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The growing role of NGOs in ASEAN

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The role and activities of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) in Southeast Asia are increasing, says JoAnn Fagot Aviel, Professor of International Relations at San Francisco State University. This growth is being encouraged both by the increasing emphasis, world-wide, on regionalization and by the attempts by the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to promote regional economic cooperation. Although in the past NGOs have been on the periphery of ASEAN, Aviel argues that the future of the Association may depend as much on the activities of NGOs as on those of ASEAN's governments and private enterprises. In this article, Aviel focuses on the role played by NGOs in the Asian region and their relationship with ASEAN. She predicts that NGO activity in Southeast Asia will continue to grow and forge links between people in the region.

Increasing attention is being paid to the role of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) internationally. Less attention has been paid to their role in regional systems. However, the factors that have increased the international role of NGOs have also increased their regional role: factors such as the end of the Cold War, technological developments, and the growing resources of NGOs themselves. Although NGOs may be less important in Southeast Asia than in some other regions, their role there has nevertheless been increasing. As in other regions, this growth is caused by and at the same time is contributing to increased regional integration. Although the role of NGOs within each country in the region is clearly important, this paper will focus on their role and activities in the region as a whole, and particularly on their relationship with the principal regional organization, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which was founded in 1967.

In response to the forces of globalization and regionalization, ASEAN is attempting to promote regional economic cooperation. Private enterprises in each country therefore have to consider conditions in regional markets as well as take into account plans by ASEAN to establish a free trade area, which will not be successful without their participation. In order to protect their interests, private enterprises have helped to form regional nongovernment organizations that are affiliated with ASEAN.
Less attention has been paid to the role of nongovernment organizations that are not affiliated with the profit-making sector; the influence of such NGOs varies from country to country, but is increasing in each. Like many private enterprises, these NGOs have also formed regional associations and have formulated regional projects in order to strengthen their organizations through obtaining technical information and resources or by cooperating on research. Such research can improve the quality of their programs but may be difficult to undertake independently. Regional action is particularly important when the problem being addressed by an organization is region-wide and requires regional solutions. Many NGOs believe that regional action can have an impact on the problems the various nations face domestically. By holding regional conferences in preparation for every global conference, the United Nations has encouraged NGOs to have a regional focus, although this focus is not necessarily confined to ASEAN. Both private and government donor agencies have also encouraged regional programs.

ASEAN NGOs

Although the ASEAN Secretariat is itself a weak institution, it has promoted the growth of regional NGOs and has encouraged more ASEAN NGOs to affiliate formally. An ASEAN NGO is defined as “a non-profit-making association of ASEAN persons, natural or juridical, organized to promote, strengthen and help realize the aims and objectives of ASEAN cooperation and specifically in the social, culture, economic and scientific fields.” To qualify as an ASEAN NGO, an NGO has to have membership from a majority of the ASEAN countries. Aside from being able to use the name and official emblem of ASEAN, an affiliated NGO may submit written statements or recommendations on policy matters to the ASEAN Standing Committee. It may initiate programs of activities for presentation to an official committee or working group with which it is linked and attend its meetings for consultations as well as have access to ASEAN documents and facilities.¹

