RIS Discussion Paper # 360

From Concessional Finance to Triangular Cooperation: India's Development Partnership with ASEAN under the Global Development Compact

Sushil Kumar and Riddhi Lakhiani

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Contents

1. Introduction.....2

2. Plan of Action (PoA) to Implement the ASEAN–India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2026–2030).....4

3. Trends in Development Aid to ASEAN Countries 6

4. Dynamics of India's Development Cooperation Partnership with ASEAN.....9

5. Sub-regional Cooperation 26

6. Potential of ASEAN-India Triangular Cooperation in Global South 28

7. Advancing ASEAN-India Development Cooperation through Global and Regional Initiatives.....31

8. Potential Areas for Future Development Cooperation 33

9. Conclusion, Policy Recommendations and Way Forward 36

Endnotes.....41

References.....43

From Concessional Finance to Triangular Cooperation: India's Development Partnership with ASEAN under the Global Development Compact

Sushil Kumar* and Riddhi Lakhiani**

Abstract: This paper discusses the evolution and potential of India's development cooperation with ASEAN member countries in the context of India's vision of becoming a developed nation by 2047 and ASEAN's ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future. India's development assistance to ASEAN has expanded significantly since 2015 through capacity-building programmes, concessional finance, grant assistance, and Quick Impact Projects (QIPs). India has provided around 15,590 ITEC and capacity-building slots, approximately US$ 1.22 billion in Lines of Credit, and around 200 Quick Impact Projects in Mekong region. Key sectors of cooperation include connectivity, agriculture, health, women's empowerment, climate change, renewable energy, infrastructure, education, skills development, finance, and information technology. The paper highlights the importance of physical and digital connectivity and renewable energy, especially through the International Solar Alliance, and climate-resilient infrastructure through the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure as emerging areas of collaboration.

The paper further highlights the growing importance of QIPs, which have delivered visible benefits at the local level in sectors such as healthcare, education, water supply, sanitation, and rural infrastructure. India has also contributed significantly to preserving shared cultural heritage through restoration projects at Angkor Wat, Ta Prohm, Vat Phou, Ananda Pagoda, and My Son, thereby reinforcing long-standing civilizational linkages between India and Southeast Asia while enhancing tourism activity. The paper recommends exploring triangular cooperation initiatives particularly in strengthening connectivity and development in India's North Eastern Region under the Act East Policy. It emphasizes capacity building, localization of development through QIPs, the Global Development Compact (GDC), and the Centre of Excellence for the Global South as important mechanisms for advancing ASEAN-India development cooperation and supporting the implementation of the ASEAN Vision 2045.

Keywords: ASEAN, Development Cooperation, Capacity building, Triangular Cooperation Triangular Cooperation

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1. Introduction

India and ASEAN[1] share deep historical and civilisational ties rooted in centuries of maritime trade, cultural exchange, and movement of people across the Bay of Bengal. India's formal engagement with the ASEAN has evolved significantly since the establishment of dialogue relations in 1992 (RIS, 2019). Beginning as a Sectoral Dialogue Partnership and subsequently upgraded to a full dialogue partnership in 1995, the relationship gradually expanded in scope, with summit-level interactions institutionalised in 2002 (MEA, 2018). Over time, this engagement has matured through important institutional milestones. India–ASEAN relations were elevated to a strategic partnership in 2012 and, more recently, to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2022, which was celebrated as 'ASEAN-India Friendship Year', completing three decades of cooperation (MEA, 2025). The economic relationship has expanded alongside political engagement. Since 1992, bilateral trade has surpassed US$ 131 billion, while cumulative investments have exceeded US$ 173 billion in 2025[2].

In the context of development cooperation, India has extended development assistance to ASEAN member countries through concessional finance, capacity building, grants, and technology transfer. For example, since 2003–04, India has extended US$ 1.22 billion in concessional finance. In terms of capacity building, India has offered 1,259 slots to the members of ASEAN in 2026[3]. The important sectors of India-ASEAN development cooperation include connectivity, energy, agriculture, infrastructure, manufacturing and telecommunications. This reflects the deepening economic ties and expanding cooperation between India and ASEAN (RIS, 2025).

While the early phase of India-ASEAN relations was largely centred on trade and investment and economic engagement, the partnership has progressively broadened into a multidimensional framework with development cooperation emerging as a central pillar. A key turning point in this evolution was the transition from the Look East Policy to the Act East Policy in 2014[4], which signalled a more action-oriented and implementation-focused approach toward Southeast Asia[5]. At the 22nd

ASEAN-India Summit held on 26 October 2025, Indian Prime Minister described ASEAN as the "main pillar of India's Act East Policy" and reaffirmed India's support for ASEAN unity, centrality, and its outlook on the Indo-Pacific. He also noted that the partnership is emerging as a "powerful foundation for global stability and growth"[6].

The dynamics of ASEAN-India relations can be understood from the fact that India and ASEAN together account for nearly 25 per cent of the world's population. ASEAN accounts for 16.6 per cent of India's global trade and contributed around US$ 156 billion in cumulative FDI to India[7]. In terms of connectivity and people-to-people exchanges, around 5 million Indian tourists visited ASEAN member states in 2025–26[8], and India is granting e-Tourist Visas to ASEAN member countries. Under the ASEAN-India CSP, India is pursuing cooperation in the areas of digital infrastructure and food security. India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is already linked with Singapore's PayNow, and similar payment linkages are being developed with Malaysia, the Philippines, and Cambodia. India is also supporting initiatives such as the ASEAN power grid through training and technical cooperation. Furthermore, India has provided over 15,590 ITEC training slots to ASEAN member countries and has implemented nearly 200 QIPs in the Mekong region countries (MEA, 2026). India's engagement with ASEAN is also built upon the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), which seeks to strengthen regional cooperation and enhance both physical and digital connectivity. To support cooperation activities between India and ASEAN, India has established four dedicated funds: (i) the ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund (AIF); (ii) the ASEAN-India Green Fund (AIGF); (iii) the ASEAN-India Science and Technology Development Fund (AISTDF); and (iv) the ASEAN-India Fund for Digital Future (AIFDF)[9].

This chapter discusses the scope, sectors, modalities, and impact of India's development cooperation with ASEAN, stating evolving priorities since the adoption of the Act East Policy. Section 2 analyses the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-India CSP (2026–2030) and its potential for development cooperation. Section 3 examines the flow of development assistance to ASEAN from Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries, providing an overview of aid trends

and major development partners. Section 4 analyses India's development assistance to ASEAN under the framework of the Global Development Compact, including concessional finance, capacity building, grant assistance, QIPs, and sub-regional cooperation through the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC). Section 5 examines India's engagement with sub-regional cooperation mechanisms involving ASEAN member states, particularly the Mekong–Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and ACMECS. Section 6 examines the potential of triangular cooperation. Section 7 analyses the role of global and regional initiatives and identifies emerging areas for ASEAN-India development cooperation. The final section presents the conclusion and the way forward for deepening the ASEAN-India development cooperation partnership.

2. Plan of Action (PoA) to Implement the ASEAN–India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2026–2030)

The preceding section showed that ASEAN-India relations have evolved from a sectoral dialogue partnership into a comprehensive and multi-dimensional engagement covering political, economic, strategic, developmental and people-to-people cooperation. The fifth ASEAN–India PoA (2026–2030) provides the guiding framework for cooperation over the next five years. It seeks to further strengthen ASEAN-India cooperation in areas of mutual interest for the benefit of the people of ASEAN and India, while also contributing to peace, stability, prosperity and sustainability in the region. The plan lays out priorities and measures to deepen political-security, economic and socio-cultural ties, and to realise the full potential of the ASEAN-India CSP.

The PoA reaffirms India's support for ASEAN Centrality and contributes to the implementation of *ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future*. It identifies a broad agenda of cooperation covering trade and investment, finance, energy, transport, food, agriculture and forestry, blue economy, information and communications technology, tourism, science, technology and innovation (STI), digital transformation, artificial intelligence, disaster management and emergency response, environment, climate and biodiversity, public health, education, youth, culture and people-to-people exchanges. It also emphasises connectivity and continued support for

Box 1. Key Areas of Development Cooperation under the ASEAN-India Plan of Action (2026–2030)

2.2.1. Strengthen cooperation on the development of sustainable financial infrastructure and capital markets to create strong and robust economic and financial fundamentals for sustainable and balanced growth.

2.1.7. Promote greater financial inclusion through sharing of knowledge and best practices in areas of regulation, financial technology, and digitalisation.

2.3.2. Continue to utilise the ASEAN-India Green Fund and ASEAN-India Science & Technology Development Fund to launch new projects on the green economy, including clean and renewable energy, regional power transmission, and other areas of interest.

