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# Assessing ASEAN-India Future Cooperation Opportunities through the Sustainable Development Framework

Melinda Martinus\*

## Abstract

As ASEAN and India mark the 30 years of their partnership in 2022, it will be critical to revisit the two sides' cooperation plan. Since the adoption of the first Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress, and Shared Prosperity (POA) in 2004, ASEAN-India cooperation has been steadily evolving with various key cooperation areas such as security, transport, trade and investment, tourism, environment, and education. The partnership has also been more crosscutting and complex with the addition of cross-pillar cooperation in the most recent POA (2021-2025), such as initiatives for integration, connectivity, smart city, institutional strengthening, and sustainable development cooperation. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined by the United Nations can serve as a framework to identify the future of India-ASEAN key cooperation focus areas. Based on ASEAN and India's respective SGD scorecards, both parties must cooperate to address common weaknesses such as biodiversity and environmental protection and health and well-being. Both must also leverage their SDG strengths by promoting and exporting their expertise for strategic gains. India should leverage its climate pledges and achievements. Meanwhile, ASEAN must proactively promote their experiences and expertise in enhancing quality education.

**Keywords:** Please add five keywords: sustainable development goals (SDGs), ASEAN, India, ASEAN-India cooperation.

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## Overview

ASEAN and India mark their 30 years of partnership in 2022. Since India was admitted into ASEAN's Sectoral Dialogue Partner in 1992 and became a full dialogue partner three years later, cooperation between the two sides has been steadily evolving, with security, transport, trade and investment, tourism, environment, and education sectors remaining the key focus areas. India also became a member of the ASEAN-led regional cooperation, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), in 1995, which elevates both sides' commitment to political security dimensions.

The first Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress, and Shared Prosperity (POA) in 2004 has marked more concrete commitments from both sides to work on global issues.<sup>1</sup> The cooperation between ASEAN and India has been progressing. The POA has been updated since then to adapt to several milestones. For instance, the global financial crisis spurred by the subprime mortgage crisis in the United States in 2008 has dragged down the economic growth of both sides. ASEAN's economic growth slowed from 6.2per cent in 2007 to 5.5per cent in 2008.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, India's economic growth was heavily hit from 7.6per cent in 2007 to 3.0per cent in 2008.<sup>3</sup> During that period, the protectionist tendency becomes unavoidable as both sides attempted to recover their economy and come back stronger after the crisis.

However, ASEAN quickly responded by introducing a new trade plan to avoid the protectionist force. ASEAN presented the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) during the 19<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in Bali in 2011, and various negotiations to realize the partnership had been initiated since then. The initiation of RCEP was ground-breaking. The massive accord was planned to bring together the ten member nations of ASEAN along with China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand --and, initially, India. Under the best possible scenario, RCEP would represent approximately 30per cent of global trade and GDP, making it the world's largest free trade agreement (FTA). India since then has become an active dialogue partner in the negotiation process and shaping the policy directions – although it withdrew from the deal in 2019 because of India's fear of the surges in imports.<sup>4</sup>

The massive growth of China's economy has also become an essential milestone in ASEAN-India relations. As China's rise could destabilize the Indo-Pacific region economically and politically, India spearheaded deeper cooperation with its Southeast Asian counterparts. India's Act East Policy, launched in 2014, marked a more concrete direction to make the cooperation in the Indo-Pacific more pronounced to balance against China's rise. Before the Act East Policy, cooperation with ASEAN counterparts remained in strategic political security and economic domains. But, nowadays, both sides were more confident in articulating their shared interests that have never been explored before. For instance, tourism, talent and technology were significant key focus areas to enhance people-to-people connectivity and the human development element between ASEAN and India cooperation.

