

The state of social enterprise in South East Asia

February 2021



Executive summary

- The British Council has worked with Social Enterprise UK, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and others to map the state of social enterprise over the past few years in **Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Malaysia; the Philippines; Singapore; Thailand and Viet Nam**.



- This report aims to bring evidence together to provide comparisons between social enterprises operating in the South East Asian region and the **two regional centres of finance, Singapore and Hong Kong, China**, to highlight commonalities and differences, patterns and challenges. This study also considers the policy and support ecosystems for social enterprise in many countries, draws conclusions and makes recommendations based on the evidence.
- These studies draw on survey data from thousands of organisations across the region. Of course, each country and territory is different and the survey approaches were slightly different in every place, while definitions and understanding of social enterprise vary across the Asian region.

This research paints a picture of social enterprises in the region:

- Social enterprise has grown in popularity since the 1970s, but co-operatives go back decades and organisations with a commitment to a social purpose, which trade in markets and reinvest profits in their purpose, are not entirely a new phenomenon in South East Asia.
- Research led by the British Council around the world has included efforts to estimate the number of social enterprises in each country. It is challenging to calculate with confidence but the data suggests potentially up to a million social enterprises across the region.



- Across Asia, governments have been developing policies and strategies to support the development of social enterprise, including specialist units or offices, legislation, incentives, awards and more. In some countries, the support ecosystem – of policymakers, enablers and capacity builders, networks, platforms and facilitators, membership bodies, funders and financiers, and higher education – is relatively mature, while often dynamic, complex and growing.

- Social Enterprises are delivering impact locally and trading regionally and globally



- recognising themselves and identifying as social enterprises, while taking a wide variety of legal forms

- often young and small businesses



- often creating jobs for women more than other businesses more widely, often led by young people and relatively **much more likely to be led by women**

- Social Enterprises have diverse objectives and working for a wide range of beneficiaries but **often focused on working to improve a particular community**, often disadvantaged or marginalised by society, creating jobs, opportunities and accessible services for vulnerable people;

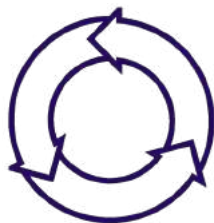


- **balancing** social and financial with the need to achieve financial stability, and taking steps to measure their social impact



- working across all sectors of the economy, from:

AGRICULTURE
ARTS
CULTURE
HERITAGE



EDUCATION
FOOD
HEALTH &
MANUFACTURING

- attracting grants and investment from a diverse range of sources
- making a profit, breaking even and making a loss, like all other businesses
- **creating jobs**, often faster than other businesses, often **optimistic and have plans to grow**



- facing a number of barriers when seeking to access finance and more widely, including staff and talent



- significantly affected by the Covid-19 crisis, with many reducing their activity and making them more pessimistic about future growth.



About British Council



The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. The British Council's cultural relations approach to development encourages work with people and communities closest to local contexts, fosters partnerships and relationships building on equal terms, and promotes trust and understanding for social cohesion and inclusive growth worldwide. It also recognises the transformative power of arts and culture in contributing to more inclusive and creative economies and societies for sustainable development.

About ESCAP



The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) serves as the United Nations' regional hub promoting cooperation among countries to achieve inclusive and sustainable development. The largest regional intergovernmental platform with 53 Member States and 9 associate members, ESCAP has emerged as a strong regional think-tank offering countries sound analytical products that shed insight into the evolving economic, social and environmental dynamics of the region. The Commission's strategic focus is to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is reinforced and deepened by promoting regional cooperation and integration to advance responses to shared vulnerabilities, connectivity, financial cooperation and market integration. ESCAP's research and analysis coupled with its policy advisory services, capacity building and technical assistance to governments aims to support countries' sustainable and inclusive development ambitions.

About Social Enterprise UK



Social Enterprise UK is the biggest network of social enterprises in the UK and a leading global authority on social enterprise. Our membership is a network that includes all the leading lights of the UK social enterprise movement from multimillion-pound healthcare and public service providers to community organisations and retail businesses. We are the membership body for social enterprise.

Acknowledgements

The state of social enterprise reports are part of a series of surveys undertaken by the British Council and partners around the world. This comparison report would not have been possible without the contributions of our research partners in seven territories in Asia – it is the culmination of deep partnerships over more than five years. We would like to thank the following partners for their help and support:

- **ELEVATE**, Social Enterprise Summit (SES), HKCSS – Social Enterprise Business Centre (SEBC), General Chamber of Social Enterprises (GCSE) and Dream Impact, Hong Kong, China
- **Platform Usaha Sosial**, Indonesia
- **Tandemic**, Malaysia
- The Philippine Social Enterprise Network (**PhilSEN**), the Philippines
- **Soristic** and **raiSE**, Singapore
- Thailand Development Research Institute (**TDRI**) and **Social Enterprise Thailand**, Thailand
- The Central Institute for Economic Management (**CIEM**), Viet Nam
- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (**ESCAP**)
- **HSBC**



Jasberry is a social enterprise that solves the problem of farmer poverty through innovative organic products with global appeal, starting with Jasberry* rice, (www.jasberry.net)

Partnerships



ELEVATE is the leading business risk and sustainability solutions provider. They deliver improved organizational performance through sustainability and supply chain assessment, consulting, program management and analytics.

ELEVATE believes in sustainable, balanced and inclusive economic growth. They see an economic model that collectively activates business and other stakeholders to improve people's lives and preserve the planet. This requires a commitment to transparency, visibility and the thoughtful management of risk and performance. It requires a commitment to business driven sustainability.



Platform Usaha Sosial (PLUS) is a sustainable social enterprise that focuses on supporting the growth of social entrepreneurs in Indonesia by providing pro-bono consulting work, free learning curriculums and ecosystem building. PLUS's works include entrepreneurship development, community development and ecosystem development projects.



Tandemic is a trusted partner for businesses, governments, and social organisations looking to be more effective in a changing world. Our teams in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines have trained over 6,000 people, helped organisations transform the way they work, and designed innovations ranging from new ways of preventing diabetes to AI-powered approaches to construction management. Our work spans the banking, insurance, telecommunications, energy, and logistics industries. We bring to the table deep expertise in a proven methodology rooted in design thinking that helps people work in new ways.



Soristic Impact Collective is a social impact consultancy which undertakes evaluation and impact assessment; research and consulting; capacity building as well as philanthropy and corporate social responsibility advisory services. Soristic Impact Collective works on regional projects from its base in Singapore.

Singapore Centre for Social Enterprise, raISE Ltd is an ecosystem builder and membership body for aspiring social entrepreneurs, existing social enterprises

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