



## Mandate Spotlight: 020 ASEAN ACCP

## Strengthening Consumer Protection in ASEAN

**Location:** ASEAN

**Beneficiaries:** ASEAN Committee on Consumer Protection

**Consultant:** Greentech Asia

**Start:** Feb. 2021

**End:** Mar. 2022

**CTIF Contribution:** CAD \$149,780

### Context

As ASEAN member state economies develop rapidly, they face various challenges, and ASEAN Committee on Consumer Protection (ACCP) has the task of developing effective consumer protection guidelines. Product injury reporting systems provide a wide range of benefits for all levels of society. They provide public health benefits by informing strategies to reduce the risk of harm, particularly for vulnerable individuals, such as children. Consumer confidence is improved as well as best practices and ultimately competitiveness for compliant firms. The data collected can be an important tool for policymakers to develop evidence-based policy.

The status of product injury surveillance regimes varies significantly across ASEAN member states. A key challenge will be to develop a system that balances robustness with ease of implementation and recognition of ASEAN diversity. Consensus and capacity building are essential features of a successful injury reporting database. The experience and successes of ASEAN mean it is well-positioned to lead the development of such a regional reporting database.

Gender differences and their implications are a major theme and cross-cutting issue in the consumer policy and protection research over the last two decades in Canada, other OECD economies, emerging market and developing economies as well as in the research of international institutions, including OECD, UNCTAD, and the World Bank. It is worth noting. However, the gender-based analysis of consumer reporting systems is limited. Incorporating gender considerations at the genesis of an ASEAN product injury reporting system provided a significant opportunity for improving efficacy, providing better information for policymakers, and establishing ASEAN as a leader in this area. These considerations form the context for developing a framework for an ASEAN Product Incident Alert System that incorporates best practices for product-related injury and consumer rights protection with special considerations for gender dynamics and environmental factors.

### Brief Description of the Mandate

CTIF consultant GreenTech Asia, working with the ACCP, in collaboration with the Competition, Consumer Protection and Intellectual Property Rights Division (CCPID) of the ASEAN Secretariat, conducted research and developed a framework for consumer protection in ASEAN. The project helped advance the implementation of the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan on Consumer Protection 2016-2025 and is linked to the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025, which envisions comprehensive and well-functioning national and regional consumer protection systems established and enforced through effective legislation, redress mechanisms and public awareness.

### Selected Key Findings and Recommendations

- The **implementation of the Framework** developed under this mandate, which ACCP will oversee, provides ASEAN consumers with the opportunity to file injury reports that feed into a central database shared across ASEAN member states. The Framework protects consumers and informs policymakers of consumer protection regulations or actions they must take.
- The mandate built the capacity of the ACCP along with other regional sectoral bodies that the ACCP worked with, such as the ASEAN Consultative Committee on Standards and Quality (ACCSQ), in considering ways to **integrate gender into their regional consumer protection initiatives** and/or relevant national regulations.
- The **regular collection and assessment of sex-disaggregated data on product-related injuries** by consumer protection agencies at the national and regional levels contribute toward the implementation and

realization of the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan on Consumer Protection 2016-2025 and the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025, which envisions comprehensive and well-functioning national and regional consumer protection systems established and enforced through effective legislation, redress mechanisms and public awareness.

### Environment & Climate Change

Environmental considerations were reflected under the issues of sustainable consumption, consumer concerns about their carbon footprint and the negative impacts for them of climate change, and product safety standards in the literature review and surveys that informed the development of the framework.

The interviews/surveys of ASEAN consumer protection stakeholders included questions on the environment and sustainable consumption. The survey indicated considerable interest in but little direct experience with these topics and issues from the perspective of consumer protection and product safety. The outcomes of the interviews/survey equip the beneficiary with key foundations for including environment and climate change issues within their respective consumer protection initiatives and/or regulations.

### Gender and Social Inclusion

The responses to the interview questions demonstrated gender and vulnerability are important issues that require more attention and study by ASEAN and its ten member states. This also reflects a global challenge in addressing women's role as key consumers, including in advanced consumer protection regimes that improve on the limitations of their existing counterparts.

The literature review demonstrated the complex interactions between gender, consumer vulnerability, consumer protection injury and related harm, environmental protection, and consumer stability issues that should be receiving greater attention in future ASEAN consumer research. The resulting Framework was informed by key insights, such as differentiating consumer behaviours across genders, the critical role of women in managing household products and products for children, and the ASEAN commitments to gender, diversity and the environment as part of broader regional economic integration initiatives.

### Follow-up Support

Following the conclusion of the mandate, a key recommendation from CTIF's consultant is to provide technical assistance to support the next steps in the Product Injury Framework, including product hazard and risk assessment systems. Simultaneously, technical assistance could be provided to further develop aspects of the Product Injury Reporting System, specifically the systems development and introduction to each ASEAN member state, as well as capacity building for government representatives.

### Testimonials

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*"We would like to thank GTAsia for providing the TA for this project...the effort put into research, investigation, and formulating the guidelines all through online means is quite good, especially the online or over-the-phone interviews made with individual officials...We do hope that we can ...launch a system that would [implement] the framework very soon."*

*- ASEAN Secretariat staff involved in the mandate's implementation*

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Figure 1: Validation Workshop, November 2021



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