

**Asean Investment and Civil Society in Improving Sustainable in  
South East Asia**

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**Abstract**

*Despite having rapid economic development, the ASEAN region is not completely stable and peaceful. Conflicts have been going on since long before the ASEAN is established. They happen in Myanmar, Thailand, and Philippines. A smaller scale of conflict also takes place in Indonesia. The view that security comes first before the investment has made it difficult to achieve peace and stability based on economic instruments. In this article, the writer proposes a view that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) can be utilized as an important instrument in boosting peace and stability provided that the civil society sustains it. Two case studies are presented to show the relationship between FDI, civil society, and peace development in the conflict area, Myanmar and Philippines. It is recommended that civil society actively makes efforts to encourage FDI to come to the conflict area and establish capital-intensive industries, especially in Rakbina and Mindanao.*

**Keywords:** FDI, Sustainable Peace, Rohingya, Mindanao, Civil Society

**INTRODUCTION**

Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Georeferenced Event Dataset of Uppsala University (Stina, 2019) reported that since the establishment of ASEAN until today, sustainable peace and stability have never been achieved in the three ASEAN states. The three states, Myanmar, Thailand, and Philippines, are in conflict every year. Otherwise, during 2013-2018 Philippine Government enters into at least one conflict with CPP (*Communist Party of the Philippines*) annually that has occurred since 1946. It has not taken account yet other eight organizations, including the latest one, IS (*Islamic State*), emerging in 2016. The conflict between Myanmar and ARSA (*ArakanRohingya*

*Salvation Army*) has begun since 1948 and now there are other seven groups entering into conflict with Myanmar Government. Meanwhile, Thailand has been entering into conflict continuously with Patani rebels since 1965. In smaller frequency, Indonesia has ever entered into conflict with OPM (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka* or Independent Papua Organization) since 1965. Thailand government has ever entered into conflict with Cambodia once related to border dispute since 1975 that eventually could be stopped with negotiation. There was also a conflict between Malaysia and Kesultanan Sulu related to Sabah territory.

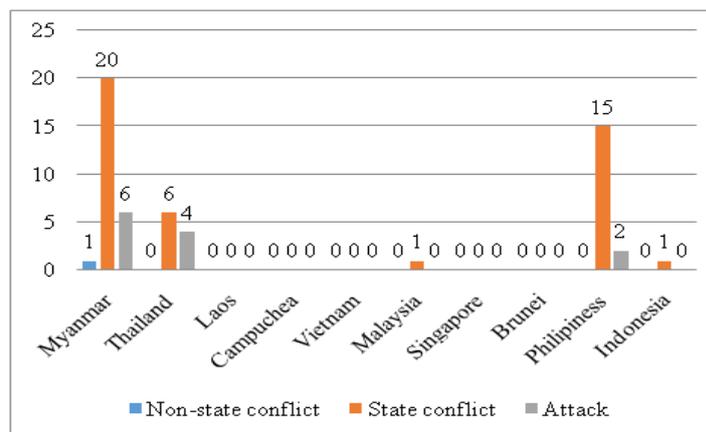


Figure 1. Number of Conflicts in ASEAN States during 2013-2018 (Stina, 2019)

The presence of conflicts in the three states did not affect global *Foreign Direct Investment* (FDI) growth in those states significantly. As shown by Figure 2, FDI of the third world states increases over years. Figure 3 even shows that FDI of the three ASEAN states increases more dramatically than the increase at global level.

