



# ASEAN FRAMEWORK ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST COVID-19 ERA

## Summary



**Southeast Asia**  
A DESTINATION FOR EVERY DREAM



Economic Research Institute  
for ASEAN and East Asia



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## **Summary**



## INTRODUCTION

1. The vision for ASEAN tourism as articulated in the AEC Blueprint 2025 is to make the region a “quality tourism destination”, which offers unique and diverse ASEAN experience and is committed to sustainable tourism development. In realising this vision, the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2016-2025 (ATSP 2016-2025) spelled out two strategic directions namely: (i) enhance the competitiveness of ASEAN as a single tourism destination; and (ii) ensure that ASEAN tourism is sustainable and inclusive, on which the ASEAN tourism initiatives are anchored. Sustainable and inclusive tourism is to be promoted through (i) upgrading of community and private sector participation in tourism value chain; (ii) safety, security, and protection of tourism and heritage assets; and (iii) increasing responsiveness to environment and climate change.
2. Following the mid-term review of ATSP 2016-2025 in 2020, an updated ATSP was released in January 2021. In particular, the updated ATSP recognised the need to encourage more programmes and activities that promote sustainable and responsible tourism development in ASEAN, to balance the previous focus of past initiatives primarily on marketing and promotional efforts. Thus, to implement the strategic measure on increasing responsiveness to environmental protection and climate change, new activities proposed included the design and implementation of sustainable consumption and production and financing programmes, which involved undertaking three new activities: (i) develop measures to implement sustainable consumption and production (Greening the Tourism Value Chain) practices in tourism businesses and destinations; (ii) conduct study on carrying capacities of the priority ASEAN heritage tourism products/destinations; and (iii) formulate strategy on sustainable tourism financing schemes for enterprises and destinations.
3. Furthermore, the *Phnom Penh Declaration on a More Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient ASEAN Tourism* was adopted in February 2021, which called for: (i) closer collaboration between ASEAN Member States (AMS) as well as with relevant international organisations and tourism stakeholders; (ii) the expeditious development of a *Post COVID-19 Recovery Plan for ASEAN Tourism*; (iii) promotion of opportunities especially for MSMEs, vulnerable groups, and other affected communities; and (iv) enhanced capacity building. In September 2021, ASEAN Tourism Ministers endorsed

the *Post-COVID-19 Recovery Plan for ASEAN Tourism*. The development of the *Post-COVID-19 Recovery Plan for ASEAN Tourism* was aligned with the updated ATSP and the Phnom Penh Declaration, and proposed five pillars with corresponding implementation action plans under the foreseen reopening, recovery, and resilience phases over 2021-2025.

4. Given that tourism is a complex sector composed of multiple stakeholders, sub-sectors, and regional levels, it was recognised that implementation of several recommendations fell outside of the purview of the ASEAN National Tourism Organisations (NTOs). Sustainable tourism was among the initial cross-sectoral and cross-pillar issues identified in the ASEAN Community, which was expectedly assigned to the ASEAN NTOs as the lead sectoral body, and the ASEAN Sustainable and Inclusive Tourism Development Committee (ASITDC) as the sectoral working body. And given the various sectoral frameworks and initiatives directly or indirectly related to sustainable tourism development already in existence or being developed, it would be useful to have an overarching framework to help synthesise the various frameworks, elements, and initiatives to maximise the synergies between them, as well as identify any remaining gaps in the sustainable tourism development agenda.
5. Also, while the updated ATSP and *Post-COVID-19 Recovery Plan for ASEAN Tourism* are targeted for implementation over the period 2021-2025, some action lines would necessarily require a longer timeframe for full development and implementation. In particular, achieving sustainable and inclusive tourism should be seen as a long-term vision and agenda for the region.
6. Simply put, the pandemic required ASEAN to revisit and rethink its tourism strategy as it prepared for the recovery and long-term resilience of the region. To somehow offset the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector, the pandemic should also serve as an impetus and opportunity for the sector to “build back better” or “build forward better” by designing and building a more sustainable tourism sector that would underpin its resilience, which should no longer be taken for granted. That is, the vision is for tourism to emerge more sustainable and resilient following the crisis induced by COVID-19. In particular, sustainability must be central in all future travel and tourism planning in the ASEAN region. In addition to understanding the economic impact of travel and tourism, more focus should also be on environmental conservation

and climate friendly policies, as well as on the critical socio-cultural impacts of the tourism sector in the region.

7. These factors, i.e., the need for a multi-sectoral and long-term approach with stronger emphasis on sustainability and resilience, pointed to the need for an *ASEAN Framework on Sustainable Tourism Development* (hereafter “the Framework”) to guide the work on ASEAN’s sustainable tourism development agenda, particularly in the years leading up to 2025 and beyond.

