

## The Role of Indonesia in Strengthening the Concept of “We Feeling” and ASEAN Identity in the 2023 ASEAN Chairmanship



Diva Devina Dewanto<sup>1</sup>, Hendra Maujana Saragih<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bachelor of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Nasional

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Nasional

**ABSTRACT:** This research explores Indonesia's role as the Chair of ASEAN in 2023 in promoting the concept of "We Feeling" and revitalizing the collective identity of ASEAN. Through a comprehensive analysis of Indonesia's diplomatic efforts, the policy framework it has implemented, and its active engagement at the regional level during its tenure as ASEAN Chair, this study reveals Indonesia's key role in strengthening the sense of unity, common goals, and solidarity among ASEAN member states. The research also investigates the strategies employed by Indonesia to facilitate open dialogue, enhance intra-regional cooperation, and address common challenges with the ultimate goal of reinforcing the spirit of the united ASEAN community, known as the ASEAN Community. Furthermore, this abstract explains the significance of the concept of ASEAN Centrality and Indonesia's crucial role in upholding it during its ASEAN Chairmanship. This study provides a profound understanding of Indonesia's role in guiding ASEAN toward a more cohesive, united, and relevant future. The concept of "We Feeling" serves as the foundation for these efforts, fostering closer relationships among member states and reflecting upon ASEAN's collective identity in the context of increasingly close regional cooperation.

**KEYWORDS:** Indonesia's Chairmanship 2023, we feeling, ASEAN Centrality, ASEAN Community

### INTRODUCTION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on August 8, 1967, through the signing of the Bangkok Declaration by representatives from five Southeast Asian governments. These representatives included Tun Abdul Razak, serving as Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister; Adam Malik, the Foreign Minister of Indonesia; Thanat Koman from Thailand; Narcisco Ramos from the Philippines; and S. Rajaratman from Singapore. The formation of this alliance was essentially a political statement to strengthen the independence of each member country from superpower influence while simultaneously legitimizing the sovereignty of member states in achieving stability in the Southeast Asian region. Stability was expected to be achieved through economic and socio-cultural cooperation, as well as the promotion of peace at the regional level. The ASEAN Declaration also emphasized that the organization is open to the participation of other countries in the Southeast Asian region, provided these countries share the same commitment to ASEAN's cooperation goals (DEPLU, 2008). As of 2021, ASEAN consists of 10 members: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. At the conclusion of the ASEAN Summit in 2022, Timor-Leste was agreed in principle to become the eleventh member of ASEAN.

Indonesia is often seen as the natural leader in ASEAN due to factors such as its large geographic size, a substantial population, and active role in regional diplomacy. However, it is important to note that ASEAN is an organization based on the principle of equality among its members, and each member country has a different role and contribution within this framework. As the natural leader, Indonesia bears significant responsibility for maintaining stability and cooperation in the ASEAN region.

Indonesia has served as the Chair of ASEAN officially three times (1976, 2003, 2011) and has achieved milestones that have propelled ASEAN's progress. Achievements from previous ASEAN Chairmanship Summits include the establishment of the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, with Indonesia providing the first Secretary, and the formulation of action plans covering cooperation in politics, economics, social affairs, culture, security, and the enhancement of ASEAN mechanisms. The Bali Concord I agreed to the formation of the ASEAN Community with three pillars, Bali Concord II contributed to the concept of the ASEAN community with three pillars, and Bali Concord III led to the agreement on the ASEAN Community Roadmap for 2015, including the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community. Indonesia holds a crucial role as the Chair of ASEAN in 2023,

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with the theme "Indonesia Chairmanship ASEAN 2023: ASEAN Matters: Epicenterum of Growth." Indonesia is committed to guiding ASEAN towards ASEAN 2045, emphasizing adaptability, responsiveness, and competitiveness, all in line with the ASEAN way and the principles of the ASEAN Charter. "ASEAN Matters" signifies Indonesia's intention to make ASEAN essential and relevant to ASEAN citizens and the world. "Epicenterum of Growth" signifies Indonesia's ambition to position ASEAN as the center of regional and global economic growth. As the Chair, Indonesia aims to strengthen economic recovery and make Southeast Asia a sustainable engine of global growth.

