Narrowing the Development Gap
Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) and Narrowing the Development Gap (NDG)

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), to be established by 2015, is one of the main objectives of the region’s economic integration. As ASEAN works towards the implementation of the AEC Blueprint, there are many issues relating to the realisation of the AEC that need to be considered. One key challenge is to find a balance in terms of coherence and support among the ASEAN Member States towards economic integration.

Aiming at narrowing the development divide and enhancing ASEAN’s competitiveness, the ASEAN Leaders at their Summit in 2000 launched the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) with the objectives of narrowing the development gap and accelerating economic integration in ASEAN.

The IAI is primarily directed towards the newer members of ASEAN, namely Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam. However, it also encompasses sub-regional groupings, such as the Greater Mekong, Brunei Darussalam – Indonesia – Malaysia – Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) and the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT). This will assist the relevant countries to meet ASEAN-wide targets and commitments.

**IAI Work Plan**

Efforts to narrow the development gap have been driven mainly by the IAI Work Plans. The first IAI Work Plan (2002-2008), endorsed by the Leaders at the 8th ASEAN Summit in 2002, had priorities addressing infrastructure (transport and energy); human resource development (public sector capacity building, labour and employment, and higher education); information and communication technologies (ICT); and, regional economic integration (trade in goods and services, customs, standards, and investments). Tourism and poverty alleviation have also been included.

The second IAI Work Plan (2009-2015), endorsed in 2009 at the 14th ASEAN Summit, is based on key programme areas in the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint, ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint.

Both the IAI Work Plans have been devoted largely to soft infrastructure. However, development of physical transport and communication infrastructure networks, completion of the physical road, rail, air and sea linkages within ASEAN are now key areas of focus.

**IAI Task Force**

The IAI Task Force is responsible for managing the IAI Work Plan. Under the ASEAN Charter, the Task Force now comprises the Permanent Representatives to ASEAN in Jakarta.

**IAI Development Cooperation Forum**

To accelerate the pace of the implementation of IAI, the IAI Development Cooperation Forum (IDCF) was established to serve as the main venue for engaging ASEAN’s Dialogue Partners and other donors in a collective dialogue on the IAI Work Plan. Two IDCFs have been organised, in 2002 and 2007 respectively, with a third planned for 2010.

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