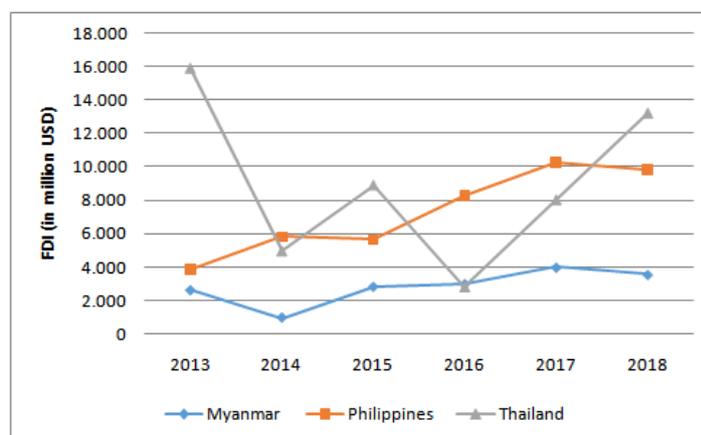


Figure 2. FDI Growth of World to Myanmar, Thailand, and Philippines during 2013-2018 (ASEANStats, 2018)

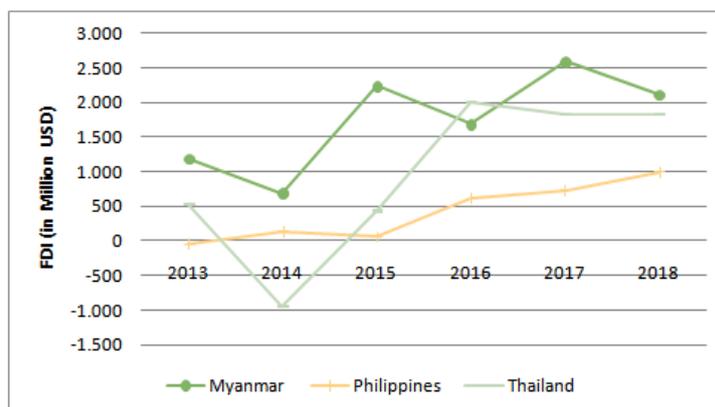


Figure 3. FDI Growth of ASEAN to Myanmar, Thailand, and Philippines 2013-2018 (ASEANStats, 2018)

The facts aforementioned generate some questions related to the relationship between conflict and FDI growth in the three states. The existing relations theoretically and in many cases in other places are fairly complex. The absence of conflict, as characterized with sustainable peace and stability can encourage FDI. A study conducted in Pakistan shows that safety stability affects significantly the FDI Inflowing into the state (Ali & Gang, 2016). Similarly, the small FDI inflowing into Africa is putatively due to security factor (Paroma & Iwuoha, 2018). On the other hand, FDI can be source of conflict. Land grabbing or the gap between the poor and the rich due to FDI can trigger conflict. FDI occasionally becomes a source of sustainable peace and stability. It occurs, for example, through the investor's constructive participation in the state's economic restoration post-conflict (Shultz, 2016). The study showed that FDI is an important element of economic restoration to a sustainable peace in Sierra Leone (Millar, 2015).

In this article, the author argued that in the case of two ASEAN states, Myanmar and Philippines, FDI is one of conflict sources. On the other hand, FDI can also be a solution to conflicts above. It can be achieved with the active participation of civil society, the organized and organic groups beyond family, market, and state (Cooper, 2018), by encouraging FDI inflow into the states potentially encountering conflict.

The research method in this research involves identifying the state conflict case in ASEAN and making it a case study. Literature study was applied to FDI concept, civil society, and case history to identify the three concepts in each case. The official sources were used as much as possible to identify the concepts and to conduct simple quantitative analysis on relevant data.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Capitalism, Democracy, and Conflict

Civil society is originally conceptualized as a group beyond family, market, and state (Cooper, 2018). It is understood more as an institution separated from the state's institution and likewise for-profit entity today (Appe, Barragán, & Cruz, 2018). This institution functions as a means and a channel for the citizens to engage with organization and to express their opinion, thereby is considered as vital component to a healthy society (Fioramonti & Kononykhina, 2015).

As an organization accommodating people's opinion, civil society is closely related to democracy. Democracy is generally viewed as having an aspect of upholding law and human rights (Rutzen, 2015). The freedom of expression is a human right. More than that, civil society sometimes voices legal injustice and partiality. Civil society attempts to cope with democratic deficits for the sake of fighting for those two matters (Gellers, 2016). For that reason, civil society becomes an important component to democracy.