Of the twenty-five affiliated and twenty-five non-affiliated NGOs that qualify as ASEAN regional organizations, most are commercial, industrial, or professional organizations. The largest and most significant ASEAN NGO is the umbrella ASEAN Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASEAN-CCI) which has assumed “something of a semi-official status and acts as an interface between the ASEAN inter-government committee structure and the various private sector groupings of the ASEAN countries.”² Recently, ASEAN recognized the importance of the ASEAN-CCI by placing its previously rotating Secretariat within the ASEAN Secretariat itself.³ A publication of the ASEAN Secretariat states that “From passive involvement, the ASEAN-CCI has become an active partner in formulating
ASEAN’s economic agenda.” It has helped members to make tangible economic gains and has promoted the greater aim of regional economic cooperation by providing contacts that lead to business ventures that help increase intra-ASEAN trade and investment. Closer links among ASEAN actors allow for the development of common interests and provide the structural means for greater bargaining power with external actors. The ASEAN-CCI or its officials have acted as an effective lobby group within ASEAN to pressure member governments to set up institutional mechanisms to facilitate greater ASEAN economic cooperation among private sector groups.\(^5\) ASEAN-CCI introduced the ASEAN Industrial Joint Ventures system in 1980, as well as subsequent modifications to make the system comply with the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement. The ASEAN Business Forum, a non-profit organization whose membership is composed of ASEAN-based companies, and various specialized associations such as in the banking, insurance, and fishing industries, all function to increase cooperation among ASEAN-CCI members and to represent their interests in ASEAN as well as enhance relations with governments and international organizations.\(^6\)

The ASEAN Institute for Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) is somewhat similar to ASEAN-CCI insofar as it has close links to ASEAN official organizations. It is a non-government association comprising Southeast Asia’s most important research institutes and think tanks on security-related issues. It usually meets before the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting (SOM), with officials attending, and prepares studies for consideration at the Meeting. It has assumed an influential role in the development of second-track diplomacy and in the generation of policy ideas that have helped shape the ASEAN agenda.\(^7\) The establishment in June 1993 of the Council for Security and Cooperation in Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) by ten institutes, many of which belonged to or were clearly linked to ASEAN-ISIS, to promote discussion of security issues between scholars and officials, preceded the inauguration in July 1994 of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). CSCAP continues to provide private-sector views to the ARF.\(^8\)

A survey conducted in 1986 concluded that: “The socio-cultural NGOs of ASEAN are few and far in between considering the broad canvass covered by this realm of activity. The most active and coordinated NGOs of this category, from our survey, are the ASEAN Confederation of Women’s Organization, the Committee for ASEAN Youth Cooperation and the ASEAN Cooperative Organization.” Since 1986, social and environmental NGOs have become more numerous and active. Many have not affiliated with ASEAN, although they often work to influence its policies. Some regional NGOs have been formed with the express purpose of
developing linkages among NGOs in the region and have even helped to found national NGOs. Such is the case with Yayasan Bina Des, which was founded in 1974 and which became the Indonesian chapter (INDHRRA) of the South East Asia Development of Human Resources and Rural Areas Forum (SEADHRRA). Along with PHILDHRRA, the Philippines chapter, THAIDHRRA, the Thai chapter, and other DHRRA organizations in Malaysia, Korea, and Japan, Yayasan Bina Des has a solid regional network. Likewise, the First ASEAN Women’s Program (AWP) meeting, held in Jakarta in November 1981, recommended establishing an inter-ASEAN communication network based on each member country setting up a National Clearinghouse on Women in Development with the functions of collecting, analyzing, documenting, and disseminating data and information on women.

Regional workshops are frequently held to share information in various fields. A leader in one Singaporean NGO, the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), explained that her organization had decided to hold its first regional meetings in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok in 1988 because Malaysia and Thailand had shelters for victims of domestic violence, which Singapore did not have at that time. Similar examples could be given in many fields. In the field of women and technology alone, a symposium on the participation of women in science and technology development and transfer was held in Bangkok in 1992, a workshop on “New Technologies and the Future of Women’s Work in Asia” was held in Kuala Lumpur in 1994, an international workshop on “Women and Technology in Southeast Asia and the Pacific” was held in Jakarta in January 1996, and a conference on “Gender, Trade and Investment Liberalization, and Economic and Technical Cooperation for Sustained Growth and Equitable Development” was held in Manila in 1996. In 1997, participants from five ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam) participated in a meeting to plan a research project on “Globalization and Rural Women’s Livelihoods” funded by the Southeast Asia Gender Equity Program (SEAGEP) (a project of the Canadian International Development Agency) in Singapore. In 1997, the Regional Consultation on Refugee Women and Women in Situations of Armed Conflict was held in Thailand as part of implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