Exploring each other's culture and enhancing dialogues has become critical to forging the future partnership, especially where mutual trust between both sides remains low. A survey conducted by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS)-Yusof Ishak Institute showed that 47.8per cent of 1677 elite opinion-makers from ASEAN have no confidence that India will do the right thing to contribute to global peace, security,

prosperity, and governance.<sup>5</sup> The respondents mainly think that India is distracted with its internal and sub-continental affairs and thus cannot focus on global concerns and issue and does not have the capacity of political will for global leadership.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, Indian policymakers started to notice ASEAN's critical role in the international affairs. A survey conducted by the Brookings Institution India Centre highlights that Southeast Asia is among the top three important regions for Indian interests. Southeast Asia even ranks higher than India's immediate neighbours, Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>

The coronavirus pandemic has left the world with economic scarring. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) data showed that Southeast Asia's GDP growth rate slumped to -3.2per cent in 2020, although it had bounced back to 2.9per cent in 2021.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, India recorded a -6.6per cent GDP growth in 2020, but it underwent a significant increase to 8.9per cent in September 2021.<sup>9</sup> However, the projection for 2022 remains modest for both sides. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Omicron outbreak in China, and global inflation have heightened uncertainty for global recovery. India's and Southeast Asia's GDP are projected to increase by 7.5per cent and 4.9per cent respectively in 2022.<sup>10</sup>

Economic recovery aside, it is undeniable that the impact of the war, global inflation and the Omicron outbreak will affect low-income workers and small and medium-sized enterprises, which contribute significantly to both sides' economies. On the positive side, India and the majority of ASEAN member states' (AMS') vaccination rate has exceeded 60per cent, making both sides much more confident in reopening their economies.<sup>11</sup>

Amid global economic uncertainties, it is a critical momentum to revisit ASEAN and India's future partnership and rethink how both sides can strategically enhance trust, strengthen cultural ties, and amplify development cooperation that is mutually beneficial and sustainable in the long run.

## **The Sustainable Development Goals**

The SDGs were adopted by the UN in 2015 as a universal call to end poverty. Unlike its predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals, a UN flagship program to end poverty, the SDGs encompass priorities to achieve economic, social, and environmental sustainability. There are goals to improve gender equality, quality of education, protection of biodiversity on land and underwater, among many others. And most importantly, the SDGs apply to all countries, whether rich, middle or poor. The SDGs are also nationally-owned and country-led. Each country is given the freedom to establish a national framework to achieve its respective goals.

Building cooperation based on the SDGs is critical for ASEAN and India. Both sides of ASEAN institutionalized the SDGs and put those in their countries or high-level regional agendas. The 2015 ASEAN Charter indicates that ASEAN is committed to sustainable development and makes it a critical component in the ASEAN community-building process. ASEAN established the ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue in 2019 to enhance cooperation on cross-cutting development issues. With assistance from UNESCAP, ASEAN has been actively monitoring AMS' progress on the SDGs. Similarly, India's commitment to the SDGs converges well with India's national development goals, "development with all and for all". India has been putting resources to track its SDGs' progress and appointed NITI Aayog, the government's think tank, to coordinate the SDG reporting.

Achieving the SDGs would help ASEAN and India to gain more confidence. ASEAN and India have not been able to display influence optimally in global affairs. But, since both made excellent progress in ending poverty in the late 90s, both have become more confident in displaying their soft influence. India has been very good at promoting what it terms as *frugal innovations*; these include affordable healthcare products such as prosthetic legs, telemedicine software, blood tests and consumer goods such as electric vehicles, mobile phones, and household appliances. These frugal innovations have a critical contribution to the world, especially for developing countries that do not have the resources to acquire high-cost innovations and technologies.<sup>12</sup>

ASEAN, meanwhile, has become more confident in branding its region as a place for future growth and innovation. ASEAN is projected to have a sizeable working-age population in the following decades and offers promising economic growth. ASEAN has been improving policies and made critical investments in connectivity, education, and public infrastructure, alongside an overall liberalization of trade policy that makes the region attractive for global investments.

