



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Professor Annamarie Jagose
Provost & Deputy Vice-Chancellor

31 January 2023

Ray Marcelo
Assistant Secretary
Southeast Asia Strategy, Economic and Communications Branch
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

By email: SoutheastAsiaEconomicStrategy@dfat.gov.au

Dear Mr Marcelo,

The Australian Government's *Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Department's development of the Government's *Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*.

The University of Sydney has invested extensively into the Southeast Asian region over many decades; both through our education mission and our transformative research focus that seeks to build strong, mutually beneficial partnerships.

In addition to addressing the four questions listed on the Department's [Southeast Asia Economic Strategy webpage](#) (attached at **Appendix A**), I draw your attention to the initial advice we provided to the Special Envoy for Southeast Asia in December 2022 (**Appendix B**).

As noted in our December 2022 feedback prepared for Special Envoy Moore, if it would assist, we would be delighted to facilitate a roundtable discussion and/or meetings with some of our Southeast Asia academic experts. If this is of interest, Ms Kirsten Andrews, Vice-President (External Engagement) and members of her team will work with the Department to organise and can be contacted via kirsten.andrews@sydney.edu.au, 02 9351 5030 (assistant).

Yours sincerely,

(signature removed)

Professor Annamarie Jagose
Acting Vice-Chancellor

- Attachment A: Submission to the Australian Government's *Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*, January 2023
- Attachment B: Initial feedback prepared for Mr Nicholas Moore, Special Envoy for Southeast Asia, December 2022

Submission to the Australian Government's *Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*, January 2023

The University of Sydney welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on the priority issues it should be considering while developing the Government's *Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*.

What are the key trends affecting the depth or scale of your economic partnerships spanning Australia and Southeast Asia?

- Southeast Asia represents a geographic area of economic growth that is slated to [become the fifth largest economy](#) in the world by 2026 - behind the US, China, Japan and Germany. While the level of economic development and growth potential varies between countries, taken as a whole, building economic partnerships with the region will be of great benefit to Australia.
- Young people constitute 34 per cent of ASEAN's total population; in 2017, it was estimated that there were [213 million people](#) aged between 15-34 years in the region. It is in our interests to promote Australia as a place for tertiary study amongst the growing market of students from Southeast Asia.
- While Australia remains a popular choice for students from Southeast Asia seeking higher education opportunities, Southeast Asia's rapid economic development and the growth of alternative education markets mean Australia has lost relative advantage as a destination for future leaders from the region.
- There has also - unfortunately - been a decline in funding for Southeast Asia scholarships in recent years - both Australian Government and market-specific scholarships. Scholarship funds that do exist in Southeast Asian countries have not increased in value despite a continual rise in tuition fees charged by Australian universities, which are likely to have put study in Australia out of reach for many students from the region. This has resulted in an increase in scholarship students going to countries that offer cheaper tertiary education fees and a lower cost of living.
- While the level of economic development varies between ASEAN countries, interest in promoting research and international collaborations is a notable trend. Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam have all invested considerable resources into promoting research collaborations and providing incentives to (public) universities to build research relationships and undertake projects with international institutions.

Where do you see the greatest opportunities to increase economic activity between Australia and Southeast Asia to 2040?

- Deepen an understanding of the economic trends, contributions and the SME (small and medium-sized enterprises) cohort of the Southeast Asian expatriate/diaspora communities in Australia. Many Southeast Asian expatriates have engaged in e-commerce with their home countries while residing in Australia. If we can better understand these economic links, we would have better insights as to how they can be supported as part of an overall bilateral trade relationship. There is currently both a data gap and lack of policy considerations of these very

people-to-people connections between Australians of Southeast Asian descent and the economies of their countries of origin.

- In terms of research, leverage the partnerships with Southeast Asian institutions for research funding opportunities. This is particularly beneficial in areas of mutual interest/benefit and/or on topics that have broad regional and/or global implications. We know that high-quality collaborative research creates mutual benefits and strengthens national institutions and capabilities. To enable this advantage to grow, the Australian Government should explore ways to incentivise Australian researchers to partner with colleagues from Southeast Asian institutions. The Government should also consider how bilateral and regional economic agreements could be leveraged to support mutual collaboration in science, research and innovation.