## **OBJECTIVES AND OVERVIEW OF THE FRAMEWORK**

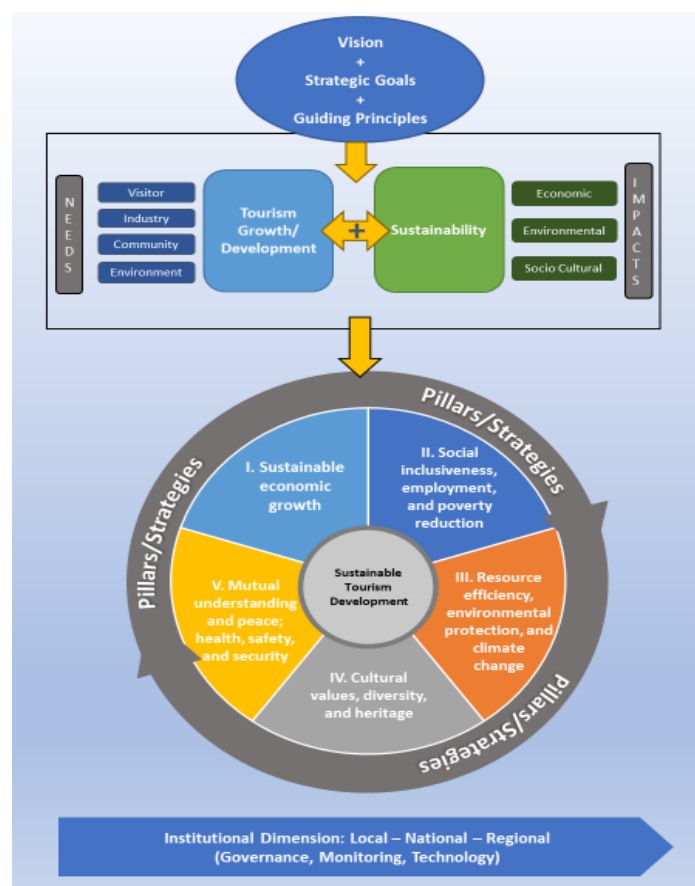
8. The objectives of the Framework are to:
  - i. Identify the long-term vision; and the overarching operational goal, strategic goals, guiding principles, and the key pillars and their corresponding strategies to achieve the long-term vision; and
  - ii. Identify an appropriate mechanism/modality to address the cross-sectoral and cross-pillar nature of sustainable tourism development to support the work of the ASEAN NTOs and ASITDC, as the lead in this area.
9. Developing the Framework drew on the United Nations World Tourism Organization’s (UNWTO) framework and its refinements, as well as other existing regional frameworks, especially those that were developed in the aftermath of COVID-19 that emphasised even more the importance of a tourism sector that is sustainable to underpin its resilience<sup>1</sup>.
10. The following schematic diagram encapsulates the key elements of the Framework (Figure 1). In particular, it hews to UNWTO’s definition of sustainable tourism as: “Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment

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<sup>1</sup> An extensive review of the literature is presented in the report prepared by ERIA, “Study to Develop a Framework on Sustainable Tourism Development in ASEAN in the Post COVID-19 Era.”

and host communities”<sup>2</sup>. Thus, making tourism development more sustainable means taking into account the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural impacts by assigning clear responsibilities, even as the needs of the key dimensions of tourism, i.e., the visitors, the industry, the local communities, and the environment (VICE), are incorporated in the planning, development, and operation of tourism. The caveat is that full harmony is not assumed to always be possible between the sustainability pillars or the key dimensions of tourism, and acceptable trade-offs have to be defined. This requires a systems perspective, which involves viewing sustainability as a process of conditional optimisation and fine-tuning of all elements so that the developmental system as a whole maintains its bearings, and no one element becomes so misaligned that it compromises the whole system.

Figure 1. ASEAN Framework on Sustainable Tourism Development



<sup>2</sup> UNWTO and UNEP (2005). *Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policymakers*. UNWTO/UNEP: Madrid/Paris (p. 12).

11. Following the UNWTO framework:

- i. Economic sustainability ensures viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation;
- ii. Environmental sustainability entails optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes, and helping to conserve natural resources and biodiversity; and
- iii. Socio-cultural sustainability means respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserving their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contributing to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.

12. The key elements of the Framework are discussed in the following sections.

## **VISION, GOALS, AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### ***A. Long Term Vision***

13. The ultimate vision in the long run is: *“An ASEAN region that is recognised as a quality sustainable tourism destination, which promotes the economic prosperity, welfare, and engagement of the local community; protects and develops its natural environment and culture; and provides a high quality experience to responsible and sustainable-minded visitors/tourists.”*

### ***B. Overarching Operational Goal***

14. While the vision is the end-game, goals are action-oriented. The tourism sector has played an important role in the economic growth and development of many AMS, and it will continue to be an important driver of job creation and growth, and a means of reducing poverty and inequality and promoting inclusivity. Especially in the immediate term following the COVID-19 pandemic, the priority would expectedly be the resumption

of business and employment in the sector. That being said, environmental and community impacts of excessive tourism have also been identified as major concerns. Thus, there has also been a growing awareness of and support for sustainable tourism approaches in the region that are necessary for the long term viability of the sector. The challenge is to how to manage growth, without necessarily limiting it, such that it is appropriate to the visitors, the destination environment, and the host population. Thus, the overarching operational goal is proposed as follows:

Continue to promote the growth and development of the tourism sector, as a critical contributor to overall economic growth and development, but with a stronger awareness of and focus on the environmental and socio-cultural impacts of tourism activities, and resolve to undertake initiatives to reduce tourism's adverse footprint on the environment and communities and enhance the environment and communities' well-being.

