

Outcomes of the Workshop to Establish the ASEAN Women's Network for Biosafety and Biosecurity

September 4th, 2024

Background: At its 37th Summit in November 2020, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Member States, recognizing the indispensable role women played in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, reaffirmed their strong commitment to mainstreaming gender equality. Developed collaboratively by the ASEAN Secretariat and UN Women, the *"Policy Brief: Enhancing Gender-Responsive Approaches in the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework"* advocates for a more inclusive, empowering, and sustainable approach for women's meaningful participation and leadership in health security. To address this need, and in partnership with Global Affairs Canada, the International Federation of Biosafety Associations (IFBA) is facilitating the development of an **ASEAN Women's Network for Biosafety and Biosecurity** to promote gender equity in the region by engaging local women champions as critical contributors to sustainable health security.

A half-day workshop was held on the margins of the **17th Asia-Pacific Biosafety Association (A-PBA) Conference in Manila, Philippines**, to begin defining the Network's priority activities, which will inform its formal structure and scope. Implementation of priority activities will be led by Network members, and will carry out the Network's objectives over the long term through the establishment of self-sustaining working groups. Network priorities were defined during the workshop as follows:

Priority 1: Promote Women's Leadership in Top Governance in Biosafety and Biosecurity

- Advocate for **increased representation of women in top governance and policymaking positions** related to biosafety and biosecurity, particularly in male-dominated sectors such as defense and national security.
- **Support soft skills and executive-level training** for existing women leaders in biosafety and biosecurity across health and laboratory workplaces to **improve collaboration** with male-dominated sectors (i.e., security, first response).

Priority 2: Support Accessible, Sustainable Professional Development for Women in Biosafety and Biosecurity

- Determine **local gaps in access to dedicated training, certification, and education in biosafety and biosecurity** for women professionals, and key stakeholders that may assist in closing said gaps.
- **Support women and girls interested in dedicated biosafety and biosecurity professions** through provision of technical training, mentorship programs, professional fellowships, and educational programming.



International Federation of
Biosafety Associations



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Priority 3: Promote Sectoral Diversity of Women Biosafety and Biosecurity Professionals Across ASEAN

- **Investigate the role(s) that women professionals play across human, animal, and environmental health** in the ASEAN region to address common threats to regional health security (e.g., AMR, climate change), common contributions to sustainable human development (i.e., UN Sustainable Development Goals) and commitments to biological disarmament and non-proliferation (i.e., Biological Weapons Convention, UNSCR1540).
- **Provide a collaboration hub** for women in ASEAN to further biosafety and biosecurity innovation using a 'One Health' approach.

Themes in Discussing Gender in Biosafety and Biosecurity across the ASEAN region:

- Workshop participants emphasized the **strong representation of women laboratory leaders** across practitioner-focused biosafety and biosecurity workplaces in ASEAN, particularly as they often were discussed to lead laboratory workforces that have a **reflective gender representation** (i.e., women-led, women-majority workplaces).
- Women are included and commonly hold leadership positions in **national and regional biosafety associations**. Workshop participants recognized and promoted the value of biosafety associations in building sustainable workforce capacity in biosafety and biosecurity through their role as civil society actors, and the services they provide their membership through **training and other career development initiatives in biosafety and biosecurity** that fit national or regional contexts.
- **Gaps concerning women's meaningful representation and inclusion in biosafety and biosecurity across the ASEAN region** were addressed with the understanding that needs may vary across the region (i.e., at the national level), and were reported by workshop participants to include **different language and cultural barriers**.

Next Steps

- Workshop participants identified necessary next steps to the Network's formal establishment to include: **(1) Outreach and Recruitment** activities, **(2) Strategic Planning**, including drafting a strategic framework, and, **(3) Stakeholder Mapping and Engagement**, including fostering international collaboration.
- **Collaboration with similar networks in the African, and Latin American & Caribbean regions**, will be facilitated by IFBA including participation at IFBA's international conference, *"Global Voices: Celebrating Diversity in Biosafety & Biosecurity"* to be held in January 2025 under Canada's presidency of the G7 Global Partnership.
- **For more information on the ASEAN Women's Network for Biosafety and Biosecurity** and related events and initiatives, please contact Stephanie Norlock, IFBA Senior Program Officer, directly at s.norlock@internationalbiosafety.org