What are the risks and challenges facing you or your organisation as you consider increasing economic engagement with Southeast Asia?

Risks

- Risks include global force majeure (e.g., global pandemic that restricts movement and ability to collaborate on transnational projects).

Challenges

- Some countries in Southeast Asia do not have clear regulatory guidelines regarding the activities of foreign entities within the country. These requirements also vary from country to country and require time and expertise to understand. Quite often, activities will require a steadfast relationship with key decision makers in government, which can take time to establish.
- Bureaucratic requirements for conducting business in many Southeast Asian countries are cumbersome and obtaining clarity is difficult to achieve. The Australian Government should promote a reduction in red tape and a more open research environment across the region, for example, foreign researchers currently face a range of complex regulatory barriers when it comes to obtaining research permits to collaborate in Southeast Asia. In particular, the process of obtaining a research permit in Indonesia - which was revised recently (2022) - is both confusing and time consuming. These regulatory requirements negatively affect the ability of Australian academics to study time-critical issues, schedule research and produce high quality outcomes.
- Decline in scholarship funding – both Australian Government and market specific. Tuition fees continue to increase, however, the scholarship funds in many Southeast Asian countries' budgets have not. Further, the economies have been impacted by the COVID pandemic; consequently, we are observing an increase in scholarship students going to countries who can offer cheaper fees and costs of living.
- Perceived return on investment (ROI) – High fees vs Ranking vs Graduate outcomes. Continued inflation and impact to demonstrated ROI. There is also an increase in the ranking and reputation of institutions in the region.
- Out-of-date recognition of Southeast Asian institutions in the National Office for Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR). This impacts the potential for postgraduate students seeking to study research degrees at Australian institutions and limits our ability to attract graduate students from Southeast Asia institutions.
- Government and institutional focus on India/South Asia or the Pacific, which impacts the engagement with Southeast Asia.

Which sectors and countries are of greatest interest to you or your organisation and why?

- The University has invested heavily into the Southeast Asian region over many decades, with a particular focus on the education and research sectors; including international student recruitment and research collaborations.
- Our relevant research, educational and engagement activities are coordinated through the [Sydney Southeast Asia Centre \(SSEAC\)](#) - a University-wide multidisciplinary initiative that is unique in Australia. Established in 2012, today SSEAC has a membership of more than 400 academics from across the University, networked with more than 9,300 academics, students and practitioners in Australia and the region. SSEAC supports disciplinary excellence and acts as a catalyst for new research, partnerships and initiatives that connect people across disciplinary boundaries and address the region's real-world problems.
- We currently have 42 active partnership agreements with tertiary institutions across the region comprising five in Cambodia, eight in Indonesia, four in Malaysia, one in the Philippines, 11 in Singapore, four in Thailand and nine in Vietnam.
- Over the last decade, our researchers have attracted almost \$100 million in funding for projects related to Southeast Asia. Almost half of this funding was for projects that addressed region-wide topics. By country, projects related to Vietnam attracted the most funding (\$18.5 million) during that period, followed by Indonesia (\$16.1 million), Cambodia (\$7 million) and Myanmar (\$3.8 million).
- The University has also invested in offshore recruitment staff in Indonesia (since 2016) and Vietnam and Malaysia (both since 2019). In these three countries, in particular, the University has experienced very strong post-COVID enrolment rates, with historically high numbers in Vietnam and Indonesia. This has contributed to the most diverse international enrolment in the University's history in Semester 2, 2022, which both manages financial risk for the University and improves the classroom experience for all students.
- At present, the University of Sydney is most active in **Vietnam** in terms of ongoing research collaborations, grant funding and publications. The University has had a long-standing presence in Vietnam, particularly in the health and medical sectors. Currently, this relationship is promoted through the [Sydney Vietnam Institute \(SVI\)](#), an initiative at the University designed to promote multidisciplinary research collaborations between researchers in Australia and Vietnam.
- **Indonesia**, as the largest country in the region, is another country of focus. The University has several academics with a research interest in Indonesia and collaborations with a number of researchers and institutions.
- We also have a long-standing commitment and presence in **Cambodia** through the [Angkor Research Program](#). Through this program we pursue a multidisciplinary approach to the Angkor region, which incorporates urban society, archaeology, history, heritage and the environment.
- **Singapore** is also a priority partner country for the University of Sydney: we currently have a curriculum licensing agreement in Singapore to deliver a post registration nursing program, and a student exchange agreement and a priority partnership with the National University of Singapore (NUS).