### **C. Strategic Goals**

15. Tourism has many dimensions. The visitors, industry, communities, and environment (VICE) model captures the goals for these four key dimensions of tourism, as well as the interactions among them. Utilising the VICE model, the following strategic goals are defined:

#### Strategic Goal 1 - Visitor satisfaction and engagement

Visitors from more diverse countries who are aware of the sustainability implications of their travel decisions and actions, and will act responsibly toward the community and the environment, as they experience a high level of satisfaction and access through a wider choice of tourism destinations and travel segments in the region, where sustainable approaches are practised and their health, safety and security are assured.

16. Visitors are the primary actor in tourism, and thus play a critical role in achieving sustainable tourism. For instance, their preferences in terms of physical environment, infrastructure development, modes of transport, and choice of services/service providers in the tourism destination can affect the achievement of sustainable tourism

development. They also need to develop a wider understanding of sustainability that goes beyond environmental issues. In particular, visitors/tourists' responsible behaviour towards the environment and local communities has important impacts on tourism in developing countries including Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Areas of intervention include promotion, education, and communication to raise visitors' sustainability awareness and direct contribution to sustainable development of tourism (i.e., carbon calculator, purchase local, zero waste, etc); regulations, guidelines, or codes of conduct where appropriate; and pricing and charging that reflect user/polluter pays principle, which can be made more acceptable if they are accompanied by some assurance that funds collected will be appropriately spent, e.g., to support conservation, maintenance or other local community purposes.

17. A key outcome of the pandemic is that it has led to the development of a new pathway for social transformation that is supportive of sustainable tourism development. That is, it has forced a change in the mindset of visitors/tourists that it is a privilege to be able to travel again after the long lockdown forced by the pandemic. There is more recognition that they now need to behave (more) responsibly to protect their health, as well as the health of other travellers and the local community. The challenge is to transform this new or stronger sense of responsibility to a "sustainable" mindset. An increasing number of global travellers have also expressed preference for more sustainable travel in the future and expect more sustainable travel options from the industry. This shift in consumer demand can then propel the industry to shift towards long term sustainability practices.

#### Strategic Goal 2 - Industry profitability/viability

Develop an industry where all business aspects of tourism are viable and competitive, and link their competitiveness and potential economic viability to tourism sustainability. Sustainability makes good business sense. The local tourism industry is aware that the main priority of sustainability is to ensure long-term economic benefits that are equitably distributed across businesses of different sizes, communities, and other stakeholders, while ensuring the responsible use of natural/environmental resources. Social responsibility of tourism businesses also fosters sustainability.

18. Meeting the challenges to deliver quality jobs, minimise resource use, support communities, promote sustainable transport, and improve accessibility partly rests on how businesses respond to these challenges. Important forms of business support include creating a favourable business climate, ensuring secure and safe destinations, setting and promoting quality standards, removing unnecessary red tape, providing skills training, and facilitating access to markets. As noted earlier, shifting consumer demand may lead to greening of the industry. Sustainable businesses may also be promoted through incubator schemes or certifications programmes. The use of renewable energy sources and green and climate smart technologies may also be incentivised. In particular, studies indicate that the availability of public incentives encourages SMEs to adopt environmental management practices. The belief that transformations in the industry can be enabled by sustainable tourism has gained momentum in the aftermath of COVID-19.

### Strategic Goal 3 – Community prosperity and engagement

Local communities that derive widespread and equitably distributed economic benefits from tourism, including business opportunities and quality employment, as well as indirect benefits from investments in infrastructure and provision of social services. This would also improve opportunities, income and services available to the poor, underprivileged, and vulnerable. Local communities' historic heritage, authentic culture, traditions and distinctiveness are also respected and enhanced, and cultural and creative industries are promoted and supported. Local communities are integrated into decision-making processes related to the development and management of tourism in their area.

19. Tourist needs and expectations are typically the core drivers of tourism planning and development. But those who have to live with the consequences of tourism are also key stakeholders. Thus, it is important to find ways to engage and empower local communities through public consultations, not just to inform them or seek their inputs on proposed plans, but to allow them to be part of discussions on the development of tourism policies. How the benefits are distributed to different types of businesses, subsectors, and communities need to be understood. Undertaking this in practice is not likely to be easy and may require capacity building, workshop, or focus group discussion. The appropriate format would depend on the nature of the destination community and

the overall political, social, and cultural context. Community involvement in tourism planning is important to manage perceptions and ensure that tourism truly supports a community to thrive.