The concept of ASEAN Centrality has strategic goals, emphasizing the centrality that benefits ASEAN's position. By placing ASEAN at the core of the regional order, the relevance of ASEAN is ensured. Normative goals in terms of ASEAN Centrality are understood in the priority of core beliefs and identity within ASEAN. The principles of inclusivity and openness enable the creation of shared understanding, positioning ASEAN as a neutral and secure platform in negotiating the regional order. The close relationships with other countries allow ASEAN to leverage networks to advance its interests. These networks are realized through various meetings where ASEAN drives the agenda in regional multilateral platforms. By setting the agenda, ASEAN can maintain and strengthen its centrality, enhancing ASEAN's capacity to shape the regional order. This influence leads to a leadership role inherent in ASEAN's position in the structural network (Caballero-Anthony, 2014).

As the Chair of ASEAN, Indonesia has the opportunity to lead and shape crucial agendas related to regional and global issues. Indonesia's role as the Chair includes facilitating dialogue among ASEAN members, coordinating various initiatives, and encouraging close cooperation among member states. With the largest size in ASEAN and a strategically important geostrategic position, Indonesia is expected to act as a connector and mediator in reconciling various interests among ASEAN members. In its role as the Chair in 2023, Indonesia can also strengthen the concept of socialization to ensure that the ASEAN people have a sense of unity as a leader actively contributing to peace, stability, and prosperity in Southeast Asia and globally.

The formation of a shared identity in the region based on shared norms and values is expected to evoke a sense of togetherness (we feeling). In realizing this feeling, a sense of community from ASEAN member countries is required, reflecting the establishment of the ASEAN Community as a development institution, a significant step that depends on a shared vision and culture. Efforts to establish the ASEAN Community reflect the importance of providing more space for people's participation, as recognized in the ASEAN Community Vision 2015. ASEAN member states also realize that two essential elements must be present to achieve the formation of a civilized community, namely a feeling of togetherness and a sense of belonging. Thus, this article discusses Indonesia's role in the Chairmanship of ASEAN 2023 by advancing the concept of we feeling and how Indonesia can redefine ASEAN's identity as the Chair in ASEAN 2023.

Given the background outlined above, the researchers formulated the research problem: How does Indonesia, as the Chair of ASEAN in 2023, strengthen the we feeling and ASEAN's identity?

The researchers reviewed three journal articles authored by Rakotomalala Hanitrianiaina Stephanie, Mely Caballero-Anthony, Novita H. Sari, and Irma Indrayani. The first journal article by Mely Caballero-Anthony, titled "Understanding ASEAN's Centrality: Based and Prospects in an Evolving Regional Architecture," provides an analysis of ASEAN's centrality from the perspective of social network approach. The article argues that ASEAN's structural position in the density of networks it has built and networks with interconnections explains ASEAN's centrality. Despite lacking material power, ASEAN can claim centrality due to its position as a node in a group of networks, allowing it to exert influence in the regional process with the silent acceptance of major countries. However, while centrality may have been achieved, maintaining centrality in a rapidly changing regional environment will force ASEAN to address challenges to its centrality (Caballero-Anthony, 2014).

### METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, where data is collected in the form of words rather than numerical figures. Qualitative research is a methodological procedure that yields descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from individuals and observed behaviors. Additionally, descriptive research is a form of investigation aimed at depicting or illustrating existing phenomena, encompassing both natural and human-engineered phenomena (Sugiyono, 2016). The qualitative type within the field of International Relations explores phenomena and actors to comprehend the processes and occurrences in the international arena. The researcher utilizes secondary data for this study (Bakry, 2016). The selection of data sources by the researcher includes journals, scholarly articles, library resources such as books, videos, and accurate news related to "The Role of Indonesia in Strengthening the Concept of We Feeling and ASEAN Identity in the ASEAN Chairmanship of 2023."

