ASEAN Leaders Programme
Five Year Report

Sponsors over the years:

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For the past five years, the ASEAN Leaders Programme has helped leaders in the ASEAN and the wider region to build strong connections, share knowledge, and develop their Cultural Intelligence.
The ASEAN Leaders Programme brings together government, business and non-profit senior leaders all across ASEAN to learn on a common platform.

The ASEAN region today has a combined population of 625 million, and presents challenges and opportunities that are vast, complex and transcend national boundaries. Imaginative thinking, experiential knowledge, and cultural understanding are some of the key factors that will contribute to innovative and sustainable growth critical to its future.

The ASEAN Leaders Programme helps leaders build strong connections, share knowledge, and develop Cultural Intelligence. In so doing, leaders gain awareness of the immense potential of the ASEAN community and ideate ways to improve it for future generations.

Now in its sixth year, the ASEAN Leaders Programme continues to build a community of cross-sector senior leaders from across the ASEAN and the wider region who are culturally intelligent and can leverage the networks and skills built on the programme to have a deeper impact in the organizations and societies they serve.

The ASEAN Leaders Programme combines the following four elements:

- **Place**: understand the roles that different sectors and industries have in how a ‘place’ grows and changes.
- **Collaboration**: practice building collaborative relationships across diverse networks.
- **Innovation**: develop new perspectives, ideas and methods to effect positive change.
- **CQ**: develop Cultural Intelligence, the ability to cross divides and thrive in multiple cultures.

Kok Yam Tan, Deputy Secretary, Smart Nation and Digital Government, and Strategy Group, Prime Minister’s Office, Government of Singapore, sets the challenge for the group in the past five years.
5 years of developing senior leaders in the region

5 programmes
Hosted in Singapore, New York, Jakarta, Manila, Bangkok, Pune
Over 200 senior leaders became alumni
Representing 14 countries

Over 100 organizations represented
Over 25 ideas generated to address the challenge
51% private sector, 30% public sector, 19% NGO sector
40 government leaders from across ASEAN join as participants

Engaged on the programme:
Singapore Government; PPP Philippines; Smart City Jakarta; EEECi Thailand; Quezon City; Municipal Commissioner Pune; National Commission of Culture; DBS Bank; GE; SAP; Google; Nutrifood; Ananda Development; Meralco; FWD; Singapore Poly; UTCC; Sampoerna University, Madarasah; MINT College; Rachel House; Equal Asia Foundation; Dignity Kitchen; CPAS; Nara Kreatif; BamBike; Shelters; Lighthouse Project

Every year, ALP is hosted in the country that holds the Chairmanship of the ASEAN
The ASEAN Leaders Programme launches in Singapore with the support of GE, ASEAN Foundation and UK FCO.

In the inaugural year, the programme is held in Singapore; Jakarta, Indonesia (being the ASEAN Chair); and New York, to broaden the perspective of the participants and expose them to new approaches to leadership, problem solving and innovation.

- The programme has the full support of:
  - An independent Advisory Group comprising of senior leaders from Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Australia.
  - The Advisory Group is chaired by Singapore’s Permanent Representative to the ASEAN and Global Vice Chairman of GE.
  - The Executive Director of the ASEAN Foundation chairs the Selection Group to ensure the recruitment of a diverse group of participants
  - Dr Vivian Balakrishnan is the guest of honour at the dinner reception on the inaugural programme and addresses the participants on the relevance of the ASEAN. He is joined by the Deputy British High Commissioner to Singapore, Alexandra McKenzie
  - DBS Bank participates by nominating their staff on the programme as part of their commitment to leadership development. Piyush Gupta, Group CEO, supports the programme by hosting the delegation at the Innovation Hub and sharing leadership insights and perspectives on digital opportunities for ASEAN
  - The first cohort of senior leaders from across sectors in the region produce five powerful ideas in response to the challenge of "What makes a city smart?"
Talking points from speakers

“People used to criticize ASEAN for being too slow. But that is our strength. We didn’t expand quickly, we don’t over promise. We have rules and regulations, a baseline, reliability, for dispute settlement and arbitration. The rule of law gives businesses more security and lowers costs. With lower barriers and costs you increase profitability. I am optimistic about ASEAN. Singapore gains from the whole of ASEAN doing well, Indonesia, Malaysia... together we can achieve critical mass.”

- Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Singapore Government and Minister In-Charge Smart Nations Programme, Republic of Singapore

"Smart cities – think well, make the proper decision for the future. To become a smart city, you need to have a holistic approach – there are many moving parts – social and environmental, that make a city smart."

