



In Conversations with ASEAN Citizens

ASEAN: A Community of Opportunities for All

Foreword

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967. The Member States are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. The ASEAN Secretariat is based in Jakarta, Indonesia.

For inquiries, contact:
The ASEAN Secretariat
Community Relations Division (CRD)
70A Jalan Sisingamangaraja · Jakarta 12110 · Indonesia
Phone: (62 21) 724-3372, 726-2991
Fax: (62 21) 739-8234, 724-3504
E-mail: public@asean.org

In Conversations with ASEAN Citizens
ASEAN: A Community of Opportunities for All

Catalogue-in-Publication Data

ISBN 978-602-5798-79-5

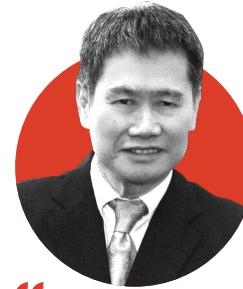


The text of this publication may be freely quoted or reprinted, provided proper acknowledgement is given and a copy containing the reprinted material is sent to the Community Relations Division (CRD) of the ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta.

General information on ASEAN appears online at the ASEAN Website: www.asean.org

Copyright Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) 2020. All rights reserved.

Supported by:



...how ASEAN citizens have used innovation and empathy in addressing social-cultural issues, which underscores the important role our people play in promoting a peaceful, dynamic and harmonious region.

It is with great pleasure that I present In Conversations with ASEAN Citizens, a publication that celebrates the people of ASEAN and their inspiring stories of perseverance, ingenuity and dedication towards building a better future for the region.

The narratives of these individuals representing each ASEAN member state is a testament to the values upheld by the ASEAN initiative on Culture of Prevention (CoP), such as tolerance, mutual understanding, and respect for life and diversity.

When we read about their efforts in this publication, we can appreciate the extent of how ASEAN citizens have used innovation and empathy in addressing social-cultural issues, which underscores the important role our people play in promoting a peaceful, dynamic and harmonious region.

This publication is part of our ongoing efforts to implement the ASEAN Communication Master Plan 2018-2025 (ACMP II), and I would like to thank Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) for their support and contributions towards this endeavour.

I am confident that this publication will foster a greater sense of awareness amongst ASEAN citizens, and strengthen our efforts in building a people-oriented, people-centred, ASEAN community of opportunities for all.

DATO LIM JOCK HOI
Secretary General of ASEAN



As champions of ASEAN vision and values, they have ignited changes, not only for themselves or their communities but for the betterment of the ASEAN region.

The birth of the ASEAN Community in 1967 which successfully brought together ten nations is nothing short of a miracle. But it is a miracle that happened by virtue of a collective determination and the resilience to rise against the odds.

These values are reflected in the stories of outstanding ASEAN individuals in this publication, who are the epitome of the ASEAN Community's strengths. As champions of ASEAN vision and values, they have ignited changes, not only for themselves or their communities but for the betterment of the ASEAN region.

"In Conversations with ASEAN Citizens" features stories that celebrate our region's dynamism and the aspirations of these change-makers for the region. Their efforts and achievements reinforce ASEAN's continual work to advance the implementation of the ASEAN Culture of Prevention (CoP), which promotes and embeds a preventive mindset at all levels to address the root causes of social and cultural issues.

This publication is an embodiment of strong and meaningful partnership between the ASEAN Secretariat and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and represents our ongoing efforts to implement the ASEAN Communication Master Plan 2018-2025 (ACMP II) with an innovative suite of communication offerings.

It is with sincere hope that this publication will excite the hearts and minds of our people in ASEAN to work towards building a Community of Opportunities for All.

Thank you.

H.E. KUNG PHOAK

Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community



These people also demonstrate that the strength of such a community not only lies in its common identity, but also in its diversity.

Establishing a genuine community in such a diverse and heterogeneous region as Southeast Asia is one of the greatest challenges for its governments and peoples alike. However, ASEAN has taken on this task and has in recent years brought citizens in its member states together and encouraged them to help to build this unique community.

This is shown by the examples of the ten outstanding personalities portrayed in this booklet, who all represent the ASEAN community in their very different ways. These people also demonstrate that the strength of such a community not only lies in its common identity, but also in its diversity. This is not about assimilating the diverse and colourful cultures in ASEAN. Every culture, every country and every individual can find its place in the ASEAN community and be valued and perceived for its individuality. This is the only way to put ASEAN's motto "One Vision, One Identity, One Community" into practice.

The stories of these role models show that it is worth taking risks, questioning conventional solutions and holding firm to your approach. In so doing, it is possible to open up new paths and opportunities for all and to promote the sustainable development of our societies.

As pioneer of the European Union Jean Monnet once said, "nothing can be achieved without people, nothing endures without institutions". That is why it is a particular pleasure for us to work so closely and trustingly with the ASEAN Secretariat and to support the further advancement of this key institution.

I hope that this booklet will inspire and encourage readers to tread their paths towards an ever-closer community in colourful diversity.

Thank you.

Dr. PETER SCHOOF

Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Indonesia, ASEAN and Timor-Leste

Table of Contents

01

Foreword

06

**ASEAN
at a Glance**



07

**The Story
Behind the Logo**

10

**ASEAN as a
Community of
Opportunities for All**



08

**ASEAN Member
States and
Landmarks**

12

**ASEAN Culture
of Prevention**

14

**ASEAN: Three
Community Pillars**

16 Community Stories

16

**Committed
to Art**

Osveanne Osman excites and inspires with her artworks in Brunei Darussalam

24

**The Quest for a Family
of Dignity and Humanity**

Dr. Madhusudan fights for equitable healthcare access in Malaysia

18

**Good News for
Good People**

Reaksa Pouy fights fake news in Cambodia

26

**Right Back to
the Long Fight**

Sonny Swe seeks to empower truth through quality journalism in Myanmar

20

**Voice of
the Voiceless**

Nadine Alexandra fights for the orangutans of Kalimantan in Indonesia

28

**Weaving Identities,
Binding Communities**

Maribel Ongpin celebrates the textile industry in the Philippines

32

**Winning Big
through Small Steps**

Through the MyWaste project, a group of young people in Thailand sets to change the world

22

**The Power of Dance:
A Big Break for Laos**

Anouza Phothisane brings Laotian dancing to the world stage

30

**Lifting
Lives**

Raymond Khoo opens up opportunities in the sky as a pilot in Singapore

34

**The Art of
Being Human**

Ha Ninh Pham builds regional solidarity and vibrancy through the arts in Viet Nam





ASEAN at a Glance



Narciso
Ramos



Abdul Razak
Hussein

On 8 August 1967, five leaders – the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand – gathered in the main hall of the Department of Foreign Affairs building in Bangkok, Thailand and signed a document. By virtue of that document, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was born.



S. Rajaratnam

It was a short, simply-worded document that contains five articles. These articles declared the establishment of an Association of Regional Cooperation among the Countries of Southeast Asia, which was to be known as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), while spelling out the aims and purposes of this association. The aims and purposes of ASEAN related to cooperation across the economic, social, cultural, technical, educational and other fields, as well as the promotion of regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice, the rule of law and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter. Moreover, this founding document also stipulated that the Association would be open to participation from all states located within the Southeast Asian region that subscribed to its aims, principles and purposes.



Adam Malik



Thanat
Khoman



The Story Behind the Logo

The ASEAN emblem represents a stable, peaceful, united and dynamic ASEAN. The colours of the emblem – blue, red, white and yellow – represent the main colours of the crests of all of the ASEAN Member States.