The Australian Government's development of a *Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*

Initial feedback prepared for Mr Nicholas Moore, Special Envoy for Southeast Asia, December 2022

Q.1 What is the value of your current planned business with Southeast Asia? Has this grown in recent years?

The University of Sydney has invested heavily into the Southeast Asian region over many decades, taking a research-led approach that seeks to build strong, mutually beneficial partnerships, rather than simply to leverage student recruitment.

Our relevant research, educational and engagement activities are coordinated through the [Sydney Southeast Asia Centre \(SSEAC\)](#) - a university-wide multidisciplinary initiative that is unique in Australia. Established in 2012, today SSEAC has a membership of more than 400 academics from across the University, networked with more than 9,300 academics, students and practitioners in Australia and the region. It supports disciplinary excellence and acts as a catalyst for new research, partnerships and initiatives that connect people across disciplinary boundaries and address the region's real-world problems.

We have a long-standing commitment and partnerships in Vietnam through the [Sydney Vietnam Institute](#) and are in the process of establishing a physical presence there to support our work in the region, with a focus on infectious diseases, digital technology, vaccine education and financial inclusion. We also have a long-standing commitment and presence in Cambodia through the [Angkor Research Program](#). Through this program we pursue a multidisciplinary approach to the Angkor region, which incorporates urban society, archaeology, history, heritage and the environment.

We maintain deep relationships with governments, networks and research institutions across Southeast Asia. For example, we have 42 active partnership agreements with tertiary institutions across the region comprising five in Cambodia, eight in Indonesia, four in Malaysia, one in the Philippines, 11 in Singapore, four in Thailand and nine in Vietnam.

Over the last decade, our researchers have attracted almost **\$100 million in funding** for projects related to Southeast Asia. Almost half of this funding was for projects that addressed region-wide topics. By country, projects related to **Vietnam** attracted the most funding (\$18.5 million) during that period, followed by **Indonesia** (\$16.1 million), **Cambodia** (\$7 million) and **Myanmar** (\$3.8 million).

In recent years we have invested in student recruitment strategies in the region as part of our strategy to diversify the countries from which we draw international students. We now have recruitment staff based in Indonesia (since 2016) and Vietnam and Malaysia (both since 2019). Since 2019, we have had over 5,500 students commence study from Southeast Asia. In 2019, we received more than \$81 million in revenue linked to students from Southeast Asia. Although enrolments dropped during the COVID-19 pandemic, we are starting to see the Southeast Asia market recover quickly.

Q.2 What do you see as the challenges and opportunities in Southeast Asian markets? How do these compare to other potential markets?

Regionally-focused research and education partnerships support Australia's soft-power diplomacy effort, helping to build a more resilient and stable region. The Government's development of an ambitious long-term *Southeast Asia Economic Strategy* represents an opportunity to recalibrate Australia's relationship with the region and promote strong and effective engagement for mutual benefit. The Government, through the new Strategy, should commit to engagements that focus on the research-education nexus, with the objective of strengthening the region's human capital, and people-to-people and institutional linkages.

