

Towards an Asean Worldview: Beyond Language, Culture and other Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts a search for a predominant worldview to drive the ASEAN vision. It recognizes the seemingly complex and diverse backgrounds from which ASEAN member countries emerged, but believes that for resounding impact to be made, the body must have presuppositions representing the lens through which its view of life is seen. In the face of possible policy imperatives of harnessing resources of member states and forging inclusiveness with a regional approach, it raises the critical concern of addressing the identity issue of ASEAN, without which the community will not go beyond the elite level. It opines that only at the grassroots level will all inherent challenges and possible dangers that might ensue from the community be effectively addressed.

Against the backdrop of diversity of language, culture, religion, government and other social structure, the paper believes that ASEAN member states share some destinies which include unemployment, inequality, high population growth, ethnic conflicts, environmental degradation, malnutrition and poverty. The images of diversity and the rallying point of shared destinies seem like arrows pointing in one direction, and also present another profound revelation: the dynamics of interaction in all of the ASEAN countries are directly related to the communication pattern that consequently produced their economic downturn.

The paper concludes that a worldview anchored on the unifying factors of the shared destinies among ASEAN member states, and the strong shield for their realization in DEVCOM, may provide the needed wisdom and perspective for an ASEAN worldview.

INTRODUCTION

The search for a predominant worldview to drive the ASEAN vision is definitely in order. This is so because of the seemingly complex and diverse backgrounds from which the member countries of the regional body have emerged. For resounding impact to be made, the emerging body must of a necessity have presuppositions representing the lens through which its view of life is seen. ASEAN needs an outlook to project its vision. However, it is necessary for us first, to understand the concept of worldview, especially as it applies in this case. This paper will try to establish the meaning and significance of this concept for ASEAN. It will also attempt to peel the layers of our search for a worldview through the following searchlights and questions; Does ASEAN fit into other known templates of regionalism in terms of its Agenda?

What realities confront us from a tabulation of current world views of ASEAN member countries?

Against the backdrop of diversity of language, culture, religion, government and other challenges, can any point of convergence be reached from the bewildering profusion of worldviews of these nations?

Do they share anything in common?

If there are visible unifying factors among these member countries, what are the implications of these unifying factors for a possible worldview?

And lastly, in what direction are the arrows of our discovery of unfolding realities pointing?. But first, let us understand the concept of worldview and its significance for this search.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding The Concept Of Worldview

Essentially, worldview operates not only at the individual level. It also operates at the societal or organizational levels. It is how an individual, or an organization views the world in terms of values, ideas and the essential system of belief that determines their attitudes and propel their actions. It is regarded as most important because it is a pivot around which many things revolve. A history of the Concept reveals that it was started by cultural anthropologists. It was initially synonymous with cosmology and eventually evolved as an essential lens for providing the models or maps which impart structures to an understanding of reality, as well guiding behavior, organizing ideas and feelings and providing help in selecting what fits in our culture, and rejecting what does not fit especially during times of change. It is therefore not a physical view of the world, but tends rather to the philosophical, to embrace what matters to an individual or in our case, an organization.(ligonier.org/focusonthefamily.com/www3.dbu.edu/shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in)

Asean Through Regionalism Template And Agenda

Like all regional bodies before ASEAN and presumably after, long standing template to drive the vision of community in the mold of ASEAN's remains the same, and has always been anchored on the policy imperatives of;

- Harnessing the resources of member states and showcasing their collective wealth with the aim of promoting their well-being,
- Forging inclusiveness and nurturing everyone in the region as an indispensable contributor to its socio-economic advancement and making them equal beneficiaries of available opportunities,
- Ensuring a regional approach to infrastructure and industrialization and commerce in line with globalization and shifts in the international political economy,
- Forging a model of governance that is enduring and capable of providing a basis for effective administration of the people, and
- Enabling each member state to develop at their own pace and in accordance with their potentials in line with their peculiar history and cultural inclinations.

If there are no anomalies in the ASEAN grouping and AGENDA, it may then be expedient to ask; can ASEAN be committed to;

- Ensuring equitable level of development across the member states to the benefit of their people?
- Creating the opportunities and platform for shared resources and enterprise with an enabling environment?
- Enabling the achievement of some of the key elements of millenium development goals for the betterment of the well-being of the people?
- Joint exploration of fresh and ingenious solutions to structural human and infrastructural development across the region?
- Enabling the leaders of the nations to be better resource managers and more effective at governance?