2.10.2. Share knowledge, experiences and best practices in the development, implementation and governance of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), and explore ways to leverage DPI, including through India Stack, for regional development and integration across sectors through the ASEAN–India Fund for Digital Future (AIFDF).

3.1.1. Support the work of the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM) to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of ASEAN's disaster management and emergency response instruments, including cooperation on ASEAN's efforts in the provision of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) through ASEAN-led mechanisms.

3.1.4. Encourage full implementation of the Memorandum of Intent between the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) and the National Disaster Management Agency of India (NDMA) in all areas of collaboration, including sharing of knowledge and best practices, capacity building, technical assistance, and support for the role of the AHA Centre during large-scale disaster situations.

3.4.3. Continue to support ASEAN capacity building and the digital transformation of education, including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) aligned with industry needs, through Indian scholarship programmes, short-term courses and training, exchange of teachers, lecturers, skills trainers, instructors and researchers, joint research initiatives, and university and think tank partnerships, in collaboration

	with the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and other regional higher education networks.
3.4.4.	Continue fellowships for ASEAN students and researchers under various programmes, including scholarship programmes offered by Nalanda University, the ASEAN–India Network of Universities (AINU), and ASEAN–India Collaborative Research and Development (R&D).

Source: ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta.

ASEAN integration and narrowing the development gap, particularly in the Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam (CLMV) countries, through human resource development, rural household electrification programmes, information technology, curriculum development, IT teacher training, and increased fellowships and scholarships. Implementation of the PoA may be supported through the governments of ASEAN member states and India, including the ASEAN-India Fund, ASEAN-India Green Fund, ASEAN-India Science and Technology Development Fund, and ASEAN-India Fund for Digital Future.

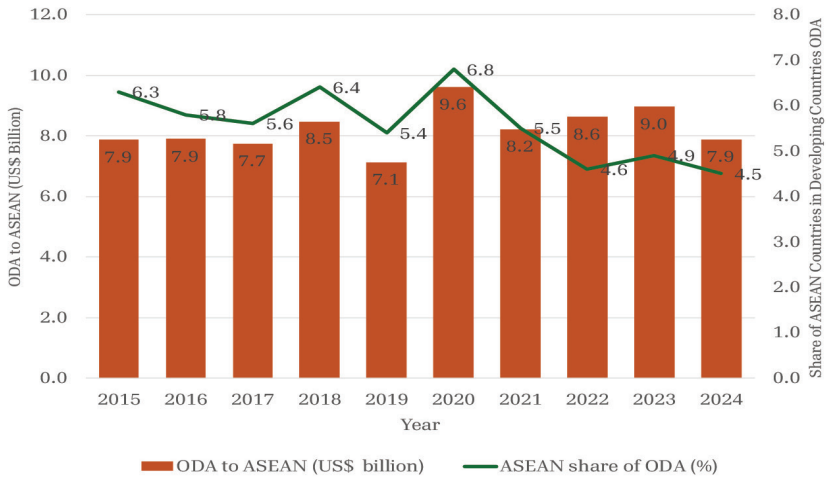
3. Trends in Development Aid to ASEAN Countries

As Section 2 analyzed the action plan for the ASEAN-India Development Cooperation Partnership, it is equally important to examine the flow of development aid to ASEAN member states from advanced economies. This analysis becomes particularly significant as many members of the OECD-DAC have recently announced reductions in their aid budgets for Global South. Analyzing aid flows to ASEAN member states provides insights into two important aspects. First, it helps assess the implications of declining aid and the extent to which ASEAN member states may need to mobilise alternative resources and explore other development financing options. Second, how assistance is distributed across ASEAN member states.

As shown in Figure 1, Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows from DAC member countries to ASEAN increased from US$ 7.9 billion in 2015 to a peak of US$ 9.6 billion in 2020 before declining to

US$ 7.9 billion in 2024. ASEAN's share in total ODA to developing countries decreased from 6.3 per cent in 2015 to 4.5 per cent in 2024 a declining relative importance of the region in overall DAC aid allocations.

Figure 1: ODA to ASEAN and ASEAN's Share in Total ODA to Developing Countries, 2015-2024

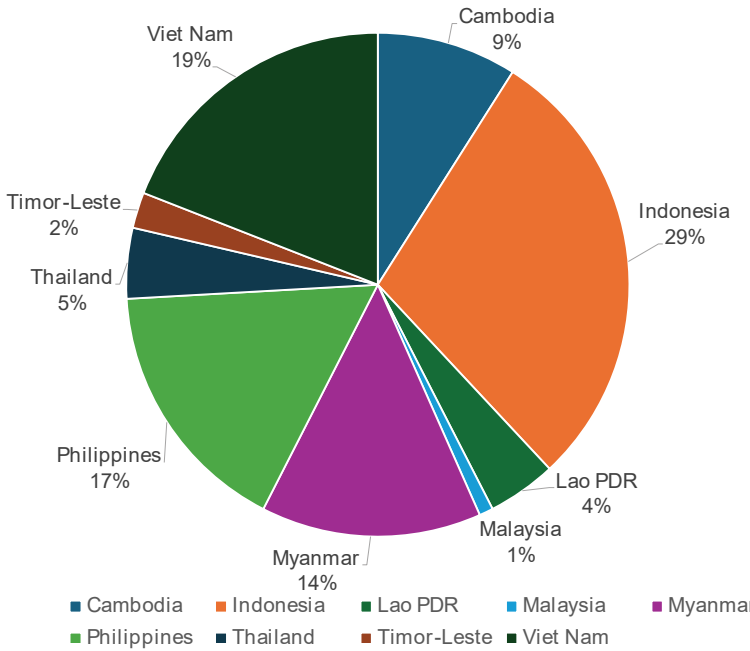


Source: Authors' calculations based on OECD DAC data.

As Figure 2 shows, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Myanmar together accounted for nearly 79 per cent of the total ODA provided by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members to ASEAN member states during 2015–2024. In absolute terms, over the ten-year period, Indonesia received the largest share, amounting to US$ 23.9 billion, followed by Vietnam US$ 15.7 billion, the Philippines US$ 13.7 billion, and Myanmar US$ 11.7 billion.

Japan was the largest DAC donor to ASEAN, providing US$ 30.6 billion between 2015 and 2024, accounting for around 37 per cent of total DAC assistance to the region. Germany (US$ 11.5 billion) and the

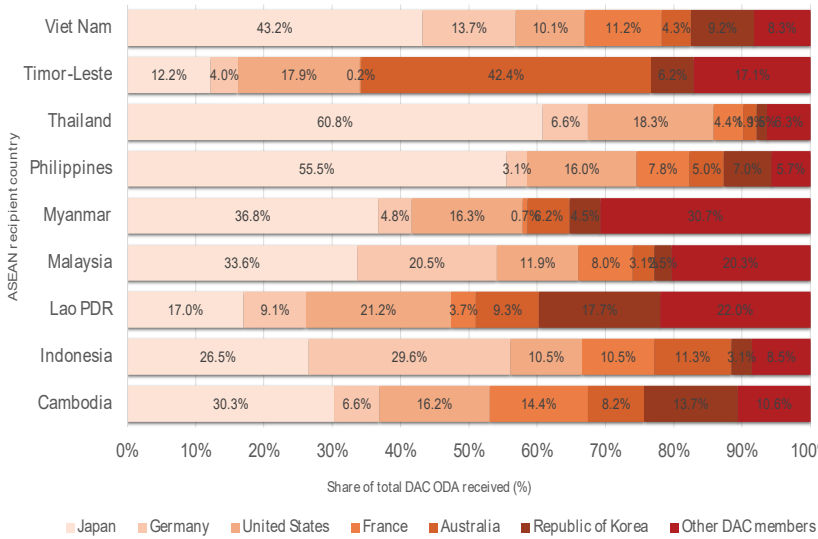
Figure 2: Distribution of DAC ODA to ASEAN Countries, 2015-2024



Note: Other ASEAN recipients include Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Thailand and Timor Leste
Source: Authors' calculations based on OECD DAC data

United States (US$ 11.3 billion) were the second and third largest donors, respectively. France (US$ 6.9 billion), Australia (US$ 6.6 billion), and Korea (US$ 5.5 billion) also emerged as major development partners. Japan's assistance was concentrated in the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Myanmar. Germany's support was primarily directed towards Indonesia and Vietnam, while the United States focused on Indonesia, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Cambodia. Together, the six largest donors - Japan, Germany, the United States, France, Australia, and Korea - provided more than four-fifths of total DAC assistance to ASEAN during the period (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Official Development Assistance to ASEAN member countries by DAC Member Countries between 2015-2024) (US$ million)



Source: Authors' calculations based on OECD DAC data

4. Dynamics of India's Development Cooperation Partnership with ASEAN

After having analysed the action plan for strengthening the ASEAN-India partnership over the next five years and the flow of international aid to the region, it is now important to examine India's development cooperation with ASEAN member states. The purpose of this analysis is to provide a way forward for India's development assistance within the framework of the Global Development Compact (GDC). This section seeks to understand how greater synergy can be created among the various modalities of India's development cooperation to enhance the effectiveness of development partnerships. It also examines how India's capacity-building initiatives contribute to strengthening ASEAN-India relations and how the development of India's Northeastern Region

under the Act East Policy can further deepen regional cooperation and connectivity. Furthermore, this analysis helps to identify the sectoral dimensions of India's development cooperation partnership with ASEAN member states and highlights areas of mutual interest and collaboration.

