



# Sustainable Mining: The ASEAN Perspectives



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## Abstract

Southeast Asia is among the major markets in the global mining industry. With the populations of more than 600 million, the region has a large industry base that can offer vast opportunities in intra-investment and trade in the region's rich mineral resources. This region has been struggling with the implementation of sustainable mining concept. In this paper, key aspects, the regional promotion of environmental and social responsibility as well as the adoption and implementation of technology that create high value for mining industry in Southeast Asia are suggested.

**Keywords:** Sustainability; Mining; Southeast Asia; ASEAN

## Introduction

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the socio-political collaboration among ten countries in the Southeast Asia. Mining industry has been among one of the major contributors to the growth of this region. In fact, minerals will progressively become one of regional most important growth engines. At regional level, the industry has a critical role to play in assisting ASEAN in meeting the ASEAN Economic Community's 2025 target, including regional sustainability. The industry obviously bolsters ASEAN's economic activities by supplying essential primary raw materials for society and industry [1]. Indeed, infrastructure, building, and manufacturing industries would be unable to function in an economy without an adequate and consistent supply of minerals. Mining industry also plays a pivotal role in the development of economy and human security at the national level. For instance, oil and gas incomes in Brunei make for more than 85% of the government revenues. In a small country, such as Timor-Leste, earnings from the extractive industry cover more than 90% of the national budget. Myanmar has also become the major player in the regional extractive industry.

What remains important for the region is how to promote policies and practices regarding sustainable mining among all countries in Southeast Asia. Some examples include best practices in Malaysia and Vietnam. The Government in Malaysia is planning to use automation and sustainable practices such as the use of remote-control hybrid excavators to reduce pollution and increase

safety in the mining industry. In order to take action regarding sustainable mining, the ASEAN Mineral Cooperation Action Plan (AMCAP) was established among ASEAN members. One of its major responsibilities is the promotion of environmentally and socially sustainable minerals development among stakeholders in the region. It is suggested that, in order to achieve what is set as goals for the sustainable mining policies and practices, stakeholders in Southeast Asia should focus on the promotion and facilitation of intra- and extra-ASEAN trade and investment in the mining sector. In so doing, the condition on the implementation of innovation and technology that enhance environmental and social responsibility by mining companies must be included at the regional level. At present, the fragmentation in policies regarding the integration of social and environmental responsibility contribute to the discrepancy in regional action towards the achievement of sustainable mining.

More importantly, there should be a clear regional framework on sustainable production that promotes novelty in technology and creates high value of natural resources to the region. At present, we have witnessed various upstream activities in mining industry in the region. Trade partners with ASEAN such as China, Australia, and the US tend to enjoy more benefits because of the application of high technology in the downstream process. ASEAN countries, therefore, should be more innovative in creating technology aiming at the development of related downstream operations, such as smelters and refineries, to gain more value

added from their natural resources. This aspect certainly will create economic sustainability to the region in the long run [2]. Finally, the ever-growing demand for natural resources, the consumption of resources needed to extract and process the mined material, and the increasing pollution caused by the extraction process remain the key obstacles to mining industry sustainability in Southeast Asia and worldwide. The regional framework aiming at the promotion of environmentally friendly technologies is the way to go. Incentives for mining companies in Southeast Asia to implement more creative ideas and cleaner technologies into their operations in a more cost-effective manner

would boost the mining industry's competitiveness while also upholding high environmental requirements.

Sustainable mining is and will be an important aspect of ASEAN community development, offering direct and indirect benefits to local, national, and regional economies.

### References

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