ASEAN ASPIRATIONS: ROLES OF LIBRARIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The concept of sustainable development is directly and indirectly highlighted within the ASEAN aspirations. Especially the ASEAN Socio-cultural Community (ASCC), one of the three pillars of ASEAN, has addressed the region’s aspiration to lift the quality of life of its peoples through cooperative activities that are people-oriented and environmentally friendly geared towards the promotion of sustainable development. Several strategies of ASCC are involved with the aims for providing and enhancing the life-long learning, mutual understanding, better quality of life and equity access to information of the people in the region. Libraries as part of the ASEAN community system should take roles to help fulfill the aims of ASCC. The author has drawn the concept of linkages between ASEAN aspirations and roles of libraries for sustainable development. The details on the library roles, functions and services in response to ASEAN aspirations for sustainable development are also included.

Keywords: ASEAN aspirations, Sustainable development, Library roles

ASEAN ASPIRATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development has been defined in many ways, but the most quoted definition is from the United Nations' World Commission on Environment and Development which defines as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains two key concepts: 1) the concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and 2) the concept of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs (WCED, 1987). With the development of modernization, sustainable development emerged as central to a debated about the limits of growth, and being applied in the areas of researches and studies in many disciplines (Spink, 1999). The aim of sustainable development is to define viable schemes combining the economic, social, and environmental aspects of human activity and to find a coherent and long-lasting balance between these three aspects. The concept of sustainable development must allow the basic needs of present
and future generations to be fulfilled with regard to demographic constraints, and the quality of life improvement, which involves access to education, medical care, social services, and culture (Legrand Group, 2014).

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been an integral part of Asia’s ongoing socio-political and economic transformation and remains an example for other regional groups of how carefully crafted cooperation can benefit all members—even if extremely diverse in size, geography, culture, income level, and resource endowment. As it approaches the target for the creation of an ASEAN Community by the end of 2015, it will find merit in forging a longer term strategy for shared prosperity of its members, the wider Asian region, and the world at large (ADB, 2014). The region’s key development priorities can be structured along the following four 2030 aspirations for “RICH” ASEAN: resilience; inclusiveness, competitiveness, and harmony. The detail of the RICH ASEAN concept is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The “RICH” ASEAN concept (ADB, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASPIRATIONS</th>
<th>DESCRIPTIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Capacity to handle volatilities and shocks through solid macroeconomic policies and effective policy frameworks ensuring financial stability also by strengthening initiatives for regional cooperation.</td>
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<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>Ability to narrow development gaps within and across countries, reduce poverty, provide equal opportunities, follow a participatory approach in decision making, and ultimately improving people’s quality of life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competitiveness</td>
<td>Ability to increase productivity and compete with major players in global markets by developing a specific set of institutions, policies, and other factors linked with innovation capability and market efficiency.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>Condition of living in peace with members of national and international communities, working together to resolve common problems, sharing prosperity with others, and respecting and protecting the environment.</td>
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The concept of sustainable development, improving the people’s quality of life, is directly and indirectly highlighted within the ASEAN aspirations. Especially the ASEAN Socio-cultural Community (ASCC), one of the three pillars of ASEAN, has its goal to contribute to realizing an ASEAN Community that is people-centered 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. The ASCC addresses the region’s aspiration to lift the quality of life of its peoples through cooperative activities that are people-oriented and environmentally friendly geared towards the promotion of sustainable development (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009). Several strategies of ASCC are involved with the aims for providing
and enhancing the life-long learning, mutual understanding, better quality of life and equity access to information of the people in the region. Examples of the actions are (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009):

- Use ICT to promote education and life-long learning particularly in underserved communities through open, distance education and e-learning;
- Develop and offer courses on ASEAN studies at all levels for better understanding of the regional issues;
- Support learning of ASEAN languages and promote exchanges of linguists;
- Implement capacity building programs to increase information and computer literacy in ASEAN;
- Promote the development, use and sharing of digital content among ASEAN Member States;
- Promote the regional cooperation on the acquisition, conservation, preservation and use of archives of cultural heritage to ensure its continuity to enhance awareness and understanding of the people about ASEAN; and
- Establish a network of science and technology centers of excellence to promote cooperation, sharing of research facilities, technology transfer and commercialization, and joint research and technology development.