Mass mobilization that brings every individual, all groups and segments of the society to a new culture of hardwork, productivity and impact for exceptional regional development?

(Development Agenda For Western Nigeria (DAWN) Executive Summary.)

Realities of Current Worldview Tabulation of Asean

Magsino Angel's (2014) worldview tabulation of ASEAN countries reveals, as expected, a motley lot of perceptions about the world.

Indonesia is marked by a belief in God and a nationalistic tendency as well as a zeal for social-justice. While Malaysia stands out with an acceptance of fate and a belief in self-discipline, and a respect for ritual and Islam. The Philippines is qualified with a transpersonal worldview, which holds above all, the view that "the human person is part of a bigger collectivity and the ego can at times lower its barriers to fuse with a bigger reality". Singapore's stance for Community support and respect for the individual is echoed in Thailand's

penchant for group orientation which sees that group welfare supersedes individual concerns. The concept of God, revelation, religion and morality pervade the worldview of Brunei Darussalam while Vietnam shows off traditional values that emerge from Confucianism ethics. Lao is reflective of the Buddhism Philosophy and its precepts. Myanmar is marked by a value for education as well as respect to elders and monks. Cambodia is highlighted with knowing “The Noble Eightfold Path” of

Right Views
Right Intention
Right Speech
Right Action
Right livelihood
Right effort
Right mindfulness
Right concentration

Arriving at a worldview that will answer for ten member states in this case from the existing array of each country may be an exercise in futility. Religious views are diverse and the effect of these views and philosophies affect other areas of calling.

According to Suryodinigrat (2004); there have been over four decades of cooperation. Within these decades there have been four declarations, two Concords, two Treaties, one Protocol, a vision statement and countless agreements are Bruneians, Cambodians, Laotians, Indonesians, Malaysians, Myanmarese, Filipinos, Singaporeans, Thais, and Vietnamese, so estranged from each other that they need a formal legalistic declaration of intent to be a community?...

To support Suryodinigrat, Abdulrahim, (2014) declares;...unless the identity issue is seriously addressed, there is a danger that the ASEAN community will only exist at the elite level and not be keenly felt among the public. At the grassroots level within the 10 member nations, public prejudices, suspicions and antipathies are likely to remain, posing a threat to peace, stability and prosperity in the region...

And Suryodinigrat seems to draw the curtains of impossibility and puts the idea of forging an identity to rest by his fiery declaration; despite intensified economic cooperation, nations of the Southeast Asian region privately still regard each other as rivals. Mutual suspicion is immersed and economic development too disparate allow more stronger integration. The lofty statement in ASEAN meetings obscure the reality that long standing geographic and strategic differences have not been established.

But despite the negatives, Guerrero, (2010) adds; The most widely recognized agreement in favor of regional integration is the benefit of expanding markets and promoting competition by eliminating barriers to trade among member countries. Economic welfare increases as resources previously engaged in costly domestic production are efficiently reallocated to the direction of a country's comparative advantage.

From the foregoing, it is clear that ASEAN aims to build a community out of diversity, that is people-oriented, socially responsible, caring and sharing, inclusive, where the livelihood and welfare of the people are top priority and are enhanced.

ASEAN'S SHARED DESTINIES AND UNIFYING FACTORS

However, against the backdrop of diversity of language, culture, religion, government and other social structure, ASEAN member states incidentally share some destinies. There are some unifying factors which on their own, have become another set of culture. Among most of these countries are shared destinies of social problems associated with the Third World. They include unemployment, inequality, high population growth, ethnic conflicts, environmental degradation, malnutrition and poverty. Ongkiko and Flor (2003)

Many in the ASEAN countries do not earn a living because they are unemployed. And many more also engage in work that demand lower skills than what they were trained for. They subsequently get wages far below what they are worth. According to Santos, (2014); The Philippines has the highest unemployment rate among members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, (ASEAN). The Philippines registered an unemployment rate of 7.3 percent as of 2013. Ranking just above the Philippines is Indonesia with 6 percent. Neighboring Asean countries, Brunei has 3.7 percent, Burma, 3.5 percent. The countries with the lowest unemployment rates are Vietnam, 1.9 percent, Laos 1.4 percent, Thailand 0.8 percent; and Cambodia 0.3 percent.