The Year of ASEAN Identity Logo

ASEAN's year of identity symbolises a sense of belonging, as well as the shared identity of ASEAN and its citizens. The design was inspired by a "blooming flower" which represents prosperity and unity among the ASEAN member-states.



ASEAN Member States and Landmarks



Brunei Darussalam

Date Join:

January 7, 1984

Landmark:

Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque ¹



Myanmar

Date Join:

July 23, 1997

Landmark:

Shwedagon Pagoda ²



Cambodia

Date Join:

April 30, 1999

Landmark:

Angkor Wat ³



Philippines

Date Join:

August 8, 1967

Landmark:

San Agustin Church ⁴



Indonesia

Date Join:

August 8, 1967

Landmark:

Candi Borobudur ⁵



Singapore

Date Join:

August 8, 1967

Landmark:

The Merlion ⁶



Lao PDR

Date Join:

July 23, 1997

Landmark:

Pha That Luang ⁷



Thailand

Date Join:

August 8, 1967

Landmark:

Wat Arun ⁸



Malaysia

Date Join:

August 8, 1967

Landmark:

Petronas Twin Towers ⁹



Viet Nam

Date Join:

July 28, 1995

Landmark:

Golden Bridge ¹⁰



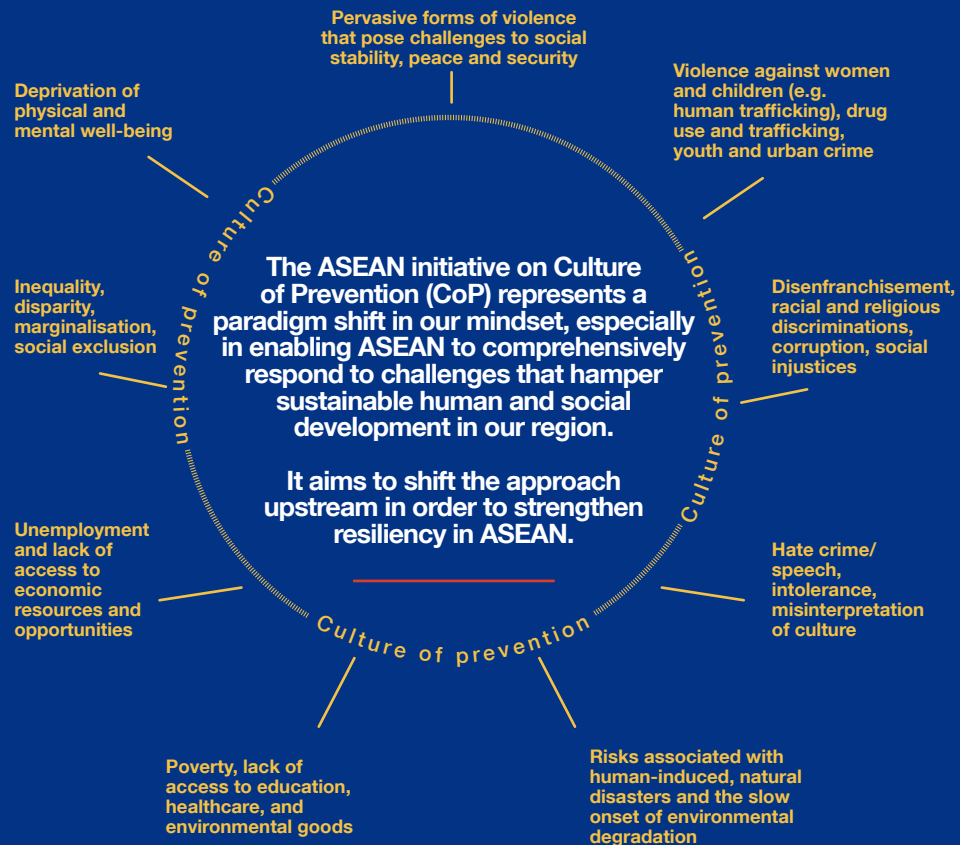
ASEAN as a Community of Opportunities for All

ASEAN is a gateway of possibilities.
It opens its door to opportunities.
Opportunities to make a greater impact.
Opportunities to rise together as one community.
Together, we are stronger.

Because, **WE ARE ASEAN.**

Culture of

What are we preventing?



Enshrined in ASEAN Community Vision 2025, is “to realise a common vision for an inclusive, sustainable, resilient, dynamic and harmonious ASEAN Community”, ASEAN seeks to develop and foster a Culture of Prevention, that **promotes our shared values of tolerance, mutual understanding, respect for life**, as well as to ingrain this Culture of Prevention mindset in the consciousness of our peoples, **particularly the children and youths so that it becomes part of our socio-cultural DNA.**

Prevention

How does CoP work?

Culture of Prevention (CoP) adopts a cross-sectoral and whole-of-ASEAN approach to promote ASEAN’s shared values of tolerance, mutual understanding and respect for life and diversity.



A Culture of Peace & Intercultural Understanding

To promote cultural pluralism, mutual understanding and strengthen the resiliency of community so as to prevent racial, religious distrust and disharmony, intolerance, lack of respect for life and diversity, among others



A Culture of Respect for All

To promote empowerment and gender equality, respect for vulnerable groups including women, youth, children, the elderly and the disabled, among others



A Culture of Good Governance at All Levels

To promote responsible citizenship, equitable socio-economic development and growth including access to education and employment so as to prevent social ills including poverty, crime, drugs and corruption, among others



A Culture of Resilience & Care for the Environment

To promote people’s awareness and care for the environment, and to prepare people for emergencies as a means to prevent risks of natural, human-induced disasters and environmental degradation



A Culture of Healthy Lifestyle

To promote a healthy lifestyle so as to prevent mental and physical illness and diseases as well as dysfunctional habits



A Culture of Supporting the Values of Moderation

To promote literacy in all aspects and at all levels so as to prevent deliberate falsehoods and radicalisation, among others

ASEAN: Three Community Pillars

These represent 3 key areas of our community-building efforts. Specifically, ASEAN is a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centred community and these pillars seek to reinforce a sense of togetherness and shared identity across the communities of the region.

Political-Security Community



Our ASEAN Political-Security Community will be a united, inclusive and resilient community filled with people living in a safe, harmonious and secure environment, embracing the values of tolerance and moderation, and also upholding the fundamental ASEAN principles, shared values and norms. ASEAN will remain cohesive, responsive and relevant in addressing challenges to regional peace and security and will also play an increasingly central role in shaping the evolving regional architecture while deepening its engagement with external parties and contributing collectively to global peace, security and stability.

Economy Community

Our ASEAN Economic Community will be highly integrated, cohesive, competitive, innovative and dynamic, with enhanced connectivity and sectoral cooperation, as well as boasting more resilient, inclusive and people-oriented, people-centred communities that are fully integrated into the global economy.



Socio-Cultural Community

Our ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community will be engaging and benefiting the peoples of the ASEAN region. This inclusive community promotes a high quality of life and equitable access to opportunities for all, while also promoting and protecting the human rights of women, children, young people, the elderly/older persons, persons with disabilities, migrant workers and vulnerable and marginalised groups.





OSVEANNE OSMAN (Manager and Curator of the Creative Space Art Gallery)
Creative Space Art Gallery & Studio

Committed to Art

“ Just feel whatever you are feeling at the time because many of us don't give ourselves enough of a chance or the space to be able to understand what we are going through. ”

I was one of those kids who did not really know what I'm going to become when I was growing up, although everybody expected me to be especially adept in the field of art thanks to the public's generous acknowledgement of my father. He is a well-respected veteran artist in Brunei Darussalam and an extremely gifted one, if I may say so myself, which further perpetuated the idea of me being the literal personification of his living legacy. It has not been a burden but an honour. However, I did not develop an inherent motivation to make my own stand and join his ranks in the Brunei art scene until much, much later into my adolescence.