In relation to research, Australia has a strong competitive advantage given our location in the region, our high concentration of expertise and research focused on Southeast Asia compared to other countries, and our globally-recognised research performance. We know that high-quality collaborative research creates mutual benefits and strengthens national institutions and capabilities. To enable this advantage to grow, the Australian Government should explore ways to incentivise Australian researchers to partner with colleagues from Southeast Asian institutions. It should also promote a reduction in red tape and a more open research environment across the region. For example, foreign researchers currently face a range of complex regulatory barriers when it comes to obtaining research permits to collaborate in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia. These regulatory requirements negatively affect the ability of Australian academics to study time-critical issues, schedule research and produce high quality outcomes. The Government should also consider how bilateral and regional economic agreements could be leveraged to support mutual collaboration in science, research and innovation.

We view the declining levels of knowledge and understanding about Southeast Asia amongst young Australians as a growing risk to our standing in region, as well as our practical capacity for meaningful engagement. Despite the efforts of the University of Sydney and a few other Australian universities to preserve and strengthen Southeast Asian studies programs, the number of Australian students taking Southeast Asia-related courses (in languages but also more broadly) at the undergraduate level has declined in recent decades. This trend is linked to the general decline in the study of foreign languages and cultures in our schools. It has flow-on effects for postgraduate study, but also for the quality of engagement by government and businesses in the region. An integrated long-term strategy is required to ensure that Australia maintains sufficient human capacity with expertise in politics and economics in particular, but also the deep cultural knowledge that is generated by language and area studies.

There is also an opportunity to make a positive contribution to economic and social development in Southeast Asia through programs led or sponsored by the Australian Government that are designed to educate more of the region's future leaders in Australia and through transnational education. Over the past decade, Australia has welcomed a declining share of international students from Southeast Asia, which now accounts for just 22 percent of all students from the region. In 2019, the ISEAS–Yusuf Ishak Institute annual survey of Southeast Asian policy elites identified Australia as the first choice of destination for tertiary education for around 25 percent of respondents. However, by 2022, this had fallen to just 10 percent. Australia has declined in relative importance as a destination from Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam, but has gained some market shares in Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and particularly the Philippines.^[1] To remain competitive, we need to ensure that Australia and its institutions are viewed as attractive study destinations for students from the region. Government funding, structures and operating models influence the capacity of Australian universities to grow onshore international student enrolments from Southeast Asia. Without strong re-engagement and promotion by Austrade working in concert with State and Territory trade and investment agencies, there is a risk of Australia falling further behind in terms of its access and influence in Southeast Asia.

A key part of the Government's new economic strategy for the region should be to increase the availability of globally-competitive programs offering financial support to facilitate the flow to Australia of students and researchers with limited resources from Southeast Asia. Scholarships and fellowships like those provided through the Government's Australia Awards program serve to bridge cultural divides and foster deeper country-to-country connections. There has, unfortunately, been a decline in funding for Southeast Asia scholarships in recent years - both Australian Government and market specific scholarships. Scholarship funds that do exist in Southeast Asian countries have also not increased in value despite a continual rise in tuition fees charged by Australian universities, which are likely to have put study in Australia out of reach for many students from the region. This has resulted in an increase in scholarship students going to countries that offer cheaper tertiary education fees and lower costs of living. The Australia Awards program is only open to students from developing nations, thereby excluding the best and brightest from more advanced economies such as Singapore. While

^[1] https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/crumbling-cornerstone-australia-s-education-ties-southeast-asia#footnote11_fbschbb

the new ASEAN scholarship scheme is a positive step, more could be done to attract high-calibre students to Australia.

Another challenge in student recruitment relates to skills and qualification recognition. The National Office for Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) qualifications recognition for Southeast Asian institutes is considered out-of-date and in need of review. This impacts the potential for postgraduate students seeking to study research degrees at Australian institutions and limits our ability to attract graduate students from Southeast Asia institutions.

Q.3 Have you explored opportunities in Southeast Asia in the past? Why did you choose to proceed/not proceed?

