MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1. Introduction

The ASCC Blueprint 2016-2025 ('the Blueprint') is a guideline for ASEAN Member States (AMS) as they pursue their collective vision for an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community that engages and benefits ASEAN's peoples, and which is inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and dynamic. At the midpoint of the Blueprint's implementation, this Midterm Review (MTR) has been completed as part of the monitoring and evaluation process.

The review takes stock and offers feedback on the implementation of the Blueprint, describes how far the ASCC has progressed from the 2016 baseline and detail how far it is from achieving its targets. The MTR also documents how the ASCC Pillar has interacted and collaborated with ASEAN's other Pillars to realise ASEAN Vision 2025: Forging Ahead Together.

2. Methodology

This MTR assesses progress in implementing the Blueprint's five characteristics and objectives (engages and benefits the people, inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and dynamic) against the following five dimensions: Blueprint activities, effectiveness of those activities, means of implementation, institutional mechanisms, and resources.

Analysis and assessment required reliable evidence-based data and information gathering, as well as adequate document review. The main data and information sources for the MTR were:

1. The Blueprint's M&E data collection methodology, which comprised the implementation-focused monitoring system under M&E Tool 1 and Tool 2, and which looks at implementation of Sectoral work plans and relevant ASEAN declarations.

2. A result/outcome-based monitoring system that tracked 32 KPIs for the Blueprint's Results Framework and Baseline Report results.

3. Other qualitative data collection methods, including a review of relevant documents (e.g., Sectoral Body work plans), a series of Focus Group Discussions (FGD), targeted interviews with relevant stakeholders, and case studies and human-interest stories to illustrate the impact of Blueprint implementation on the lives of ASEAN's peoples.

Data has been collected at the regional level (ASEAN wide) and the national level (AMS). Collection and analysis by AMS were conducted by National MTR Teams, who developed country-level assessment reports to complement the regional MTR.

3. Progress of Blueprint Implementation at Regional Level

3.1. General Overview of Implementation, Results, and Latest Status of Outcomes

The Blueprint was previously translated into 977 actions and activities in the workplans of 15 Sectoral Bodies (SB). Thirteen activities were withdrawn. The remaining 964 activities have been classified as completed, ongoing, or upcoming (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Number, Distribution, and Status of Activities as of May 2020

Overall: Number, Distribution, and Status
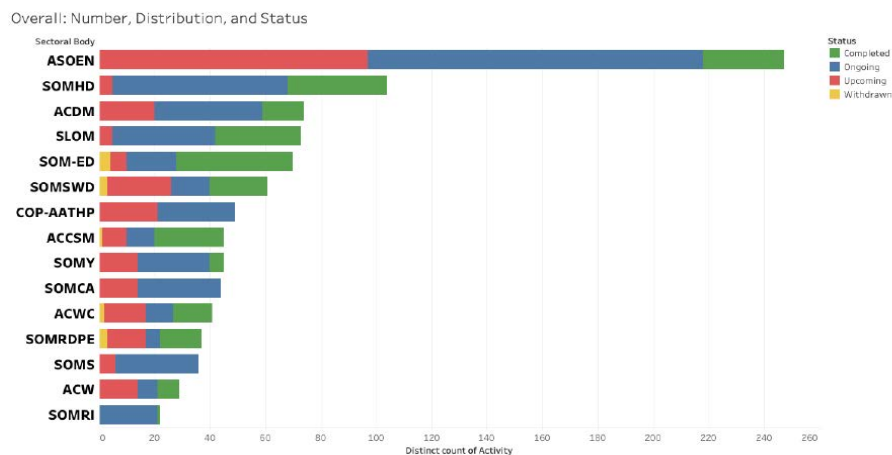
Source: ASEAN Secretariat, the ASCC Blueprint 2025 Implementation-Focused Monitoring System using Tool 1 on Framework for Reporting on the ASCC Sectoral Bodies' Implementation of the Sectoral Work Plan, Updated Status 21 May 2020.

Table 1 summarises the assessment of those 964 activities, each of which has been connected to a Blueprint Characteristic. Progress or the latest status of outcomes, as measured by Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), is also indicated on the table.