ASEAN ASPIRATIONS AND ROLES OF LIBRARIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Library is an organization that has a role in the development of society for a long time. Shera (1976) stated that library has been recognized as a wide part of a social system created by people, naming libraries as social institutions for the needs of the society. Because library is a social infrastructure, changes in the environment make a huge impact on it. In the social system the library works as an integrated cultural factor, which according to Reith (1984) distinguished the roles of libraries, that have to fulfill social needs, into the following four functions: 1) Repository role - storage and management of society’s documents by acquiring, collecting, preserving, and describing the document created by humanity; 2) Information role - dispersion of the collected information; 3) Education role – provision and support the formal and informal learning of the society; and 4) Social advocacy role - covers the document task of the library, effective services, inclusion of socially sensitive groups to social and cultural activities.
However, roles of libraries for sustainable development in the context of ASEAN aspirations must cover the roles in the region and reflect the changing environment in which the impact of library services, such as advances in information and communication technology, government policies on developing and strengthening the community, the reading and information literacy of the people, and the necessity to preserve the cultural heritage and promote cross-cultural learning. Libraries as part of the ASEAN community system should take roles to help fulfill the aims of ASCC for providing and enhancing the lifelong learning, mutual understanding, better quality of life and equity access to information of the people in the region. The linkages between ASEAN aspirations and roles of libraries for sustainable development developed by the author are shown in Figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles of Libraries in the ASEAN Aspirations’ Context</th>
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<tr>
<td>CONSAM: Collecting-Networking-ShAring-Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASEAN languages &amp; Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
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<td>ASEAN Socio-cultural Community-ASCC</td>
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<td>Resilience</td>
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<td>ASEAN “RICH” Aspirations (ADB, 2014)</td>
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Figure 1: Linkages between ASEAN aspirations and roles of libraries for sustainable development (by the author)

1) Library roles in enhancing lifelong learning

Lifelong learning or learning from cradle to grave does not have the same connotation as recurrent education within the educational system. Among other things, lifelong learning dissolves boundaries between traditional policy sectors. Educational policy, labor market policy, industrial policy, regional policy, industrial policy, social policy and cultural policy, are all affected by lifelong learning and they all have a common responsibility for lifelong and life-wide learning. Lifelong learning contains various forms of education and training, formal, non-formal and informal. All these forms of education and training rely on working methods developing the individual’s ability to search for information and develop knowledge actively and independently (Häggström, 2004).
Libraries have the potential to make a difference between a traditional system of formal education and a broader system of learning. Libraries are socially inclusive places, offering a broad choice of different media and professional guidance in information search. In a society of lifelong learning libraries will be nodes connecting the local learning setting – whether it is of a formal or informal kind – with the global resources of information and knowledge, libraries can therefore play a role of fundamental importance in the development of future systems of lifelong learning (Häggström, 2004). The development of ICT has already laid the basis for the creation of information networks, giving users even of small local public libraries access to the world wide sources of information. It is inevitably that libraries in the ASEAN member countries must take roles in enhancing the lifelong learning of the people in their communities.

2) Library roles in enhancing mutual understanding

Mutual understanding is defined as a relation of affinity or harmony between people. It is undoubtedly that ASEAN aspiration for one community needs the mutual understanding of the people in the member counties, from the grassroots to the leaders, where there are so much of diversities in cultures, languages, ways of livings and so on. Libraries as the integral parts of the community can perform the roles of providing information resources about ASEAN countries, and creating the activities to enhance the knowledge sharing on ASEAN issues from time to time. Provision of the resources, tools, and activities for enhancing ASEAN languages learning can also be a vital role of the library which would be benefit for better communication among people from different languages backgrounds. The roles of libraries thus become extended into something more international, and may contribute to the mutual understanding among the countries which is so important at this time.

