

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Calling Planet Earth - Space Outreach to the General Public (6)

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CONNECTING SPACE WITH CITIZENS OF ASEAN: A SOCIAL AND POLICY ECOSYSTEM FOR
SUSTAINABLE SPACE DEVELOPMENT

Abstract

Emerging space countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have the chance to define for themselves what it means to engage in off-Earth initiatives. Most established space powers began space activities with a strong focus on government and defence. On the other hand, in order to grow sustainable space ecosystems in developing ASEAN countries, it appears crucial to emphasise and plan for two-way linkage between domestic space actors and the general public. ASEAN is unique in the intensity of its regular natural disasters, and in the fragmentation of its geographical and socio-economic landscape. There is a strong dual connection between ordinary citizens and space development because: (i) potential benefits from space technologies stand to increase not only quality of life by bridging gaps in connectivity, but also likelihood of survival, and (ii) anchoring vulnerable new space activities within broad public engagement may increase resilience in the face of actual and figurative storms ahead.

However, it is challenging for local policymakers new to the space field to develop practical methods for public engagement. One reason is a lack of accessible resources on the topic. This important issue was brought up in discussions by the next generation of regional space leaders at the 6th Asia-Pacific Space Generation Workshop (AP-SGW) in November 2019, and by government stakeholders in Cambodia during a recent University of Tokyo space capacity-building project. In response, this paper provides an overview of (i) motivations and (ii) methods to achieve a sustainable space development ecosystem supportive of bi-directional linkage between the public and domestic space stakeholders, in the ASEAN context. The work is based on a wide-ranging review of practical case studies in ASEAN and in space powers overseas, and highlights links to ten of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

First, the paper presents the benefits of connecting the general public with space in ASEAN. Five key motivations are identified: to grow the wider economy beyond space; to legitimise and stabilise national spending on space; to strengthen the national "brand" of space development; to democratise access to space; and to promote constructive communication on space utilisation.

Then, four considerations are proposed to construct a sustainable public-centred ecosystem for space development: to promote gender diversity in infrastructure for knowledge-building and sharing; to enhance regional cooperation based on existing frameworks; to develop an inspiring space popular culture based on local roots; and to foster two-way communication via locally-tailored media.