- Keith Martin, former Singapore Managing Director (CP&I), PricewaterhouseCoopers

"The definition of smart is how humans act and respond across organizations, corporates and society."

- Kok Yam Tan, Head, Smart Nations Programme Office, Govt of Singapore

"We need people to work more closely in the region. Every country has its strength. Every country in the ASEAN has to help each other to grow. For GE, Asia is a big priority. My No.1 priority is to put ASEAN in the spotlight of GE."

- Wouter van Wersch, Former CEO, GE ASEAN
The programme is held in Singapore, Manila, Philippines (being the country that holds the Chairmanship of the ASEAN) and Pune, India to mark 25 years of the ASEAN-India Partnership.

- An even bigger cohort of leaders join, representing 12 different nationalities, all the three key sectors, and a diverse set of specializations and backgrounds, ranging from financial services, telecom, education, peace & conflict, environment, women and child welfare, agricultural businesses, L&D professionals, governance, infrastructure, microfinance, construction and aerospace business.
- Key players in Manila contribute to make the programme a successful learning experience in the city. Mayor of Quezon City, Civil Service Commission Philippines, MERALCO amongst other organizations host the participants and share perspectives on leadership, smart cities and innovation.
- An alumnus from the Philippines pilots one of the ideas from the inaugural year in 2016 on the “ASEAN Smart Cities Festival” to coincide with the programme.
- The 2017 cohort interacts with the public sector delegates as a part of the launch of the leadership series “Leading Smart Organizations”.
- Key organizations in Pune, India including the City Municipal Commissioner, GE, Thermax and the Pune Smart City Connect share their perspectives and challenges on leadership and navigating through change.
Key reflections from participants

“It’s good to see different perspectives from different sectors across the ASEAN region. I’ll definitely share what I learned from the ASEAN Leaders Programme with my multi-national team. The team usually has a lot of touch time that focuses more on actions and results rather than focusing on the individual. The framework around CQ that I learned from the programme will help the team navigate through our differences.”
- Rachata Sankhavaniem, General Manager Commercial Operations, APAC, GE (TH)

“It’s really interesting to be able to work with participants from different backgrounds, industries, cultures, sentiments and beliefs. I’m used to working with people who have similar mind-set and background in my daily routine. The ASEAN Leaders Programme is unique in that the diverse cohort provides me with different perspectives and a deeper understanding of different cultures. It was also really good to understand the theory behind Cultural Intelligence because it’s something that’s new to me.”
- Terzian Niode, Associate Vice President, PT Bank HSBC Indonesia (ID)

“I come from the Singapore public service so we deal with Singaporeans or other government officials the vast majority of the time. I thought the ASEAN Leaders programme was a very useful setting where I learned from other leaders from the commercial world and the not-for-profit sector. The need to understand the different ways of thinking and responses to issues is very important in order to work with other ASEAN countries in overcoming the challenges we face.”
- Ser Huei Chia, Director, Ministry of Finance, Singapore

“I find that with the ASEAN Leaders Programme I’m really able to hone in on the region’s challenges and to link the local challenges in Myanmar to the regional issues. In these 5 days, the experience has been to really delve deep into the region and to be with each representative from each country of the ASEAN. The programme allows ASEAN leaders to inspire and get ideas from each other, to be together in tackling challenges. ALP is unique in a sense that it allows us to find inspiration in each other’s work and to go back stronger to our respective countries.”
- Khin Khin Lwin, PhD Student (Myanmar), National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago
In its third year, the programme reaches a larger cohort of participants from diverse backgrounds.

- 2018 is Singapore’s year of ASEAN Chairmanship. The programme is held in Singapore and Jakarta to gain insights into some of the new thinking on ASEAN, especially the newly launched ASEAN Smart City Network—an initiative under Singapore’s Chairmanship.

- Then British High Commissioner to Singapore, HE Scott Wightman hosts the cohort at his residence with Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Ambassador-at-Large at the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the Guest of Honour. Both of them stress on the opportunities in ASEAN and therefore the need for leaders to have more global mind-set to tackle the local challenges and take ASEAN to the next level.

- The programme challenge is reframed to add the crucial element of inclusion within smart cities. This is based on the feedback from the Advisory Group and alumni.

- In Jakarta, the Governor of Jakarta hosts an evening reception for the delegation and shares the initiatives to make Jakarta a smart and inclusive city.