4.1. Global Development Compact

India's development cooperation journey has always been guided by the philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* - the world is one family. This belief has consistently shaped India's approach to global partnerships. Whether it is humanitarian assistance, technology sharing or capacity building, India has always stood with fellow nations, especially those in the Global South. On 17 August 2024, during the 3rd Voice of Global South Summit, India proposed a comprehensive and inclusive framework for global development cooperation called the Global Development Compact. It draws from India's own development experiences and is shaped by the priorities set by countries of the Global South themselves. The GDC is a human-centric, multi-dimensional, and multi-sectoral model of engagement. This Compact is built on five broad, interlinked modalities, which can be adapted based on specific needs (RIS, 2024). These include:

- Capacity building for sustainable growth
- Trade for development
- Technology sharing
- Project-specific concessional finance
- Grants

These pillars do not work in isolation. Instead, they support each other, allowing flexibility and balance in how countries approach their development goals. This time-tested model of Indian development cooperation is grounded in the domestic priorities of partner countries. It is not prescriptive; it is participatory. It is important to mention that finance is important, but it is not enough to achieve sustainable development. Many countries in the Global South face other significant challenges-lack of relevant and adaptable technologies, shortage of well-

trained human resources, and limited institutional capacities[10]. The GDC is designed to address these challenges in a holistic and practical manner.

India believes that development must be sensitive to debt burdens, respectful of environmental sustainability, and responsive to the real needs of people. This model is now ready to be scaled up and adopted by other countries to implement meaningful and impactful projects. As part of this commitment, India is initiating a trade promotion activity worth US$ 2.5 million to support countries of the Global South. In addition, India is contributing US$ 1 million to build capacity and provide training in trade policy and trade negotiations for these nations. These initiatives reflect unwavering commitment to support development efforts across regions and sectors[11].

4.2. Modalities of India's Development Cooperation with ASEAN Member States

India has been providing development assistance to ASEAN member states since 1947. For instance, India in 1946 provided US$ 1 million loan to Myanmar (erstwhile Burma). It is important to mention that India's development cooperation is demand driven and it is based on need and priorities of the partner countries, without conditionality and respecting national sovereignty and mutual gain. This section analyses India's development assistance to ASEAN member countries under the framework of the GDC.

4.2.1 Capacity Building for Sustainable Growth

Capacity Building is one of the most important pillars of ASEAN-India development cooperation. India's flagship programme in this area is the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme, launched in 1964. ITEC is among the world's longest-running structured capacity-building programmes and remains a central component of India's development partnership policy. The programme is demand-driven, partnership-oriented, and focused on addressing the developmental priorities of partner countries. In recent years, India has considerably expanded its global capacity-building initiatives. During

2025–26, India offered nearly 12,000 ITEC training slots for countries of the Global South and allocated approximately US$ 19.24 million towards capacity-building programmes. To date, more than 225,000 officials from over 160 countries have received training in civilian and defence sectors under the ITEC framework[12].

ASEAN member states have been important beneficiaries of India's capacity-building initiatives. Since 2015, ASEAN member states have utilised nearly 5,700 ITEC slots, while the cumulative number of ITEC slots extended to ASEAN member states stands at 15,590. In 2025-26 alone, 1,259 ITEC slots have been allocated to ASEAN member states.

India's engagement with ASEAN member states through capacity building reflects both bilateral cooperation and broader regional partnership objectives. Cambodia, for instance, has extensively benefited from the ITEC programme, with more than 3,000 Cambodian nationals trained between 1981 and 2025. For the year 2025–26 alone, 300 civilian training slots were allocated to Cambodia (see table 1). Similarly, Thailand has been a long-standing partner in India's capacity-building efforts. India annually offers 90 ITEC slots to Thailand, and during the past decade more than 425 Thai officers have participated in various training programmes in India. In addition, Thailand receives seats under the Colombo Plan Technical Cooperation Scheme, while Thai students have also benefited from scholarships offered by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR).[13]

India offers 100 ITEC slots annually to Indonesia and provides 20 ICCR scholarships every year for higher studies in India. Beyond training programmes, India has strengthened academic cooperation through the establishment of ICCR chairs in Indonesian universities including at Universitas Udayana in Bali and the University of North Sumatra in Medan (MEA, 2024). These initiatives promote collaboration in fields such as Sanskrit studies, ayurveda, and political science. India's cooperation with Lao PDR also demonstrates the developmental orientation of its capacity-building programmes. Around 1,500 Lao

nationals have been trained under ITEC in various sectors (MEA, 2026). India additionally provides scholarships for undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral studies under ICCR and MGC frameworks. Lao PDR diplomats and students have also participated in specialised programmes at institutions such as the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service and Nalanda University.

Brunei has similarly benefited through both physical and virtual training programmes. Over the years, 37 Brunei nationals have attended ITEC courses in India, while several officials have participated in e-ITEC programmes in recent years. Myanmar represents one of the most extensive examples of India's institutional capacity-building support in ASEAN. India has conducted specialised training programmes for Myanmar's election officials, judicial officers, police personnel, health professionals, and power-sector experts. More than 1,200 Myanmar police officers have undergone civilian-side training since 2017, while judicial cooperation programmes have trained hundreds of officers at Indian institutions such as the National Judicial Academy. India has also supported human resource development through postgraduate education opportunities, including Master's programmes under ITEC.

More than 1,000 Filipino professionals have attended courses in areas such as renewable energy, environmental management, public health, and Ayurveda. Additionally, Filipino students benefit from India's "Study in India" initiative and doctoral fellowship schemes for ASEAN students (MEA, 2025). India's development partnership with Vietnam has similarly focused on training, education, and human resource development. Every year, around 200 Vietnamese nationals participate in ITEC and ICCR programmes, with India offering 130 civilian ITEC slots and 48 ICCR scholarships annually (MEA, 2022). India also extends training and scholarship opportunities to Timor-Leste, including ITEC slots, ICCR scholarships, and diplomatic training programmes through India's foreign service institutions (see Table 1).

Table 1: Indian ITEC Slots to ASEAN Member States

Sr. No.	Country	Total slots till date	Slots 2025-26
1	Brunei Darussalam	71	6
2	Cambodia	3000	300
3	Indonesia	1001	100
4	Lao PDR	1500	22
5	Malaysia	1067	40
6	Myanmar	5571	500
7	Philippines	1000	75
8	Thailand	370	70
9	Timor-Leste	39	16
10	Vietnam	1971	130
	Total	15590	1259

Source: Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), *Annual Reports*, various years.

Beyond bilateral cooperation, India has institutiona-lised several ASEAN-focused educational and research initiatives under the ASEAN-India cooperation framework. Scholarships are offered to ASEAN students at Nalanda University for Master's, PhD, and Postgraduate Diploma programmes, funded through the ASEAN–India Fund. India currently provides 80 Master's and 10 PhD scholarships annually under this initiative. It is also important to note that since 2015, more than 300 ASEAN students have been awarded scholarships to pursue higher education at Nalanda University. In addition to ITEC and ICCR programmes, India supports ASEAN member states through a wide range of scholarship and fellowship initiatives, including the ASEAN-India Network of Universities (AINU), ASEAN-India Collaborative Research and Development Programme (AICRD), ASEAN-India

Research and Training Fellowships (AIRTF), Quad STEM Fellowship, Quad Infrastructure Fellowship, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Scholarship Scheme, BIMSTEC Scholarship, and the ASEAN-India Fellowship for Higher Education in Agriculture and Allied Sciences (ASEAN Secretariat, 2024).

