Southeast Asia has sustained impressive and rapid growth in the last few decades. Although economic progress has reduced poverty, the region still suffers from important challenges such as inequities, violence targeting minorities, environmental depletion, growing informal employment, and food insecurity. These pressures strain the infrastructure and fray human relations, ultimately hampering development.

Through strategic investments, IDRC is helping local actors play a more effective role in solving regional challenges while also contributing to the Plan of Action to implement the Joint Declaration on ASEAN-Canada Enhanced Partnership 2016-2020. Supported research projects and fellowship programs in the regions provide much-needed evidence to launch locally adapted programs to improve the lives and livelihoods of millions of people.

**Funding research, building leaders**

Researchers across the region have a critical role to play in providing crucial data to generate technological and scientific innovation to help ASEAN countries make sound decisions. Since the 1970s, IDRC has provided support to a large body of researchers working in various areas of expertise in the region.

Currently, IDRC provides fellowships to students in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam to strengthen the future generation of leaders in agriculture. IDRC also fosters collaboration between Canadian and Singaporean academic institutions, which generates insights on the opportunities and challenges of ASEAN to contribute to a sustainable economic future in the region.

In health, long-term support to the Asian Partnership on Emerging Infectious Diseases Research has provided decisive evidence to prevent the spread of serious health threats.

**Supporting sustainable economic growth**

ASEAN includes some of today’s most dynamic economies. Ensuring that growth leads to better jobs for an increasing number of youth is a top priority.

IDRC projects are addressing this challenge in the region. Eight research teams in the Mekong region are currently examining policies and practices to provide better job prospects for youth, women, and low-skilled workers. New research is also providing evidence of how entrepreneurs, much touted as pillars of growth in the region, are emerging, and identifying their conditions of success.

**Climate adaptation for vulnerable cities**

As cities expand, climate change compounds the stress on poor communities already struggling with unplanned growth. Building on IDRC’s long history of research into environmental factors that intensify urban poverty, researchers are working with urban communities to increase their adaptability to climate change and build disaster-resilient nations through practical, policy-relevant solutions.

**Total IDRC support in ASEAN:**

1179 projects | CA$187 million since 1971

**IDRC support is helping to:**

- build research capacity in the sub-region
- develop equitable labour markets
- upgrade skills and improve working conditions for young, low-skilled workers
- increase climate change resilience in Southeast Asian cities
Research is examining policies to improve working conditions.

**Selected current activities:**

**Building the leaders of today and tomorrow**

**Project:** ASEAN-Canada Research Partnership  
**Funding:** CA$1,000,000  
**Duration:** 2011-2016  
**Grantees:** Nanyang Technological University (Singapore), Institute of Asian Research (Vancouver, Canada)

Researchers from Singapore and Canada are advancing knowledge about the impact of ASEAN regional integration. They are providing a unique perspective on the opportunities and challenges faced by the ASEAN economic area such as growth, inequalities, energy choices, labour markets, health, and social services.

The collaboration between Nanyang Technological University of Singapore and the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, also strengthens ties between ASEAN and Canadian research institutions, building knowledge on key issues of mutual interest. It has led to an informal network of senior and junior researchers associated with universities, think tanks, and governmental agencies interested in sustainable development in the ASEAN region.

The project is part of IDRC’s contribution to the ASEAN-Canada Plan of Action to implement the Joint Declaration on ASEAN-Canada Enhanced Partnership.

**Project:** Consortium of development studies scholarships in the upper mainland SE Asia  
**Funding:** CA$1,419,600  
**Duration:** 2012-2017  
**Grantees:** Chiang Mai University (Thailand), Chulalongkorn University (Thailand), Asian Institute of Technology (Thailand)

Across Southeast Asia, mega-development projects are contributing to growth, but they are often accompanied by social and environmental problems. There is a need for critical analysis around this issue to promote a sustainable and more inclusive regional development scene.

