PLENARY REPORT

_Deconstructing the ASEAN Economic Ambition_
_A Conversation among Advocates, Analysts and Activists_

Plenary Discussion on ASEAN Economic Pillar
8 – 10 am, October 19, 2009

Moderator:  
*Jenina Joy Chavez*, Focus on the Global South

Speakers:

1. *Bonnie Setiawan*, EU-ASEAN FTA Campaign Network: on Free Trade Agreements/Economic Partnership Agreements (FTAs/EPAs)
2. *Sajin Prachason*, FTA Watch Thailand: on Investment
5. *Reena Arora*, MAP Foundation: on Impact on Migration and Migrant Workers
8. *Sudaporn Sittisathapornkul*, Aian Farmers Association: o Regional Agriculture (speaking from the floor)

Presentation Assistant and Timekeeper:
*Yuyin Yu*, Focus on the Global South

Documentors:
*Geoffrey Thant*, MAP Foundation
*Mariette Nguyen*, UNI-Apro

Rapporteur:  
*Marlene Ramirez*, AsiaDHRRA

Plenary Co-Anchors:
Focus on the Global South (Jenina Joy Chavez)
EU-ASEAN FTA Campaign Network (Joseph Purugganan)
Asian Farmers’ Association (Esther Penunia)
HomeNET Southeast Asia (Rosalinda Ofreneo)
AsiaDHRRA (Marlene Ramirez, Lany Rebagay)
Center for Migrant Advocacy/Migrant Forum in Asia (Ellene Sana)
Institute for Global Justice (Bonnie Setiawan, Veronika Sintha)
UNI-Apro (Chris Ng, Magdalene Kong)

Invitations:
Focus on the Global South (Chanida, Joy, Joseph, Aya and Mary Ann)
FTA Watch Thailand (Sajin Prachason)
AsiaDHRRA (Marlene Ramirez, Lany Rebagay)
Sokorpor (Sudaporn Sittisathapornkul)
Executive Summary

Context

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) vision talks about a stable, prosperous, and highly competitive region, with equitable economic development, and reduced poverty and economic disparities. Its goal is to hasten complete liberalization and opening up of the regional economy by 2015.

However, this framework of a competitive market economy which mainly benefits MNCs/TNCs in developed countries has long been criticized. In addition, it has only benefited developed ASEAN countries and has undermined developing countries within the region - thereby exacerbating regional asymmetries, leading to greater poverty and inequality. The economic integration model pursued by ASEAN has negatively impacted its working peoples and their families where working conditions, livelihoods and living standards have deteriorated.

Urgent Issues

(1) ASEAN’s ambitious trade and investment deals, coupled with the weakening of regulations at the national and regional levels has led to the worsening of poverty and inequality in the region, especially among small farmers, indigenous peoples, small fishers, labor and migrant workers, people with disabilities, women, and youth.

(2) ASEAN's processes in relation to the economic pillar have been the most secretive. There has been no participation of and consultation with civil society, much more with the grassroots people directly affected by their economic policies. Likewise, the impacts of economic integration are not closely monitored and review mechanisms are unclear.

(3) Issues of civil society, in particular migrant workers, women, youth and people with disability, are not holistically integrated in the ASEAN community pillars. These are mainly boxed in the socio-cultural pillar instead of the economic. Yet many of the economic investments in the region are taking place at the expense of ASEAN's working peoples. Legal frameworks at national and regional levels are also not keeping up to protect their rights and livelihoods.

Recommendations

(1) ASEAN must give priority to building a people’s community and recognize the potentials of grassroots/alternative economies. It should support and provide the legal framework to promote local people's initiatives, identify good models and replicate them. It should invest in capacitating people to participate in trade instead of favoring
MNCs and TNCs. ASEAN should review the impact of all agreements it has signed, together with the people. Its economic integration must become a means to allow people to live well and enable developing countries and marginalized communities to achieve sustainable development.

(2) Its economic policies must be responsive to sensitive sectors important to food sovereignty, biodiversity and people’s livelihood. The vulnerable sectors must be given a stronger voice in ASEAN economic investment policy-making because these impact on their lives and livelihoods. TNCs cannot be the drivers of caring and sharing communities. Indigenous knowledge economies based on solidarity economy such as micro-finance institutions, cooperatives, small farmers/producers organizations, marketing groups, and various resource management schemes by indigenous peoples have long been established and ASEAN only needs to build on these gains by the people.

