

Concept Note

Social Sustainability in ASEAN+3: The Challenges of Inclusive Growth

The importance of inclusive growth has become a significant part of emerging consensus on recent development discourse, as many countries have experienced economic growth process without significant improvement in income equality, poverty alleviation, and other socio-economic shortcomings.

Economic development is necessary for the improvement of quality of people's life in every country. However, for economic development to be more equitable and sustainable, the process should be accompanied by the development of social sustainability.

There is an emerging consensus that policy makers need to be more committed in addressing problems related to social sustainability. Economic growth does not automatically translate into improved social sustainability. Good and sound policy, cooperation of non-government sectors, and community and people engagement are also needed.

ASEAN+3 countries are at different stages of development with varying development needs and priorities. The different stages of development among ASEAN+3 countries create different challenges related to the development of social sustainability and the resources available to address the issue.

For example, in East Asia, Japan and South Korea have clearly achieved very impressive economic development so that they have now reached the high-income economy and developed society status. But with emerging problems like ageing population, they too need to make their future economic growth more inclusive. For some low-income ASEAN countries, they are still at the stage of struggling with their primary objective of maximizing economic growth in order to provide the material basis for poverty reduction. Other middle-income ASEAN countries have achieved remarkable economic growth; but they still have to fulfill their other development needs, including reducing their high income inequalities.

Despite the differing conditions in each ASEAN+3 country, it was observed that the policies and measures to address social sustainability in the context of inclusive growth ought to involve a whole-of-a-government or a comprehensive approach that cuts across the economic, social and political dimensions. The commitment is on each ASEAN+3 country to find the right mix of these dimensions in line with its local conditions before they could embark on the policy enhancement to maintaining and strengthening social sustainability as new ground of regional cooperation.

In consideration of the abovementioned preamble, student participants may consider some of the following challenges in preparation for the 'essay' for the Young Speakers' Contest and 'policy paper' and 'country position' for the Educational Forum that will lead to the 'Youth Joint Statement' as result of the event:

- On the economic front: How to ensure continued economic growth and at the same time help citizens obtain a fair share of economic pie? Sustaining economic growth would require constant upgrading and restructuring of the economy through ways such as promoting higher skills, encouraging innovation, raising productivity and improving infrastructure. At the same time, the government should to also introduce various schemes and incentive to help as many businesses to retain a presence in their respective countries. Assistance should also be rendered to assist citizens who may be displaced find new jobs.
- On the social front: How to develop a more inclusive society? This includes an access to quality education, better healthcare, affordable housing for elderly and vulnerable group, and tenacious social mobility in each generation, as well as prevention of a permanent underclass from forming in each society.
- On the political front: There is a need to ensure that the existing political system in the ASEAN+3 countries provides sufficient avenues for its citizens to give feedback on policies as well as allow them to express their concerns and more importantly to participate in any social sustainability related issues.
