



ASEAN YOUTH ROLE WITH UP-COMING CHALLENGE

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Many people around the world are now eager to know what will be impacts of ASEAN Community beyond 2015. They are trying to hear opinions from diverse communities. The voices of young people in the 10-member nation need to be heard. Definitely, they will play a role and have the rights to participate in the community. Here, we have shared some young people's voices from regional and western countries. We believe their views on ASEAN Community will be of benefit for our readers.

For me, it is the first time joining in ASEAN Youth Forum by coming to Myanmar. I was concerned about the issue of peace and conflict. I do understand the issue is very sensitive to discuss. But for example in my organization we have Muslims and Buddhists. We are trying to build a kind of understanding between these two groups. Why it is successful and I believe this kind situation can be created in Myanmar. Of course it is not a short-term project. It is a long-term project. And the research will be felt by our next generation. We should study from now.

In my opinion, actually of course there are challenges and there are also opportunities and the best way is we have to do analysis how could we handle the challenges. Because ASEAN community 2015 is seen and that is coming already.

That's why we should try to do our best to make it useful for all people not only for specific part of Asean but I hope it can be very very helpful for all people in Asean. We are trying to make up to live that Asean community will be very beneficial for all ten countries in Asean.

I suggest that to solve certain issues we should not depend on the government but we should especially depend on civil societies. Should be active to try to identify the problems and try to dialogue. Asean Youth is part of the whole civil society and also of course part of Asian people and Youth forum is very important to build up very holistic healthy action community. So, Youth forum should be heard, youth forum should express truth and through this channels we can improve Asean. ☑



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We have a lot of topics here in the workshop. We have education. We have sustainable quality of education and sustainable development. I think it is not only in my country that education is very big problem and very concerning issue. We are facing the problem in Cambodia too. And as we are experiencing the problem of

unemployment, the quality of education is effected by unqualified teachers. The reason that teachers are not qualified is that teachers have low salary. So, they think it that distortions happen when the salary is low. So, I mean that the number of graduates is high but the jobless rate is high. Because during the study they are not qualified. So, after the graduation they are not qualified for a job. So, we are facing a problem of high unemployment rate. In one year, they ask about 20,000 to 25,000 graduates, but we only have 1,000 jobs for them. So the others are everywhere. So, you can't say that the quality is the very big concern only in Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar. It is a problem of many countries in Asean. This is a very hot and big issue to the region. We identify the main issue of education is poor system. So, because of big area are poor we need to fix out the area. We find the salary is the main issue among teachers. So what we like to comment to the policy maker of the government is that they should provide enough. They can survive only in a suitable environment. So that, this is the good motivation to be a

good teacher. A good teacher produces good students. Human resource development is one important element in all countries. The issue of teacher is not the only one in Cambodia's rural areas, we also lack other facilities. We are lacking in technology as well as science. So what we are recommending the government that they have to fix those issues of the teacher, the facility and also the environment.

I believe it is unlikely that ASEAN will achieve it if blue print does have one single community. If you look at each area in term of economic development it is a very big gap between the rich and four CLMV countries- Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar. In terms of politics, I am really concerned about the democratization in Myanmar right now. If you look at each area of economics, politics and also social cultural, the gap is still there. I don't think that by 2015 ASEAN community can be achieved. But I do believe that If the government absorb the participation from young people to be part of the solution to take part in any areas of the development. **A**

This is the first time I attended this sort of forum. I heard this forum from my network, my friends. I am reading information about this. In my view for 2015, Asean can be more united and successful for bigger roles as each country may have opportunity to make a difference to the world. I think at the moment some problems may be challenges for some countries to become one Asean 2015 set up you know the conflicts between some governments to resolve some problems like conflict of the sea and cooperate some problems in diplomatic way. On the other hand, each country can handle its inter-



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nal problem to be resolved quickly.

I think the first problem did not come from China. It came from us, Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines. I think very different because ASEAN is so complicated, very different countries, different cultures but I think is not big problem today because now many methods to correct young people in ASEAN like social network, cultural exchange and many activities can be used in Asean more closely. 



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To be honest, I had learned about the ASEAN Youth only when I started to prepare for my participation in the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF). ASEAN-related meetings have a tendency to be high in symbolic measures and shy of open discussions. Therefore, I was very pleasantly surprised by the quality of the debate, the passion of the participants and the openness to tackle even controversial issues.