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The term '*logocentric*' encapsulates the concept of "*we feeling*" in ASEAN, denoting a shared identity among member states. In this context, a common identity is constructed through a shared understanding of regional phenomena and agreements on specific ideas. This reflects the logocentric principle, emphasizing identical consciousness, where a group of people shares the same awareness of the regional realities in ASEAN. Furthermore, there is a relevant principle of interpretation associated with the

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development of the "we feeling" concept in ASEAN. Within the ASEAN framework, this identical consciousness leads to interpretations developed by a group of individuals or member states. These interpretations involve a shared understanding of how they perceive the role and objectives of ASEAN in the regional context. Over time, these interpretations evolve into a common interpretation or shared understanding accepted by all ASEAN member states. Thus, the interpretation principle helps explain how the "we feeling" concept can flourish in ASEAN, where identical consciousness and shared interpretation strengthen unity and cooperation among member states.

In the ASEAN context, the "*we feeling*" concept reflects identical consciousness among member states. In this regard, ASEAN countries comprehend and agree on specific ideas that form the basis of their shared identity. The logocentric principle emphasizes identical consciousness, which is the foundation of the "*we feeling*" in ASEAN. In ASEAN, this identical consciousness leads to interpretations developed by a group of individuals or member states. These interpretations result from a shared understanding of the role and objectives of ASEAN in the regional context. Over time, these interpretations develop into a broader shared understanding accepted and adopted by all ASEAN member states. The interpretation principle helps explain how the "we feeling" concept grows and strengthens in ASEAN, where identical consciousness and shared understanding become pillars for unity and cooperation throughout the ASEAN region. In other words, this concept explains how ASEAN member states feel united and collaborate as a strong regional entity.

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), one of the three pillars of ASEAN, plays a crucial role in implementing the "*we feeling*" concept across the ASEAN region. The main goal of ASCC is to strengthen and advance the social, cultural, and human dimensions of ASEAN cooperation. Its primary focus is to build a united, inclusive, and sustainable ASEAN community. In this context, ASCC aims to strengthen and advance the social, cultural, and human dimensions of ASEAN cooperation. One of its roles is to reinforce the ASEAN identity among the populations of member states. This is achieved through various promotional efforts and a shared understanding of culture, history, traditions, and cultural diversity in ASEAN. Through this shared understanding, individuals and ASEAN member states begin to develop an identical awareness of the role and objectives of ASEAN in the regional context. One key point is to strengthen the ASEAN identity. Through cultural promotion, ASCC seeks to build a sense of unity among member states. This creates a deeper understanding of shared identity, crucial for achieving ASEAN integration goals.

Furthermore, ASCC focuses on enhancing social well-being in ASEAN by promoting fair and equal access to healthcare, education, employment, housing, and other social services. This creates a sense of equality and justice among ASEAN member states, an essential aspect of the "we feeling" concept. Thus, ASCC plays a key role in strengthening unity, shared identity, and cooperation in ASEAN, forming the foundation of the "we feeling" concept that supports integrity and unity throughout the ASEAN region. ASCC contributes to improving Social Welfare in ASEAN. Efforts to promote fair and equal access to healthcare, education, employment, housing, and other social services are integral to this agenda. By reducing social and economic inequalities among member states, ASCC contributes to regional stability and strengthens the "*we feeling*" in ASEAN. Cultural Diversity is also a primary focus of ASCC, including the promotion of arts, literature, and performances, as well as the preservation of cultural heritage and historical sites. In a region rich in cultural diversity like ASEAN, understanding and appreciating cultural differences are crucial steps in strengthening unity. This diversity is a significant attraction of ASEAN, and ASCC helps preserve it.