President Ramos of the Philippines stressed the importance of these regional networks, which he said “will eventually constitute a veritable trans-governmental order. Already these cross-border networks of both government and non-government organizations are well established. We have regional and global networks of parliamentarians, jurists, finance and trade ministers, police officers, chiefs of staff, intelligence services and so forth.” Advances in communication and transportation
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have facilitated these networks. The development of the Internet and e-mail has especially helped NGOs, who have faced more resource constraints than government and business leaders, to forge and maintain regional networks.

**Regional problems**

Actions taken by ASEAN, as well as increased communication among organizations in the region, have allowed NGOs to identify issues requiring joint action to eradicate regional problems, particularly in relation to the environment. However, it was forces outside the region that first led to the identification of environment issues as a regional problem and that led to the creation of a regional environment program in the late 1970s. The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) was the catalyst for the drafting of the Asian Environmental Program (ASEP), and this served as the initial framework for environmental collaboration in the region. In the early 1980s, common training activities were undertaken in the areas of watershed management and energy conservation. During this period, ASEAN implemented a USAID project directed toward improving watershed management. With assistance from Australia, Canada, and the United States, ASEAN also undertook a series of energy conservation and management projects in the 1980s. The 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio provided the impetus for the decision by the ASEAN environment ministers to inaugurate the process of setting basic environmental quality standards and regulations at the national level and, subsequently, to standardize environmental regulations in the region. In April 1994, the ASEAN environment ministers adopted the ASEAN Strategic Plan of Action on the Environment, partly in response to the recommendations set out in Agenda 21, which was adopted at the 1992 Rio conference. In May 1995, a series of workshops were held in Manila, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and Jakarta on trade and the environment, and these were attended by delegates from the environment and trade ministries, as well as by representatives from the private sector, academia, and NGOs.

In 1997 fires in Indonesia caused a regional haze crisis that prompted NGOs to call for regional action. In October 1994, ASEAN environment ministers had agreed to the formulation of an ASEAN Cooperation Plan on Transboundary Pollution. In 1995, ASEAN Senior Ministry Officials on the Environment established a Haze Technical Committee, but this never operated. In 1997, when the haze problem was particularly bad, NGOs in Malaysia as well as other affected countries called upon their governments to take action. Petitioners in Malaysia called in particular for “stricter monitoring of companies operating in the ASEAN countries.” The
haze problem became a focal point for NGOs in the region because of its attendant health problems. The wind blew the haze not to Jakarta, but to the neighboring countries of Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines. The Indonesian government’s inaction led to the formation of an informal network of solidarity between NGOs. NGOs in Indonesia shared information with NGOs in neighboring countries.\(^ {21} \)

Although the ASEAN ministers and senior officials who were responsible for tackling the haze problem had met every month or so since November 1997 and had formulated a Regional Haze Action Plan, NGOs pressed ASEAN officials who were meeting in Singapore in June 1998 to work harder on the problem. Singapore Environment Council Chairman Simon Tay, who is also a nominated member of parliament, said before his address to top ASEAN civil servants who were meeting on the issue, “I’m going to tell them that the ASEAN agreements have to be strengthened to get beyond the idea that we can’t talk about these issues.”\(^ {22} \) Simon Tay proposed an ASEAN Environmental Council modeled on one in Singapore, to facilitate external input and expertise and not wait until the next environmental disaster.\(^ {23} \)

At the fourth Asia-Pacific conference for environmental nongovernment organizations in November 1998, he lamented that the economic crisis “focuses attention of limited resources on economic and political reforms, driving the environmental problems—even a global disaster such as the fires—to the bottom of the agenda.”\(^ {24} \) However, efforts at the conference to focus attention on regional environmental problems as well as to propose such actions as creating a regional database of environmental information may help prevent the total neglect of environmental problems.