Box 2: Training of Trainers on Computer Networking Technology

India's capacity-building cooperation with Southeast Asia increasingly includes specialised technical programmes designed to create a multiplier effect through the Training of Trainers model. An example is the first Early Harvest Project under the India–The Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) Development Partnership, titled "Training of Trainers on Computer Networking Technology," conducted by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), New Delhi, from 23 September to 4 October 2024. The programme trained participants from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand in computer networking technologies while strengthening their ability to further disseminate technical knowledge within their own institutions and countries. The programme focused on enhancing technical skills and capacity building among participants from IMT-GT member countries, highlighting India's contribution to regional development cooperation through knowledge sharing and human resource development (MEA, 2025).

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, Annual report 2024-25

4.2.2. Project-Specific Concessional Finance

As discussed in Section 4, concessional finance plays an important role in supporting partner countries for their development activities. Recent data indicates that India has extended more than 300 Lines of Credit (LoCs) worth approximately US$ 32 billion to 68 countries, including those in the ASEAN region. The LoCs are governed by the Indian Development and Economic Assistance Scheme (IDEAS) of the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, as amended

from time to time[14]. Over the years, India has extended concessional financing to countries such as Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam, supporting a wide range of projects from irrigation systems and hydropower to telecommunications and railway modernization. These LoCs are an important modality of India's development cooperation policy, aligned with its broader *Act East Policy.*

India's development cooperation has benefited partner countries. For instance, the Stung Tasal development project in Cambodia was financed under a US$ 35 million LoC and executed by WAPCOS[15] Limited, a Government of India undertaking. The project was completed, and the utilization of water for irrigation commenced in November 2014 in the downstream area up to the Roleang Chrey Regulator located in Kampong Speu Province. The project provides irrigation to an additional 10,000 hectares of land during the dry season and stands as a long-lasting symbol of friendship between India and Cambodia[16]. Another successful example of India's development cooperation is the irrigation development project in Lao PDR, for which India announced a US$ 17.34 million LoC in 2006[17]. The objective of the project was to increase dry-season rice yields and strengthen food security in the country. The project consisted of three components: the conversion of diesel-driven pump sets to electric-driven pump sets, the improvement of three existing pump service centers, and the installation of ten pump sets delivered to the Government of Laos. The project covered six large irrigation schemes in Champassak province, developed a command area of 2,676 hectares, and created 65.6 kilometers of canals. It also involved the installation of 10 large pump sets, the conversion of 34 diesel-driven pump sets to electric-driven pump sets across 17 sites, and the improvement of three existing pump service centers located in Pakse, Vientiane, and Savannakhet. The project contributed significantly to increasing agricultural productivity and strengthening food security in Lao PDR[18].

Table 2 shows that India has committed US$ 1.22 billion in LoCs to Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam. Power generation and transmission, particularly hydropower, account for a major share of this

Table 2: India's Lines of Credit to ASEAN Countries (US$ million)

Country	Number of LoCs	Total amount, US$ million	Major sectors / project areas
Cambodia	4	102.12	Stung Tasal project, transmission capacity, water resources development
Lao PDR	4	153.83	Irrigation schemes, transmission and distribution, hydropower, electrification, renewable energy
Myanmar	10	475.57	Optical fibre, telecommunications, railway rehabilitation, refinery renovation, vehicle plant, transmission lines, petrochemical complex, farm mechanisation and irrigation
Vietnam	6	491.50	Textile machinery, hydropower support, equipment and supplies, strategic projects
Total	24	1,223.02	Infrastructure, energy, connectivity, irrigation, telecommunications and strategic projects

Source: EXIM Bank / Ministry of External Affairs / Department of Economic Affairs, Government of India.

assistance, followed by railway and transport infrastructure to enhance regional connectivity. India has also supported agriculture, irrigation, and telecommunications projects, reflecting its commitment to energy security, rural development, food security, and connectivity. However, improving the effectiveness of LoCs requires attention not only to the volume of financing but also implementation. In the context of placing India's development cooperation projects on a faster track, there is need

to reduce by reducing cumbersome documentation and bureaucratic procedures, open branches of the EXIM Bank of India in the region and strengthen network of export credit guarantee agencies between India and Southeast and East Asian countries could improve the utilization of LoCs as well as promote trade (De, 2022).

4.2.3. Grants

Grant assistance is an important modality of India's development cooperation. At present, around US$ 4.17 billion worth of grant projects are under implementation across the Global South[19], covering various sectors, including infrastructure, power transmission, health, agriculture, hydroelectricity, and education. Unlike projects implemented under concessional finance, grant projects are provided without any repayment obligations and are primarily aimed at supporting community development, social infrastructure, capacity building, healthcare, education, cultural preservation, and livelihood enhancement. Among ASEAN member states, one of the most successful instruments of India's grant assistance is the QIPs programme (see Table 3). India's grant assistance has also contributed significantly to improving basic services and quality of life. In Cambodia, the project titled "Supply and Installation of 1,500 Hand Pumps for Augmentation of Rural Water Supply in Cambodia" was successfully completed in 2021. The project was implemented with grant assistance of US$ 10.41 million provided by India. The hand pumps were installed in the provinces of Tboung Khmum and Banteay Meanchey. The project benefited nearly 400,000 people across 433 villages and contributed to increasing access to safe drinking water, with population coverage rising from 27 per cent to 40 per cent. In Lao PDR, a US$ 1 million food fortification project, funded through the India-UN Development partnership fund, has supported nutrition and food security initiatives. Timor-Leste has also benefited from a US$ 100,000 infrastructure grant, which contributed to local development efforts. A second important dimension of India's grant-funded projects is the preservation of cultural heritage and the strengthening of civilizational linkages. Major grant-supported projects include the restoration of

Angkor Wat and Ta Prohm in Cambodia, Vat Phou in Lao PDR, Ananda Pagoda in Myanmar, and the My Son monuments in Vietnam. These projects preserve shared cultural heritage while also supporting tourism, local livelihoods and people-to-people cooperation.

Box 3: Entrepreneurship Development Initiatives in CLMV

India has established Entrepreneurship Development Centres (EDCs) in all four CLMV countries to promote entrepreneurship development and skill enhancement. The first EDC was established in Lao PDR in 2004, with the Ministry of Education and the Department of Higher Technical and Vocational Education serving as the host institutions. In Vietnam, the EDC was established in 2005 under the Ministry of Planning and Investment. Similarly, the EDC in Cambodia was established in 2006 with the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training as the host ministry, while the Myanmar-India Entrepreneurship Development Centre (MIEDC) was established in 2009 under the Ministry of Education.

These centres have not only helped create an enabling environment for entrepreneurship development but have also introduced training programmes in niche areas. The Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDII), Ahmedabad-an internationally renowned institution in entrepreneurship training, teaching, and research-was entrusted with supporting the governments of these countries in establishing and operationalizing the centres.

The EDC in Cambodia, for example, currently has 96 faculty and staff members. Its trainers are drawn from diverse fields, including finance, agriculture, livestock development, and business administration. The centre currently trains around 450 students through short-duration vocational courses and bachelor's degree programmes[20].

India recently provided grant assistance of US$ 50,000 to the Lao-India Entrepreneurship Development Centre (LIEDC) for infrastructure development. The centre has played an important role in supporting entrepreneurship in Lao PDR. The COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected the Lao economy, resulting in the closure of a large number of businesses and increased unemployment. Individuals trained at LIEDC are better positioned to establish their own enterprises and earn sustainable livelihoods[21].

The Myanmar-India Entrepreneurship Development Centre (MIEDC), Yangon, was inaugurated in 2009 by the then Vice President of India. Since its inception, the centre has trained a total of 6,644 participants. MIEDC has conducted certificate courses in Project Management, Marketing Management, Human Resource Management, Marketing Research, Leadership and Management Skills, Logistics Management, Financial Management, and Strategic Management, among others[22].
Source: Authors' compilation from various sources

A further dimension of grant assistance is capacity building and technology transfer. This includes the establishment of institutions such as the Centre for Excellence in Software Development and Training (CESDT) in Lao PDR, the Myanmar Institute of Information Technology (MIIT), and entrepreneurship development centres (see Box 3). Together, these examples show that India's grant assistance in ASEAN operates not only as financial support, but also as a means of strengthening community development, cultural cooperation, technical capacity and long-term institutional linkages.

a. Quick Impact Projects to CLMV Countries

India's QIPs have emerged as one of the most visible and community-oriented pillars of India's development partnership with ASEAN, particularly with the CLMV countries.[23] It was introduced under the MGC framework in 2012 and got operationalized from 2015 onwards, QIPs reflect India's broader *Act East Policy* and its emphasis on people-centric regional cooperation.[24] QIPs are designed as short-gestation, high-impact initiatives that directly benefit local communities through rapid delivery of essential social and civic infrastructure.