Deepening engagement with Southeast Asia is a priority for the University of Sydney. We have not yet pursued the level of bricks-and-mortar investment that Monash University and some other Australian providers have made in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. However - as outlined above - we have a long tradition of building and preserving disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research expertise about the region, as well as collaboration with the region in research, on curriculum, joint degrees, student exchanges and study abroad. An early example of this was a co-delivered degree in agricultural science in Hue in Vietnam. We have also provided health-related curricula to Malaysia (medicine) and Singapore (nursing).

Q.4 What could government(s) do to make opportunities in Southeast Asia more attractive? How could the Australian Government practically help overcome obstacles faced?

Australia's tertiary education and research sector is highly regarded internationally and will remain our key channel for engagement with the region.

The Government should consider ways to reposition Australia as a quality, higher education destination of choice for international students from Southeast Asia. Practical options include:

- Establish an in-market presence in key markets similar to the British Council model, which represents all States and Territories and promotes Education Australia.
- Improve visa processing times for Southeast Asian coursework students, research students and academics.
- Work with local companies to promote Australian university graduates and find or incentivise employability pathways for these graduates.
- Update NOOSR benchmarking to better recognise the levels of the institutions and qualifications in Southeast Asian countries.
- Address visa policy settings to improve the retention of Southeast Asian graduates, particularly in areas of Australian workforce need.
- Establish a High Potential Individual visa class to attract high-quality Southeast Asian students and researchers.
- Expand the New Colombo Plan (NCP) to include postgraduate coursework and higher degree research students.
- Increase investment in the Australia Awards program to grow the flow to Australia of students and leaders from the region.

New scholarships could include:

- Additional Southeast Asia-specific scholarships to attract high-achieving students to Australia.
- A merit-based scheme targeted at the regional countries that do not receive bilateral development assistance from Australia (Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei).
- A program for prospective ASEAN PhD students to conduct research in areas of shared national priority.
- Offerings for Australian students that support Asian language literacy and cultural competency.

A key function for Government in relation to research in the region is to build strong government-to-government relationships and follow the lead of the European Union and various individual countries in investing in structured opportunities for research partnerships and researcher mobility. The role that DFAT plays in brokering connections is an extremely valuable one. SSEAC has worked with DFAT on a wide range of events, including Australia Now – ASEAN (2021) and, as part of a consortium of Australian universities, on a side event as part of the ASEAN-Australia Dialogue (2017). SSEAC has also been pleased to brief outgoing diplomatic staff and collaborate with DFAT on the hosting of high-ranking officials from the region including parliamentary delegations from Myanmar, Malaysia and Laos, the region's permanent representatives to ASEAN as well as ministerial-level visitors, ambassadors and consuls-general from the region. These visits have led to opportunities for return engagement with the highest levels of government in various Southeast Asian countries.

However, incidental support of this nature is not sufficient. Programs to support research and educational engagement should be included as core pillars in the Economic Strategy, and a comprehensive plan for government-supported engagement to 2040. Australian universities are subject to multiple and competing priorities, and without structured incentives in relation to both research and education, Southeast Asia will likely not receive the level of attention required to meet the Government's objectives in the region.

Steps that the Government can take to ensure that our world-leading Southeast-Asia related research capability and literacy is maintained past the current generation include:

- Develop targeted support schemes for regionally-focused expert research, including for projects involving collaboration with researchers from the region, to be administered through the Australian Research Council (ARC).
- Develop pathways and incentives to encourage researchers who are not Southeast Asia specialists to engage with the region.
- Work through diplomatic channels to encourage governments in the region to reduce red tape associated with conducting research and, ideally, to adopt an open-door approach to foreign researchers.
- Provide incentives for universities to maintain existing and develop new enrolments in specialist courses related to Southeast Asian languages, politics, culture and economics that underpin our national knowledge base.

Q.5 What are the main trends and likely drivers of change in your industry to 2040?

