

1997 MINISTERIAL UNDERSTANDING ON ASEAN COOPERATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ERADICATION

Adopted in Subang Jaya, Malaysia on 23 October 1997

WE, the ASEAN Ministers on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication from Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, Member Countries of ASEAN,

REAFFIRMING the Declaration of ASEAN Concord signed in Bali, in February 1976 which noted that the elimination of poverty, hunger, disease and illiteracy is a primary concern, and resolving to intensify cooperation in economic and social development, with particular emphasis on the promotion of social justice and on the improvement of the living standards of the people in ASEAN;

RECALLING the decision of the Fifth ASEAN Summit Declaration of 1995 to improve the quality of life of the peoples of ASEAN by ensuring social justice, improving the quality of and access to social services and working towards the reduction of poverty;

NOTING that the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development proclaimed, among others, that all states and all people shall cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world;

ENDEAVOURING to further the commitment of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and to implement its Plan of Action with respect to the goal of eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of human kind;

RECALLING also the commitments made in 1995 Beijing Platform of Action at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women to give top priority to eradicating poverty among women through advocacy, resource mobilisation, tapping the potential of women-as equal partners and mainstreaming gender concerns in the economic, social and national development process;

RECALLING the principles of the 1996 Cairo International Conference On Population and Development which stated that all states and all people shall cooperate to eradicate poverty and attain sustainable development which can decrease the disparities in standard of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people in the world.

PURSUANT to the 1996 Istanbul Declaration at the Second United Nations Conference of Human Settlements (Habitat II) of ensuring adequate habitable shelter for all, and providing adequate employment opportunities that can minimise rural-to-urban migration.

RECALLING that the 1996 Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the World Food Summit Plan of Action stated that poverty eradication is essential to improve access to food and that equitable access to staple food supplies should be ensured as poverty, hunger and malnutrition are some of the principal causes of accelerated migration from rural to urban areas in developing countries.

RECOGNIZING that empowerment and active participation of rural population, particularly of the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, plays a critical role in rural development within the framework of national development strategy, structure and system of ASEAN countries;

RECOGNIZING the challenges of the new Millennium particularly with respect to the impact of globalisation, trade and investment liberalisation and information technology on rural development and poverty eradication efforts;

DO HEREBY DECLARE OUR AGREEMENT to strengthen and coordinate ASEAN collaboration in rural development and poverty eradication by adopting the following as the Framework of the ASEAN Plan of Action on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication:

VISION

The ASEAN Ministers on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication are committed towards eradicating poverty, with particular emphasis on promoting the development of progressive, prosperous, and self-reliant rural communities, and thus contribute towards creating a caring society in the ASEAN Member Countries.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Plan of Action is to formulate strategies, and implement programmes and projects and carry out activities to realise the Vision.

CHALLENGES

Guided by the Vision, the Plan of Action will address the following challenges:

- i. socio-economic disparities between the rural and urban communities;
- ii. socio-economic disparities among regions within each ASEAN Member Country;
- iii. the mainstreaming of gender concerns in the rural development process;
- iv. the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups;
- v. unemployment and underemployment, low productivity, illiteracy, backwardness, inadequate economic opportunities, the increasing incidence of social problems, as well as lack of basic infrastructure and social amenities which continue to constrain rural development of most ASEAN countries;
- vi. the impact of environmental degradation, natural and man-made disasters;
- vii. internal migration in the Member Countries; and
- viii. the impact of globalisation and information technology in the rural areas.

STRATEGIES

The strategic thrusts for achieving the objectives of the Plan of Action are as follows:

- i. developing human resources as a means to empower individuals, families and vulnerable and disadvantaged groups to cope effectively with the challenges of modernisation and globalization
- ii. developing capacity for policy formulation and programme implementation;

- iii. promoting the sharing of experiences, training resources, best practices and information;
- iv. encouraging the active participation of the private/business sector and the empowerment of the non-governmental/ people's organisations;
- v. promoting networking among the national and regional rural development/poverty research institutes of the ASEAN Member Countries;
- vi. promoting collaboration with other relevant regional and international organisations; and
- vii. promoting the development of common positions on matters related to rural development and poverty eradication among ASEAN Member Countries.

PROGRAMME OF ACTION / PRIORITIES

The programme of action shall address the following areas of concern:

- a. developing an ASEAN capacity for monitoring and assessing poverty incidence and trends;
- b. facilitating regional networking among the following:
 - governmental organisations dealing with rural development and poverty eradication;
 - rural development and poverty research institutes;
 - non-governmental/people's organisations; and
 - private/business sectors.
- c. sharing of information, best practices, lessons learned, research capacity and exchange of technical expertise in priority areas to be identified by the Senior Officials;
- d. developing regional training programmes on priority areas identified under the Programme of Action;
- e. developing a regional rural volunteer programme; and
- f. promoting greater public awareness on the need to accelerate rural development and poverty eradication.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

To strengthen and coordinate ASEAN collaboration on rural development and poverty eradication under ASEAN Functional Cooperation, and to implement the Plan of Action, Member Countries agree to the following:

- a. that the ASEAN Ministers on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (AMRDPE) shall endeavour to meet at least once in two years and informally in between and that the meetings be hosted and chaired on a rotational basis;
- b. to convene the Meeting of the ASEAN Senior Officials on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (SOMRDPE) at least once a year;

- c. the ASEAN Senior Officials on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (SOMRDPE) will have the following functions, among others:
 - i. to plan, coordinate, monitor and evaluate the implementation of policies and programmes adopted by the ASEAN Ministers on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (AMRDPE);
 - ii. to report to the ASEAN Ministers on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (AMRDPE);
 - iii. to encourage and enhance collaboration with governmental organisations of ASEAN dealing with rural development and poverty eradication, regional and international organisations, the private/business sector and non-governmental/people's organisations;
 - iv. to convene ad-hoc working groups of experts to assist it in carrying out its functions, when appropriate; and
 - v. to ensure the designation of a national focal point/office for rural development and poverty eradication in each Member Country that could coordinate at the national level and also with other ASEAN focal points/offices.
- d. the chairmanship of the Senior Officials Meeting will coincide with the chairmanship of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (AMRDPE); and
- e. the ASEAN Secretariat will assist in coordinating with relevant ASEAN Functional and Economic bodies to facilitate the implementation of the Plan of Action.

TIME FRAME

The ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication shall initiate actions to operationalise priority programmes, projects and activities under the Plan of Action for an initial period of five years taking into account the need to synchronise with other relevant international and regional Plans of Action.

FUNDING STRATEGIES

To implement priority projects under the Plan of Action, the Senior Officials on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, assisted by the ASEAN Secretariat, shall consider developing the following:

- a. cost-sharing arrangements among Member Countries; and
- b. resource mobilisation strategies to obtain funding from ASEAN funding resources, the ASEAN Dialogue Partners, relevant regional and international organisations and the private sector, among others.

DONE at Subang Jaya, Malaysia on the twenty third-day of October 1997 in two originals in the English language.