The success of environmental campaigns in Thailand resulted in a ban on commercial logging in Thailand in 1989, with the result that Thai logging companies moved into Burma and Laos. This prompted a Thai NGO, the Project for Ecological Recovery (PER) to take its campaign to Burma, Laos, and Cambodia. Witoon Permponscharoen of PER said: “From a nationalist perspective, the exploitation of resources in neighboring countries is beneficial to Thailand. What we’re trying to do is cross the border of nationalism; to prove that destroying the forest in Burma or Laos is like destroying forest in Thailand.”\(^ {25} \)

WEDNET Asia Pacific is a new regional research and action network on Women, Environment and Development. Engender, a regional organization with headquarters in Singapore, serves as its secretariat.\(^ {26} \) Partially in response to regional and global environmental networks of NGOs, networks of elected politicians and unelected bureaucrats have also been formed, particularly in the forestry, energy, and economic ministries, together with people representing business interests in the timber industry and, in Indonesia, the military.\(^ {27} \)
In Sarawak, Malaysia, policymaking insiders formed a counter-movement to the NGOs based on the sovereign right of the nation to resource-based economic growth. The Malaysian federal government established an organization in the timber industry to counter NGO campaigns inside Malaysia and, particularly, in the global arena. In regional terms, this more concerted reaction in opposition to NGO campaigning actually led in 1990 to an ad hoc coalition between ASEAN governments that was designed to undermine campaigns to restrict trade in tropical timber.\(^28\)

ASEAN NGOs have also worked with governments, one example being a workshop held in Jakarta in 1996 where nongovernment organization representatives met with researchers and government officials to discuss how ASEAN governments should respond to increasing environmental policy challenges such as global warming. NGOs are beginning to play a greater role in monitoring environmental trends, enforcing environmental regulations, and formulating environmental policies. However, ASEAN governments’ deliberations are still quite secretive, and NGOs often have difficulty presenting their views.\(^29\)

**Regional impact on domestic problems**

According to one survey, the majority of Indonesian NGOs who responded indicated that the main reason they sought linkages with other NGOs in the region was to promote specific advocacy agendas.\(^30\) NGOs in one country will contact those in others to seek help on specific issues or act on their behalf. For example, the Union of Civil Liberties, the headquarters of which are in Bangkok, was among the first sources of protest against Malaysia’s crackdown on the Al-Arquam Islamic sect in August 1994. The Asian Forum for Human Rights is also based in Bangkok, and Amnesty International has shifted the base of some of its Southeast Asian programs to Thailand.\(^31\) NGOs in the Philippines asked the Singaporean NGO, AWARE, to help them in their fight against domestic violence by signing a petition. Indonesian women contacted AWARE regarding the rape of Chinese women and gathered petitions that were presented at the Indonesian Embassy.\(^32\)

NGOs have attempted to meet before important ASEAN meetings to network among themselves as well as to attempt to influence the proceedings on issues important to them. For example, before the first meeting of ASEAN leaders with their counterparts in the European Union on 1–2 March 1996, over one hundred peoples’ organizations and NGOs participated in a Joint Asia-Europe NGO conference from 27–29 February. The conference unanimously endorsed proposals for the parallel withdrawal of France from French Polynesia and New Caledonia under the supervision of the European Union, and of Indonesia from East Timor under the auspices of ASEAN. The NGOs also called on Asian governments to reject the
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Multilateral Investment Agreement and demanded that governments end repression and harassment of NGOs. A Malaysia-based NGO, the International Movement for a Just World, prepared a memorandum that was endorsed by a number of prominent individuals from NGOs in Southeast Asia. Its main purpose was to persuade the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in London “to put forward tangible proposals on curbing currency speculation and regulating currency trading.”