There is also a unifying inequality factor in all Asean countries. All of the countries show evidence of wide gap between the Rich and the Poor. To attest to this, Bock (2013) states relative income inequality within most ASEAN countries is rising as national elites capture more of the wealth. Inequality continues to rise in wealthier ASEAN nations such as Singapore and Malaysia, as well as low income economies such as Cambodia and Laos. Conversely, countries of lower middle income states, i.e., Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam have been able to reduce inequality slightly"

High population growth is also another pervasive factor in the ASEAN countries. Nowhere else has the Malthusian prediction come to pass more than in Asia and the ten most highly populated nations are developing countries. This leaves ASEAN countries with no room for isolation.

In addition to high population growth, the issue of environment degradation and the loss of farm lands is a factor that runs through the ASEAN countries. Many of the farmlands had previously been subjected to chemicals such as fertilizers, in the name of efficiency which for long was the philosophy by which increased yield was driven. Mechanized planting and harvesting opened the door for depletion of land and consequent degradation. The environment has also undergone untold pollution from

the fall out of green house emissions, bringing climate change and food shortages.

Closely tied to this is the issue of hunger/malnutrition, which is the absence of food, high and complete in nutrients, to feed especially children and supply their body growth needs adequately.

Ethnic conflicts rage on in various ASEAN countries. From Myanmar to East Timor, to Mindanao in the Philippines; all of which are taking the shape of cultural and ethnic strife.

Of this Kihl, (1989) says; "Many of the sources of intra-regional conflicts lie in the nationalism associated with nation building and national integration in the various countries of Southeast Asia. Ancient territorial claims and ethnic concerns often underlie the policy interests and agendas of contemporary governments seeking enhanced natural security and increased economic development".

And last but not the least of the shared problems in ASEAN countries is poverty. It appears to be the most troublesome. For example, among some of the ASEAN countries, 47.8 million are said to live in abject poverty in Indonesia, 37.6 million in Vietnam, 35.2 million in the Philippines. Six out of ten Filipinos are said to be poor. It means these people are unable to have a decent meal, clothe themselves properly and effectively, treat themselves of diseases or live in safe or comfortable houses. In Szczepanski's (2008) words Across Southeast Asia, more than 1 billion people live on less than \$2 U.S. per day. Malaysia and Singapore, have wealthy economies and low poverty rates. Nations such as Cambodia, Laos, Burma, and East Timor, however rank near the bottom of global development lists. Thirty sevenpercent of Southeast \$1 a day.

METHODOLOGY

Implications of these Unifying Factors for a Possible Worldview

Effort has been made to provide the above detail to establish a link through which an undisputable vehicle to move the ASEAN community/identity/vision agenda may emerge. The images of diversity that have so far shown up in our journey through the landscape of cultural determinants, as well as the rallying point of shared destinies not only seem like arrows pointing in one direction, but also present another profound revelation: the dynamics of interaction in all of the ASEAN countries are directly related to the communication pattern that consequently produced their economic downturn. The predominant climate of socio-political, and economic woes in the societies under review are likely consequences of the actions or inactions that trailed set patterns of relationships and especially social structure. For instance, in a society with a predominantly authoritarian stance, the kind of government that emerges in the state will always be higher than the individuals in the society. For an individual to succeed in such a society, they must learn to submit to the authority of the state. Communication pattern will automatically be top-down and the individuals are left at the whims and caprices of the state. All players in the media and other information or communication practitioners must of a necessity reflect the views of the state. Where the practitioners find

themselves functioning within a pattern of communication that favors the watchdog role, rather than being instruments in the hands of the king, state or government, they are in a position to provide checks for the government. Individuals in such societies are accorded the right to know what is true and what is not. The truth resides not with the government, but in the governed. Where the communication pattern is set with the media having the social responsibility to present both sides of the coin, the results will be visible. The degree of commonness found in any society is influenced by dominant communication patterns in such a society. The dominant ideology, either Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social responsibility or Soviet totalitarian reflect in the practice of their societies and steers the ship of attainments or the lack of it. The practitioners' knowledge of values is affected by the dominant ideology and this consequently determines to whom they owe their moral duty. Siebet et al's four theories of the press as already outlined, provide the lenses for us to see societies as a reflection of the kind of press their predominant values have bred. Ongkiko and Flor, (2003: 153); however provide deeper insights with the following thoughts; It may be noted that Siebet et al's typology covers the major types of social and political structures analyzed by historians and political scientists during their time. Less than a decade after the publication of their work, however, another type of social structure began to emerge, one that would hardly escape notice if only for its pervasiveness. This was the developing society, the predominant social genre in post colonial Asia, Latin America, and Africa. It is in the context of this particular society its global environment that a "Fifth theory" finds its application.

