



## Policy Brief

# Positioning ASEAN in International Climate Negotiations

Lessons Learned from the ASEAN Negotiating Group  
for Agriculture (ANGA)

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Recent developments in climate change governance exhibits that the United Nations Framework for Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC) is opening up to more inclusive and sector-based engagement. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Negotiating Group for Agriculture (ANGA) is ASEAN's first-ever attempt for the agriculture sector to negotiate jointly within the UNFCCC, and make full use of the space given to agriculture. This policy brief reflects on the rich experience made by ANGA so far and draws lessons that can inform future ASEAN engagement under the UNFCCC or other environmental agreements.

## Key messages

- **Learning from experience:** ANGA's visibility as a cohesive negotiating group is widely deemed a political success and recognised by the UNFCCC Secretariat, and by negotiating blocs, such as the EU and G77 and China. It may therefore provide valuable lessons learnt for future ASEAN cooperation on environmental issues.
- **Stronger together as a region:** ANGA's experience has shown that acting jointly in the name of ASEAN gives a stronger voice to the countries involved, especially to small and least-developed countries. AMS are able to appreciate how joint an approach contributes to the national agenda. And it has also helped to raise the profile of a topic that had long been neglected in climate negotiations.
- **Leadership and coordination:** champions such as Viet Nam, the Philippines and Thailand lobbied successfully for a negotiating group focused on agriculture. A strong ANGA Chair who is recognised by all ASEAN Member States (AMS) played a key role in ensuring successful interaction with other negotiating parties and groups and facilitating the process for arriving at common positions.
- **Broader perspective and expert knowledge:** the success of ANGA shows how the climate negotiations and the actors usually involved in them can benefit from including representatives directly from the sectors affected by climate change.
- **Identifying commonalities:** the process of arriving at ANGA common positions for submissions to UNFCCC workshops may serve as guidance for establishing consensus, backed by scientific views and knowledge.
- **Patience and a structured process:** establishing ANGA, defining modes of cooperation within the group and with the existing national UNFCCC negotiation teams, building capacity in the group's members, and seeking recognition by other UNFCCC negotiation blocs took several years and went through several stages. Support through training courses, dialogues and funding for participation in negotiation meetings from development organisations like the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization Regional Asia Pacific Office (FAO-RAP) was instrumental in this regard.
- **Clear institutional set-up and rules-based approaches and mandates:** when ANGA was set up, Terms of Reference and Standard Operating Procedures were put in place, and the serving Chair of the ASEAN Ministers Meeting on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) was appointed as the rolling Chair of the group.
- **Continuity for progress and stability:** the ANGA experience shows the importance of nominating permanent Focal Points that represent ASEAN positions in mutually agreed areas and to mandate them accordingly.

## Introduction

Climate change has already impacted heavily on the agriculture sector of Southeast Asian nations. The livelihoods and daily food of millions of farmers in the region are being threatened as crops are lost and farmland and infrastructure are damaged by extreme weather events brought about by climate change.

To address these challenges, the AMAF in 2015 developed and committed to the Vision and Strategic Plan for ASEAN Cooperation in Food, Agriculture and Forestry 2016–2025 (FAF 2025). FAF 2025 strategic thrust 4 emphasises the need to address climate change and its adverse impacts by promoting appropriate agricultural practices, building competencies, providing access to financial resources, and enhancing regional and international collaboration. Moreover, strategic thrust 6 expresses the need to promote and protect ASEAN interests within global and regional fora by developing ASEAN common positions on relevant issues on trade, climate change, forestry, biodiversity conservation, and food safety. Both thrusts highlight ASEAN's intention to enhance coordination and joint approaches to issues affecting food, agriculture and forestry.

In 2016, the AMAF endorsed the establishment of ANGA to raise awareness of the adverse impacts of climate change on agriculture in the international arena and to position ASEAN as a driver for promoting progress in climate-friendly and resilient agriculture.

Bringing their common concerns to the UNFCCC has made the AMS realise the value and efficiency of negotiating together. Acting jointly in the name of ASEAN has given a stronger voice to the countries involved, especially to small and least-developed countries, and helped to raise the profile of a topic that had long been neglected in climate negotiations. This policy brief shares lessons learned that may provide a good example for strengthened sectoral engagement in climate governance and for how to promote ASEAN positions in the international climate negotiations.