Funnily enough, I used to feel somewhat compelled to prove that an artistic inclination was not in the least bit hereditary. Perhaps it was just a subconscious psychological resistance. Teachers at school would sometimes say things such as, “You can do this, your dad is an artist,” and I would think to myself, *that's not how it works*. In any case, I went on to take up psychology and sociology studies for about two years before eventually deciding that they were not for me.

My reawakening came about through an innocent act which I had watched a thousand times over, namely my father working on a painting. It was magical, as clichéd as that might sound, the way he started with an empty piece of paper and ended up with an entire scene. I began to observe his works and the arts more closely and ultimately concluded that I wanted to be a part of what my father had been doing this whole time. My newfound passion was henceforth ignited, and not at the flick of a switch but through a genuine determination to understand what I truly aspired to for myself. Without it, I would not have been able to make the choice to dedicate myself to the Creative Space Gallery and Studio, Bandar Seri Begawan, which has proved to be the enterprise of a lifetime for my father and me.

Creative Space

Finding myself more and more immersed in the milieu, I had decided to pursue my Bachelor's Degree in Creative Industries at the Queensland University of Technology in Australia. I was eager to embark on a creative career, particularly within the fine-arts sphere, upon my return. Unfortunately, the art industry was, and still is, quite niche in Brunei. Nobody in Brunei was a full-time artist and everyone had to have a day job. I quickly realised that making a living through this sole path would simply be unrealistic, at least for the time being.



After one or two years of working in various corporate jobs, I knew that I had to pave my own way if I wanted to make it in the art scene here, which was practically non-existent. There had to be a hub, a safe space, a foundation for artists to grow in Brunei. Someone has to make it happen. Thus, I pivoted. Once again, I have my father to thank, because Creative Space was his brainchild. Initially, it was just a private art studio but together we've nurtured it into a gallery, into the hub that I had previously envisioned.

Curating Art, Curating Power

I have been working as an art curator at Creative Space for a couple of years now. It appears that the job title sounds foreign to a lot of people, so I tell them that a curator is like a manager of art or a specialist of art. A curator assembles a collection of art under a specific theme or concept and projects it into a space by employing both context and narrative. Considering my background, I personally identify myself more as an “artist-curator”. Being in a team of two with my father, my day-to-day occupation is both hands on and flexible. I communicate with stakeholders, establish connections with artists and prepare for upcoming exhibitions. Moreover, I am also in charge of training interns. My father and I are very driven to encourage Bruneian artists to



be brave and to commit to their art, including the youth because they are the principal game changers. We need them to be the powerhouse of the industry that we are trying to resuscitate.

In the past, veteran artists had to use money from their own pockets in order to carry the Brunei banner overseas through the exposure of their art. My father belonged to the third generation of those artists and he has attested that change has only recently revealed itself to the Bruneian art scene. We can contribute to that change by providing our best artists with the best platform on which to showcase their art.

One Milestone at a Time

The preservation and conservation of local heritage is one of the biggest and most important causes that I aim to promote. A serious issue that has unfortunately manifested itself all over the ASEAN region is the impending disappearance of traditional cultures. Perhaps this can be seen as a post-colonial effect but it almost seems as if

Brunei did not have any art until we were colonised. Indeed, I feel that other countries such as Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia generally take more pride in their cultures, whereas Bruneian arts are not very openly celebrated, at least not explicitly, nor have they ever been well documented since the time that we declared our independence. This is why I believe that going forward, cultural exchanges, especially among ASEAN nations, will be important because we share so many fundamental similarities.

The truth is that Brunei houses a plethora of hidden gems. It has, therefore, become our mission to secure a place for Bruneian artists on the international stage and I am proud to say that we have made good on the various opportunities that we have so far earned in this regard. We have helped local artists exhibit their art in Japan, Korea and other places within the ASEAN region, as well as on the other side of the world. However, we are taking things one step at a time and this is only the beginning.

“We need more collaboration between countries especially for the arts and culture...”

In order to realise the **ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community**, we need to intensify efforts to strengthen the bonds among ASEAN countries. ASEAN programmes in the arts and culture sector through the ASEAN-COCI (ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information) set up in 1978, continue to support cultural exchanges that benefit and engage the peoples of ASEAN. These activities have not only enhanced mutual intercultural understanding but it has also built a greater sense of togetherness and fostered efforts in developing and celebrating a shared identity.





REAKSA POUV (News Anchor)
BAYON TV Cambodia

Good News for Good People

“ Success is not settling for the good when you know that you can go for the best. ”

I am a journalist, a desk editor, a news anchor. My life bustles around the news, just as the news bustles around my life. At 9 AM, I would be at my desk following through on the stories of the reporters assigned under my supervision. At 10 AM, I would start collating and editing their stories. The rest of my typical day is filled with on-air primetime schedules, meticulous meetings, plans, pitches and evaluations. Only then will I be able to head home, rest and recharge.

My job keeps me occupied all the time. I don't mind this at all. I would tell people that I eat the news for breakfast, lunch and dinner, which may sound like a corny exaggeration — but it is what it is and I am who I am. Volunteering myself as a messenger for the people was never a hard choice, for I believe that every individual in this world has a mission and a responsibility to fulfill. It just so happens that mine is to serve the public with the clarity they deserve.

A Public Servant to the Truth

My work as a journalist is heavily sustained by a strong sense of social responsibility. The press and subsequently journalism in their post-modern iterations are oftentimes dubbed as the fourth pillar of democracy (the other three being the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government). Every journalist is, therefore, a public servant and I don't ever intend to take my vocation for granted.

Journalists are in charge of the truth in the same way that legislators are in charge of the law. This has proved increasingly challenging for my peers and me, what with the current upsurge in misinformation and fake news plaguing all kinds of media platforms every single waking day. Technology, particularly television and the internet, has revolutionised the ways in which people consume and interact with information to the point that noises have become indistinguishable from the truth. It is my job as a journalist to keep articulating well-processed information for the people.



The sporadic dissemination of fake news is no mere phenomenon; it is a disease that will not cease until it utterly corrupts society. Therefore, citizens must always arm themselves with the best knowledge in order to keep their governments in check. This is why journalists should never fall too easily into complacency and must scrutinise and preserve the quality of the news that they deliver. I feel fortunate to be a part of Bayon TV in Cambodia, a reputable network founded on integrity, teamwork, accuracy and — most importantly — social responsibility. At Bayon, I get to actively combat the spread of misinformation and fake news by incorporating a reliable fact-checking system into all of our stories, as well as promoting this culture across other media platforms.

I am of the opinion that fake news will only be efficiently curtailed if journalists continue to be hell-bent on delivering good news for good people, and the backbone of all good news is the quest for veracity.

Delivering the Right Message during the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has launched the whole world on an unprecedented trajectory. Fake news has yet again proved to be a huge threat to the global community. Fake news propagates prejudices over solidarity, fear over understanding and rhetoric over expertise. More than ever, the community needs good journalists willing to keep fighting the good fight against ignorance. This is ultimately because the correct message that we should all be hearing during the ongoing pandemic is one of equality, as COVID-19 is indiscriminate and we are all in this together. It is not



just a matter of which country is doing the best at flattening the pandemic curve but rather a lesson in interconnectivity: each of us should become more aware of the impact that we can have upon others.

COVID-19 has unleashed tremendous social, political and economic distress across every country in the world and governments must concern themselves with surviving both the pandemic and its aftermath. As the designated trustees of their respective peoples, governments must also be the first to demonstrate that recovery begins with unity.