RESEARCH RESULT

Devcom;Where the Arrows are Pointing

From the above, it becomes clear that to convert the aims, principles and objectives of ASEAN to reality, requires a pragmatic, purposive and value laden vehicle most suitable for existing political and social structures that trail the developing world to which all ASEAN member states belong. All of the hopes to resolve the shared destinies of poverty, unemployment, hunger, environment degradation, high population, etc, are met in DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION, the only voice of hope that can provide the needed identity oasis away from the profusion and confusion of the irreconcilable differences among the ASEAN nations in their search for an identity. The predominant objectives and vision of ASEAN which include forging inclusiveness with the individual and especially the grassroot as indispensable contributor their own growth and development, as well as ensuring an equitable level of development across member states and mobilizing the masses to a new culture of hard work for development and especially of confronting their unifying factors of unemployment, inequality, high-population growth, ethnic conflicts, environmental degradation, malnutrition and poverty that will culminate in one-true identity seem best anchored on the values attached to Development Communication as a conception for driving and mobilizing the people, toward the unfolding of the human potential.

According to Quebral (2012); Development Communication is “The Science of human communication linked to the transitioning of communities from poverty in all its forms to a dynamic, overall growth that fosters equality and the unfolding of individual potential”.

It is therefore a concept woven around human communication with inherent values that can be imbibed through application for the transformation of a people’s lives from poverty to a level of appreciable fulfillment of their potential. As a concept perfected by the developing nations, it is able to influence the experiences and situations of the poor and has been tested by the first set of development agents-agricultural extension workers- during the 50’s. It has been noted especially to contain the ingredients needed to galvanize the people through the raising of their consciousness and awareness on issues that concern them and providing feedback especially on programs that promote nation-building. Among its elements is its advocacy for responsiveness, feedback, innovativeness, sustainability and continuity, and the need to reduce seemingly complex issues to the experiential level of the common man through tasks such as networking, facilitating, interviewing, training and interpreting information. (www.thusong.gov.za/documents/arctic_pres/dev_comm.htm) The instrument of Development Communication is therefore applicable for the following reasons;

- It uniquely expresses the people’s voice and deeply represents the individual’s vision.
- It emerged from the situations and circumstances noted with the Third World.
- It shares affinity with religion
- It is geared toward not just meeting man’s basic needs but also toward the actualization of man’s potential.
- It advocates a structure that includes government, the people, N.G.O’s and Civil society; and
- It has respect for traditional cultures and encourages the use of indigenous technology and communication in a way that they will be socially productive. Ongkiko and Flor,(2003)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In closing, there has been a highlight of the need for a new paradigm to describe the social relationships where different organic groups can unite and work toward the same unified social order. A call has also been made on ASEAN to do it right by evolving a society with the critical components of democracy, good governance and people’s participation that will also include the institutional level in the form of civil groups, organizations and new constitutions. A rules- based, society with shared norms and values with a focus on Human Development and Environmental Sustainability has also been underscored. ASEAN’s Agenda on Mass mobilization that brings every individual, all groups and segments of the society to a new culture of hardwork, productivity and input for exceptional regional development has

also not escaped highlight for emphasis on its significance to the ASEAN identity and is by far the most resounding of the items on ASEAN's Agenda for an identity.

To conclude this essay on what might be its most deserved tone, the voices of Carden, Jones, and Alamanach would reverberate more than the "voice" of any pen, and lend more credence to the undisputable potential in Development Communication as the sole driver of the ASEAN identity dream.

Carden, (2014) declares; our primary concern will need to be for the Environment and society at large. We need a different relationship with the land and its resources. In order to create this relationship, leaders including those in ASEAN will need to educate the people on what needs to be done.

Re-echoing these thoughts, Jones (2004) states; education, the form of capacity building and knowledge management will be a fundamental means of achieving a shared regional identity. The development of educational incentives will be successful only if education averts the tendency to stratify society and bolster an elite cadre of citizens.

And Alamanach's (2012) voice, provides a cliff hanger for this work; They will choose their identity. Asean can make suggestions but if it wants to succeed in forming a common identity, then it will leave the details and the final decision up to the people.

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