Table 1. Results Overview of MTR of the ASCC Blueprint 2025

Implementation Progress	Outcome Progress (KPIs)	Overall Progress
• Satisfactory, with a 71.8% implementation rate (including 24.8% complete). • Each Strategic Measure was implemented. Key Result Areas were delivered by multiple SBs in collaboration. • Type of activities comprised capacity building (29.5%), research and publication (23.9%), public outreach (21.0%), policy formulation (19.2%) and groundwork (6.5%). • Any given type of activity was implemented in conjunction with other types to ensure effectiveness and impact.	• Of the 45 KPIs and sub-KPIs measuring the Blueprint's intended outcomes, 19 lack sufficient data points against the 2016 baseline, meaning changes cannot be measured. • Of 26 KPIs with sufficient data points, 21 have clear evidence of realised progress.	Based on progress made on 21 KPIs, the Blueprint 2025 is well on its way to achieving its objectives. Implementation has been satisfactory.

3.2. Progress Review of Blueprint under Characteristic A (Engages and Benefits the People)

Of 387 activities in SB work plans under Characteristic A, 297 (76.8%) have been either completed or are ongoing. Of nine SMs under Characteristic A, no measure was implemented by a single SB working alone. There were always multiple SBs working on each SM. This indicated that cross-Sectoral work has been implemented, albeit indirectly.

The predominant activities under Characteristic A were public outreach and capacity building. However, for each SM, other activities were also implemented–indicating a comprehensive approach to Blueprint implementation. Table 2 summarises progress.

Table 2. MTR Summary on Characteristic A (Engages and Benefits the People)

Implementation Progress	Outcome Progress (KPIs)	Overall Progress
• Implementation rate: 76.8% of 387 activities, including 23% completed. • SOMHD activities comprised the largest share (23.5%) of activities. • Common activities: public outreach and capacity building.	• Intensive stakeholder engagement in AMS for promoting ASEAN initiatives, through activities conducted by all ASCC SBs. • Increase in Government Effectiveness Indicator (ASEAN average). • High level of satisfaction on ASEAN engagement as expressed by 60% of 100 of respondents participating in the survey. • Fifty-seven percent of 100 respondents reported increased satisfaction over previous years. • Increased number of programmes or news for promoting ASEAN identity in AMS, suggesting increased institutional capacity through policies/ measures among AMS for raising awareness on ASEAN community building and public engagement.	Realisation of the Blueprint's objective for engaging and benefiting people has been satisfactory, as indicated by good progress in implementing of sectoral activities and in achieving expected outcomes.

3.3. Progress Review of Blueprint under Characteristic B (Inclusive)

Of 402 activities in SB workplans under Characteristic B, 215 (78.36%) were completed or are ongoing. While public outreach or capacity building activities were dominant, such work was supported or conducted in combination with other activities. Table 3 summarises progress.

Table 3. MTR Summary on Characteristic B (Inclusive)

Implementation Progress	Outcome Progress (KPIs)	Overall Progress
• Implementation rate: 78.4% of 402 activities, including 33.6% completed. • SOMHD comprised the largest share of activities, at 25% of total. • Common activities: public outreach and capacity building.	• Decreases in undernourishment, stunting, wasting, and underweight. Increased numbers of overweight children under five years of age in several AMS. • Slight improvements in mean years of total schooling among 15 to 24 year olds and expected years of schooling for those 25 or above in some AMS. • Decrease in population living in slums, informal settlements, inadequate housing, or danger zones as defined by national laws, policies, or regulations in most AMS. • Increases in regional policies, strategies, and programmes that mainstreamed promotion and protection of human rights, e.g., the protection and promotion of migrant worker rights.	Progress has been made toward an inclusive ASEAN. In conjunction with the inclusive growth agenda of the ASEAN Economic Community, Characteristic B of the Blueprint guides ASEAN toward an inclusive ASEAN Community that promotes an improved quality of life, addresses barriers to the enjoyment of equitable access to opportunities by ASEAN's peoples, and which also promotes and protects human rights.

3.4. Progress Review of Blueprint under Characteristic C (Sustainable)

Of 362 activities in SB workplans under Characteristic C, 229 (63.3%) were either completed or are ongoing. ASOEN and COP-AATHP, the two leading Sectoral Bodies on environmental issues, dominated activities. Policy formulation and capacity building were the primary focuses and were supported by other activities. Table 4 summarises progress.