## Beginnings: Forming A Negotiation Group

The agriculture sector of Southeast Asian countries has often not been represented within international fora. Only a few countries have embedded agriculture negotiators in their negotiating teams, such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Viet Nam. Many AMS negotiators to the UNFCCC lacked expert knowledge of agriculture concepts and principles or the issues and problems in agriculture brought about by climate change. However, since 2013, several trends at international and regional level prompted ASEAN to strengthen policymaking for agriculture at multilateral environmental negotiation level.

At global level, increased recognition and support for agriculture as a sector within the UNFCCC resulted in 2017 in the adoption of the landmark decision termed 'Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture' (KJWA),



*ANGA focal points honed negotiations skills during the simulation exercise of the UNFCCC training, February 2020.*

*Photo : GIZ/Build Yosawat*



ANGA Focal Points examined and discussed submission to the Koronovia Joint Work on Agriculture (KJWA) during ANGA Coordination Meeting and UNFCCC Training in Bangkok in mid-February 2020. Photo : GIZ/Wikran Pongput

which calls on the subsidiary bodies of the UNFCCC to jointly address issues related to agriculture. The FAO and a number of countries have also started to promote the concept of climate-smart agriculture (CSA), highlighting improved livelihoods and the adaptation and mitigation potential of agricultural practices.

Over the same period, ASEAN bodies and Member States became increasingly aware of the impact of climate change on agriculture in Southeast Asia. This led to the establishment of the ASEAN Climate Resilience Network (ASEAN-CRN). The group, in cooperation with development agencies and the scientific community, supported the ASEAN Technical Working Group on Agriculture Research and Development (ATWGARD) in exploring best practices to promote the resilience of rice, maize, and cassava production in the region.<sup>1</sup>

This in turn led to the development of the ASEAN Guidelines on the Promotion of CSA.<sup>2,3</sup> These bodies

of work provided the basis for the first joint engagement of the ASEAN agriculture sector with UNFCCC in the form of a submission made by Vietnam on behalf of ASEAN on views on adaptation measures in agriculture to the 44th meeting of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA). These views were then discussed during SBSTA's 45th workshops in Bonn in 2016, which contributed to establishing the KJWA a year later. At around this same time, Vietnam and Philippines saw the need for a sector-based negotiation group that will act jointly during relevant meetings and workshops.

These initial successes, aided with technical insights on possible areas of engagements<sup>4</sup>, ultimately led to ANGA's formal establishment under the umbrella of AMAF in 2018. Terms of Reference and Standard Operating Procedures were put in place at the same time, with the AMAF Chair appointed as the rolling Chair of ANGA. Having a strong ANGA Chair who is

<sup>1</sup> GIZ (2015): Promotion of Climate Resilience for Food Security in ASEAN Rice, Maize and Cassava. <https://asean-crn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Promotion-of-Climate-Resilience-for-Food-Security-in-ASEAN.-Rice-Maize-and-Cassava.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> ASEAN (2015): ASEAN Regional Guidelines for Promoting Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) Practices. [https://asean-crn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2015\\_ASEANGuidelines\\_CSA-Vol1](https://asean-crn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2015_ASEANGuidelines_CSA-Vol1).

<sup>3</sup> ASEAN (2017): ASEAN Regional Guidelines for Promoting Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) Practices – Volume II. <https://asean-crn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2017-ASEANGuideline-CSA-Volume-II.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Chandra, A., McNamara, K.E., Dargusch, P., Damen, B., Rioux, J., Dallinger, J. and Bacudo, I. 2016. Resolving the UNFCCC divide on climate-smart agriculture. Carbon Management. Advance online publication. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17583004.2016.1235420>. Available: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17583004.2016.1235420>

'My Ministry of Agriculture does not really focus on climate change issues, but since receiving training in negotiation, I have become the de facto expert on climate change issues for my Ministry.'