I, for one, am glad that Cambodia is part of the closely-knitted and resilient community that is ASEAN. In light of today's pressing issues of economic and social protectionism, ASEAN has always upheld the greater relevance of multilateral cooperation, trade and partnership as the primary keys to the future. In its very essence, the ASEAN I know will always ensure that no single member country is left behind, even as the pandemic ends and further challenges arise.

We need not be ruled by despair. I believe that this is the ultimate message here. We'll never truly be on our own, as long as we're ready to acknowledge that we're all tied to a giant web of humanity. There will always be someone out there to watch our backs and I'll be sure to keep sharing that good news.



“...the fake-news problem is neither a Cambodian nor an ASEAN problem. It is a global scale threat that we should fight together...”

The authenticity of information has become a longstanding issue that is affecting communities, societies and even democracy itself. One of the strategies available to build resilience to online disinformation involves media and information literacy. As a part of the **ASEAN Culture of Prevention**, ASEAN promotes a *culture of supporting the values of moderation* which encourages literacy in all of its many aspects and at all levels so as to prevent deliberate falsehoods and radicalisation.



NADINE ALEXANDRA (Actress and Environmentalist)
Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation (BOSF)

Voice of the Voiceless

“ All these images of orangutans being slaughtered. I’m going to talk about this issue because I don’t see anybody else talking about it. ”

I was 19, inexperienced and knew so little but when I picked a battle that I wanted to be in, I became highly dedicated to it. When you are that young and yet have a very grown-up role to take on, you sort of have an idealised image in your head of what that role is ultimately going to be. I certainly had expectations regarding environmental activism, particularly as part of the fight for orangutans. It was and still is a pressing issue. I thought everyone was going to be on board and that a direct approach could be taken - the organisation was going to engage in some research while the government would act to tackle the issue. However, that didn’t prove to be the case at all. Finding that out as you go, with these raw and albeit hopeful expectations about how the process is supposed to be, was disheartening and frustrating. However, that only fuelled my passion. I wanted to fight for the voiceless, become a shield to protect the orangutans from the bad things coming their way.

Beginning of the Journey

There were a lot of news reports and articles about orangutans and how their habitats were being destroyed in Kalimantan and Sumatra. That was the start of my fight for orangutans. I wanted to ease their pain and halt the injustice. Orangutans, following their instincts, were looking for food and stumbled upon a palm oil plantation. Considered pests, they were shot at and many were found dead while still huddling their babies. The misery continued as these baby orangutans were traded on the black markets and would end up living their lives in cages as pets, never knowing their natural habitats.



I am an Orangutan Warrior

I started to become vocal and speak as the voice of the orangutans through the BOS Foundation. It takes a village to raise a child, and so does fighting for the rights of orangutans. It takes collective power to bring these cases to light. From that beginning, the “orangutan warriors” were born and I became a part of them. We worked together as a team to spread the message and to create public awareness on orangutan conservation, what the struggles are and what we need from the public. It is an uphill battle but we are not here for ourselves. We are here to save our primate cousins. The orangutan is an “umbrella species”. When you save them, you save many other species that live within their habitats. So, we are here not only to save one species but are here to also save humanity and to help promote a more compassionate society.

What You Don’t Know, You Don’t Love

I live by this axiom. When people do not care about things, they are not inclined to change things that may benefit the environment. Up until now, I am still left in awe by the resilience that people on the ground show when fighting for the orangutans, and the reluctance of the general public to love orangutans and to care for the environment. Though daunting and tiring, I want to continue to create that awareness and love within people so that they will care. Nowadays, we live such hectic lives that we have no time and space to love other living things as our attention is elsewhere. However, we don’t have to tackle the environmental issue on an individual basis. Indeed, this issue can only be tackled collectively.



Love Above All Else

Countries in the Southeast Asian region belong to the same archipelago and have come together as part of ASEAN. I feel that we are one community that needs to work together in order to make significant changes that will lead to proper and robust evidence-based regulations and policies. Beyond all this though, we need to nurture the love for the environment. Fear is a good motivator but love is ultimately more sustainable.

An Environmental Problem Is Every Nation’s Problem

If we all realise that we are part of a larger community and that the borders between countries are invisible and transparent, we will be able to work better together as an entire community, and as part of ASEAN. For example, our environmental problems in Indonesia affect people in other countries. As ASEAN continues to build its community, we need to start joining hands to work together on this front. We are siblings with one common goal - to create a better world that is filled with love and compassion for the future generations. I am just a tool echoing this message, however, power ultimately lies in the hands of the people. I believe that we, as ASEAN community, can and will put a stop to this destruction if we are committed to working together, as brothers and sisters in arms.



“I don’t want us to look back in hindsight and to say that we should’ve done things differently. We need to look at each other as siblings and we need to work together, because protecting and conserving the environment is something that we will be presenting to future generations.”

The protection of our environment is everybody’s responsibility. Failure to prevent the destruction of our ecosystem leads to habitat loss, pollution and climate change. The ASEAN initiative on the **Culture of Prevention** aims to provide equitable access to a sustainable, clean and safe environment across the region. Yes, our planet is in a state of crisis, however, it is not too late to save it. Acting together as one community, let us join hands to accelerate efforts to protect our environment and humanity.



 **ANOUSA PHOTHISANE (President of Laobangfai Prime Association)**
Laobangfai Prime Association

The Power of Dance: A Big Break for Laos

“ My friends said to me:
‘We’re already at work but you’re still dancing?’ ”

Here’s a bit of a funny story: I have a law and political science degree to my name. I was going to be an ambassador or something along those lines because my father told me that we needed more people to work for the government. However, I soon realised that I preferred dancing to pretty much everything else and I thought perhaps it was better that way because a lot of my friends were working for the government already. Not that the decision liberated me from the emotional toll, for eyebrows were definitely raised and judgments were made. I carried on regardless.

I am, in fact, a choreographer and art director by trade. Right now, my day-to-day occupation centres around the Laobangfai Prime Association — Laos’ first breakdance troupe, which I co-founded. The journey to sustain its very existence has been one of hard-earned approvals and collective resolves, and even now we’re still dancing our way through every challenge that comes along. I grew up thinking that I could not make a living by dancing, but I guess that now I am.

The First Breakthrough

Our beginnings stretch back to the year 2000. Laos wasn’t exactly keen on western culture back then, so breakdancing in the country seemed like a pipedream, maybe even more akin to a joke. Nevertheless, we created some breakdancing videos, gathered a solid crew and began to take part in shows and competitions. As our accolades grew, grander ideas started to develop. In addition, a number of people asked if they could practice with us. Eventually, Laobangfai was set up in 2004. We weren’t always known as Laobangfai. At one point, we performed under the name of “Extension”. However, nobody could tell where we came from (frequently mistaking us for a Thai dance crew), which was less than ideal since our initial goal was to introduce the Lao performing arts to the ASEAN region, as well as on the international stage.



We therefore came up with our current moniker. *Bangfai* translates as fireworks in English and is a reference to the fireworks festival that we hold in Laos as a prayer to God for rain.

We do not take the opportunities we’ve experienced for granted. Despite sharing a similar cultural heritage with Thailand, Cambodia and Burma, Laos has its own wonderful colours that the world needs to see and appreciate, and we want to catch the global attention too, albeit in a somewhat non-orthodox fashion.

Laos, Remixed

My father influences me greatly and shapes my outlook in life. When Laos first became independent, the local arts were all about the country’s traditional culture. Anyhow, my father — a “pop style” actor/singer hybrid who was quite ahead of his time — was already dancing to Michael Jackson CDs at home. When I try to picture that statement in my mind, I am reminded of the importance of keeping up with the global stage. Art is a universal language and that language never ceases to evolve. It’s the same with Laobangfai. Breakdance is the language and Laos is what we’re trying to talk about.

