



Concept paper
A Virtual Seminar on
“Connecting the Connectivities: Synergy through Enhanced Partnership”

Date and Time: 22 January 2021

Venue: Virtual

Background:

For ASEAN Member States, enhanced connectivity in the region has been considered a key driver in achieving competitive growth, facilitating economies of scale and integrated production networks, enhancing intra-regional trade, attracting investments and promoting deeper ties among ASEAN peoples.

At the 28th ASEAN Summit on 6 September 2016 in Vientiane, Lao PDR, ASEAN Leaders adopted the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025. It remains the key strategic document meant to guide and build a seamlessly and comprehensively integrated ASEAN which will promote competitiveness, inclusiveness, and a sense of community, in five strategic areas: (1) sustainable infrastructure (2) digital innovation (3) seamless logistics (4) regulatory excellence and (5) people mobility.

MPAC 2025 is a strategy envisioned to lead to enhanced intra-ASEAN connectivity; but there are notable challenges and constraints, particularly a lack of required resources. At the same time, ASEAN’s connectivity must also link-up beyond the region, for ASEAN to truly benefit from enhanced connectivity. This objective in itself becomes an even more complicated endeavor.

At present, there are a number of connectivity strategies within and outside of the region. Some are meant to promote intra-ASEAN connectivity and others are meant to connect ASEAN more effectively with regions beyond ASEAN. In either scenario, the case for looking into how these different strategies can link up for a reinforced and even more impactful outcome seems only logical. But how to do that requires further study.

During the 35th ASEAN Summit and Related Summit in Bangkok in November 2019, ASEAN and the World Bank shared the results of a preliminary study paper on **“Connecting the Connectivities: ASEAN and the Regions”**. The study revealed sixteen regional connectivity initiatives that have activities, directly and indirectly, involving ASEAN Member States such as the Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI), the Better Utilization of Investment Leading to Development (BUILD) Act, Partnership for Quality Infrastructure and its expanded version, the Republic of Korea’s New Southern Policy as well as India’s “Act East” Initiative. Despite different aims, these regional connectivity initiatives share common priorities where synergies can be harnessed in the following areas: (a) infrastructure investment, (b) strengthening of rules, policies, regulations and practices, and (c) knowledge and capacity building.

This is a solid starting point. Now, we must move beyond and figure out the “how”.

Another foundation we can build upon are the three joint statements adopted last year by the ASEAN Leaders and the Leaders of China, Japan and South Korea: namely (1) the ASEAN Plus Three Leaders' Statement on Connecting the Connectivities Initiative, (2) the ASEAN-China Statement on Synergising the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 and the Belt and Road Initiative, and (3) the Joint Statement of the 22nd ASEAN-Japan Summit on Connectivity.

Another important document to guide our efforts on connectivity is the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) adopted by ASEAN Leaders during the 34th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in June 2019. It serves as "ASEAN's Vista for Peace and Prosperity," on how to promote regional stability and prosperity in partnership with external partners, based on the ASEAN-centred regional architecture and the principles long-recognised in the region, such as inclusiveness and the 3Ms, namely, mutual trust, mutual respect and mutual benefit, a rules-based framework, and on the principles of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). The AOIP has identified priority areas of cooperation with strategic partners both in and outside the region, which include connectivity, among others.

Objectives:

The seminar on "Connecting the Connectivities: Synergy through Enhanced Partnership" aims to:

1. Identify linkages and synergies between MPAC 2025 and other connectivity initiatives, especially through the implementation of the ASEAN Plus Three Leaders' Statement on Connecting the Connectivities Initiative, the ASEAN-China Statement on Synergising the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 and the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Joint Statement of the 22nd ASEAN-Japan Summit on Connectivity;
2. Gather recommendations in enhancing the implementation of MPAC 2025 through the "Connecting the Connectivities" approach;
3. Update the current dynamics on the global supply chain productions and future development directions;
4. Provide a platform for policy discussion and promote further collaboration and concrete cooperation between stakeholders on connectivity in the region; and
5. To explore how to promote connectivity beyond ASEAN based on the principles contained in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

Participants:

- ASEAN Secretariat;
- ASEAN Connectivity Coordinating Committee;
- ASEAN Sectoral Bodies/ MPAC 2025 Implementing Bodies;
- MPAC 2025 National Focal Points;
- Dialogue Partners/ Sectoral Dialogue Partners/ Development Partners;
- International Organisations and Multilateral/ Regional Development Banks;
- Representatives from the private sector; and
- Think-tanks and the academia

Expected outcomes:

This seminar is a platform for policy discussion and promotion of collaboration bringing together experts, scholars, and participants who have worked on relevant and related issues on connectivity.

Key expected outcomes are:

- (a) recommendations on how to deepen cooperation on connectivity while highlighting the common areas between connectivity strategies through “the Connecting the Connectivities” approach; and
- (b) recommendations on how to implement the three statements that were adopted last year.

These comprehensive recommendations will be presented to the ASEAN Foreign Ministers during the ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting (AMM) and the Post Ministerial Conferences (PMCs).