**Mr Izzannudin Bujang**

Department of Agriculture and Agrifood  
Brunei

'I am very grateful for the incredible energy and alertness of the ASEAN group and its substantial contribution to the whole negotiation process. The ASEAN group was a strong advocate in dealing with agriculture from the perspective of the particular vulnerabilities of the important economic sector and its relationship with food security.'

**Mr Ayman Tharwat Amin Abdel Aziz**

Egypt, Lead Negotiator of G77 and China  
for Agriculture

recognised by all AMS is key to ensuring successful interaction with other negotiating parties and groups. Groups like G77 and China are looking for a focal point with whom to coordinate. The ANGA Chair also plays a crucial role in facilitating the process for arriving at common positions.

Support from various partners such as German Government (through GIZ), FAO-RAP and the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security has been instrumental in terms of establishing ANGA. They have provided technical and scientific expertise or financial resources and now continue to help strengthen ANGA capacities.

### Arriving at Commonalities

The development of common positions is a lengthy process and is guided by several factors. Key points of reference are the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) reflecting countries' targets, concerns and national strategies. ASEAN-CRN developed commonalities by reviewing the countries' NDCs and identifying common interests. Then the group collectively defined priorities and actions relevant to all countries in the region. Today, ANGA with the help of partners also sends key questions related to the topic in question to each AMS, gathers their feedback and then collates the common ground as a basis for further discussion among the AMS.

Another important source for regional engagement are ASEAN policies, which already summarise key priorities, areas of action and good practices agreed amongst the AMS. In the case of ANGA, the most important sources were the ASEAN Regional Guidelines on Promoting CSA, which in turn were based on a series of consultative meetings at national and regional level to compile best practice being implemented by various leading development agencies in the region.

Common positions are also science-based, so scientific knowledge based on literature reviews and expert opinions serves as input to the drafting process. Once the common ground has been determined and coordinated among all AMS, negotiators on behalf of ASEAN agree on concrete positions and how they are to be presented. For this purpose, ANGA representatives usually meet in a workshop prior to important negotiation events.

Afterwards, the initial draft is circulated to all AMS and relevant ASEAN working groups for additional input and comments before the final draft is presented to senior officials for final approval and endorsement. The negotiators involved in this process have a key role in facilitating the approval process, as they need to present the draft to their respective governments for comments or feedback.

The common position then has to be submitted to the international body which requested the submission – in the case of ANGA, the UNFCCC. As ASEAN is not recognised as a negotiating party to the Convention itself, the AMAF Chair which also holds the ANGA chairmanship, submits the endorsed common position on behalf of the 10 ASEAN governments.

### National and Regional Identity

In the development of common positions, considerable emphasis is placed on ensuring that their content does not conflict with country-level agendas. This is done by consolidating similar views on a particular topic and opening the discussion to those with minor differences. Views that cannot be mutually agreed upon are often removed from commonality exercises.

The ANGA experience has shown that the benefits of acting as a group are explored and emphasised on an ongoing basis so that AMS can appreciate how these contribute to the national agenda. Countries should be able to see clearly how a regional position could enhance national views. It is also key to understand that a joint ASEAN position does not preclude them from submitting their individual position as a country.

### Inter-Sectoral Coordination

Understanding the positions of the national UNFCCC

focal points of the different AMS and analysing how the agriculture sector experts relate to them was one of the initial activities of ANGA in order to promote coordination. The success of ANGA shows how climate negotiations and the actors involved in them can benefit from the inclusion of representatives from the sectors affected by climate change. In raising the concerns of agriculture at international level, ASEAN sector representatives reached out to the Ministries leading the UNFCCC negotiations, mostly environment ministries, to work together to address the sector's concerns. In preparing common positions, ANGA consulted various scientific communities and experts to understand the science behind the policies.

The group also ensured that representatives from the ASEAN Working Group on Climate Change and the ASEAN Working Group on Forestry and Climate Change were invited to their meetings and training events to build a shared understanding of ASEAN positions within the UNFCCC and build negotiation capacity.

### Capacity-Building and Networks for Negotiations

Because the agriculture sector was new to multilateral environmental agreements, ANGA members struggled to understand UNFCCC processes and protocols. Seeking help from international development partners, it steadily increased its knowledge and skills to build capacity and confidence as negotiators through a series of training



ANGA focal points demonstrated a strong negotiation presence during COP25 in Madrid, Spain, December 2019. Photo : ANGA

courses and workshops where experts and experienced negotiators trained the ANGA representatives. This also contributed to strengthening ANGA's identity.