The existence of civil society beyond government and for-profit institution gives it a freedom to make the two types of institution the target of grievance. Civil society can move to protest the public (government) policy or to hinder the company's attempt to damage environment and break Human Rights. Civil society instead is expected to take specific position related to a state's policy and capitalism's operational process (Swyngedouw, 2016). It means that not only civil society becomes the control of governmental or capitalistic power. But also civil society can be the partner and capitalist, just like the state becomes a partner of capitalist and even becomes capitalist (Li, Cui, & Lu, 2018), as long as they view it reasonable to do based on the interest of people they represent.

Capitalism itself is a paradigm prioritizing the competition within it. Some capitalists can compete for the same resource or consumer and whoever becoming the winner will get a large financial benefit, the end goal of capitalism. Because of its competition-oriented characteristic, capitalism is vulnerable to trigger the conflict. The competitor should not always be the fellow similar companies. Rogers (2018) argued that IS (*Islamic States*) group can be considered as the competitor of capitalism in reaching the control over global market hegemony.

FDI is one of obvious capitalism forms. It is a competing strategy to capitalist in the market existing in other state. With FDI, capitalist encourages the people to yield value and keep encouraging new desire and demand, and for that reason, resulting in more capital accumulations to keep surviving and expanding (Bauwens & Kostakis, 2015). The appearance of FDI itself departed from capitalistic class in developed countries faced with limitations occurring in their origin state in the terms of either exporting strategy or domestic market size (Artz, 2017).

Because the end goal of capitalist is financial benefit from the accumulative capital, if indeed peace is more profitable, capitalism can participate in sustainable peace. They can participate in the peaceful agreement by advising whatever needs to be agreed to encourage the conducive climate to their operation (2017). Nevertheless, capitalists can also trigger a conflict, for example, through encouraging the resentment to government if the government policy harms their investment in the state, as observed in Delta Niger (Udoh & Chijioke, 2017). In the following section the author presents a case in South East Asia in which FDI plays a substantial role in the conflict event.

## Analysis on Myanmar and Philippines Case

### *Myanmar and Rohingya*

Rohingya case in Myanmar is a case concerning how FDI can affects adversely the peace and stability. About a quarter of FDI inflowing into Myanmar comes from China (MIC, 2019). China is the largest state investing in Myanmar since three decades ago. It is in line with the mutual fate in getting economic sanction from Western states over the authoritarianism enacted in the two neighbour states (Kocamis, 2019). The domination of China's FDI can be found in many Myanmar states, including Rakhine (Joy, 2018). Nevertheless, Chinese infrastructure project has long been a source of conflict in Kachin, Shan, and Rakhine due to the sustainable competition for land (bin Motaher, 2019).

Myanmar itself has ambition to improve FDI inflowing into its state up to US\$ 8.5 billions in 2026 from US\$ 3.5 billions in 2018 (Kipgen, 2019). Included into this program is to encourage the foreign investment to Rakhine area that has almost been clean of Rohingya ethnic (MIC, 2019). It means that the increase by 15% per year, despite a mean of 6% per year during 2013-2018. Nevertheless, Rohingya issue has affected FDI originating from states supporting human right such as European Union. The data indicates the ever decreasing investment from European Union since Rohingya issue surfaces at international level in 2016. In line with this, there is a decrease in the number of tourists coming from Western Europe and North America (Kipgen, 2019).

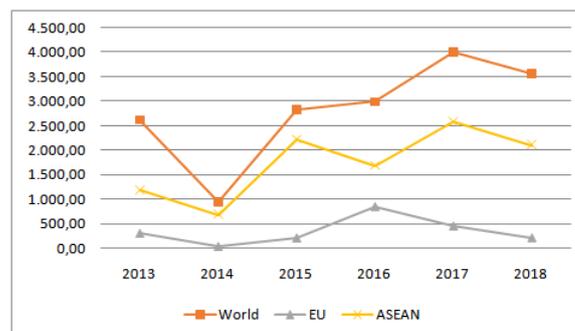


Figure 4. Development of Myanmar FDI (ASEANStats, 2018)

Although Rakhine conflict resulted in massive refuge and “ethnic cleaning”, the international world did not respond to it firmly. Tajuddin (2018) observed that it is because international world also wants to benefit economically from FDI opened widely in the state. Perhaps FDI can run without the need for intervening with Myanmar’s internal affairs (Chattoraj, 2018).