To fill the gap, this project supports master’s level students to provide insight into the ASEAN development policies and practices, the impact on ecological sustainability, social justice, and economic growth. With full scholarships and training activities, these students are improving their understanding of emerging issues and changes taking place in the region. These gains will equip them to foster informed policy development within ASEAN as the new generation of development professionals, policymakers, and researchers.

**Project:** Southeast Asian Uplands Agriculture Fellowships  
**Funding:** CA$1,688,700  
**Duration:** 2012-2017  
**Areas of impact:** Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam

IDRC’s funding is providing two-year fellowships to enable 30 students from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam to pursue master’s degrees in science at leading universities in the region. This program is strengthening knowledge and research skills in agriculture and food security in the uplands of Southeast Asia that will be essential to developing a strong network of professionals who can address some of the region’s most critical development challenges.

**Promoting migrant workers’ rights**

**Project:** Jobs at the borders: What policies can promote gender equality and growth in ASEAN’s economic zones?  
**Funding:** CA$382,600  
**Duration:** 2015-2018  
**Areas of impact:** Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Thailand  
**Donor (in addition to IDRC):** Toyota Foundation (Japan)  
**Grantee:** Asian Institute of Technology (Thailand)

Driven by the ASEAN Economic Community’s desire to increase the region’s connectivity, borders are increasingly becoming special economic zones. This is the case for the town of Mae Sot (located at the Burma-Thailand border) and Bavet (at the Cambodia-Thailand border). These and many other zones host labour-intensive industries, such as the garment production, that predominantly employ young migrant women.

A team from the Asian Institute of Technology and the Mekong Migrant Network are examining how employment of migrant women in special economic zones can contribute to more and better jobs for women in the rapidly changing garment industry. More
specifically, the research is examining working conditions at the borders, evaluating the level of legal provision for women workers, and analyzing how these jobs affect women’s role at home. Researchers hope that the findings will trigger a review of policies and practices to ensure women’s empowerment while sustaining growth in ASEAN’s economic zones.

**Building better employment opportunities**

**Project:** Job prospects in the Mekong  
**Funding:** CA$1,029,600  
**Duration:** 2015-2018  
**Areas of impact:** Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, China, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand  
**Grantee:** Cambodia Development Resource Institute

Since the 1990s, foreign investment and a vast pool of workers have positioned Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and more recently Burma (Myanmar), among the world’s fastest growing low-income countries. But as millions of new jobs have been created in the garment, electronics, food processing, hospitality, and other industries, there is growing concern about how these economies can continue to create more jobs for growing numbers of youth, while simultaneously improving their working conditions and prospects.

The Cambodia Development Resource Institute is the hub for a regional network of researchers. A call for proposals has produced eight research teams that will examine policies and practices aimed at improving working conditions through enhanced minimum wages, social security, and upgraded skills for young workers, particularly women and members of ethnic minorities.

**Project:** Empowering women through humane workplaces: garment factories in Southeast Asia  
**Funding:** CA$866,100  
**Duration:** 2016-2020  
**Donors (in addition to IDRC):** International Labour Organization, Walmart Foundation  
**Areas of impact:** Indonesia, Vietnam  
**Grantees:** Tufts University (USA), University of Indonesia (Indonesia), Real-Time Analytics (Vietnam)

Asian garment factories are implementing new management improvements to advance working conditions for women and comply with international labour conventions, while enhancing competitiveness. However, little is known about the efficiency of such interventions on the workers’ productivity and well-being.

A multi-disciplinary team of researchers from industrial psychology, management science, and economics will examine the link between working conditions, well-being, and productivity. Research outcomes will guide future human resource policies in Indonesia and Vietnam, two of ASEAN’s largest garment exporters, and provide evidence for better gender-sensitive interventions on the factory floor.

**Project:** Promoting entrepreneurship research in Southeast Asia: Applying the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)  
**Funding:** CA$704,000  
**Duration:** 2013-2016  
**Areas of impact:** Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam  
**Grantee:** Universiti Tun Abdul Razak SDN BHD (Malaysia)

Entrepreneurship is considered a key driver of growth in ASEAN countries, but decision makers lack the evidence on which to base supportive policies. As part of a regional initiative of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor led by Malaysia, researchers are bridging this gap through a benchmarking exercise that measures how entrepreneurs are emerging in the region. For the first time, it brings together teams from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam. It also includes the experiences of Thailand and Singapore.