- An impact of the programme is that one of the alumni from Myanmar collaborated with a Jakarta-based start-up organization to enable better data management for waste disposal in the city of Yangon.
Key reflections from participants

“This is an amazing programme that has helped to bring my leadership skills to a different level both at work and in my personal life. I’m excited to bring what I learnt from this programme to help my people, coach and empower more people in my organization and my community.”
- Khenglay Song, EVP / Chief Operation Officer, Canadia Bank, Cambodia

“Within a short period of time, I had a great learning experience from the ASEAN Leaders Programme. My biggest learning centred on leadership and what that means to me, the value of innovation and the importance of Cultural Intelligence. Most importantly, Cultural Intelligence has allowed me to cross boundaries not only in my personal life but especially in my working environment. Developing Cultural Intelligence plays a very important role within my team since most of our vendors are foreigners. I shared the concept of core and flex with my team – how important it is to protect their core and to recognize when to flex.”
- Mya Thida Than Technical Officer, Co-Operative Bank (PLC), Myanmar
The programme is held in Singapore and Bangkok, Thailand, being the country that holds the Chairmanship of the ASEAN this year.

- Alumni from previous years join the Bangkok leg to continue their learning journey on the ALP.
- British High Commissioner to Singapore, HE Ms Kara Owen, and British Ambassador to Thailand, HE Brian Davidson, address the participants in Singapore and Bangkok respectively. They both share invaluable lessons on cross boundary leadership and the importance of ASEAN in the world.
- Our corporate partners VISA and Arup open their doors to host the participants and share perspectives on financial inclusion and urban planning to create innovative and inclusive city spaces.

The Advisory Group is expanded to include Bill Luz, Associate Director, Ayala Incorporation. The Selection Group is expanded to include an alumnus from 2016, Alvin Ng, regional VP & General Manager of Johnson Control.
Talking points from speakers

“As global citizens we recognize the need for strong leadership to tackle the challenges of an ever-changing, complex and boundary-less world. At GE we believe that the individual excellence of people, and the collective progress that they will generate across all sectors and communities, will pave the way to success. That’s why we have partnered with Common Purpose to support the ASEAN Leaders Programme as it enables us to invest in the development of local leaders that will be able to make a difference in the cities and the communities where we are active in the ASEAN.” - Wouter van Wersch, Former President & CEO, GE ASEAN

“We are excited to partner with Common Purpose on this excellent initiative that brings senior leaders from ASEAN together to build connections across the region and work collaboratively to solve its common challenges.” - Elaine Tan, Former Executive Director, ASEAN Foundation

Key reflections from participants

“My participation in the ASEAN Leaders Programme was very timely and helpful because it brought a wider perspective on leadership principles, management policies, styles, frameworks, building collaborations, cultural intelligence, among others.” - Maria Theresa L. Laranang, Director IV, Administrative Service, Public-Private Partnership Center of the Philippines

“I work in education and I read a lot of theory. Although this resonates on one level, Common Purpose’s experiential learning approach means you actually see things in play and hear how leaders implement strategies in their own organizations. It’s really precious – it’s hard to get that level of candour otherwise.” - Lauren Clarke, Vice Rector for the University College and International Relations, Sampoerna University

“I really learnt a lot from the ASEAN Leaders Programme and the participants. The programme brought together people from different countries, cultures, backgrounds and sectors to learn and work together. From the different cities we went to, I got a chance to learn more about finding different approaches to challenges we face in real life as a leader both at work and in daily life. I also learnt more about leadership from different perspectives, with leaders operating in different contexts.” - Aris Munandar, Retail Banking Operations Head, PT Bank BTPN Tbk
In 2020, the ASEAN Leaders Programme adapts quickly to the changes caused by the global pandemic and completely transforms.

The impact of the programme continues to grow given our expertise in online facilitation, signature techniques to create safe space for conversations and reflections, and inspiring insights from senior contributors. The participants are able to build connections with fellow participants and broaden their horizons in finding new ways to accelerate complex change in the region.

Key partners from the Singapore Government and other private sector organizations continue to support the programme by joining in as contributors and also nominating their senior staff to attend the programme.

In 2021, we are looking forward to bringing everyone together face to face along with the new cohort of ASEAN Leaders to continue the learning journey.
Key reflections from participant

“The ASEAN Leaders Programme has been an important part of my leadership journey. It’s very important to me to be inclusive in my work and my leadership, without this skill, I wouldn’t be able to lead a diverse workforce. The ALP helped me focus on the areas that would add real-world value to my job. A focus on Cultural Intelligence and unpacking that help all the participants to understand the importance of thinking more broadly and was pivotal to me understanding the huge range of diverse opinions across the ASEAN community. As we learned to work with each other and understand our own cognitive bias we were able to use core and flex to extend ourselves into working in ways that challenged us. Using real-world problems, it was a great opportunity to learn about the barriers faced by each of us in our own regions and work together to find solutions. Even in a time of lockdows, isolation and pandemics, we formed solid friendships across the region. It’s a program that I highly recommend and I look forward to ongoing life-long connections with the other participants and the crew from Common Purpose.”