(3) We urge ASEAN to recognize the role of civil society and institutionalize their participation in building a democratic, just, and “people-centered” ASEAN. ASEAN must maximize consultation with involved and concerned sectors during the entire policy formulation process – from the creation of working groups, preparation of drafts and actual policy implementation. Feedback and evaluation of effectiveness of policies must involve the people.

(4) We appeal for support for the ASEAN Framework Instrument on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers. ASEAN needs to recognize all peoples of ASEAN communities, including the problems of stateless workers. ASEAN should pursue the framework of Development and Migration as a means of reducing barriers to migration and creating more positive effects for development.

(5) We demand the attention and action of ASEAN on the causes of small fisherfolks which are hardly heard at the regional level. The Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) in particular has the objective of preserving fishing grounds in the region yet there is no representation by small fishers in the body. Further, we reiterate our call to ASEAN to establish a Council for Small Farmers/Producers and Fishers, and an Agricultural Policy that upholds their economic rights, protects land rights and promotes food sovereignty in the region.

Concluding Points

The interconnection of the community pillars is clear. ASEAN's approach of compartmentalizing civil society engagements as socio-cultural will prevent itself from benefiting from the capacities of CSOs for integrative development. Along this, we seek to highlight the following:

(1) the question of process - representation and transparency on how economic agreements are negotiated by ASEAN;
the question of impact - whether ASEAN and member states are making appropriate interventions in the economic sphere; and

the need for new ways of organizing the economy, responding to people’s needs. This is the big call not only for ASEAN but for all of us.

The final challenge rests on the ASEAN people: let us move forward in solidarity and be more concrete in un-marginalizing ourselves. Let us collect the little spaces and power that we have to build our own people's economy. Let us put into action our principles and not wait for accountable institutions to make our dreams into reality.

PLENARY DOCUMENTATION

Opening: Jenina Joy Chavez

Good morning.

First of all, thank you very much for joining us in such an early session. We might have started a little later than scheduled, but it’s still impressive that most of you could make it to a session before 9 o’clock in the morning.

This session was meant to be a dialogue between participants of the ASEAN Peoples’ Forum/ASEAN Civil Society Conference, and ASEAN and Government officials. Unfortunately, we have experienced what could only be described as a major snub from both the ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN Member Governments, something we have not expected given that the interest and participation of both ASEAN Secretariat staff and Member Governments’ officials in the APF/ACSC have shown substantial improvement in the past. The February 2009 dialogue with the ASEAN Secretary General and the ASEAN Chair (represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand) was greeted with much anticipation in the First APF/4th ACSC. This time, however, confirmed speakers have pulled out at the last minute, but thanks to the flexibility and resourcefulness of co-anchors and other participants, we have managed to restructure the session.

We are still going to try to have a fresh format, this time focusing on conversation rather than big presentations. Welcome, everyone to Deconstructing the ASEAN Economic Ambition: A Conversation among Advocates, Analysts and Activists.

This morning we will try to cover broad issues related to ASEAN’s economic initiatives, from trade and investment agreements and the impact of economic integration, to agriculture and regional food security, and the economic crisis and alternative financial cooperation. These broad topics would necessitate several workshops to be fully discussed and understood, something we are unable to do in this year’s APF/ACSC. In lieu of workshops, we will have very short initial remarks from our speakers. The idea is to provide basic information, but more importantly to provide space for the interaction
among the different issues, and the possibility of generating preliminary ideas towards common analysis, action or campaigns on specific concerns. We will try to go beyond principles and extract ideas towards alternatives and action.

The main objectives of the conversation are:
- to shed light on the most urgent economic issues faced by ASEAN, and how they impact on common people
- to highlight how different groups respond to these issues and their impact
- to solicit ideas on how we can collectively move forward
- to see whether there is enough interest and energy to actually move forward together on specific common issues

At this point, I would like to recognize the Economic Cluster co-anchors who helped develop what should have been the dialogue framework, as well as those who stepped up and volunteered to be speakers this morning. They are:

Focus on the Global South  AsiaDHRRA
Asian Farmers Association  Committee for Asian Women
Institute for Global Justice  EU-ASEAN FTA Campaign Network
HomeNET-Southeast Asia  FTA Watch Thailand
MAP Foundation  Thai Labour Campaign
ASEAN Youth  Union Network International-Asia Pacific Regional Office (UNI-Apro)

They will be our speakers, documentors, timekeepers and floor managers for this session.

The economic pillar is the least understood and most feared of the ASEAN initiatives. It is imperative that we understand what the key economic projects in ASEAN and what they may imply.