However, despite their significant contribution to global growth, both ASEAN and India are not on track to achieve their Sustainable Development Goals. According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), with its current trajectory, the majority of the countries in Asia and the Pacific will not achieve the 17 SDGs by 2030. The findings also confirmed that in more than half of the SDGs, progress has stagnated or headed in the wrong direction.<sup>13</sup>

ASEAN and India are home to 45 per cent of the Asia and the Pacific's total population. Failure to achieve sustainable development goals by India and ASEAN will likely hamper the overall development of the Asia and Pacific region. From the geostrategic perspective, inability to achieve sustainable development goals could possibly hinder both sides' potential to become more proactive in influencing and shaping multilateralism order and global affairs.

## **ASEAN and India's SDG Scorecard**

The UN recently launched the Sustainable Development Report 2021 that evaluates the overall performance of all 193 United Nations Member States.<sup>14</sup> Countries were ranked by their overall score towards achieving the 17 goals. Only Thailand ranked in the top 50 SDGs Ranking and Overall Performance among ASEAN member states (AMS). Meanwhile, five other AMS; Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and Indonesia, ranked between 50<sup>th</sup> to 100<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately, four AMS; Myanmar, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Lao, ranked above 100<sup>th</sup>. India, meanwhile, was ranked 120<sup>th</sup> out of 193 countries evaluated (Table 1).

It is important to note that GDP per capita is not the main predictor of SDG progress. Countries are evaluated based on a broad range of development criteria, including gender equality, climate action, justice and strong institution and governance, and other development indicators. Even though countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei are high-income economies in ASEAN, they are not part of the top 50 best performance in SDGs.

**Table 1: ASEAN and India's SDGs Ranking and Overall Performance**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Score</b>
43	Thailand	74.19
51	Vietnam	72.85
65	Malaysia	70.88
76	Singapore	69.89
84	Brunei Darussalam	68.27
97	Indonesia	66.34
101	Myanmar	64.95
102	Cambodia	64.54
103	Philippines	64.51
110	Lao PDR	63.01
120	India	60.07

Source: Sachs, J., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., Woelm, F. (2021). The Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals: Sustainable Development Report 2021. Cambridge: Cambridge University

The SDGs performance of each AMS and India varies across goals. Overall, both sides still have major challenges in achieving many environmental protection indicators. These include Goal 14: Life Below Water and Goal 15: Life on Land. Major and significant challenges also remain in achieving Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being and Goal 16: Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institution.

#### *Goal 1: No Poverty*

Only three AMS: Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, have achieved no poverty goal. Significant challenges remain in Indonesia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, and India. Cambodia, Myanmar, and Vietnam are on track to achieve the goal. Efforts to achieve this goal are moderately accelerating in Indonesia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, and India.

#### *Goal 2: Zero Hunger*

Major challenges to achieving zero hunger, particularly the prevalence of stunting and wasting in children under five years of age, are still prevalent in Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and India. Trends to achieve the goal stagnate in Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and India.

#### *Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being*

Trends to achieve the goal are moderately increasing all across AMS and India. Major and significant challenges remain in India and All AMS except Singapore.

#### *Goal 4: Quality Education*

Only Brunei, Singapore, and Vietnam have achieved the goal. Significant challenges remain in Cambodia and Lao PDR. Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand are on track to achieve the goal. Meanwhile, India and Philippines' efforts to achieve the goal are significantly decreasing.

#### *Goal 5: Gender Equality*

Major challenges remain in Cambodia, Malaysia, and India. Trends to achieve the goal are stagnating in Cambodia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and India.