It was my first time participating in the Youth Forum, but based on my talks

with participants and the organizers, the AYF in Myanmar marked a major step forward. The past meetings ended in a resolution and that was about it. Now, the representatives of the AYF were promised their own timeslot to present their views to the ASEAN leaders in May. Judging from all the reports I heard and read about the past two ASEAN presidencies, the climate in Cambodia and Brunei was very restrictive, if not outright hostile towards civil society. Keeping all reservations in mind, I am still impressed that Myanmar offered a comparatively open environment for such a meeting.

At least from my observation there was no restriction on the topics that were addressed during the meeting, with the

exception of the plight of the Rohingyas (Bengalis) which was treated with caution. There were strong calls for transparency, good governance, democratic reforms, freedom of expression and bringing forward negotiations on peace and reconciliation. Further positions were anti-land grabbing, anti-trafficking, the situation of sex workers and, close to my own research focus, the rights of migrant workers, no matter if documented or undocumented. This wide spectrum of topics notwithstanding, they still managed to come out with a concise statement. Maybe the biggest surprise for me was the major support for LGBTIQ (young people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identities, and gender expression). While



Current

some participants were of the opinion that there are more pressing issues for a country in transition like Myanmar, I am strongly convinced that the tolerance and acceptance shown to widely discriminated groups is an important aspect of democratic reform. And considering the troubling developments in Brunei or the discriminatory politics of countries like Malaysia towards LGBTIQ highlights the importance of the statements made in Yangon.

There are many topics which are certainly challenging but that does not mean they are impossible - it is more a question of willingness. ASEAN countries seem to be the most ready to cooperate in economic aspects as shown by the plans to have a common market by the start of 2016. But, and that is a debate we have in Europe as well, how successful can economic integration be without political integration? Aside from the big political issues, there are also questions of standards, compatibilities etc. The disappearance of Flight MH370 highlighted some troublesome lack of cooperation in the air traffic sector and beyond. And while some political scientists analyze ASEAN as a “security community”, the stance of the organization in the South China Sea issue

shows that cooperation here is still limited.

Among the most challenging fields of cooperation seems to be the issue where I focus my research on: The rights of migrant workers, which are closely connected to human rights, labor rights, women’s rights etc. ASEAN has promised an “instrument” to address labor migration, but all they have come up with so far is a so-called “zero draft” because in particular Malaysia is not supportive of a rights-based approach to migration as well. The Asian Economic Community aims for full integration of “skilled labor” which basically means that there will be a two-class society in the field of labor mobility. I also object to the term “skilled labor” - for example, many of the Filipinas that are employed as domestic workers in Singapore have obtained a university degree. Classifying this work as “low-skilled” is just used as an excuse to deny them basic labor rights. This is where civil society can - and has to - play an important role: In a marked contrast to ASEAN, the regional migrant civil society organizations have used a fairly inclusive process to come up with very specific recommendations on the regional governance of migration.

There are regional and cultural differences, but in the end I think that young people all over the world want very much the same thing: The chance to have a decent live in dignity, to live in a country with a government that makes inclusive politics and can be held responsible for it, education opportunities, personal freedoms... ASEAN countries are very heterogeneous and so are the experiences that the youth representatives bring to a meeting like these. For example, the Philippines have maybe the most active civil society in the world and the Indonesians are very strong in organizing as well. So the AYF is a great place for mutual exchange on strategies etc. What struck me most when meeting several Myanmar young representatives was, how “hungry” they are for education which they have been denied for a long time, including my own discipline, political science. When people on the stage spoke out about political issues and injustice in Myanmar at the AYF and the ACSC, some of the participants sitting next to me could barely hold on to their seats in excitement that these issues could finally be tackled. I was also impressed that some delegates from remote areas took up 5 days of travel just to participate. 🇲🇲





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Atlantic Marine Services as a side job next to my studies in the Netherlands

I am doing an internship at the center for Youth and Social Harmony and my supervisor, Ko Thet Swe Win, told me about the AYF. I attended the AYF as an observer. I am currently doing a Master in conflict studies and human rights. For this master I am doing research on how co-operations affect the development of Myanmar, with a focus on youth empowerment. So this is why I attended the AYF. I wanted to see how the youth thought about their own empowerment and how they deal with issues. The forum taught me about current issues the youth in the ASEAN countries are trying to deal with. It was very interesting to see how the youth really is calling for change.

