

Operationalising the ASEAN Common Carbon Framework: Early Lessons from Regional Dialogue at COP30

ASEAN's Common Carbon Framework is moving from concept to coordinated implementation. A recent dialogue at COP30 helped clarify how the initiative can support high-integrity, interoperable carbon markets across the region.

Why a Common Framework Still Matters

Members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are steadily expanding their use of carbon pricing instruments, national registries and both voluntary and compliance carbon markets. Yet these developments remain largely fragmented, with differing rules, methodologies and verification standards creating frictions for cross-border investment and market participation.

The ASEAN Common Carbon Framework (ACCF) is an industry-led response to this challenge. Developed collectively by the Malaysia Carbon Market Association (MCMA), Indonesia Carbon Trade Association (IDCTA), Singapore Sustainable Finance Association (SSFA), Thailand Carbon Markets Club (TCMC) and the ASEAN Alliance on Carbon Markets (AACM), the ACCF was presented as a regional initiative to:

- Align standards and expectations across markets,
- Build trust in ASEAN-originated credits, and
- Facilitate access to climate finance through interoperable, high-integrity carbon markets.

The ACCF concept was framed around five design elements: locally appropriate methodologies, high-quality credits aligned with both national circumstances and international expectations, mutual recognition of methodologies, shared technical resources, and linkages to compliance markets, including Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.

One year on from the launch of the ACCF Memorandum of Collaboration (MoC), a dedicated session at COP30 in Belém, Brazil, revisited this architecture—not to redesign it, but to examine how it is being operationalised and what is needed to turn a common framework into tangible regional outcomes.

From Blueprints to Work Plan

The COP30 discussion highlighted that the ACCF is no longer only a conceptual blueprint. Over its first year, participating associations and partners have begun translating the original design into a concrete work plan and governance structure. Implementation efforts are currently organised around three core pillars, supported by cross-cutting activities:

- Supply and demand
 - Mapping existing and potential supply of high-quality credits (e.g. nature-based solutions, industrial decarbonisation).
 - Understanding evolving demand from corporates, financial institutions and, over time, compliance schemes.
- Market infrastructure
 - Exploring options for registries, trading and settlement, data and transparency systems that can prevent double-counting and enhance trust.
- Strategic communications and capacity building
 - Developing a shared narrative on ASEAN's carbon market opportunity.
 - Delivering capacity-building and knowledge-sharing activities for policymakers, market participants and local stakeholders.
- Cross-cutting areas
 - Policy and regulatory alignment, to ensure ACCF outputs can inform national and ASEAN-level policymaking.
 - Pilot projects, to test interoperability, governance and cross-border trading concepts in practice.

Bridging National Priorities with Regional Coherence

A recurring theme in the COP30 dialogue was the tension—and opportunity—between national flexibility and regional coherence. Past engagements with policymakers, investors, project developers and standard-setters have focused on positioning ACCF as complementary to national regulations, not competitive. The following are key pointers of ACCF in the ASEAN carbon markets, which are likely to remain relevant beyond COP30:

- Regional diversity is a feature, not a bug. ASEAN member states differ markedly in sectoral profiles, institutional capacity and policy priorities. Any common framework must allow for national flexibility, while still promoting a shared baseline of integrity and interoperability.
- Instead of uniformity, interoperability is the end goal. The ACCF is intended as a coordination platform, identifying where methods, MRV approaches, and safeguards can be recognised across jurisdictions, rather than prescribing identical frameworks. The role of the ACCF in enabling mutual recognition and interoperability lowers transaction costs and increases investor confidence.
- Global alignment matters. To ensure ASEAN credits remain attractive to international buyers, the ACCF will need to stay closely aligned with Article 6 guidance and evolving integrity standards in the voluntary market, while still allowing space for region-specific innovation.

Governance and Policy Translation

ACCF is guided by a Steering Committee that provides strategic direction, and is organised by workstreams aligned to an overarching work plan and cross-cutting priorities. Furthermore, ACCF has ensured alignment with the public sector, national associations, and technical partners to generate stakeholder buy-in and momentum in the ecosystem.

The ACCF is anchored in national carbon market associations, which act as “entry points” connecting regional principles with domestic realities. This decentralised model recognises that carbon markets are ultimately implemented through national laws and institutions, while still allowing for coordination at the ASEAN level.

Looking Ahead

The ACCF is still in its early years, but the trajectory is clear. For the next phase, the ACCF is expected to:

- Broaden ASEAN participation and deepen engagement with regulators and ASEAN sectoral bodies.
- Move towards some form of regional acknowledgement or endorsement of ACCF principles, once adequate trust and track record are built.
- Design pilot transactions or demonstrations to test interoperability and market infrastructure options.
- Ensure leadership continuity beyond the initial two-year MoC timeframe, potentially through rotating roles among member associations.

It is also expected that if the ACCF is successful in the next five years, observers should see clearer regional guardrails that complement national policies, concrete interoperability pilots, and credible cross-border transactions. These should incentivise further investments in high-integrity projects that benefit communities and ecosystems across ASEAN.

The ACCF offers a living case study of how regional carbon market coordination can be built from the ground up—driven by industry, anchored in ASEAN policy processes, and continuously stress-tested in global fora such as COP30.