#### Strategic Goal 4 - Environment protection and enhancement

Environment that is protected and preserved through low carbon and efficient use of resources in the development and operation of tourism facilities and services; with conservation of biodiversity and protection of the natural environment; minimisation of air, water, and land pollution and the generation of waste by tourism enterprises and visitors; and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

20. More than any other industry, tourism depends on the integrity of the natural environment. The COVID-19 pandemic not only adversely affected businesses, jobs, and economies, but put wildlife conservation and overall conservation efforts in jeopardy as well. In particular, the sudden fall in tourism revenues cut off funding for biodiversity conservation, and cases of poaching and looting are expected to rise as livelihoods driven by tourism in and around protected areas dwindle<sup>3</sup>.
21. Thus, environmental responsibility is a fundamental requirement for sustainable tourism development, and building a more sustainable industry means working within its environmental limits. The impacts of tourism on the natural environment are multi-dimensional; similarly, environmental considerations have significant short- and long-term impacts on sustainable tourism development. Thus, tourism has a specific responsibility because of its heavy reliance on natural resources and diverse ecosystems. Resource management is essential for the sustainability of tourism.

#### ***D. Guiding Principles***

22. The following principles will guide the development and implementation of tourism policies for sustainable development:
  - i. Sustainable tourism development applies to all forms of tourism. Unlike eco or

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<sup>3</sup> UN (2020). *COVID-19 and Transforming Tourism*. UN Policy Brief, August 2020.

green tourism, sustainable tourism addresses social, cultural, economic and environmental issues in all forms of tourism. For tourism to be sustainable, it needs to consider the local community's needs and quality of life, promote and respect its culture and local traditions, contribute to the prosperity of the local economy, and minimise environmental damage, as it pursues a quality experience for visitors/ tourists;

- ii. Sustainable tourism development requires a holistic approach, as part of an overall sustainable development agenda, to ensure consistence in approach and the best use of scarce resources especially in developing economies;
- iii. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution in the pursuit of sustainability in tourism development. Policies, approaches, and tools need to be adapted to prevailing national, even local conditions, needs, and capacities. Tourism destinations have their own unique features, assets, problems and vulnerabilities, which require adaptable strategies, approach and inputs from the bottom up;
- iv. Sustainable tourism development has to involve all relevant stakeholders in both the public and private sectors, taking into account and balancing their respective positions and motivations. This requires appropriate institutional structures to help governments work in harmony both internally and with the private sector and other stakeholders to pursue sustainable tourism development. A structure for government to engage private sector and other stakeholders is also important in the formulation of a relevant strategy, policies, and actions for sustainable tourism, as well as for effective coordination of actions;
- v. Because of the tourism sector's fragmented nature, public concern issues, and required institutional capacity for sustained tourism development, governments play a leading role. More generally, strong leadership and political support is also necessary to ensure wide participation and consensus building;
- vi. Sustainable tourism development should be seen as a continuous, long-term process of improving and adapting to changing conditions, instead of an end-state, because tourism and its contexts are dynamic in nature;
- vii. It is critical to measure how successfully the region is moving towards sustainable tourism. Effective monitoring and evaluation are essential to track progress toward tourism sustainability in all its dimensions and guide necessary policy adjustments, which in turn require developing practical and practicable monitoring systems,

- mechanisms and tools such as indicators;
- viii. Digital and innovative technologies have widespread usefulness and application for sustainable tourism development;
  - ix. Regional cooperation is another pathway toward sustainable tourism development. Strategic regional cooperation and coordination can add value to and support the national agenda. In particular, a collaborative approach to deal with the big challenges would allow the sharing of best practices and more efficient pooling and use of resources; and
  - x. While regional harmonisation is not the end-goal, it should also be noted that too big differences in terms of commitment to pursue sustainable tourism development may lead to a race to the bottom; e.g., competition for tourists may drive down sustainability standards, which would be problematic for the whole region.

## PILLARS AND STRATEGIES

23. To achieve the strategic goals, the Framework adopted the **five central pillars** that UNWTO identified for the International Year of Tourism<sup>4</sup>, which were a refinement of its original framework and hewed very closely to the structure of the ASEAN Community. This makes them easy to align with and modify according to the pillars, elements, and strategic actions of the ASEAN Community that relate to sustainable tourism development. Identifying the areas and sectors where modalities for cooperation, coordination, and/or collaboration may need to be established to promote and pursue common goals and initiatives would also be facilitated.
24. In particular, the five inter-related and overlapping central pillars were deemed as the key elements of sustainable development to which tourism could make a significant and lasting contribution, hence shifting the focus to implementation effectiveness. In the context of the pandemic, which elevated the importance of health and hygiene as a critical aspect of travel, the fifth and final pillar is redefined to explicitly incorporate

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<sup>4</sup> UNWTO (2018). *Tourism for Development – Volume I: Key Areas for Action*. Madrid: UNWTO. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284419722>)

this aspect. Finally, governance systems at various levels were added as a sixth overall pillar, which defines how the Framework is controlled and operated, the mechanisms and instruments for implementation, and the structures and mechanisms for interactions among the various stakeholders. The role of technology as an overall key driver of the synergies among the different stakeholders and sustainability pillars is especially highlighted.