- Gregory Storer, General Manager, ASRC, Melbourne
"I learned from other leaders from different sectors around the region. The need to understand the different ways of thinking and responses to issues is very important in order to work with other ASEAN countries in overcoming the challenges we face."

- Ser Huei Chia, Director, Ministry of Finance, Singapore

Participants from over 100 organizations on ALP, including:

- DBS Bank
- Visa Worldwide Pte Ltd
- Ministry of Finance Singapore
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (Cambodia)
- Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, Singapore DBS Bank
- GE Global
- Asian Development Bank (ADB)
- PricewaterhouseCoopers Singapore
- PT Surya Semesta Internusa Tbk.
- Singapore Customs
- Bangkok University
- Securities and Futures Commission (Hong Kong)
- Yangon Region Parliament
- RMIT University
- Public Private Partnership Center of the Philippines
- Singapore Polytechnic
As a result of the ASEAN Leaders Programme, leaders adopt a much broader perspective, and have a greater ability to adapt to new situations and deal with complex problems both within and outside their organizations.

The programme has proven to deliver a unique and memorable experience for participants and stakeholders alike, as well as develop the behaviours and competencies crucial for participants to operate as regional and global leaders.

At the end of every ASEAN Leaders Programme, participants are asked to complete an assessment to measure their leadership skills and competencies. Analysis of the results of both the assessment and interviews highlights changes in a number of key behaviours and competencies, demonstrating the impact of the ASEAN Leaders Programme on participants.

96% have developed a better network of peers

88% feel better prepared to lead a diverse team

87% feel better prepared to have a wider impact in their community or organization

88% are better able to lead or operate within a diverse team

90% recognize the value of bringing in wider perspectives when making key decisions

86% are better able to create the conditions required for innovation to occur
"We are currently transforming the government to become more digital. This means we need to reorient service delivery – from the Minister’s perspective to the user’s perspective. The programme has helped me to combine collaboration and delivery. The Core and Flex framework, in particular, helps us to know when to be flexible and when to stand for our core."

- Agung Hikmat, Advisor, Executive Office of The President, Republic of Indonesia

“I am passionate about inclusive leadership and constantly try to explore new ways to unravel it for myself and for my stakeholders and partners. At the ASEAN Leaders Programme, what struck me was the importance of perspectives and how they impact one’s approach to leadership. I loved the field visits as it provided so many different perspectives and such great learnings from the interaction with the various companies.”

- Pauline Sahetapy, Head – Global Key Clients & AP Government Engagement Learning, VISA Inc

“The programme has broadened my perspectives from the interactions with senior leaders from different organizations and countries, expanded my network in the region and I also learned more about leadership and smart cities in an engaging manner through solving a challenge.”

- Ong Kah Kuang, Executive Director, Youth Corps Singapore
Impact Story:

How the ASEAN Leaders Programme helped Narita to leverage Cultural Intelligence

Narita Hang Chuon first heard about Common Purpose from a friend who joined the ASEAN Young Leaders Programme back in 2013. Thirteen years on, her friend’s Common Purpose experience is still as relevant as ever and gave Narita more than enough reason to join the ASEAN Leaders Programme in 2016.

As the Head of Local Corporates for ANZ Royal Bank, Narita constantly works with numerous corporate clients and internal stakeholders that come from diverse backgrounds and different cultures.

"Before joining the programme, I faced some challenges in dealing with people from different backgrounds and often faced a clash of priority with some stakeholders. With all these challenges I faced, I almost quit my work place."

For Narita, her biggest takeaway from the ASEAN Leaders Programme was how Cultural Intelligence can help to drive success in a leadership position such as hers where every day she faces diversity and differences in culture – whether that's with work, priorities, language or background.

"After I attended the ASEAN Leaders Programme, I learned a new concept - Cultural Intelligence (CQ). I used CQ by first trying to understand the culture of stakeholders that I deal with. Only by understanding and listening would I then be able to apply the right strategy at the right time. I realized that by putting myself in other people’s shoes, helping them to understand about me, my culture and my expectation while also understanding their culture and expectation was the key in crossing boundaries."