The economic pillar is defined by the AESEAN Economic Community. Inspired by the 
**ASEAN Vision 2020** which dreams of ASEAN as a “stable, prosperous, and highly competitive region with equitable economic development, and reduced poverty and socio-economic disparities”, the AEC has since into an ambitious program backed up by a blueprint with set timelines and benchmarks. Punctuating the primacy of the economic pillar in ASEAN is the fact that it was signed together with the ASEAN Charter in November 2007. The other community blueprints – the Political-Security and the Socio-Cultural community blueprints – would take at least one more year to finish.

The AEC is one of the pillars of the dream ASEAN Community which ASEAN hopes to complete by 2015. It aims to establish ASEAN as a Single Market and Production base, towards developing ASEAN as a competitive economic region.
- The goal is complete liberalization and opening up in goods, services, investment and skilled labour, and less restrictions in capital flows by 2015
- There are flexibilities, exceptions and restrictions (especially in the flow of money and capital) for newer Members; and participation in economic initiatives
may be done through the ASEAN Minus X formula, or the practice by which Member Countries not yet ready to join an economic agreement may opt not to do so.

- However, the strategic goal and commitment is to remove all these restrictions and exceptions, and for all Members to have the same commitments. That is, the CLMV countries may be given longer periods for liberalizing their trade and investment, BUT everyone will eventually have zero-tariffs in most products, and fully open investment regimes at some point.

To illustrate the wide-ranging impact of the AEC and its blueprint are some of the most urgent economic issues being faced by the ASEAN region today.

Earlier this year, the Philippines—whose poultry, egg and hog industries and the rice sector will be badly hit—pushed for the delay of the full implementation of the ASEAN Free Trade Area/AFTA, a move opposed by Singapore. The inclusion of unprocessed agricultural products has always been the acid test of AFTA. Against the backdrop of a global recession and health concerns in the poultry and hog sectors, how ASEAN will tackle apprehensions by Members will be an acid test of regional solidarity.

The ASEAN-6: Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand have agreed to bring down to zero the tariffs of almost all imports by 2010. The phase-in of sensitive agricultural products, including rice, into the AFTA will also have to be completed and their tariffs brought down to 0-5%. The CLMV countries have until 2013 (Vietnam), 2015 (Laos and Myanmar) and 2017 (Cambodia) to fully implement AFTA.

The ASEAN Investment Area is also expected to be fully established by 2015, with most sectors opened up by 2010, esp. in the ASEAN-6 countries.

As ASEAN continues to negotiate or sign FTAs, and as some of these FTAs become fully operational, adverse distributional impacts of such agreements get revealed. FTAs with developed countries (Korea, Australia/New Zealand, Japan) raise obvious concerns on negative impacts, fairness and balance of interest. Trade cooperation with developing countries (China, India) has the potential to address common development issues, but it remains a question whether using the FTA format is the best way to promote South-South solidarity. Given that FTAs with developing countries also imply adverse impacts to vulnerable groups, ASEAN needs to sort out how to deal with opposition from sectors from its FTA partners (like in the case of India), at the same time that it has to deal with opposition from its ASEAN sectors negatively affected by FTAs.

The food crisis last year rendered ASEAN Members vulnerable and unable to craft regional responses quick enough. Instead, the food crisis punctuated ASEAN’s lack of a regional strategy, with Members choosing to implement policies, such as export bans or excessive importation of rice stocks, that further pushed prices up and eroded confidence in the food market.
Asia’s (and ASEAN’s) financial sector did not take the kind of beating that crippled the financial sectors of Northern countries. Yet, the region’s real economy reels from the impact of the slide in global financial markets. The slowdown in traditional markets, as well as in China, has caused massive blows to heavily export-dependent ASEAN Members. This results in economic downturn, worsening unemployment and poverty levels.

If the more established ASEAN economies are having jitters about the full implementation of AFTA and other regional agreements, one can assume that newer Members feel even more anxious and vulnerable. The 3-7 years grace for fully acceding to regional agreements might not be enough for the CLMV, as they have fewer resources and less endowment compared to the ASEAN-6.

Finally, the recent spate of natural disasters cost ASEAN Member countries hundreds of million dollars in damaged crops and infrastructure. On top of the social consequences, rebuilding lives and livelihood will be a major concern for many Members, affecting their readiness to take part in the region’s many economic initiatives.

As I said, these are big issues. What we would like to do this morning is to understand how these issues translate into our everyday lives, and what civil society think in terms of possible ways of tackling these issues.

