

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of dots in various shades of gray and red, arranged in a pattern that suggests a world map or a network of connections.

Trade Unions in Transformation

Institutionalizing Labour's Voice in ASEAN: The ASETUC Initiative

MELISA R. SERRANO
October 2017

- This paper analyzes how the ASEAN Services Employees Trade Union Council (ASETUC) was successful in »institutionalizing« labour's voice in the integration process in the pursuit of a more social Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). It demonstrates how trade unions can play a role in shaping political, economic and social landscapes and in linking their organizations and actions at the national, regional and global level.
- Among the crucial success factors were the common sense of purpose among several unions, their democratic interaction and bridging the different spatial levels, the flexibility to adopt strategies that resonated with the »ASEAN way« as well as a long-term perspective to their engagement. ASETUC demonstrates how unions can successfully use and develop multiple power resources.
- Trade Unions in Transformation is an FES project that identifies unions' power resources and capabilities that contribute to successful trade union action. This study features among two dozen case studies from around the world demonstrating how unions have transformed to get stronger.



Contents

Abstract	3
1. Introduction	3
2. The Birth of ASETUC	5
3. The ASETUC Structure	6
4. Linking Capabilities with Power Resources	7
5. Implementing ASETUC's Initiatives Across Space	7
6. Gaining a Voice Today, Enhancing the Social and Labour Dimensions Tomorrow: The ASETUC Scorecard	10
7. Success Factors, Lessons and Insights	14
References	16

Abstract

Using the power resources approach, the paper analyzes the initiatives of the ASEAN Services Employees Trade Union Council (ASETUC) in »institutionalizing« labour's voice in the ASEAN integration process in the pursuit of a more social ASEAN. It examines how the initiatives are implemented at the regional and national levels and the power resources and capabilities that were utilized and developed along the way, and highlights the link between power resources and capabilities. Using ASETUC as a case, the paper highlights that trade unions can play a role in shaping political, economic and social landscapes and in linking the spatial scale of labour organization and action at the national level and at the regional/global level through the unions' simultaneous and complementary use and development of multiple power resources.

1. Introduction

Since its establishment in 1967, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which is comprised of ten countries in Southeast Asia—Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam—has been continuously, albeit slowly, pursuing regional integration and community building over the years. In the latter part of the 1970s, the focus of integration slowly shifted from political and security issues to the economic dimension with the establishment in 1977 of the ASEAN preferential trading agreement arrangements¹ among the original ASEAN-5 (i.e. Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand). In 2003, the ASEAN member states established the ASEAN Community comprised of three pillars—ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). Henceforth, economic integration—the AEC pillar²—in terms of liberalization of trade (e.g. ASEAN Free Trade Area, Common Effective Preferential Tariff Scheme, ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint, ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement, ASEAN Framework for Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), liberalization of investments (e.g. ASEAN Investment Agreement, ASEAN Comprehensive

Investment Agreement), and liberalization of services and skilled labour (e.g. ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services) has been at the heart of the integration process and initiatives in ASEAN. In short, an »open economic regionalism« that privileges the market is at the core of ASEAN's integration process.

The ASCC, meanwhile, seeks to address the human and social dimensions of regional integration through, among others, the promotion of human development (including decent work), the provision of social welfare and protection, the promotion of social justice and rights, and the promotion of environmental sustainability. The ASCC pillar also recognizes the centrality of participative and multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder engagements, including tripartite engagement with the labour sector, in building a »sharing and caring« community. Towards this end, the ASCC Blueprint³ 2025 includes the strategic measure of »institutionalising ASEAN policies on relevant stakeholders' consultations and engagement in the work of ASEAN Organs and Bodies including policy making initiatives« (ASEAN Secretariat 2015: 105).

However, the ASEAN social pillar has been taking the back seat in the region's integration process. The ASEAN's initiatives to develop the components of the ASCC, including decent work, social justice and rights, have been at best lacklustre. While the AEC Blueprint⁴ was developed in 2007, it took another two years for

1. See <http://agreement.asean.org/media/download/20140119163517.pdf> (accessed on 13 September 2016).

2. The AEC is guided by four pillars, namely: (1) the establishment of a single market and production base mainly through the liberalization and facilitation of free flow of goods, services, capital, investment, and skilled labour; (2) the establishment of a competitive economic region through competition policy, intellectual and property rights, consumer protection, and infrastructure development; (3) promotion of equitable economic development mainly through the development of small and medium enterprises; and (4) deeper integration into the global economy through free trade agreements (FTAs). For more information about the AEC, see: Asian Development Bank Institute (2014): *ASEAN 2030: Towards a Borderless Economic Community*. Tokyo: Asian Development Bank Institute.

3. The ASCC Blueprint includes general strategic measures that are aimed at achieving progress on the various components of the ASCC and encourage the commitment of member states, in the form of national policy and legal frameworks, to the various declarations and guidelines adopted by the different ASEAN organs and sectoral bodies.

4. See the AEC Blueprint 2025 at <http://www.asean.org/storage/images/2015/November/aec-page/AEC-Blueprint-2025-FINAL.pdf>.

ASEAN to develop the blueprint for the ASCC. In fact, while a scorecard⁵ to track progress in the AEC has been developed and used since 2008, it was only in 2015 that a scorecard⁶ for the ASCC was developed, albeit ambiguous, and used to provide information about how far the goals, objectives, and targets of the socio-cultural pillar have been achieved. Meanwhile, the ASEAN has been fiercely pursuing regional integration through unrestricted economic liberalization resulting in an »Asian-noodle bowl« effect—the difficulty of managing a multiplicity of FTAs, each with different structures, coverage, and rules of origins (ADB 2014: 19). By the end of 2013, 90 bilateral, plurilateral, and multilateral FTAs⁷ were either signed, being negotiated, or proposed (ibid: 18) in ASEAN.

Thus, despite the remarkable economic growth in the region—regional gross domestic product (GDP) has nearly doubled between 2007 and 2014 (ASEAN Secretariat 2015: 1), making ASEAN Asia's third largest, the world's seventh largest and among the most advanced integrated markets—income inequality still persists within and between the member states. According to ILO and ADB (2014: 6), the Gini coefficients across seven⁸ ASEAN economies range from 35.6 to 46.2. Three out of the seven countries also experienced a rise in quintile ratios—the ratio of the per capita expenditure of the top 20 per cent of households to that of the bottom 20 per cent—over a two-decade period, indicating a rise in income inequality. This ranged from 5.9 in Vietnam and Lao People's Democratic Republic in 2008 to 11.3 in Malaysia in 2009 (ibid). And while economic integration is expected to result in increases in total employment between 2015 and 2025 in majority of the ASEAN countries, more than half of these em-

ployment gains would be in vulnerable employment⁹, especially in Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, Lao PDR, and Cambodia (ibid). In the Philippines, vulnerable employment would comprise nearly 40 per cent of the additional job gains by 2025.

In addition, social protection programs remain inadequate in many ASEAN member states. According to Handayani (2014: 7), estimates reveal that the countries¹⁰ are spending only 2.6 per cent of GDP on average for social protection programs.¹¹ Vietnam has the highest spending ratio at 4.7 per cent of GDP, while Singapore and Thailand have a spending ratio below 4 per cent.