### ***Pillar 1: Sustainable Economic Growth***

25. Sustainable economic growth or economic prosperity is typically the first pillar in sustainable tourism development plans even for developed economies. This means building an economy that is strong, stable, and sustainable that is capable of providing prosperity and opportunities for all, and in which those who impose environmental and social costs are the ones who bear them (polluter pays), and there is an incentive to use resources efficiently. The viability and competitiveness of tourism destinations and businesses need to be ensured for them to continue prospering and delivering benefits in the long term, including visitor/tourist satisfaction and contributing to the host destination's prosperity. The challenge is influencing businesses to relate their competitiveness to sustainability practices. Hence, the call for the transition to the circular economy<sup>5</sup> including in the tourism sector, which entails investment to transform tourism value chains; prioritisation of sustainable food approaches for circular economy; and a shift towards a circularity of plastics in tourism.

26. Strategic areas for intervention include:

- i. Sustainable tourism policy, regulatory environment, and strategy; overall enabling business environment and support;
- ii. Promotion of green investment; investment in physical infrastructure (enhance the reach, sustainability, and quality of transport by investing in airports, roads, and other transport infrastructure and promoting sustainable modes of transport), and digital infrastructure (capitalise on new technological solutions such a big data for tourism development and smart destinations).

Addressing this area would involve cross-sectoral/cross-pillar engagement

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<sup>5</sup> A circular economy is a proposed economic system or model of production and consumption, where waste output is reduced or eliminated using finite resources.

between tourism and the AEC sectoral working bodies in charge of: (i) investment; (ii) transport; (iii) Information and Communications Technology (ICT); (iv) sustainable consumption and production; and (iv) the circular economy, which also encompasses a wide range of initiatives related to trade; services and investment; finance; transport; food, agriculture and forestry; energy; ICT; science and technology; and the environment under ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC); and

- iii. Marketing campaigns, e.g., that highlight health, hygiene and safety; and product development/diversification for greater resilience, such as health and premium wellness experiences and ecotourism.

Addressing this area would involve cross-pillar engagement between tourism and the ASCC sectoral working body in charge of information and media.

## ***Pillar 2: Social Inclusiveness, Employment, and Poverty Reduction***

27. A key contribution of tourism to sustainable development is employment generation. In addition to reducing poverty and inequality, the sector is well placed to further engage, protect, and promote vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including women, minorities, and young people who are more strongly represented in the sector compared to other economic sectors. Inclusive tourism also entails providing a high level of access and quality experiences for people with physical, sensory and other disabilities. An inclusive ASEAN also involves a greater focus on people engagement and empowerment.

28. Strategic areas for intervention include:

- i. More quality jobs in the tourism sector, including the level of pay, conditions of service and availability to all, supported by fair labour practices and regulations and investment in human resources (i.e., skills training/retraining programmes);

Addressing this area would involve cross-pillar engagement between tourism and the ASCC sectoral working bodies in charge of: (i) labour; and (ii) education;

- ii. Widespread and fair distribution of direct and indirect economic and social benefits from tourism throughout the local community, with additional focus on improving opportunities, income, and services available to the poor and disadvantaged (e.g.,

utilise income from tourism to support social programmes).

Addressing this area would involve cross-pillar engagement between tourism and the ASCC sectoral working bodies in charge of: (i) labour; (ii) youth; (iii) social welfare and development; and (iv) rural development and poverty eradication;

- iii. Address specific vulnerabilities faced by women both in the formal and informal sectors, such as seasonality/part-time work, low wages/wage gaps, precarious working conditions, and sexual harassment. There are studies indicating that gender inequalities result in economic costs, social inequities, and ecological damage, while women's involvement in tourism development and decision-making brings unique and invaluable wisdom to the process and underpins sustainability.

Addressing this area would involve cross-pillar engagement between tourism and the ASCC sectoral working bodies in charge of: (i) labour; (ii) gender and development; and (iii) social welfare and development; and the ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC) sectoral working body in charge of women, peace, and security;

- iv. Targeted interventions for more sustainable locally driven MSMEs (e.g., capacity building such as training on business and ICT skills, market access, accessible finance, standard setting and marketing e.g., of locally produced goods).