ASCC is also committed to improving the well-being of children and families in ASEAN. This includes child protection, child education, and the promotion of gender equality. In developing societies like ASEAN, the protection and empowerment of children and families are crucial. These efforts also create a deeper sense of unity among member states. Women's empowerment is a vital component of the ASCC agenda. By supporting women's participation in decision-making, providing equal access to education and economic opportunities, and eliminating violence against women, ASCC contributes to promoting gender equality in ASEAN. This is also a significant step in strengthening the "we feeling" among member states. Finally, environmental protection is a crucial issue emphasized by ASCC. Protecting and conserving the environment in the ASEAN region, including water management, waste, nature conservation, and climate change mitigation, are global challenges that must be addressed collectively. ASCC ensures that environmental issues receive due attention, creating a shared awareness of the importance of preserving the natural environment and promoting cooperation across ASEAN to protect our planet. Overall, ASCC is not only a crucial pillar in the social and cultural development of ASEAN but also plays a key role in strengthening the "we feeling" concept among member states. By understanding and appreciating a shared identity, reducing inequalities, and promoting cultural diversity and environmental sustainability, ASCC creates a strong foundation for closer unity and cooperation in ASEAN.

Through collaboration in ASCC, ASEAN countries strive together to shape a fair, inclusive, and sustainable society in the ASEAN region. By emphasizing the social, cultural, and human resource dimensions, ASEAN aspires to achieve equitable and comprehensive development across its entire region. Introduced in 2003 as part of the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community 2009-2015, ASCC has been implemented in several stages. Its goal is to strengthen ASEAN cooperation in social, cultural, and humanitarian issues. By achieving the set targets, ASCC hopes to shape a fair, inclusive, and sustainable ASEAN community. In

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this community, it is expected that every citizen can enjoy an improved quality of life and have equal access to opportunities and development benefits.

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) plays a vital role in implementing the "we feeling" concept in ASEAN. Here are ASCC's key roles in fostering "we feeling" among member states:

1. **Promoting ASEAN Identity:** ASCC aims to strengthen the ASEAN identity among member state populations. This involves efforts to understand and appreciate the culture, history, traditions, and cultural diversity in ASEAN. By promoting this shared identity, ASCC helps build "we feeling" among ASEAN residents, connecting them as part of a regional community.
2. **Enhancing Social Well-being:** A primary focus of ASCC is improving the social welfare of ASEAN communities. This includes ensuring fair and equal access to healthcare, education, employment, housing, and other social services for all ASEAN residents. By creating a more just social condition, ASCC contributes to enhancing the quality of life and welfare of ASEAN residents, strengthening solidarity and "we feeling."
3. **Supporting Cultural Diversity:** ASCC values and promotes cultural diversity among ASEAN countries. This includes the promotion of arts, literature, performances, and the preservation of cultural heritage and historical sites. By respecting and promoting this cultural diversity, ASCC helps create an environment where member states feel connected through an appreciation for diverse cultures in the ASEAN region.
4. **Empowering Women and Children:** ASCC is committed to protecting the rights of children and improving the well-being of women in ASEAN. This involves child protection, child education, gender equality promotion, and women's participation in decision-making. By advocating for women and children's empowerment, ASCC plays a role in creating a more inclusive and fair society in ASEAN.
5. **Increasing Community Awareness:** ASCC contributes to raising awareness among ASEAN communities about social, cultural, and environmental issues. Through education programs, advocacy, and cultural exchanges, ASCC helps build a better understanding of critical issues in ASEAN. This can strengthen the "we feeling" among ASEAN residents who become more conscious of their shared concerns.