Clearly, ASEAN's integration process underscores the primacy of market and economic dimensions and the subordination of social and labour dimensions. Despite ASEAN's rhetoric of »participative and multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder engagements in building a caring and sharing community', peoples« voices, including labour's voice, remain muted. In fact, while the bulk of entities associated with the ASEAN, that is, non-state organizations or associations formally accredited by the ASEAN, are comprised of business organizations (e.g. ASEAN Business Advisory Council) and professional associations, many of which are referred by ASEAN as civil society organizations (CSOs), trade unions are markedly excluded. The absence of collective labour's voice in ASEAN processes arguably perpetuates the dominance of market ASEAN over social ASEAN.

It is against this backdrop that three global union federations (GUFs)—Union Network International Asia-Pacific Regional Office (UNI-Apro), Building and Wood Workers International Asia-Pacific (BWI-AP), and Public Services International Asia-Pacific (PSI-AP)—came together in 2007 to formally establish the ASEAN Services Employees Trade Union Council (ASETUC) to influence the discourse on regional integration towards a more

5. For a discussion of the AEC scorecard, see: ASEAN Secretariat. 2015. A Blueprint for Growth. ASEAN Economic Community 2015: Progress and Key Achievements. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat. file:///C:/Users/Melisa/Desktop/ASETUC%20case%20study/Literature%20for%20ASETUC%20case%20study/AEC-2015-Scorecard-Progress-and-Key-Achievements.pdf (accessed on 13 September 2016).

6. For more information about the ASCC scorecard, see: ASEAN Secretariat (2016): 2015 ASEAN Socio-Cultural (ASCC) Scorecard. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat. <http://www.asean.org/storage/2016/04/9.-March-2016-2015-ASCC-Scorecard-1.pdf>.

7. A bilateral FTA is between two economies: one ASEAN and one non-ASEAN member, with the exception of the Lao PDR-Thailand Preferential Trading Agreement. A plurilateral FTA is between one ASEAN member and two or more non-ASEAN members. A multilateral FTA is between two or more ASEAN members and one or more non-ASEAN members (includes ASEAN+1 agreements). See ADBI (2014: 18).

8. These seven economies include Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

9. According to the ILO, vulnerable employment is defined as own-account and contributing family workers, often entails less formal arrangements and inadequate working conditions and social protection. See: International Labour Organization and Asian Development Bank (2014): ASEAN Community 2015: Managing integration for better jobs and shared prosperity. Bangkok, Thailand: ILO and ADB.

10. For eight ASEAN countries, excluding Brunei Darussalam and Myanmar.

11. According to ADB, social protection spending that corresponds to 20 per cent of poverty-line expenditures or 5 per cent of GDP per capita—as in the Republic of Korea—is a reasonable strategic target (ADB 2013: xix).

social ASEAN. Using the power resources approach, this paper discusses and analyzes the various initiatives of ASETUC and their outcomes to date in raising a voice »of and for« labour both at the ASEAN level and at the individual member state level. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: section 1 recounts the factors that led to the formation of ASETUC. Section 2 analyzes how the use and development of power resources and capabilities in ASETUC are linked. Section 3 explores how ASETUC's initiatives are implemented at the regional and national levels and which power resources and capabilities were utilized and developed along the way. Section 4 outlines ASETUC's »successes« to date and the power resources and capabilities that go with these successes. Finally, Section 5 identifies the factors that influenced ASETUC's achievements and highlights lessons and insights on the importance of power resources and capabilities in transforming trade unions to become agents of change.

2. The Birth of ASETUC

With the adoption of the ASEAN Social Charter in 2007 and the ASCC Blueprint in 2009, ASEAN began opening up more spaces and platforms for civil society CSOs to engage in dialogues with ASEAN organs and sectoral bodies. However, trade union presence in these CSO assemblies (e. g. ASEAN People's Assembly or APA, ASEAN Civil Society Conference or ACSC, Solidarity for Asian Peoples' Advocacies or SAPA) was very thin. Between 2005 and 2007, only the Union Network International Asia-Pacific Regional Office (UNI-Apro) was attending some of the CSO assemblies. In effect, the voice of trade unions was drowned out by the broader issues represented by CSOs.

The above conjuncture presented an opportunity for regional trade unions to gain a voice for labour as a way to develop their *institutional power* in ASEAN. Thus, in 2007, ASETUC was established.¹² ASETUC was the product of the *strategic choice* of the leaders of three GUFs—UNI-Apro, BWI-AP, and PSI-AP. Its membership is comprised of trade union federations that are affiliated to these GUFs in seven ASEAN countries (excluding Brunei, Lao PDR and Myanmar). At the time ASETUC

was established, it was the only trade union body actively seeking social dialogue at the ASEAN level.

By coming together to form ASETUC, the three GUFs sought to enhance their *associational power* derived from regional trade union organizations, each with its own complex structure, sectoral priorities, and internal power relations, uniting to form a parallel and complementary regional trade union body that is focused on sector (services)-specific and ASEAN-specific issues. Of course, the association of the three GUFs to form ASETUC was facilitated by the very good personal relations among the regional leaders of the GUFs built from working together for many years on various campaigns. Furthermore, the GUF regional leaders saw that, through ASETUC, their individual campaigns would be strengthened and expanded by having additional allies in the region and more available shared resources, both material and human (Grecia, Mariano, Ng, Tolentino, & Vaidhiyanathan interviews 2016).

By its terms of engagement, ASEAN would only engage with an organization that is ASEAN-focused (i. e. members of the organization are from the ASEAN member states, objectives and programs are related to ASEAN), non-confrontational, and adhering to constructive and meaningful dialogue.¹³ It is thus another strategic decision of the three GUFs to embrace »non-conditional« social dialogue as its main approach in engaging with ASEAN organs and sectoral bodies to influence ASEAN processes. It could be said that the successful association of the three GUFs and the collective work they have been doing for nearly a decade since ASETUC was established may be partly attributed to their *capability to intermediate*, that is, the capacity to develop a collective interest (consensus-building) out of conflicting demands both from within and outside of the union (Levesque and Murray 2010).

All this suggests the presence of *institutional vitality*—»the capacity to adjust to new contexts, internal enthusiasm to embrace new strategies, and a sense of introducing something new and »fresh« to the union« (Behrens et al. 2004: 22)—and concomitantly of *or-*

12. To supposedly facilitate its accreditation as a CSO by the ASEAN, ASETUC registered as a foundation in Indonesia. The ASEAN Secretariat is located in Jakarta, Indonesia.

13. See Rules of Procedure and Criteria for Engagement for Entities Associated with ASEAN: http://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/2015/January/entities_associated_with_asean/Rules%20of%20Procedure%20and%20Criteria%20for%20Engagement%20for%20Entities%20Associated%20with%20ASEAN.pdf (accessed 15 September 2016).

ganizational flexibility as the establishment of ASETUC would require deliberate and targeted reallocation of resources, regeneration of staff and leadership, and new forms of member participation, as well as improvement of infrastructural resources (material and human resources) and organisational efficiency (Schmalz and Dörre n.d.).

The birth of ASETUC was also the GUFs' strategy to amplify the voice of organized labour in the ASEAN-organized civil society assemblies which are dominated by non-government organizations (NGOs) and CSOs.¹⁴ While these assemblies have the potential to influence social issues in ASEAN, without the collective voice of trade unions in these assemblies, the labour issues may be lost in the world of NGOs/CSOs (Ng interview 2016). This suggests that ASETUC sees these ASEAN-organized NGOs/CSOs assemblies as a way to enhance its *societal power*—the ability to clearly and persuasively articulate societal change and develop cooperative relationships between trade unions and other groups, movements and organisations which share many of their goals and interests—at the regional level.