Laobangfai’s style is the regular, good old-fashioned breakdance with a touch of home. We would dress up in traditional Lao costumes and dance to traditional Lao music that is remixed with contemporary hip hop tunes. Combined with breakdance’s athletic, distinctive movements, we felt that this approach would grant us more room for freedom and creativity.

We have now made our way to dozens of countries around the world, from France to South Korea to New Zealand, carrying the pride of our nation with us with each and every step we take.

Community and Creativity

When I visit another country, I think to myself: “Why we don’t have this, why we don’t have that, why can’t we do it?”, so when I see something new happen in my country, I feel happy. That’s my default mindset as a creative entrepreneur.

I don’t generally concern myself with the idea of success in conventional terms, I just want to dedicate my whole being to the things, people and places that raised me. Most of the projects that I take up are personal passions. One that was particularly close to my heart was undoubtedly the choreography that I helped to organise for the opening and closing ceremonies of the SEA Games in Laos. The resurrection of Nam Phou Park in Vientiane was another because I used to play soccer on the grounds around its historic fountain when I was younger. Indeed, the place had been long neglected before



we repurposed it into a cultural space.

I am constantly looking for the next opportunity to do something hands on for my own community. Indeed, it remains a great honour that I do not take lightly. Going forward, I want to keep campaigning for Laos’ artistic heritage. I want it to penetrate the veins of the global world as much as I want cultures to keep blending with one another. Take ASEAN as an example, an entire region with resonating legacies and identities. Imagine an all-star ASEAN dance group and the message of unity it will convey to different peoples. I am a proud citizen, of Laos, of ASEAN and of the world because, to me, the underlying message is equally clear: community empowers creativity and creativity empowers community.



“Art is a universal language and that language never ceases to evolve.”

Aligned with the values of the **ASEAN Culture of Prevention** is the aspiration to support a *culture of healthy lifestyle*, where dancing is not only an art form, but as a form of aerobic exercise that contributes to both physical and mental well beings of people.



dr. S. MADHUSUDHAN (Founder of Teddy Mobile Clinic)
Teddy Mobile Clinic

The Quest for a Family of Dignity and Humanity

“ We cannot change the world but we can definitely change someone’s world. ”

At one point in my life, I was jobless and had nothing to lose, so I started helping people. It proved to be quite addictive because once you help a person and realise that it means something, you feel like doing it more. You feel meaningful. You begin to notice that a little kindness is totally contagious.

I, for one, suspect that I’m merely emulating my father’s attitude toward people. He was a doctor and ran his medical clinic on the ground floor of our two-storey house. As a general rule, his services were free of charge for those who couldn’t afford them. It was inevitable that I followed in his footsteps, coupled with the solemn understanding that when your Indian parent is a doctor, you are expected to become one too (even when you’d rather be a cook and open your own restaurant!). Two of my three siblings are a doctor and a pharmacist, while my little brother successfully rebelled and became a software engineer. At the end of the day, all of them are the closest allies in my endeavour.

Humanising Humans

I never knew that there were so many homeless people on the streets of Kuala Lumpur. I learned that most of them were on their own and that they had nobody to take care of them. I recognised that they needed more than just medical care. They needed support. They needed a community.

There is a perpetuated stigma that homeless people are criminals and drug addicts, that they condemn themselves to the streets. I was similarly wary of such a notion in the beginning, however, the reality is that every single one of them has a different story to tell. I know a selfless old man who was diagnosed with lung cancer, who left his loving family because he knew they couldn’t pay for his treatments and he didn’t want to burden them. I know many others with their own stories. You just have to talk to them and humanise them. These people deserve a fighting chance to live with dignity. We need to show that we are there for them.



A Fierce Mission, A Fierce Promise

My mother had predicted long ago that I would bankrupt myself if I ever opened my own clinic, she wasn’t particularly wrong and I don’t at all mind. We started small. Five years ago, it was just my two siblings and me with the help of six to eight earnest volunteers. Nowadays, we easily have a hundred volunteers gladly coming to our aid. They’re my family and I’m nothing without them.

We set up the clinic on Wednesday nights, quickly made aware of just how much people rely on our helping hands. The poor, the homeless, kids in orphanages, low-income labourers, old folks, migrants, refugees. Healthcare is relatively inexpensive in Malaysia, yet many still lack accesses. Transportation costs are a common issue. Initial costs are too, no matter how cheap we may deem them to be. Embarrassment is another: these underprivileged people avoid hospitals for fear of being looked down. I have therefore made it my mission to make them believe that everybody is entitled to equal treatment.

Standing up to Sceptics and Challenges

Apart from medical care, we employ several other means to help the people on the streets, such as circulating groceries and paying for rental or tuition fees. Sceptics contend that this will render our people dependent. It’s a concern, yes, but I also believe that we cannot allow them to die on the streets. Social mobility and reintegration are indeed the eventual aims of our efforts, we have to remain patient and remind them that

together, we can raise the bar for many more.

Although my initiative isn’t always met with support, it doesn’t bother me in the slightest. I have witnessed the changes the clinic has brought to the lives of others. It’s a community of dignity and humanity. I have seen other mobile clinics rise in other parts of the country and that’s already more than I can ever hope for. Imagine how powerful it can be if the movement spreads across the ASEAN region or maybe even the world. ASEAN, for example, can facilitate endless collaborations and exchanges of resources among the citizens.

The possibilities are without limits. ASEAN can garner and unite a broader audience to bring more attention to basic healthcare issues for all layers of society, including the homeless and the marginalised.

Today, COVID-19 has unsurprisingly disrupted the mobile clinic’s operations. I therefore decided with a heavy heart to shut it down for the time being to protect my volunteers and my patients. However, I don’t intend to stop and nothing can stop me as long as I have my family and my friends at my side because we stand together in order to sustain one another.



“...be kind to one another, the little things you do can make a difference to another person.”

The depth and breadth of the unmet healthcare needs of impoverished people significantly reflect the importance of innovative community collaborations. Together, we can make a difference and embody the aspirations of the **ASEAN Culture of Prevention** on supporting a culture of respect for all that promote inclusive community and equitable access to opportunities for all, as well as in promoting and protecting the human rights of vulnerable and marginalised groups.



SONNY SWE (CEO of Frontier Myanmar Weekly Magazine)
Frontier Myanmar Weekly Magazine

Right Back to the Long Fight

“ To be a journalist, you’ve got to be really stubborn, because we stick to what we believe. We stick to defending press freedom. We stick to defending democracy. We reveal the truth at any cost and wage a war against misinformation. That is what we do. ”

In Myanmar, the telecommunications sector has only been open to privatisation in the past seven years. It is therefore totally understandable that the people of Myanmar still regard Facebook as the internet. They see the headlines, read a few passages, settle on a response (“Oh my, how vicious, how despicable, how sad!”), and share their so-called news with their friends and families. But, the way I see it, it is at least a sign of progress.

My life has been a long fight for freedom – my own as well as others’ – and there has been no time to dawdle. For me, it has all seemed fairly simple: I was running and I tripped and fell, so I got up and started running again. I always do.

The Constant Push Forward

My entrance to the news industry had been rather a coincidence. I owe my beginnings to the Mayor of Mandalay, who originally commissioned me to help produce the regional newspaper some twenty-five years ago. My job was mainly to ensure that the newspapers were properly printed. Admittedly, I did not know much about newspapers at the time. However, this proved to be a lively period of learning-by-doing, sustained by my mere determination to do good business.

