The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC): Development and Prospect

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Introduction

1. One of the major aims of ASEAN is to “accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavors in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian Nations.”

2. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), together with ASEAN Political and Security Community and ASEAN Economic Community, are the three pillars of the ASEAN Charter, officially adopted in the 13th ASEAN Summit in November 2007.
Seven Key Features of the ASCC

(1) Equitable access to opportunities is universal.
(2) Human potentials are nurtured to the fullest.
(3) Norms of social and distributive justice are upheld by addressing issues of poverty and equity, and special care is given to vulnerable groups.
(4) The environment and natural resources are protected and managed to sustain development and as a legacy for future generations.
(5) Civil society is engaged in providing inputs for policy choices.
(6) People are healthy in mind and body and living in harmony in a safe environment.
(7) ASEAN citizens interact in a community conscious of its ties of history, aware of its cultural heritage and bound by a common regional identity.
Four Core Elements of the ASCC

(1) Building a community of caring societies
(2) Managing social impact of economic integration
(3) Enhancing environment sustainability
(4) Strengthening regional social cohesion
I. Building a Community of Caring Societies:

1. Poverty alleviation

(1) The ASEAN Ministers Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (AMRDPE) was regularly held since the late 1990s.

(2) Key topics in the October 2004 AMRDPE included enabling self-reliant communities, progress of ASEAN cooperation on rural development and poverty eradication, AMRDPE’s contribution towards a community of caring societies, and cooperation with East Asian partner.
1. Poverty alleviation

(3) The 5th AMRDPE in January 2007 covers the topics such as community empowerment, coordination and synergy of efforts, millennium development goals, the future of rural development and poverty eradication within the ASEAN community, and partnerships with Plus Three countries.

(4) In the Sixth ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting in October 2008, Mrs. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, Singapore’s Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports, noted that narrowing the development gap remains an important task for ASEAN countries. Minister Yee Shoon also emphasized that narrowing development gaps within and between ASEAN member states must be done in tandem with larger ASEAN goals of community-building.
2. Protecting the interests of children, women and the elderly.

(1) ASEAN established a Sub-committee on Women in 1976, which was renamed the ASEAN Women’s Program (AWP) in 1981, responsible for related works and issues on women in the region.

(2) In the ASEAN Summit of 2003, leaders of member states committed to foster cooperation in social development and see the active involvement of all sectors of society, particularly women, youth, and local communities.
2. Protecting the interests of children, women and the elderly.

3. Strengthening the system of social welfare.

(1) The ASEAN Ministerial Meeting for Social Welfare and Development (AMMSWD) meets once every three years, in charge of the overall work on social welfare.

(2) The ASEAN Plus Three Meeting for Social Welfare and Development (AMMSWD+3) was established in 2004, responsible for related works on social welfare in the region.

(3) ASEAN developed a social welfare and development work program of 2003-2006, which has accomplished a number of activities covering such concerns for the elderly, early child care and development, and people with disability.
4. Preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases.

(1) In the joint statement of the Special ASEAN Leaders Meeting on SARS on 29 April 2003, ASEAN leaders recognized that SARS poses a serious challenge not just to the regional but globally and deeply concerned about its consequences to the well-being of the people and the economic development of Southeast Asia. This similar statement was shared in the Special ASEAN-China Leaders Meeting on SARS on the same day.
4. Preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases.

(2) The first ever ASEAN+3 Health Ministers Meeting was held on 23 April 2004, strengthening collaboration on health among the thirteen countries.

(3) The ASEAN+3 Health Ministers’ Special Meeting on Influenza A (H1N1) was convened in May 2009; the issue of H5N1 (avian influenza) was also discussed in the meeting.
5. Promoting a culture of science and technology

1. The ASEAN Committee on Science and Technology (COST) held the 60th meeting in December 2010.
2. The Fifth Meeting of ASEAN COST Plus Three was also held in December 2010.
3. The 13th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Science and Technology (AMMST) was held in Singapore in November 2009, discussing and exchanging views on a number of issues on the cooperation of science and technology in the region.
6. Establishing efficient mechanisms for disaster prevention and relief.

(1) The ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM), established in 2003, has developed an ASEAN Regional Program on Disaster Management (ARPDM), which consists of 29 activities on various disaster-related activities.

(2) The program of the Fourth ACDM, for example, points out four strategic components: (A) disaster preparedness and response, (B) risk assessment, early warning and monitoring, (C) prevention and mitigation, and (D) recovery.

(3) ACDM conducted the first Regional Disaster Emergency Response Simulation Exercise in September 2005 in Selangor, Malaysia. The fourth Simulation Exercise was held in August 2008 in Pattaya, Thailand.
Ⅱ、Managing the Social Impact of Economic Integration

1. Building a competitive labor force.
2. Promoting an efficient labor market.
3. Strengthening systems of social protection at the national level.
4. Addressing liberalization in the health sector.
5. Promoting joint certification and accreditation of science and technology at the regional level.
Examples of implementation

(1) The ASEAN Labor Ministers Meeting (ALMM) was annually held since the mid-1980s. The 19th ALMM, for example, was held in Singapore in May 2006; the main theme of which was occupational safety and health, covering how to protect the safety of labors, health and welfare of workers in Southeast Asia.

(2) The ASEAN Plus Three Labor Ministers Meeting was established in 2002. In the 6th Meeting in Bangkok in 2008, for instance, a number of topics were on the agenda, e.g. promotion and enhancement of decent work for the vulnerable categories of labor, partnership in labor initiatives, etc.
Ⅲ・Enhancing Environmental Sustainability

1. Priorities for a clean and green ASEAN:
   (1) global environmental issues
   (2) land forest fires and trans-boundary haze pollution
   (3) coastal and marine environment
   (4) sustainable forest management
2. Pursuing seven goals for promoting environment sustainability.