East Timor and Myanmar are two issues over which NGOs have mobilized. In May 1994, regional NGOs faced difficulties in holding a conference on East Timor in the Philippines. Peter Traub of the German Friedrich Naumann Foundation stated: “This government takes a positive view of NGOs, so long as they stick to local issues. As soon as they start talking about East Timor and Burma, the government is more critical.” Although Thai NGOs were prevented by the Thai government from holding a regional human rights seminar that included activists from East Timor before the annual ASEAN foreign ministers meeting in July 1994, they were able to hold one in 1995. “The conference is being timed to maximize the impact of a Southeast Asian NGO collective voice on the regional grouping,” said Boonthan Verawongse of the Coordinating Committee of Human Rights Organizations in Thailand. The committee was organizing the conference with the Southeast Asian Human Rights Network (SEANET).

When ASEAN countries were criticized for human rights violations in the 1970s and 1980s, ASEAN governments attacked human rights as a Western invention and branded those NGOs who supported it as subversives. Vitit Muntarbhorn, law professor at Chulalongkorn University, says this may be changing because ASEAN governments have taken up the issue of human rights, but in their own way and on their own terms. The 1993 Joint Communique of the ASEAN foreign ministers stressed that human rights must not be politicized and should be addressed with “due regard for specific cultural, social, economic and political circumstances” and for a necessary balance between individual and community rights. In 1994, Thailand's deputy foreign minister, Surin Pitsuwan, argued that the trend toward regional NGO advocacy is here to stay, and ASEAN governments will have to learn to adjust. “The more it happens a gradual immunity will build up and it will become part and parcel of regional relations.”

However, in 1996, after receiving a memorandum from twenty-nine local nongovernment organizations which were opposing Myanmar’s entry into ASEAN, Malaysian Foreign Ministry Secretary General Tan Sri Ahmad Kamil Jaafar said: “We cannot be seen to be interfering in the affairs of other countries including Myanmar as we do not want others to interfere in Malaysia’s affairs too.” In 1997, Malaysian police detained nine NGO activists protesting the ASEAN decision
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to admit Burma. An umbrella body of twenty-two NGOs, the Burma Solidarity Group Malaysia, had earlier staged a peaceful demonstration outside the Malaysian Foreign Ministry to protest the proposed admission. Aung San Suu Kyi, the leading Burmese dissident and Nobel Peace Prize winner, has repeatedly appealed to ASEAN leaders to condemn the regime of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). In October 1997, 227 organizations and individuals from existing ASEAN member states endorsed the Alternative ASEAN Declaration on Burma, which opposed ASEAN membership for Burma and ASEAN’s policy of “constructive engagement.” After ASEAN’s decision to admit Burma, the Malaysian NGO, ALIRAN, stated “It is disappointing too that the ASEAN leaders have continued to project the impression that protests against ASEAN’s decision to admit Burma have only come from the West. In fact, 374 human rights groups and prominent personalities from ASEAN countries have openly protested against the decision to admit the SLORC regime into ASEAN.”

Although the first two meetings of the Asia Pacific Conference on East Timor (Apcet) in Manila and Kuala Lumpur had been unsuccessful because of government harassment, the third attempt on 4–5 March 1998 in Bangkok was successful, as was the International Symposium on Peaceful Settlement for East Timor (Peaceset), held in Bangkok on 2–3 March 1998. The meetings were held in cooperation with Chulalongkorn University’s Asian Studies Institute, whose director called on ASEAN “to consider constructive engagement with East Timor rather than bend to Jakarta’s insistence that this is Indonesia’s problem.” Peaceset and Apcet II issued joint resolutions that called on ASEAN governments to support the peace process in East Timor. Although the Thai government closely monitored the forums and imposed certain restrictions on participants, the very fact that it was held was seen to be encouraging. Surin Pitsuwan said, “Perhaps it is time for ASEAN’s cherished non-intervention principle to be modified. When a matter of domestic concern poses a threat to regional stability, peer pressure or friendly advice can help.” The decision by Indonesian President B. J. Habibie to hold a referendum in East Timor was due at least in part to action taken by both regional and global NGOs.