3. The ASETUC Structure

Each of the national federations that are affiliated to the three ASETUC GUFs has enterprise-based or local unions as members. With this membership make-up in ASETUC, goal- and strategy-setting thus pose a challenge not only to internal democracy and participation of grassroots members, but also to organizational communication and policy coherence.

The way ASETUC has dealt with this challenge is two-fold. Firstly, apart from having a Management Board chaired by a member union from the ASEAN country which has been appointed by ASEAN to host the annual Leaders' Summit for a given year, it established a well-defined organizational structure at the regional level which incorporates the existing sector-specific functional Councils of the GUFs—the 11 ASETUC Councils. Some of these Councils, in turn, correspond to specific ASEAN bodies and platforms to facilitate engagement. For example, the ASETUC's ASEAN-BWI

Forestry Unions Council engages with the Pan-ASEAN Forest Certification Scheme of ASEAN, the ASETUC Occupational Safety and Health Council engages with the ASEAN Occupational Safety and Health Network (OSH-NET), the ASETUC Migrant Workers' Council engages with the ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ACMW) and the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour, and the ASETUC Young Workers' Council and the ASETUC Women Workers' Council engage with the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC). The leaders of the Councils meet once a year.

For the day-to-day coordination work and implementation of ASETUC programs and activities, an ASETUC Secretariat was created which is composed of a Secretary General, a Deputy Secretary General and Assistant Secretary Generals who represent each of the ASEAN countries where ASETUC has federation affiliates.

The second way ASETUC tried to address interest representation and internal (representative) democracy was the setting up of a National Working Groups (NWG) in each of the ASEAN member states where the three GUFs have affiliated federations. An NWG, which is comprised of six to twelve national federations, provides the link between the work of ASETUC at the regional level and the ASETUC-related work of the GUF-affiliated federations at the national level (Grecia, Mammal, Mariano, & Tolentino interviews 2016). As the primary implementing body of ASETUC's strategic plans, NWGs are expected to formulate and implement a national action plan reflective of national priorities and country contexts yet anchored on the ASETUC Strategic Plan. Specifically, the work of NWGs includes the following: (1) conduct ASETUC's trainings, meetings and/or other activities at the national level to raise awareness of their members and non-members about ASEAN and ASETUC; (2) conduct audiences, lobbies and meetings with the Ministry of Labour and other relevant ministries at the national level to advance ASETUC's Strategic Plan; (3) conduct audiences, lobbies and meetings with employers' associations at the national level to advance ASETUC's Strategic Plan; and (4) link advocacy works within their national federation with the implementation of ASETUC's Strategic Plan, and vice versa.

14. In ASEAN parlance, CSOs correspond to NGOs. ASEAN prefers to use term CSOs than NGOs.

4. Linking Capabilities with Power Resources

The complexity of ASETUC's organizational structure and, at the same time, the need to address internal democratic processes required the development and exercise of several capabilities to strengthen ASETUC's *associational power*. Associational power, in turn, is needed to sustain ASETUC's initiatives aimed at gaining *institutional power* in relevant ASEAN bodies and organs. The critical capabilities are *intermediation*, *articulation* (i.e. the ability to construct multi-level interaction and understanding, linking the local and the global across space), and *framing* (i.e. the ability to develop the discourse and formulating (new) strategies by defining a proactive and autonomous agenda within a larger context) (Levesque and Murray 2010). All these capabilities have been simultaneously and complementarily developed, employed and further enhanced in ASETUC through the various processes and activities it has undertaken over the years.

The capabilities of *intermediation*, in terms of consensus-building, and of *framing* discourses and strategies in a larger context are at the heart of ASETUC's decision-making processes. One example of an ASETUC activity where these capabilities are brought to bear is in the formulation of ASETUC's policy papers, which elaborate the organization's position on labour-related issues in ASEAN and set the organization's priorities and guiding frameworks for its engagements with ASEAN and other partners. In preparing its post-2015 policy paper, ASETUC convened an ASEAN Unions Assembly that gathered the leaders of the three GUFs and their national affiliates from eight countries on 4–6 August 2014 in Bali, Indonesia. It also invited representatives of its social partners—the ASEAN Confederation of Employers (ACE), ASEAN Secretariat, Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration (MOMT) of Indonesia, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security of Myanmar, ACWC, ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, ASEAN CSR Network, Migrant Forum Asia (MFA), Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), and the Danish Trade Union Council for International Development Cooperation (LO/FTF). Together with these experts and social partners, the trade unions discussed, deliberated upon, and finally adopted and endorsed the paper as ASETUC's Policy Paper. By involving key ASEAN bodies, the social partners, and progressive NGOs, activities like this can likewise enhance ASETUC's *societal power*.

The formulation of strategic plans is another venue or process where the capabilities of *intermediation*, *articulation* and *framing* are simultaneously utilized and at the same time further enhanced. The use of these capabilities in strategic planning activities contributes significantly to strengthening *associational power*. A recent example of this strategic planning process witnessed by the author is the ASETUC planning and evaluation workshop held in Langkawi, Malaysia on 20 to 22 February 2016. In this workshop, the ASETUC and GUF leaders, together with the NWG leaders from six ASEAN countries, reviewed and assessed the outcomes of their various activities, took stock of their accomplishments, and identified challenges and their limitations (i.e. capabilities of *intermediation* and *framing*). The workshop provided the NWG national federations the opportunity to influence the formulation of the strategic aims of ASETUC until 2025 and the specific action plan for the next two years. The workshop thus served as a venue for multi-level interaction and understanding among the leaders of ASETUC at the regional level and the national federations at the national level, thereby developing the link between the global/regional and the local (i.e. *articulation capability*). Following the Langkawi workshop, ASETUC organized a regional communication strategy workshop in June 2016 in Kuala Lumpur and national communication workshops in some ASEAN countries (e.g. Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines) to further improve communication systems within ASETUC and within its member organizations.

5. Implementing ASETUC's Initiatives Across Space

ASETUC as a regional trade union organization seeks to »make connections« across the spectrum of labour strategies between the GUFs that comprise it and the national trade union federations that populate its NWGs¹⁵, but with a strong recognition of the existing politico-economic context of ASEAN. These connections, which require good *intermediation* and *articulation* capabilities

15. It should be noted that members of ASETUC's NWGs are in those bodies in their capacity as representatives of sectoral unions affiliated to one of the three GUFs that comprise ASETUC. However, often they are also engaged in national confederations (centers) as members of the ASEAN Trade Union Council (ATUC), a regional trade union organization whose membership is comprised of national confederations in ASEAN countries, and therefore can play a bridging role between sector specific interest and needs and national (cross sectoral) labour politics.

and *organizational flexibility*, are necessary in strengthening the *associational power* of ASETUC.

As noted earlier, the ASEAN is basically an intergovernmental body led and driven by the political leadership of the member states that include the military-led governments of Lao PDR, and Thailand, the one- or dominant-party states of Cambodia, Vietnam, Singapore, and, to a lesser extent, Malaysia, the recently established civilian government of Myanmar (after nearly five decades of military rule), the absolute monarchy of Brunei, and the populist governments of Indonesia and the Philippines. All the organs and sectoral bodies of ASEAN are populated by official representatives of the governments of the member states. This is very much emphasized in the 2007 ASEAN Charter which provides the legal and institutional framework for ASEAN. Embedded in the Charter is the so-called «ASEAN Way» —the adherence to flexibility, consensus, informality, openness, and pragmatism—that guides the member states' relationship and interactions. This «ASEAN Way» is expressed in having non-binding rules, non-interference in domestic affairs, and respect of national sovereignty. It ensures that regional concerns do not supersede domestic concerns.