Nevertheless, FDI flowing into Myanmar is because the state has more natural resource and abundant food source, than quality human resource (Uddin, 2018). About 98.1% of investment value in Myanmar comes from extractive and energy sector (Dale & Kyle, 2015). FDI does not lead to the increase in the number of labour or workers and instead leads to the wider national gap (Nguyen, 2018). This wide gap is due to, among others, the poorer people working in agrarian sector such as farmers and fishermen (Burke, 2016). In turn, it leads to the people’s frustration, triggers conflict, and eventually impacts on the culminating crisis in Rohingya (Nguyen, 2018).

Rohingya civil society has fought for disseminating information about Rohingya crisis throughout world using social media and website in order to get wide support from civil society at international level (Marston, 2019). Civil society at international level has held PGA (*People’s Global Action*) conference in Dhaka in 2016 and Berlin in 2017 to respond to Rohingya problem and to encourage UN to develop Global Compacts policy to enable the states to give serious attention to Rohingya (Rahman, 2018). Meanwhile, civil society in Bangladesh keeps protesting to require the conflict in Myanmar ceased immediately (Bhattacharjee, 2017).

### ***Philippines dan Mindanao***

Mindanao is a big island in the southern part of Philippines occupied by majority Muslim population. This island has been the source of sustainable conflict since 1970 in which a number of armed groups attempted to separate themselves from Philippine non-Muslim government. As aforementioned, Philippines has entered into a conflict with CPP since 1946. As a result, practically, Philippines has entered into a conflict to resist two extremists: communist on the left and Islam group on the right extremes.

The prolonged conflict makes Mindanao area the more left behind area economically, compared with other areas in Philippines. Recently, China devised to invest in Mindanao as a part of *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI). This plan immediately results in pros and cons concerning the effect of FDI on the reconciliation in Mindanao. The government sees this to be a solution to improve the people’s socio-economic condition, and therefore, can solve a prolonged conflict problem (GMA News, 2017). On the other hand, some parties argue that FDI from China instead will worsen the condition as it can trigger tension or conflict because the rebels sees FDI as an instrument of suppressing and exploiting the people (Wolf, 2019).

Cloud (2018) argued that the difficulty of coping with rebellion in Mindanao is, among others, due to the government replete with corruption. Severe corruption and collusion make the economy progress in Mindanao benefiting only a very few people, some of which are elites in central level. They do not want Mindanao more developed because it will reduce their income from underground economic activities.

In contrast to Myanmar, Philippines has a very alive civil society. Even the government requires the civil society to be represented in all local government institutions. There are about 100 thousands NGOs in Philippines considered as the most trustable political actors to supervise the government (Thapa, 2016). Nevertheless, such civil society is as if stagnant because it does not lead to a more democratic government, remove corruption, collusion, and nepotism, and relieve the conflict in Mindanao. This paradox results from the close clientelist relationship between government and NGOs. NGOs obtain fund from the government and, despite claiming to be independent, actually they as if have been bought by the government. As a result, NGOs become only a kind of non-violent bridge connecting the government to the rebel groups. They cannot take further measure because they cannot criticize and advise the government and lose the budget, and do not criticize and advise the rebels bravely because they fear of losing their trust (Thapa, 2016).

Although in such dilemma, South & Joll (2016) saw that NGOs have been on the right track. Despite running slowly, civil society can create sustainable peace (reconciliation) in Mindanao. For example, civil society is believed by both government and rebels to be the witness in negotiation and even involved as supervisors or members of councils or board resulting from reconciliation agreement between government and rebels such as the distributor of humanity aid and poor people reconstruction/rehabilitation (Herbolzheimer, 2015). Anak Mindanao and Mindanao Forum Inc. NGOs even could establish Mindanao Garden of Peace as the meeting point to the parties in the conflict (Curaming, 2017). As such, civil society that cannot promote democracy instead can encourage the reconciliation between the parties in conflict (Espesor, 2017).

