

FINAL REPORT

'Feature Series on CSR in the ASEAN Community'
IPS Asia-Pacific Center Foundation Inc

Brief description

The project aims to create a professional, ASEAN-based venue for capacity-building on in-depth, explanatory reporting among journalists from ASEAN countries on CSR and the larger role/responsibility and impact of the private sector in sustainable development in an increasingly integrated ASEAN Community.

It seeks to make a contribution toward the creation of more public awareness and discussion of corporate social responsibility in ASEAN, with particular attention to how the private sector and stakeholders in ASEAN are discussing, developing and setting norms around CSR against the backdrop of increased and deeper integration under the ASEAN Community.

While a lot of coverage about the ASEAN Community has been about the ASEAN Economic Community, this coverage about the AEC has often been about opportunities for companies and such 'traditional' angles. There has not been much space given to the role of businesses beyond their nature as moneymaking enterprises and beneficiaries of AEC, to discuss the larger question: What are businesses' roles in helping ensure that the citizens of ASEAN reap the dividends of greater economic integration? The goal of ASEAN integration, after all, is the betterment of the lives of the 625 million constituents of South-east Asia's main grouping, including through economic growth, equity, and sustainability that businesses are not isolated from as members of society.

This feature series' outputs include the discussion, commissioning, production, distribution of eight features/story sets around theme of how CSR is being discussed, developed, and pursued by the private sector in different ASEAN countries.

Outputs

IPS Asia-Pacific Center Foundation Inc carried out the activities covered by the project. It commissioned a total of 12 features, beyond the eight required by the agreement. Eight of them have been produced as of end-February 2016, with the rest to be released in March 2016.

The features are a mix of material when it came to format, approach, news hooks, and content. They were produced from interviews, angles developed from running stories/issues of the day used as news hooks, Q and As, and come from a mix of datelines. Some are focused on locally focused stories, others thematic, and others more regional, such as the stories from the ASEAN Responsible Business Forum held in Malaysia in October 2015. Although generated from Malaysia, most of these features were regional in scope or had international inputs. The feature story around Singaporean companies taking action against firms involved in the forest fires in Indonesia took advantage of the news peg that was current at the time of the 2015 haze episode.

The list of story titles/links of the released features is below:

1/Oct 28 How to Make Doing Good, Good Business - By Diana Mendoza

<http://www.aseannews.net/how-to-make-doing-good-good-business/>

- 2/Nov 6 Sharpening Weapon vs Corruption in ASEAN - By Diana Mendoza
<http://www.aseannews.net/sharpening-weapons-vs-corruption-in-asean/>
- 3/Nov 7 Women Sow Seeds of Entrepreneurship in Agriculture – By Diana Mendoza
<http://www.aseannews.net/women-sow-seeds-of-entrepreneurship-in-agriculture/>
- 4/Nov 10 Business Tries to Cut Through the Haze – By Candida Ng
<http://www.aseannews.net/csr-in-the-philippines-everybody-happy/>
- 5/Feb 15 CSR in ASEAN: It's About How You Make Money – By Johanna Son
<http://www.aseannews.net/csr-in-asean-its-about-how-you-make-money/>
- 6/Feb 29 CSR in the Philippines: 'Everybody Happy' – By Diana Mendoza
<http://www.aseannews.net/csr-in-the-philippines-everybody-happy/>
- 7/Mar 16 A Fine Line between CSR and Karmic Cash – By Kyaw Hsu Mon
<http://www.irrawaddy.com/factiva/in-burma-a-fine-line-between-csr-and-karmic-cash.html>
- 8/Story awaiting queue in The Phnom Penh Post – By Sor Chandara

Distribution

The stories were posted on the Reporting ASEAN website www.aseannews.net, which also features the partnership credit with the ASEAN CSR Network for the series. (See *Annex 1 for Web page*.) A number were carried by the IPS news wire for global distribution, such as one story from the Malaysia conference on CSR in ASEAN. The stories were also distributed by email and through the social media feeds of Reporting ASEAN through Twitter and Facebook. The Q and A with ASEAN CSR Network's CEO Thomas Thomas got very good reach, as did the opening story from the Malaysia conference and the action by Singaporean companies amid the haze.