ASETUC is well aware of the diverse political spectrum of ASEAN governments and the embeddedness of the «ASEAN Way» in the region. The regional leader of an ASETUC GUF explains: «ASETUC's soft approach takes into account the so-called «ASEAN Way». In the present environment, confrontational tactics may not work. It was decided at the outset that the soft approach—regular and sincere social dialogue—is the most appropriate in forging partnerships in ASEAN and in engaging with ASEAN governments. ASETUC's actions are more strategic; it is very patient in its engagements» (Ng interview 2016).

Thus, «non-conditional» and regular social dialogue has become the main strategy of ASETUC in engaging with ASEAN organs and bodies. This soft approach is seen as appropriate and effective in engaging with ASEAN not only by the ASETUC leaders themselves but also by the ASEAN Secretariat, other GUFs, regional and national employers' organizations, non-government organizations, international trade union solidarity support and other non-state organizations that have supported and engaged with ASETUC. At the regional level, social dialogue on thematic labour issues has been organized

by ASETUC, with the support of FES, through the annual conduct of the Regional Tripartite Social Dialogue Conference (RTSDC) since 2010. By 2016, seven RTSDCs have been held.

The RTSDC draws participation from ASETUC leaders, ASETUC's NWGs, Ministries of Labour of ASEAN countries, ASEAN Secretariat, other ASEAN bodies, employers' organizations, Asia-Pacific regional offices of other GUFs, NGOs, and progressive academics. In effect, the RTSDC is a tripartite-plus platform. Though it started as a purely ASETUC-organized platform, the RTSDC gradually incorporated the active involvement of the ASEAN Secretariat and the Ministries of Labour of the ASEAN member states (i.e. hosting the RTSDC, participation in the determination of the conference theme and the program, acting as resource persons and facilitators, inviting resource persons, etc.). The annual RTSDC is held in the ASEAN country chosen by ASEAN leaders to host the annual ASEAN Summit. Through the RTSDC, the ASETUC has created a space, which did not exist before, to directly engage with ASEAN governments and bodies and employers' organizations through social dialogue in order to influence the ASEAN rhetoric on labour issues. The RTSDC also seeks to legitimize ASETUC's voice and develop a clear identity of the organization in ASEAN.

Apart from the annual RTSDCs, ASETUC, through the support of its partners, directly undertakes or commissions research that are aligned with the research needs identified in the Work Plan of the Senior Labour Officials Meeting (SLOM), an organ of the ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting (ALMM). One such example is the comparative study of labour laws in ASEAN¹⁶ which was jointly undertaken with the International Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (ICD-MOLISA) of Vietnam. The results of the research were published as an official ASEAN study and a contribution to the ASCC work plan.

Although ASETUC is still not accredited as a civil society organization¹⁷ in ASEAN, its continuous and patient ini-

16. The author was among the international team of researchers in this research project.

17. In ASEAN, accreditation as a civil society organization qualifies an organization or association to become «an entity associated with ASEAN». Accreditation allows civil society organizations into the mainstream of ASEAN activities so that they are kept informed of major policies, directives and decisions. It also gives civil society organizations the opportunity and privilege to participate in ASEAN activities. To be accredited as an

tiatives have earned it *de facto* recognition from several ASEAN national government bodies and ASEAN bodies and organs (e.g. ASEAN Secretariat, SLOM, ASEAN-Occupational Safety and Health Network ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour, ASEAN Committee on Migrant Workers, ASEAN Youth Forum, ASEAN Disability Forum, ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights). This *de facto* recognition is arguably anchored on the principle of informality as part of the »ASEAN Way«. Thus, even without formal accreditation, ASETUC has been increasingly drawn into the mainstream of ASEAN activities—getting informed of major policies, directives and decisions of ASEAN, and participating in many ASEAN activities.

To further strengthen its *societal power*, ASETUC also involves regional CSOs/NGOs (e.g. ASEAN Peoples' Forum/ASEAN Civil Society Conference, Migrant Forum Asia (MFA), Global Coalition on Migration, Human Rights Working Group) in its activities, even involving itself in the latter's activities and campaigns. Thus, alliances with CSOs are built, enhancing ASETUC's strategic leverage and *societal power* in engaging with ASEAN bodies. For example, ASETUC has joined forces with MFA in the campaign for the full observance of migrant workers' rights in the region by demanding the adoption by ASEAN of an implementing instrument for the 2007 ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Migrant Workers. The two organizations signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate in developing and implementing joint activities and programs to reach out to and recruit migrant workers into trade unions, advocating for legislative changes and amendments at the national level to protect and promote the rights of migrant workers, and providing services, advice and assistance to migrant workers in need, among others. All this suggests that ASETUC's *societal power* rested on its ability to build *coalitional or discursive power*.

ASETUC also draws from its existing *societal power*—partnerships and coalitions with CSOs and international support organizations—to enable it to »penetrate« and participate in the activities of ASEAN bodies. In fact, ASETUC's participation in many of the ASEAN activities

had been facilitated by its partner CSOs. This »back-door« entry of ASETUC into mainstream ASEAN activities may be understood in the ASEAN context of informality in the terms of engagement between the ASEAN and CSOs.

At the national level, ASETUC implements its tripartite social dialogue initiatives through the NWGs by organizing national tripartite conferences focusing on various themes. In Cambodia, the tripartite conference in 2014 focused on occupational safety and health (OSH). In Indonesia, a tripartite conference on decent work and human rights was organized in 2013. In Malaysia, a social dialogue forum on the impact of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) on labour was organized. In addition, NWGs organize educational activities aimed at raising awareness among their grassroots members about ASETUC and its work in ASEAN, and the labour impact of economic integration in ASEAN, among others. These activities use the educational tools (e.g. videos, illustrated handbooks) already developed by ASETUC. The topics of the national social dialogues are guided by ASETUC's strategic priorities.

The level of activity of NWGs varies as well. In general, NWGs are activity-driven, that is, the federation leaders meet and collectively act only when there is an activity or project. As funds are limited to support regular activities, there are NWGs that hole up for some time. Also, at the time of writing, only the NWG in the Philippines and Cambodia have a formal Secretariat. Nonetheless, a number of the member-federations of several NWGs have been active in operationalizing in their respective countries some of ASETUC's initiatives. For example, the Asosiasi Serikat Pekerja Indonesia (ASPEK), an affiliate of UNI-Apro, has been able to forge a formal agreement with the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration and the Trilogi University in Indonesia on OSH training for ASPEK members employed in unionized companies that are participating in the program. The Federasi Serikat Pekerja Farmasi dan Kesehatan Reformasi (FSP Farkes Reformasi), an affiliate of PSI-AP, launched a campaign in 2015 on the rights of migrant workers in ASEAN. In Malaysia, the Union Network International-Malaysian Labour Center (UNI-MLC), another affiliate of UNI-Apro, launched a campaign extending the coverage of the minimum wage to migrant workers. This campaign is also used by the BWI-affiliated union in Malaysia to organize workers in wood processing and construction.

entity associated with ASEAN, all the member states need to agree on the accreditation. To date, ASEAN has not recognized organizations that represent the other social partners in industrial relations—employers' organizations (e.g. ASEAN Confederation of Employers) and regional trade union organizations (e.g. ASETUC, ATUC).