(1) Building national capacities to address issues and commitments to multilateral environmental agreements through awareness raising and informed policy choices.

(2) Managing trans-boundary haze in accordance with the ASEAN Agreement on Trans-boundary Haze Pollution.

(3) Promoting the sustainable use of ASEAN’s coastal and marine environment as a source of food supply and natural heritage.
2. Pursuing seven goals for promoting environment sustainability.

(4) Conserving ASEAN’s rich biological diversity and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from these biological and genetic resources.

(5) Promoting the sustainability of water resources to ensure adequate and quality water supply to meet ASEAN health and food needs.

(6) Promoting environmental education with the view to developing ASEAN citizens who are environmentally conscious.

(7) Ensuring quality living standards in ASEAN cities and urban areas.
Examples of Implementation:

1. ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Environment (AMME), established in 1981, held meeting annually. In the March 2007 AMME meeting, for example, the Ministers reviewed and exchanged views on a number of environmental issues such as land and forest fires, trans-boundary haze pollution, etc.
Examples of Implementation:

(2) On the 40th Anniversary of ASEAN and the 13th ASEAN Summit in Singapore in November 2007, ASEAN leaders recalled the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II, 7 October 2003) and the ASEAN Vision 2020 that envision a clean and green ASEAN with fully established mechanisms for sustainable development to ensure the protection of the region’s environment, the sustainability of its natural resources, and the high quality of life of its peoples.

(3) In the Third East Asia Summit (EAS) in November 2007, 16 leaders of the member countries affirmed their commitment to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as the core mechanism for addressing climate change at the global level, and for relevant countries, the Kyoto Protocol.
IV、Strengthening the Foundations of Regional Social Cohesion


2. Measures for creating an ASEAN identity:
   (1) Promoting ASEAN awareness, regional identity and values in national communications plans, educational curricula, people-to-people contact through culture, arts and sports;
   (2) Preserving and promoting ASEAN cultural heritage and living traditions;
   (3) Fostering dialogues among civilizations, cultures and religions as a means to foster better understanding; and
   (4) Promoting ASEAN’s standing in the international community.
Examples of Implementation

1. The First ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting (ASED), in associated with the 41st Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), was held in Singapore in March 2006. One of the major outputs of these two meetings is the promotion of ASEAN identity and socio-cultural community—building on the strengths of a multi-ethnic society in Southeast Asia.

2. The ASEAN Ministers of Culture and Arts (AMCA): annually held, originally from the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (COCI) in 1978. In the 2003 AMCA, for instance, the Ministers called upon the ASCC to “nurture talent and promote interaction among ASEAN scholars, writers, artists and media practitioners to help preserve and promote ASEAN’s diverse cultural heritage while fostering regional identity as well as cultivating people’s awareness of ASEAN.
3. AMCA Plus Three Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA+3) begins to hold meetings annually since 2007. The Fourth AMCA+3 was held in the Philippines in March 2010; Dr. Vilma L. Labrador, Chairman of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts of the Philippines, said in the opening address that the Philippines will place the well being, livelihood and welfare of the people at the center of the ASEAN Community building process, including underscoring the importance of incorporating the cultural ingredient in disaster management and emergency response.
Conclusion: Institutionalization of ASCC

Ⅰ、Scope: from simplicity to complexity

1. Old issues: labor, education, culture, etc.
2. New concerns: climate change, environment, trans-boundary disease, food safety and security, protection of natural resources, etc.
Ⅱ、Continuity: previous experiences for new development.

1. Previous experiences: mutual understanding and cultural cooperation on labor, education, culture, science, technology, etc.
2. New development: regionalization, economic integration, labor migration, building a regional identity, etc.
III、Implementation: from meetings to actions

1. Meetings: numerous meetings with a great deal of joint statements, chairman statements, concords, plans, etc.
2. Actions: simulation exercise for regional disaster emergency, emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction, etc.
3. More actions are needed.
Expansion: from ASEAN to neighboring countries

1. ASEAN member states:
   
   (1) Numerous activities and committees within the ASEAN, such as ASEAN established a Sub-committee on Women in 1976, which was renamed the ASEAN Women’s Program (AWP) in 1981, responsible for related works and issues on women in the region.

   (2) The First ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting (ASED), held in March 2006, was in associated with the 41st Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO).
2. ASEAN Plus One (China): since 1997
   (1) ASEAN countries held a meeting with China (PRC) in August 2005 to promote the close and friendly relations between ASEAN member countries and the PRC in cultural sector.

3. ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan, and South Korea): since 1997
   (1) The first ASEAN Plus Three Health Ministers Meeting was organized in 2005.
   (2) The ASEAN Plus Three Labor Ministers Meeting was established in 2002.
   (3) The ASEAN Plus Three Meeting for Social Welfare and Development (AMMSWD+3) was established in 2004.
4. ASEAN Plus Six (East Asian Summit), or 10+6: mostly since 2005
(1) In the Third East Asia Summit (EAS) in November 2007, 16 leaders of the member countries affirmed their commitment to take measures for addressing climate change at the global level.

5. Special Meetings for unexpected events
(1) ASEAN leaders organized a special meeting on SARS on 29 April 2003.
(2) The Special ASEAN-China Leaders Meeting on SARS was also held on the same day (29 April 2003).
(3) The ASEAN+3 Health Ministers’ Special Meeting on Influenza A (H1N1) was convened in May 2009; the issue of H5N1 (avian influenza) was also discussed in the meeting.