Research to date shows that Singapore continues to lead ASEAN in supporting conditions for entrepreneurship, while Vietnam needs to improve financing, education, and its commercial and regulatory infrastructure to support business start-ups and growth. Their recommendations underscore the need for more effective business incubators and training to face the competitive challenge of further integration within ASEAN.

**Improving food security**

**Project:** Livestock Vaccine Innovation Fund  
**Funding:** CA$1,062,044  
**Duration:** 2015-2020  
**Donors (in addition to IDRC):** Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Global Affairs Canada  
**Areas of impact:** South Asia, Southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa

A $57 million partnership will improve the health of livestock and the livelihoods of farmers.

Livestock provides both income and nutrition for approximately 1.4 billion farmers globally, including 800 million low-income livestock keepers and their families. It also constitutes a source of social and economic well-being for farmers’ families in South and Southeast Asia. However, one quarter of the animals owned by poor livestock keepers globally die from disease.
Researchers are providing data to help cities cope with climate change.

Cities confront climate change

Project: Urban climate resilience in Southeast Asia partnership
Funding: CA$1,259,100
Donor (in addition to IDRC): Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
Duration: 2014-2019
Areas of impact: Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam
Grantees: Thailand Environment Institute (Thailand), University of Toronto (Canada)

In the Mekong Region of Southeast Asia, climate change poses a physical and economic threat to vulnerable urban populations. The high rates of urbanization, limited municipal capacity, rapid social and economic change, and the occurrence of extreme climatic events are further exacerbating the problem. This project aims to create new spaces for dialogue that will bring solutions to this situation.

Working with academics, local governments, and civil society partners, researchers are building and refining tools that will enable municipalities in Cambodia, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, and Vietnam to strengthen urban resilience to climate change. The project focuses on secondary cities that will play an important role in ASEAN regional integration plans and infrastructure development but which, to date, have received less attention from researchers.

Part of Canada’s foreign affairs and development efforts, IDRC invests in knowledge, innovation, and solutions to improve lives and livelihoods in the developing world.

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Healthier environment, healthier lives

Project: Ecohealth Field-building Leadership Initiative in Southeast Asia
Funding: CA$4,000,000
Duration: 2011-2016
Areas of impact: China, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam
Grantees: University of Indonesia (Indonesia), Mahidol University (Thailand), Health Systems Research Institute (Thailand), Veterinarians Without Borders (Canada), Hanoi School of Public Health (Vietnam), Kunming Institute of Botany (China), Kunming Medical University (China), Vietnam Public Health Association (Vietnam)

Southeast Asian researchers and their partners are tackling the negative influences of agricultural intensification on ecosystems and human health because of the Ecohealth Field Building Leadership Initiative. Developed jointly by research centres in China, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam, the five-year project is building ecohealth capacity in Southeast Asia, and supporting innovative, context specific research that can inform agricultural practice and policy. The initiative is generating scientific evidence that mitigates health risks without diluting the advantages of agricultural intensification.

Preventing violence in fragile states

Project: Insider peace builders in societies in transition
Funding: CA$27,241
Duration: 2012-2016
Areas of impact: Burma (Myanmar), Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka
Grantee: University of Science (Malaysia)

Ethnic conflicts, sectarian violence, and widespread impunity of security forces for war crimes still exists in Southeast Asia, despite several decades of impressive economic growth. Even in regions where there are peace agreements and political settlements, such as in Aceh, Indonesia, implementation processes have been difficult and accountability remains poor.

Researchers examined the influence of local interlocutors in Indonesia, Burma (Myanmar), Sri Lanka, and Nepal, and explored their role as bridge-builders in fostering more sustainable and legitimate political settlements. Their findings highlight the crucial role that local interlocutors play to improve accountability and challenge impunity, war crimes, and sexual violence after peace settlements.