Basically, the relationship between economy and security is controversial between two groups: “*economics first*” and “*security first*”. In “*security first*”, the security is considered as an economical precondition. Otherwise, “*economics first*” group sees that it is economy that becomes a precondition to security. This dispute between two groups can be observed in the policy formulation, for example, in Russia, when the “*security first*” group argues that Russia should master Arctic first and ensure the security in the area before attracting foreign investment. Otherwise, “*economic first*” group argues that the emphasis should be put first on providing investment

opportunity and in the presence of investment cooperation, the Arctic's security will be ensured better (Rowe, 2018).

These different perspectives appear in some places. Governments in some states try to ensure their state's security to enable investment to enter into and to build the state's economy. Nevertheless, such paradigm is counterproductive and cannot guarantee that no more conflict will explode in the future. It will also remove one of very important economic advantages of FDI, to create reconciliation.

As aforementioned, a trigger of prolonged conflict in Rohingya case is the expropriation of land for infrastructure construction. Myanmar takes "*security first*" to smooth the foreign investors' way to invest in Myanmar. However, the prolonged conflict instead occurs and results from investor's sentiment prioritizing the Human Rights such as European Union states.

Situation will be productive if "*economics first*" perspective is prioritized. In Rohingya case, the conflict occurring related to land expropriation, in turn, stems from economic gap due to focus on extractive and energy industry. Economic gap is a bad economic parameter and this small gap should be used to reflect the even and prosperous economic condition. The continuous emphasis on security will result in prolonged gap or discrepancy only, so that eventually natural resource will be used up and the state will fall down to "recourse curse" (Ross, 2015).

If "*economics first*" paradigm is prioritized, the government will attempt to reduce the economic gap within society. The people with evenly distribute wellbeing should have no big economic envy and should have solidarity feeling and prevent the conflict originating from economic reason. As a result, it is very important to foreign investors, particularly those in ASEAN region, to begin investing in peace (reconciliation), meaning to build labour-intensive industry rather than the capital-intensive one. World Bank believes that the labour-intensive industry is a solution to even economic distribution because labour is the most important asset to the poor people (Sanjaya & Nursechafia, 2016). This sector includes, among others, garment, in which many labourers can be absorbed and people's income is distributed relatively evenly compared with the capital-intensive or technology-intensive sectors requiring less labourers, particularly the skilful and rich ones. There are many labour intensive investment sectors. Linshan & Yanji (2015) listed 12 (twelve) labour-intensive sectors: processed food from farmland, food, beverage, textile, furniture, fur-leather, wood, furniture, paper, printed and recording media, culture-education-sport, and metal industry.

## CONCLUSION

Considering the two cases above, it can be seen that civil society has a big opportunity of encouraging reconciliation and stability by utilizing foreign investor. In Rohingya case, civil society can encourage investor to invest capital in capital-intensive industry in the chaotic Rakhine or other region with real conflict potency. If the rebels hold the people's wellbeing as their primary goal, it is rational for this armed group to instead escort the foreign investors in creating massive job opportunity to the people they fight for. It is also true in Mindanao case, in which civil society has been trusted by the parties to be mediator.

In this case, the role of other stakeholders becomes more crucial. In both cases and likewise in Patani case, non-government party entering into conflict is generally the armed Muslim group. Civil society can invite Muslim investors to invest. ASEAN has four states with a large number of Muslim investor sources: Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Brunei, completed with Islam economic perspective constituting an alternative to capitalism. These Muslim investors are even more wanted because they have not far different nationality, still in Austronesia family, to both Mindanao and Rohingya Muslims.

To support this, the good will of government in the targeted state is very vital. Myanmar and Philippines should remove Islamophobia and focuses more on economic development and even economic distribution in their states. In this case, international civil institutions and ASEAN can be mediator and negotiator to help the process of developing sustainable reconciliation based on cross-border economy.

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