FTAs/EPAs – EU-ASEAN FTA Campaign Network (Bonnie Setiawan)
Investment – FTA Watch Thailand (Sajin Prachason)
Impact on Labor/Employment/Wages – UNI-Apro (Chris Ng)
Impact on Agriculture/Farmers and the Links to Finance – AsiaDHRRA (Paul Sinappan)
Impact on Migration and Migrant Workers – MAP Foundation (Reena Arora)

Each will speak briefly for 5-6 minutes. To help me keep time is Ms. Yuyin Yu. She will flash before the speakers a sign indicating remaining time and when they should wrap up.

After the first round of interventions, we will open the floor for questions and comments, and then give our panelists time to respond to them.

There will be a second round of interventions, from two more speakers to speak with a perspective for the future:

Junya ‘Lek’ Yimprasert from the Thai Labour Campaign…
Donaldson Tan from the ASEAN Youth Movement

Then we open again for questions and comments, and responses from the panelist. After which we give all the panelists a chance to give final remarks before I make a synthesis.
Round 1 Presentations

Sajin Prachason / FTA Watch

Another wrong way to go: AEAN Comprehensive Invest Agreement (ACIA),
- AIA, now ASEAN changes to ACIA. In every country, despite opportunities, there’re problems.
- Buy 1 get 4 free policy: liberalization, protection, facilitation & promotion of Investment
- Scope: manufacturing, agriculture, fishery, forestry, mining & quarrying and related services (possible for expansion in the future).
- Template more or less follows NAFTA’s investment chapter.
- Sensitive sub-sectors include Plant Cultivation, Propagation and breeding, aquatic animal culture and forestry from forest plantation. In Thailand: these 3 sectors will be committed to be liberalized
- Aiming to benefit ASEAN & ASEAN-based investors.

Where injustice lies
- Sensitive sectors important to (a.) food security, biodiversity, people’s livelihood (b.) sensitive to right violation and environmental degradation.
- Doors and privileges opened up for big and bigger investors at regional and national levels, leaving issues of communities & local people’s rights protection at their own struggle.
- Often, sensitive sectors vs. big (and greedy) investor, e.g. CP, Monsanto, etc → big troubles (intensifying exploitation & monopoly of common resources e.g. seeds, water, fishing resources, land, forest, etc.)
- Finally, heading up competition, conflicts and violence over resources on the ground.

Where is our caring and sharing community?
- We need to reconstruct our ASEAN’s investment regime
  - We need a better process at country and ASEAN levels!
  - Impacts assessment and study: HIA, EIA, SIA (done by independent org)
  - Public hearing
  - Access to necessary information
  - Check & balance system
  - Mechanism to redistribute benefits
  - Slots for marginalized people in the negotiation team
  - More importantly, a new direction (and mindset) needed!!!
  - TNCs cannot be the drivers of sharing communities
  - Caring & sharing community in ASEAN must start with a recognition and guarantee of local people’s rights to manage and access natural resources.
- More ASEAN investment agreements for mentoring and regulating large investment are needed.
- More ASEAN investment agreements for facilitating and promotion of localized and green economy and cooperation are needed.

**Chris Ng / UNI-Apro**

He reckons that ASEAN is working its concepts based on the economic-oriented direction. As a representative of Asia Pacific region, UNI-Apro also contributes to monitor ASEAN and Asia Pacific Economic Community. UNI-Apro pointed out many problems for workers and employees during ASEAN Integration Process.

Besides that, there has always been a wrong perception of trade union as being an obstacle for the government; hence, workers are excluded from joining trade unions and being organized. That proved to be favorable for the investors – wrongly seen as the main drivers of the economy. Looking at the core problem of financial crisis, it was due to corruption and greed. Billionaires don’t buy billion pairs of shoes to stimulate the economy. It must be a billion people to consume those billion pairs of shoes to help the economy develop. Wealth must be equitably shared among the society. As a result, we must give people the highest priority.

Trade unions in ASEAN countries don’t have positive responses to the labor movement during ASEAN Integration Process. He thanked NGOs and CSOs to keep the human issues alive. Trade unions must also cooperate to complete the picture. He urged trade unions to take action and cooperate among themselves as well as with CSOs. It’s very important for all of our organizations to work closely to empower ourselves and our people. He encouraged trade unions in the region to respond and participate and together we create the mechanism to work better.

