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ASEAN Community 2015: Where Are We?

By Raman Letchumanan

Synopsis

The ASEAN Leaders meeting in Kuala Lumpur this week will, among others, make the final assessment of the achievements over the last five years as they announce the realisation of the ASEAN Community by the end of the year. To what extent have the goals they set in 2009 been achieved?

Commentary

THE ASEAN Heads of State/Government (ASEAN Leaders) meeting this week in Kuala Lumpur will formally launch the ASEAN Community by 2015. The primary means of achieving the 2015 ASEAN Community is through the Road Map for an ASEAN Community 2015, which consists of the three Community – Socio-Cultural (ASCC), Economic (AEC), and Political-Security (APSC) – Blueprints, and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan 2.

As they announce the achievement of the ASEAN Community, the ASEAN Leaders are also expected to outline details of the post-2015 ASEAN Agenda for the next ten years - the next phase of ASEAN community building. Invariably in everyone's mind is whether the ASEAN Community 2015 has been achieved, and if so how well it has performed, and what tangible impacts has it made to the people of ASEAN, who are the main beneficiaries of the socio-cultural pillar.

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Scorecard

ASEAN Community building is based on work in three mutually-reinforcing community pillars, the APSC, the AEC and the ASCC: commonly referred to as the 3Ps – peace, prosperity and people - respectively. While much attention, analysis,

and debate goes on regarding the APSC and AEC – in fact the AEC has produced a series of scorecard analysis – relatively little attention is given to the ASCC, the people who are the ultimate beneficiary of all the efforts of ASEAN Community building.

In this regard, ASEAN has commissioned the S.Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) to compile the 2015 ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Scorecard Report. The ASCC Scorecard is published in two volumes: the Main Report and the Executive Summary.

The Executive Summary, accessible through the ASEAN Secretariat, is primarily for public consumption, for ASEAN to communicate and send out key messages on the achievements of the 2015 ASCC, and for the general public to have a comprehensive overview of what the 2015 ASCC is all about and how they can benefit and contribute.

The Main Report – about 250 pages - is an internal working document for ASEAN to conduct further work on the indicator sets, methodologies, data and information as a basis for the future monitoring and evaluation system for the next phase of ASEAN Community building 2016-2025.

The development of the ASCC Scorecard was based on a robust conceptual, methodological and analytical framework which was developed by ASEAN over the last two years. It should be noted that the Scorecard assessment is a distinct but complementary process of the implementation monitoring system of programmes and projects which the ASEAN Secretariat undertakes and reports annually based on the ASCC Blueprint Actions.

Most comprehensive database ASEAN ever produced

Though the ASCC Scorecard represents a self-assessment by ASEAN, it is firmly rooted in quantitative and qualitative indicators, data, and information. The achievement of goals, strategic objectives, targets/outcomes of the ASCC Blueprint were assessed through a total of 208 indicators as determined by the ASEAN sectoral bodies as most appropriate, consisting of 136 quantitative indicators and 72 qualitative indicators. Data and information for each of the indicators were obtained firstly from ASEAN sources as supplied by the ASEAN Member States (AMS), and secondly from reputable international sources.

It can be safely claimed that the 2015 ASCC Scorecard contains the most comprehensive data sets and coverage of AMS of the socio-development aspects of ASEAN ever produced. Certainly there are data and information gaps as highlighted in the section on challenges and limitations in the study.

Considering that this is the first comprehensive attempt to compile so much duly verified information covering all the sectors in the socio-cultural pillar, this is indeed a commendable achievement.

How has the ASCC impacted and benefitted the people?

The ASCC Scorecard informs how far the socio-cultural pillar of the ASEAN Community 2015 has been achieved in terms of the goals, strategic objectives and targets set by the ASEAN Leaders in 2009.

The Scorecard assessment - variously also known as the results/impact-based, key performance index, or management by objective assessments etc - analysed the goals, strategies, and targets agreed upon in the ASCC Blueprint 2009-2015. It covers five Characteristics (or broad thematic clusters) namely A: Human Development; B: Social Welfare and Protection; C: Social Justice and Rights; D: Ensuring Environmental Sustainability; E: Building the ASEAN Identity. Each of the Characteristics contains related Elements (or sectoral areas) totalling 31. These Elements further contains a total of 339 Actions or broad based programs and activities.

The ASCC Scorecard assessed the achievement of the Goals in each of the Characteristics, the Strategic Objective in each of the 31 Elements, and the targets/outcomes specified in the Actions. These assessments collectively provides an overview of attaining the primary goal of the 2015 ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community: *“to contribute to realising an ASEAN Community that is people-centred and socially responsible with a view to achieving enduring solidarity and unity among the nations and peoples of ASEAN by forging a common identity and building a caring and sharing society which is inclusive and harmonious where the well-being, livelihood, and welfare of the peoples are enhanced.”*

ASEAN Community 2025: people aspects need greater emphasis and investments

ASEAN through this year’s theme – Our People, Our Community, Our Vision - has aptly recognised that emphasis on the people is long overdue and much needed as they plan for ASEAN Community 2025. Of immediate value of the 2015 ASCC Scorecard is its contribution to informed programming of the ASEAN Agenda 2016-2025 in terms of meaningful and achievable quantitative goals, objectives, targets and outcomes benchmarked on past and current state of affairs.

The ASCC Scorecard Report is basically a “state of affairs” reporting as of the reference year 2015. It does not include deeper cross-sectoral analysis or reasoning of the state of affairs, as this is subject to further specific analytical research and assumptions. It is therefore hoped the 2015 ASCC Scorecard will spur such informed policy-relevant academic and research work to support ASEAN, going beyond debates and arguments. Quantitative information brings objectivity, simplicity, and focus to public and intellectual discourses.

It is hoped that ASEAN will conduct further work in enhancing the Scorecard system as the data and information are also useful national tools to monitor progress and achievement of AMS national development agenda. AMS, collectively through ASEAN, should eventually aim to generate as much primary data sources with robust methodologies specific to the region, rather than overly depending on international secondary sources.

AMS could use these primary sources of data to not only assess national goals and policies, but also to contribute to the implementation and assessment of their international obligations such as the recently adopted UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Raman Letchumanan is a Senior Fellow with the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University. The views expressed here are strictly his own. Dr Raman was a senior official at the ASEAN Secretariat from 2000-2014. He led a team of RSIS researchers to prepare the 2015 ASCC Scorecard Report for the ASEAN Secretariat.

Nanyang Technological University
Block S4, Level B4, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798
Tel: +65 6790 6982 | Fax: +65 6794 0617 | www.rsis.edu.sg