Each QIP is capped at approximately US$ 50,000 and is generally expected to be completed within one year. The projects primarily focus on sectors such as education, health, sanitation, water supply, renewable energy, agriculture, rural development, civic infrastructure, disaster

Table 3: Quick Impact Projects

Country	Projects Sanctioned	Projects Completed	Under Implementation
Cambodia	72	55	17
Lao PDR	36	30	6
Myanmar	25	NA	NA
Vietnam	65	56	10
Total	198	141	33

Source: Authors' compilation based on various official sources

resilience, and cultural preservation. Through this model, India seeks to deliver tangible developmental outcomes at the grassroots level while simultaneously strengthening people-to-people ties with ASEAN members.[25] The QIP initiative is funded through the India-CLMV Quick Impact Projects Revolving Fund, which initially began with an annual corpus of US$ 1 million. Reflecting the growing importance of the initiative, the fund was subsequently increased to US$ 1.5 million in 2018 and later expanded to US$ 2 million during the India-Vietnam Summit in 2020.[26] Cambodia has received the largest number of projects, followed by Vietnam, Lao PDR, and Myanmar.

b. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)

Over the years, India has increasingly positioned itself as a dependable "first responder" in the Indo-Pacific, capable of delivering rapid humanitarian support during natural disasters, public health emergencies, food insecurity situations, and maritime crises[27]. Under initiatives such as "Vaccine Maitri[28]," India supplied vaccines, essential medicines, oxygen support systems, and medical equipment to multiple ASEAN member states. In the case of Cambodia, vaccine distribution was undertaken under broader mechanisms like the QUAD Vaccine

Table 4: India's Humanitarian Assistance to ASEAN Countries

Sl. No.	Country	Year	HADR/Medical/Disaster Relief Supplies
1	Cambodia	2020	15 tons of flood relief material
		2022	3.25 lakh Covishield vaccine doses (under QUAD Vaccine Initiative)
2	Indonesia	2021	Deployment of Deep Submergence Rescue Vessel (DSRV) for submarine KRI Nanggala rescue operation.
			100 MT Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) and 300 Oxygen Concentrators and 10 ISO cryogenic tanks
			Cooperation in the maritime domain and Indo-Pacific initiatives under the ASEAN-India frameworks
		2025	Participation in regional disaster management and resilience mechanisms.
3	Myanmar	2020	20,000 relief kits (food + tarpaulin) for displaced people in Rakhine State
			Medical devices, equipment, medicines, oxygen plants, and oxygen tanks
		2021	10000 MT rice and 200 MT wheat
		2022	Two medical Oxygen Plants 40 tonnes of HADR and medical aid
		2023	Deployment of a 10-member medical contingent along with a medical facility under Operation Karuna in the aftermath of Cyclone Mocha
		2024	53 tonnes of HADR supplies under Operation Sadbhav during the outbreak of typhoon Yagi
			22 00 Mt of rice
		2025	52 Tons of relief material after devastating earthquake under Operation Brahma
		2026	625 MT of Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) material delivered under Operation Brahma.

4	Thailand	2021	200 Oxygen cylinders and 25 Oxygen concentrators
		2022	India, along with the Quad countries, jointly provided 2 lakh doses of the Made in India Covovax vaccine.
			52 tonnes of essential relief materials, under Operation Brahma
5	Vietnam	2020	1500 tons of relief material for flood victims in Central Vietnam
			300 Oxygen Concentrators
		2021	35 tons of supplies during Typhoon Yagi under operation Sadbhav
		2024	US$ 1 million worth humanitarian relief assistance to Vietnam under Operation Sadbhav
6	Timor Leste	2022	2000 MT rice in the aftermath of Cyclone Seroja
7	Lao PDR	2022	3 lakh Paracetamol tablets and other supplies
		2023	50,000 doses of Covovax
		2024	10 tonnes of HADR assistance under Operation Sadhbav

Source: Authors' own compilation based on MEA brief with ASEAN member states for various years

Initiative, reflecting India's growing coordination with regional and global partners in responding to humanitarian challenges.[29] Indonesia received liquid medical oxygen, oxygen concentrators, and cryogenic tanks during the severe second wave of the pandemic, while Thailand and Vietnam received medical supplies, oxygen support, and emergency healthcare assistance. India extended critical health assistance to Myanmar through the supply of oxygen plants, PPE kits, and nearly 20 million vaccine doses reflecting the humanitarian dimension of its development cooperation.

4.2.4. Trade for Development

Another important modality of the Global Development Compact, as discussed in the previous section, is trade. In the context of ASEAN-India relations, the concessional dimension of trade has strengthened economic cooperation by promoting greater trade flows and reinforcing South-South Cooperation. Increased trade between India and ASEAN has also been accompanied by investments, facilitating technology transfer and capacity building, which are essential for integration into global value chains (GVCs) and enhancing the technology intensity of exports. Market access through the Duty-Free Tariff Preference (DFTP) Scheme for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) is an important instrument for generating mutual benefits. Trade finance provided by Southern partners, currency swap agreements, and bilateral investment funds have further strengthened economic cooperation by enabling deeper economic relations. Trade facilitation and trade promotion initiatives also constitute important components of this modality.

In the ASEAN context, the DFTP scheme is relevant to three of the four CLMV countries: Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar, recognised as LDCs in the UN list.[30] The DFTP scheme provides duty-free or preferential access on around 98.2 per cent of India's tariff lines at the HS six-digit level. Under the latest structure, only 97 tariff lines remain on the exclusion list, while 115 tariff lines receive margin-of-preference treatment; all other products outside these categories are eligible for duty-free access. For Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar, this creates potential opportunities to expand exports to India, diversify export destinations and participate more actively in South-South trade linkages.

India also introduced an investment-oriented trade-for-development instrument through the Project Development Fund (PDF) for CLMV countries. The Union Cabinet approved the creation of the Fund on 31 August 2016 with a corpus of US$ 74.42 million. Its stated purpose was to catalyse India's economic presence in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam. The Fund was housed in the Department of Commerce,

operated through the Export-Import Bank of India, and governed by an Inter-Ministerial Committee chaired by the Commerce Secretary.[31]

India's trade-for-development measures with ASEAN demonstrate a layered approach. AITIGA created a reciprocal framework for trade liberalisation; the DFTP scheme provided non-reciprocal market access to ASEAN's LDC members, and the PDF sought to promote investment and regional value-chain integration across all four CLMV countries. Together, these measures show that India's engagement with ASEAN has not been limited to tariff reduction alone. It has also involved attempts to use trade, investment and production networks as instruments of development cooperation. At the same time, the actual developmental impact of these measures depends on preference utilisation, rules of origin compliance, sectoral competitiveness, project implementation and the ability of CLMV economies to translate market access into productive capacity.

4.2.5. Technology Sharing

In the context of science and technology cooperation, formal engagement between India and ASEAN began in 1996 with the establishment of the ASEAN-India Science and Technology Working Group (AIWGST). Initially, ASEAN-India S&T collaborative activities were supported through the ASEAN–India Fund. A major boost to this cooperation came in 2008, when India established a dedicated fund, namely the ASEAN-India Science and Technology Development Fund (AISTDF), to support research and development projects as well as associated project development activities[32]. The fund has a budget of US$ 5 million for development activities, jointly contributed by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST). On the Indian side, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) serves as the nodal department for the execution and implementation of ASEAN-India science and technology cooperation.[33]

India has contributed to ICT training and skill development programmes, regulatory dialogues, and the deployment of telecom and

ICT solutions across ASEAN member states. A particularly important contribution has been the establishment of Centers of Excellence in Software Development and Training in the CLMV countries. These centers support human resource development and digital capability creation in ASEAN member states. ISRO is also developing a Satellite Tracking and Data Reception Station along with a Data Processing Facility in Vietnam. This facility is designed to acquire and process remote sensing data from Indian satellites for the ASEAN region and disseminate it to member countries. By enabling access to satellite-based data and strengthening regional data-processing capabilities, this initiative reflects India's role in building technological infrastructure and enhancing space-based services for partner countries in Southeast Asia.

5. Sub-regional Cooperation

5.1. India's Engagement with ACMECS Countries

The Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) was established in 2003 as a subregional cooperation framework to promote economic cooperation and development among five countries connected by three major river systems: the Ayeyawady River in Myanmar, the Chao Phraya River in Thailand, and the Mekong River, which flows through Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Vietnam (De et al., 2020). It serves as an important platform for enhancing connectivity, narrowing development gaps, and promoting sustainable and inclusive growth across the subregion.

Development partners play a significant role in supporting the implementation of ACMECS initiatives. The current development partners include Australia, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the United States, and New Zealand, which was formally welcomed as a development partner during the 10th ACMECS Summit in November 2024. Cooperation with development partners includes resource mobilization, human resource development and capacity building, sustainable development, water-resource management, energy and food

security, climate resilience, and the implementation of prioritized projects under the ACMECS Master Plan (MFA Thailand, 2022).

