

OUR COMMON STRATEGIES

1. Articulation of sectoral agenda along specific themes. Rural sectors should make a clear stand on specific issues or interests. This agenda will then refine our bases of unity. This agenda building, and/or the consolidation of the different sub-sectors' agenda, can be a parallel activity to the ASEAN official meetings.
2. Capacity building of CSOs and rural grassroots constituency for the promotion of this agenda (or bases of unity). A basic orientation about ASEAN, its governance and operational structures, particularly issues and agreed agenda for advocacy to ASEAN can be conducted. The conduct of such sessions/trainings should be done in the language understandable to basic sectors, hence, the need for investment in translating or popularizing educational processes, methodologies and materials.
3. Forging strong and sustained contact with national government agencies working closely with ASEAN. Strong linkage with these agencies will facilitate engagement with ASEAN. Concretely, they can support CSO participation by sponsoring a call to allow representatives from CSOs to have an interaction in official processes of ASEAN.
4. Building and strengthening a basic rural sectors' constituency for ASEAN. Leaders from organizations of farmers, fishers and indigenous peoples must be made capable to articulate their agenda and to dialogue with ASEAN leaders. It should be the farmers, fishers and IP leaders that should articulate their agenda to make it a more credible voice. NGOs of this working group can bridge

dialogues, facilitate if necessary, and do the necessary research and policy work to build the capacity of the grassroots leaders.

SOME OF OUR POLICY TARGETS IN ASEAN FOR 2009

1. A Small Producers' and Fishers Council (with dialogue status)
2. A Common Agricultural Fund for small-scale farmers and fisheries
3. An ASEAN agricultural policy for small producers
4. A review of ASEAN Food Security Reserve System

OUR IMMEDIATE ACTIONS:

1. Complete the stocktaking process of rural development initiatives of RD WG members and their partners at national and regional levels to facilitate cooperation, complementation, and in aid of defining strategies.
2. Study sessions on ASEAN, ADB, and FAO with respect to issues of strategic interest to us e.g. public investments in smallholder agriculture and fisheries and food security, climate change and its impact on agriculture, and agri trade.
3. Drafting of policy proposals in relation to targeted policy agenda with ASEAN and other bodies.
4. Dialogue with ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN food and agriculture ministerial bodies and working committees.
5. Mobilize resources (members initiatives and/or joint effort) to carry out plans.



WHO WE ARE

We are CSOs working with rural communities, and grassroots organizations of farmers, fishers and indigenous peoples, operating at the Asian region. As individual organizations, we work on issues of trade in agriculture, goods and services; sustainable development focused on agriculture, fisheries and human resources; and access to natural resources; at local, national, regional and international levels. Individually, we have engaged governmental organizations from local to international levels.

We are initially composed of the following organizations:

- Agribusiness Accountability Initiatives (AAI)
- Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA)
- Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia (AsiaDHRRA)
- Focus on the Global South (FOCUS)
- Oxfam GB-East Asia Program and Oxfam International
- Rice Watch Action Network (RWAN)/East Asia Working Group (EARWG)
- SEAFISH for Justice (SEAFISH) -*observer status subject to SEAFISH country-convenors confirmation*)
- Task Force Food Sovereignty (TFFS)/Asia Pacific Network on Food Sovereignty (APNFS)
- Third World Network (TWN)

We are open to fellow RD CSOs from South and East Asia. We look forward to interact with them in the working group. With majority of us working in the Southeast Asian region, we would like to initially focus our attention to strengthening our capacity in engaging ASEAN.

Beyond ASEAN, we will get our acts together in engaging key multilateral and inter-governmental agencies. Imperfect as it may, the WDR2008 is a key report that CSOs should use in its continuing advocacy for agricultural

policy reform, specifically on specific issues highlighted in the report; the UN CSD now on the Review Session of the third implementation cycle, CSD-16 will focus on the thematic issues of Agriculture, Rural development, Land, Drought, Desertification, and Africa. New mandates, at different levels, to face the major issues of Climate Change and the Global Food and Financial Crises are also compelling reason for us to strengthen our ranks.

OUR NATURE

We come together as a loose platform of CSOs who will brainstorm, plan, and implement, in a coordinated, complementary or joint manner, activities that engage the ASEAN inter-governmental body. We are also open to address rural development issues beyond Southeast Asia and engage other intergovernmental bodies like FAO, IFAD, and the UN, however in our immediate action plan we shall focus on ASEAN engagement.

WHY WE FOCUS ON ASEAN ENGAGEMENT

Many of ASEAN policies and agreements have significant impact, albeit on a negative manner, to small scale men and women producers – farmers, fishers, indigenous people's, small entrepreneurs; as well as to formal and informal sectors working on rural-based industries.

With the ASEAN Charter signed in 2008, we believe that it is necessary for CSOs to engage ASEAN in constructive dialogues, as well as policy and program development and implementation. The Charter is expected to provide more institutional channel for CSO engagement, for pushing our advocacies in ASEAN. Also officers in the ASEAN Secretariat have expressed openness to engage CSOs through policy consultations, dialogues and policy work. The new Secretary General is seen to be supportive of CSO engagement with ASEAN, and can be expected to support reforms particularly towards rural poverty alleviation.

WHY THE NEED TO FORM A WORKING GROUP FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ASEAN ENGAGEMENT

As a working group, we can improve our coordination on common issues and strengthen our positioning before key decision-making bodies. Specifically, we noted that there is absence of a strong and coordinated engagement with ASEAN on rural development issues to articulate and push for the equally imperative issues faced by vulnerable rural sectors e.g. fishers, farmers, indigenous peoples, and rural women. As a working group we can pro-actively and critically pursue our advocacies before ASEAN and its member countries.

OUR AGENDA IN ASEAN: THE BASES OF UNITY AMONG US

We would like to call on ASEAN to

1. Ensure the implementation of international agreements on access and control of natural resources and people-centered development (e.g. the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, WSSD, WCARRD, etc) in the different ASEAN countries.
2. Establish conflict resolution mechanisms on competing use of natural resources.
3. Pursue an agriculture, fisheries and a people-centered rural development that promotes the well-being of all, with preferential option for the poor and marginalized. It should be equitable, gender-sensitive, inclusive, sustainable, rights-based, and eventually leads to empowerment of the poor farmers, rural women, indigenous peoples, and fishers.
4. Institutionalize mechanisms for the regular consultation and participation of farmers, fishers, IPs, rural women, and rural development NGOs on matters affecting their sector (e.g. Basic Sector Council)