NGOs have also worked to integrate new member states into ASEAN. The Information Resource Center has held a series of symposiums and study groups bringing together government officials and academics based on the idea that Southeast Asia should be one. After working to integrate Vietnam into ASEAN, it is now trying to do the same regarding Myanmar. It is in contact with other NGOs on the issue, but is opposed to Myanmar’s more confrontational approach. Before Cambodia could join ASEAN, it was agreed that elections needed to be held. Human rights groups in four ASEAN countries (Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and
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Cambodia) as well as in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh joined in setting up the ASEAN Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) to campaign for free and fair elections. ANFREL’s first job was to monitor Cambodia’s elections in July 1998.46

NGOs have worked to institutionalize ASEAN activity regarding human rights. In July 1992, ASEAN-ISIS submitted a note on human rights to the ASEAN Ministers Meeting in Manila which proposed that “ASEAN should examine the feasibility of establishing an ASEAN Commission on Human Rights.”47 In 1993, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization (AIPO) adopted an ASEAN Charter on Human Rights which posed the question of setting up a regional mechanism on human rights.48 Asia’s first regional human rights conference in Bangkok in 1993 was held in preparation for the UN’s global conference on human rights in Vienna. More than one hundred and seventy NGOs attended as observers; they criticized the Bangkok Declaration issued by the governments and issued their own declaration.49 In July 1993, after the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, ASEAN ministers declared that “ASEAN should also consider the establishment of an appropriate regional mechanism on human rights.” However, several senior officials of ASEAN countries admitted privately that the 1993 declaration had been made largely to make ASEAN look good. Activists in the region have established a Working Group for a Regional Human Rights Mechanism for ASEAN, and its leaders have met with ASEAN representatives.50 An understanding was reached in July 1997 between national working groups and senior ASEAN government officials to drop the previous insistence on having national mechanisms as preconditions for a regional mechanism, since only the Philippines and Indonesia had set up national commissions.51 The establishment of an Eminent Persons Group, which would be less threatening to ASEAN governments than a formal commission, is now being considered, but the governments would be sensitive to any issue the Group considered.52 In May 1998, over two hundred nongovernment organizations approved their final version of an Asian Human Rights Charter and called for an Asian Human Rights Court and an Asian Human Rights Commission.53 Although governments continue to resist regional mechanisms, the forces of globalization and NGO activism are eroding their ability to do so.

Foreign encouragement

As ASEAN NGOs increase their activity, they are becoming less dependent on foreign NGOs. Victims of human-rights abuses used to rely on Western groups to spark international protests. Peter Franke of the Southeast Asia Information Centre in Asia House says this now happens only in emergencies. These days Asian NGOs give priority to networking at local and regional levels and no longer give their
foreign counterparts as much up-to-date information as they used to. Some Asian leaders have expressed resentment at attempts by developed countries to link human rights and environmental issues with trade. Mr. Wittaya, who chaired the Thai House Committee on Justice and Human Rights, said that Thailand needs to clean up its human rights record, "But we sweep our house for our own people."

Nevertheless, foreign governments, foundations, and NGOs, as well as international organizations, continue to play an important role in funding regional activities, networking, and holding meetings. Since 1974, ASEAN's Dialogue Partners have contributed to ASEAN Functional Cooperation Programs and Projects in which NGOs have played an important role. Of the eight Dialogue Partners, Japan has contributed the most ($73.2 million from 1977 to 1992), followed by Australia ($68.8 million from 1974 to 1992). Of Japan's contribution, 44 percent goes to social development programs, which comprise 37 percent of all contributions to social development. A Japanese coalition of NGOs, the NGO Network on Official Development Assistance has held discussions with the Japanese government to encourage it to give 50 percent of its official development assistance budget to social development and to increase its partnership with NGOs. Japan helped to fund the most important study of NGO regional activity to date, Emerging Civil Society in the Asia Pacific Community. Through its International Development Resource Center, the Canadian government has funded the Pan Asia Network, which has facilitated networking not only between ASEAN NGOs but between all those NGOs both inside and outside the region that are interested in regional issues.