**Paul Sinapan / AsiaDHRRA**

My sharing is based on the experiences of working with AsiaDHRRA and Micro Finance Institutions in Asia in organizing farmers, indigenous people, fisherfolks and urban poor. We were involved in organizing, building, strengthening alternative grassroots institutions such as farmers trade, cooperatives, micro-credit, micro-enterprises, developing marketing groups which are people-owned and controlled.

What should be the ambition of ASEAN Economy?

Are we simply going to adapt the competitive market economy which is promoted by neo liberal global economy, which mostly favors MNCs/TNCs/privatization?

Or are we going to promote a sharing/caring economy through community-based solidarity/collective initiatives? Community based economy initiatives will serve the vulnerable groups/marginalized at the same time put breaks on exploitative economic policies and projects.

What should we focus on?
ASEAN people are founders of indigenous solidarity concepts such as Bayanihan, Gotong Royong, Sachackorn. All these gave rise to solidarity economies such as cooperatives, microfinance institutions, enterprises and farmers organizations developed to deal with supply, production and marketing of their products. During the recent financial crisis, these grassroots economic initiatives provided social safety nets for the vulnerable groups.

Therefore, ASEAN should:
- recognize these grassroots economies
- support, provide legal framework to promote these grassroots economic initiatives
- identify models and help replicate them
- capacitate local people to participate in trade instead of favoring MNCs/TNCs.

Policies signed by ASEAN Ministers/leaders should be reviewed with the people, especially their impacts on vulnerable groups, e.g. WTO policies and agreements (AoA, intellectual property rights, financial deregulations, etc.).

To conclude, please allow me to share the calls made during the recent workshop on Constructive Engagement for People-Centered Governance which some of the delegates here also attended:

- **We urge ASEAN to recognize to role of civil society and institutionalize the mechanisms for their participation in building a democratic, just, and “people-centered ASEAN”.** People’s participation is key in helping ASEAN to be accountable and transparent. Therefore, ASEAN must maximize consultation with involved and concerned sectors during the entire policy formulation process and its implementation. Information on agreements must be made more accessible to the people at all stages of policy formulation. Feedback on and evaluation of the effectiveness of policies must also involve the people.

- **ASEAN economic integration must become a means to allow people to live well and enable poorer countries and marginalized communities to achieve sustainable development.**

Thank you.

**Bonnie Setiawan (Institute for Global Justice)**

FTAs in context of economic community in ASEAN: No consultation with civil society / stakeholders. No dialogue, transparency, participation. Secrecy, lack of people’s participation. Texts of agreements made public after being signed.

Who benefits?
Benefits to rich ASEAN countries and undermine the development of poorer countries. Singapore is behind these agreements, as chair of ASEAN Economic Community. Poor sectors and communities, few benefits, most are suffering.

What’s the price for signing these agreements?

Job losses (ambitious liberalization agendas with profound negative impacts). Corporate control of resources (weakening of domestic regulations). Erosion of policy space / rights. Exacerbating regional asymmetries.

Reena Arora / MAP Foundation

When we talk about migrant rights, it’s been falling under the socio-cultural cluster, but in reality it’s an economic issue as well. No one is talking about labor mobility for unskilled labor. ASEAN Declaration – no talk of migration policy, that remains national. Policies re unskilled labor are not keeping up with free-trade policy.

Most people are moving without documents. We have irregular migration. This issue requires regional cooperation, but there are few legal pathways. According to a UNDP report, barriers to movement are highest for unskilled labor. We see a focus on economic investment at the expense of labor rights and protections – these areas effect migrant workers disproportionately.

The idea of CBEZs, pockets of free-trade within ASEAN. Labor protection framework is not keeping up. There is fear of asserting labor protections for migrants, arrest/detention/deportation. There is no space to assert their rights.

We cannot talk about migrant rights or migrant policy without talking about Burma, forced migration, leaving because there is no other choice. Even when we have bilateral agreements (MOUs), they are unrealistic. Nationality verification process in Thailand is a case. You have to deal with migration policies, complicated bureaucratic measures, myth of regular migration. For pre-departure / bilateral agreements, governments still do not allowing migrants to participate. Most migrants are left out.

ASEAN Committee on Migrant Workers. Framework Instrument must apply regardless of legal status! But right now that is not the case. If ASEAN continues to operate under the myth of legal migration, and focus on skilled labor, then this underclass continues to flourish disjointedly. And to only speak of it in the socio-cultural cluster ignores the integrationist goals of 2015.

Have to be two-fold: can’t ignore rights, can’t ignore what’s happening.