Addressing this area would involve cross-sectoral engagement between tourism and the AEC sectoral working body in charge of MSMEs;

- v. Develop public-private-community partnerships/mechanisms to engage and empower local communities in the planning and decision-making process about the development of long-term inclusive and sustainable tourism strategies. A greater sense of ownership and well-being among locals would promote social cohesion and facilitate tourists-locals' relations.

Addressing this area would involve cross-sectoral engagement between tourism and the sectoral working body in charge of public-private sector engagement.

### ***Pillar 3: Resource Efficiency, Environmental Protection, and Climate Change***

29. COVID-19 led to a renewed focus on sustainability and the natural environment. And even after the effects of the pandemic-induced crises have been more or less resolved, risks will continue including dwindling resources and climate change. To the best extent

possible, the impact of tourist facilities on the environment should be minimised in recognition of the fact that the environment is a finite resource. Thus, there has to be a cohesive approach to tourism and the environment, particularly where tourism-related economic growth is decoupled from environmental degradation and excessive resource use.

30. Overall, the ASEAN region is under incredible stress with respect to its resilience and sustainability due to loss of biodiversity, pollution of water bodies, loss of tropical rain forests, increasing solid and industrial waste, and plastic marine pollution. The region is also very prone to natural disasters, making it especially vulnerable to climate change's ill effects. Thus, fostering sustainable development requires strengthening natural resource management; encouraging and empowering communities to engage in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use; and promoting clean energy and the circular economy.

31. Strategic areas for intervention include:

- i. Low carbon and improved efficiency in the use of scarce and non-renewable resources among tourism businesses and destinations; promote a reduce-reuse-recycle mentality; and engage with managers, employees, and tourists to raise awareness of efficient resource use and environmental protection;
- ii. Focus on environmental protection, ecosystem preservation, and biodiversity conservation; establish guidelines that will further enhance environmental protection through engagement with the private sector, academia and local communities; support conservation efforts and capture the value of conservation through tourism; and invest in nature-based solutions for sustainable tourism; and
- iii. Mitigate the effects of climate change by encouraging the monitoring and reporting of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from tourism operations, accelerating the decarbonisation of tourism operations through market-based incentives to promote energy efficient practices, and engaging the tourism sector in carbon removal.

32. Addressing this pillar would involve cross-sectoral/cross-pillar engagement between tourism and the sectoral working bodies in charge of: (i) energy; (ii) environment; and (iii) the circular economy.

#### ***Pillar 4: Cultural Values, Diversity, and Heritage***

33. Tourism can promote/amplify the preservation and enhancement of rich cultural heritage through initiatives to restore and promote significant buildings and traditions, and foster meaningful encounters between people of diverse cultures. Socio-economic benefits may also be gained through cultural tourism and development of creative industries. Avoiding risks of physical damage to heritage site or the misrepresentation of cultural practices requires proper management, including raising awareness and understanding among visitors/tourists.
34. Strategic areas for intervention include:
- i. Promote and enhance the diverse cultures through cultural tourism, e.g., by closer integration of cultural and tourism policies and planning;
  - ii. Safeguard tangible and intangible cultural heritage through proper planning and management, including close monitoring of carrying capacities of cultural sites and destinations, proper pricing, and engaging and empowering of host communities as the guardians of cultural heritage; and
  - iii. Promote living culture and the creative industries through tourism, which can revitalise the creative arts, historic buildings, and local communities, and harness the contribution of the creative industries towards innovations and generating livelihoods; examples include traditional music, arts, gastronomy, and locally produced handicrafts.
35. Addressing this pillar would involve cross-pillar engagement between tourism and the sectoral working bodies in charge of: (i) culture and arts; and (ii) MSMEs.
36. In particular, the formulation of a roadmap on the role of culture in sustainable development has been identified as a priority area of action in the Strategic Plan for Culture and Arts, but is yet to be developed. Such as roadmap would help to synthesise

approaches and harness the synergies between the culture and tourism sectors, indicating a very important role for the tourism sector in its development.

***Pillar 5: Mutual Understanding and Peace; Health, Safety, and Security***

37. Tourism cannot take place without peace, safety, and security. And a sustainable, well-managed tourism sector can contribute to the building blocks of peace and mutual understanding. Thus, the safety and security of both visitors/tourists and locals must be ensured in order to develop a thriving, sustainable tourism sector.
  
38. Similar to how the September 11 attacks in the United States radically changed global security protocols while traveling, the COVID-19 pandemic is also expected to permanently change health and hygiene protocols. The need for national emergency mechanisms and crisis management systems to be in place in tourism destinations has also been amplified.
  
