



A Qualitative Analysis on the Cross-Country Experiences of selected ASEAN Member States on Gender and Development

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ABSTRACT

ASEAN has been vocal with its support for gender equality and women's empowerment; they have formed committees and regional mechanisms that will guide them in achieving this. They also spearheaded various meetings with its member states and established partnerships with other organizations outside ASEAN to further enhance their response to gender and development. Their aim is to promote gender and development with their three pillars to create a gender-sensitive society. Based on the data gathered, the women's sector and LGBTQI+ community in selected ASEAN member states is still struggling with gender equity. There have been developments, but hardships are still visible in their work and in society; they still lack opportunities to grow in fields that are dominated by men; they are still suffering from unequal treatment; and some are still not represented in politics.

RESUMO

La ASEAN ha manifestado abiertamente su apoyo a la igualdad de género y el empoderamiento de las mujeres; han formado comités y mecanismos regionales que los guiarán para lograrlo. También encabezaron varias reuniones con sus estados miembros y establecieron asociaciones con otras organizaciones fuera de la ASEAN para mejorar aún más su respuesta al género y el desarrollo. Su objetivo es promover el género y el desarrollo con sus tres pilares para crear una sociedad sensible al género. Según los datos recopilados, el sector de las mujeres y la comunidad LGBTQI+ en determinados estados miembros de la ASEAN todavía luchan por lograr la equidad de género. Ha habido avances, pero las dificultades aún son visibles en su trabajo y en la sociedad; todavía carecen de oportunidades para crecer en campos dominados por los hombres; todavía sufren un trato desigual; y algunos todavía no están representados en la política.

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Introduction

Gender does not only relate to a person's sexual orientation, but also to the cultural and social reference that the person selects whether he or she wants to be mentally masculine or female, as well as how you mold yourself as you grow up (Pryzgoda & Chryiler, 2000). Gender and development go hand in hand since both attempt to enhance people's living situations and how these individuals are acknowledged in the progress (Momsen & Momsen, 2009). Gender and development are not merely about empowering women or ignoring men's egos, but about advocating for the empowerment of all individuals, regardless of gender or social standing. It is a movement that promotes equality between the sexes, color, race, age, and anything else that deals with discrepancies in life and opportunities (Steans & Tepe-Belfrage, 2016).

Discrimination grew as more pressing issue particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to increase the violence and hate towards Asians, minorities like the LGBTQI+ community, women, and children (Gover et al., 2020). Although the Philippines ranks 17th in the world in terms of gender equality, with 78.4% of its gender gap closed to date, making it a top performer in East Asia and the Pacific (Buchhave & Belghith, 2022), there is still gender inequality issues and opportunities that needs to address.

In regional context, Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) plays a crucial role in promoting regional peace, order, and stability among its member states. It is essential to address this issue and work towards a more inclusive society. ASEAN it represents all sectors of the society whether you belong to the oppressed, LGBTQI+ community, women sector, or children. They are committed to promote a strong relationship between its member states and countries outside Southeast Asia and they are also dedicated to enhancing its commitment in the international scene and trade (ASEAN, 2020).

It is important for us to fully understand its purpose, function, and relevance in our daily lives and to the world. Most Southeast Asians are having a hard time with these changes in terms of political, social, cultural, and economic developments due to their background of being conservative. These developments should be acknowledge to achieve a better community, though it is a given that they will take a lot of time for us to adapt to these changes, but we should consider that it will help us to progress for a long time.

Despite improvements and developments, how can ASEAN continue to promote gender and development frameworks and policies in Southeast Asian nations where the women's sector and the LGBTQI+ community still need socio-cultural and eco-political support? Also, how does ASEAN increase its interventions to promote gender equality even in deeply entrenched social systems? The purpose of this research is to provide insight on the plethora of ever-changing gender and development initiatives in regional contexts, particularly in nations with strong cultural norms.

Methodology

This study used a systematic document review using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses, or PRISMA Model (Cheong et al., 2023), to examine gender and development scholarly articles and ASEAN published reports to construct general themes and interpretations to strengthen transparency. Initially, the study identified the 10 ASEAN member states to give a wide and impartial examination. Articles were identified in credible scholarly databases such as Google Scholar and ScienceDirect and screened by abstracts. However, in the screening and eligibility process, only five countries were recurrent, not duplicated, and accessible in full and in English texts.

Thus, fifty (50) scholarly articles were included with selected five (5) ASEAN member states, such as Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore, related to gender and development foci.

