustainable agriculture through massive extension and promotion. Formulate standards for sustainable and fair production and



marketing, such that farmers and traders are encouraged to produce and sell only products that are produced in a safe and sustainable manner and that give fair returns to small producers.

9. Institutionalize mechanisms for participation of small men and women producer/ farmer organizations and non-government social development organizations in decision-making processes of ASEAN – e.g. an ASEAN Farmers’ Council, which ASEAN officials can consult on matters affecting their respective sectors. To ensure quality participation, ASEAN governments should

- disclose the terms of the trade negotiations early enough for meaningful discussions
- hold public hearings and consultations especially with small scale farmers, fishers and civil society groups
- translate the proposed terms of trade agreements into non technical language and in local languages
- give ample representation of small men and women producers in these consultative and decision making bodies

What has AFA done so far to engage ASEAN?

AFA started engagement with ASEAN in 2005, when it co-organized with its strategic partner, AsiaDHRRA, a session on “ASEAN and Agriculture” ,attended by Dr. Azmi Mat Makhir, an ASEAN Secretariat senior official. This was one of the panel sessions during a Regional Conference on Civil Society Engagement in ASEAN, organized by several regional networks which included Forum-Asia, SEACA, Focus on the Global South and Institute for Global Justice.

At the beginning of 2006, the ASEAN formed an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) tasked to make recommendations on the

framework of the ASEAN Charter. AFA worked with a broader network called Solidarity for Asian People’s Advocacies, (SAPA) who then produced three submissions to the EPG, one for each ASEAN pillar (security, economic and socio-cultural). In December 2006, AFA jointly organized with AsiaDHRRA a panel session on “ASEAN Regional Integration in Agriculture: What It Is, How It Should Be”. The panel session was conducted during the ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC2) in Cebu City, Philippines.

In 2007, AFA intensified its engagement with ASEAN by conducting two regional consultations and by taking part in all three civil society conferences prior to the ASEAN Leaders Summit in Singapore. A consultation was held in March, and focused on the draft charter, bio fuels, and bilateral FTAs. The results of this consultation were presented to then ASEAN Secretary General Ong Keng Yong and top senior officials. In December, another consultation was held, this time focused on analyzing the signed ASEAN Charter and Economic Community Blueprint, with two senior officials: Dr. Somsak Pippopinyo and Dr. Termsak Chalermphanupap. AFA also participated in the 6th ASEAN Peoples’ Assembly organized by ASEAN-ISIS, the ACSC 2007 organized by the Singapore Institute for International Affairs and the ACSC+3, organized by SAPA.

What can we do to engage ASEAN on the issues of the ASEAN Charter, AEC and agriculture in general?

For farmers’ and producers’ groups like us in AFA, we need to build, strengthen and consolidate ourselves both at the national and regional levels so that we can be powerful, effective, influential voices at all political levels-local, national regional . We may not be able to match the money of the big agribusiness corporations, but we can have the numbers. We can match , maybe even surpass their passion and dedication, but for us, dedication towards making trade fair and just, dedication to make agriculture still a viable and important livelihood.

Hand in hand with other like-minded civil society groups, we can exchange information and views and help promote people-to-people



cooperation. With governments and non-government organizations, we can implement projects and programs on sustainable production of crops, on sustainable management of natural resources, and on efficient but fair and just marketing and trading. In so doing, we likewise build our capacities for self-governance and entrepreneurship.

Following are some concrete things that we can do to influence how ASEAN develops its brand of regionalism:

- discuss thoroughly the issues of the ASEAN Charter, the AEC and its agricultural policies to as many small scale men and women farmers and producers as possible
 - make known our concerns by demanding for and participating in national and regional consultations on the ASEAN Charter and the AEC blueprint;
 - participate in the discussion of the still-undefined sections of the ASEAN Charter, particularly the terms of reference for human rights body, and the definition of roles and functions of the new organs formed (e.g. Committee of Permanent Representatives, the Community Councils);
 - push for the clarification of and the definition of spaces for people participation in ASEAN, and recommend mechanisms appropriate for our sector;
 - push for the discussion of the broad objectives of economic community beyond just liberalization, and formulate specific recommendations
 - recommend specific policies and action points for protective mechanisms in the AEC blueprint;
 - recommend specific policies and projects for the still undefined sections of the AEC Blueprint: consumer protection, competition policy, intellectual property rights, and development of agricultural cooperatives
- Be involved in the development of the Political-Security and the Socio-Cultural Community Blueprints.
 - Learn from other regional farmers' groups who are also working with their regional governments
 - continuously build and document alternative models through further experimentation of potential good practices and replication of tried and tested successful initiatives.
 - engage ASEAN in the development of a monitoring card that will measure the performance of ASEAN governments in the area of agricultural trade, access and ownership of natural resources, sustainable agriculture, farmers' participation.

CONCLUSION

The current ASEAN logo depicts 10 rice stalks and has as one of the purposes in its Founding Document the development and growth of agriculture in the region.

As small men and women farmers in the Southeast Asian region, our biggest challenge today is how to respond to the many issues confronting us at many levels: in the farm, in the community, nationally, regionally and globally. Being direct producers, we know whereof we speak. We produce the food that nourishes society, and we keep the land productive. As a sector, we are under many threats, including land conversion and the domination of big agribusiness. Keeping alive the small farming system is a big task in today's world, where bigness has become vital for survival. Our defense is in our ability to meet local and national challenges. We will become stronger if we are able to work with farmers from all over the region and push forward credible and viable alternatives.

It is necessary to show that we have aspirations beyond just accessing markets – e.g. protection of the land and the environment that give us livelihoods, solidarity with other farmers and other sectors of society, protecting the



farmer's way of life, etc. Increased farmer-to-farmer interaction can also be done through information exchanges and common projects (e.g. regional seed banking by farmers to protect against the domination of the seed trade by big agribusiness; possible co-production in key food products encompassing the major production stages from planting to harvesting to processing and marketing; etc.). Such aspirations and concrete initiatives will help demonstrate that regional cooperation and integration can be done with the common people at the center.

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