39. Strategic areas for intervention include:
  - i. Management of security issues to reinforce the reputation of the region as a secure destination;
  - ii. Multi-hazard risk management systems and structures for enhanced communication, collaboration, co-ordination, and partnerships among the relevant government agencies, between the public and private sectors, and across borders to facilitate swift and effective crisis management and recovery responses; and where necessary, involvement of the tourism minister in the national crisis committee would ensure that the specific needs of the sector are more properly addressed; and
  - iii. Integration of in preparedness planning: crisis preparedness plans that include financial and other support for the most severely affected sectors; collaboration with the private sector to determine what kind of assistance would be needed in different crisis scenarios; and understanding the effects of crises on the tourism sector, so that governments and ASEAN can better address them and to ensure the sector's future resilience; and

- iv. Establish/Leverage existing relationships with other regional and international organisations for sharing of information, experiences, best practices, and more importantly developing common, holistic responses and solutions. A more compelling case can be made for governments to cooperate and intervene at the international level in order to protect lives and livelihoods worldwide.

40. Addressing this pillar would involve cross-pillar engagement between tourism and the sectoral working bodies in charge of: (i) disaster management; (ii) health; and (iii) peace and security.

### ***Cross-Cutting Factors: Institutional Dimension***

41. The institutional dimension is cross-cutting and refers to the requirements in terms of governance, policies, and tools to plan, guide, support and coordinate sustainable tourism development at the local destination, national, and regional levels. In particular, governance is focused on structure and processes for decision making, accountability, control, and behaviour. Governance structures include cooperation, collaboration, and coordination among all relevant stakeholders. Cooperation and delegation of roles within countries and across the region are essential in order to effectively govern the tourism industry. Partnerships formed between inter-governmental departments, tourism businesses, civil society, local communities, tourists, international organisations, and other stakeholders are the building blocks for harnessing the full potential of sustainable tourism development. Ideally, these are defined initially as part of the preparation for developing an action plan. Timely, accurate, and comprehensive data to measure and monitor tourism performance, impact, and sustainability is also critical. And technology operates as an overall key driver of the synergies among the different stakeholders and sustainability pillars.

42. Strategic areas for intervention include:

- i. Develop effective coordination and partnership structures at the local/regional destination, national, and regional/international levels;
- ii. Timely and accurate data collection, analysis, and monitoring framework; capacity building;

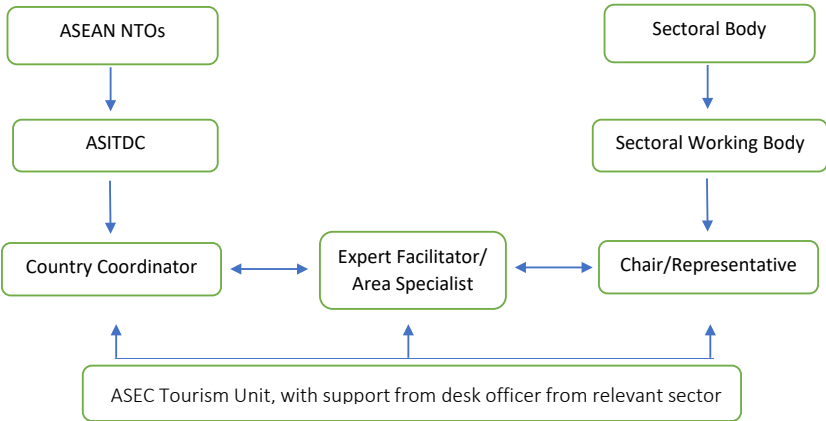
- iii. Promote understanding and usage of digital technologies across the tourism sector;  
and
- iv. Ensure adequate financial and human resources.

#### Governance structure

43. It is mostly at the local/regional destination level where necessary actions to plan, promote, and manage sustainable tourism development take place. Effective governance at the local level requires: (i) effective coordination; (ii) multi-stakeholder governance and management structures; and (iii) community engagement. At the national level, strong governance frameworks entail: (i) national-level recognition of sustainable tourism development (ii) inter-ministerial liaison groups on tourism; and (iii) national multi-stakeholder bodies on tourism. Effective coordination between governance at the local/regional and national levels is also necessary.
44. The development of a strategy for sustainable tourism should already be a participatory process, involving the range wide of stakeholders to ensure adherence to the strategy and commitment to its implementation. The regional sustainable tourism frameworks reviewed all highlighted the importance of effective tourism governance structures in the development and implementation of sustainable tourism strategies. They include tourism ministries and institutions, and how they relate to other areas of government that affect its sustainability and performance. They also consider the presence of structures and mechanisms for engaging public, private, and third sector stakeholders, including local communities, at different levels. According to UNWTO, an ideal structure would be a permanent forum or standing conference for stakeholders representing different interests, and a smaller body or council to deal with more detailed work.
45. In the case of ASEAN, **unpacking sustainable tourism development into its key pillars and elements, and forging partnerships with the relevant sectoral bodies** that also work on those elements would make the process more manageable and lead to more definitive courses of action for sustainable tourism development.