In the Philippines, the National Union of Building and Construction Workers (NUBCW), an affiliate of BWI-AP, has been using ASETUC's video on the AEC in its membership orientation activities. Furthermore, the recently-concluded Communication Strategy Workshop involving the affiliates of ASETUC's GUFs in the Philippines resulted in the establishment of a National Communication Committee. Through this Committee, the NWG launched a campaign against contractualization in the country. Meanwhile, the Public Services Labor Independent Confederation (PSLINK), a PSI-AP affiliate, has been actively engaging with the Philippine Nurses' Association (PNA) in the latter's plan of establishing a workers' association within the PNA structure. The PNA has been using ASETUC's materials about the impact of ASEAN integration on professions like nursing.

The NWGs also play a key role in facilitating and enabling ASETUC's participation in many of the labour-related activities of ASEAN. As human rights activist in Indonesia explained, actual engagement with ASEAN governments and bodies relies heavily on one's personal contacts (Wahyuningrum interview 2016). The »ASEAN Way« of informality inadvertently encourages the use of informal channels to make way into ASEAN bodies and activities. Thus, NWGs that have been recognized as dialogue partners and have had good working relations with their respective Ministries of Labour have had some success in »persuading« the latter to mediate the participation of ASETUC regional leaders in some of the activities of certain ASEAN bodies (e. g. ASEAN-OSHNET Coordinating Board Meeting, ASEAN-OSHNET Conference, SLOM, ACMW) and/or carry ASETUC's position papers to these bodies. By nurturing good relations with relevant government bodies in their respective countries, NWGs can play a facilitative role in legitimizing ASETUC's voice in ASEAN bodies. In fact, it was through the good relations between UNI-MLC and the Malaysian Chairperson of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), and between ASPEK-UNI and the Indonesian AICHR Commissioner, that facilitated ASETUC's accreditation of Consultative Relationship with this ASEAN body (Ng interview 2016). AICHR is the overarching ASEAN body on human rights that is tasked to mainstream human rights in all ASEAN bodies.

Indeed, ASETUC regional and the NWGs have been implementing various initiatives and activities across space in mutually reinforcing ways.

6. Gaining a Voice Today, Enhancing the Social and Labour Dimensions Tomorrow: The ASETUC Scorecard

Nearly five decades since its establishment, informality remains among the key defining characteristics of ASEAN processes. An attempt towards institutionalization took place in 2007 with the adoption of the ASEAN Charter, but while the Charter provides a framework for generating »legitimate expectations« or »regional norms«, the so-called »ASEAN Way« is nonetheless strongly embedded in the document and the preference for *ad hoc* structures rather than developing regional institutions is emphasized (Leviter 2013). Further, ASEAN remains a strongly intergovernmental regional body where a number of the member states are still under authoritarian regimes. This is set against a regional economic landscape marked by deepening liberalization of trade, investment and services. It is in this context that ASETUC brings its goal of enhancing the social and labour dimensions of ASEAN to bear. In this regard, contextualizing the outcomes of ASETUC's initiatives to date makes for a better appreciation of its »successes«.

ASETUC saw the potential benefits to ASEAN workers in *the long term* of engaging with ASEAN. ASETUC does not concentrate as strongly upon what can be gained in the short term but rather what it could achieve in the future in shaping a social ASEAN (Wahyuningrum interview 2016). Therefore, ASETUC undertakes its initiatives with patience and strategic pragmatism. It is to be noted that ASEAN started to take »institutionalization« seriously with its adoption of the ASEAN Charter in 2007. The Charter, which to Leviter (2013) is ASEAN's »Constitutional moment«, formalized venues for ASEAN-CSO engagements. With this development, the GUFs that comprise ASETUC saw an »opening« for engagement with ASEAN governments. However, technically, the GUFs cannot engage directly with ASEAN bodies and organs as ASEAN engages only with CSOs whose membership is wholly drawn from the ASEAN member countries. Thus, ASETUC was born.

The years that followed the enactment of the ASEAN Charter saw the adoption by ASEAN member states of several regional instruments (e. g. ASEAN Guidelines on Good Industrial Relations Practices, ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection) that address the social and la-



bour dimensions of integration, as mentioned earlier in this paper. ASETUC, together with some regional and national CSOs, actively engaged with the relevant ASEAN organs and sectoral bodies in the formulation and adoption of some of these regional instruments. Although these instruments are *non-binding* in nature, they serve as guiding frameworks for ASETUC-affiliated trade unions to engage with their respective governments to secure their commitment, in the form of *legally binding* and *enforceable* national policy and legal frameworks, to the various declarations and guidelines adopted by the different ASEAN organs and sectoral bodies. A number of the initiatives and achievements of ASETUC's NWGs indeed point to this direction.

Without doubt, ASETUC has been able to raise a legitimate voice »of and for« labour in relevant ASEAN bodies and organs. At the time of writing, »institutionalization«, either formally or informally, of this voice is manifested in several key accomplishments of ASETUC at the regional level. These include the following:

1. ASETUC's annual RTSDC continued to be part of the annual program of the ASEAN SLOM Work Plan for the period 2016–2020 (SLOM 2016: 6). In fact, ASETUC has been specifically mentioned as the sole union organization collaborator in the SLOM Working Group on Progressive Labour Practices for ASEAN Competitiveness for the RTSDC (ibid). The annual RTSDC was already part of the ALMM Work Programme for the period 2011–2015. An officer of the ASEAN Secretariat points out that ASETUC has a good relationship with the SLOM that was facilitated by the ASEAN Secretariat (Irena interview 2016). ASETUC's RTSDC initiative has, to a large extent, not only restored confidence in the use of social dialogue, but also successfully institutionalized social dialogue to promote sound industrial relations at the regional and national level in ASEAN. In fact, some of ASETUC's partners consider the RTSDC's inclusion in the SLOM Work Plan a major breakthrough, especially given that most ASEAN governments are hostile to trade unions (Dolot, Ofreneo, & Wahyuningrum interviews 2016). The institutionalization of ASETUC's RTSDCs in the SLOM program is arguably a stepping stone towards achieving, albeit gradually, *institutional power* in the labour dimension of ASCC. It is also a way to sustain this initiative.
2. In the ASEAN publication Mid-Term Review of the ASCC Blueprint (2009–2015) adopted by the ASEAN leaders in 2013, ASETUC was the only trade union listed as a contributor supporting the ASCC Blueprint in the thematic and sectoral focus on labour and migrant workers (ASEAN Secretariat 2014: 55).
3. ASETUC's proposal to the ASEAN High Level Task Force on ASEAN Vision 2025 to embed sound industrial relations, decent work, and social dialogue ASCC Blueprint 2016–2020 was significantly considered. Thus, »tripartite engagement with the labour sector« is now among the elements of people engagement in the ASCC Blueprint 2025 (ASEAN Secretariat 2015: 105). In the previous ASCC Blueprint, building »an ASEAN network of experts in industrial relations to assist in promoting sound industrial relations, industrial harmony, higher productivity and decent work« (ASEAN Secretariat 2012: 3) was already mentioned, and ASETUC was identified as the only non-government collaborator in building this network through its national and regional social dialogue initiatives. This suggests that the relevant ASEAN bodies recognize ASETUC as an expert in industrial relations.
4. The AICHR, the overarching ASEAN body on human rights, has officially granted ASETUC Consultative Relationship in May 2016. ASETUC applied for this recognition in late 2015. This formal affiliation with AICHR serves as a »functional equivalent« to the CSO accreditation by ASEAN. AICHR recognizes that ASETUC will bring its expertise on workers' rights and decent work into the AICHR, areas in which it lacks competency. Here, as ASETUC's relationship with AICHR has been institutionalized, albeit on a consultative level only, the fact that AICHR sees ASETUC as an expert on workers' rights and decent work presents a lot of potential for a more substantive collaboration. ASETUC's affiliation with AICHR presents a good opportunity to influence the discourse on and mainstream workers' rights in ASEAN (Wahyuningrum interview 2016). Further, there are positive developments in AICHR—a number of the new representatives are willing to engage with CSOs including trade unions, and some of the Commission's work is increasingly moving towards standards setting (ibid). These create more spaces for ASETUC to grow *institutional power*. Also, ASETUC's accreditation with AICHR may be seen as a way to maintain its »voice« in ASEAN.



