

MONTHLY MONITOR

ASEAN Commits to Sustainable Economic Recovery

On 12 November 2020, the [37th ASEAN Summit](#) took place online, with Viet Nam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc representing the country's chairmanship. This is the third major meeting in 2020 to be conducted virtually. In the summit, ASEAN Leaders adopted the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework ([ACRF](#)) and its Implementation Plan, as a consolidated strategy for ASEAN to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis. Focusing on five broad strategies, the ACRF foresees three stages: reopening, recovery, and resilience. Actions will be coordinated in a "whole-of-community" approach, strengthening complementarity between the UN SDGs and the ASEAN 2030 vision. To advance towards a more sustainable and resilient future, the ACRF strives to guide the region's transition to a circular economy and address the issue of plastic waste, among others.

Sustainability Shift: Will Consumers Make that Change?

A study was conducted by GlobeScan among 27,000 online respondents worldwide to assess whether consumers are [willing to adopt healthier and more sustainable lifestyles](#). The 2020 Healthy and Sustainable Living (HSL) Survey suggests that consumers have become increasingly aware of the urgency to protect the environment. However, they may need more practical guidance on what steps they could take in their daily lives. Younger generations, specifically Millennials and Gen Z, are found to be most open to switch to more environmentally-friendly practices. *(cont'd)*

BUYERS BEWARE

An important principle of consumer protection is to increase understanding about the [impact of consumption decisions on the shared environment](#).

The current COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with growing concerns about climate change, has been drawing more attention to sustainability issues, such as reducing and replacing single-use plastic bags. Ethical and environmentally-friendly habits are also gaining ground among consumers.

This month's edition of the PROTECT Pulse delves into recent developments on sustainability and their relevance to consumer protection in ASEAN.

Happy reading!

(cont'd) The [HSL Behavior Change Index](#) shows the tendency for behavioral change towards more healthy and sustainable lifestyles. Within ASEAN, the survey covered Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, which also turned out to be among the markets where consumers exhibited the greatest willingness to change.

Conscious Consumers in ASEAN

On June 2020, HakuHodo Institute of Life and Living (HILL) ASEAN, a regional think tank, organized its sixth annual forum online with the theme [“The Rise of Conscious ASEANs: Why Should You Care?”](#). Findings from a recent survey and home-visit study in Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam showed that 78% of the respondents are aware of and living conscious lifestyles. The research also observed a certain uniqueness of an ASEAN “environmentally-conscious” lifestyle, which follows more effortless daily actions, triggered by personal experiences and oriented towards social media exposure. Interestingly, more than 60% of the respondents stated they are willing to pay a 20% extra charge for conscious brands. More insights can be found in the webinar recording [here](#).

Indonesia: Where Sustainable Fashion Meets Function

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only stepped on the pedal for digitalization, but also heightened public awareness about eco-friendly goods and services, including in the fashion industry. Taking a deeper dive into this new trend, the Jakarta Post hosted a webinar titled [“The Rise of Sustainable Retail Fashion”](#) in cooperation with TENCEL, a brand producing biodegradable fabric. The COVID-19 pandemic is boosting the demand for sustainable fashion as trends of activewear purchases go up in the online marketplace. Contrary to popular belief, prices of clothes made from sustainable fabrics vary depending on the blend of the materials, making them quite competitive. There is now also a growing number of business initiatives concerned with reducing waste and the carbon footprint in manufacturing and transportation, as well as adopting eco-friendly packaging.

Financing a “Green Wood Industry” in Viet Nam

On November 2020, the [Green Vietnam Fund](#) was officially launched by the Vietnam Timber and Forest Product Association (VIFOREST), in cooperation with several local wood associations. The fund aims at supporting sustainable wood production and processing. Timber associations and enterprises met in Ho Chi Minh City to commit their compliance with relevant regulations in wood trade, as well as using more domestic plantation timber. The latter may not only be beneficial for the environment, but also provides consumers with more choices and affordable prices in the long run.

The Philippines: Sustainable Food, Prosperous Farmers

[Conscious Collective Manila](#), a distributor of sustainably-grown food products, was featured in an interview with the Manilla Bulletin for its sustainable business practices. The company sources its products from local farmers and cooperates with small businesses, linking them to consumers and a larger market in Metro Manila. In the face of the pandemic and other challenges, the business model allows for both the distributor as well as consumers to help sustain the livelihood of farmers and small businesses. By being transparent about their sources and health standards, the distributor hopes to raise awareness about the benefits of natural food and ingredients, thereby encouraging more conscious consumption choices.