I think the AYF is very important. Young people are the future and therefore they need to be given a voice. In a globalizing world, it is good to be able to connect with other people. This creates awareness and understanding for each other. The way the participants of the AYF worked together to come up with solutions, is an example for the leaders of the

ASEAN countries. The participants talked about many subjects ranging from (un)employment, education, sexual health to religions, gender, ethnicity and corruption. I thought it was very good that the range of topics was very wide and that the participants felt free to talk about everything.

Working together always brings difficulties. All parties need to be willing to listen and have a common goal. I feel that less intense issues such as employment and education will not cause any problems in working together, but other issues will. It will be challenging to work together on issues which the ASEAN countries differ in opinion, such as human rights, cultural, religious and ethnic issues. I don't think there is much difference between ASEAN and Myanmar youth. There are some minor differences though. Myanmar youth, in general, have less access to information and knowledge. Furthermore, Myanmar youth often lacks the opportunity to be productive, while they do possess the ability to be productive. 



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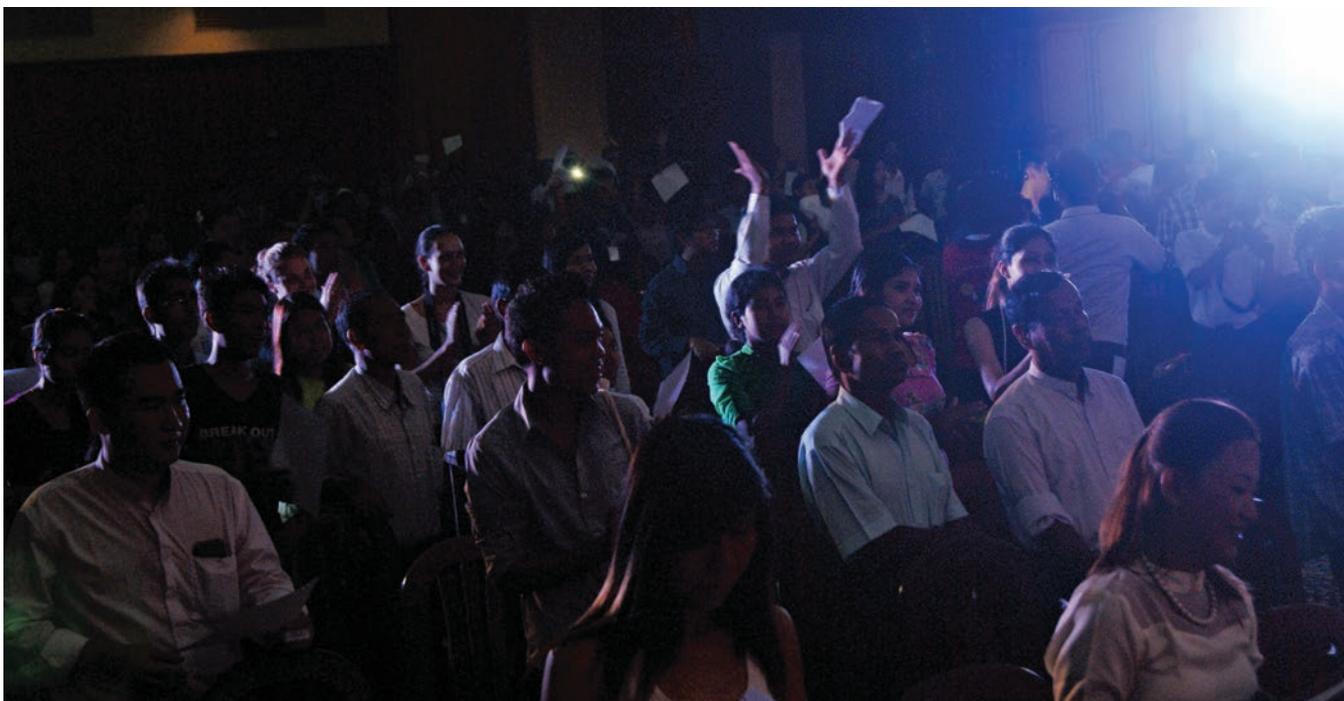
I was invited by the internship supervisor of my Dutch friend, who is working for an NGO in youth empowerment. I am doing an internship at another NGO, which is also related to the ASEAN youth

forum. I learned a lot from the Forum. I had just arrived in Myanmar at that time, so I learned some things about Myanmar and how the youth is perceiving the situation and also how much the youth is involved in the process of achieving a better future for themselves, other youth and ASEAN itself. The advantage of holding a youth forum is a dialogue is starting about the problems that the youth is facing in the ASEAN corporation. It is clear that the ASEAN corporation is a good initiative but that it's lacking some perspective on youth and livelihood development. Talking about this is the first step to achieve change.