In our recent submission to the NSW Government's consultations to develop an Industry Policy White Paper for the State, we nominated the following three interlinked transformative forces that we expect will shape the Australian higher education sector over the next decade:

- **Continuing industry and labour market shifts in the domestic economy:** from resources and goods-producing industries to services and jobs that will increasingly require people with higher-level technical and employability skills and post-secondary qualifications. This shift, combined with industry's increasing desire and need to hire more workers from local labour markets will further increase the demand for education qualifications from NSW's higher education providers.
- **Life-long learning enabled by digital advancements:** the changing nature of work; the increasing need for workers to upskill or retrain throughout their careers to stay competitive or pivot in response to disruption; the increasing demand for affordable and flexible online and blended learning options; and increasing competition from non-traditional higher education providers globally offering innovative delivery models.
- **Continuing globalisation of higher education and research:** including Asia's rise – both as a market for these services and increasingly as a high-quality provider and competitor – and technology-enabled international collaboration in education and research to advance knowledge, develop sovereign capability for new technology-based industries and to address our greatest challenges.

The development of a new *Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040* presents an opportunity to critically assess the importance of international education in relation to 'soft power' and public diplomacy in the region, which were viewed as a such powerful feature of the original Colombo Plan. In terms of student flows to and from the region, the New Colombo Plan is a success story, because it has boosted Australian students' knowledge of the region's diverse languages and culture. However, the long-term value of the Government assisting more students from the region financially to access high-quality tertiary education in Australia cannot be overstated.

Governments throughout Asia have been investing strategically and significantly in their own tertiary education and research systems, with the quality, ranking performance and reputations of Asian universities and other providers expected to continue improving rapidly. For Australia's international education sector to remain competitive, we need to ensure that we continue to be recognised as an attractive destination for international students.

We see enormous opportunities for Australia to meet its future workforce and skills needs, as well as to strengthen defence, diplomatic and people-to-people relations in the Southeast Asia region, through deeper educational engagement. This will, however, require Australia taking a far more strategic approach to international education, skilled migration, regional development and engagement than it has to date. For example, Australia's universities are renowned for providing world-leading education across the health professions while our health system faces major skills shortages. Countries across Southeast Asia and the Pacific are also confronting serious health workforce challenges (exacerbated by COVID-19 and other infectious diseases) and are very interested in the training Australia has to offer.

Yet our universities cannot meet the demand from international students in many fields due to a lack of clinical placements, made worse by the pandemic. The development of this Southeast Asia strategy presents an opportunity for the Albanese Government to think creatively and holistically about how education providers, governments, industry and local communities can work better together to address long-term skills needs – in both Australia and our region – across the health professions and many other critical fields that are facing similar challenges, including teaching, engineering and information technology. Achieving substantial change in this area will, however, require alignment and integration of the development of this strategy with other key intersecting policy reviews and processes the Government has underway, including the [Employment White Paper](#), the [Migration System Review](#) and the [Australian Universities Accord](#).

Q.6 How do you assess the overall level of Southeast Asia literacy in your institution, including on your board and/or among your senior managers?

The presence of SSEAC has enhanced the level of Southeast Asia literacy across our institution. There are also pockets of strength in relation to Southeast Asia among the professional staff in some faculties and schools, most notably the Faculty of Medicine and Health (for example, [The University of Sydney School of Office of Global Health](#), the [Sydney Infectious Diseases Institute](#), and the [Menzies Centre for Health Policy and Economics](#)), the [Sydney School of Veterinary Science](#) and the [Sydney Institute of Agriculture](#). However, most in senior management have much more knowledge and understanding of traditional partner countries such as the US, China and in Europe.

Among academics and students, SSEAC helps us to strengthen Southeast Asia literacy by creating opportunities to learn about Southeast Asia through workshops and events targeting non-specialists and the general public, providing pathways for academics looking to establish a research profile in the region, and by supporting academics to integrate Southeast Asia content in their units of study. SSEAC provides programs and grants for academics, research students and undergraduates to receive basic training in languages such as Burmese, Indonesian, Laos, Khmer and Vietnamese. The Centre runs 20 field schools for undergraduates to seven Southeast Asian countries (the majority with NCP funding) involving students from disciplines where they would not normally be exposed to the region. Over 300 undergraduate students have received intensive language training through a SSEAC field school program over the past 10 years.

