

## LEADERS IN EU-ASEAN: An Interview Series



### KARIN JAGER

Asia-Pacific Regional Director for  
Government and Public Affairs, Novartis

#### Could you share with us the path that led you here in your career today?

I really enjoyed working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but after 15 odd years in the diplomatic service of the Netherlands, I believe it was time for a change. I contemplated for a while what I wanted to do next, in what type of job I could have an added value and have a purpose, and in which industry or sector I would prefer to work. Several options passed by thoughts, for example applying for an international NGO or the United Nations. Industry sectors I considered were energy, healthcare, water management and finance. It ended up being healthcare.

#### Which recent projects or partnerships at Novartis have you been the most excited about?

There are quite a few I could mention, but I'll focus on a partnership-in-progress: We are currently working on a multipartner public private partnership to address certain gaps in the primary healthcare services at the community level in Vietnam. Urban hospitals are overcrowded in Vietnam, while the community healthcare centers are underutilized. We wish to find out why that is and offer solutions in collaboration with (a.o.) the Ministry of Health.

#### What is the current most pressing challenge you are facing in the region as Regional Director for Government & Public Affairs?

One of the biggest challenges for our industry (but not a recent one) is how to shift the Government's mindset in understanding better that healthcare is not an economic drag or a "debit" for the broader economy and for economic growth, but rather that expenditures in health is one of the "great equalizer\*". Particularly for emerging economies where access to basic health services is often sparse, this allows for a more solid basis to pursue their economic goals. Governments should consider a long-term view with regard to their health care system, like they do when they finance infrastructure investments. It's quite possible that the ROI on long-term and quality health care services would be higher than that of roads.

Another more recent challenge in the region lies around the recognition of IP: as an industry for innovative medicines we should highlight better how a strong IP law and regulations supports economic development of a country. Governments all over the world are looking for ways to improve their economies, help their citizens and build national capabilities in many areas of technology, information and culture. IP protection benefits the economy in terms of GDP, employment, tax revenues and strategic importance. Effective IPR increases funding for R&D and other innovation and IPR helps small and medium enterprises, as well as consumers and society at large.

*\*quote from David Lipton, IMF*

#### Lastly, do you have any advice for aspiring public affairs executives reading this?

- 1) Always follow-up and deliver what you promised;
- 2) Build your network, and maintain it;
- 3) Continue to practice your writing and communication skills;
- 4) Understand the business needs & adapt your priorities to them;
- 5) Don't underestimate the value of a great company reputation and what it takes to rebuild it.

**Thank you for your time, Karin! Read the rest of the interview series [here](#).**