Table 4. MTR Summary on Characteristic C (Sustainable)

Implementation Progress	Outcome Progress (KPIs)	Overall Progress
• Implementation rate: 63.3% of 362 activities, including 11.6% completed. • ASOEN, at 25%, comprised the largest share of activities of 10 SBs. • Common activities: policy formulation and capacity building.	• Increase from 7 (2016) to 20 (2019) in regional initiatives on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources in AMS. • Regional initiatives to promote and achieve environmentally sustainable cities in AMS have been implemented over the last four years. • Some progress realised on enhancing AMS capacity to achieve Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), with increases in the number of ongoing and completed ASEAN climate-change related projects to achieve AMS respective NDCs during 2016-2019. • Increase, from 3 (2016) to 7 (2019), of ASEAN-level activities supporting AMS in building SCP policies and institutional arrangements, demonstrating progress on KRA C4, sustainable consumption and production.	Realisation of sustainable ASEAN shows ongoing progress in implementing Sectoral activities, mostly on a recurring or multi-year basis. Progress is noticeable, given available data.

3.5. Progress Review of Blueprint under Characteristic D (Resilient)

Of 325 activities in SB workplans under Characteristic D, 218 (67.08%) were completed or are ongoing. While ASOEN was the dominant SB for Characteristic D activities, there is a clear indication of cross-Sectoral work. For instance, KRA D1, for which ASOEN and ACDM are primary contributors; substantial work was also done by SOMY and SOMRDPE.

Research and publication and capacity building were the most common modality. However, these activities did not stand alone, and were planned in conjunction with other activities. Table 5 summarises progress.

Table 5. MTR Summary on Characteristic D (Resilient)

Implementation Progress	Outcome Progress (KPIs)	Overall Progress
• Implementation rate: 67.1% of 325 activities, including 14.8% completed. • ASOEN comprised the largest share of activities, at 46%, among 10 SBs. • Common activities: research and publication, capacity building.	• 3 to 4 resolutions a year between 2016-2019 crossed Sectoral consultation platforms to synergise Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) in AMS. • Increased number of regional initiatives, from 1 to 3 initiatives, to enhance financing systems, food, water, energy, and social safety nets in times of crisis, from 2016 to 2019. • Good progress made by ongoing initiatives on drug use and rehabilitation in AMS, coordinated between the Health and the Security Cooperation Divisions, with three projects a year from 2016-2019. Ongoing activities contributing to the ASEAN Health Sector priority on mental health and HIV/AIDS projects to a drug-free ASEAN–with two projects a year during 2016-2019.	Some progress in implementing Sectoral activities, and in some outcomes dedicated to achieving Blueprint's objective for resilient ASEAN.

3.6. Progress Review of Blueprint under Characteristic E (Dynamic)

Of 559 activities in SB workplans under Characteristic E, 73.9% were completed or ongoing. ASOEN was responsible 44.19% of activities, followed by SOMHD, with 14.13%. Characteristic E had the greatest number of associated activities to realise under the Blueprint.

While public outreach and capacity building dominated activities, these modalities were executed in combination with research and publication, policy formulation, and groundwork.

Table 6. MTR Summary on Characteristic E (Dynamic)

Implementation Progress	Outcome Progress (KPIs)	Overall Progress
• Implementation rate: 73.9% of total 559 activities, including 21.1% completed. • ASOEN (44%) and SOMHD (14%) implemented the majority of activities. • Common activities: public outreach and capacity building.	• KPIs for measuring KRA E.1 showed good progres, as evinced by increases numbers in various information and communication platforms, based on the ASEAN Communication Master Plan; • Progress was made for KPIs under KRA E.2, as shown by an increased number of visitors to the ASEAN website, and an increased number of collaborative R&D activities. • Global Competitiveness Indices increased in every AMS, with the average score growing from 62.47 in 2017 to 64.5 in 2019. • Efforts to increase recognition for AMS films at an international level were challenging. • ASEAN average NEET increased from 12.3% to 15.3% between 2016 and 2019.	Satisfactory progress in realising a dynamic ASEAN, as evinced by high implementation rates for Sectoral activities, and in most outcome indicators.