2nd Forum ASEAN on Migration and Labor – presentation on stakeholders (MAP attending). Huge sectors that cannot participate in unions, who live in isolation, experience the gender dimension of exclusion too. We are happy that Thailand involved civil society, but there is concern that Vietnam will shut out civil society. 2009/2013
deadlines, gets more important for stakeholders, unions etc – industries and employment actors, not being talked about in the equation.

Global Forum on Migration and Development is not properly involving civil society, just another government to government discussion. UNDP Human Development report says that lowering barriers to migration leads to lots of positive effects for development. This is not a sole development strategy, it can complement other initiatives. We must push for freedom for movers and protection of movers.

**Floor Comments Round 1**

*Question 1 (Nik – from MAP).*  
Lots of people moving around ASEAN countries. In Malaysia, there are deaths in detention, and in Thailand, there are detention/deportation. ASEAN countries have a big obligation to respond to this situation. They must follow the ASEAN Charter in promoting rights of migrants. We would like ASEAN countries to support domestic workers. Please one day off per week with pay.

*Question 2 (from Vietnam).*  
Investment is not bad, it is actually necessary for economic growth. But the question is what kind of investment? What kind is good for the people? Foreign trade and investment are, yes, very sensitive. How to ensure investment is good for us? What can NGO/CSO do to ensure this? We need transparency and accountability of government – how to demand more openly for participation, voice of people. We need to empower minority farmers to have voice in this, and monitor the impacts of investment on livelihoods of people.

*Question 3 (Philippines).* Not in English.  
*(translation).* Issues of Fisherfolk communities do not enjoy enough discussion. It is always about how to further marginalize or punish fisherfolk communities. There is no one to ensure protection of fisherfolk communities. Traditional alliance, we have to include this in our statement – to ensure that millions of fisherfolk are heard and included in our statement to ASEAN.

*Question 4 (Ko Linn – from Burma Partnership).*  
ASEAN countries want to make business or trading, example in Burma. There are no strong system or rule of law. For most ASEAN countries, it is just about resource extraction. It is allowing generals to have more human rights violations, bad impact on the people. Doing business with countries like Burma is bullying Burma people, and violating non-interference policy.

*Question 5 (Htoo Chit – Mekong Migration Network / Grassroots HRE).*  
On the ASEAN human rights charter, the ASEAN Governments are implementing impossible process. In the case of Burma: nationality verification process, registration, need to go back to Burma to register. Good if it works, if it is successful, but the problem is the Burmese government. Most of migrants afraid to go back, many are arrested. Over
90% don’t want to give address or family information. This is impossible. Over 225 applicants rejected recently, this process impossible. Thai government also approves martial law on the migrants, you cannot move after 8 p.m., cannot use mobile phone, motorbike.

Question 6 (from Thailand). Not in English. (translation). If you look at ASEAN countries, they do not really respond to needs of people, they are not solving problems of poor. Looking at migration, ASEAN needs to recognize people of ASEAN communities, and problems of Burmese migrant workers. If we have one ID card, and are allowed to work everywhere and travel anywhere in ASEAN, it will solve the issue of migration. Allow free movement, it is necessary. Adhere to ILO conventions, consider labor as human right. We ASEAN people are treated like slaves.

Question 7 (On disability). ASEAN should sign convention on disabilities. We do not have enough opportunities to participate in public seminars, public work. Investment is also difficult. Working in ASEAN countries is difficult as well. The best thing is to exchange expertise for our people in each country, like the Europeans. Whenever ASEAN conference or forum is organized, we would like you to give the opportunity to the persons with disabilities. In future we hope we establish ASEAN on basis of human rights, part of human rights is the right of a person with disability.

Question 8 (ASEAN Youth Movement). We are not talking about youth issues, but we have common issues with you, like education services. Dropout rates rise because of economic crisis. The youth have a vision for equality to participate in ASEAN. Why we don’t we invest in youth, not only for them to be trained as skilled workers.

Panelists’ responses to floor comments Round 1

Bonnie Setiawan. We have to be aware the AEAN Economic Community (AEC) belongs to the state, to the corporation, not to us. We should say we reject this AEC. Why? Free trade regime does not work. The person from Vietnam – really, it’s the wrong perception. Investment is now part of free trade regime. Under this regime, it is a system of the global system, under WTO, new FTA, which is under rules that only the big investors win. Investor rights on the table. All of the ASEAN nations adopt new laws on investment in line with FTA regimes.

In Burma, there is a kind of authoritarian development regime. The old kind of regime, like Suharto, is passed. Why does capital, the FTA regime, not care about this? Because it’s still the same thing – Burma is servicing the capital. Burma can keep with this military regime, and all the corporations are still going to Burma.