**Table 2: ASEAN and India's SDGs Overall Performance by Goal**

Country	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5	Goal 6	Goal 7	Goal 8	Goal 9	Goal 10	Goal 11	Goal 12	Goal 13	Goal 14	Goal 15	Goal 16	Goal 17
Brunei Darussalam	Grey	Red	Orange	Green	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Grey	Grey	Red	Red	Red	Red	Orange	Grey
Cambodia	Yellow	Orange	Red	Orange	Red	Red	Orange	Red	Red	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Orange
Indonesia	Orange	Red	Red	Yellow	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Orange
Lao PDR	Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Orange	Green	Yellow	Grey	Red	Red	Red
Malaysia	Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Yellow	Orange
Myanmar	Yellow	Orange	Red	Orange	Red	Green	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Red						
Philippines	Orange	Red	Red	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Orange
Singapore	Green	Orange	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Orange	Green	Grey	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Red	Orange	Orange
Thailand	Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Orange	Orange
Vietnam	Yellow	Red	Red	Green	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange	Green	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Orange
India	Orange	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Red	Yellow	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red

Source: Sachs, J., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., Woelm, F. (2021). The Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals: Sustainable Development Report 2021. Cambridge: Cambridge University

Overall performance is be interpreted as the percentage of achievement. Overall performance can be interpreted as follow

green	Goal Achieved
yellow	Challenges remain
orange	Significant challenges remain
red	Major challenges remain

**Table 3: ASEAN and India's SDG Trends by Goal**

Country	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5	Goal 6	Goal 7	Goal 8	Goal 9	Goal 10	Goal 11	Goal 12	Goal 13	Goal 14	Goal 15	Goal 16	Goal 17
Brunei Darussalam	n/a	→	↗	↑	↗	↑	↗	→	↑	n/a		n/a	→	→	→	↗	n/a
Cambodia	↑	↗	↗	→	→	↑	↗	↗	↗	n/a	↗	n/a	↑	→	↓	↗	→
Indonesia	↗	↗	↗	↑	↗	↑	↗	↑	↗	n/a	→	n/a	→	→	→	↗	→
Lao PDR	↗	↗	↗	→	↗	↑	↗	↑	↗	n/a	↑	n/a	→	n/a	↓	→	→
Malaysia	↑	→	↗	→	↗	↗	↑	↑	↑	n/a	↗	n/a	→	→	↓	↗	→
Myanmar	↑	→	↗	↑	→	↗	→	↗	→	n/a	→	n/a	↑	→	↓	→	↗
Philippines	↗	↗	↗	↓	→	↗	→	↗	↗	n/a	→	n/a	↑	→	↓	→	→
Singapore	↑	↗	↗	↑	↗	↗	↑	↗	↑	n/a	↗	n/a	↗	→	↓	↗	↗
Thailand	↑	→	↗	↑	↗	↑	↗	↗	↑	n/a	↗	n/a	↗	→	↓	↗	→
Vietnam	↑	↗	↗	↑	↗	↑	↑	↗	↗	n/a	↑	n/a	→	→	↓	↗	→
India	↗	→	↗	↓	→	↑	↗	↗	↗	n/a	→	n/a	↑	↗	↓	→	→

Source: Sachs, J., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., Woelm, F. (2021). The Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals: Sustainable Development Report 2021. Cambridge: Cambridge University

Trends are estimated by how fast a country has been progressing towards an SDG. To estimate an SDG trend the linear annual growth rates (i.e. annual percentage improvements) needed to achieve the goal by 2030 (i.e. 2010-2030) is compared to the average annual growth rate over the most recent period (usually 2010-2015). Trends can be interpreted as follow:

	On track or maintaining achievement
	Moderately Increasing
	Stagnating
	Decreasing

*Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation*

Major challenges remain in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Singapore, and India. Of note, despite having achieved indicators on basic drinking water and sanitation services, Singapore still faces challenges on excessive freshwater withdrawal and scarce water consumption.

*Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy*

Major challenges remain in Myanmar. Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam are on track to achieve the goal.

*Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth*

Major challenges remain in Cambodia, Myanmar, and the Philippines. Indonesia and Lao PDR are on track to achieve the goal.

*Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure*

Singapore has achieved the goal. Major challenges remain in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Vietnam, and India. Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, and Thailand are on track to achieve the goal.

*Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities*

Major challenges remain in Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and India.

*Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities*

Major challenges remain in Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and India. Lao PDR and Vietnam are on track to achieve the goal.

*Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production*

Major challenges remain in Brunei Darussalam and Singapore. Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, and Vietnam have achieved the goal.

*Goal 13: Climate Action*

Cambodia and India have achieved the goal due to low per capita carbon emissions. Major challenges remain in Brunei Darussalam and Singapore. Cambodia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and India are on track to achieve the goal.

*Goal 14: Life Below Water*

Major challenges remain in all AMS (no sufficient data for Lao PDR) and India. Efforts to achieve the goal are stagnating across all AMS. Meanwhile, India's efforts to achieve the goal are moderately increasing.

*Goal 15: Life on Land*

Major challenges remain in all AMS and India. Efforts to achieve the goals have been dismal and stagnating in all AMS and India.

### *Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institution*

Major and significant challenges remain in India and all AMS except Malaysia. However, efforts to achieve the goal have been moderately increasing in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

### *Goal 17: Partnership for The Goals*

Major challenges remain in Lao PDR, Myanmar, and India. Efforts to achieve the goal have been moderately increasing in Myanmar and Singapore.

## **Cooperation Opportunities**

The Sustainable Development Report 2021 highlights the progress made so far in the journey of achieving SDGs. It shows the data-based evidence of ASEAN and India's progress towards achieving the SDGs and associated targets. It will also help policymakers identify focus areas where cooperation needs to be reinforced between two sides. As ASEAN and India continue to mark their 30 years of partnership in 2022, it will be critical for both sides to revisit these thematic areas to enhance cooperation on development and socio-cultural themes.

### *Address Common Weakness*

Based on ASEAN and India's SDG scorecard, there are some commonalities on weaknesses. Firstly, both India and ASEAN lag in achieving and enhancing efforts to achieve Goal 14: Life Below Water and Goal 15: Life on Land. Thus, both sides must seek potential cooperation to address sectors relevant to advancing these two goals.

To tackle these two SGD weakness, ASEAN and India can revive their cooperation on biodiversity. The cooperation was initially explored in 2012, when both sides convened the first ASEAN-India Environment Minister meeting.<sup>15</sup> Following the meeting, several capacity building activities such as expert meetings and workshops on benefit sharing and urban biodiversity were conducted, including implementing a work programme under the ASEAN-India Green Fund.<sup>16</sup> ASEAN and India can further work to enhance cooperation across borders for coastal and marine conservation and, most importantly, improve their respective SDGs indicators such as reducing deforestation and overfishing, and protecting terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity.

Another opportunity to embed biodiversity theme in ASEAN-India Cooperation is through the maritime domain, which was a key theme explored when leaders from both sides convened in New Delhi for the Commemorative Summit in 2018.<sup>17</sup> Both sides agreed that non-traditional security such as climate change and exploitation of ocean's resources had been a major emerging concern in the Indian Ocean. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) of the Republic of India has been promoting the 'blue economy' as a critical emerging focus area to advance ASEAN-India cooperation and develop an ASEAN-India Blue Economic Framework (AIBEF). The MEA of the Republic of India had convened three workshops on the ASEAN-India blue economy in 2017 in Vietnam, in 2018 in New Delhi, and in 2019 in Bangkok.<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, the AMS (except Singapore and Brunei) and India lag in achieving Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being. The SGD indicators highlight that both sides still have a high incidence of tuberculosis and non-communicable diseases like cancer and

diabetes. Both sides are also trailing behind some health indicators such as life expectancy at birth and universal health coverage. Cooperation on health has not yet quite intensively promoted between both sides before.