46. In particular, a Country Coordinator from ASITDC (or other Committees as applicable) will be assigned to take the lead for a specific pillar or strategic action under the Framework. The country coordinator will then engage the Chair/Representative of the relevant sectoral working body/bodies whose initiatives intersect with the particular pillar or strategic action. To enhance the cross-sectoral engagement/discussion, an expert facilitator (i.e., an expert in the particular pillar or strategic action who can translate the work of the other relevant sector in the context of tourism) will then be appointed to guide/support the collaboration between the two sectors and help to develop an appropriate action plan on the specific pillar or strategic action. Overall coordination will be provided by ASEC desk officers from the Tourism Unit and the other relevant divisions.

*Figure 2. Modality for Cross-Sectoral Engagement*



Measuring sustainable tourism development

47. Timely, accurate, and comprehensive data to measure and monitor tourism performance, impact, and sustainability is critical across the five pillars of sustainable tourism development. The need for more and improved data is also recognised across all stakeholder groups, cutting across the regional, national and sub-national (including local) levels, for informed decision-making. That is, the success of tourism is measured by its sustainability along all three dimensions, and not just by its own performance as reflected in the tourism-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicators.

48. Measurement and monitoring of the state and impacts of tourism and sustainable tourism development in many AMS is still inadequate. The task of measuring sustainable tourism is extremely challenging; hence, the use of more readily available macro-level data and indicators is understandable. Developing any monitoring system will require significant investment in terms of time, resources, technical expertise, ICT/digital infrastructure, and governance frameworks. But it is investment worth undertaking if progress towards sustainable tourism is to be concretised. In particular, three of the methodologies that are currently being used and/or developed include: (i) destination level monitoring systems (e.g., the European Tourism Indicator System); (ii) UNWTO's International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO) and Measuring Sustainable Tourism; and (iii) big data for tourism. For ASEAN, the development of an ASEAN Sustainable Tourism Toolkit should be undertaken to assist the relevant stakeholders in tracking the progress of existing sustainability practices in the region. The aforementioned toolkit shall take into consideration to what extent destinations respond to sustainability criteria set forth and how/what to do in order to fill the gap.

49. Current approaches have their strengths and weaknesses, and they will be further examined in terms of their suitability in the ASEAN region, as well as the requirements for their effective implementation (such as statistical expertise, funding, soft and hard ICT infrastructure). The support/involvement/participation of the statistics offices in the AMS, as well as the ASEAN Community Statistical System (ACSS) Committee will also be critical. Finally, support for capacity building will need to be established.

#### Technology/digitalisation as a driver of the synergies in sustainable tourism development

50. COVID-19 accelerated digitalisation and the use of big data, as governments sought to have a clearer understanding of the pandemic's impacts on traveller movement and habits, and support businesses in developing better and smarter products and services. Digitalisation also promoted the introduction of seamless travel technologies, and accelerated the piloting of digital travel certificates. There is still plenty of room to capitalise on new technological solutions for sustainable tourism development and smart destinations.

51. New technological solutions facilitate evidence-based decision-making, and the responsible management of tourism and its impacts. “Smart destinations” are considered a boon to sustainable development, as cutting-edge technological infrastructure helps to ensure the sustainable development of tourist areas. As such, they promote accessibility; facilitate the interaction and integration of visitors/ tourists with the environment; enhance the quality of visitors/tourists’ experiences at destinations; and improve the resident population’s quality of life. Smart solutions for destinations include regular and timely measurement of tourism, intelligent promotion of tourism sites, and digital accessibility. Advanced technologies can also lead to the improvement of tourism enterprises’ resource efficiency; mitigation of climate change; and decoupling of economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation.
52. Deepening the role of technology in sustainable tourism development would involve capitalising on the ASEAN Smart Cities Network, as well as the work currently being undertaken in ASEAN on the digital economy and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

53. This multi-sectoral Framework seeks to capitalise on the work that is already being undertaken by the tourism sector and other relevant sectors in the ASEAN Community and globally that have direct implications on the pursuit of sustainable tourism development. Going forward, the Framework may be utilised to guide the development of a more holistic, long-term action plan and detailed implementation plan that engages the sectoral bodies and relevant stakeholders who will be part of implementing the plan in order to build a sense of ownership of and commitment to the success of the plan.

54. There are currently two existing and inter-related tourism frameworks for implementation up to 2025, i.e., the updated ATSP and the Post COVID-19 Recovery Plan for ASEAN Tourism, which already incorporate initiatives related to sustainable tourism development. Some action lines will necessarily require a longer timeframe for full development and implementation. Furthermore, work on developing the post-2025 vision and agenda of ASEAN is now ongoing. The pursuit of sustainable tourism development will continue to remain a relevant agenda post-2025, and developing a cross-sectoral action plan in the lead up to 2025 would ensure that the key sustainable tourism-related issues and aspects would be adequately covered in the relevant post-2025 sectoral action plans.
55. The application of this Framework shall exempt matters relating to national sovereignty, national security, public safety, and all government activities deemed suitable for exemption by an AMS. The Framework may be adjusted as necessary with the consent of all AMS.