In the context of the ASEAN High-Level Conference 2023, ASCC plays a crucial role in strengthening the social, cultural, and human dimensions of ASEAN cooperation. As the ASEAN 2023 Summit Chair, Indonesia has contributed to instilling the "we feeling" concept in the region. Specifically:

1. **Joint Proposal on UNESCO Nomination:** Indonesia, along with four other ASEAN nations, proposed to UNESCO to designate the kebaya as the nomination for the year 2023. This joint effort aims to enhance cultural collaboration and reinforce the "we feeling" among ASEAN member states. Indonesia, as the ASEAN 2023 Summit Chair, further supports this initiative by organizing a workshop titled "Proposal of Kebaya as Joint Nomination 2023." The workshop promotes collaboration in preparing the nomination script and strengthens the sense of solidarity and cooperation among ASEAN nations.
2. **Supporting Timor Leste's ASEAN Membership:** Indonesia's efforts to assist Timor Leste in becoming an ASEAN member through a civil servant training program reflect a significant contribution to strengthening the "we feeling" in ASEAN. This aligns with Indonesia's role as the ASEAN 2023 Summit Chair, fostering deep solidarity and cooperation among member states. These actions support the social well-being, shared identity, and community awareness aspects promoted by ASCC in ASEAN.
3. **Empowering Women and Children:** Indonesia, as the ASEAN 2023 Chair, organized the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) and the High-Level Dialogue Conference in Yogyakarta. This initiative aims to advance the implementation of regional action plans for women, peace, and security. In line with women's empowerment, the agenda will take place in Yogyakarta from July 3-7, 2023. Indonesia encourages sharing best practices in empowering women, emphasizing their crucial role in building peace and security within ASEAN.

These initiatives not only enrich cultural diversity but also create a sense of equality and support among ASEAN member states, reinforcing the "we feeling" as a core principle in regional cooperation.

### CONCLUSION

In the context of Indonesia's role as the Chair of ASEAN in 2023, the discussed efforts illustrate Indonesia's commitment to advancing the "we feeling" concept in ASEAN. As mentioned earlier, Indonesia plays a role in shaping a new identity for ASEAN member states through the promotion of cultural cooperation, appreciation for diversity, and empowerment of women and children. Indonesia's actions in preparing Timor Leste for ASEAN membership are also a concrete example of how Indonesia strives to strengthen the "we feeling" in the region.

It is important to remember that ASEAN is an organization based on the principle of equality among its members, with each member state having distinct roles and contributions within this framework. However, due to Indonesia's significant size in



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ASEAN and its strategic position, it has the potential to serve as a bridge and mediator in uniting various interests among ASEAN members. As the Chair of the ASEAN 2023 Summit, Indonesia has the opportunity to reinforce the "we feeling" concept in its role as an active regional leader contributing to peace, stability, and prosperity in Southeast Asia and worldwide.

To realize this sense of community, a collective effort from ASEAN member states is required. The establishment of the ASEAN Community reflects ASEAN's efforts to forge a stronger and more unified identity. While challenges persist in implementing more inclusive regionalism within the context of national sovereignty, concrete steps such as the "Proposal of Kebaya as Joint Nomination 2023" workshop and the civil servant training program for Timor Leste contribute significantly to solidifying the "we feeling" concept in ASEAN. Thus, Indonesia's role in implementing the "we feeling" is a crucial foundation in strengthening ASEAN's identity and unity in the context of increasingly close regional cooperation.

For the next ASEAN chairmanship, aiming to reinforce the "we feeling" and ASEAN identity, several suggestions should be considered. First, enhancing cultural exchanges among ASEAN member states is crucial to deepen shared understanding and stimulate solidarity. Additionally, regional educational programs should be promoted to help the younger generation comprehend ASEAN's values and goals. Cooperation in addressing pressing regional issues needs to be intensified, alongside leveraging modern communication technology to raise public awareness of ASEAN. The next ASEAN chair should also commit to the principle of ASEAN Centrality in international relations, boost public diplomacy campaigns, forge strong collaborations with external partners, and take an active role in global issues. All these efforts will contribute to strengthening the "we feeling" and ASEAN identity, preserving ASEAN's position as a united regional force.

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