5. ASETUC's publication on OSH guidelines for the retail sector was appreciated by the ASEAN OSHNET which recommended it to ASEAN members as a good reference material (Cucueco interview 2016). The publication has been translated into various languages including Bahasa Indonesia, Khmer, Laos, Thai, Vietnamese, and Japanese, and has been used by the Ministry of Labour of several ASEAN countries in their OSH training.
6. ASETUC leaders have been continuously invited, either as resource persons or participants, to many of the activities organized by various ASEAN bodies, the Ministries of Labour of ASEAN member states, and employers' organizations in ASEAN. Through these activities, ASETUC has endeavored to change the mindsets of these organizations about trade unions. Furthermore, the good relations developed through the sustained interactions among these actors have been useful when ASETUC needed their »intervention« to be able to participate in a critical ASEAN meeting or activity. These networks of relations are also good sources of information when ASEAN meetings and activities are strictly for government actors only. These networks, along with those forged with CSO/NGOs, bolster ASETUC's *societal power*.
7. ASETUC's RTSDCs and other activities (i.e. campaign on the ASETUC Agreement to Promote and Protect the Rights Workers or the One ASEAN Agreement, campaign for the full observance of the rights of migrant workers, regional training on social dialogue) continue to draw support and participation from its social partners, other GUFs, international trade union solidarity support organizations, CSO/NGOs, research institutions, and other non-state organizations. This suggests that ASETUC's legitimacy and competency in advocating for the social and labour dimensions in ASEAN policies and processes is widely recognized, another indicator of its growing *societal power* in the region. An officer of ACE sees the development of ASEAN-wide mutually-recognized labour standards as a possible area of cooperation with ASETUC (Rendall interview 2016). Likewise, an officer of the Malaysian Employers' Federation (MEF) declares that ACE recognizes ASETUC as a social partner at the ASEAN level (Bardan interview 2016). An officer of Education International-Asia Pacific (EI-AP) appreciates learning ASETUC's soft approach.

He is also impressed with the initiatives of ASETUC, stressing that »it is quite an achievement to penetrate ASEAN structures« (Dolot interview 2016). An officer of IndustriAll-Southeast Asia remarks that ASETUC is doing a good job in terms of having policy discussions on workers' rights, migration, and ASEAN integration (Adviento interview 2016).

These regional level accomplishments may seem abstract in terms of their concrete impact on building social ASEAN where sustainable jobs, workers' rights, universal healthcare, education, water, energy, social security and affordable housing are provided, and where democratic and participatory processes at national and regional levels are instituted. However, ASETUC's perseverance in getting involved, while in a largely *ad hoc* manner, in several of the activities of ASEAN bodies and organs indicates that it is gaining ground in making ASEAN's consultative processes more inclusive and participative. Particularly through the yearly conduct of RTSDCs, ASETUC is gradually »sensitizing« ASEAN member states, especially those under authoritarian regimes, to social dialogue so that these countries may arguably become more open to social dialogue when they deal with trade unions and other labour organizations in their respective countries. Indeed, some of the achievements of ASETUC at the national level, as discussed later, point to this potential.

The ASETUC, together with some regional and national CSOs, was actively engaged with the relevant ASEAN organs and sectoral bodies in the formulation and adoption of some regional instruments that address the social and labour dimensions of integration, including the ASEAN Guidelines on Good Industrial Relations Practices (2010), ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (2012), ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection (2013), and the ASEAN Guidelines for Corporate Social Responsibility on Labour (2016). Although these instruments are non-binding and non-enforceable in nature, they provide a framework for trade unions and CSOs to call upon their governments to demand the transposition of these declarations into national laws.

As noted, the achievements of ASETUC in terms of amplifying labour's voice to promote a social ASEAN are more evident and concrete at the national level. Some of the achievements of ASETUC's NWGs, as outlined below, promote decent work, including sustainable jobs, occupational safety and health, minimum wage for mi-



grant workers, right to organize and join a union, and social dialogue:

1. In Cambodia, ASETUC's OSH Guidelines for the Retail Industry has been translated into Khmer and has been used by the Department of Occupational Safety and Health-Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT) in their OSH training activities involving garment workers and informal sector workers (Kannitha interview 2016). The conduct of the ASETUC National Tripartite Dialogue on OSH in December 2014 facilitated the drafting in 2015 by MoLVT of a Prakas (Ministerial Directives) on personal protective equipment (PPE) for the construction sector. At this writing, this Prakas is yet to be signed. Cognizant of the divisions in the trade union movement in Cambodia, ASETUC has provided a venue (i.e. NWG) for federations that are affiliated to »rival« labour confederations to work together on common issues such as OSH and migrant workers' rights.
2. In Indonesia, ASETUC and UNI-Apro facilitated the signing in 2015 of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Ministry of Manpower and ASPEK-Indonesia, as noted earlier. This MOU which started in the retail sector has expanded to other sectors, such as finance and logistics and telecommunications. The number of participating companies that would pay for the training fees of their employees who are ASPEK members has been increasing since the program was launched. It is envisaged that after completing the training, the ASPEK members will become part of the OSH Committee in the participating companies. This makes the union represented in the committee. The MOU was later deepened with the participation of Trilogi University as the training provider (Amri interview 2016). Trilogi University started to offer the OSH training program in August 2016. ASPEK is now working towards becoming an OSH training provider too. Once this materializes, ASPEK would reach out to non-unionized enterprises for OSH training. It sees the potential of this training as an entry point in organizing workers in these enterprises. The Ministry of Manpower of Indonesia also often solicits recommendations from an officer of ASETUC on labour migration issues.
3. In Malaysia, the NWG launched a minimum wage campaign for migrant workers. This campaign has been used by BWI union affiliates to organize workers in wood processing and construction. In 2015, about 60 Nepalese migrant workers joined the BWI-affiliate Timber Employees Union Peninsular Malaysia (TEUPM) (Tolentino interview 2016). The Ministry of Human Resources in Malaysia often invites UNI-MLC and ASETUC in meetings that discuss important labour issues (Mammal interview 2016). Further, the branch managers of EON who had a markedly anti-union stance until six months ago are now more cooperative with trade unions, thanks to ASETUC's engagements with them (Ng interview 2016). All these underscore the potential of NWGs as vehicles to organize workers.
4. In the Philippines, the NWG has been invited by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) in the preparatory meetings and activities for the ASEAN Summit in 2017 which the Philippines will be hosting (Bor-goños interview 2016). Further, a National Communication Committee has been established within the NWG which is now actively participating in the ongoing campaign against contractualization in the Philippines. Another successful outcome is the move of the Philippine Nurses Association (PNA) to establish a workers' association as a result of its engagements with PSLINK-PSI (Grecia interview 2016). PNA would encourage its 70,000 members to join this workers' association. It uses ASETUC's materials and videos on the AEC to raise awareness among its members of the impact of economic integration on workers' rights.
5. In Vietnam, the joint publication of the ASEAN, MOLISA, and ASETUC on Comparative Labour Laws and Practices in ASEAN Volume II served as one of the resource materials used by the policy makers in the MOLISA in revising Vietnam's Labour Law and Gender Equality Law (Minh email correspondence 2016).
6. ASPEK-Indonesia and UNI-MLC in Malaysia have collaborated to set up a HelpDesk for Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. This is a clear example of a cross-border union-to-union collaborative initiative.
7. National unions are now more knowledgeable about the developments in ASEAN and the impact of ASEAN integration on workers, thanks to the education activities and campaigns launched by ASETUC. Up until around 2008, there was knowledge gap among