The topics vary a lot. Migration, land grabbing, human trafficking, economic development, education and human rights were very important during the ASEAN youth forum. The thing that kept with me the most was the notion that the ASEAN youth thinks that economic development is the most important for the ASEAN governments, and that they forget about the people. The human rights of people and the livelihoods of people should be taken into account when developing the country, not only the money counts. In my opinion, it is easier to work together in

the case of trading agreements and sharing economic benefits; to form a block of South East Asian Nations that can compete with countries like China, Russia, the US and Europe. The hard parts are agreements about human rights. These agreements cost money, and don't directly benefit the governments like trade agreements do. Of course, they do benefit the governments indirectly, because countries with inhabitants whom human rights are being protected are more developed in general. This part is not impossible, it has been done before. It is very hard though, and I think ASEAN people and youth should make it clear to the ASEAN governments that this part cannot be forgotten.

I think that the Myanmar youth is still a bit careful in their talking and acting. Their country has just been opened, but people are still a bit hesitant to talk freely. Youth from other ASEAN countries are a bit more experienced in sharing their opinions. But this is a difference that will hopefully change in time. Similarities are that the ASEAN youth is very kind and very welcoming. Some countries in other parts of the world could learn from these qualities. 





This is third time for me. This forum is the biggest one, is more progressive. Firstly, freedom of expression, democracy and good governance and second day I am facilitator for the issue of legends of a national strategy to move forward Asean youth to engage to the Asean boundary. During this forum, I try to share that we have something as common issue we can move forward together from the younger people, young people power, young people voices. We are the future of Asean, of course, right now not really compound each other, we as a young people we are starting to make understand to each other from now on. In the future, if we are in future, we have more harmonies, loyalties, less space together in the future.

We want to tell about that we should not forget on the economic integration. Social and cultural integration is very important for our legends or also our new

generations. So just economic integration is thing of many issues, many problems in the region that we are concerning. In my opinion, nationalism still willing and strong in each country. I want all Asean youth to think cross country, cross nation. So we don't need to win nationalism too much for our benefit. We have to get together to negotiate to the outside Asean legend such as European Union. Between ASEAN young people, we have different nationality, different culture and very diverse. I think diversity in principle of humanity, we can walk together in the future.

Some of us may be politicians in the future, may be the businessmen. Some of us may be head of the big organization in the ministries or normal people. Try to create understanding each other. You see here many cultural exchange, understanding they have it together. This is the basic



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principle to go beyond political differences, social cultural differences, that is the good thinking for the future. 



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I mainly focused on environment issue in the forum. The main issue is plastic bags in our environment. After the ceremonies, lots of plastic bags can be seen around the area. There are no dust bins. Myanmar consumers are the most plastic bags users. This is current issue we are facing. The plastic bags are very hard to trans-

form fertilizer. And also the roots from plants and trees hardly go through to meet with the soil. It is a big challenge for forestation. In my township agriculture sector, we only plant rubber as long-term project. It is not good for environment because their production and replantation are quite different. It shouldn't be only rubber. Like in Vietnam, more deforestation is likely to be happening in Myanmar. Their issue is forest fire, only one type of plantation and tourism. We have to build up a network with them. What the forum offers the youth is the youth know what they need. **A**



What we talked in the forum is freedom of expression, education, good governance, and other issues. We can see how the youth are active in the talk in two topics- good governance and freedom of expression. Because the ASEAN is an organization transformed from dictatorship so that some parts of their activities are limited for the people to participate. The young people from ASEAN Youth Forum actively discuss their views that dictatorship is totally unacceptable. Different thing in the forum is Filipinos are very interested in sexual reproductive health issue. Indonesians are the same. If it is one of the issues for them but it is not issue for the countries like Myanmar and Cambodia. On the other hand, democracy and human rights is one of the issues for



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Myanmar but it is not for Vietnam and Brunei. ASEAN is a diversity community with different backgrounds. In our talk, interests are different depending on topic. We are worried about ASEAN Integration. After the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement and leads towards ASEAN Community, educated youth from regional rich countries will come to Myanmar, Cambodia, Lao and there can be lack of job opportunity for local young people. Different education system is a weakness for youth. We worry about it so much. So to protect local job opportunity we would like to talk with government. If economic integration is in the upper level, it will be difficult to integrate for the people in the lower level. **A**