Summary of Findings

The ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have had a huge influence on the whole community, allowing for peaceful orders, norms, and an emphasis on gender equality. ASEAN established dedicated committees to handle gender issues, developed work plans, regulations for gender training, and maximized knowledge resources. However, activities such as building gender institutions, developing and implementing gender mainstreaming policies, and boosting women's empowerment are still missing. These organizations lack the legal and financial power to enforce legislation, and gender issues are frequently handled as economic and social concerns rather than political concerns. As seen in table 1, even if the selected ASEAN member nations enforce the framework, the women's sector continues to suffer from inequity.

Furthermore, addressing gender diversity or development is commonly related to women's empowerment, feminism, equality, and equity. Feminism typically integrates gender development since they were historically the ones who experienced unfairness and paved the road for society to acknowledge their rights and eradicate the stigma.

Table 1.

Selected ASEAN Countries and the Challenges of Women's

Country	Women's Landscape
Indonesia	The long history of under-representation of women in politics and public sphere may have influence several factors such as cultural context. The country still heavily patriarchal where the beliefs that are men are the only responsible in providing the needs of their family.
Cambodia	Women are overworked, underpaid, and are not given opportunities to advance to supervisory roles. Additionally, some women have suffered sexual harassment at work and are not being compensated appropriately while on maternity leave.

Vietnam	Due to the stereotype that women should only be used as caregivers, employers prioritized men over women, especially in highly professional and technical positions. Also, disparity in access to education and training in general, and to skilled labor in particular is prevalent.
Singapore	Political empowerment of women is still low as well as women in high-ranking positions.
Philippines	Women's safety and the percentage of female labor force still need to be improved. Also, people give the laws protecting women from harassment and violence a little thought and access to healthcare, sex education, and birth control treatments is frequently restricted.

The findings revealed five common themes, including gender and development, the role of ASEAN, addressing discrimination and inequality, empowerment and leadership, ethical considerations, and the potential of digital economies and fashion to increase awareness and inclusivity.

Gender and Development

It underline the significance of gender and development as a primary area of the study. It is a vital component that addresses the importance of equity, justice, and empowerment for women and other marginalized groups in society. Also, the theory of feminism is referenced briefly as a guiding concept in dealing with power relations and oppression. GAD policies have been designed and are in place to address disparities and enhance opportunity. Factors that may impede advancement are still present, yet significant progress is being made. In addition, gender equality should be mainstreamed instead of a add-on to the overall framework and strategies.

ASEAN Community

It is recognized as an important institution that fosters understanding, healthy connections, and a common sense of identity and duty among member states. Also, the ASEAN's responsibility in promoting gender equality and development, developing human capability, and fostering an inclusive and harmonious society is vital to have a framework within the region in terms gender and development strategies, actions, and response. In addition, gender equality should be mainstreamed instead of add-on to the overall framework and strategies.

Discrimination and Inequality

Despite attempts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, there were issues of discrimination, inequity, and violence that persist in society. There is a need to highlight the promotion of awareness, treating people fairly, and providing equal opportunity to all people, regardless of gender. When it comes to economic and social rights, women are

less given opportunities to hone their skills and abilities for development. Even if new and better opportunities are being offered to women, still the vulnerable poor women are left behind. Also, there were issues when it comes to fair wages and hours when it comes to working conditions.

Empowerment and Leadership

It highlights the necessity of empowering women and fostering female leadership in a variety of areas, including the political and public sphere, economy, and vulnerable people. It emphasizes the importance of education in character development, social awareness, and regional affinities. Women are encouraged and should be exposed to entrepreneurship to take on their economic rights.

Digital Economy and LGBTQI+ community

There was also a brief highlight of the potentiality of digital economies throughout the world as opportunity, as well as the usage of fashion as a method for the LGBTQI+ community and the women sector to address their challenges and raise awareness. It stresses the significance of fashion in reflecting society, questioning established views, and empowering the LGBTQI+ community. These findings gave insight on the ASEAN region's issues and progress toward gender equality and women's empowerment. It highlights the need of eliminating gender stereotypes, encouraging women's involvement in a variety of fields, and guaranteeing equitable opportunity for both genders.

Conclusion

Despite difficulties, ASEAN is still striving for a means to ensure that member countries live peacefully and that various nations visiting the area make constructive and meaningful pledges to the region's peaceful, helpful, and harmonious atmosphere. The success of the ASEAN Community and GAD is dependent on ASEAN people, regardless of gender, being aware of and accepting of a shared identity. Furthermore, they are prepared to utilize other ASEAN committees to effectively and efficiently promote gender and development among ASEAN member nations. ASEAN's GAD initiatives should tap into and construct a gender sensitive development program that includes educational institutions.

Education also provides a solid foundation for character development, inculturation, social awareness, and regional loyalty. It is clear that today's youth are the future leaders and inhabitants of ASEAN nations, and they will play a significant role in bringing about a rules-based, people-oriented, and people-centered ASEAN Community, where their motto "One vision, One Identity, One Community" will come alive.

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