Further, we offer languages of Southeast Asia through our [School of Languages and Cultures](#) with [Indonesian Studies](#) being the main language offering.

Q.7 We also welcome case studies of success stories to showcase in the public report.

We provide below a small sample of University of Sydney research success stories and capacity related to Southeast Asia. We would be happy to provide more information on these or other projects and to host the Special Envoy and DFAT colleagues for roundtables and one-on-one meetings with these and other experts if that would be of interest.

[Dr Justin Beardsley](#) is an infectious disease expert who has led extensive research on fungal infections in Vietnam. In 2020, Justin secured a \$750,000 National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) grant to examine the disease burden of chronic pulmonary aspergillosis in tuberculosis survivors in Vietnam, and work with local partners to advance diagnosis and treatment. Justin is currently leading cutting-edge research at the crossroads of health and agricultural practices that aims to promote better human health and food security in Vietnam.

[Professor Alex Broom](#) leads a multidisciplinary team from the University of Sydney and collaborators from the Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e and Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA on an ambitious project that aims to produce the first-ever comprehensive analysis of the experiences of people with disabilities seeking employment in Timor-Leste. The project takes into account the perspectives of people with disability, service providers and government officials, thereby providing a robust evidence base for policy and practice interventions aimed at supporting people with disability seeking paid work in Timor-Leste.

[Professor Simon Butt](#) and [Associate Professor Jeffrey Neilson](#) are investigating the legal recognition of customary law communities and land access in the Toraja region of Indonesia. The impacts of customary land tenure on livelihoods are both poorly understood and controversial and have been the focus of policy debates in Indonesia since the colonial period. Their research addresses critical policy questions affecting economic and cultural development, inequality and the sustainable management of natural resources in Indonesia.

[Associate Professor Navneet Dhand](#) is leading a multi-agency program to train a new generation of 'animal disease detectives' across Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The \$4.3 million DFAT-funded project aims to prevent and contain the spread of zoonotic and animal diseases in the Indo-Pacific and develop capacity for early intervention in countries including Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. It involves an international consortium of over 40 world-class epidemiologists, along with partners including the World Health Organization, the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Professor Roland Fletcher](#) is the Director of the Angkor Research Program. The Program takes a multidisciplinary approach to the Angkor region, incorporating urban society, archaeology, history, heritage and environment. It creates business opportunities for Australian industry and develops teaching resources for Australia's high school curriculum.

[Professor Michele Ford](#) is the Director of the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre and leads several research projects on labour relations in Southeast Asia, including one on labour and politics in Indonesia, one on the garment industry in Myanmar and another on gender-based violence in the workplace in Cambodia's construction sector. In the contexts of these projects, Michele works with the International Labour Organization, several of the Global Unions and a number of Trade Union Solidarity Support Organisations including Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA and the Solidarity Center. In addition to documenting and analysing labour relations in the region, Michele and her team work with local and international trade unions to improve their practice.

[Professor Gregory Fox](#) is the Director of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Tuberculosis, based at the University of Sydney, and Co-Director of the NHMRC Centre for Research Excellence in Tuberculosis. Greg co-leads a group of 60 research staff working across 11 Provinces of Vietnam who work on community-wide cluster randomised trials. Greg and his colleagues at the Centre of Excellence are developing a novel regimen to treat the commonest form of drug resistant tuberculosis.

[Dr Rosemary Grey](#) studies international criminal law, with a focus on Cambodia. In 2021, Rosemary was awarded an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award to critically examine the international community's response to forced pregnancy and other crimes that violate reproductive rights through a case study of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in Cambodia. In the course of this project, Rosemary has analysed court documents and interviewed Tribunal lawyers to generate the first comprehensive account of Khmer Rouge era reproductive crimes and will identify legal and practical barriers to prosecution.