Another key element to building negotiation capacity is exposure. ANGA representatives have now engaged in UNFCCC negotiations continuously since 2016. As a result, negotiators have gained greater insight into the complex world of climate negotiations, built confidence, and started to establish a network with other negotiators, particularly from G77 and China. Southeast Asian countries are usually engaged in this group, which speaks for all the countries involved.

## Challenges

The ANGA experience shows the importance of, but also the challenges posed by cross-sectoral coordination. International climate negotiations usually falls under the purview of the Ministries of Environment. These ministries are represented in the ASEAN Working Group on Climate Change, who regularly coordinates the general ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change to the Conference of Parties (COP). ASEAN-CRN and ANGA's intention and activities to bring agriculture negotiators closer in the climate governance space and promote common ASEAN positions on this topic was initially questioned by some stakeholders. ANGA's purpose was initially seen as duplicating the roles traditionally assigned to existing negotiators.

Furthermore, AMS have various degrees of working closeness and cooperation between the ministries responsible for environment and climate change, and those responsible for agriculture, and these distances had to first be bridged.

It took a lot of meetings, dialogue and information dissemination to increase understanding of ANGA's goals and mission, to create mutual understanding, to ensure coordination and strategic engagement of all relevant stakeholders, and to promote that agriculture sector representatives are being integrated into their respective national negotiating teams.

ANGA has learned that to sustain momentum for joint ASEAN engagement in climate negotiations, it will be crucial to demonstrate the positive outcomes and the added value this brings to the AMS.

Internally, the group also struggles for continuity and consistency because not all AMS have appointed permanent ANGA representatives. Different people attend different events, so organisers find themselves orienting different individuals and recapping developments and agreements every time. This experience shows how important it is to nominate permanent Focal Points who represent ASEAN positions in certain mutually agreed areas and to mandate accordingly.



During the climate conference in Bonn, June 2019, ANGA contributed to shape the KJWA's future action. Photo : Imelda Bacudo

Furthermore, for ANGA's engagement to be sustainable, the group needs designated coordinators and spokespersons to facilitate both internal and external cooperation.

A further challenge is that timelines for ASEAN approval processes are hard to reconcile with UNFCCC timeframes and deadlines. All AMS must agree to a common position and the official procedures for approval must be complied with while at the same time submitting the positions in time for them to be recognised by the other parties to the UNFCCC.

## Forging Ahead

The KJWA forms a strong basis for ASEAN governments to work together for shared agricultural goals in Southeast Asia. It has opened up many opportunities for ANGA to share best practices, enhance cooperation, and raise issues of common concern for all AMS. This may inform further regional policy processes as well as implementing certain approaches in the AMS.

Countries are already working to translate achievements within the international arena into national and local actions to secure tangible results from all these agreements. The AMS are looking for support from the international community based on ANGA's efforts with the UNFCCC.

As the world feels the devastating impacts of climate change, ANGA is preparing for more effective engagement to respond to the global climate crisis. ANGA has played and should continue to play a significant role in mainstreaming agriculture in the UNFCCC processes in line with AMS' joint interests. It may also look for further arenas within the UNFCCC or beyond where the group's engagement could benefit ASEAN. Trained ASEAN negotiators such as ANGA could in future provide a link between the UNFCCC and other UN Rio Conventions to enhance support for activities focused on agriculture and land degradation neutrality. In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic also shed light on the important connection between agriculture and climate change within the whole food system – a topic which could provide further opportunities for ANGA engagement.

The lessons learned from establishing ANGA could provide important input into the continuous pathway of establishing ASEAN as a strong actor in the international policy arena on environment and climate change. Moreover, as climate governance becomes more inclusive and sector-based, it could serve as an inspiration for other sectors to pursue similarly rigorous joint contributions to effectively ensure that climate policies genuinely produce specific and effective climate actions.



Group photo of participants attending UNFCCC Training Workshop in Bangkok, February 2020. Photo : GIZ/Build Yosawat

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