trade unions about ASEAN integration. Today, the individual federations in the NWGs have been using ASETUC's educational materials in their membership orientations and even in their organizing drives (e.g. Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation (BWTUC)-Cambodia, ASPEK-Indonesia, Federation of Construction, General and Informal Workers Union (FKUI)-Indonesia, UNI-MLC-Malaysia, NUBCW-Philippines, and PSLINK-Philippines). Here, ASETUC's *knowledge-generation and learning capabilities* are enriching the educational and organizing activities of national trade unions.

Arguably, the capacity of ASETUC to grow *institutional power* at the ASEAN-level may translate into the development of *institutional power* of trade unions at the national level. This is likely an unexpected positive outcome of ASETUC's work at the regional level. Here, the *capability of articulation* (i.e. constructing multi-level interaction and understanding, linking the local and the global across space) is key. To a large extent, ASETUC's formal/informal recognition by ASEAN bodies has enabled and facilitated the engagement of national trade unions with their respective Ministries of Labour (e.g. partnership between ASPEK and MOMT in Indonesia). In addition, the affiliation with ASETUC has added stature to national unions in their engagement with various government offices. As declared by a member of the NWG-Philippines Secretariat, the Occupational Safety and Health Center (OSHC) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in the Philippines are in confidence with the NWG trade unions knowing that they are affiliates of ASETUC (Borgoños interview 2016).

With increased *institutional power* at the national level, trade unions have the capacity to build more substantive engagements in policy-making. Clearly, the NWGs are ASETUC's primary platform in national engagements regarding its initiatives. Where NWGs already wield or have been able to build *institutional power*, ASETUC is more likely to gain political space at the national level.

7. Success Factors, Lessons and Insights

Many of the critical factors that facilitated ASETUC's attainment of voice »of and for« labour in relevant ASEAN bodies and organs of the ASCC pillar have

been identified and discussed in the previous sections. Table 1 lists these factors into two categories—external and internal. The external factors pertain to several developments in ASEAN that deal with or put emphasis on the social dimension of regional integration. The internal factors are elements, aspects and circumstances that characterize and/or are in place within ASETUC.

There are important insights and learning that can be drawn from ASETUC's experience in raising a voice »of and for« labour in ASEAN. Firstly, a combination of several factors, both external and internal to ASETUC, has contributed to the strengthening of existing power resources and capabilities of ASETUC and the development of new ones. In the second instance, in overcoming the challenges it encountered in gaining ground in ASEAN as the voice of services workers in the region, ASETUC had to constantly nurture *institutional vitality* by experimenting on and adopting innovative strategies. This simultaneously created new sources of power (e.g. institutional power) and/or strengthened existing ones (i.e. associational and societal power). Furthermore, ASETUC has been strategically using its existing power resources—*associational power* and *societal power*—in developing and gaining *institutional power* in relevant ASEAN bodies, as discussed earlier in this paper. This supports the observation of Serrano and Xhafa (2016: 39) in their recent study that »the combined and complementary use of existing power resources« facilitates the simultaneous construction of new power resources. Finally, the ASETUC initiative also showed that the »combined and complementary« use of existing capabilities is necessary in strengthening existing power resources. Thus, the ASETUC experience shows that power resources »can be simultaneously developed, strengthened and used«, suggesting »a rather nonlinear conceptualization of power resources«, as argued by Serrano and Xhafa (2016: 39).

The ASETUC initiative highlights that trade unions play a role in shaping political, economic and social landscapes and in linking the spatial scale of labour organization and action from the national (and nation-state) level to the regional/global level by their simultaneous and complementary use and development of multiple power resources.



Table 1: Critical factors that facilitated ASETUC's »successes«

External factors	Internal factors
The establishment of the ASCC and the development of the ASCC Blueprints	Good relations among the Asia-Pacific Regional Secretaries of UNI, BWI and PSI, which was developed through their collaborations and joint campaigns even before ASETUC was established
The adoption of the ASEAN Charter which embedded ASEAN engagement with CSOs	The presence and exercise of institutional vitality—the ability of ASETUC and the three GUFs to adjust to the context of ASEAN and the member states, to embrace new strategies, and to introduce something new and »fresh« to the whole organization
A succession of ASEAN Secretary Generals—Ong King Yong (2003–2007), Surin Pitsuwan (2008–2012), and Le Luong Minh (2013–present) who are open to social dialogue and engagement and with CSOs and trade unions	ASETUC's non-confrontational and soft approach—focus on social dialogue without conditionalities
The establishment of AICHR	ASETUC's strategic pragmatism and deep understanding of the so-called »ASEAN Way« and its capacity to identify the »opportunities« it offers in gaining access to ASEAN bodies and in participating in ASEAN activities
Union-friendly or union-tolerant officials of the Ministry of Labour and other government officials in various ASEAN countries	ASETUC's patience in carrying out its initiatives, putting more emphasis on long-term substantive results than short-term yet temporary gains
The robust civil society community in the region and the civil society assemblies (i.e. APA/APF, ACSC, SAPA)	ASETUC's organizational structures—the Councils—whose work correspond to the work of specific ASEAN organs and platforms
International trade union solidarity support organizations that are working in ASEAN	The NWGs as ASETUC's primary platform in national engagements and in gaining political space in ASEAN countries
	Processes and spaces in ASETUC that provide an opportunity for national trade unions to influence the setting of priorities and agenda and to provide their input into ASETUC's strategic plans
	The ability of ASETUC to strategically use its existing capabilities—intermediation, articulation, framing, learning and knowledge-generation, organizational flexibility, and resource mobilization—where and when needed
	The ability of ASETUC to utilize its existing capabilities to develop new power resources and in the process existing power resources are further enhanced and new capabilities are developed