[Professor Justin Hastings](#), [Dr Aim Sinpeng](#) and **Professor Nitin Agarwal** (University of Arkansas at Little Rock) are investigating misinformation and online foreign influence. This project aims to strengthen Australia's ability to identify and intercept information warfare through a better understanding of attack campaigns online. It uses the award-winning YouTube Tracker, a tool that performs a 'cyber forensic analysis' of online content – exposing suspicious behaviours, key players, and otherwise hidden relationships between content across social media platforms. The project has a particular focus on the Asia-Pacific region and has recently turned to the spread of misinformation related to COVID-19 and tensions in the South China Sea.

[Dr Aaron Opdyke](#) and **Associate Professor Paul Jones** are working with Ateneo de Manila University and Mindanao State University, Marawi to investigate informal sheltering practices in post-conflict and post-disaster contexts in the Philippines. Their research seeks to facilitate communities' awareness and of their rights to decent, safe, and sustainable housing solutions and enable their active participation in local-level planning and decision-making processes related to sheltering, promoting accountability and transparency in post-conflict and post-disaster support.

[Dr Aim Sinpeng](#) studies the impact of digital repressive technologies on activism in autocracies. In 2019, Aim was awarded over \$77,000 from Facebook for a project on hate speech, which led to the social media giant altering its hate speech policy in 2021 in line with the report's recommendations. Aim subsequently won another Facebook grant in 2021 with **Deborah Barros Leal Farias** (UNSW Sydney) for a project on countering misinformation in countries with low press freedom.

[Professor Daniel Tan](#) led a research project investigating sustainable intensification and diversification of the lowland rice system in northwest Cambodia. With funding from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, the project used social network analysis to identify how information and ideas spread among smallholder farmers in order to better facilitate the uptake of effective, safe, labour-saving and sustainable agricultural innovations. This research led to the dissemination of technologies such as machine planters, a seed cleaner and drones to spray pesticides, as well as the development of an image-rich mobile phone application to assist Cambodian mung bean farmers with insect pest identification and crop management.

[Dr Russell Toth](#) co-led a three-year research project on the impact of interoperable digital finance schemes on emerging economies in South and Southeast Asia, including Myanmar. Managed by Innovations for Poverty Action, the project builds on Russell's previous work on digital finance, microfinance and microenterprises, and is supported by USD 3.5 million in funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Russell is also engaged in research on how women-led small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can better access finance in Vietnam with support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

[Associate Professor Sonja van Wichelen](#) explores how new biomedical technologies are redefining society, law and politics in a globalising world. In 2020, Sonja was invited to join the prestigious Institute of Advanced Study (IAS) in Princeton, United States of America. Sonja's focus while at the IAS was on the transfer of human biological material and the tensions between national and global medico-legal regulatory regimes in Indonesia. By developing an anthropological understanding of regulatory cultures, Sonja hopes to advance scholarship in the social study of law and biotechnology, and to provide a new conceptual account of how global regulatory orders translate outside the Global North.

[Dr Sophie Webber](#) studies how urban resilience is being rolled out as a policy solution for cities such as Jakarta and Semarang in Indonesia, that are trying to adapt to the many shocks and stresses associated with urbanisation and climate change. Sophie was also awarded an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Research Award (DECRA) to investigate the social, economic and

environmental impacts of large-scale sand and water extraction to build protective infrastructure in vulnerable cities. Through a qualitative study of climate change hotspots in Indonesia and Fiji, this project will generate new knowledge about the potentials and limits of urban resilience infrastructure to protect cities against climate change.

[**Emeritus Professor Peter Windsor**](#) has led multiple field-based research projects in Lao PDR, aimed at increasing knowledge of transboundary livestock disease and its impact on human health in local communities, with extensive funding from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research. Through training on biosecurity practices and animal vaccination programs, rural households were able to prevent disease transmission and increase their productivity. Sustainable farming practices have contributed to improving the local families' livelihoods. With higher income levels, there was no need to do external work to seek additional revenue, which allowed parents to spend more time raising their children and even to afford university education.