3.7. Findings from Assessment on Means of Implementation, Institutional Mechanisms, and Resources

In addition to assessing implementation of activities and the progress made on outcome indicators (KPIs), an assessment was done of means of implementation, institutional mechanisms, and resources, as presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Finding from Assessment on Means of Implementation, Institutional Mechanism, and Financing

Assessment Dimension	Summary
Implementation Means	• Implementation of the Blueprint's five characteristics has been realized through declarations or statements by ASEAN Leaders at ASEAN Summits. • Since the Blueprint's launch in 2016, 36 declarations or statements have been made, which have offered substantial direction for follow-up activities for the ASCC, at the Sectoral, cross-Sectoral, national, and regional levels.

Assessment Dimension	Summary
Institutional Mechanisms at Sectoral Level/ Cross-Cutting Issues	• The ASCC Blueprint 2025, along with the AEC Blueprint 2025 and the APSC Blueprint 2025, is part of ASEAN Vision 2025: Forging Ahead Together. However, there are challenges in strengthening cross-Pillar/cross-Sectoral coordination, such as overlapping initiatives, information gaps due to a lack of communication platforms, and resource mobilization. • One institutional mechanism to harness cross-Sectoral coordination is through the ASCC Blueprint, whereby all ASCC SBs work together to implement SMs and KRAs.
Resources	• Financial resources to implement activities are limited, requiring prioritization. • Financing comes from various sources, such as government budgets, ASEAN allocated funds, external partners or donors. AMS prioritise funding for domestic issues, meaning that the ASCC Blueprint's programmes, initiatives, or activities might be underfunded. There are also budget concerns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. • On human resources, responsible desks are overloaded when dealing with numerous international and bilateral cooperation issues, thus the ASCC is often not a priority. • Rotations of ASEAN desk officers by SBs have adversely affected institutional memory and expertise.

4. Progress of the Implementation of the Blueprint at National Level

In general, all ten AMS have made satisfactory progress in achieving the Blueprint's objectives since 2016. The policies and programs of SBs have been aligned with the ASEAN Vision 2025, in particular the priorities stipulated in the Blueprint. While almost every SB in charge of implementing activities has secured funding internally, challenges remain, due to delays and uncertainties–notably due to limited financial and human resources, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

SOCA and ASEC are to be commended for facilitating and providing support to SBs in implementing the Blueprint, especially in coordination between Sectors and Pillars. All relevant 15 SBs have undertaken joint activities, and work has been done across Pillars to better ensure the cooperation required for addressing cross-Sectoral issues. Likewise, progress has been made on engaging ASEAN's Dialogue Partners and relevant stakeholders to obtain technical and funding support for SBs in implementing cooperative programs. A summary of national-level progress is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Summary of National MTR: Five Assessment Dimensions

Assessment Dimension	Summary
Blueprint Activity Attribution	• Activities supporting Blueprint objectives were acknowledged as relevant and fairly aligned with national policies in all ten AMS. • Some AMS expressed concerns on activity ownership and the distinction between national and regional interests. • SBs under ASCC in AMS have prioritised their national interests; while the ASCC, through the Blueprint, was focused on regional cooperation aspects.
Blueprint Activities Implementation	• Implementation was generally satisfactory. Most activities under the 15 SB work plans was done timely. • However, since the project activity directly attributed to the Blueprint was small, the Blueprint's impact was insignificant for intended stakeholders in AMS. • Nevertheless, some outcome indicators showed progress.
Institutional Mechanisms at Sectoral Level/Cross-Cutting Issues	• Fifteen SBs, coordinated by SOCA and SOCCOM in 10 AMS, were responsible for implementing the Blueprint's objectives at national level. • There are different institutional capacities and arrangements by SBs at the regional level. For example, some SBs have centres (e.g., ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity); others run through SOMs. This affects coordination and implementation. • Stronger institutionalisation (e.g., through a centre) is a demonstrated way to ensure stronger coordination and implementation.
Implementation Means	• The initiatives and programmes in the Blueprint's objectives have, in general, been mainstreamed into AMS national policies; • This is because the overarching nature of the Blueprint enables commonality with any national development agenda or policy. • However, when it comes to prioritisation–for instance in the case of limited resources–an AMS would naturally prioritise its national agenda over the Blueprint.
Resources	• There are insufficient financial and human resources to implement the Blueprint at national level. • Insufficient human resources stem from the fact that responsible desks are overloaded with multiple tasks in dealing with various international and bilateral cooperation issues. Thus, the ASCC is often not always a priority. • Rotation of the ASEAN desk officers at SBs has adversely affected institutional memory and expertise.