By early March 2016, the Reporting ASEAN's Facebook page reached 886 likes, and 385 followers on Twitter (@reportingasean). The project does not use paid promotions, so these figures have been growing healthily given that the social media series was just created in 2015.

The Reporting ASEAN programme also shares in its feeds news analysis, information and events related to CSR in ASEAN and in the wider Asia, making it a core topic the series follows. These go to a mix of individuals, organisations interested in ASEAN and journalists. The programme's social media feeds are shaped around the question of what is important for journalists to know, or might give them tips of stories to develop, cover and follow up on.

Some articles are to be published in media outlets such as The Irrawaddy and the Phnom Penh Post; the series is waiting for space given the 'competition' with local news.

Some Insights

The features in the 'CSR in ASEAN Series' achieved the target of production of stories with a focus on CSR, contributing to widening the variety of news found in media and public spaces on aspects of ASEAN regionalization and integration.

At the same time, doing this series also brought the following realizations:

- As in the wider Reporting ASEAN programme, even on topics different from CSR, there is a learning curve for many journalists on how to view and craft news angles around ASEAN and link it to CSR;
- Journalists also often are caught in the more 'traditional' and older concepts of CSR, so opportunities to brush up their 'content' in this aspect would be useful
- Journalists could use more skills and exposure to craft truly regional ASEAN angles or scopes to their stories, whether on CSR or other angles

The Future

IPS Asia-Pacific sees the need for space and variety around news and analyses of the ASEAN regionalization process – which will continue for many years to come – to include topics like CSR that are not always covered by the media in the region.

Typically, stories related to ASEAN focus too much on what leaders say, what governments do, what their statements say and not enough of what actually happens on the ground. What happens on the ground includes how the lives of ASEAN citizens are affected by policies like integration, and among these citizens are the business sector. The business sector is often included in stories about the ASEAN Community and the ASEAN Economic Community as profit-making entities, investors or employers, but much less so as organizations that have a stake in the thriving economies and sustainable development of the societies they make money from.

Journalists tend to gravitate toward state voices and toward events as news, so efforts are needed to widen the definition, in effect, of what the ASEAN Community is made of, and enriches news and public information about ASEAN integration and its varied stakeholders.

IPS Asia-Pacific would like to suggest the development or encouragement of some possible venues to push both media's greater understanding of ASEAN regionalism as well as of CSR:

- Inclusion of sessions on CSR in ASEAN in discussions around ASEAN and media. (We will keep this mind as we try to find resources for the second 'Reporting ASEAN' media forum, which focuses on media aspects of ASEAN regionalization.)
- Development of venues to acquaint journalists in a deeper way about CSR and its different hues, nuances, styles and how companies in ASEAN put shape to it;
- Production of a real-time publication from key conferences on CSR in ASEAN, to help disseminate information in reader-friendly material to audiences, perhaps through ways that include the production of conference newspapers (which IPS Asia-Pacific also does). This seems particularly appropriate for CSR discussions, in order to combine both the effort to sensitize journalists to CSR and ASEAN issues, and the hands-on, actual production of news and information around these issues. This could also be a cooperative partnership of IPS Asia-Pacific with the ASEAN CSR Network and the companies sponsoring or taking part in such conferences.

Beyond this series, IPS Asia-Pacific will continue to follow CSR in ASEAN issues as part of its news radar on ASEAN regionalization and integration, as part of its Reporting ASEAN programme.

Financial Report

The financial report for this project follows. IPS Asia-Pacific would like to explain that it used the coverage travel funds to cover partial costs of trips, which is why the budget line that had a remaining amount. Instead, the remaining funds were used for project management and editing and distribution, including social media outreach, under the budget line 'editing, editorial and project management'.