The times back then were crazy. Indeed, it was a formative period as newspapers demanded punctuality and the meeting of deadlines, otherwise everything tended to pile up. Indeed, I could recall one particular incident very clearly. The printing machine had broken and this was, unfortunately affecting the scheduling of the entire publication. For a short while, everything seemed a complete frenzy. Ironically, this was also the moment that I fell in love with what I was doing, with all the pressure and with every deadline that I had to meet. I love it when I am pushed to run forward all the time. I love it when I am driven to be better and to perform better every step of the way.



I knew that I wanted to stay the course of the path that I had chosen, no matter how hard I had to work. I wanted to build my own publication from the ground up and do what I had been doing for as long as I could. This dream ultimately came true in 2000 when I co-founded *The Myanmar Times*, the first privately-owned, English-language newspaper in Myanmar, alongside my Australian then-partner, Ross Dunkley. My aim was no less than to set and raise the standards for our readers with my own hands.

Mutual Respect

Good journalism obliges one to act with a little audacity. How can we challenge the boundaries? How can we be people’s ears and voices? How can our daredevil quest be pursued without a hitch? How can every single choice of words help to create decent content that is also ethical, independent, critical and of public interest?

The news industry, in my opinion, is pretty straightforward. What we’re offering is the truth, what we’re selling is knowledge. If we do a good job, we earn a reputation. If we taint that reputation with even the smallest mistake, everything goes down the drain. Once you get your readers to trust you, they make decisions



(hopefully better ones) based on the clarity that you generate. This premise of mutual respect plays a central role in keeping the dynamic relationship between journalists and the audience alive.

Being Human

I have learned that all human beings are truly the same. If you see someone solely as a human being, I think a lot of problems will go away. Moreover, during the four years that I spent in the United States during my adolescence, I also cultivated a default mentality based on the belief that if you work hard, you will achieve what you set out to do. You go for it and you never stop. Hence, we must never stop chasing our hopes of betterment, even if going the distance is what it takes.

Being ASEAN

In the ASEAN region, we have a surfeit of issues in common. We might have been born and bred in different countries but we are all human beings.

If we face these issues as one community, then we are bound to effect bigger changes at a systemic level. My country has seen such changes first hand. Indeed, Myanmar came to the ASEAN’s fold quite late in comparison with Malaysia and Indonesia. ASEAN was the shield for Myanmar, particularly ten to fifteen years ago when the military regime was in power. However, ASEAN’s non-interference principle has strengthened the community as a whole and it has encouraged our government to undertake reforms by demonstrating the fruits of the global standards enjoyed by its member countries.

Now that Myanmar is slowly getting the hang of its young democracy, I have been blessed with the luxury to carry on the long fight for other human beings. The truth is always in need of resilient messengers and I plan to do my part by never taking my freedom for granted.



“...ASEAN’s non-interference principle has strengthened the community as a whole and it has encouraged our government to undertake reforms by demonstrating the fruits of the global standards enjoyed by its member countries.”

The ASEAN Political-Security Community will be a united, inclusive and resilient community filled with people living in a safe, harmonious and secure environment, embracing the values of tolerance and moderation, and also upholding the fundamental ASEAN principles, shared values and norms.



MARIBEL ONGPIN (CEO of HABI)
HABI The Philippines Textile Council

Weaving Identities, Binding Communities

“ I never imagined I'd be doing what I am now doing. I just wanted to go to school. That was my ambition. ”

I have been inspired by a number of individuals. My mother who was a delightfully hard-working lady; my late husband who was patriotic; and my teachers who made me learn about myself, about my country and the world. A woman educated is a woman empowered and I would never have been so impassioned by the causes I devote myself to if this were not the case.

I remember how adamant my husband was about coming back home when he and I had finished our studies overseas. He could've stayed abroad and settled for a good job there, but all he wanted to do was to return to the home he loved so much. I found solace in his determination. It was the drive that fuelled his lifelong service to his fellow countrymen, the drive that he carried on until his passing.

The truth is that it was the country that brought us to life. It is an identity we keep with us for the rest of our lives, and I value this as much as I do God and my family. This is also the mindset that I pursued during the founding of HABI, the Philippines Textile Council.

Taking Pride in National Pride

It all began at the annual ASEAN Traditional Textile Symposium in 2009. The Philippines was set to host this prestigious event. However, we soon realised that every other country has a national textile council of its own, except us. I was the president of the National Museum Foundation of the Philippines back then and the foundation was enlisted to help organise the event. I subsequently decided that we had to create our own textile society and thus HABI was established.

Traditional textiles are a testament to our national identity. The preservation of indigenous fabrics is something I strongly champion and to do this we have to keep abreast of present-day challenges. We also have to emancipate local, indigenous weavers, as it is these people who are the guardians of our legacy. We have to modernise but we also have to be culturally sensitive. With these goals in mind, education, alongside research, prove to be instrumental.

What I cherish most about this enterprise is how grassroots it actually is. It encourages collaborations across different levels of society. It allows everyone involved to be exposed to one another, thus instilling a shared understanding, as well as a stronger sense of oneness and solidarity.



This sense of grassroots goes beyond the national context all the way up to the ASEAN-level because, for the most part, we share the same veins of history and geopolitical identity. There are more similarities than there are differences between us in fact and the most interesting part is that it's all reflected in our respective fabrics. The existence of ASEAN, both as a community and an intergovernmental organisation, has enabled us to travel and to see and experience one another more, to exchange unique ethnic products among ourselves and, as a result, we have learned to appreciate one another more. I truly believe that the revitalisation of the traditional textile industry can help local communities to realise their full potentials and I'm very glad that this is the case.

A Work of Betterment

Before our initiative began to take effect, the national textile industry was practically dormant here. Lack of cotton supply and credit facilities was an issue. As a result, weavers used to rely on synthetic threads, which are of inferior quality in comparison with natural cotton fibres, not to mention quite expensive. On the flipside, cotton supply was limited and weavers would have to travel long distances in order to obtain this precious commodity. Moreover, farmers didn't really grow cotton anymore due to low demand. We, therefore, began advocating for cotton production over cotton imports. Planting indigenous fibres should be supported and promoted, and this does not just apply to cotton but also abaca, piña and other crops too. We have since partnered up with the Philippines Fibre Industry Development Authority to produce and buy cotton from our own farmers.

I most certainly do not take credit for this but I am proud of what HABI has achieved for our people and for our culture. I have seen gifted indigenous artists and designers rise to the international stage, I have seen diverse communities of weavers persist and prosper and the economies in rural areas improve. I am proud to look back and be reminded that this wasn't achieved overnight.

A Restless Mind, A Restless Conscience

With five wonderful kids all living their own fulfilling lives, I have nothing but time (and my cats and dogs) by my side. I have dedicated much of my time to acting upon and speaking up for the things that I care about: the environment, children's rights, heritage conservation, social justice and arts and culture, to name but a few of my interests. Moreover, a Manila-based newspaper has been kind enough to give me the opportunity to share my thoughts and views through my own weekly column.

However, that's not nearly the end of the matter. I intend to continue striving to do good and I want to stay inspired and to continue with the process of education. I want to keep relaying messages to the world: value your environment, don't let it become wasted or destroyed.

Treasure your natural resources, try to steer clear of the artificial. And finally, understand people. Enrich each other with power and knowledge. We are always a part of something greater than ourselves. If Indonesia didn't come looking for a textile community that was non-existent in that ASEAN Symposium a decade ago, HABI wouldn't exist today. There is so much that we can achieve together.

“...it is so nice to note that in ASEAN there are more similarities than there are differences...and that's what we should be taking advantage of...”

