

OECD Southeast Asia Regional Programme (SEARP) Ministerial Conference
Inclusiveness through Participation
Intervention by Foreign Minister Kono
March 8, 2018

Thank you, Ambassador Sihasak.

Let me briefly focus upon three points.

First, structural policies are of vital importance from the perspective of inclusive “participation”.

Vigorous implementation of structural policies is essential in ensuring greater access to economic opportunities by every actor, including low-skilled workers, women and Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs).

ASEAN and other international organizations have also been placing emphasis on structural issues, but this exact area is one in which the OECD has strong comparative advantage.

Through rich analysis and evidence-based policy recommendations, the OECD has been supporting Japan’s structural reforms under Abenomics with a view to realizing a “society where all citizens are dynamically engaged”.

Ministers and colleagues of ASEAN,

I hope that you make the best use of the OECD in this area to further advance your domestic reform priorities and avoid the “middle income trap”.

Second, let me emphasize that development of human resources is key to inclusive and sustainable growth.

In a rapidly changing world of globalization and digitalization, human resource development is more critical than ever.

Last year’s OECD Ministerial Council Meeting recognized the necessity of policies to promote greater access to lifelong quality education and training.

The importance of human resource development is also highlighted in the context of ASEAN.

According to an estimate by ADB and ILO, several ASEAN countries will face skill mismatches in more than half of high-skilled employment by 2025.

As such, Japan has been supporting ASEAN's efforts in this area, including the "Industrial Human Resource Development Cooperation Initiative". Under this initiative, Japan has already provided assistance to approximately 50,000 industrial human resources over the past two years.

I am pleased to see the recent development of Japan-ASEAN cooperation in this area, and sincerely hope that these efforts will contribute to decreasing future skill mismatches in the region.

Third, as we are celebrating International Women's Day today, let me draw your attention to the issue of female participation.

As more countries are facing ageing population and shrinking labor forces, with Japan being the frontrunner, the OECD has been devoted to policy discussions on gender. The OECD's work particularly focuses on policies for ensuring equal access to the "three E's", that is, education, employment and entrepreneurship.

The OECD's work has already provided valuable insights in the context of Southeast Asia. For example, according to the OECD/ASEAN report prepared for this session, women's limited access to capital and credit hampers potential for female owned businesses to expand.

Ensuring female participation is gaining relevance and urgency in ASEAN's agenda, particularly because the region will experience a rapid demographic transition over the next few decades.

In this context, I would like to emphasize that the OECD's high-level expertise in this area is always available for ASEAN countries, including through SEARP.

Let me conclude my intervention by expressing my strong expectations that ASEAN countries further benefit from the OECD in order to achieve inclusive growth and ensure that "No One is Left Behind".

Thank you.