Leading beyond the work place

The programme also helped to inspire Narita to use her knowledge and networks to help others within her community. Narita doesn't just challenge herself professionally, in her spare time she is a passionate advocate for women and is the instigator of a series of local projects providing education and opportunity for girls who may not otherwise have reached their full potential.
Partnerships between private, public and not-for-profit is becoming more and more critical, not just in the ASEAN context, but in our globalized world. Surprisingly, each sector does not entirely comprehend that it takes the collective to make any real impact in society. It takes a bottom-up, rather than a top-down, approach to help produce a change in perspective.

The ASEAN Leaders Programme allows this sort of grassroots perspective to happen between leaders of each sector.

Looking through different leadership lens

In my day to day work life, I drive a lot of commercial activities and businesses for the company. You don’t get a lot of chance to look at leadership from any other lens in this setting. The ASEAN Leaders Programme brought together senior leaders from across the region and from across different sectors. What this allowed was the opportunity to look at leadership from different lenses through close interactions and connections with other participants.

Being able to look at leadership from the lens of someone coming from an emerging country gives you a different view, a different perspective. That perspective will change if viewed from the leadership lens of another participant from the not-for-profit sector.

“This ability to view leadership through different lenses was, to me, a most powerful experience.”
Viewing each sector as part of an ecosystem

At GE Digital, when we decide to start doing business in a new country, we encounter different sets of challenges and barriers especially in adapting to a new set of culture, people and politics. As a multi-national organization, it is necessary that we are cognizant of the nuances of each culture, that we develop a deep understanding of their government, people and what builds the community.

“In essence, the organization needed to have Cultural Intelligence.”

From the programme, I gained high respect and appreciation of the different sectors. It gave me that lens to view them as essential partners if we are to expand in the region. It was then I realized that other sectors are becoming more integrated, thereby more important, to the business world.

Gaining this perspective – realizing the value of all sectors – helps to lessen the barrier and accelerate the value that we bring to the community as an organization.

Zooming out of a country-focus lens to the ASEAN lens

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) aims to promote active collaboration on matters of common interest across its ten member states. The ASEAN Leaders Programme allows this collaboration to happen, not necessarily at a state level, but at a grassroots level.

I believe the programme underlines and builds a foundation for the appreciation that ASEAN is one rather than ten different countries. It eliminates the barriers between countries. So you take the culture, country, nationality away and what you’re left with is a collective group of Southeast Asians that want to make a difference in their region.

The programme then helps the leaders build strong connections, share knowledge and develop leadership skills in its participants to be able to thrive in the region. It allows them to learn from each other on a common platform. As a result, the whole group realizes that openness, collaboration and helping one another are what’s needed in order to lift and build the ASEAN economy.
Becoming a contributor on the programme

When I came back from the ASEAN Leaders Programme, I realized that although GE already plays a huge role in shaping Smart Cities around ASEAN, it had the potential to play an even bigger role in bridging the gap between sectors.

This is why I seized the chance for GE to become a contributor on the programme. I saw this as an excellent opportunity for leaders across all sectors to come together and realize that we all needed to create an ecosystem to collectively solve the enormous problem of building smart cities. Being a contributor also allowed GE to show its openness and willingness to partner with not-for-profits and the public sector in order to build this ecosystem.

Committing to helping Common Purpose develop the next generation of leaders

Two years ago, I decided to join as a Trustee for Common Purpose Student Experiences. My vision has always been to be a teacher and a coach. Therefore, it made sense to be part of an organization that enables and impacts youth in a significant way, allowing them to become future shapers of the world. By joining the Board of Trustees, it has helped to fuel my vision and has given me the opportunity to add value to the groundwork that Common Purpose is doing.

I believe in how Common Purpose looks at the world – it is devoted to helping leaders transform the disconnected nature of the world into a collective ecosystem. In this ecosystem, public, not-for-profit and private sectors work together to address and meet the challenges they’re facing.

Only when these leaders cross boundaries do they solve interconnected problems and produce real change.
“The passion and enthusiasm of the Common Purpose team supporting this dynamic ASEAN Leaders Programme really won us over. FWD is building a pan-Asian insurance group, and ASEAN is crucial for our growth, so the development of leadership in ASEAN really resonates with us. At a personal level, being Vietnamese, and having also built and run several companies in the region, ASEAN has a strong personal and emotional connection for me. So, at every level, we are glad to be a part of this.”

- Huynh Thanh Phong, OBE
Group Chief Executive Officer (FWD Group)