5. Recommendations

As the first half term of the Blueprint has passed with satisfactory implementation, it is important to keep momentum. Challenge is mounting, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic. A course must be charted that is comprehensive yet achievable, both strategically and operationally. The following recommendations are offered.

5.1. Strategic Recommendations

Strategic recommendations pertain to substantive aspects of the Blueprint and indicate emerging issues that must be addressed.

Table 9. Strategic Recommendations

Issue	Recommendation
Unavailable Outcome Indicators (KPI)	• 19 KPIs are currently incomplete, covering three categories, based on data collection sources. • First are data that should be recorded by an ASEAN Sectoral Body and compiled and managed by the ASCC Monitoring Division. KPIs could easily be collected if monitoring tools are improved and SBs are committed to update them regularly. Example: KPI 3. • Second are data on the policies, whether formulated or enacted by individual AMS, under the common framework of ASEAN or another international organization, e.g., the policies on Adaptive Social Protection (KPI 16) and Universal Health Coverage/UHC (KPI 6d). To keep this data updated, ASEAN, and especially ASCC, should develop a focal point in each AMS to monitor development of the data. While data might be updated by agencies in each AMS, this is not necessarily reflected immediately in the Statistical Office. A direct connection with the right focal point would ensure timely data updates. • Third are data on public perceptions, conditions, or awareness of issues in ASEAN that should be collected through research or surveys. For example, KPI 22, on ASEAN awareness, KPI 24, on ASEAN benefits, or KPI 19c, on digital natives, that might be collected or estimated through research.
Substantive Issue for Characteristic A (Engages and Benefits the People)	Based on available data from KPIs, it is recommended to enhance awareness and engagement with affiliated stakeholders of ASEAN as well as the general public.

Issue	Recommendation
Substantive Issue for Characteristic B (Inclusive)	Based on data from four KPIs, there are two recommendations. First, a way must be found to decrease the prevalence of overweight children under 5. Second, a way must be found to increase the coverage, width, and depth of Social Protection (KPI 5a, 5b, and 7b), especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
Substantive Issue for Characteristic C (Sustainable)	Blueprint implementation is on track. However, efforts should be made to formulate indicators and measuring methods that can demonstrate the quality of outcomes, in addition to the number of projects.
Substantive Issue for Characteristic D (Resilient)	Efforts should be made consistent to ensure impactful intervention towards the end term of the Blueprint. Efforts should also be made to formulate indicators and measuring methods that can demonstrate the quality of outcomes, in addition to the number of projects.
Substantive Issue for Characteristic E (Dynamic)	While progress has been made according to KPIs related to public outreach and research (processes), efforts should be strengthened to increase the Global Competitiveness Index (KPI 26a) and international recognition for ASEAN films (KPI 30), and to decrease NEET (KPI 31c).

5.2. Operational Recommendations

Operational recommendations refer to how to improve implementation process in the end term.

Table 10. Operational Recommendations

Issue	Recommendation
Harnessing Activity Attribution to the Blueprint	• Tool 1 has been substantial in collecting information on implementation progress for SB workplans to check attribution of activities to the Blueprint. However, two things must be done to improve such data collection and monitoring tools, as well as data collection and coordination. First, data entry must follow the golden rules of data management: data must be cleaned and entered in a uniform and standard format, and data must be readable by any standard application. Second, Tool 1 should be become a digital platform where SBs can report data and read data from other SBs. Hence, they would be able to collect information on who does what in order to implement Blueprint.