However, the emergence of COVID-19 has opened up various discussions on how India and ASEAN must explore health cooperation to equip themselves for a future health crisis. At the 17th ASEAN-India Summit in 2020, President Jokowi of Indonesia expressed the need for both sides to increase the production capacity of COVID-19 drugs and vaccines, raw materials for the production of medicines, and conduct joint research and development in the health sector.<sup>19</sup> He also emphasized that both sides' cooperation can help to bring healthcare access at affordable prices, which is critical for the developing countries of ASEAN and India. The majority of AMS and India struggled to procure vaccines and personal protective equipment (PPE) when the deadliest variant of the coronavirus, the Delta variant, emerged in mid of 2021.

Lastly, ASEAN and India are not on track to achieving some SDG indicators. India, for instance, is at risk of not achieving Goal 5: Gender Equality and Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, while ASEAN is dismal in its efforts to achieve Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institution. Both sides should proactively push these key cooperation themes and seek more assistance and investments from its counterpart to enhance cooperation activities around these themes.

### Exporting Strengths

Both sides must explore cooperation that allows each side to export their expertise. For instance, India has been maintaining the achievement of Goal 13: Climate Action due to low per capita carbon emissions despite the country's continuous economic growth. India has also launched a pledge to net-zero by 2070, sending a strong message that developing economies can also make an ambitious climate commitment despite the pressure to maintain rapid domestic economic growth.<sup>20</sup>

It is interesting to see how India's climate mitigation ambition is translated into more concrete foreign policies and articulated in cooperation with ASEAN in the coming years. To start, ASEAN and India convened an ASEAN-India High-Level Conference on Renewable Energy to promote experience and innovations for an integrated renewables market in February 2022.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, cooperation with ASEAN on climate adaptation had been explored before India's net-zero pledge. For instance, ASEAN and India have convened six Ministerial Meetings on Agriculture and Forestry as of October 2020. Both sides have explored cooperation on climate-smart agriculture and the use of technology to manage the transboundary disease and health management in agriculture.<sup>22</sup>

ASEAN has shown excellent progress in achieving Goal 4: Quality of Education, particularly o high primary school enrolment rate, literacy rate, and lower secondary school dropouts. The Times Higher Education also ranked three ASEAN universities; National University of Singapore (3rd), Nanyang Technological University (5th), and University of Malaya (49th), in the top 50 Asia University Ranking.<sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup> Moreover, prestigious universities, particularly from the United Kingdom, Australia, and Europe have increasingly established campus branches in the region such as Monash

University in Malaysia and Indonesia, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in Vietnam, and INSEAD Asia Campus in Singapore.<sup>25</sup>

ASEAN should explore opportunities to promote its region as the next emerging education hotspot<sup>26</sup> and promote people-to-people cooperation with India. This opportunity could further drive collaborative innovation, exchange of knowledge, and cultivate cross-boundary innovations to spur economic growth and sustainability.

## Conclusions

ASEAN-India cooperation has become more cross-cutting and evolving due to the global challenges. The 17 SDGs outlined by the United Nations can serve as a framework to identify the future of India-ASEAN key cooperation focus areas. The themes and cooperation areas proposed in this policy paper, for instance, biodiversity and environmental protection, health, climate change, and quality education, are not exhaustive. However, those are some of the most relevant areas connected to both sides' SGD progress. As ASEAN and India mark the 30 years of their partnership in 2022, it is an important momentum to revisit some of these cooperation opportunities.

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## About AIC

Considering the work of the ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group (AIEPG), and its Report with recommendations for forging a closer partnership for peace, progress and shared prosperity, the Heads of the State/Government of ASEAN and India at the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit 2012, held at New Delhi on 19-20 December 2012, recommended the establishment of ASEAN-India Centre (AIC), which was formally inaugurated by the External Affairs Minister of India on 21 June 2013 at RIS. AIC serves as a resource centre for ASEAN Member States and India to fill the knowledge gaps that currently limit the opportunities for cooperation. AIC is working with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India to undertake and disseminate evidence-based policy research and provide policy recommendations.

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