Paul Sinapan.
When we talk about people-centered government, we cannot escape these economic systems. FTA? Control Trade Agreements (CTA). How can we talk about free when it is only for the investors? Who do the FTAs favor?

Chris Ng.
Employers increasingly asking for more. We are seeing tremendous increase in non-traditional employment, migrants for example. We need to focus on update to existing law, update our protections. If not, these people are used against better employment practices, lead to spiral down. We need more close cooperation between NCO/CSO and trade unions. Unions representing traditional workers complain increasingly under pressure, but they don’t understand, if you don’t bring these (migrant) workers under your fold, they’ll be used against you. There is need for formal trade union organizations so migrant workers can claim their rights, and not be underground.

Sajin Prachason.
We need more R and D on a few topics. How to ensure good investment? We must ensure the rights of marginalized people, including fisherfolk, etc. We need to bring decisions to local communities. This will not solve all problems, but at least people have more access to information and decision-making. We need investment that responds to community needs, so we need strong communities to advocate for their needs. In the case of Thailand, article 190 of the Constitution mandates what government must do before it can sign international agreement. But mainly we need to bring this process to local communities.

[No FTA rally with signs etc. entered the hall, and delivered messages.]

Reena Arora.
On creating ASEAN ID card similar to EU, ASEAN is deliberate in integrating other regional systems’ practices. They are stressing economic integration without talking identity and labor mobility. They are creating commissions and intergovernmental commissions – but not creating courts, not having a human rights convention. They do this by using values of consensus and non-interference, but not having supranational power bases. Hence, ASEAN has disjointed vision.

Round 2 Presentations

Donaldson Tan / ASEAN Youth Movement

He shared his thoughts on ASEAN integration. Competition is good for economy, but the assumption of perfect competition or perfect knowledge/information is not true. There are limitations on different communities, unrealistic approach.

What things are crucial for youth? Youth form huge sectors of migrants, farmers, fisherfolk. CSOs should be part of assessment work, of adequately grasping issues. During crisis, we experience funding cuts to education. From 3% to 1.5% of national budget in Burma, for example. It is very important for youth entering labor markets. For
the youth delegation, education is a huge issue. Governments and ASEAN need to think about alternative education as well, local wisdom. This comes up in agricultural policy. The encouragement to grow specific types of rice, for instance, leads to the loss of certain types of knowledge as a result. This they do by only lending money to farmers who comply with government recommendations. Debt can increase when farmers need to go to other lending sources. Thus, forcing farmers to be unskilled workers, and into being other kinds of agricultural workers.

He cites many issues: food security, food sovereignty, land rights, choice of what to grow and how, what to sell – all having impact on the youth.

He also cites FTAs and the growth of black market and informal economy, of opium and sex workers, and people being lured into these kinds of things.

**Junya ‘Lek’ Yimprasert / Thai Labor Campaign**

Leaving capitalism behind: Modern capitalism results in 80% of people out of protection. Unions are incapable of uniting / helping people. More and more people will suffer if we let this continue.

Getting away from hegemonic paradigms: We need to strengthen microeconomic paradigms: small-scale organic farmers, workers, urban poor, civil society. There is need for solidarity during crisis and disasters from global warming.

Organic development paradigm: ASEAN should move from cheap manufacturing, and should go into gender mainstreaming. ASEAN should rely on (producing) organic food for the world.

We must forget about capitalism, which left us behind. Now we leave capitalism behind.

**Floor Comments Round 2**

*Question 1 (Southeast Asia Women’s Caucus).*

Since this is the first topic of today, we should ensure that we look at the pillars together holistically, and think about how women cut across them. We should challenge the language of the development paradigm. Migrants need jobs and livelihood at home. There should be adherence to international law.

*Question 2.*

To what extent do we know the current FTAs? Are we lobbying on them, do we know if they cover goods and services that come back to local communities? Do they cover migrant labor, documented and undocumented? We need more knowledge.
Sudaporn Sittisathapornkul / Asian Farmers’ Association
(intervention from the floor)

Sawadee Ka!

Our organization, Asian Farmers' Association, is an alliance of nine national farmers' organizations in 8 Asian countries, representing 10 million farmers. We have members in five ASEAN countries, namely Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand. We were established in 2002, and among our eight-point basis of unity is fair and just treatment of farmers, promotion of food security measures, and promotion of alternatives to economic globalization.