Issue	Recommendation
	• The main issue in mainstreaming the Blueprint is prioritisation. Coordination must be done so that AMS are willing and able to translate the Blueprint's regional priorities into national priorities. It must be emphasized, from the formulation phase, that whatever is in the Blueprint must be aligned with national priorities. • Blueprint implementation must be recognized by and aligned with each AMS national Master Plan (long-term or 10-year plans) or Midterm Plan (if every five years). This would result in consistent implementation, including identification of requisite financial and human resources, which would in turn create a foundation of common awareness for of the goals of the ASEAN2025 Vision.
Increasing Activity Implementation Effectiveness	• To yield impactful activities, quality rather than quantity should be emphasized. Only high-impact projects or initiatives with localised context should be considered and, if implemented, be allocated sufficient resources. • Close monitoring and evaluation of initiatives should be done to ensure that challenges are identified and overcome, and that best practices are recognized, scaled up, or replicated, if necessary.
Harnessing Institutional Mechanisms	• Various sources indicated that Sectoral policies, programmes or activities often overlap or conflict. This is natural, as Sectoral Bodies tend to work and focus only on the Sector that falls under their purview. • Lessons learned from successful AMS on coordinating ASEAN's work should also be identified and adapted if possible. • The leading Ministry of respective Pillars, if possible, could play an overarching role in monitoring and advising the work done on Strategic Measures and Key Results Areas. • Existing SOC-COM and JCM mechanisms to discuss cross-cutting issues should be retained and enhanced. If need be, the roles and functions of SOC-COM should be expanded to keep up with expected tasks to strengthen cross-Sectoral and cross-Pillar coordination. SOC-COM must be more interactive, to promote engagements between Sectoral Bodies, particularly on cross-Sectoral issues and cooperation. • Quarterly meetings with and regular communications or updates to AMS Sectoral Bodies are the key to drive coordination and monitoring of SB Work Plans to ensure that implementation is aligned with the Blueprint.

Issue	Recommendation
Improving Implementation Means	• ASEAN and relevant government agencies must rethink their approach to popularising and turning the Blueprint into commendable actions to the ASEAN community without creating new entities. • The role of the ASEAN Secretariat must be re-evaluated, with an eye to giving it a significant advisory role to support Blueprint implementation. Specifically, ASEC departments and divisions can play an advisory role on relevant activities supporting Blueprint implementation. • Institutes or centres play a leading role in performing activities to attract financial grants and collaborative activities with regional and international organizations. However, this does not mean more centres must be created, unless a specific evaluation on existing mechanisms has been done and shows robust evidence that this would be effective.
Financial and Human Resources	• To minimize underfunding of ASCC programs or activities in favor of national priorities, programs and activities must be translated and integrated with AMS SB national long-term and short-term planning documents. • AMS must establish a national ASCC Office or Secretariat and set up a strong system, including M&E. Such offices must be adequately equipped with resources, especially human resources, to ensure sustainability. • Learning from implementation during COVID-19, it is possible that many activities will be implemented through video conference and social media after the pandemic ends, such as virtual museum tours, online craft bazaars, webinars or online promotion and marketing. This would minimize activity costs. • On resources, ASEAN must encourage contributions from multinational companies and the Private Sector through Corporate Social Responsibility activities. The development of ASEAN Aid is a good start. • On staff development, there should be multiple regular trainings on topics such as project management, professional development, communications, multimedia or graphic design, survey and research, and leadership, among other topics.

Issue	Recommendation
	• Capacity building programs should also be conducted related to improve/access public health, social welfare and technology transfer, promoting trade and investment and the greater use of E-government activities, greater application of IT, IT assisted technology and machinery equipment's in business, public communication, education, climate action and green economy. • Online platforms should be developed to boost human resource capacity via webinars or online training, which has become the new normal during the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. Conclusion

The ASCC Blueprint 2016-2025 has reached its midpoint with a satisfactory implementation rate. Progress has been made on some outcomes, as shown by 21 KPIs with available data. However, it is apparent that the major challenge going forward will be the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic's full effects cannot be encapsulated at the moment, studies have warned that the advances made over the last decade across multiple dimensions of development might be lost. Inevitably, COVID-19 hindered the progress made during the first term of the Blueprint's implementation (2016-2020). Fallout from the pandemic has become the most important context and background for the Blueprint's second term (2021-2025).

Realising this, the Special ASEAN Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) was held on 14 April 2020. A subsequent Declaration was released to encourage the development of post-pandemic recovery plans. Following that, the 36th ASEAN Summit, held virtually on 26 June 2020, announced the start of the process within ASEAN to recover from COVID-19, and to develop a ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) that is robust, holistic, inclusive, gender-responsive, and science-based, as well as effective in taking the region through its reopening and recovery, and, over the longer term, buttressing resilience, preparedness, and competitiveness.

It is timely for ASCC to incorporate and align the Blueprint's end-term implementation, strategically and operationally, with the ACRF. Concretely, ASCC Sectoral Bodies must develop Sectoral workplans for the 2021-2025 period according to two principles: carrying forward their remaining and ongoing activities and mainstreaming and aligning activities with the ACRF.