3) Library roles in improving quality of life

Quality of life is the degree to which a person enjoys the important possibilities of his/her life. Possibilities result from the opportunities and limitations each person has in his/her life and reflect the interaction of personal and environmental factors (Notes on quality of life, 2015). The dimensions of quality of life are varied. It can be referred to in many aspects, such as health condition, living condition, access to education, and even the conditions of moral and happiness of the people. Even if the library is not directly involved in creating a better quality of life for its citizens, but as a provider of educational opportunities and access to information and knowledge it already take part in. This is due to the fact that all human needs to be knowledgeable about the things that surrounded and importance to them to fulfill their self-esteem and self-actualization. Libraries can help its citizens in seeking for any required information and knowledge that will help
enhancing their quality of life, such as health care, career opportunities, food and nutrition, agriculture, and so on.

4) Library roles for equity access to information

Equity of access means that all people have the information they need—regardless of age, education, ethnicity, language, income, physical limitations or geographic barriers. It means they are able to obtain information in a variety of formats—electronic, as well as print. It also means they are free to exercise their right to know without fear of censorship or reprisal (ALA, 1996-2015). Libraries can provide essential services to the public through equitable public access to information and telecommunications services. It is essential that the information technology infrastructure of the ASEAN countries can provide affordable “big pipe” broadband connectivity to meet the ever-increasing needs of library users for enhancing the equity of access to information.

THE LIBRARY FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES IN THE CONTEXT OF ASEAN ASPIRATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The primary functions of a library are to acquire, organize, maintain, and make available information in a range of formats to meet the needs of its users. However, the library functions in the context of ASEAN aspirations for sustainable development shall be more beyond the users to the community and society of the region. The author calls these library roles as “CONSAL”, derived from an acronym of the Congress of Southeast Asian Libraries. This CONSAL comprises of the library functions on COllecting, Networking, ShAring and Learning. In addition to the common library services, in response to ASEAN aspirations, the focuses should also be on the following areas: ASEAN language and studies; Cultural heritages; Research and Development; Information literacy; and library and information professional development. The details of library functions and services in the context of ASEAN aspirations for sustainable development are shown in Table 2.
Table 2: Library functions and services in the context of ASEAN aspirations for sustainable development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The “CONSAL” library functions &amp; services</th>
<th>ASEAN languages &amp; studies</th>
<th>Cultural heritages</th>
<th>Research &amp; development</th>
<th>Information literacy</th>
<th>LIS Professional development</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collecting</strong></td>
<td>Collecting (including acquisition, creation, and selection) of the contents required for ASEAN community mutual understanding and lifelong learning (ASEAN languages and studies, cultural heritages, and research and development) in any formats (printed, electronic and digital).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Networking</strong></td>
<td>Networking among the libraries according to types and areas of interests to ensure the users obtain what they need from other libraries, facilitate the formal and informal education to the citizens, and use it as a platform for communication and professional development.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sharing</strong></td>
<td>Sharing the contents that are uniquely collected at the local library to the other to enhance the ASEAN social, economic and cultural developments. Building the digital contents of research publications in ASEAN to enable research sharing among scholars and researchers in different countries</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Learning</strong></td>
<td>Use the library as a learning hub for lifting the information literacy skills of the people. Also make use of the library to be a place for library and information professional training, internship, and career development via international collaboration programs.</td>
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The library services in ASEAN aspirations context can be described as follows:

1) **The services on ASEAN languages and studies.** The strategic framework of ASCC indicates that the governments of ASEAN members shall encourage the teaching of ASEAN studies at all levels in order that ASEAN is perceived as one community rather than a combination of ten nations. In other word, people in the region perceive that they are ASEAN citizens in addition to their national citizens. ASCC strategy also indicates that each country shall promote the communication skills in ASEAN languages, in addition to English which is an official language. This will help achieve a better understanding among the people at all levels, not only among those who have access to higher education. Libraries should use this opportunity to develop a collection of ASEAN languages and studies, and provide access to resources via different activities and channels.