5.2. India's Engagement with Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC)

Established in 2000, the MGC is one of the oldest sub-regional mechanisms in the Mekong sub-region. The initiative seeks to strengthen cooperation between India and the five Mekong countries-Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam (MEA, 2017). Initially focused on culture, tourism, education, and transport and communication, the scope of cooperation has gradually expanded to include MSMEs, public health and traditional medicine, agriculture and allied sectors, water resources management, science and technology, skill development and capacity building, conservation of rice germplasm, and QIPs[34]. One of the most visible outcomes of MGC cooperation is the MGC Museum of Traditional Asian Textiles at Siem Reap, Cambodia, established with Indian assistance in April 2014. The museum serves as a platform for preserving and promoting the shared textile heritage of the Mekong countries and India[35].

Education and capacity building constitute a major pillar of MGC cooperation. Since 2005, India has offered 50 MGC scholarships annually to students from Mekong countries for diploma and degree programmes in history and culture, tourism, information technology, vocational training, engineering, management, teacher training, film direction, and other fields. In addition, under the ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund, India has provided six scholarships for students from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam to pursue Master's programmes at Nalanda University, covering tuition fees, boarding, lodging, and travel expenses. Furthermore, 10 MGC scholarships are offered annually to Cambodia (MEA, 2025).

The 12th MGC Foreign Ministers' Meeting, held in Bangkok on 16 July 2023, reaffirmed the commitment of member countries to deepen cooperation across the ten identified areas of collaboration. To improve

implementation, the ministers agreed to adopt a lead-country approach for each sector and endorsed the establishment of the MGC business council to strengthen trade and business linkages. In 2024, India organised the first meetings of the working group on education and the working group on water resource management, both chaired by India, while the MGC business council was formally established[36].

A distinctive feature of MGC cooperation is the implementation of QIPs, which are short-gestation, community-oriented development projects designed to generate immediate and visible benefits. Since 2016, each CLMV countries has been eligible for up to 10 projects annually, with a maximum funding ceiling of US$ 50,000 per project. A total of 121 QIPs have been sanctioned under the MGC framework. In Vietnam alone, 27 Quick Impact Projects have been completed to support local community infrastructure development across different provinces. Through scholarships, institutional cooperation, cultural initiatives, working groups, business engagement, and community-level development projects, the MGC framework continues to serve as an important instrument for strengthening India's partnership with the Mekong sub-region and advancing regional connectivity, capacity building, and sustainable development[37].

6. Potential of ASEAN-India Triangular Cooperation in Global South

Triangular cooperation has gained significance as it allows developing countries to combine their own development experience with the financial, technical and institutional capacities of third partners. In the traditional understanding, triangular cooperation involves a partnership between a beneficiary country, a pivotal southern partner and a facilitating partner such as a developed country, multilateral organisation or development agency. However, in the Indo-Pacific and ASEAN context, this model is becoming more flexible. Countries such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand are no longer only recipients of development cooperation; they

are increasingly acting as providers of knowledge, technical expertise and capacity-building support to other developing countries.

India's approach to triangular cooperation has historically emphasised solidarity, mutual benefit, respect for national sovereignty, demand-driven engagement and non-conditionality. In recent years, India has sought to expand this approach through new platforms such as the Global South Centre of Excellence. In practice, India's triangular cooperation model combines Indian expertise with multilateral or third-country implementation capacity. For instance, the India-UN development partnership fund established in 2017 as a US$ 150 million fund led by the Government of India and implemented in collaboration with the UN system, it supports Southern-owned, demand-driven projects, especially in least developed countries and Small Island Developing States.[38] In Southeast Asia, this model is visible in Timor-Leste, where India supported the project "Leveraging ICT to Improve Education and Skills in Timor-Leste" through the India-UN Development Partnership Fund. The project provided more than US$ 880,000 to improve ICT skills and knowledge for over 5,000 primary and secondary school students in the Oé-Cusse region.[39]

India's participation in the IBSA[40] fund also demonstrates its triangular cooperation approach. In Vietnam, the IBSA Fund supported an innovative e-learning project for health, implemented with WHO, Hai Phong University of Medicine and Pharmacy and Vietnam's Ministry of Health. The project trained 134 district-level and 160 commune-level staff in remote areas during the pilot, with an additional 600 students enrolled in the e-learning system, which was later used for COVID-19 training.[41]In Timor-Leste, the IBSA-funded project at a cost of US$ 1.4 million on conservation agriculture, permaculture and sustainable fisheries management supported food security, sustainable livelihoods and climate resilience, with FAO and local partners involved in implementation under the supervision of Timor Leste's Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.[42]

India's partnerships also indicate the possibility of scaling such cooperation. Under the UN-India Global Capacity-Building Initiative launched in 2025 under MEA-UN cooperation. Indian institutions such as C-DAC, the National Health Authority and the National Institute of Health and Family Welfare are linked with UNDP to share Indian development practices and providing technical support. One of the first projects includes a digital health platform initiative in Lao PDR (and Zambia).[43] It illustrates a distinct channel through which Indian digital public infrastructure and health-governance experience can be transferred through multilateral triangular channels.

India's triangular cooperation with ASEAN should be understood within the wider transformation of South-South cooperation, this is particularly relevant in the ASEAN context, where countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand have developed their own approaches to triangular cooperation through partnerships with Japan, Germany, Korea, UN agencies and other development actors. Their experience creates an important basis for rethinking ASEAN-India cooperation not simply as India extending development initiatives to ASEAN member states, but as a potential partnership among Southern actors with complementary strengths.[44]

ASEAN can be seen as a platform through which India and selected ASEAN member states jointly design and deliver development solutions. In such a model, India and ASEAN member states would act as co-providers, while third partners such as Japan, Germany, France, Australia, Korea, the UN or other multilateral agencies could provide finance, technology, institutional support or implementation networks. This would create a more horizontal form of triangular cooperation, consistent with the principles of South-South cooperation while also benefiting from the resource-mobilising capacity of traditional and multilateral partners.

This approach is especially relevant for less-developed ASEAN members and other countries of the Global South because ASEAN already possesses institutional models for triangular capacity-building.

For instance, Malaysia's Third Country Training Programme (TCTP) demonstrates how a Southern country can work with external partners to train officials and professionals from other developing countries, thereby combining Malaysian development experience with the financial and technical support of partners such as JICA[45], GIZ[46] and the Islamic Development Bank. Similarly Thailand's model, implemented through TICA[47], uses training programmes, scholarships, expert exchanges and trilateral partnerships to support capacity-building in neighbouring countries.[48] India could contribute its strengths in digital public infrastructure, health systems, agriculture, renewable energy and development finance, while ASEAN partners could provide regional training platforms, local implementation experience and sector-specific expertise.

7. Advancing ASEAN-India Development Cooperation through Global and Regional Initiatives

India is a member of several multilateral and plurilateral platforms, including the G20, the United Nations, and BRICS. In addition, India has established and promoted a number of international initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), and the Global Biofuels Alliance. Through these platforms, India has articulated its perspectives on global development challenges and development cooperation. Across international forums, India has consistently advocated inclusive and equitable growth, greater representation of the Global South in international financial decision-making, and reforms in global governance institutions (MEA, 2025).

During its G20 Presidency, India highlighted the priorities and concerns of developing countries and positioned itself as a leading voice of the Global South. As the chair of BRICS in 2026, India has continued to advocate reforms in international institutions and supported the expansion of BRICS membership, including the inclusion of Indonesia as a full member and Thailand and Malaysia as partner countries. Through these engagements, India has promoted low-cost and scalable development

solutions in areas such as digital public infrastructure, healthcare, start-up ecosystems, and skill development. At the same time, India has launched several important regional initiatives, including the Neighbourhood First Policy, Act East Policy, Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions (MAHASAGAR), the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). In this context, it is important to examine ASEAN-India development cooperation through multilateral platforms that provide opportunities for collaboration and policy convergence.

7.1. International Solar Alliance (ISA)

The International Solar Alliance has emerged as an important platform for promoting ASEAN-India cooperation in renewable energy. Through ISA, India supports cooperation with ASEAN member states in solar energy deployment, technical assistance, capacity-building, and renewable energy integration. This cooperation was reflected in the ASEAN-India High-Level Conference on Renewable Energy in 2022, where India and ASEAN discussed knowledge-sharing, capacity-building, technical assistance, renewable-energy manufacturing, and grid integration (ASEAN, 2022). During the conference, ISA also presented its vision and highlighted the potential benefits of engagement with ASEAN partners. A notable ASEAN-linked example is Cambodia's ISA-supported project to solarise three schools in Koh Rong City through the installation of solar photovoltaic systems and battery energy storage facilities[49]. The project seeks to improve access to reliable electricity in educational institutions while also providing training for local communities in the operation and maintenance of the systems. Although modest in scale, the initiative demonstrates how ISA can facilitate decentralised clean-energy solutions and strengthen local capacities in ASEAN member countries[50].