Through weaving communities, we are not only creating a dynamic and harmonious community that is aware and proud of its identity, culture and heritage and embodies the **ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community** but also a resilient, inclusive, people-oriented, people-centred community that engenders equitable development and inclusive growth and represents the **ASEAN Economic Community**.





 **RAYMOND KHOO (Pilot of Singapore Airlines and Seaplane Rally)**
Project Stingray Dreams

Lifting Lives

“ Just charge towards what a lot of people say can’t be done, and keep at it... ”

At the age of fourteen, I knew that I was going to be “the adventure guy”. My penchant for thrills was simply too alive within me to just ignore. I have always been an eager participant in all kinds of sports and outdoor activities. Indeed, amongst other exciting activities, I was even a member of the national badminton youth squad at the time. However, everything ultimately fell into place when I chanced upon a government-funded opportunity to join the Singapore Youth Flying Club. This club gave me my first taste of a machine lifting into the sky. By the time I turned seventeen, I had learned how to fly. I pretty much knew by then that I was going to be a pilot, and I kept trusting and pursuing that belief until I became a professional pilot for Singapore Airlines.

It is important to come to terms with the core of your being before you can explore the sweet realm of endless possibilities. I’ve long surmised that I am a man in his Timberland walking boots, built to stride over boundaries to connect with people around the world; to lift them up literally and figuratively and share the adventure of a lifetime. Three years ago, I settled on a compelling course to do exactly that and, in my case, it’s a seaplane rally.

A Sentimental Rush

Six hundred and fifty million people. That’s approximately the number of people hustling and bustling across ASEAN region. The thought of it awakens a rush inside me because a human connection has always been the foundation of my visions for life. Think of all the wonderful things you can do when that many people choose to live as one. Identity is a powerful thing.

I’ve flown over the ASEAN region for more than twenty years now. I can tell you that there is hardly a place on earth that can compete with its glorious archipelagos. On top of it all, though, it’s home and I care about the people. I care about the beauty it exudes. And so I just thought that there ought to be something good that I could do for the region. An idea came into mind. It was of Charley Boorman and Ewan McGregor (yes, the actor). They were two gentlemen



travelling around the world on a motorcycle ride in an eye-opening voyage that was documented in two televised features called *The Long Way Round* and *The Long Way Down*. What better way is there to celebrate an entire continent than to actually tour its length and breadth for the entire global population to see?

There are thousands of gorgeous coastlines across the ASEAN region, and coastlines are obviously the environments that seaplanes are intended for. As a pilot who is also a huge motorcycle enthusiast, a seaplane rally represents a meeting of my passions. This inspiration was all I needed for a push and soon after, Project Stingray Dreams was conceived and is the name that my partners and I picked for the rally of our dreams.

What We Rally For

Naturally, a seaplane rally is going to be a massive event and will require substantial funding. We therefore decide to break the project into a number of workable and manageable pieces, starting with an initial motorcycle ride across the ASEAN region to kick-start the project. We imagined the publicity that this would garner. State-of-the-art technologies, virtual realities, drones, 360° cameras—it will be ASEAN on full display. Tourism potentials will be elevated. Community ties will be strengthened. As

we gather more sponsors, the next step is to move up into the air with our seaplane rally. We are aiming to link up with investors and governments, as well as with the ASEAN secretariat, for these rallies. We envisage that a significant part of the rally’s revenue will be channelled to ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance.

We are, after all, the sum of our parts. That is why I yearn to achieve this ASEAN dream. This rallying together does not have to be too formal, and we aim for these rally events to be fun and appealing to all.

Resisting Limits

In spite of everything, the what and the how are always secondary to the purpose. You have to hang on to that because it’s easy to lose yourself in the enormity of what you’re trying to do, and with the universe’s blessing, it’s only going to get bigger and bigger. This project, for instance, is clearly a mammoth task. A lot of challenges are bound to emerge and indeed they have been. Most recently, we have to deal with a regrettable setback, specifically with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We realised that we would have to postpone our project, which we have expected to launch between 2020 and 2021.

However, these challenges are always educational. One of my role models, Soichiro



Honda — the only Japanese citizen whose name is etched into the Automotive Hall of Fame in the United States — taught me that you have to keep forging ahead no matter how many times you fail. We are keeping our heads up and we believe that we are involved in something good. We also know that we are not alone and it’s indeed a nice feeling to know that we’re in this together. I’ve made it my personal mission to demonstrate this fact to everyone: through the lessons from the amazing people I met during my teenage volunteer experience in Singapore’s refugee camp, through working with many entities and leading the nationwide Nepal Earthquake Relief efforts by Singapore pilots. The never-give-up attitude is the fuel for all of us to always going forward because together, we can make anything happen.

My determination is steadfast and our seaplane rally will transform lives. Whatever comes our way, Project Stingray Dreams will soar.

“A better future can only happen when we come together and do things together as a community...”

The ASEAN Culture of Prevention seeks to build a culture of good governance at all levels by way of promoting responsible citizenship, equitable socio-economic development and growth including access to education and employment so as to prevent social ills including poverty, crime, drugs and corruption, among others.





SORAVIT, MAYLIN and PANTACH (Students)
MyWaste Project

Winning Big through Small Steps

“ We’re proud of ourselves for moving out of our comfort zone, having the courage to fight for change and addressing a cause that we feel strongly about. ”

When you live within the bubble of a community, particularly one that you feel comfortably settled into, it’s easy to feel sheltered. These are words that people rarely associate with any negative undertones. Occasionally this sense of comfort and shelter may be extended to the point where it feels immobilising, as complacency has a knack of preventing you from having your say about the big wide world out there.

Speaking from experiences, we can vouch for this claim first-hand and we certainly aren’t the only ones. To be fair, we were much younger back then. School was our entire ecosystem... or so we thought. However, you eventually grow up, your perspective widens and you suddenly realise that a lot of work needs to be done; not only for you and your community but also within the home that you’re inhabiting, specifically mother earth. However, the first victory that you can ever pull off in an effort to make the world a better place is simply to come out of your shell.

We are Pantach Anantapong, Soravit Thummawatwimon and Maylin Wongjarapun — students, citizens, members of society — and we’ll tell you why.

Setting Plans, Setting Goals

All change should begin with a plan. Ours is to rejuvenate and revolutionise the waste-recycling culture long dismissed in our school. Inspired by business models that encourage users to collect points in exchange for rewards, we wanted to develop a digital application that would shake up the waste management system in our school. Unfortunately, our idea proved to be costly, so we had to pivot a little and place a larger emphasis on our field operations.

We ultimately decided to call it the “MyWaste Project”. In essence, people turn their waste over to us and receive eco-friendly rewards



in return. These rewards come in many forms, such as sustainable bamboo straws. We enrolled the project in a competition called The Youth for Sustainable Development Goals. To be honest, we wanted to think and indeed become big from the get-go and to try to solve the waste problem for the whole of Thailand. However, we were mindful of our lack of resources, at least for the time being. Nevertheless, it is an article of faith for us that even the smallest steps matter. The problems in our society simply won’t disappear until people decide to walk hand-in-hand with the complete understanding that we all have to act, no matter how small our efforts are. Today, we can effect changes in our school. Tomorrow, we can effect changes in Thailand. In a couple of years, we can promote changes in the ASEAN region and maybe even the world.

The Need for a Wake-Up Call

Waste is a multidimensional issue. It is a psychological problem as much as it is an environmental problem. All waste stems from a lethal combination of unhealthy consumer behaviours and unsustainable lifestyles. What we must do to put an end to these habits is to promote a preventive mindset, because our waste problem will never be solved until we curtail our waste production. Nevertheless, making people care is a tough challenge.