2) **The knowledge resources of cultural heritages.** Cultural heritages have become the most interesting areas of research and development in library and information professions. This is due to the advancement of ICT which offer innovative approach in managing cultural heritages objects and information. It also becomes an awareness of library and information professionals aroused by the natural disaster phenomena, such as tsunami in Southeast Asia and Japan, which destroyed a huge collection of valuable cultural heritages in many countries. Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums which is known as “GLAM”, helps cultural institutions share their resources with the world through collaborative projects. The Europeana project supported by the
European Union can be a good example of GLAM collaborations on cultural heritage digital libraries. The Europeana collects millions of items including books and manuscripts, photos and paintings, television and film, sculpture and crafts, diaries and maps, and sheet music and recordings from a range of Europe's leading galleries, libraries, archives and museums (Europeana: think culture, 2015).

3) The resources for regional research and development. The resources on research and development are essential for regional social, economic, cultural, and also scientific and technological developments. The network of research and university libraries in ASEAN countries which are key resources of research publications shall be set up for research sharing. It is important that the research strengths of each country and the best resources of the areas of research studies are identified. The standards and channels for information exchanges which allows researchers to share their profiles, expertise, and research publications, and also to communicate about the research activities should be funded and implemented at the regional level.

4) The promotion of information literacy skills. Libraries all over the world play a key role in creating literate environments and promoting literacy by offering relevant and attractive reading material for all ages. They embrace the social responsibility to offer services that bridge social, political and economic barriers, and traditionally make a special effort to extend their services to marginalized people. Libraries assist in finding, using and interpreting appropriate information that opens up opportunities for lifelong learning, literacy enhancement, informed citizenship, recreation, creative imagination, individual research, critical thinking, and ultimately, empowerment in an increasingly complex world Krolak (2005). In this age of information society, information literacy is perceived as a survival skill of everyone. It is also acknowledged to be one of the core values for library and information professionals. Research shows that information literacy is an especially significant value for librarians in regions where the information infrastructure is relatively less developed. However, information literacy is important in all societies and communities: it “empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion of all nations” (IFLA, 2005). Information literacy rate is one among other indicators for measuring the country development. Since library has potential in terms of being information resources, having tools such as ICT facilities for information seeking and searching, and professional librarians who believed to have better information literacy skills, it is important that it takes role in enhancing information literacy skills for the people in its community.
5) **The library and information professional development.** Aside from being a place for information services and access, library is the best place for library and information professional development. The collaboration programs for library and information professional development among libraries in ASEAN countries can be done in many ways, such as, through student exchange program among library and information schools which usually library practicum or internship are essential for the LIS graduates. The programs on staff development via staff exchanges, internship, on-site training, formal training, or even distance learning, e-learning and web based learning can also be implemented.

**CONCLUSION**

The concept of sustainable development is highlighted within the ASEAN aspirations. Especially the ASEAN Socio-cultural Community (ASCC), one of the three pillars of ASEAN, has addressed the region’s aspiration to lift the quality of life of its peoples through cooperative activities that are people-oriented and environmentally friendly geared towards the promotion of sustainable development. Several strategies of ASCC are involved with the aims for providing and enhancing the life-long learning, mutual understanding, better quality of life and equity access to information of the people in the region. Libraries as part of the ASEAN community system should take roles to help fulfill the aims of ASCC. The linkages between ASEAN aspirations and roles of libraries for sustainable development have been discussed in line with the details of library functions and services. To fulfill the library roles in this concept, there may be other factors that are needed to be considered and supported by related stakeholders, such as government bodies, library associations, national libraries, and library and information schools. The important factors include national policy on library in the context of ASEAN development, budget allocations, assignments of responsible units or organizations, and strategic frame work which clear road maps for the operation and implementation levels.

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