References

- ASEAN Secretariat** (2012): *Work Plans of the Subsidiary Bodies of the ASEAN Senior Labour Officials Meeting (SLOM)*. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat; <http://www.asean.org/storage/images/2012/publications/Work%20Plans%20of%20the%20ASEAN%20Senior%20labour%20Officials%20Meeting%20SLOM.pdf> (accessed 18 September 2016).
- ASEAN Secretariat** (2014): *Mid-Term Review of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint (2009–2015)*. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat.
- ASEAN Secretariat** (2015): *ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together*. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat; <http://www.asean.org/storage/2015/12/ASEAN-2025-Forging-Ahead-Together-final.pdf>.
- ASEAN Secretariat** (2016): *2015 ASEAN Socio-Cultural (ASCC) Scorecard*. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat; <http://www.asean.org/storage/2016/04/9.-March-2016-2015-ASCC-Scorecard-1.pdf> (accessed on 14 September 2016).
- Asian Development Bank** (2013): *The Social Protection Index: Assessing Results for Asia and the Pacific*. Manila: Asian Development Bank.
- Asian Development Bank Institute** (2014): *ASEAN 2030: Towards a Borderless Economic Community*. Tokyo: Asian Development Bank Institute.
- Behrens, M./Hamann, K./Hurd, R.** (2004): »Conceptualizing Labour Union Revitalization«, in: Frege, Carola M./ Kelly, John (eds): *Varieties of Unionism – Strategies for Union Revitalization in a Globalizing Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 11–29.
- Handayani, S.W.** (2014): *Measuring Social Protection Expenditures in Southeast Asia: Estimates Using the Social Protection Index*, ADB Sustainable Development Working Paper Series No. 32. Manila: Asian Development Bank.
- International Labour Organization / Asian Development Bank** (2014): *ASEAN community 2015: Managing integration for better jobs and shared prosperity*. Bangkok: ILO and ADB.
- Lévesque, C./Murray, G.** (2010): »Understanding union power: resources and capabilities for renewing union capacity, Transfer«, in: *European Review of Labour and Research* 16 (3), pp. 333–350.
- Schmalz, Stefan / Dörre, Klaus** (2017): *The Power Resources Approach*, Working Paper prepared for the FES Project »Trade Unions in Transformation«, Berlin: FES.
- Serrano, M.R./Xhafa, E.** (2016): *From »precarious informal employment« to »protected employment«: the »positive transitioning effect« of trade unions*, GLU Working Paper No. 42. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
- SLOM** (2016): *SLOM Working Group on Progressive Labour Practices to Enhance the Competitiveness of ASEAN (SLOM-WG) Work Plan 2016–2020*; <http://www.asean.org/storage/images/2012/publications/Work%20Plans%20of%20the%20ASEAN%20Senior%20labour%20Officials%20Meeting%20SLOM.pdf> (accessed 18 September 2016).

Online Resources

World Bank World Development Indicators: <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&series=NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG&country=#>.

Interviews

- Annie Adviento**, Regional Secretary, IndustriALL, Skype interview, 5 August 2016.
- Ir Amri**, AK, Director of Occupational Safety and Health, Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration of Indonesia, Jakarta, 14 July 2016.
- Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan**, Executive Director, Malaysia Employers Federation (MEF), Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, 21 June 2016.
- Lukas Bauer**, Project Coordinator, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Office for Regional Cooperation in Asia, Skype interview, 9 July 2016.
- Tes Borgonos**, Project Coordinator, BWI-AP; Secretariat, ASETUC National Working Group-Philippines, Quezon City, 7 September 2016.
- Gregorius Chen**, President, Outsource-Indonesia/APIINDO, Skype interview, 21 July 2016.
- Teresita Cucueco**, Executive Director, Occupational Safety and Health Center (OSHC), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Quezon City, 16 June 2016.
- Sabda Djati**, Secretary General, ASPEK, National Working Group-Indonesia, Jakarta, 13 July 2016.
- Rey Dolot**, Senior Coordinator, Education International Apro, Kuala Lumpur, 20 June 2016.
- Norman Grecia**, PSI Project Coordinator, Quezon City, 7 July 2016.
- Mega Irena**, Assistant Director/Head of Social Welfare, Women, Labour and Migrant Workers, ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, 11 July 2016.
- Yi Kannitha**, Deputy Director, Occupational Safety and Health, Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training Cambodia, Phnom Penh City, 9 June 2016.
- Sok Kin**, BWTUC-BWI President, National Working Group-Cambodia, Phnom Penh City, 2 June 2016.
- Evi Krisnawati**, Assistant Secretary of International Relations, National Working Group-Indonesia, Jakarta, 15 July 2016.
- Prem Kumar**, General Secretary of Association of Maybank Employees; Secretary, ASETUC National Working Group-Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 21 June 2016.



Mohd Roszeli Majid, President, Tenaga Nasional Berhad Junior Officers Union; Secretary, ASETUC National Working Group-Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 20 June 2016.

Mohamed Shafie BP Mammal, ASETUC General Secretary, Kuala Lumpur, 23 June 2016.

Ian Mariano, Sub Regional Secretary South East Asia, PSI-AP, Skype interview, 29 July 2016.

Braema Mathi, President, MARUAH, Skype interview, 27 July 2016.

Christopher Ng, Regional Secretary, UNI-Apro, Skype interview, 29 July 2016.

Rene Ofreneo, Senior Professorial Lecturer, U.P. School of Labor and Industrial Relations, Quezon City, 14 September 2016.

Rasmina Pakpahan, Chairman, FKUI; ASETUC National Working Group-Indonesia, Jakarta, 13 July 2016.

Kun Ran, CICA-PSI President; ASETUC National Working Group-Cambodia, Phnom Penh City, 2 June 2016.

Matthew Rendall, ACE Secretary General, and President of Cambodian Federation of Employers and Business Associations (CAMFEBA), Phnom Penh City, 9 June 2016.

Rita Shalya, Vice President, FSP Farkes Reformasi; ASETUC National Working Group-Indonesia, Jakarta, 15 July 2016.

Mirah Sumirat, President, ASPEK; ASETUC National Working Group-Indonesia, Jakarta, 13 July 2016. NWG)

Tuti Suwartini, International Relations Chair, FSP Farkes Reformasi; ASETUC National Working Group-Indonesia, Jakarta, 15 July 2016.

Thomas Thomas, Chief Executive Officer, ASEAN CSR Network, Skype interview, 27 July 2016.

Apolinar Tolentino, Regional Representative, BWI, Quezon City, 4 July 2016.

Lakshmi Vaidhiyanathan, Regional Secretary, PSI-AP, Skype interview, 29 July 2016.

Yuyun Wahyuningrum, Coordinator, READI; Human Rights Working Group (HR-WG), Skype interview, 15 September 2016.

Kun Wardana, Operations Officer, UNI-Apro, Jakarta, 13 July 2016.

Dimas Wardhana, Chair of FSP Farkes Reformasi Bogor Branch; ASETUC National Working Group-Indonesia, Jakarta, 15 July 2016.

Rulita Wijayaningdyah, President, Kahutindo; ASETUC National Working Group-Indonesia, Skype interview, Jakarta, 12 July 2016.



About the author

Melisa R. Serrano is Associate Professor and Director of the Center for Labour Justice at the School of Labor and Industrial Relations, University of the Philippines. Her current research interests include non-standard forms of employment in ASEAN and East Asia, union renewal, role of trade unions in transitioning from the informal to the formal economy, role of collective bargaining in linking wages and productivity, industrial relations in micro, small and medium enterprises, and »alternatives« to capitalism.

Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Global Policy and Development
Hiroshimastr. 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:
Mirko Herberg | International Trade Union Policy

Phone: +49-30-269-35-7458 | Fax: +49-30-269-35-9255
www.fes.de/gewerkschaften

To order publications:
Blanka.Balfer@fes.de

Commercial use of all media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted without the written consent of the FES.

About this publication

With *Trade Unions in Transformation*, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) aims to direct trade union discourse at successful union work. Using the power resources approach, two dozen case studies analyze how unions were able to secure victories. For us, the Global Trade Union Programme of the FES, and our partners, learning from positive experience opens opportunities to reflect about strategic opportunities for unions in a rapidly changing environment. This project thus aims to analyze and strategize union action, including the needed transformation and mobilization of power resources within and outside the organizations.

www.fes.de/gewerkschaften



The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