7.2. Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)

The CDRI provides another important platform for India–ASEAN cooperation. It focuses on strengthening the resilience of infrastructure systems against climate and disaster-related risks. This is particularly

relevant for ASEAN, where many countries are highly vulnerable to floods, cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis, sea-level rise, and other climate-induced hazards[51]. The 2024 ASEAN-India Joint Statement recognised the importance of enhancing the resilience of infrastructure systems through knowledge-sharing, exchange of best practices, capacity-building, and technical assistance, including through CDRI[52]. The statement also highlighted cooperation between the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) and India's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) (MEA, 2024). Through such engagements, CDRI can contribute to strengthening regional preparedness and resilience while supporting ASEAN's broader sustainable development objectives[53].

8. Potential Areas for Future Development Cooperation

As Table 5 shows, the sector-wise development cooperation is based on India's development partnership with ASEAN member states. The table also identifies potential future areas of cooperation based on mutual benefits. It clearly highlights the diversity and evolving nature of India's development cooperation. As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, India's cooperation with ASEAN member states has gradually expanded from traditional areas such as education, capacity building, agriculture, healthcare, and cultural cooperation to emerging sectors including UPI, Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), Artificial Intelligence (AI), FinTech, renewable energy, and climate resilience.

Table 5 also highlights several future areas of cooperation that are important for sustainable growth. These sectors are equally important from the perspective of India's own developmental priorities and comparative advantages. Potential areas include artificial intelligence, semiconductors, renewable energy, climate resilience, digital governance, smart agriculture, blue economy, and cyber security. These emerging sectors provide significant opportunities for deepening India–ASEAN development cooperation and strengthening long-term strategic partnerships.

Table 5: Country-wise Potential Areas of Cooperation with ASEAN

Country	Existing Sectors of Cooperation	Potential Sectors for Future Development Cooperation
Malaysia	Capacity building, Higher Education, Cultural Cooperation, Traditional Medicine, Scholarships, Skill development and language Promotion	Digital Public Infrastructure, Artificial Intelligences, Digital health, Fintech, UPI, Skill development, renewable energy
Thailand	Connectivity, Capacity building, Tourism, Education, Culture, Buddhist Heritage and Health	Renewable Energy, Public Health, Finance, Supply Chain Integration, Connectivity and smart logistics, DPI and digital economy
Indonesia	Cultural cooperation, Space cooperation, Science and technology, Higher Education	Maritime Cooperation, Blue Economy, Disaster management, AI, Renewable Energy, Community Development
Myanmar	Infrastructure, Connectivity, Transport, Capacity building, Health Care, Entrepreneurship development, Agriculture	Trade facilitation, Renewable Energy, Digital Public Infrastructure, Agriculture value chain, Skill development, Humanitarian, Connectivity and Transport
Singapore	Fintech, DPI, Space Cooperation, Cyber Security, Green Economy, Trade Facilitation	AI, Semiconductor Cooperation, Quantum Technologies, Digital trade, Green Finance, Advanced Manufacturing

Table 5 continued....

Table 5 continued....

Lao PDR	Capacity Building, Irrigation, Entrepreneurship Development, Agriculture, Heritage Conservation and Telecom Infrastructure	Hydropower Cooperation, Skill development, Renewable energy, Digital governance, Climate smart agriculture, Tourism Infrastructure and food processing
Cambodia	Drinking Water, Power Transmission, Water resources, Irrigation, Heritage Conservation, IT, Local development	Digital Skill, Smart agriculture, Renewable energy, Vocational education, Women entrepreneurship development, public health
Vietnam	Hydropower, Agriculture, Cultural cooperation, Capacity building, Industrial development, Railways	Semiconductor manufacturing, Green energy Transition, digital economy, Innovation partnerships, Blue economy, AI, Supply chain resilience
Philippines	FinTech, Agriculture, Space Cooperation, Science and Technology, Capacity building, Health and Tourism	Digital payments Integration, Disaster Risk Management, Renewable Energy, Maritime Security, Blue Economy, Digital health
Brunei	Capacity building, Skill Development, Space cooperation	Energy Transition, Digital economy, Cyber Security, Finance, Renewable Energy and Higher education
Timor Leste	Healthcare, ICT, Agriculture, entrepreneurship development, Infrastructure development	Renewable Energy, Fisheries Development, Digital education, rural development, Food Security, Climate adaptation and health

Source: Author's own compilation based on Various Sources

9. Conclusion, Policy Recommendations and Way Forward

India's vision is becoming a developed country by 2047 and ASEAN in 2045. Our shared future provides an important strategic context for deepening the ASEAN-India partnership and expanding development cooperation. This chapter has shown that India's engagement with ASEAN has evolved into a broad and multi-dimensional development partnership, shaped by the Act East Policy and implemented through a combination of capacity building, concessional finance, grant assistance, Quick Impact Projects, technology cooperation and infrastructure development. Since 2015, India has provided 15,590 capacity-building and ITEC training slots, approximately US$ 1.22 billion in Lines of Credit for development projects, around 200 Quick Impact Projects in Mekong sub-region countries, and grant assistance across ASEAN member states. The growing emphasis on localisation through QIPs has been particularly significant in translating broader development objectives into visible community-level outcomes.

The analysis also demonstrates the diversity of India's development cooperation. Major initiatives include the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project in Myanmar, the Stung Tasal Dam in Cambodia, irrigation projects in Lao PDR, and industrial and agricultural projects in Vietnam, alongside cooperation in digital technologies, health, renewable energy, space, cultural heritage and human resource development. Connectivity remains a central pillar of the partnership, while emerging platforms such as the International Solar Alliance, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and the Global Biofuel Alliance provide additional avenues for cooperation in energy transition, climate resilience and sustainable development.

The chapter also highlights several areas where cooperation can be strengthened further. These include improving the implementation and operationalisation of connectivity projects, expanding capacity-building programmes, scaling up community-level development initiatives,

deepening digital and technological cooperation, strengthening coordination across multiple regional mechanisms, and mobilising more innovative forms of development finance and triangular cooperation. The following section, therefore, sets out a series of recommendations aimed at addressing these gaps and translating the growing strategic convergence between India and ASEAN into a more coordinated, scalable and outcome-oriented development partnership.

9.1. Expand Capacity Building Programmes

The establishment of IIT campuses in Malaysia and Thailand represents a significant advancement in educational cooperation. In 2024, India launched the ASEAN-India Fellowship for Higher Education in Agriculture and Allied Sciences providing for 50 fellowships over five years to strengthen expertise in agriculture and allied sectors across ASEAN. As this chapter analyses, greater emphasis should be placed on expanding capacity-building programmes. The current number of ITEC training programmes and specialised professional courses for ASEAN member states should be increased. Similarly, the ICCR scholarships should be expanded to further strengthen India-ASEAN relations.

9.2 Strengthen Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Cooperation

India's experience with Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) provides an important model for ASEAN member states. Sharing best practices in digital payments, digital identity systems, e-governance platforms, and fintech solutions can significantly strengthen existing cooperation and support digital transformation across ASEAN member states.

9.3. Scale up Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)

Localization of development is essential. In this context, scaling up Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) represents an important way forward. Increasing both the number of QIPs and the financial allocation for ASEAN member states would enable greater community-level impact. Future projects

should focus on healthcare, education, water management, women's empowerment, and climate adaptation.

9.4. Prioritise Connectivity Projects

Connectivity should remain a central pillar of ASEAN–India development cooperation. India should prioritise the timely completion of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and its proposed extension to Cambodia, Lao PDR, and VietNam (De, 2021). Existing Lines of Credit and other development financing instruments should continue to support transport corridors, border infrastructure, and logistics networks. India should also explore multimodal and digital connectivity initiatives linking Northeast India with mainland Southeast Asia to strengthen economic integration under the Act East Policy.

9.5 Deepen Cooperation in Agriculture and Food Security

Agriculture and food security represent another important area where India and ASEAN can deepen their partnership. Building on successful initiatives such as irrigation projects in Lao PDR and Cambodia and support to the Cuu Long Rice Research Institute in Vietnam, India can replicate similar successful models in other ASEAN partner countries.