Asia-related NGOs in Europe are choosing project themes that cut across country borders. Guenter Freudenberg, head of the German Asia Foundation said: "Asia's main development problems are transregional, such as environmental problems and women's exploitation. So we need transregional models for cooperation and solidarity." Donors have supported the process of regional norm-setting and the need for regional forums that permit cross-national dialogue among NGOs as well as among governments and donors. The Friedrich Naumann Foundation sponsored a meeting in Bangkok in which Thai NGOs could inform Indonesian human rights activists of their experiences in the mid-1970s and in the more recent pro-democracy uprising of May 1992. The Save the Children Fund (SCF) used the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's resource pack of ideas and materials to support teachers in responding to pupil diversity and has organized in-training workshops for teachers as well as for SCF staff, United Nations and government representatives, and other NGOs from Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. An SCF official stated that "... supporting or creating
networks of similarly focused organizations can be very productive and cost-effective in influencing public attitudes as well as governments . . . Moves toward regional rather than purely national programs could also increase flexibility."61

The United Nations has encouraged regional networking among NGOs. Global conferences on the environment, population, human rights, social development, women's rights, and human habitats were all preceded by regional preparatory conferences, while most international agreements include clauses that call for regional meetings to assist with implementation. The regional economic commissions, as well as many of the specialized agencies, all sponsor regional meetings at which NGOs either participate or attempt to exert external influence. For example, in September 1997 in Kuala Lumpur the NGO Forum on Social Development in Asia and the Pacific was jointly organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the International Council on Social Welfare, and the Australian Council for Overseas Aid together with the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development and the National Council of Social Welfare Malaysia, and it was funded by the Netherlands and the Asian Development Bank. The Forum made a set of recommendations to the Fifth Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Development which met in Manila in November 1997.62

Conclusion
Although NGOs have been on the periphery of ASEAN, the future of ASEAN may depend as much on their activities as on those of ASEAN's governments and private enterprises. The European Community was created not just by governments, but by the actions of business, academic institutions, and NGOs. According to Jusuf Wanandi, there is growing recognition that if ASEAN is to survive, the people of the region, not just government officials and private enterprises, must be involved in formulating a sense of regional community.63 At an ASEAN ministerial meeting in July 1995 Thai Foreign Minister Kasem Kasemsiri even suggested creating a regional council to provide a forum for grass-roots groups to discuss common concerns for consideration at a state level.64 The difficulty of integrating new members who have little experience with NGOs, together with the current regional economic crisis and the political crises in several nations, make it unlikely that such a step will be taken in the immediate future. However, former Thai minister Meechai Viravaidya believes that: "The whole of Asia will be seeing more NGOs, because they do make a difference."65 NGO activity in Southeast Asia continues to grow and is helping to forge links among the people in the region. These links are
greatest among the elite, but regional meetings of NGOs and a greater focus on regional issues have helped to increase contacts and regional awareness among more and more people.

Notes
4. ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Economic Co-operation, p. 191.
6. ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Economic Co-operation, pp. 122–129.
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23. Interview with Professor Chin Kin Wah, University of Singapore, 2 October 1998.
32. Interview with Phyllis Chew, President of AWARE, 22 September 1998.
35. Vatikiotis, "Going Regional," p. 16.
37. Makabenta, "South-East Asia: ASEAN's See-No-Evil Policy Under Fire."
52. Interview with Chin Kin Wah.
55. Manibhandu, "Human Rights: Cleaning up the record."
60. Vatikiotis, "Going Regional," p. 16.