We suspect that people remain nonchalant toward the handling of waste as they are oblivious to the consequences that they are creating. Therefore, unless inconvenience is imminent, people would rather turn a blind eye, which further underlines the urgency in trying to come out of our shell to take a stand on this challenge.

In order to eliminate the waste problem, all of the interlocking elements of society require reform: governments, corporations and households. Thorough planning, as well as proper risk-and-benefit assessments, will be key to such an epochal shift. However, most of all, it is our duty as young people to never stop advocating for change. Find a good cause, do something and fight for it. The rest will follow. People will follow. Such was the case with our cause.

The Work of Ripples

At first, many were sceptical of our project. Indeed, we are but three young people trying to find a way to be a force for change. We persevere by remaining optimistic and continue with all the things that we’ve been doing. Going forward, we wish to inspire other schools throughout Thailand and eventually go beyond our schools. We want MyWaste to be a movement that spreads and normalises the virtues of waste-recycling. Maybe, just maybe, we will finally start to see a significant shift in people’s behaviours.



After all, environmentalism is the work of ripples: for other humans, for all living things, for future generations.

More than anything, we wish to inspire. MyWaste is a mindset that can be applied by everyone at every level of society and across all social institutions. We dream of, for example, sharing our story across the ASEAN community, because stories empower and ASEAN is a platform that can unify people across the region. In addition, the bigger the platform, the bigger the opportunity for everyone to be exposed to each other and other ideas. Look around, let the reality of your surroundings sink into your mind and heart, then march forward. Now is as good a time as any and it starts with the belief that in the bigger picture, anything that anybody does always has an effect.



“...everyone should change their habits and strive for an eco-friendly and sustainable lifestyle.”

Waste management is only a secondary solution that is not actually tackling environmental problems at their source. Being conscious regarding consumption and reducing waste is the mindset shift that we need to engage in and promote as a community. The **ASEAN Culture of Prevention** on supporting a *culture of resilience and care for the environment* will benefit future generations.



★ HÀ NINH PHAM (Artist)

The Art of Being Human

“ I am a part of Viet Nam but I am also a part of the world; I am a part of you people and I am a part of so many different things. ”

I did not always feel at peace about the idea of being an artist. In retrospect, this had more to do with the way art compels you to flesh out the statements of your authenticity as a living being, and I was not quite done resolving my own dissonances. My conviction only shifted once I discovered what I truly wanted to do with myself.

I grew up with my father, a Northern Vietnamese visionary who thought of himself as an artist but ended up as a veteran of the war. He made me go to the Viet Nam University of Fine Arts, projecting much of the dream of his youth onto me. I did not blame him for that, although it was not much of a surprise either when I did not feel an immediate connection with the local art scene upon graduation.

A lot of art back then was cultural, exotic, politically charged, like something that was very uniquely Vietnamese, and perhaps I just felt as though whatever I had to say on the matter would simply be redundant or inadequate. Perhaps I had always known that I had other statements to make. In any case, I wasn't done navigating.

So I opened up this coffee shop in Hanoi, just a couple blocks away from the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum. Funnily enough, I always feel that the coffee shop was the first professional artwork I ever made. I built it from scratch: it's full of do-it-yourself stuff, the chairs, the tables, all kinds of things inside the place. Maybe it was then that I first realised that I had the liberty to have my own say, that I could sculpt it — both literally and figuratively — however I desired.

Validating Humanity

It was my father who sent me off yet again to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. However, after three long years of regaining my sense of self and purpose overseas, the decision to devote myself to the arts had finally been my own.



Ever since I started to feel like an individual, I have been trying to make art because I believe that I have something to bring to the world, no matter how good or bad it is. Art is a demonstration of individualities, a means to give tangible form to thoughts and emotions, therefore validating one's humanity.

Any fear, greed, guilt or other negative feelings that I have are largely absolved by the act of making these bodies of work, these pieces of art. I, too, wish that they could be a shelter for as many people as possible. That is why I am inclined to create works without a clear message because somehow, it feels pretentious to create a message and to then use a work as a piece of “propaganda” for the message itself. When I start a drawing or set up a collection or an exhibition, I don't concern myself with the message that I want to deliver. Instead, I want to explore a concept and invite the viewer to consider it, to develop their ideas together with me. In other words, I want them to be human with me.

Transcending Rules

At this point, I recognise that autonomy has perhaps been the common denominator of my art to date. We, as people, are perennially defined by rules and configurations, and autonomy means having the courage to mould their fluidity. Our culture in Viet Nam is very communal. We practically live for each other and it can, therefore, be a formidable feat to maintain an individual footing within such a culture. Indeed, often there is conflict to be navigated when attempting to integrate individuality with communality, and I know that I still have to work on harmonising my identity with my community. For the most part, though,

these days I feel stronger as a person when I am faced with differences. Everybody is entitled to be a multitude of things at once. It makes us feel alive.

I used “Cheat Codes” — an exhibition which also happened to be my first ever solo show — to ponder the idea of being in a world with so many rules. Playing by others' rules? Well, I have never been particularly good at that. I cannot change the game (call it life, call it social norms or even the law, the metaphor is pretty broad) because the game is so big that one can never escape from it. The only way you can do that is by cheating, so to speak. I tinkered with the notion of being a player who simultaneously plays and creates the game. This is basically cheating, however, it's also exciting and I ask the viewers to undergo the experience of living a duality with me — no, a multiplicity — beyond the rules.

A Little Part of a Little Bit of Everything

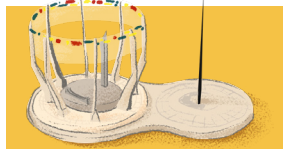
In this modern world, it may be fair to say that everyone is a little part of a little bit of everything. Identities and communities overlap with one another. I am my father's son, a Vietnamese artist, a former student in the United States, a member of the ASEAN community, a citizen of the world. I am proud of who I am and every society that I belong to. For one, I am proud of being a Southeast Asian. We are so different and yet the same. There is power in that fact.

I don't see a lot of Southeast Asian artists out here in the Western art world. Then again, if I were to name a challenge that I see as an artist, it would reflect how many of us still think of



“the Western audience” and the “global audience” as being synonymous. We Southeast Asians are the global audience, too. Sometimes, the dichotomy between what's “global” and “local” is nothing but counterproductive, maybe even reductive.

I just want to do more things with my fellow artists from other ASEAN countries. I want us to enliven a purpose, creating a web of connections so that the art we create can become a chain of relief for those who seek to come to terms with themselves.



“ASEAN is a way of thinking about our distinctive position in the world, in the global sphere, which is really hopeful and motivating...”

The ASEAN Culture of Prevention actively promotes a culture of peace and intercultural understanding by way of celebrating cultural pluralism, mutual understanding and strengthening the resiliency of community so as to prevent racial, religious distrust and disharmony, intolerance, lack of respect for life and diversity, among others.



Photo Credits

Shutterstock.com:
 Kraken Images • Dragon Images •
 Kapture House • Stock Image Factory
 • Littlekidmoment •
 Focal Point • 9hong •
 Odua Images • project1 photography •
 Nopphon_1987 • 2p2play • bankerwin
 • TORWAISTUDIO • Rawpixel.com •
 Doucefleur • Kertu • Hagen Production
 • Hananeko_Studio • paulaphoto



www.asean.org



[aseansecretariat](https://www.facebook.com/aseansecretariat)



[@asean](https://www.instagram.com/asean)



[@asean](https://twitter.com/asean)



[asean secretariat](https://www.youtube.com/aseansecretariat)