9.6. Renewable Energy and Sustainable Development Cooperation

Renewable energy is another important area of cooperation. Several ASEAN member states are members of the International Solar Alliance (ISA). ASEAN member states possess solar energy potential that is nearly one hundred times greater than their existing installed capacity, creating significant opportunities for cooperation in solar energy deployment, decentralized renewable energy systems, technical assistance and capacity building. India has also successfully achieved 20 per cent ethanol blending, which offers another important area of cooperation between ASEAN and India in the biofuel sector. Development cooperation through the International Solar Alliance (ISA), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and the Global Biofuel Alliance can

further strengthen collaboration in renewable energy, climate resilience and sustainable development.

9.7. Strengthen Cooperation in Traditional Medicine and Health

Traditional medicine and healthcare provide another promising sector for enhanced ASEAN-India cooperation. The establishment of regional centres for traditional medicine research and training across ASEAN member states would further strengthen development cooperation in the health sector.

9.8. Expand Space and Technology Cooperation

Science and technology cooperation has also expanded through the dedicated funding mechanisms, including the ASEAN–India Science and Technology Development Fund (AISTDF) and the ASEAN–India Green Fund (AIGF). India initially contributed US$1 million to the AISTDF, increased its contribution to US$5 million in 2016, and provided an additional US$5 million in 2022. The ASEAN–India Green Fund, established in 2010 with an initial contribution of US$5 million, supports cooperation in climate change adaptation and mitigation. These initiatives support research, technology development, innovation, and climate-related cooperation (ASEAN Secretariat, 2025).

Existing cooperation in space technology should be further strengthened. India's successful partnerships with Indonesia and Brunei in satellite tracking and space technology provide a strong foundation. Greater emphasis should be placed on capacity-building programmes in satellite applications, remote sensing, disaster monitoring, and increasing the number of ITEC training slots in these specialised sectors.

9.9. Promote Cultural Heritage Conservation

The continuation of restoration projects at important cultural and religious heritage sites remains essential for strengthening development cooperation. Such initiatives will also promote tourism between India and ASEAN member states. Greater emphasis should also be placed on promoting Buddhist circuits and cultural exchange programmes.

9.10. Promote Innovative Partnership Models through Triangular Cooperation

Triangular Cooperation can enhance the flow of development assistance by bringing together donor countries, multilateral institutions, pivotal partners, and beneficiary countries (Kumar & Lakhiani, 2026). India and ASEAN should develop a structured framework for triangular cooperation, with third partners contributing finance, technology, and implementation support. Initial pilot projects could focus on Digital Public Infrastructure, digital health, agriculture and food security, renewable energy, climate resilience, skills development, and capacity building, with particular attention to less-developed ASEAN members countries.

9.11. Establish an ASEAN-India Development Cooperation Platform

The chapter recommends establishing a dedicated ASEAN-India Development Cooperation platform to coordinate capacity building, grant assistance, development finance, knowledge sharing, and monitoring of development outcomes. The platform should align development cooperation with the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and India's Vision 2047 of becoming a developed country.

9.12. Leverage the Global South Centre of Excellence (DAKSHIN)

The Global South Centre of Excellence (DAKSHIN), launched by India on 17 November 2023 during the Second Voice of Global South Summit, provides a dynamic platform for addressing the developmental challenges of the Global South[54]. By facilitating a two-way exchange of knowledge and experiences, DAKSHIN works with stakeholders to identify and disseminate sustainable solutions capable of transforming economies and societies across the Global South. At present, DAKSHIN has signed Letters of Association (LoAs) with 163 think tanks from 94 countries, including eight think tanks from ASEAN member states. By fostering the exchange of knowledge, evidence-based policy frameworks, and peer learning, DAKSHIN can support sustainable and inclusive development.

Endnotes

1 The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok. It currently comprises 10 member states: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Timor-Leste was granted observer status and admitted in principle as ASEAN's 11th member in November 2022 (MEA, 2025)

2 The ASEAN–India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) was signed in August 2009 and entered into force in January 2010. By August 2011, all ASEAN member states had become parties to the Agreement.

3 Refer, MEA (2026)

4 The objective of Act East Policy is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationships with countries in the Indo-Pacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels (MEA, 2022) and it was announced at the 12th ASEAN-India Summit in 2014.

5 In January 2015 set up a separate Indian Mission to ASEAN in Jakarta to strengthen engagement with ASEAN and ASEAN-centric processes (MEA, 2025).

6 https://www.mea.gov.in/speeches-statements? dtl/40229/English_Translation_of_Prime_Ministers_opening_remarks_during_the_22nd_ASEANIndia_Summit_October_26_2025

7 https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/BRIEF-ON-ASEAN-INDIA.pdf

8 https://www.mea.gov.in/speeches-statements? dtl/41060/Remarks_by_Secretary_East_at_Inaugural_Ceremony_Centre_for_Southeast_Asian_Studies_Nalanda_University_Rajgir_Bihar

9 Refer MEA (2025)

10 https://www.ris.org.in/sites/default/files/Publication/Global_Development_Compact.pdf

11 https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases?dtl/38550/Prime_Minister_addresses_G_20_session_on_Sustainable_Development_and_Energy_Transition

12 https://embindpp.gov.in/press?id=dJNDd

13 Embassy of India, Bangkok, 2022.

14 https://www.mea.gov.in/lines-of-credit-for-development-projects

15 Water and Power Consultancy Services

16 https://www.wapcos.co.in/media/docs/Publication/WAPCOS_Stung_Tasal_Dam.docx.pdf

17 https://kpl.gov.la/EN/detail.aspx?id=73

18 https://www.wapcos.co.in/media/docs/Publication/WAPCOS_CTB_21st_Aug_2024_compressed.pdf

19 https://www.mea.gov.in/grant-in-aid-projects-development-projects

20 https://embindpp.gov.in/pages?id=penRe&subid=QdJ2d

21 https://kpl.gov.la/en/detail.aspx?id=67430

22 https://embassyofindiayangon.gov.in/public_files/assets/pdf/Yangon_DC_080126.pdf

23 Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam

24 https://presoffministry.gov.mm/en/article/21485

25 https://mgc.gov.in/qip

26 https://mgc.gov.in/qip

27 https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=1&ls_id=14390&lid=8807

28 During the COVID 19

29 https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35188/Inaugural_delivery_of_Covid_Vaccines_under_the_Quads_Vaccine_Partnership

30 https://unctad.org/topic/least-developed-countries/list

31 https://www.pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=149378&reg=48&lang=2

32 Department of Science and Technology [DST], n.d.

33 https://dst.gov.in/sites/default/files/ASEAN-India%20Collabortive%20R%26amp%3BD%20_Annoucement__0.pdf

34 Refer, MEA (2015)

35 Refer, MEA (2019)

36 MEA (2024)

37 MEA (2023, 2022)

38 https://unsouthsouth.org/indiaunfund/

39 https://unsouthsouth.org/2019/07/01/improving-ict-skills-of-students-in-oe-cusse-region-timor-leste/

40 India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA)

41 https://southsouth-galaxy.org/solutions/detail/innovative-e-learning-approach-for-health/

42 https://www.indembassydili.gov.in/page/bilateral-relations/

43 https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl% 2F39933%2FLaunch_of_Projects_under_India_UN_Global_Capacity_Building_Initiative=

44 https://www.ris.org.in/sites/default/files/Publication/southern-perspective-on-triangular-cooperation.pdf

45 Japan International Cooperation Agency

46 Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

47 Thailand International Cooperation Agency

48 https://www.ris.org.in/sites/default/files/Publication/southern-perspective-on-triangular-cooperation.pdf

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51 https://ndmindia.mha.gov.in/ndmi/leadership-initiatives

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53 http://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/82024J1.pdf

54 Prime Minister's Office, 2023

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FIDC, has been engaged in exploring nuances of India's development cooperation programme, keeping in view the wider perspective of South-South Cooperation in the backdrop of international development cooperation scenario. It is a tripartite initiative of the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, academia and civil society organisations.

Forum for Indian Science Diplomacy

FISD aims to harness the full potential and synergy between science and technology, diplomacy, foreign policy and development cooperation in order to meet India's development and security needs. It is also engaged in strengthening India's engagement with the international system and on key global issues involving science and technology.

As part of its work programme, RIS has been deeply involved in strengthening economic integration in the South Asia region. In this context, the role of the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS) is very important. SACEPS is a network organisation engaged in addressing regional issues of common concerns in South Asia.

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The focus of the work programme of RIS is to promote South-South Cooperation and collaborate with developing countries in multilateral negotiations in various forums. RIS is engaged across inter-governmental processes of several regional economic cooperation initiatives. Through its intensive network of think tanks, RIS seeks to strengthen policy coherence on international economic issues and the development partnership canvas.

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