We have started to engage ASEAN in 2005 when we participated in the first Regional Conference on Civil Society Engagement in ASEAN, organized by several regional networks, mostly who are with us today. We have cooperated with the Solidarity for Asian People's Advocacy or SAPA in the submissions to the EPG and HLTF when ASEAN was drafting its Charter. We have conducted our own consultations on the Charter, the Economic Community Blueprint, on the various bilateral FTAs of ASEAN. Last year, we studied the agricultural trade policies of ASEAN countries where we work with, as well as ASEAN agricultural trade policies. As a result, we have come up with our recommendations for agricultural trade policies, both at national and regional levels. We would like to share these with you today.

1. ASEAN must ensure that the trade agreements it enters into must preserve Member State's capability to (a) exempt sectors important to food security, livelihood security, rural development and poverty alleviation objectives from trade liberalization (b) provide sufficient safeguard measures and remedies; (c) move towards the creation of a real level playing field with major economic powers through the removal of trade distorting domestic subsidies.

2. Adopt a regional agricultural policy and the creation of a Common Agricultural Development Fund. The Policy and the Fund should create venues for greater cooperation among agricultural producers' groups across the region especially in the area of sustainable farming practices, agricultural processing, marketing and distribution, cooperative formation, development and management, among others. The Policy and the Fund should provide for the creation of a comprehensive and tangible support program for small scale rural producers.

3. Develop an ASEAN standard for sanitary and phytosanitary measures, not only to meet international standards but to safeguard the health and safety of the region's populations.

4. Establish an ASEAN rice reserve. This will help stabilize rice supply and prices in the region. It must pass and adopt an agreement giving members priority in accessing rice produced within the region, at fair prices. The fact that ASEAN members include the
top exporters and importers of rice in the world emphasize its role in helping achieve regional food security and self sufficiency.

5. Recognize a Small Agricultural Producers' Council in ASEAN. ASEAN must regularly consult an advisory council composed of representatives of national and regional organizations of small agricultural producers - men and women farmers, fishers, indigenous peoples, across the region on policies, programs and initiatives affecting or has the potential to impact on agriculture. Consulting stakeholders on policies that will affect specific sectors is not a new idea in ASEAN. It recognizes ABAC - the ASEAN Business Advisory Council. Hence, it is only proper that the coalition create a mechanism to get the input of small agri stakeholders in formulating regional policies, especially on trade.

Conclusion

The current ASEAN logo depicts 10 rice stalks and has one of its purposes in its Founding Document the development and growth of agriculture in the region. It is necessary to show that we have aspirations beyond just accessing markets - but we have aspirations to have small farmers and producers lead happy, decent, meaningful, dignified lives and all of us are able to promote sustainable rural development through various regional and national, multi-partite cooperation. Such aspirations and concrete initiatives will help demonstrate that regional cooperation and integration can be done with the common people at the center.

Panelists’ Responses to Floor Comments Round 2.

Bonnie Setiawan.
You know quite well that on AFTA, AEC, FTAs – our position is strongly to reject these things.

Donaldson Tan.
FTAs are making skills obsolete. We need training for the future, maintaining diverse and supportive environment for diverse skills to remain in ASEAN. Some form of microfinance is important – focusing on women mostly now, but should also focus on youth to rise above their poverty.

Junya ‘Lek’ Yimprasert.
Just quickly about Thai Labour Campaign, our work, and our anti-trafficking group. We are supporting organic farming, because we need also sustainable solutions to migrant worker issues. How to integrate people into ASEAN, grassroots people, strengthening microeconomic culture here, also global warming?

Synthesis: Jenina Joy Chavez
The interconnection of pillars is clear now. Compartmentalizing these pillars is what ASEAN wants, and just keeping CSOs in the socio-cultural pillar. But we can see that is not a good approach.

This panel highlighted key things:
- the question of process – representation and transparency, how agreements are negotiated;
- the question of impact, whether ASEAN governments are making appropriate interventions in the economic sphere; and
- the need for a new way of organizing the economy, responding to people’s needs. This is the big call. Alternative employment practices, free movement of people, answering the question of regionalism and solidarity, how actually to promote sustainable trade etc.

How do we formalize engagement to un-marginalize ourselves? We have little power and space, yes. But how do we collect these little spaces and power to build something, giving strength to dreams and aspirations for new economic ideas?

Our final challenge: let’s move forward, be more concrete. How do we put into action these principles? We cannot just wait for accountable institutions to make our dreams into reality. This is the challenge we ourselves have to face.